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SITTING DAYS—2009

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FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SIXTH PERIOD

Governor-General
Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

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 Georgeanias MP, Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP, Ms Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Mr Albert John Schultz MP, Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Hon. Peter Neil Slipper 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
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP
Deputy Manager 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. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alex Somlyay MP
Opposition Whip—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP
Deputy Opposition Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

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

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

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Members of the House of Representatives

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

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—H Evans
Clerk of the House of Representatives—IC Harris AO
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
RUDD MINISTRY

Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion
Treasurer
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Defence and Vice President of the Executive Council
Minister for Trade
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the House
Minister for Health and Ageing
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Minister for Finance and Deregulation
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of the House
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Minister for Climate Change and Water
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts
Attorney-General
Cabinet Secretary, Special Minister of State and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism
Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services

Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP
Hon. Julia Gillard, MP
Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Senator Hon. John Faulkner
Hon. Simon Crean MP
Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP
Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Hon. Tony Burke MP
Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Hon. Chris Bowen, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Hon. Alan Griffin MP

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

Minister for Home Affairs
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP

Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP

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

Assistant Treasurer Senator Hon. Nick Sherry

Minister for Ageing
Hon. Justine Elliot MP

Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport
Hon. Kate Ellis MP

Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change
Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP

Minister for Employment Participation and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Government Service Delivery
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib

Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
Hon. Maxine McKew MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water
Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction
Hon. Bill Shorten MP

Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance
Hon. Bob McMullan MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs
Hon. Duncan Kerr SC, MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade
Hon. Anthony Byrne MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion
Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services
Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Employment
Hon. Jason Clare MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Health
Hon. Mark Butler MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation
Hon. Richard Marles MP
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition  The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Opposition  The Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals  The Hon. Warren Truss MP
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate  Senator the Hon. Nick Minchin
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate  Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz
Shadow Treasurer  The Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House  The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and COAG and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on Emissions Trading Design  The Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation  Senator the Hon. Helen Coonan
Shadow Minister for Human Services and Deputy Leader of The Nationals  Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources  The Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs  The Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Cabinet Secretary  Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water  The Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing  The Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Shadow Minister for Defence  Senator the Hon. David Johnston
Shadow Attorney-General  Senator the Hon. George Brandis SC
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  The Hon. John Cobb MP
Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations  Mr Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship  The Hon. Dr Sharman Stone
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors, Tourism and the Arts  Mr Steven Ciobo

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law
The Hon. Chris Pearce MP

Shadow Assistant Treasurer
The Hon. Tony Smith MP

Shadow Minister for Sustainable Development and Cities
The Hon. Bruce Billson MP

Shadow Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Minister for Housing and Local Government
Mr Scott Morrison

Shadow Minister for Ageing
Mrs Margaret May MP

Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence
The Hon. Bob Baldwin MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Mrs Louise Markus MP

Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare, Status of Women and Youth
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP

Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs
The Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Training and Sport
Dr Andrew Southcott MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia
Senator the Hon. Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport
Mr Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development
Mr John Forrest MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Energy and Resources
Mr Barry Haase MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector
Senator Mitch Fifield

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources and Conservation
Mr Mark Coulton MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration
Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
The Hon. Peter Lindsay MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education
Senator the Hon. Brett Mason

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Justice and Public Security
Mr Jason Wood MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader in the Senate
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
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The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 2 pm and read prayers.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts will be absent from question time this week. He is opening the Australian Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors exhibition in Washington, and having high-level bilateral meetings with the US administration. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Mr TURNBULL (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. I refer the minister to yesterday’s survey by Dun and Bradstreet on geographic risk indicators on financial stress, which found that one-third of Australia’s suburbs are designated high risk. Can the minister explain how the government’s reckless spending, putting upward pressure on interest rates, will impact on those suburbs and especially on the young home buyers living in them?

Mr TANNER—In the 2004 election campaign, the former Prime Minister promised to keep interest rates at record lows. Of course, what eventuated thereafter was 10 interest rate increases in a row. So when this government took office we had a pattern of rising interest rates which continued for the first few months of that term in office. We now have the Reserve Bank rate at three per cent; of course, the rate was 6.75 per cent when the government took office.

This government absolutely rejects the suggestion—the ludicrous proposition—that our fiscal settings are putting upward pressure on interest rates. That suggestion from the opposition has attracted derision from a wide range of respected economic commentators. We have got circumstances in the global economy that the opposition simply refuses to acknowledge. In fact, we had the bizarre proposition today from the member for Sturt, pronouncing that it is all over: the global financial crisis, the recession and the difficulties in the Australian economy are all over—it was all in your imagination; it is all finished! What are we worrying about?

The truth is we have a major economic challenge still underway in this country. As far as the government is concerned it is true to say, over the past six months, ‘Yes, so far so good. The stimulus strategy has been working, and working well.’ But there are many challenges in front of us, and it would be absolutely retrograde of the government to withdraw that stimulus. In fact, I note today that an organisation that is usually supportive of the opposition on many matters—ACCI—came out and said precisely that. You cannot even get ACCI to support your position. The organisation that has a long history of being very close to the Liberal Party, the employers’ organisation, points out that peremptory withdrawal of the stimulus would threaten the recovery, would threaten the Australian economy, would threaten jobs and would threaten businesses.

It is a sorry situation when the conservative parties in this country cannot even get the No. 1 employer organisation to support their economic policy. That speaks volumes for the economic competence of the opposition.

Economy

Mr TREVOR (2.04 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on developments in the
Australian economy and Australia’s response to the global recession?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for Flynn for his question. I am also taken by the fact that the Leader of the Opposition has just asked a question about a Dun and Bradstreet survey. I found that a remarkable intervention by the Leader of the Opposition because, according to the Dun and Bradstreet business confidence survey, today we have a positive picture of business confidence and expectations. Sales and profits expectations for the December quarter have risen significantly; 46 per cent of respondents expect an increase in sales, 31 per cent expect an increase in profit, and the employment indicator has risen sharply—16 per cent of businesses expect to increase staff.

Mr Hockey—It proves our point!

Mr RUDD—Furthermore, capital investment expectations are at their highest level in two years, 16 per cent of firms expect to increase their cap ex and inventories are expected to rise for 20 per cent of firms. I quote from Dun and Bradstreet CEO Christine Christian:

The improvement in key indices such as employment and sales expectations is a sign that the economic stimulus has been successful in encouraging household spending.

I notice the member for North Sydney stopped interjecting, ‘This proves our point.’ She said, ‘The economic stimulus has been successful in encouraging household spending.’ I just draw the honourable member for North Sydney’s attention to a full reading of Dun and Bradstreet, and perhaps the Leader of the Opposition might do the same.

But there is more: the NAB Monthly Business Survey and Economic Outlook is out today. It says that business confidence has surged a further eight points to 18. NAB goes on to say:

…the result is the strongest since October 2003 and indicates that businesses are very optimistic about the monetary and fiscal measures undertaken by authorities to deal with the current global crisis as well as the resultant economic impacts.

Let me just go back to it again: the monetary and fiscal measures undertaken by authorities. I think one of those authorities is the Australian government because we are responsible for fiscal policy. I would have thought that on a reading of that, member for North Sydney, that what it points to by way of positive data in terms of business confidence and business conditions has not simply materialised out of thin air; it has been the construct in part of government policy acting through stimulus in the economy. We have therefore these outcomes from the business confidence survey of the NAB and of course the business confidence survey and business conditions survey by Dun and Bradstreet. These are important figures and I simply draw the honourable member’s attention to the fact that business confidence is now up 50 points from its trough in January—and remember: January was when we were absolutely in the pits of what was unfolding globally.

I also draw the honourable member’s attention to this statement from the NAB monthly business survey:

Retailing is now no more the best performing among the cyclical sectors, although it still remains positive overall. That mantle has now been handed over to construction.

Presumably that construction materialises out of thin air—it just happens! I can say to the honourable members opposite, with their rolling, negative campaign about the government stimulus strategy, that neither retail sales go up because of thin air factors nor does construction go up because of thin air factors. It is because, in the worst global economic crisis in three-quarters of a century,
government policy action has been out there, shoulder to the wheel, supporting the economy while the private sector is in retreat. These two pieces of data come off the back of what we had with the ANZ job advertisements data of yesterday, which showed an increase of 4.1 per cent in August. This was the first monthly increase since April 2008.

These things reflect positive signs for the Australian economy but, as I said yesterday and will continue to say, we still have major global economic challenges lying ahead. We still have great uncertainties in the US economy and in the European economies and in those in North Asia as well. Therefore, for those opposite to argue, as they continue to do, that the government should pull the rug from under the recovery by abolishing stimulus now through the Nation Building for Recovery plan is simply not responding practically to the uncertain data which exists out there in the global economy.

Mr Hockey—You’ve just been saying how strong it is!

Mr Rudd—Ah, the member for North Sydney: always interjecting. With Joe, you know that the volume of the interjection is directly proportional to the thinness of the content. It always happens that way with Joe.

In response to the global economic crisis the government have embarked upon a National Building for Recovery plan. We have embarked upon three stages of stimulus. Seventy per cent of the stimulus is in infrastructure. Our stimulus is designed to do this: to support jobs, small business and apprenticeships today by investing in the infrastructure Australia needs for tomorrow. I say also to honourable members that I am advised that one of our senators had a few problems on the doors today when he was interviewed about fiscal stimulus. He had a problem with the spelling of the word ‘fiscal’. This is of no real consequence; anyone can make mistakes in spelling. I make mistakes in spelling; I am sure other members make spelling mistakes as well.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Rudd—It is true. Everyone makes spelling mistakes. However, making a spelling mistake on fiscal stimulus is one thing. Having profound misjudgement on fiscal stimulus is something else, and those opposite, led by the Leader of the Opposition, have shown profound misjudgement on fiscal stimulus.

Every single mainstream economic commentator in the country—everyone from the peak industry organisations, to the major public economists, to those responsible for the treasuries and the central banks of the G20 economies through to our own Treasury and our own central bank—has argued that this is the right course of policy action—except for one single organisation, tattered and swinging in the breeze though it is. That organisation is the Liberal and National Party coalition of Australia. They alone believe that they have a script for the economic future. They alone believe that it was wrong to use stimulus in response to the worst global economic challenge since the Great Depression. They now argue that the rug should be pulled out from under recovery now that we have achieved some results from the stimulus we have injected. I say to the Leader of the Opposition and to those opposite: reflect honestly and impartially on the economic data which is before us and, for the first time in the period that he has been Leader of the Opposition, start talking the Australian economy up rather than continuing to talk to the Australian economy down.

Economy

Mr Hockey (2.12 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Minister, will the government pull back
on its record level of emergency spending when interest rates start to rise?

Mr TANNER—The government strategy does have within it a number of initiatives that are due to run out in a short order of time, particularly things like the first home owner grant boost and the incentive for businesses to invest in equipment. The stimulus strategy is calibrated to tail down over a period of time, but I refer again to the Australian Chamber of Commerce Industry, ACCI, press release today which does warn everybody about the risks of peremptorily withdrawing, prematurely withdrawing, the stimulus strategy. The government does not speculate about what may happen with interest rates in the future, but I remind the opposition of their recent track record on these issues. After having promised at the 2004 election to keep interest rates at record lows, they then delivered an economy which saw 10 interest rate increases in a row.

The government’s policy settings are not putting and will not put upward pressure on interest rates. Finally, I remind the opposition of the government strategy to return the budget to surplus and point out, as I have pointed out in the media over the last couple of days, that the stimulus strategy is a relatively small proportion of total government spending. In order to return the budget to surplus the focus is not going to be on that small proportion of government spending; it is going to be on the ongoing totality of government spending across the board. That is where the focus will be.

We do have a major challenge to return the budget to surplus, because $210 billion over four years of revenue has been knocked out of that budget by the global financial crisis and the global recession and much of that is not going to return in a hurry because of a resumption of growth. That is why we have put in place strategies to deliver more savings, that is why there were tough savings initiatives in the budget this year; and that is why it is really important that the opposition passes all of those tough savings initiatives in the Senate and starts to put its money where its mouth is instead of coming in here every day and criticising the government for not exercising enough fiscal restraint.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The minister will now move to conclude his answer.

Mr TANNER—I was just urging the opposition to start practising what it preaches. If it is suggesting that we need fiscal restraint—if it is suggesting we need spending restraint—then what it should do is pass things like the budget and private health insurance and rebate reforms in the Senate.

Employment

Ms REA (2.15 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on the impact the economic stimulus package and cooperative workplace relations are having on job creation?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Bonner for her question and know that she, like all members of the Rudd Labor government, is unapologetic about supporting jobs in our economy today. We are unapologetic about taking decisive measures to keep Australians working. Whilst those opposite sit and wait and watch the unemployment numbers go up, the Rudd government has decided to provide immediate stimulus to the Australian economy to make a difference to the ability of Australians to secure and stay in work. Without that decisive action we would have seen, and would have continued
to see, more than 200,000 extra Australians out of work—something that members opposite should reflect on. We know that employment and unemployment are lagging indicators of economic activity. That is why, even with the decisive action the government has taken to provide economic stimulus to the economy, the government understands and has been clear about the unhappy truth that we expect unemployment to rise over the coming months and we will see new indications in the unemployment figures later this week.

I am very pleased to be able to report to the House that during these difficult economic times—during the days of the global recession—we are seeing employers and employees, employer organisations and trade unions working together to do what they can to keep people employed. What we have seen with the employment numbers over the last six months is a rise in part-time work and a reduction in full-time work. This would, in part, reflect the fact that many firms have learnt the lesson and are doing everything they can to keep their valued staff in work during these difficult economic days. And this is good news, because once Australians become unemployed statistics tell us it can be a difficult road back. During the 1980s the unemployment rate jumped from 5.4 per cent to 10.4 per cent in two years. It took another six years to get it back down. In the 1990s the unemployment rate increased by a similar amount in the space of three years, but this time it took 11 years to get it back down. So keeping people connected to work is a very important thing to do. That is what economic stimulus is about and that is what these cooperative workplace arrangements are all about. I would point in that regard to the example of Mitsubishi Motors, which in February this year announced it would be closing its assembly vehicle plant in Adelaide.

**Dr Southcott**—That was last year.

**Ms Gillard**—Sorry, February last year; thank you very much. That resulted in 930 direct job losses, but there were cooperative arrangements to help those affected workers secure work and those cooperative arrangements were supported by both state and federal governments. We have seen short-time working arrangements entered into—for example, at Holden—where short-time working arrangements have kept people connected to the workforce. These are important developments that we are seeing across the nation—employers of goodwill working together with employees and trade unions to make arrangements during these difficult days of the global recession. The government supports and applauds the efforts of those working together with economic stimulus. They are providing support to Australians and keeping Australians working.

**Primary Schools for the 21st Century Program**

**Mr Turnbull** (2.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. I refer the minister to a speech by the Secretary of the Treasury last week, in which he said: ‘Government spending that does not pass an appropriately defined cost-benefit test necessarily detracts from Australia’s wellbeing.’ What cost-benefit analysis was undertaken in relation to the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program?

**Mr Tanner**—I am very pleased to hear that the Leader of the Opposition pays attention to speeches on cost-effective policy by the Secretary of the Treasury. I refer the minister to a speech by the Secretary of the Treasury last week, in which he said: ‘Government spending that does not pass an appropriately defined cost-benefit test necessarily detracts from Australia’s wellbeing.’ What cost-benefit analysis was undertaken in relation to the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program?

**Mr Dutton**—Mr Speaker, a point of order on relevance: the question was very specific. The Leader of the Opposition referred to a...
particular point from the secretary and that is what he should refer to.

The SPEAKER—I am listening very closely to the Minister for Finance and De-
regulation. He is responding to the question.

Mr TANNER—I reiterate my point that the Secretary of the Treasury has a long track
record of drawing attention to this issue. He did so in a way that proved rather embarrass-
ing for the Howard government and pointed out the massive failings on its policy front. I
most vividly recall the infamous gestation of the $10 billion water plan which was on the
back of a serviette at a long lunch.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question that was asked by the
opposition leader, in part, was: what cost-benefit analysis was undertaken in relation to
the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program? The minister is refusing to answer
it.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister is responding to the question.

Mr TANNER—I have a vague recollection that the member for Wentworth and the
Leader of the Opposition was in fact minister for water in the former government at a time
when they announced their $10 billion water plan, which had not even been costed by the
department of finance, much less subject to any cost-benefit analysis.

Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition does not have the call.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! We can get out the cups of tea and coffee if people want to
have a little afternoon tea.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will resume his seat. Now the House will
turn its mind to how people outside perceive us. This is question time. People, when
they approach the dispatch box, will get the call when the House comes to order. There
was an illustration there where the Leader of the Opposition may have thought he had the
call but those on my right were denying him the call outside of the standing orders.

If the point of order, as I understand it, goes to the relevance of the answer, I simply
put to the House that, in following the practice that has been for many parliaments, the
finance minister has taken an aspect of the question, which he is directing his remarks
to. Whilst this is a definition of relevance that may be a mystery to many, it has been
the way in which question time has been conducted for a while. I have urged the
House to use the Procedure Committee to look at these matters, but that has not hap-
pened yet. The minister for finance has the call.

Mr TANNER—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was asked about cost-benefit
analysis approaches to the government’s stimulus package and, in particular, the
Building the Education Revolution initiative. I will tell you, Mr Speaker, and I will tell the
Leader of the Opposition the cost-benefit analysis approach that was taken. It was this:
we received advice from the Secretary of Treasury and other Treasury officials that a
huge storm was about to hit the Australian economy and that it was necessary to get
money into the Australian economy—inject it into the Australian economy in a variety of
ways as quickly as possible to sustain hundreds of thousand of jobs and thousands of
businesses—and that the best way of undertaking this was a staged process which in-
volved, firstly, payments to individuals through the tax system and the family pay-
ment system, which would get money mov-
ing into households very quickly; secondly, money that could be moved quickly into maintenance, into infrastructure, into building things and into sustaining the construction sector and, thirdly, longer term infrastructure projects that would build Australia for the future.

We understand that the other side is now back in the zone where they do not believe the global financial crisis or the global recession are real. They have waxed and waned, they have gone in and out of the twilight zone, they have been off there with the zombies, they have been all over the place and they are now back in the zone where they have discovered that it never happened—that it did not exist. The member for Sturt has pronounced it dead; it did not happen; it is all over today. The truth is that the cost-benefit analysis for the Australian people was this: without rapid action on the part of this government through injecting large sums of money into the Australian economy, into construction, into retail, into tourism and into all of the activities of the Australian economy we would be facing unemployment much higher than we do today. We would be facing thousands of businesses, particularly small businesses, that would be bankrupt. That was the basis on which that decision was taken, along with all of the other stimulus decisions. This government stands proudly by those decisions and we point out that virtually every other commentator and participant in this debate says we were right and you were wrong.

**Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program**

Ms OWENS (2.27 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. How are all local communities benefiting from the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure program? How does the allocation of funding across electorates compare with previous programs?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank member for Parramatta for her question. There has been some commentary today about how the funding for the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure program matches up to the political balance in the House of Representatives. I must say I was surprised by some of the commentary because it simply does not stack up to analysis. Indeed, Labor members of parliament—those fine men and women on this side of the chamber—make up some 55 per cent of the House of Representatives. We, the electorates represented by the fine men and women here, got 53 per cent of the funding for the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure program.

It was also claimed that marginal electorates received a disproportionate amount of the funding. Marginal seats, measured by the standard measure of a margin of less than five per cent, make up a third of the seats in this parliament. They received less than a quarter of the funding under this program. By comparison, safe electorates—the standard measure is a margin of more than 10 per cent—make up 35 per cent of this parliament. They received 41 per cent of the funding. Indeed, one of the comments that came from local governments as a result of this program, whether in safe Labor seats or safe Liberal seats, was that it was the first time that the government had recognised that you should not have to be in a marginal seat to get funding from the Commonwealth government. Certainly the Mayor of Mosman was very vocal about that, as were the Mayor of Warringah, the Mayor of Ku-ring-gai and a number of the mayors represented opposite.

The other statement that was made was a claim that funding went disproportionately to Labor heartland seats. Well, safe Labor seats,
as measured, received an average of $3.5 million. Safe non-Labor seats received an average of $6.1 million across the program. The great benefit of this program was not that bureaucrats sat down and made decisions; it was that local government made applications as a result of their priorities that they determined as local representatives. Indeed, every single local government area in the country—all 565—benefited from at least $100,000 of the funding under the first component.

But let us look at the top 10 projects—and I am glad the Prime Minister selects the frontbench now, because I am not sure I am doing myself some favours with the caucus! Of the top 10 projects, the first is Gold Coast Stadium in Moncrieff, a Liberal electorate—$36 million. Do you support that funding or not? Do you support it? I think the member for Moncrieff supports that project.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister at the table was drifting away from the issue and he was asking you directly if you support these initiatives. I ask you to bring him back and ask him to—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The minister will refer his remarks through the chair. Rhetorical questions are not very helpful.

Mr Hockey—Stop spending money!

Mr ALBANESE—The only person saying, ‘Stop spending money,’ Joe, is you, because last week I was out with your backbenchers, with them campaigning for extra money from the second round.

The fact is that this compares in stark contrast with what the former government did, and I was asked about that. Under the former government’s Regional Partnerships program—the ‘Regional Rorts’ program—one-third of the funding went to just 10 coalition electorates—not a single Labor electorate on the list, not one. I sat in this place for 12 years and there was not a single grant to my electorate, not one. The fact is that those opposite rorted the Regional Partnerships program. They did not go through local government; they went through the private sector. There was a million dollars for an ethanol plant in Gunnedah that does not exist, $420,000 for a cheese factory that closed down and $845,000 for a rail line that burnt down. The contrast is very stark.

We on this side of the House have set up a rigorous process that stacks up, that does not advantage us politically, and that stands in stark contrast to the actions of those involved with their ‘Regional Rorts’ program.

Mr Hockey—Stop spending money!

Mr ALBANESE—The member for North Sydney wants the spending to stop, but none of his colleagues do. The member for Dickson is so keen about the Gold Coast Stadium that he is moving there to get a piece of the action—so keen is he.

The second is the Einasleigh River bridge in the electorate of Kennedy, a flood-affected area. We gave special consideration to those areas affected by floods or bushfires. It came second—$18 million.

The third was the Flinders Street Mall redevelopment in Townsville, in the electorate of Herbert, again held by the Liberal Party. The member for Herbert is nodding. He supports this funding of $16.2 million. He does. He nods in support of this funding. I say to the member for North Sydney: look around you and talk to your colleagues.

The fourth was the Goulburn River High Country Rail Trail, in the electorates of Indi and McEwen, again two Liberal electorates.

Mr Hockey—Stop spending money!
Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr PYNE (2.35 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. I refer the minister to her answer yesterday in which she failed to address the case of the Evesham State School, in the Labor electorate of Flynn, which last week received a grant for $250,000 to build a new library for its one enrolled student. With the benefit of 24 hours notice, has the minister now uncovered the elusive cost-benefit analysis which justified this wasteful spending or does she, like the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, stand proudly behind that decision?

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question is once again out of order because it contains argument.

The SPEAKER—Again I would indicate to the Leader of the House that, if there is argument in the question, it is at the minor end of the scale compared to the traditional allowances made by myself and my predecessors.

Ms GILLARD—I thank the shadow minister for his question. I enjoyed his questions yesterday and I am going to enjoy them today, I can see as well. I am still waiting for his much promised ferocious attack but we live in hope. On the question of Evesham State School, let me inform the member of this: he may not be aware of it but the Evesham State School at this stage is in community consultation about an amalgamation process.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Manager of Opposition Business having asked the question, I would have thought that members on my left would be willing to listen to the answer.

Ms GILLARD—This consultation process has been in train for some time.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I take from the guffawing that the Liberal Party stands for the unilateral closure of schools without any consultation with anyone. If that is the policy of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Opposition, I will make sure that all 9,500 schools in this country know that. But most responsible education authorities actually engage in consultation and work when they are coming up with new school structures and the Building the Education Revolution guidelines dealt with this process.

We have had media reports and we have had members of the opposition on earlier parliamentary days race into this parliament and make claims about Building the Education Revolution money going to closing schools. This matter was always dealt with by the Building the Education Revolution guidelines and what the guidelines have provided is crystal clear, which is that in circumstances where schools are amalgamating the money goes to the continuing school site in order to provide facilities for the students who go to that school. That is obviously an appropriate process to go through when schools are amalgamating. I take it from the guffawing that the members opposite are saying that, firstly, there should be no consultation and, secondly, there should be no benefits to schools that are amalgamating and receiving students from other schools.

I think it does bear reflecting on that the Building the Education Revolution program is about school modernisation, the biggest school modernisation program this country has ever seen, but it is also about supporting jobs today during the difficult days of the global recession, and members opposite day after day, including in their questioning today, show how out of touch they are on the
question of the global recession and its impact on Australian jobs. As recently as yesterday the shadow minister for education said on Radio National about our economic stimulus measures and our measures for school building about construction work:

There wouldn’t be enough workers. There wouldn’t be enough resources to fulfil those contracts as quickly as the government demand it.

The shadow minister obviously lives in a world where he thinks in these days of the global recession that every Australian who wants a job has a job and that every Australian is already working the overtime they would want to be working and that there is no spare capacity. He lives in a world of denial, believing that the global recession has not commenced and is not impacting on our economy. But the truth is—and the Prime Minister referred to this a little bit earlier—it is impacting on our economy, and the recent AiG survey of construction works showed that employment in construction declined 17 months in a row. When you are seeing construction work decline 17 months in a row, when you are seeing construction workers who are being laid off and who are not able to find work, then obviously they are the people whose jobs the Building the Education Revolution will give support to.

Can I conclude my answer to the shadow minister’s question by referring him to an article in the Australian newspaper on 1 September where builder Wayne Cash, who was working on one of the Building the Education Revolution projects, said:

… the first six months of the year were very quiet, and the company was forced to let two or three staff members go but managed to keep their apprentices and junior staff members.

Mr Cash is now not only hiring subcontractors but also putting on extra staff, including another apprentice, a labourer and an office junior, and perhaps at some point the shadow minister might want to reflect on whether he thinks those Australian should be in work.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt will withdraw.

Mr Pyne—I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

Economy

Mr BRADBURY (2.42 pm)—My question is to Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy. What are the benefits of the government stimulus packages for small business? Is the minister aware of any support for continuing the stimulus for small business?

Dr EMERSON—I would like to thank the member for Lindsay for his question. The member for Lindsay is a very strong supporter of small business, in particular in his local area of the Penrith Valley and his support for the Penrith City and District Business Enterprise Centre, which is being financially supported for the first time by the Commonwealth of Australia under the Rudd government’s leadership.

There has been encouraging recent news. Yesterday we were reminded of the ANZ job advertisements which showed the first monthly rise since April of 2008, so that is encouraging news. That is pretty good. Today, Dun and Bradstreet in their national business expectation survey recorded the highest sales expectations in five years and the greatest rise in one quarter recorded since the survey began in 1988. Also out today, the National Australia Bank’s monthly business survey reported that business confidence has reached its highest level since October 2003, so this is all encouraging news.

Last week the national accounts were out, showing positive growth for the June quarter of 0.6 per cent and growth in investment in plant and equipment of 5.6 per cent, so
clearly the government’s strategy for managing the economic downturn is working. The stimulus is helping to restore business confidence and, in particular, small business confidence. We know how vital that is in sustaining the economic viability of small businesses, because if businesses are confident then they will invest in the future and, very importantly, they will ensure that they keep on their staff to the maximum extent possible.

Instead of making a constructive contribution to the policy debate the Leader of the Opposition has in fact opportunistically held just about every conceivable position on the stimulus. I will spare members opposite the task of going through all of those different positions, but I can report that initially he said it was about right—that was a flip. Then he said it was not enough—that was a flop. He then went on to say it makes no difference—flip—and then finally he said it is too much and it ought to be withdrawn. But on this matter the Leader of the Opposition remains isolated. I have been looking around since yesterday for any support that we might be able to find for the Leader of the Opposition’s position that the stimulus should be withdrawn. I cannot find any support. The International Monetary Fund has said:

Premature exit from accommodative monetary and fiscal policy is a principal concern. We have had the Secretary of the Treasury in the United States warning about not repeating the mistakes of withdrawing stimulus prematurely. The OECD said:

… strong policy stimulus will continue to be needed in the near term. The World Bank said countries should be prepared to:

… take additional steps and not withdraw stimulus in 2010.

So there are the four major international organisations warning about withdrawing stimulus prematurely, warning against the policies of the Leader of the Opposition.

Here at home we have the Commonwealth Treasury saying do not withdraw the stimulus prematurely. We have the Reserve Bank saying do not withdraw the stimulus prematurely. We have the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry saying do not withdraw the stimulus prematurely. We have Craig James, from CommSec, saying, ‘We wouldn’t be advocating that the government or the Reserve Bank change the settings in any way at the moment’—that is, do not withdraw the stimulus prematurely. The Ai Group said, ‘In relation to early withdrawal of the stimulus we would be getting well ahead of ourselves’—that is, do not withdraw the stimulus prematurely. Michael Blythe, the Commonwealth Bank’s Chief Economist, said, ‘The Australian economy will continue to benefit from economic policy stimulus in 2009.’ ANZ economist Riki Polygenis said, ‘Government policy actions continue to be a critical factor supporting the economy.’ Annette Beecher, of TD Securities, said, ‘Don’t withdraw the stimulus prematurely.’ AMP Securities senior economist Bob Cunneen said, ‘Don’t withdraw the stimulus prematurely.’ The scorecard is that a total of 13 international and national organisations have said do not withdraw the stimulus prematurely, do not take the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, because that would undermine economic growth and business confidence in this country—that is, 13 in favour of continuing the stimulus and one against.

I noticed before question time that the Leader of the Opposition was holding a press conference and he was using the phrase ‘as night follows day’. I wondered when I had heard that before from a Liberal opposition leader. I remember that none other than An-
drew Peacock preceded Malcolm Turnbull with this statement—he regularly used to say ‘as night follows day’. Here is Sydney’s answer to Andrew Peacock. I used to say about Andrew Peacock because he made many attempts at the leadership and he made these comebacks—and here comes the fellow who has not asked a question for 468 days—

Mr Ciobo—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. That direct comment is absolutely false; there have been numerous questions—

The SPEAKER—There is no point of order. The member for Moncrieff, if he has a point of order, should come to the point of order straightaway. He should not engage in other things.

Mr Ciobo—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The minister is now meandering all over the place and has completely lost track of small business—

The SPEAKER—The member for Moncrieff will resume his seat. The minister has the call and the minister will bring his answer to a conclusion.

Dr Emerson—I will bring it to a close. I remember that Andrew Peacock used to say ‘as night follows day’. We have Sydney’s answer to Andrew Peacock. The only thing is that, when Andrew Peacock went through the leadership again, it was said of him that a souffle cannot rise twice. We have a dud souffle here; we cannot even get it to rise once.

Building the Education Revolution Program

Ms Julie Bishop (2.50 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. I refer the minister to the Northern Territory government’s internal advice that nearly 13 per cent of the schools stimulus package funding will be soaked up in project management fees of up to $400,000 per school. Does the minister maintain that this represents value for money for the Australian taxpayer?

Ms Gillard—I had anticipated a question to the Minister for Foreign Affairs but I am of course happy to answer the question of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. On the deputy leader’s question, as I have had cause to explain in the House before, the Building the Education Revolution guidelines set clear specifications for the amount of money that can be spent on project management fees and also the amount that can be spent on administration costs. On project management fees the amount is four per cent, on administration costs it is 1.5 per cent.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Gillard—I believe that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is probably referring to an article which was recently in the newspaper—

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

Ms Gillard—Well, it may have been an article based on the advice that she is now showing. But I am aware of those reports, and obviously, when we see reports that there is an expenditure beyond what the guidelines provide for, we look into it. But the arrangements between us and state governments and block grant authorities in the Catholic and independent sectors are very, very clear. We made those guidelines clear because we wanted to ensure that project costs and administration costs were kept to a minimum and that this money rolled out to schools to support jobs now.

What I would say to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition—and I would say it to all members of the opposition—is that at the end of the day the central part of this debate is: do you support jobs today? Do you support building infrastructure for tomorrow?
Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The question has been asked.

Ms GILLARD—You have already decisively answered no to both questions. You stand neither for supporting jobs nor for modernising schools. Then, of course, given that the question was asked by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I would remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that when she was Minister for Education—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: this is a question about a $400,000 rip-off by the Northern Territory government with project managers; it is not about anything else, and the minister should answer the question about value for money.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt should not add debate into his point of order. The member will resume his seat.

Mr Tanner—Why didn’t you get that question?

Ms GILLARD—Yes—a very interesting question from the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. But I remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, given that she has raised the question of school capital, that when she was Minister for Education, Science and Training, as I referred to in the House yesterday, of course the Investing in Our Schools Program was costed on an 80 per cent take-up rate and she needed to fix an 18 per cent blow-out in it.

Nation Building and Jobs Plan

Ms COLLINS (2.54 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women. Will the minister update the House on the impact of the government’s investment in social housing?

Ms PLIBERSEK—I thank the member for Franklin. I was down her way just recently looking at a terrific new housing affordability fund project that will make blocks of land for people to build houses on much more affordable as well as doing a nice bit of urban renewal in an area that really needs it. The government’s Nation Building and Economic Stimulus Plan includes the largest single investment in social housing that has ever been undertaken by an Australian government, and it is part of our efforts to act decisively to build today the infrastructure that we will need for tomorrow while supporting the jobs that we need in the Australian economy. It is obviously working—we have seen the fastest growing economy in the developed world and the second lowest unemployment—but, of course, we are not out of the woods yet, and this investment in social housing is critical to our continued weathering of the storm.

Last week I visited Tasmania to look first-hand at the work that we are doing down there through the investment in social housing. In Launceston I visited the first three homes to be completed under stage 1 of the nation-building social housing element. I met a couple of the families that have moved into those houses, and I was also able to hear about the builders and tradespeople that were employed on those jobs—10 tradespeople were employed at varying times on that project—and the work for local businesses and contractors. I was also able to announce that, for stage 2 of the social housing stimulus package, we would be working with Tasmania to build 445 new homes in Tasmania for $109 million, supporting small businesses and jobs in Tasmania.

I was also able to look at the repair and maintenance work that is being done there. I visited a quite old building of about 62 units, built around the 1960s, in New Town in Hobart. These were tiny little units, probably not much bigger than this table here. While I was visiting these units, which had become so run down that a number of the units were not livable, I met a man called Alex Lidster
who is 91 years old. He told me that the work that was being done to upgrade his unit had completely changed his life, and he said that this accommodation was so necessary to him. He told the newspaper down there, the *Mercury*:

Without it I would probably be homeless, so it is very important to me.

That was a 91-year-old Tasmanian talking about the effect of this work on his quality of life. Spotless, the contractor overseeing the project, were employing 48 tradespeople and 10 apprentices to do the work that they had got through the social housing stimulus package—48 tradespeople and 10 apprentices. So the repairs and maintenance that Spotless were doing and the other work that is being done around Tasmania have been absolutely critical to keeping those jobs in the construction sector.

If you look around the country at the repairs and maintenance alone, we expected to fix up 2½ thousand homes—to bring them back from the scrap heap, essentially. Instead we will fix up about 10,600 homes. We will do major work on homes that are already uninhabitable or would have been lost to public housing stock. We will do work, altogether, on about 60,000 homes. What is particularly interesting about this is that about 35,000 homes have already had work done on them and about 15,000 homes have benefited from work being done in common areas. So those small jobs and larger jobs around the country have been supporting employment for many months now in all parts of the country where there is social housing. I was lucky enough to visit the site—in Hobart as well—of a new homelessness facility that will be built in Campbell Street and will house 50 people. It is one of the 40 new specialist homelessness facilities that we will build around the country as part of our efforts through social housing and through our homelessness spending.

It is worth remembering, of course, that the opposition have not supported any of this at any stage. They have not supported the stimulus spending, they have not supported the repairs and maintenance, they have not supported the new building, they have not supported the housing for vulnerable Australians and they have not supported the jobs that have come from this work. It is our policy instead to support this housing for vulnerable Australians but also to support those jobs for tradies, for builders, for electricians, for plumbers, for carpenters, for tilers, for manufacturers of building equipment and for all of their apprentices right around the country.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The SPEAKER (2.59 pm)—Before giving the call to the member for Mallee, I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a parliamentary delegation from the United Kingdom. On behalf of the House, I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

The SPEAKER—In addition, we have 80 members of the Australian Medical Students Association in the gallery today. I welcome them to the parliamentary version of a long consultation.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Building the Education Revolution Program**

Mr FORREST (3.00 pm)—My question is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Education and Minister for Social Inclusion. I refer the minister to revelations in today’s Victorian *Herald Sun* that the schools stimulus fiasco will amount to as much as $37,500 per student in some Victorian schools with fewer than 10 stu-
Does the minister maintain that the program is delivering value for money for Australian taxpayers?

Ms Gillard—I thank the member for Mallee for his question and I am aware, of course, that the member for Mallee in his electorate knows how much his local schools have benefited from this program. The member for Mallee, of course, when he is back in his electorate, is very keen to be associated with the expenditure in those local schools and the benefits that the Building the Education Revolution program brings. But when he comes to Canberra, when he is out of Victoria, he needs to fall behind the Leader of the Opposition’s opposition to supporting jobs today and to supporting expenditure on schools. I am aware of the article that the member refers to. What the member may know about the Building the Education Revolution program that he voted against—or maybe he does not, but he ought to know it about the program—is that it is correlated to school size. What he also ought to know about the program is that it is possible for schools to put in projects that are under their allocation. On some of the divisions and ratios that appear in that Herald Sun article today, that is exactly what has happened. A school has put in for a project that is under its allocation and consequently, when you then divide that number by the number of students, you get the variations in ratios that are reported in that Herald Sun report.

This is a program rolling out in every primary school across the country to bring new school capital. It is rolling out in every school across the country to bring vitally needed repairs. It is rolling out in 537 schools around the country to bring science and language centres. Schools around the country are welcoming this investment—including, of course, in the electorate of Mallee. The thing for the opposition and indeed the member who asked the question to explain is whether he is prepared to go to each school in his electorate and look a principal and a parent representative in the eye and say, ‘I don’t think your school should have the benefit of these facilities,’ and then whether he is prepared to walk the main streets of the towns that he represents and meet local tradespeople and look them in the eye and say—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the question very deliberately asked the minister whether she believed that this was value for money. I ask you to draw her back to that part of the question.

The Speaker—The Deputy Prime Minister will respond to the question.

Ms Gillard—and, to conclude, he should explain whether he is prepared to look tradespeople in the eye and say, ‘I don’t believe that we should be supporting your jobs during the days of the global recession.’ People who care about education and supporting jobs today are supporting the Building the Education Revolution program. It is a great pity for the schools in Mallee that their local member does not.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr Perrett (3.04 pm)—My question is also to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on the government’s transparency agenda for schools?

Honourable members interjecting—

Ms Gillard—I thank the opposition for making it clear by its reaction that it has the same position as the New South Wales leader of the—

Mr Simpkins interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Cowan is warned because he is interjecting from out of his place. It took me an hour to
work it out but I finally worked it out and he is warned.

Ms GILLARD—I was thanking members of the Liberal Party in the parliament for making it very clear by their reaction to this question that they support the Barry O’Farrell position on school transparency and they do not believe that parents should have more information about what is happening in local schools. They are guffawing at transparency despite the fact that parents around the country want it. Perhaps their guffawing is to hide the fact that when they were in government they talked a lot about school transparency—and the member for Bradfield nods that, yes, as minister he talked a lot about it. The current Deputy Leader of the Opposition also talked a lot about it. But when they were ministers for education for the Liberal Party they got absolutely nothing done—not one thing achieved.

In contrast to that I am pleased to be able to inform the House that this Friday, with education ministers from around the country, I will release the 2009 summary report of the national testing on literacy and numeracy. That will be followed on Monday the 14th with school education authorities starting to supply to parents reports on their individual students’ performance.

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is interjecting: ‘That’s a coalition program.’ Well, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition might want to listen to this, a reform she could never achieve and could never have dreamed of achieving as minister for education: at the end of this year, through our new reporting requirements, we will assemble, school by school, transparency measures, including the results of the 2008 and 2009 national tests, and from early next year parents and community members around the country who care about education will be able to go online. They will be able to look at test results and other indicators for their local school, including school population, school resources and numbers of teachers, and compare them with schools in their local area and, importantly, they will be able to compare achievements with like schools around the country.

I note that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has fallen into silence because, of course, she knows that, despite talking about transparency for over 12 years, this was a reform that would not be achieved by the Liberal—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The minister was starting to reflect on the point of view of the former minister for education while neglecting the fact that her co-minister is in fact—

The SPEAKER—The member for Mackellar will resume her seat. That is not a point of order.

Ms GILLARD—This is an important reform which will be available to parents and to those who care about education from the start of next year. These transparency measures will relate to our national partnerships for disadvantaged schools, schools that are underachieving; to our national partnerships on teacher quality, programs to bring the best teachers to the schools that need them the most and to pay them more for being in those schools; and to our program to ensure literacy and numeracy efforts are focused where they are needed the most.

Unfortunately, the federal Liberal Party as a matter of policy is silent on all of these things and says absolutely nothing about them—not one policy, not one plan. The only stated view of the Liberal Party about these matters is Barry O’Farrell’s view in New South Wales, and he has legislated to prevent parents in New South Wales getting access to
this information through their daily newspapers. So, courtesy of the Liberal Party and Barry O’Farrell, this information, which is transparently available online, will not be available to New South Wales parents or citizens in the pages of their daily newspapers. I think that is a disgrace, and what is more disgraceful than that is that the federal Liberal Party is absolutely silent about it.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Mackellar!

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Mackellar is warned!

Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr Turnbull (3.10 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. I refer to his remarks in this House on 9 August 2007. He said:

It is traditional in the economic debate about the relationship between government spending and interest rates to focus on the quantity of government spending, the size of the surplus and the size of the deficit. That is vital; it is very important, but there is another dimension which is often overlooked—that is, the quality of government spending. What is that money being spent on? Quantity is obviously vital and the settings are vital but so too is the quality.

The question is this: does the minister stand by this statement and, if so, how does he reconcile it with his answer earlier today in which he made it clear that the $14 billion primary schools assembly hall program was undertaken solely because the money could be spent quickly?

Mr Tanner—I am delighted that the opposition have paid so much attention to that speech. I thought it was a pretty good speech at the time. It did not attract huge coverage, but we were in opposition, so I am delighted they paid so much attention—so much so that I would like to remind them of some of the other things that I referred to in that speech. I referred to the $457 million being spent on government advertising by the previous government in the space of 16 months. I referred to the outrageous regional rorts scandal, where vast sums of money were spent on trains that never existed, cheese factories that closed down before the grant was made and those kinds of things. I had some pretty soft targets to aim at in 2007 when I was talking about quality of government spending, I can tell you.

The underlying point that I made there remains absolutely valid, and this government has been committed to improving the quality of government spending and to reducing the total amount of money that is spent on the processes of government. In the two budgets that we have brought down over the course of our time in office, we had $33 billion of savings over four years in the first budget, $22 billion of savings over four years in the second budget and, of course, very substantial ongoing savings mounting in this year’s budget from a number of initiatives, particularly some of the indexation related initiatives, which will take time to build up. So I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition, who as a minister was the man who presided over the quintupling, from $2 million to $10 million, of a grant to a bloke who claimed he could make it rain, that he is in no position to hold forth on the quality of government spending and that he is particularly ill-advised to remind anybody of debates about the quality of government spending in 2007.

Child Protection

Mr Craig Thomson (3.13 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. What action is the government
Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Dobell for his question. This is an issue that I know every single member of this House and the Senate feels very strongly about. It is important that we pursue these issues every day of the year, but I want to raise particular matters today and this week. This week is National Child Protection Week and today is White Balloon Day. White Balloon Day is the day on which we particularly raise the very confronting issue of child sexual abuse. The theme for the day and in fact for the year is: ‘Break the silence on child sexual assault. It’s ALL WHITE to say no’. These are very difficult issues for everyone, particularly for the children who are victims of this terrible abuse. It is also National Child Protection Week. The theme this year for National Child Protection Week, a similar theme to that for White Balloon Day, is: ‘Help bring child abuse out into the open’. Once again, it is a job that we all have a responsibility to do to make sure that we raise public awareness of the terrible levels of child abuse and neglect taking place in our country.

The stark facts are that in 2007-08 there were more than 55,000 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in our country. The level of substantiated abuse and neglect has in fact doubled over the last decade. The terrible facts are that Indigenous children are more than six times more likely to be the subject of abuse or neglect. It is important that we remember these are not just figures in a report. Each and every one of them reflects a child that has been either neglected or abused.

This is a national problem and one that requires us to show national leadership. For the first time we now have a national child protection framework. We are working with the state and territory authorities and with the non-government sector to do everything we can to protect children in our country. One of the things that we have moved to do quickly is to improve information sharing between the Commonwealth and state child protection authorities. One of the things I have announced just this week is that Medicare Australia can now provide information to state child protection authorities. This could be medical information that could be useful to foster carers as they go about the very important job of meeting the health needs of children in their care. It could also be used by child protection authorities that are building a case against abusive parents. Those authorities will now have access to medical records that may show evidence of abuse.

These Medicare arrangements will build on the success of the information sharing that we have already begun between Centrelink and child protection authorities. There have been more than 2,000 requests for information from Centrelink to child protection authorities, and this protocol only began in January this year. This information from Centrelink can be used to help child protection workers locate families where children are at risk of harm and stop vulnerable children from falling through the gaps when families, for example, move interstate.

I take this opportunity to thank the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, otherwise known as NAPCAN, for their leadership and the work that they do to run Child Protection Week. Also, yesterday we had Bravehearts founder Hetty Johnston here to help us mark White Balloon Day. She was joined by many members and senators and, most importantly, officers from the police force and other emergency services—people who are so important in helping all of us with the critical job of protecting our children.
**Donations to Political Parties**

Mr ABBOTT (3.19 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, representing the Special Minister of State. Is the minister aware of a report in today’s *Sydney Morning Herald* that a pensioner made a $75,000 donation to the New South Wales Labor Party? Why would the Labor Party want to take this much money from a pensioner? Will the minister investigate to ensure that the person in question really was entitled to the pension and will the minister consider referring this matter to the Electoral Commission as a possible case of the use of a dummy donor by the New South Wales Labor Party?

Mr TANNER—First, any allegations about fraud or misuse of pension entitlements are matters that should be referred to Centrelink. Second, any questions about the propriety of donations are ultimately matters for, in that case, the state secretary of the Labor Party. I am not aware of the detail of the report, but ultimately it is a matter for the organisation that is responsible for the donation. Therefore, it is a matter for the party organisation as to whether there is anything untoward with respect to the donation. It is certainly not something that I as minister for finance have a role in directly investigating.

**Nation Building and Jobs Plan**

Mr MURPHY (3.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Will the minister update the House on the job opportunities being created by the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program around Australia? How are members of parliament participating in the program?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Lowe for his question. This is a very exciting program which is delivering important community infrastructure projects right around the nation. Indeed, my attention has been drawn to comments about Mirrabooka Regional Centre in Perth. The comments include:

The City of Stirling is seeking $5.1 million in funding from the federal Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program for strategic projects to assist with building new infrastructure around the Mirrabooka Regional Centre. The project will see significant economic benefits flow through to the immediate and surrounding communities.

That is a worthy statement. It goes on to say: Implementation of the project is projected to provide 870 jobs and support 1,800 jobs long term.

This person goes on to say: I strongly urge the government to provide funding of at least $5.1 million towards the Mirrabooka Regional Centre.

The council only wants $5.1 million, but Michael Keenan, the member for Stirling, wants at least $5.1 million for this program. I table the progress report from the member for Stirling campaigning in his electorate for funding for this project. Indeed, he is pretty hands-on. The member for North Sydney has said that if you have voted against projects you are morally obliged to not show up and say that you support them. But the member for Stirling does not have that view. He turned up to applaud the opening of the project just last week.

Government members interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE—There it is—the Nation Building Program sign and all in the background—and he is applauding that project. But the member for Stirling goes a step further. The member for Stirling wants to build the project himself. He is out there with the hammer building the project himself, putting a hammer through the credibility of the arguments of those opposite. And, if a hammer is not enough, he has a jackhammer.

Opposition members interjecting—
The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume his seat.

Mr Pyne—Better than using a sickle, Albo. In any event, Mr Speaker, you yourself have ruled that photographs should be at the very most incidental to an answer to a question. I would say that the minister has transgressed the good taste of the House and your tolerance, and I would ask you to call him to order.

The SPEAKER—The minister has the call. I will watch closely how things develop.

Mr ALBANESE—I will put the other photos up on the website. They will all be there because they are terrific photos. What this illustrates is the serious point that those opposite say one thing in their electorates. Last week they were out there—the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Treasurer—saying that this was all wasteful, that the stimulus should be withdrawn, but when they go into their seats they are arguing for extra funding. I was in the electorates of coalition members last week at the invitation of coalition members, asking them to look at projects for the next round. They have a view that they can get away with arguing one thing in here but another thing in their electorates. They will not get away with it. Senator Fielding might have had a problem in spelling ‘fiscal’, but I can spell out of touch: T-u-r-n-b-u-l-l.

Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program

Mr ABBOTT (3.26 pm)—It is great to follow the Dan Quayle of the Australian parliament. But my question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Given the minister’s confirmation yesterday that not a single house has been built under the government’s Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program, can the minister detail exactly what Indigenous people have received from the $45 million that has been spent on this program so far?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Warringah for his question. As I outlined to him yesterday, in fact 102 houses have been built since the last election. Of course, those opposite do not want to hear that because when you compare the number of houses that were built by the Liberal government—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I think, 25 seconds into an answer to a question, that members on my left could listen to the answer.

Ms MACKLIN—As I was saying, the reason they do not want to hear that 102 houses have been built since the last election is that, when they were last in government, in 2004-05 there were 94 houses built and in 2005-06 only 51 houses were built. These are the relevant comparisons for how many houses were built over a similar period of time. But the member for Warringah asked me what some of this money has been spent on so far, and it gives me the opportunity to outline what some of the money has been spent on. I will first go to the important scoping works—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms MACKLIN—Plainly, those opposite have never been involved in building a house and thinking about what the scoping works are that have to be done before any house is built in any part of Australia. Has the shadow minister ever been responsible for building a house? Plainly not, because some of the money that has been provided so far has gone to make sure that we assess the state of houses that currently exist so that we know what level of refurbishment is needed. The availability of serviced blocks has had to be pursued so we can make sure that blocks are ready for houses to be built on. The training needs of the local community have been pur-
sued so that local people can get construction jobs.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Macklin—I hear those opposite laughing about this—plainly, they have never taken any responsibility for making sure that local Aboriginal people have the chance to get a job as these houses get built.

There has been the design work; design, of course, is a necessary part of scoping work that is done before a house is built. All of this is a necessary part of the work that happens before any house is built in any part of Australia. All of this is vital work that is done properly at the start of a program to make sure that we avoid problems down the track.

I might also let those opposite know that some of this money has also been spent on the upgrades of power infrastructure. Of course, not only do those opposite think it is not necessary to do any design work or any other scoping work but, plainly, they do not think it is necessary to make sure that we have the power supplies available for these houses to be built in these remote parts of Australia.

This is where that money has gone. I have, of course, indicated to those opposite before this question was asked that I have had very serious concerns about the delays in the Northern Territory. That is why the Commonwealth has decided to take the unusual step of putting Commonwealth officers into this program. We will put Commonwealth officers into this program on a permanent basis. They will also be part of the alliance process to make sure that the 750 houses that will be built are built on time and on budget.

Landcare Week

Mr Cheeseeman (3.32 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Given it is Landcare Week this week, will the minister inform the House of the importance of Landcare to Australian communities and Australian farmers? How does this work relate to threatened species?

Mr Burke—I thank the member for Corangamite for his question. This week it is good to be able to celebrate the work of more than 100,000 Landcare volunteers in something in the order of 4½ thousand community groups around the nation. Three-quarters of all Australian farmers are involved in some way in Landcare, and these are the people who manage 70 per cent of our landscape.

This year also marks two decades since Landcare Australia began, originally under Minister Kerin and the late Peter Cook, and then followed on from 1990 by the then Minister for Agriculture, who is now the Minister for Trade, Simon Crean. It started as a partnership between the NFF and the Australian Conservation Foundation but now includes significant urban and peri-urban groups as well.

When the community cabinet met in Lyne I had the opportunity to visit the Landcare Community Nursery in Port Macquarie, where volunteers are replacing invasive species with local native plants to support a wildlife corridor and to repair flood damage.

For some time MPs, including the member for Corangamite, have raised with me the need for a return to a small grants program within Landcare and within Caring for our Country. I am very pleased that earlier today the Minister for the Environment and I were able to announce $5 million to bring back a small grants program which will allow small grants between $5,000 and $20,000 for natural resource management groups, including Landcare groups, under Caring for our Country.

Members may be aware that yesterday was National Threatened Species Day, and much of the work of Caring for our Country...
goes to threatened species. Threatened species have descriptions such as vulnerable, critically endangered and extinct in the wild—all of which prompted me to think about the National Party! Something that has these listings is terribly hard to find, but last week four National Parties travelled together so they would be easier to find and vox pops were asked on this question in Lismore: is Warren Truss or Barnaby Joyce Leader of the Nationals? The first person who got it right—

Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This cannot possibly be relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER—The minister will relate his material to the question.

Mr BURKE—On the topic of whether or not they were regarded as endangered species, the final person on the vox pop got it right: Emma Adams from Tabulam said, ‘The Nationals’ leader is Warren Truss,’ and then added, ‘No, I don’t have any interest in politics, I just guessed it.’

Endangered species do have a higher recognition rating than the Leader of the Nationals, but compare that with the recognition throughout the country of Landcare in its logo, its volunteers and on our landscape.

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

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Report No. 3 of 2009-10

The SPEAKER (3.36 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit report No. 3 of 2009-10 entitled Administration of Parliamentarians’ entitlements by the Department of Finance and Deregulation.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.37 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.

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (EXTENDED MEDICARE SAFETY NET) LEGISLATION

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (3.37 pm)—I present the draft Health Insurance (Assistive Reproductive Technologies) Determination 2009. These are draft determinations that affect the debate on IVF. They have been requested by the opposition and the minor parties. They are being provided as a draft as the final regulations cannot be presented until the Health Insurance Amendment (Extended Medicare Safety Net) Bill 2009 is passed. They do, however, have all of the details that the opposition parties have been seeking and I think that they will assist the debate in the Senate on the extended Medicare safety net measures.

Importantly, I advise the House that the reason that they have not been tabled before now is that the final meeting with the medical profession and patient group Access was conducted on Thursday. There have been finalisations between the Department of Health and Ageing and the Department of Finance and Deregulation to ensure that the measures as they have been negotiated are within the funding allocation and will achieve the same level of savings as was announced in the 2009-10 budget. Importantly, of course, the new structure shows that patients charged at the average and median fee for a typical cycle will not be worse off as a result of this measure. In fact, many patients will receive higher MBS rebates. I hope that
these draft determinations will now enable the passage of the bill in the Senate.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Defence Science

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (3.39 pm)—by leave—I wish to take this opportunity to outline to the parliament how the Rudd government is enhancing the effectiveness of our national defence effort through science. In May the government tabled the Defence white paper titled Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030. In the white paper the government noted that the future operating environment of the Australian Defence Force will be shaped in large measure by changes in military technology and its employment. To this end, the government has placed increased emphasis on the ability of our Defence scientists to innovate and design new technologies and to apply and adapt existing technologies. In particular, we are developing a new role for our scientists in evaluating defence projects, analysing technical risk and designing risk management and risk mitigation strategies that will deliver increasingly robust defence capabilities.

Australia, of course, was one of the first nations in the world to recognise the importance of applied science and dedicated scientific research in sustaining a credible national defence effort. For more than 100 years, science has been an integral part of Australia’s defence. From beginnings that were built around the technologies of the day—principally explosives and munitions—Australia’s defence science now covers the spectrum of our national defence capabilities. From kinetics to electro-optics, from metallurgy to adhesives, from aeronautics to nutrition, our scientists are fundamental to the technological edge that is essential if our defence force is to deliver the level of security that the Australian people expect of government. With strategic responsibility for a disproportionate share of the earth’s surface, but with a small population, Australia has to be both agile and smart if it is to maintain an adequate defence capacity. Defence science provides the ultimate force multiplier. While our scientists are largely unseen, they are extremely important to our national security. Their contribution is critical.

The DSTO is the lead agency charged with applying science and technology to protect and defend Australia and its national interests. DSTO delivers expert, impartial advice and innovative solutions for Defence and other elements of national security. DSTO supports Australia’s defence by providing, amongst other things:

- support to operations;
- support to the current force;
- support to the Defence acquisition strategy;
- accident investigation; and
- enabling research.

DSTO’s capability also supports whole-of-government national security needs. Headed by the Chief Defence Scientist, Dr Robert Clark, the DSTO has an annual budget of approximately $400 million and employs more than 2,300 staff, predominantly scientists, engineers, IT specialists and technicians.

The DSTO has a presence across Australia. DSTO scientists also support the ADF on its deployments internationally, as well as working alongside our allies in their research establishments. At all times, DSTO works closely with CSIRO, as well as with the broader industry, scientific and technology community, to enhance its ability to support Australia’s defence and national security capabilities and to contribute to national
wealth. Staying at the forefront of the technology is key to the ADF’s capability edge. DSTO contributes directly to maintaining that edge by exploiting, adapting and developing new technology, so that our fighting men and women have the best possible equipment and platforms at their disposal. Moreover, DSTO’s work on human performance enables the men and women of our defence force to deliver maximum effect from their physical and psychological effort. Demands on DSTO’s science and technology support are extensive and continuous. The increased deployment of Australian troops overseas, the current global security environment and the challenges that it represents, new advances in technology and the multi-billion-dollar Defence acquisition program continue to place pressure on science and technology. DSTO’s track record in rising to these challenges is impressive and I will go through a number of the achievements and the work that is currently underway and in prospect.

Support to Operations

Firstly, in relation to support for ADP personnel in operations, with the increase in operational tempo over recent years DSTO has been responding to urgent operational demands by providing practical, life-saving solutions for the protection of Australian troops deployed around the world and by providing technology insertion, a key to the ADF’s mission. This direct support to operations has taken many forms—from embedding scientists within deployed units for immediate technical advice on mission effectiveness to developing customised camouflage uniforms. It also includes the provision of survivability kits and blast protection for ADF vehicles and sophisticated countermeasures to mitigate the effects of improvised explosive devices. This area of work in particular has contributed to saving the lives of ADP personnel.

Last month I inaugurated the upgrade to the Air Operations Simulation Centre and the Melbourne operations of the DSTO. This is a unique Australian research facility, capable of accurately simulating the full scope of flight operations and combat scenarios for a variety of military aircraft. The facility is designed to introduce a far more realistic experience for pilots and operators and allows Defence to test-drive aircraft and tactics without leaving the ground. By re-creating real-life situations in a virtual environment, this facility allows air combat operations to be rehearsed and evaluated at a significantly reduced cost and without putting ADF personnel in harm’s way—although from my own experience in a simulator it does leave one potentially slightly motion sick.

Support to the current force

Importantly, DSTO provides extensive support to the current force. In providing essential technical support to every aspect of Navy, Army Air Force, intelligence and joint operations, DSTO both enhances existing capability and adapts it for Australia’s unique circumstances. DSTO also extends the service life and availability for use of these capabilities.

Today, more than ever, the ADF needs to extract every bit of value from the equipment it operates and to ensure that its people are able to carry out the demanding tasks of defence to the best of their ability. DSTO provides expert advice on reducing the cost of operating and maintaining that equipment and delaying the huge expense of replacing it by prolonging its effective performance. For more than 50 years, DSTO has been the indisputable world leader in testing airframes for metal fatigue and extending the lives of military aircraft, which was celebrated last month at DSTO’s Melbourne facilities.

Recently, DSTO’s rigorous testing of the fuselage centre barrel in the FA18 Hornet
proved that the actual life of this critical component was 10 per cent greater than originally certified. This finding has effectively given the aircraft an additional two years of flying life, providing the fleet with sufficient fatigue longevity to safely reach its planned withdrawal date. As a result, fewer aircraft than previously identified will need to have their centre barrels replaced and consequently Defence stands to save an estimated $400 million—roughly the equivalent of DSTO’s annual budget.

A similar example is the recent completion of a fatigue test to ensure the structural integrity of the replacement wings fitted to the F111 fleet until their planned withdrawal date in the not-too-distant future. After nearly 38,000 hours of simulated flight tests without failure, DSTO was able to estimate the retirement life of the wings and recommend inspection intervals that minimise the burden of frequent maintenance.

Cost savings are not the only benefit of extending the life of aircraft components. Equally important, the platforms have been available for ADF use over longer periods of time instead of being grounded. This is vital in these days of increased operational requirement. We should also never forget that thorough testing of aircraft components contributes to the ongoing safety of our aircrews, and that is the predominant and overriding concern of the ADF.

DSTO’s support for Navy has been equally important. The recently published history of the Collins class submarine highlighted how DSTO’s scientific expertise was fundamental to the overall success of the project. DSTO developed the steel and welding technology for the hulls; it developed the anechoic tiles which make them inaudible to other submarines or ships; and when the submarine project ran into difficulties it was DSTO which helped solve many of the problems with the diesels, the generators, the propeller, the noise signature of the vessel and the combat system.

The result is that the Collins submarine is now acknowledged as a unique underwater platform operating at a ‘world’s best’ standard. In the book The Collins Class Submarine Story: Steel, Spies and Spin, the book’s authors summed up the DSTO contribution by saying that the scientists:

… grappled with and overcame the unexpected problems that inevitably arose when doing things for the first time. This effort demonstrated the importance of sustaining in Australia a body of technical knowledge, a mode of operation and links with industry and overseas colleagues and institutions to provide a range of options and answers.

The lessons learnt from the Collins submarine experience have been invaluable for DSTO, which is now undertaking research to support the future submarine project and the next generation of undersea warfare, including many advanced concepts such as the potential integration of unmanned vehicles within submarines.

Developing physical employment standards

DSTO is also conducting work to support our personnel through the development of new modern physical employment standards. DSTO has partnered with the University of Wollongong to establish a Centre of Expertise in Physical Employment Standards. This centre of expertise will assist the ADF to develop objective benchmarks for physical employment assessments to ensure soldiers have physical capacity commensurate with the performance of critical tasks, regardless of trade classifications, rank, age or gender. The Centre has been tasked to develop physical employment standards for the Army, with a view to later assessing requirements for the Air Force and the Navy.
Physical employment standards are physical fitness standards that accurately measure a person’s ability to physically perform the variety of jobs that make up the modern ADF. By defining a set of physical employment standards that represent the real demands of military tasks, Defence can ensure that all personnel have the appropriate physical capacity to safely and effectively carry out those tasks. Adoption of employment standards will also help guide recruits to occupations for which they are most physically suited and could also potentially facilitate access to occupations traditionally closed to particular groups on the basis of task physical readiness. Importantly, these new standards could also potentially contribute to significant savings for Defence as a result of lower healthcare and compensation costs by reducing trade related injuries.

The development of these new standards will also help inform the government on the appropriateness of a possible expansion of the roles that women can play in the ADF. A priority of the government is to improve the recruitment and retention of women in the ADF. Women already play a very important role, including on operations such as in Afghanistan at the moment. The government recognises that it is crucial to recruit and retain more women if the ADF is to meet its overall force requirements. Defence aims to provide all its members with the opportunity to progress based on merit, ability, performance and potential in a work environment that fosters personal recognition and job satisfaction. This work will help further inform the ADF about the suitability of all people, regardless of gender, age or rank, to serve in positions throughout the ADF.

It is perfectly valid to argue that all categories should be open to women. The only exceptions should be where the physical demands cannot be met, regardless of gender, according to criteria that are determined on the basis of scientific analysis rather than cultural assumptions. The government, in consultation with the broader Defence community, will consider the results upon completion in the context of possibly further expanding the roles that women can play in the ADF.

**Support to Acquisition**

On the issue in relation to the support of the DSTO to the acquisition of military material, as confirmed by David Mortimer’s report into Defence Procurement and Sustainment, titled *Going to the Next Level*, DSTO’s role in supporting acquisition is also vital. In close partnership with Defence’s Capability Development Group and the Defence Materiel Organisation, DSTO advises Defence and the government on the full spectrum of technical issues associated with platforms and equipment and on solutions that offer the best performance and best value for money. This is an integral part of the acquisition process and the capability life cycle. DSTO’s assessments ensure the technical risks of acquiring new capability are minimised. Their independent and objective advice also provides a reality check on available options for government.

Within the capability development process, DSTO’s feasibility studies and operational analyses are essential early inputs in determining what sort of equipment the ADF needs, and why. For example, in the recent air combat capability review, DSTO compared the relative merits of current and future combat aircraft and their ability to carry out the mix of roles required for Australia’s air defence. The capabilities of our planned air combat systems were then assessed against the projected future threats in the Asia-Pacific region.

Just as important, DSTO also provides advice on how Australia can maintain its capability advantage through the development of
leading edge technology that may not be available anywhere else in the world. Importantly, due to the risks that are associated with such developments, DSTO plays a very important risk management role in this process.

As it acquires next-generation technologies the ADF will be relying more heavily on DSTO’s expertise to reduce technical risk and integrate capabilities into the force structure. The establishment of the Systems Integration Technical Advisory unit by DSTO and DMO should go a long way towards addressing the challenges involved in integrating systems and reducing delays in the delivery of Defence projects and that is a high priority of the government.

**Accident Investigation**

DSTO also has built up high levels of forensic skill and sophistication in military accident investigation. This has helped provide support to investigations of historical and contemporary military incidents, which not only illuminate these but also help inform current ADF doctrine and practice. The most comprehensive accident investigation carried out by DSTO in the last 20 years was its investigation of the 2005 Sea King helicopter crash on the Indonesian island of Nias, which resulted in the tragic death of nine crew members.

The DSTO investigation team conducted an analysis of the accident, with their findings used to support the Board of Inquiry. This work helped contributed to the Board of Inquiry being able to provide a full account of this incident, which in turn helped provide information to the victims’ families.

This work in Indonesia was followed by another DSTO investigation resulting in the discovery three months ago of the Canberra bomber and the remains of the aircrew that went missing in Vietnam in 1970. The Air Operations Division of the DSTO provided crucial support for that investigation by analysing potential trajectories given the last known position, likely altitude and airspeed of Canberra bombers on the mission. This expertise and modelling work refined and prioritised the search area for the two missing airmen. The ensuing investigation resulted in the return last week of these two airmen, our last missing in action from the Vietnam War, to Australia.

More recently, DSTO’s contribution to the Cole Commission of Inquiry into the 1941 loss of HMAS Sydney was a key piece of evidence that reconstructed the final hours of the ship. The evidence was a computer generated simulation based on extensive scientific models, an exhaustive analysis of video imagery and photographs of the wreck site, as well as historical documents and photographs. The simulation and analysis were crucial in recreating the most plausible scenario to resolve the mystery surrounding Australia’s biggest maritime tragedy.

Some years earlier, DSTO also used its underwater investigation expertise to identify and photograph the wreck of Australia’s World War I submarine AE2 which had been scuttled in Turkish waters in 1915 during the Gallipoli campaign. It is clear from the evidence the importance of the DSTO in this field.

**Enabling Research**

In order to continue to magnify the capabilities of the ADF, the DSTO invests in nurturing emerging technology and in developing new applications for existing technology. Through our white paper, the Rudd government has a forward-looking research program that focuses on a number of enabling technologies designed to deliver the maximum advantage to Defence.

The program is closely aligned to the ADF’s current and future operational priorities. This new program is designed to be
flexible and adaptable so that promising technologies and innovative developments can be fast tracked and fielded systems can be deployed at the earliest available opportunity.

The enabling research program covers a portfolio of initiatives which span very significant research and development across challenging technology areas, including:

- cyber warfare;
- intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance;
- electronic warfare;
- over the horizon radar;
- antisubmarine warfare;
- systems integration;
- force protection and counter-improvised explosive devices;
- signatures, materials, power and energy;
- micro unmanned airborne systems;
- undersea warfare; and
- chemical, biological and radiological protection.

All of these are extremely important areas of research for Australia’s future national security.

External Engagement

To deliver on its research program DSTO continues to forge closer links with industry and the science and technology community both here and overseas. These links enable industry to better support the capabilities needed to defend Australia.

The Capability and Technology Demonstrator Program and the related Extension Program, both managed by DSTO, have greatly improved access for industry, especially small-to-medium enterprises, to demonstrate their innovations in technology and contribute to the development of Defence capability. Since the program started, 92 projects have been undertaken, with a total investment of approximately $224 million.

The DSTO has had some success in developing technology in partnership with industry. A great example of this is the Joint Direct Attack Munition-Extended Range (JDAM-ER) project. The JDAM-ER is based on DSTO developed technology that was successfully licensed to industry and developed under the CTD Program.

The Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) is a tail kit that converts free-fall unguided bombs into precision-guided weapons. The tail section contains an advanced guidance system that directs the bomb to the selected target. The key enabler that allows the guided weapon to glide towards long-range targets is the wing kit, developed by Hawker de Havilland (now Boeing Aerostructures) under the auspices of the CTD Program and based on DSTO technology.

This innovative technology has increased the range of the launch aircraft’s fire-and-forget capability, allowing the launch at a safe distance from the target. This increases the safety of our pilots and other ADF personnel. The system was developed under the CTD Program and then under the new CTD Extension Program. It is now in final development for commercial production. This collaboration between DSTO and industry has led to a world-leading product and has the potential to improve the safety of ADF personnel and create jobs in high-technology occupations.

A further example of collaboration around the CTD Program is the assistance it provided for the successful transition of advanced sonar communications interception technology into operational service. The Low Probability of Intercept Sonar project, developed by Nautronix (now a division of L-3), has already transitioned into service with the
Navy. The technology aims to ensure that there is a low probability that underwater communications will be intercepted and/or recognised by foreign forces. This is another product that increases the capability of the ADF and improves the safety of our ADF personnel.

A further distinct form of collaboration between Defence and industry is the successful establishment of the Defence Materials Technology Centre (DMTC). The DMTC aims to leverage the expertise and resources of DSTO, industry, universities and other public research bodies to develop leading-edge materials-related technologies for the ADF.

The Rudd government intends to promote further joint ventures in high-technology areas of interest to Defence. Accordingly, DSTO will expand its engagement program with its industry and overseas partners to stay ahead of the technology curve. By collaborating with and transferring its technology to Australian industry, DSTO plays a significant role in creating jobs, generating national wealth and reducing Australia’s reliance on overseas products and expertise. This in turn helps build a stronger Australian defence industry.

DSTO’s value and its credibility stem from its incorporation as an integral part of Defence, its exclusive focus on Australia’s war-fighting needs, its experience in supporting the ADF since the early 1900s and its knowledge of modern warfare based on leading-edge, highly classified research. It would be hard to find anywhere else this unique combination of research excellence, specialist knowledge of Defence needs and rigorous objectivity.

The value that the 2,300 men and women of DSTO deliver to ADF capability more than justifies the two per cent of the Defence budget that the government invests in this world-class science and technology organisation. Indeed, the Rudd government is of the view that an increasingly strong and adaptable DSTO is a critical national security asset for the future. I thank the House.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Paterson to speak for 25 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr COMBET—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Baldwin speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 25 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (4.04 pm)—It is a delight to speak on the contribution of defence science to the security of our nation. Our Australian Defence Force has internationally been recognised as a defence force that punches well above its weight. Punching well above your weight does not just come from having a very well-trained and disciplined defence force; it comes from supplying the men and women of the defence force with the equipment, the platforms and the technology they need to be able to do their job effectively.

Warfare today is significantly different to the warfare conducted just a few decades ago. Not only have there been fewer state-versus-state conflicts across the globe but we have witnessed a phenomenal increase in asymmetric warfare and in those willing to use such warfare for their own purposes. Too often the symbolic date of 9-11 is referred to as being the start of terrorist campaigns and asymmetric warfare, but I think it goes back to the days of Lockerbie, which has been in the news recently, and the advent of terrorism using whatever means necessary to bring about disruption, downfall of government and financial strains on countries and to instil fear into communities.
Aside from the strategic shift in the way warfare is now conducted and the manner in which defence forces now have to plan for future conflicts, there has also been a very rapid advancement in defence technologies to support those efforts. Developing technologies in rapid response to the new and emerging threats is key and critical. For example, new warfare means that have strongly emerged in particular since the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have been improvised explosive devices, and the face and the nature of those devices have changed from being very small and very basic military equipment to now incorporating high technology—the use of mobile phones planted in the devices to set off charges. It is important is that the science addresses those emerging threats.

We have talked about the fine scientific minds in our nation, but unlike years gone by, where our top scientific minds would sit in a laboratory testing, developing and checking, these fine minds now serve on the front line with Australia's finest soldiers, sailors and airmen witnessing, experiencing and looking at these technologies so they can provide instant response, taking that science and putting it straight back into the laboratory so their colleagues can work on new and innovative ways of addressing threats which would not only take the lives of Australian soldiers, sailors and airmen but also the lives of innocent victims, innocent players, in the pursuit of terrorism driven by those with ulterior means and motives to destroy everything we stand for in the way of democracy, freedoms and the ability of people to go about their life by peaceful means. So the science of warfare is as important as those who go out into the field to prosecute the arguments of warfare to reduce terrorism. Making sure, though, that these people have the tools and the resources necessary to conduct the science that brings about speedy resolution is key and critical.

I congratulate the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science, Mr Combet, on his speech today. It was a great run-down through the history of all of the accomplishments over the decades of the Defence Science Technology Organisation and the great people who have worked there. Some of Australia's leading minds have worked there. In fact, one of our own colleagues Dennis Jensen was a scientist at DSTO working on the submarine project. So many people from many fields work there and we need to make sure that we as a nation keep investing in the people who can bring about these opportunities, this science and this technology.

There are many people amongst the 2,300 scientists, engineers, researchers, technicians, the new and emerging area of IT specialists and support staff who work for DSTO. As I have travelled around Australia to the various DSTO outfits, I have met these people and they are some of perhaps the most enthusiastic people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. Without being rude or dismissive of them, they are perhaps some of the most anal people I have ever met. They are so focused on the job that they have to do that everything else is immaterial. They are so fixated on achieving the outcome because they know that if they achieve that outcome they are going to save lives. It is not just about tinkering with machines and information. Their focus is on saving lives, not only the lives of our Defence personnel but also the lives of innocent people who are the victims of terrorism.

If I were to use a more polite word—and I meant no disrespect to them individually or as a group—they are perhaps some of the most excited people I have ever met. The way they talk about their inventions, their creations and their value adding to technology cannot help but inspire you in looking at what they do, and their dedication to their
work, their attitude, is due in no small part to the fact that they understand the uniqueness and the importance of the work that they conduct. There may be people who have great minds and have great ability but who perhaps are not prepared to engage in developing defence technologies for the benefit of our nation and our allies, but their contribution can be equally supportive in an indirect way.

The speech just given by Minister Combet on the work undertaken by DSTO and their achievements, their support of our Defence Force and industry sectors is truly welcome. For most people, the work of DSTO is not really known out there in the general public. It is almost like they are the secret service—the service that people do not know exists—but they understand the outcomes that DSTO achieve, and they achieve it on a very tight budget. This is a group of scientists, 2,300 people, who achieve a lot for the amount of money that is invested in them. I will not revisit all of the scientific breakthroughs that have been covered by the minister, but one in particular that I have had a look at when I was out on a ship it was on is the Nulka ship launch missile countermeasure device which is designed to act as a decoy to incoming radar guided antiship missiles.

We are a relatively small nation and as such we have a reasonably sized defence force and a reasonably sized armada of ships. Over the next couple of decades we will see an expansion of those ships with new warfare destroyers. We will see an upgrading of our ships, but making sure that they have a survivability at sea is key and critical. One cannot just walk in and buy things off the shelf. They take years of design and development and our Defence Force people on those ships are the most important assets that we have in our Defence Force. Platforms and bits of metal are one thing, but it is our people who are the most important. So an instrument like a Nulka—a decoy which will take a radar guided missile away from the ship, thereby protecting the asset and protecting the personnel—is a very important piece of design technology created in Australia. The Nulka is now in use with the Royal Australian Navy and the US Navy. Here is where our science has developed technology which is able to be exported to our allies. Australia again is at the forefront of technology and doing what it can not just for our people but for our allies who serve alongside us. Science technology can earn massive amounts of money for Australia, but as the minister rightly said it can save a lot of money for Australia as well. One example that he identified very close to me at RAAF Base Williamtown is the cost savings in excess of $400 million by, through science, extending the life structure of the centre barrel for the FA18.

This fleet was thought to have reached a critical point in its fatigue structure. Through scientific testing they were able to extend the life of that, which fits in better with our platform procurement, whether it is through the Super Hornets or indeed the Joint Strike Fighter, and extends their lives. By extending their lives, we save money. It is not something that you can just enter into. It is not done through guessometrics because people fly these platforms and you cannot put people’s lives at undue risk, so the science, the research and the technical correctness is very critical. Importantly, through proper funding we can achieve even greater savings and understanding of defence technologies through the science.

The DSTO has been very important in investigating the development of physical employment standards for Australian Defence Force personnel. The development of such standards will produce rigorous scientific standards for employment categories in the ADF and may potentially open up new ave-
nues of employment for women. The coalition is committed to increasing opportunities for women in the Australian Defence Force. It is not just rhetoric; it is action. I note that my colleague the former Minister for Defence, Brendan Nelson, is here today. He was one of the key drivers in creating equality of opportunity for all people in Australia to serve our nation in a variety of capacities. Through this program we will see opportunities open up. We will see that people, because of their commitment, because of their courage, will be able to serve Australia and its needs in theatres of operation to the best of their ability. In designing these standards we are putting people with capacity into the right placements to achieve the maximum outcome. This is good stuff for Australia, and it is good for the people in our defence forces to know that there are designs around their capability to make sure that they can have maximum impact.

One of the other science improvements that I witnessed at DSTO was at the forefront of air-to-air missile technology. They provided substantial expertise, in conjunction with our RAAF, in developing the lock-after-launch ASRAAM missile capability. This capability was developed so that the ASRAAM missile can be fired at an enemy aircraft that is flying behind an engaged aircraft. Having talked to the RAAF pilots at Williamtown, I know that this is important technology. To manoeuvre your aircraft in such a way that you can do a loop over the back and engage a missile or indeed an aircraft that is pursuing you in a dogfight is very difficult—no matter what the platform. Australian science has developed the ASRAAM missile, which can be deployed and locked on after launch to an aircraft or a missile that is following an aircraft, therefore protecting Australian lives and allowing us to go further and deeper into areas of operation to prosecute the arguments that we ask our Defence Force people to do for us.

This is good technology, designed and developed by Australians, and it is technology that is now proven. I have been informed by DSTO that this lock-after-launch ASRAAM missile has the capability of picking up a missile five kilometres away, when it is pursuing an aircraft, and taking it out of operation. The work undertaken by the DSTO is invaluable. It is invaluable because it not only helps to protect our troops and ADF personnel in the front line but also helps save the Australia taxpayer a considerable amount of money and, most importantly, continues to help Australia to maintain its military technology edge.

The speech given by my opposite number has served two purposes today. First, it has served to highlight to the public the exceptional work that DSTO has been engaged in, and I must stress that their work is invaluable. As I said, DSTO’s work not only supports our troops today but, critically, will ensure our technological edge into the future. However, the minister has also used this statement in an attempt to gloss over his government’s shameless acts of cutting funding from Australia’s premier research institutions such as CSIRO, ANSTO and DSTO. He should be ashamed of himself for politicising the genuine good work of DSTO. Just when we thought that the politicisation of defence had come to an end with the dismissal of Joel Fitzgibbon, I stand here today growing increasingly concerned with the direction in which this minister is taking defence. While the minister was happy to speak about the successes of DSTO and the good work of its many scientists, engineers and researchers, he conveniently forgot—or, more accurately, deliberately omitted—certain information about his government’s policies that have cut funding for DSTO and,
by extension, joint DSTO and industry programs.

I am reminded of the Treasurer’s budget night speech where he decided to announce the government’s spending initiatives while deliberately omitting anything to do with national debt. It is unfortunate that Minister Combet has decided to submit to the Rudd Labor government’s policy of ‘spin over substance’. It is a decision that will ultimately be to the detriment of DSTO and our serving men and women. For the record, the Rudd Labor government has implemented a program that will see a significant reduction to DSTO staffing levels and their budget. Despite the minister’s rhetoric about the importance of DSTO, he is overseeing policies that will see DSTO’s budget cut by more than $108 million over the next 10 years. The minister stands here talking about the fine work that they have done but there is not a mention of the budget cuts over the next 10 years. This is only small compared to the $20 billion of cuts being implemented by the Rudd Labor government broadly across defence.

Mr Combet interjecting—

Mr BALDWIN—Minister, there are $20 billion worth of cuts. You can play smoke and mirrors, you can spin all you like, but $20 billion worth of cuts is $20 billion worth of cuts. A dollar is a dollar is a dollar is a dollar, and you should know that.

I would like to talk about the proactive nature of DSTO and the importance of that. We can remind ourselves of the experience with the Collins class submarines, which the minister has pointed out to this House, but can I also remind him of the fact that cutbacks to DSTO by the former Labor government actually impeded the due diligence on the science and technology on projects like JORN and the Collins class submarine. I say one thing to the minister: proactive due diligence in scientific and engineering assessment is a lot cheaper than rectification work. Rectification is very expensive. So I say to this minister: forget about the cutbacks. If you are talking about the opportunities for science and technology for Australia in defence then actually increase their budget, and the savings will come because there will not be the rectification costs. Because of the due diligence as we take first of line and develop new and emerging technologies, the costs will not be there in rectification.

So where do I see this playing out first-hand? One of the first operations of this government was through DSTO’s capability and technology demonstrator fund. One of the first painful cuts was taking their budget from around $26 million annually down to $13 million. This is a program that develops new technology and gets small-to-medium enterprises working hand in hand and reduces the risk profile for those small businesses. Some of the best military technologies in the world have been developed by small-to-medium enterprises—people with a vision, an idea and a dream looking for support to be able to implement that technology. A lot of that technology cannot be taken to the marketplace because it is defence-style work. You cannot just build it, put it on the shelf and hope somebody will come and buy it. If you are designing technology which is for defence, you need to work hand in hand with defence science and technology to make sure it fits their needs. Once that product or technology is developed there is a market for it, and the secrecy and the IP are protected because it has been developed in cooperation with government. The minister talks gloatingly about all the projects that have been developed and funded through this capability technology demonstrator fund. I say to him that the $13 million a year in cutbacks, halving the project, will see a massive reduction.
The minister has made a lot of statements in his speech about the Collins-class submarine and developing physical employment standards. In a previous life, he stood up for workers and, in particular, for occupational health and safety for workers. I remind him that cadmium has been found in the Collins-class submarine. It was identified 12 months ago, in August 2008, and it has taken till now to put safety warning signs on those submarines. I need to be clear on this. The issue is not the fact that cadmium is present on the submarines. Cadmium is required in the electrical equipment to reduce corrosion and make sure that the sustainability of the equipment continues. The issue here is one of occupational health and safety, where people are advised of the problem so they can wear personal protective equipment to protect themselves. This is the minister who made much, and rightly so, of Bernie Banton and the need for companies like James Hardie to implement occupational health and safety standards for the protection and welfare of their workers. This minister was previously the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement. This is an occupational health and safety issue which is of paramount importance to people who are submerged in a submarine for extended periods of time. They cannot leave the submarine. They have to breathe the air that is pumped around the submarine. They cannot walk away. They cannot go outside. They cannot go for a swim. They cannot go down the street. They do not have weekends off but are in there 24/7. And here is the man who took 12 months to put up a sign. I would hate to see what is going to happen if there is a large task that he has to undertake other than making sure that signs are put up to make people aware of the danger and threat of the cadmium in the equipment in these submarines.

Minister, you have now had a few days. I hope that you have actually put the call through to make sure that those signs are established on those submarines. It should not be too hard to get the signs on the submarines, because most of them are in port. They are in port because, in 22 months, you have not increased the manning levels to increase the capacity of our submarines to go to sea and you have not applied the funding to the engineering to make sure that our submarines can go to sea. The ANAO audit in 2008 showed a shortfall of 240 submariners to meet the current demand for a full complement of 667. The reality is that the ANAO audit showed that our submarines are operating at 43 per cent of capacity. So I say to you: your snail’s pace in delivering reform programs is not like the Greg Combet who was so vitriolic and vocal about workers and—

Mr Combet interjecting—

Mr BALDWIN—I do not care who it was about, and I actually agreed with you when you stood up for Bernie Banton. It is just a pity you have not stood up for the sailors of this nation on our submarines.

In conclusion, I want to say this. Our Defence Force, as I said right at the very beginning, punch well above their weight on an international scale, as is recognised by our allies across the world. But that ability to punch well above their weight comes not just from their own training standards and, in particular, their discipline; it comes from the technologies and the platforms that we provide to our people. A lot of that development and technology is Australian home grown. Minister, take this message on board: your cutbacks of $20 billion over 10 years—$2 billion per annum—will have dire effects on our Defence Force. They are already having effects on the morale of our Defence Force. I urge you, even if do not you have the capac-
ity to lobby your own government to restore all of that funding, to make sure the funding for DSTO is restored and that it is actually increased. You have come into the House today and enunciated all of the great work that they have done but you have failed to back that up with dollars. Make sure they have the funding to continue to provide the new and emerging technologies that are needed, in the face of the emerging threats and technologies that our enemies are developing, so that our Defence Force can be protected and the lives of the people they go out to protect are also protected. Minister, if you do not do that, you have failed our nation.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Budget

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Mr Speaker has received a letter from the honourable Leader of the Opposition proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The Government’s failure to prevent wasteful spending

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

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

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Leader of the Opposition) (4.29 pm)—Last Thursday the Secretary of the Treasury, Dr Henry, gave a speech which included this insight: Government spending that does not pass an appropriately defined cost-benefit test necessarily detracts from Australia’s wellbeing.

Sadly, barely a day goes by without fresh evidence of reckless spending by this government that fails any plausible cost-benefit test. Billions of borrowed dollars are being squandered in ways that are doing nothing for our nation. In his determination to put government at the centre of the Australian economy, the Prime Minister is presiding over the largest expansion of the public sector in our history. Commonwealth spending in 2009 is forecast to be a staggering $65 billion higher than in 2007—a rise of 24 per cent since Labor was elected less than two years ago. For every $4 that was being spent under the coalition, Labor is now spending $5. The question we must ask is: how much of this vast increase in expenditure, almost entirely funded by borrowing, fails the test set out by Dr Henry? How much of this spree represents a wasteful diversion of resources that detracts from the nation’s wellbeing? Regrettably, a great deal of it fits that description.

Consider some of the recent examples of this government’s fiscal recklessness and inability to deliver value for money to taxpayers: Julia Gillard memorial libraries, assembly halls and gymnasiums are being thrust upon primary schools across the nation, including, as we have discovered, a number that are slated to be closed down—and a $250,000 assembly hall for a school with a single, lucky student! More than $40 million is being outlaid on an Indigenous housing program that is yet to deliver a single house, that is yet to involve the laying of a single brick, and hundreds of millions of dollars is being spent on imported pink batts. Cheques for $900 are being sent across the country and, as we have learnt, across the world, including to the deceased, to pensioners living abroad and, according to the press, to a number of pets. More than $215 million has been spent on government advertising and a further $49 million on government spin doctors and on community infrastructure grants that appear to be astutely targeted at marginal Labor electorates. The justification for all this was given by the Minister for Fi-
nance and Deregulation today, and I am delighted that he has come into the chamber.

Mr Tanner—Especially for you!

Mr Turnbull—That is very touching. I am deeply touched by the minister, but not as touched as the taxpayers’ pockets are. The minister was asked: ‘What was the cost-benefit analysis done on the Julia Gillard memorial assembly hall program?’ The minister replied that it was justified because of the global financial crisis. He said it was necessary to get money into the Australian economy as quickly as possible to sustain jobs and that the money was therefore spent because ‘it could be moved quickly into maintenance, into infrastructure, into building things, into sustaining the construction sector’.

What the minister has said is that the quality of the spending was irrelevant and the only thing that mattered was the quantity and the timing. In other words, he was taking up, in a less extreme version, the example, given by John Maynard Keynes, of stimulatory spending to avert a recession: paying men to dig holes and then to fill them in again. No consideration at all was given to the $14 billion Julia Gillard memorial assembly hall program, nor was a cost-benefit analysis done. Yet, when the minister was in opposition, a little over two years ago, he said in this House:

… there is another dimension which is often overlooked—
in addition to the quantity of government spending—
that is, the quality of government spending. What is that money being spent on? Quantity is obviously vital and the settings are vital but so too is the quality.

The approach the government took to spending money on schools stands in marked contrast to the approach the coalition took when we were in government and to the approach that we took when we set up an alternative program to the government’s $42 billion stimulus package. One of the great falsehoods told by the Rudd government, in their Orwellian way, is that the coalition opposed any form of stimulus. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our objection was to the amount of money being borrowed and spent and the manner in which it was targeted. We were focused on both the quantity and the quality. As far as schools were concerned, we pointed to the success of the Howard government’s Investing in Our Schools Program. That program, in which $1.2 billion was spent, was successful because, rather than imposing Julia Gillard memorial assembly halls on primary schools whether or not they wanted them or needed them, the federal government reached out to school communities and asked them: ‘What do you need? What are your priorities? What is your dream? How can we help you realise your ambitions for your school and your community?’ Those proposals then came back, were assessed and most were funded.

The coalition proposed an extension of that program back in February, with funding of $3 billion over three years, which would have resulted in less money being spent on these school buildings, but every dollar of it would have been spent on a project, on a building, on a structure, on a playground or on equipment that was actually wanted and needed by the school community because they would have made the decision. It would have guaranteed value for money.

The Prime Minister is currently claiming credit for the strong performance of the Australian economy relative to other developed economies. He points to the good figures on business and consumer confidence. We of course are delighted that the Australian economy is performing well, but we are appalled, as are most Australians, at the graceless and ungenerous way in which the Prime Minister
constitutes himself as a latter-day Winston Smith. Yes, the Prime Minister is impersonating a character out of George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four. In that book there was a Ministry for Truth, which of course was responsible for telling lies on behalf of the government. There was something called a ‘memory hole’, into which inconvenient facts and matters of history were dropped by Mr Smith, who is now reincarnated as the Prime Minister, thereupon to be destroyed—rewriting history, in other words. That is exactly what we are seeing at the moment.

The fact of the matter is that we have done better in this downturn than other comparable developed economies because of the strong state of our economy and our public finances set up by the coalition. The true reasons for our superior performance have very little to do with the stimulus spending from the Rudd government. In fact, it is quite clear that we entered this crisis with the strongest financial system in the developed world, and that is almost entirely due to the prudential and regulatory framework put in place by the coalition. There was no banking crisis in Australia. There was no subprime crisis in Australia. Whereas other countries entered this downturn with massive public borrowings, we entered it with zero net public debt and $45 billion of cash in the bank—one of the strongest balance sheets in the world, thanks to a decade of budget surpluses, debt repayment and financial discipline presided over by the member for Higgins as our Treasurer.

We have an open and deregulated economy with a highly efficient export sector focused on our immense natural resources and our close economic relations with China and other fast-growing Asian economies. That was the result of a quarter-century of economic reform and restructuring under the Hawke, Keating and Howard governments. Unlike the Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, we recognise that there were important reforms undertaken by our predecessors. We recognise that both of the major parties have played a role in the strength of our economy today. Those of us who were unfortunate enough to have to listen to the Prime Minister’s Winston Smith impersonation at the launch of Paul Kelly’s book yesterday would have heard him say that nothing good was ever done by any party other than the Labor Party. Above all, Australia had a mature and flexible labour market. That flexibility in our labour market has been cited again and again as the reason for our strong economic growth with manageable inflation during the boom years. This is the reason we have come through this downturn with lower levels of unemployment so far than many had predicted. As the Australian’s economics editor Michael Stutchbury recently wrote:

… a more flexible job market has allowed business to cut costs by reducing working hours rather than sacking big chunks of its workforce. The pain has been shared around rather than concentrated.

Every reform under our administration, under the Howard government, that established that flexibility was opposed by the Labor Party. But, above all, the greatest single domestic stimulus we have seen was the substantial easing in monetary policy—the reductions in rates delivered by the Reserve Bank of Australia, whose credibility and independence also reflects the legislative protections provided to it under the coalition and which were opposed by the Labor Party.

All of these advantages, all of these strengths, reflect the legacy of economic and structural reform under governments of both political persuasions from the 1980s onwards. As I said a moment ago, we, unlike the Prime Minister, are not so graceless or conceited as to claim the credit for all of these reforms. It has been a long work by both sides of this House and this parliament.
But history recalls nonetheless that during the years of the Howard government the Labor Party voted against virtually every one of the Howard government’s reforms that made Australia’s economy so strong and resilient—whether it was giving independence to the Reserve Bank, whether it was waterfront reform, whether it was the workplace relations reform or whether, indeed, it was the tax reforms and the GST, which the Prime Minister described as being the foundation or the instigation of what he called ‘fundamental injustice day’. The single biggest tax reform in our history, the most complex and challenging tax reform in our history, and one which is now part of our fiscal architecture, was strenuously opposed by the Labor Party. They opposed Work for the Dole and the crackdown on welfare rorts. They opposed employers having the right to choose their own superannuation fund and they opposed every single one of the 11 budgets under the Howard government that helped create more than two million new jobs and eliminate the $96 billion of net debt that the Keating government had left behind.

It is clear that since the end of 2007, under a very different Labor government to its 1983 and 1996 predecessors, there has been a sea change in the way economic policy is approached in this country. The Prime Minister claimed the Labor Party’s monopoly on economic reform yesterday. But we all waded through that incredible innings from the Bradman of boredom—that long essay in the Monthly—in which he denounced the whole neoliberal experiment, Howard-Costello and Hawke-Keating, as being all as bad as each other. He proclaimed, with a Whitlam-esque commitment to big government, that the government should be at the centre of the economy. What we have seen is a reckless spending and a reckless borrowing that are inevitably going to lead to higher taxes and higher interest rates for Australians in the years ahead.

Mr Tanner (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (4.44 pm)—Sometimes politicians get accused of not knowing what day it is, and I must confess that this morning I was close to leaving myself open to that accusation. When I got the topic for the MPI, signed by Malcolm Turnbull, and saw the words ‘the government’s failure to prevent wasteful spending’, I had to check the date—I thought it might have been 1 April. This is a genuinely surreal proposition being advanced by the opposition. It is perhaps somewhere in the same league as the Leader of the Opposition telling us how he created the republic or saved HIH. Of all the areas in which the opposition, and particularly this Leader of the Opposition, might seek to claim the high moral ground, wasteful government spending is very much at the bottom of the list. For the opposition to be putting forward this debate is truly in the surreal world of two-way mirrors of politics.

I want to start by drawing some attention to the recent track record of the Leader of the Opposition and his party in government just to illustrate what the Rudd government inherited by way of government spending—that is, the situation when we took office at the end of 2007. We took office at the end of a period when there had been four federal budgets in a row with virtually no significant savings measures. We took office at the end of a period when, over five years, the total headcount in the federal public sector had risen from 212,000 to 247,000, a dramatic increase in the total number of public servants on the federal government payroll. We took office at a time when the federal government, at a time of economic boom with the mining boom turbocharging the Australian economy, was budgeting for five per cent real growth in spending. There are some
circumstances where that kind of spending is appropriate, but not when the economy is already going along at a rapid rate and inflationary pressures are building.

We took office within weeks of an Auditor-General’s report into the Regional Partnerships scandal, in which government funding was provided to assist in the establishment of a cheese factory that had closed down before the funding had been provided, to assist in the creation of a heritage steam railway where no trains had ever run and to provide a carriage for the Queen. This, to my mind, was probably the most spectacular example of wasteful government spending. The Howard government budgeted for and provided $350,000 to subsidise a private citizen’s gift of an ornate carriage to the Queen—$350,000 of taxpayers’ money for a private citizen’s birthday gift to the Queen! That was the kind of standard that was being set for wasteful government spending by our predecessors when we took office.

We may want to actually consider the approach that was taken by the Leader of the Opposition when he was a minister. We well remember the infamous $10 billion water plan announcement. It was all dreamed up on the back of an envelope or a serviette. It was announced without consultation with the departments of treasury and finance. My predecessor as minister for finance, Senator Minchin, was asked about this the following weekend on Meet the Press. He was asked, ‘Will this be costed by the department of finance?’ His answer was, ‘Yes, this will be costed in due course.’ In other words, a program of $10 billion was announced by the government without even being costed by the department of finance.

I can move on to other spectacular examples such as the fact that, from about 2002 to 2007, the Howard government’s spending on discretionary grants rose from about $450 million to $4.5 billion per annum, a tenfold increase, as well as the scandalous misuse of taxpayers’ money on government advertising. In the last 16 months of the Howard government, according to advice from my department, $457 million was spent on government advertising. So that is the recent past of the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party.

We cannot forget the Leader of the Opposition’s decision as a minister to grant $10 million, five times the amount recommended by his department, to somebody who was well known to him and lived near him in his electorate who indicated that he would be able to make rain and that he was exploring new technology that might be able to make rain. That is the recent track record of the opposition when in government.

We now consider the coalition’s track record in opposition and their practice when dealing with the question of fiscal responsibility. Numerous announcements have been made by both the Leader of the Opposition and his predecessor about their commitments to the Australian people if they were to be elected to government. We have heard proposals for a 5c a litre cut in fuel tax which are yet to be formally repudiated. We have seen proposals to cut the capital gains tax on the retirement of small business owners which have never even been costed and have never been withdrawn. Proposals have been advanced to pay a proportion of the superannuation liabilities of small businesses.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr TANNER—Mr Deputy Speaker, are you awake over there? I am getting persistent interjections.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The minister for finance will withdraw that comment. I am quite awake. If he wants to be flippant like that, he will be asked to sit down.
Mr TANNER—I withdraw. I asked for some order because I am getting persistent interjections.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The minister for finance has the call.

Mr TANNER—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will turn to the most recent example, which is the opposition’s response to the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Their proposal, which they could not quite sign up to as policy but which they wanted us to sign up to as policy, would involve an additional hit of about $1.3 billion to the budget by the time we get to 2020 in order to buy a lot more international emissions permits than are permitted under the government’s scheme.

We have seen the opposition relentlessly block government savings initiatives in the Senate. We have seen them block the government’s alcopops initiatives for months. We have seen them block reform of Commonwealth dental services which would ensure that dental services are delivered to the people most in need. Most recently we have seen them block the government’s reforms to the private health insurance rebate, which will deliver huge amounts of savings to the budget in the longer term.

They are doing all of these things while at the same time posturing about how, if they were in government, they would have a much lower deficit and much lower debt. This is all at the same time as not announcing one single savings initiative—none. In opposition, we announced savings initiatives, sometimes ones that attracted political controversy—none. In opposition, we announced savings initiatives, sometimes ones that attracted political controversy. There has not been one savings initiative. The only proposal they have advanced that could be categorised in this way is a tax hike on cigarettes. In order to ensure that the Leader of the Opposition and other wealthy Australians can still get subsidised private health insurance, they want to increase the price of cigarettes.

That is the Liberal Party’s track record. Here they come today criticising the government for alleged wasteful spending. Their track record in opposition is one that simply cannot stack up against their rhetoric about what the government is doing. In government they set global records for waste and misuse of taxpayers’ money and global records for excessive spending. In opposition all they have consistently done is propose more spending, block government savings measures and, indeed, fail to deliver any savings options themselves.

I will turn now to the government’s record, because that has been impugned in the MPI proposal today. The government’s record is this: first, in the budget last year, a total of $33 billion of savings over four years, and $7.3 billion in the 2008-09 year. The bulk of that was in spending cuts—$5.4 billion in cuts to spending. In this year’s budget, the savings for the four years were slightly lower at $22 billion, but there were many substantial, tough decisions that will deliver much larger savings once we get to the five- to 10-year period, because the savings steadily increase over time. A number of those savings decisions were hard decisions that will inevitably attract and have already attracted significant political controversy and complaint. I mention these just as examples to indicate how important it is and how much priority the government places on getting the budget back into surplus. Reforming the private health insurance rebate, reforming indexation of the family tax benefit structure, freezing the top end family tax benefits indexation arrangements in order to—

Mr Hockey—28½ per cent of GDP!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Member for North Sydney!

Mr Hockey—I am trying to help him!
Mr Tanner—Finally, among these examples is the increase in the pension age to 67.

I want to mention a number of other, more specific matters. I have given you the big picture of government efforts to initiate savings and to strengthen the budget and to get it back into surplus off the back of the huge hit to the budget that has occurred from the global financial crisis. First, we initiated a one-off two per cent efficiency dividend across virtually all departments and agencies, reducing administrative costs. Second, we reformed many grants programs—in particular, the climate change related grants programs. When we took office, there were around 65 different government grant programs purportedly dealing with climate change, some of them rather peculiar to say the least.

We have set in place a new structure with respect to rules governing discretionary grants made by ministers. There is much greater disclosure, with the requirement that any grant has to be made public on the relevant website within seven days of that decision being made. Where a decision has been made contrary to Public Service advice, it has to be fully documented. And a report has to be provided to me when a minister makes a grant in his or her own electorate. All of these changes indicate some of the dodgy things that occurred under the previous government.

We have increased funding for the Auditor-General. We have initiated massive reforms to government procurement to gradually eliminate the huge waste and inefficiency which occurred from the totally decentralised model of procurement under the previous government. We had an inquiry by an international expert, Sir Peter Gershon, into IT procurement which made a number of recommendations and which is putting in place processes that will save hundreds of millions of dollars in the short term, and billions in the long term, for the government. That process is now well underway, with the implementation process occurring.

We are following through in a similar vein in areas like travel procurement. Members may be aware that an announcement was made only a couple of days ago with respect to procurement of travel services. That will significantly improve what the government does with respect to its own services and activities. We have made similar changes with regard to communications procurement and we are working on the process of procurement of property and rental property and things of that kind.

Again, all we need to do is look back into the relatively recent past to find some examples of how this was done by our opponents when they were in office. A couple of examples of IT procurement come to mind. In the families and community services department there was one case—and in the defence department there was another—where an IT project of over $50 million was abandoned because it turned into such a disaster. More than $50 million in both cases simply went out the window.

To continue the list of initiatives: we have cut ministerial staff and we have substantially cut government advertising. Campaign advertising expenditure in the calendar year 2007 was approximately $254 million. In calendar year 2008 it was around $85 million. And of course we now have a structure where the Auditor-General scrutinises any proposed advertising campaign on the part of the Commonwealth that is going to cost more than $250,000 in order to determine that it is not political advertising but genuine advertising.
There are a couple of important things to mention in this context. First is the Operation Sunlight set of transparency reforms, which means that it is much easier for government decisions and financial arrangements to be scrutinised by outside parties and by the parliament. There is serious program information in the budget for the first time in many years, after it was taken out by the previous government. And of course there is the fact that on processes of government—on the administration of government alone, leaving aside cuts in entitlements or programs—we are saving around $5 million over five years.

I will conclude by suggesting to the opposition that they perhaps should try a somewhat different tack, that they need to think again about their line of approach. It is about time they stopped acting like a minor party in the Senate and started acting like an alternative government. I have a lot of experience of being in opposition, sadly, and one thing I know is that giving in to the temptation of behaving like a minor party in the Senate—going for the cheap point, contradicting yourself, trying to get yourself in the media at all costs no matter how silly what you are saying is—does not take you anywhere in the long term. They have got a giant shock waiting for them when they get to the election campaign. (Time expired)

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney (4.59 pm)—The Minister for Finance and Deregulation has delivered two Tanners over the last few months: Tanner number 1 was the man who believed in death duties and taxes on the family home, Tanner number 2 does not believe in those things anymore, he said they were too far away. Tanner 1 was, in fact, the man who demanded value for money and quality spending, yet today we had Tanner number 2, who says, ‘Get the money out the door, it does not matter how the hell it happens. Get the money out the door.’ As he walks out of the chamber, I say to the minister that it was two plus two that equals five that brought down Winston Smith. Winston Smith is the man in 1984 that was brought down because he accepted that two plus two equals five. Here we have two Tanners: two plus two equals five.

If you believe the rhetoric of the Labor Party, they are the custodians of an economic recovery that they are unsure about. On the one hand, one person in question time praised the government for its performance during the economic downturn and recognised that the enormous amount of stimulus actually made a perfect storm redundant in the Australian economy. Perplexingly, they seem to forget a number of the key initiatives that have delivered only one quarter of negative economic growth so far. On the other hand, other ministers get up and say, ‘It is really tough out there.’ We have had examples of that from the Deputy Prime Minister.

There are five key reasons why Australia thus far has been able to survive the global financial crisis. Number 1: the economy that the Labor Party inherited was in great shape as Australia faced the impact of the global financial crisis. The Labor Party inherited an economy that had four per cent growth and four per cent unemployment, and they inherited $45 billion of net government cash assets in the bank without any government debt. So they went into the storm with a budget and an economy that was at a record speed and at record levels of performance.

Number 2: the government inherited a financial system which was the envy of the world. Through the Wallis reforms and the Financial Services Reform Act, which the Labor Party spoke against at times and moved amendments to, and through excellent financial management by the coalition government, they did not inherit a Lehman Brothers or a Bear Stearns or a Merrill Lynch or a Royal Bank of Scotland—they did not...
have one of the major banks in Australia end up as the equivalent of Citigroup. In fact, the four major Australian banks entered into the top 12 banks in the world and, as my leader said on Sunday, ‘The top four banks have had a very good war,’ delivering, perhaps, up to $16 billion of accumulated profit in a period that covers the global financial crisis.

It is also the case that they inherited very good regulators: APRA, the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, which was set up by the coalition; ASIC, which was set up by the coalition; and the Reserve Bank, without the burden of prudential supervision. They inherited three key regulators that, with separated powers, on the one hand were able to deal with the credit crisis and deal separately with the potential impact on the balance sheet of the banks on the other.

The third reason is monetary policy. Do you remember the Labor Party blaming us, the coalition, for all of those increases in interest rates? I have got some news for them: we are going to apply the same test to Labor that they applied for 12 months—to make the government responsible for every single interest rate increase. The Liberal Party had monetary policy in place through the Reserve Bank that reduced the cash rates from 7¼ per cent to just three per cent in an incredibly short period of time. That gave the Australian public the opportunity to significantly reduce the after-tax costs of a mortgage on their households.

Australia is blessed, in one sense, with a high-transmission factor; that is, the majority of Australians have variable rate mortgages and when the Reserve Bank moves it flows directly to the bottom line of the Australian people, and the same on the way up. The difference between the last time that interest rates went up and the next time that interest rates go up is that we had a strongly growing economy last time, and households had a 22 per cent increase in real wages. Next time and if, as the markets say, interest rates are going to go up by up to 200 basis points by September next year, Australians are going to be hit with a double whammy: Labor’s cocktail of higher interest rates and higher unemployment. Last time interest rates were rising, unemployment was dropping—it dropped to four per cent. Under Labor you are going to find the Australian people facing rising interest rates and rising unemployment.

The fourth reason Australia has been able to survive the economic crisis was because of our terms of trade. We have had the benefit of a flexible exchange rate, an initiative undertaken by the Hawke government, with the support of the coalition, to float the Australian dollar. When the Australian dollar fell to 48c against the US dollar during the Asian financial crisis the coalition did not panic. It held its nerve and we maintained the dignity of an independent and floating exchange rate. That has delivered substantial benefit to this contentious mob, who actually do not understand the benefit of a floating exchange rate. When we were near parity with the US dollar it dropped to 60c at exactly the right time. It is back up to over 80c, and it has delivered the best terms of trade that anyone could have hoped for during an economic crisis. The terms of trade today are more favourable to the Rudd Labor government than they were at any time under the coalition. As of today the terms of trade are more favourable than the day we lost government in 2007.

The fifth reason why Australia has survived the global financial crisis is stimulus spending. I want to recognise that because we always have recognised it. Our difference with this government is that they have spent too much money. The best evidence that the stimulus package, the total government expenditure, has not delivered is that the eco-
nomic results that they are claiming credit for are due to the simple fact that since the 2008 budget this government have announced $106 billion of new spending initiatives and 40 per cent of it kicks in after 1 July next year. So at the same time as interest rates are rising—according to the markets, they will be up 200 basis points around the middle of next year—40 per cent, $40 billion, of extra, new additional spending kicks in until 2013.

I say to the Labor Party: stop spending the money. It is not yours; it belongs to taxpayers, and they are going to have to pay it off for years to come. If you stop spending so much money, it will put downward pressure on interest rates. At the moment your spending is putting upward pressure on interest rates. It is going to lead to higher taxes, and Australians are going to have seven years of deficit to pay for one quarter of negative economic growth. The Labor Party’s contempt for the taxpayers of Australia is legendary, but they are taking it to an all-time high with this massive spending binge.

Ms KING (Ballarat) (5.09 pm)—Listening to the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon, with his rolling negativity on the economy, I really had to stop and have a good think about whether I was actually here in the House of Representatives chamber, because the only conclusion that you could possibly draw from the Leader of the Opposition’s contribution is: just what sort of parallel universe is this bloke living in? Perhaps he actually thinks he is an avatar in Second Life, in a world where he is not just Prime Minister but the world economic supreme being who knows all, sees all and is the world economy—an economy where there has been no crisis, merely a little blip. But the reality is that even Second Life has been hit by the global financial crisis. This is just how inconsistent the Leader of the Opposition has been on this issue.

First he told us that we were exaggerating the scale of the global financial crisis. Then he told us that there was no need for stimulus to the economy, voting against the government’s measures. Then each time there has been data on sectors of the economy, whether it is the retail sector not having as sharp a downturn as expected or the building and construction industry just holding up, he has said that it has absolutely nothing to do with the government’s stimulus package. Now he is telling us, just as there are very early signs that some elements— and I emphasise, some elements—of the economy are improving slowly, that we should go through a slash and burn exercise and cut the remaining stimulus package. Counter to advice of the IMF, the OECD and the Reserve Bank, Malcolm knows better.

If we take all of these things together, the views of the Leader of the Opposition are that the global financial crisis is really not happening; that if it is happening then it does not need to be responded to; that if it does need to be responded to then it does not need to be responded to with much; that even if we did respond a little, it really would not have an effect; that even if it is happening, it is nothing to do with the response; and, finally, that if it is actually having an effect, it is now time to stop responding despite the fact that people are still losing their jobs, that private sector capital is still not flowing into the economy and that funding from the building and construction component of the stimulus has only just started to flow. If you are confused, imagine what a member of the coalition would be feeling at the moment when trying to be consistent with their leader’s views. No wonder many of them have actually stopped trying and said, ‘Blow it; I’m going to say whatever I think.’

Let us remember where we actually are. When we came into office we were follow-
ing a government that had done little to set this nation up for long-term productive growth. Those members opposite failed in a number of key ways. They failed to invest on the back of the mining boom. They failed to allocate funding across our nation fairly. They failed to set up our nation’s economy in critical areas of education, health and roads and rail infrastructure. They sat on their hands and watched the clock tick by, with no new ideas. Now it seems that nothing has changed for those opposite. The clock is still ticking and they are still recommending that we all sit on our hands. They have no new ideas, no consistent policy and no alternative government.

When this government announced our economic stimulus, we did so on the basis of a number of factors. The main ones were that the world was facing the onset of the global financial crisis and the possibility of Australia falling into a recession. Also, we knew that without action Australian jobs were at risk. So we acted. We did not sit on our hands while thousands of Australians lost their jobs; we acted. We invested in productive areas of the economy: in education, health and infrastructure. What this stimulus has done, and will continue to do, is provide support to our nation’s economy when economies around the world are at their weakest. The Rudd government first acted to support families with cash payments that flowed through to the retail sector. Second, we invested in crucial infrastructure that could be delivered in all regions in a reasonable time frame. Then, finally, we invested in large long-term infrastructure to support jobs into the future, creating three phases of economic stimulus to provide continued support to the Australian economy.

We now have the Leader of the Opposition with this MPI that reflects his underlying objection to taking action and protecting Australian workers’ jobs through economic stimulus. Our national economy and subsequently the thousands of businesses and workers who drive it have faced tough times over the course of the past year, and although they have battled hard, worked hard, now is not the time to pull back on our efforts. Without the economic stimulus package there is no doubt that Australia would have been in recession. The last national accounts showed that without our swift action Australia would have experienced three consecutive quarters of negative growth.

But those opposite are saying we are out of the woods and that the stimulus should now stop. I am not sure where the opposition is getting its advice from. It is certainly not from the International Monetary Fund, the OECD, the Reserve Bank or Treasury—they are all expecting that Australia will experience sub-trend growth over the coming period. These expectations are not on the basis that we halt all economic stimulus today. These expectations are on the basis that the stimulus package, as originally planned, is fully implemented. The Rudd government has a plan to withdraw as the economy recovers, but this does not mean ripping away funds from regional communities in particular who are relying on Australian government support.

This year the House Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, which I chair, has been travelling across the country, to regional Australia, as part of the inquiry into the impact on our regions of the global financial crisis. Let me debunk some of the things the Leader of the Opposition seems to want us to believe. Regional communities have made it absolutely clear to me and members of this committee that combating the impact of the global financial crisis on regional and rural Australia is critical to their long-term prosperity. Regional Australia is experiencing continued unemployment
growth. Unemployment has already risen by almost two percentage points, and nowhere is this more evident than in regional areas. Regional industry is telling us that the programs announced by the Rudd government are critical to their survival. Business after business and local government after local government appearing before the committee have given evidence of the stimulus payments supporting local economies, from Geraldton to Broken Hill to Townsville to Ararat.

To put the brakes on now would be disastrous for communities who are seeing many projects just on the verge of implementation. If the opposition leader is sincere in his belief that our spending has been wasteful then he really needs to get out of his Sydney office and have a chat to the thousands of workers and businesses across regional Australia who are relying on this stimulus package and the nation’s leaders to assist them. If we do not continue to act we put at risk thousands of jobs. The Liberals’ plan would see over 200,000 Australians out of work.

The Leader of the Opposition cannot say on the one hand that we should cut spending and on the other that we should not. In the last budget we put forward a number of savings measures to combat the ripping of $210 billion from the government’s bottom line as a result of the global financial crisis. The opposition decided to block these savings measures. They blocked these measures because the opposition leader wants it both ways. It is hypocritical for the opposition leader to introduce an MPI attacking the government’s fiscal strategy when he is the very person who is blocking savings measures that would have assisted in the very area of his concern. A perfect example is the private health insurance rebate, which is a key savings measure to be blocked by members opposite. They argue that they would have a lower deficit and lower debt yet they have not introduced a single savings measure of their own, other than a tax on cigarettes, nor supported savings measures introduced by the government.

This government does have a clear plan to bring the budget back into surplus by 2015-16. As part of the 2009-10 budget, the government made tough choices to deliver $22.6 billion in savings over four years. Yet many of these savings measures were blocked by those opposite. These were savings that were expected to halve the deficit over the next three years and see it return to surplus in 2015-16. Again, these measures have been blocked consistently by an opposition failing consistently to introduce savings measures of their own.

The former government squandered the economic prosperity from the mining boom. They had the opportunity, whilst such an unprecedented level of government revenue was coming in, to invest in productive areas of the economy—infrastructure, education, schools, road and rail. They declined to do so. We, in response to an unprecedented financial crisis, have invested important stimulus that will boost the supply side of the economy so that the economy has a greater productive capacity without a trigger for inflation. We have acted to protect Australian jobs. We have acted to invest in the nation for the short, the medium and the longer term. And we make no absolutely no apologies for continuing to act in the interests of the Australian people on this issue. They expect no less of this federal parliament.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (5.19 pm)—In March this year, the finance minister was quoted by AAP as saying that the government debt burden kept him awake at night. In March of this year, the government debt burden was already keeping the finance minister awake. Since that time he has been part of a government
that has continued to borrow $2 billion a week. This minister must be pacing endlessly around his room in the evenings now, because the debt continues to grow. And, unlike what was said in the intervention from the previous speaker, the reality is that Labor has no plan whatsoever to ever pay that money back. The finance minister has good reason to be sleepless every night. Yet he is a part of a government that continues to go out and spend, spend, spend.

Indeed, the only criteria for choosing spending projects when the government was designing its stimulus package was: ‘How fast can we get the money out the door? It doesn’t matter where it goes, so long as it goes.’ This was an irresponsible approach to financial management. There was no feasibility study, no investment plan and no discussion about the relative merits of projects, just ‘Let’s get it all out the door.’ Indeed, billions of dollars went out, on simple formulas, to schools that were under a particular size or over a particular size. The fact that a school may have been slated for closure did not stop it being funded. The fact that there may have been only one student did not mean that he could not have a $250,000 library. I do not know how many books he is going to have to share amongst himself! This is the kind of stimulus package that this government has said we should be supporting.

The Prime Minister said before the election that he was a fiscal conservative and that he would stop the reckless spending of the Howard government. Yet he has been out there spending, spending, spending, without any comprehension of the value and the worth of projects that are being funded. Today in the Australian Financial Review we saw further evidence of the way in which this government is spending its money. It is clearly devoted not to stimulating the economy but to stimulating Labor’s electoral chances in their marginal seats. If you look through the spending in relation to many of these local discretionary programs, the hand of the minister for regional development, Mr Albanese, is very clear. The Labor marginal seats, particularly in New South Wales, have been slated for extra-generous attention.

In his pathetic attempt to try and justify it today, the minister dragged in other spending programs to try and reduce the starkness of this spending focus on Labor electorates. In Victoria, Labor electorates received $100 million compared with just $57 million in coalition seats. In New South Wales, Eden-Monaro, the famous bellwether seat at election time, gets $4.4 million. Bennelong, a seat narrowly held by the new member, gets $5.9 million. Swan, in Western Australia, gets $4.5 million for a seat Labor wants to win. And $9.1 million was spent to try and shore up the seat of Brand, which is one which is always going to be close to the line. That is how Labor chose where it would spend its money in relation to this stimulus package: in the marginal seats. Of course they have much form in relation to that. Remember, 82 per cent of Labor’s off-highway network roads program funding is going to Labor electorates. Almost 100 per cent of the funding for the Better Regions program has gone to Labor seats and to fulfil the promises made by Labor candidates at the last election.

If you do not live in a Labor seat, you cannot even apply for the money. It has already been spent, with 100 per cent of it going to Labor electorates. It is a rolled gold rort. We know it is a rort. This minister for regional development is devoting all of his efforts into funneling and shovelling this money into seats held by his mates. But the reality is that this government has not carefully and properly managed its program. We are going to get about $10 billion worth of school buildings at a cost of $16 billion as billions are raked off the top for commissions to the
state governments and to pay consultant fees that get no results. I visited a school the other day that expects to get $100,000 worth of painting and plastering out of a $200,000 grant. *(Time expired)*

**Ms SAFFIN** (Page) *(5.24 pm)*—The member for Wide Bay, in his contribution, was talking about how fast we can get the money out the door. That reminded me that, 51 minutes prior to the last election being called, the then parliamentary secretary of his party, the National Party, spent over $3 million in allocations to Regional Partnerships. That was pretty fast. I think that takes the cake for getting the money out the door really fast—51 minutes prior to the election.

Just having to sit there and listen to the humbug about the spending, I remembered very well that, with the Regional Partnerships, one-third of the funding went to just 10 coalition electorates. All of this was documented. It was not only documented but was also in an ANAO report. It said of Regional Partnerships:

… the manner in which the Programme had been administered … had … fallen short of an acceptable standard of public administration …

It said a number of other things as well. It also said—and we have heard here today—that there was the $1.5 million for the Gunnedah ethanol plant that does not exist. We know that $420,000 went for the cheese factory that closed down and also an extra $22,000 went to it three months after it closed. It was unbelievable, sitting there listening to the member for Wide Bay.

One other thing: today the member for Wentworth was talking about quality and saying that was really the issue now. Before that, though, it was quantity. Then we had the member for North Sydney saying, no, it is really about quantity. So what is it? Is it quality? Is it quantity? We do not know what it is. It shows the division that exists within the opposition and within their party. They do not where they are on this. You have some people out there applauding the stimulus package, like the member for Cowper. In the newsletters he does in his local electorate he talks about how wonderful it is, welcomes it and explains it to the people in his seat. He says how good it is. How can it be wasteful spending—and that is what the accusation is—when every economic organisation, institution and commentator has endorsed the government’s stimulus plan?

The fiscal stimulus has recognised that it has kept people in jobs, kept retail figures up, was responsible spending and was timely, targeted and temporary. We all know that. They are the inbuilt elements of a stimulus package. It has to be timely and it was; the government acted decisively. It has to be well targeted and it has to be temporary. All those elements exist. How can it be wasteful spending? I look at my electorate of Page. The money that has gone into schools is keeping people in jobs, building infrastructure and providing better facilities to students and teachers. Home insulation: how could that be wasteful spending? In my area there are already 249 applications.

Just the other day, the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment—the member for Blaxland—and Bill Kelty were in Lismore. We had a jobs forum. A local company, Power Results, had 20 employees and now have 130 because of the insulation. The parliamentary secretary, Bill Kelty and I went and met the workers. We saw them about to install the insulation, and we talked to them. They had also come off jobs, they were long-term unemployed, they had come into the workforce and they talked about what that meant. That is what this is about. Stimulus is about nation building, recovery and supporting jobs—jobs for now and jobs for the future. These guys told us what it meant to them to have a job. Firstly, it meant money;
secondly, it meant they had some sort of a life, they had connection and they were somebody in the community. We spent time with them. How could that be wasteful spending? Indeed it is not.

Last week in the Northern Star, the local newspaper, the editorial talked about it. The headline on Thursday, 3 September was ‘In the market for a boost to confidence’. It said:

So far we are the only developed country in the world to avoid a recession in the world’s major economic downturn.

… … …

The Coalition must be seething and will continue to play up the country’s debt as the legacy of this Labor Government.

But thanks to the Labor Government … the country has beaten the odds—(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. JE Moylan)—Order! The discussion is now concluded.

LAW AND JUSTICE (CROSS BORDER AND OTHER AMENDMENTS) BILL 2009

RENEWABLE ENERGY (ELECTRICITY) AMENDMENT BILL 2009

RENEWABLE ENERGY (ELECTRICITY) (CHARGE) AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Assent

Messages from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the bills.

COMMITTEES

National Capital and External Territories Committee

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. JE Moylan)—Mr Speaker has received a message from the Senate informing the House that Senator Humphries has been discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories and Senator Scullion has been appointed a member of the committee.

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (2009 BUDGET MEASURES) BILL 2009

NATIONAL GREENHOUSE AND ENERGY REPORTING AMENDMENT BILL 2009

VETERANS’ AFFAIRS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET MEASURES) BILL 2009

VETERANS’ AFFAIRS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PENSION REFORM) BILL 2009

MIGRATION AMENDMENT (ABOLISHING DETENTION DEBT) BILL 2009

Returned from the Senate

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

NATIONAL HEALTH SECURITY AMENDMENT BILL 2009

CORPORATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FINANCIAL SERVICES MODERNISATION) BILL 2009

Referred to Main Committee

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (5.30 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

I indicate to all honourable members that this motion enjoys the support of the Chief Opposition Whip, the honourable member for Fairfax.

Question agreed to.
RESALE ROYALTY RIGHT FOR VISUAL ARTISTS 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’s amendments—

(1) Clause 2, page 2 (lines 1 to 12), omit the clause, substitute:

2 Commencement

(1) Each provision of this Act specified in column 1 of the table commences, or is taken to have commenced, in accordance with column 2 of the table. Any other statement in column 2 has effect according to its terms.

Commencement information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision(s)</th>
<th>Commencement Date/Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sections 1 and 2 and anything in this Act not elsewhere covered by this table</td>
<td>The day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sections 3 to 5</td>
<td>A single day to be fixed by Proclamation. However, if any of the provision(s) do not commence within the period of 6 months beginning on the day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent, they commence on the first day after the end of that period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Part 2</td>
<td>At the same time as the provisions covered by table item 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Part 3</td>
<td>The day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Parts 4 and 5</td>
<td>At the same time as the provisions covered by table item 2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table relates only to the provisions of this Act as originally passed by both Houses of the Parliament and assented to. It will not be expanded to deal with provisions inserted in this Act after assent.

(2) Column 3 of the table contains additional information that is not part of this Act. Information in this column may be added to or edited in any published version of this Act.

(3) Clause 3, page 4 (after line 10), after the definition of unlawful non-citizen, insert:

works of visual art has a meaning affected by subsection 7(2).

(4) Clause 7, page 5 (lines 7 to 14), omit the clause, substitute:

7 What is an artwork?

(1) An artwork is an original work of visual art that is either:

(a) created by the artist or artists; or

(b) produced under the authority of the artist or artists.

(2) Works of visual art include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) artists’ books;

(b) batiks;

(c) carvings;

(d) ceramics;

(e) collages;

(f) digital artworks;

(g) drawings;

(h) engravings;

(i) fine art jewellery;
The Deputy Speaker (Hon. JE Moylan)—The question is that the amendments be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

**Third Reading**

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (5.33 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (MIDWIVES AND NURSE PRACTITIONERS) BILL 2009**

Cognate bills:

**MIDWIFE PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY (COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTION) SCHEME BILL 2009**

**MIDWIFE PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY (RUN-OFF COVER SUPPORT PAYMENT) BILL 2009**

Ms NEAL (Robertson) (5.34 pm)—I rise to continue what I was saying yesterday about the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Run-off Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009.

In circumstances such as these, nurse practitioners can spend time in nursing homes and retirement villages ahead of and during a doctor’s visit, writing repeat prescriptions, ordering testing in advance of the doctor’s visit and following up on doctor diagnoses and paperwork to maximise the time spent in crucial diagnosis by the GP. It is not hard to see how doctors benefit from these collaborative arrangements. Nurse practitioners also benefit greatly from being able to expand their patient care into areas of particular competency and specialisation. This could be in areas such as immunisation, chronic condition management or aged care.

So, in several crucial ways, nurse practitioners can be a great bridge within primary care, as patient educators and as partners in the maintenance of chronic and complex care patients. Under the provisions of this legislation, doctors win, nurses win and, most especially, patients and the community win. All benefit from the expansion of capacity and efficiency within the primary healthcare system provided by this legislation. I commend the bills to the House.

Dr STONE (Murray) (5.35 pm)—I too rise to talk to the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Run-off Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009. I am particularly concerned about midwives because they offer, in country Aus-
tralia, an opportunity for a woman and her partner to have a birth at home—or indeed in hospital, but a birth that is a matter of their choice—where they are perhaps a very long distance from hospital, where there perhaps is not a gynaecologist, an obstetrician or a GP who still assists with births in their community.

There is a real problem with the changes to the legislation that were mooted by the federal minister, which in essence made midwives’ activities unlawful in most of Australia. It was said that you had to have indemnity if you practised as a midwife outside a hospital setting, but as a midwife operating outside a hospital you could not in fact seek and obtain insurance for your work, so both the people seeking the services of a midwife and the midwife were put into an extremely difficult situation.

Hence we had nearly 2,000 people—mostly women with their children but also some of the men who support those women—outside Parliament House yesterday in the rain protesting, saying, ‘This is Australia and this is the 21st century. How come in a country like this any government would choose to drive away from women a choice about where they give birth and how they give birth?’ It was quite an extraordinary circumstance and it reminds you, going right back, of medieval times, when women as midwives were subjected to the most extraordinary prosecution and persecution. You would have thought in the 21st century all of that was behind us but here we have the government of the day trying to say that a woman choosing to give birth at home cannot lawfully be assisted by a trained and highly professional midwife.

There is a lot of nonsense spoken about homebirths being less safe and more likely to have a catastrophic outcome than a birth in a hospital. That is a nonsense proposition given the data that is coming in from various developed countries where homebirths have been practised for a very long time. We know that there are risks associated with childbirth—and those risks, of course, are not eliminated with a homebirth. According to AIHW statistics from 2005, 601 planned homebirths in Australia were reported nationally, representing 0.2 per cent of all women who gave birth. It is a very small proportion but it is an important decision for those women. The highest proportion of homebirths occurred in Western Australia, and 27.1 per cent of women who had homebirths were mothers having their first baby.

A 2008 study of the homebirths of 24,000 women revealed that homebirth is an acceptable option for low-risk women and that it leads to reduced medical interventions. The same data states that planned homebirth—while it is very controversial and often causes great excitement amongst the medical fraternity, who would otherwise be receiving the fees for assisting as gynecologists, obstetricians or general practitioners—is not more dangerous than an in-hospital birth. The rate of infant deaths for both groups—for homebirths and those giving birth in hospital—was similar. In the 2008 study, of the 24,000 women who gave birth no mothers died. The number of babies born in poor condition—in other words, with low Apgar scores—was lower in the homebirth group, and the number of mothers with severe lacerations was lower in the homebirth group.

Midwives in Australia are highly trained and highly professional. They have been practising in association with gynecologists, obstetricians and general practitioners for a very long time, but they also practise alone. In my electorate of Murray there are very highly professional and skilled midwives who offer a private homebirthing service but who find that, even though their clients wish them to be supportive of their births right
through to the actual delivery, if the mother presents at hospital the midwife is not allowed to attend to the woman, even though it is her choice and preference to have that midwife with her in the hospital. There is also the extraordinary circumstance that, even if the baby is born without the assistance of a GP, whether it is one who is on duty at the time at the hospital or one who cannot get to hospital in time, the GP is still paid the fee. The private practising midwife certainly does not receive any fee at the hospital.

This is a very serious matter when it is about the choice of women at one of the most important times in their life—giving birth. In Australia we always want to be sure that both the mother and the baby are safe, and it will always be the case that low-risk women will be most likely to have homebirths. But it is also the case in Australia right now that we have only seen a two-year moratorium with the status quo. It is no solution either for the women who wish to give birth at home or for the midwives who are trained to assist them.

We have to have a resolution of this problem once and for all. This government has to accept the fact that highly trained professional midwives should have insurance. They should be able to practise in the way that they do in other countries where homebirthing is understood to be an important alternative to births in hospitals. Midwives should not be treated as weird minority women who are more likely to be out knitting jumpers than attending to women’s needs. This is one of the unfortunate stereotypes that you see coming up again and again. I want to commend the midwives who work in my electorate. They are some of the most dedicated and compassionate women I have met anywhere. They have their patients’ and their babies’ futures always very firmly at the front of their minds as they advise and support women through birth.

Midwives and their clients are deeply distressed at the moment about the fact that there is no solution. Their choices are now even more seriously limited than they were before. We have no increase in gynecologists, obstetricians or GPs giving birth attention. In our region the numbers in those sorts of practices are declining. I just wish that this government would start to understand what women in this country want, that they would tune in to rural and regional Australia, that they would go out amongst the real people in real communities and understand that there is nothing more distressing for a woman than to have to go and attend a hospital for a birth when perhaps her first experience of a hospital was less than optimal or if she wishes to be surrounded by a supportive partner and others at the time of birth in a home environment. This is a very fundamental issue and I feel that women and midwives have been very much let down by this government. I am surprised; it should have known better.

A lot of lip-service is paid by the Labor Party to choice in the area of women’s reproductive health but, in this particular circumstance, women have been insulted, their rights have been trampled on, their choice has been severely limited and professional women who practise as midwives have been treated like backyarders with no cares and no skills to pass on to women as they come through one of the most important times of any woman’s life, and that is giving birth to a healthy baby. I have been told by my midwives and by a number of their clients who have had both a hospital and a homebirth experience that, if there is some trauma or distress during the experience of giving birth, in comparing their experience of professional care at a hospital to that of professional care at home, they had a much more supportive
experience in the homebirthing situation when there was extra care needed or when some unforeseen difficulty arose. Women in the child-birthing situation felt that they had greater support than the women left in hospitals, often with very little attention or chance to understand what was going on.

This bill is a disappointment. I certainly believe that we are going to see a big change occur in the future in midwives’ rights in the area of insurance. It will be a shame if we have to wait until the next election, when the coalition is restored to government, for those changes to be made. I urge this government to make those changes.

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (5.46 pm)—I rise this evening to speak in this place on the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Run-off Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009. I would like to begin by acknowledging the enormous contribution that all our allied health professionals have made to the quality of care in Australia, and I also take this opportunity to thank them for their outstanding efforts. Our health and medical professionals have ensured that Australia is one of the safest countries in which to give birth and, indeed, in which to be born. However, I also acknowledge the shortages we are currently experiencing in our medical workforce and the need for increased access to essential services with medical professionals, particularly in remote and regional areas. That is why our Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, has introduced these bills that support greater choice and access to health services. The bills aim to deliver a strong framework of quality and safety for mothers and babies in maternity care.

In 2008, Minister Roxon initiated the maternity services review headed by the Commonwealth Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer, Rosemary Bryant. That review received over 900 submissions from various stakeholders, including health professionals, researchers, non-government organisations, representative organisations and individuals. The review found that many of the women who submitted their individual experiences noted the need for further models of midwifery care, while professional groups highlighted the importance of collaborative, multidisciplinary maternity care. In response to the review, the government announced $120.5 million worth of maternity measures in this year’s budget. The amendments proposed in the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and related bills are part of that important $120.5 million maternity reform package.

Under the proposed changes in the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 midwives and nurse practitioners will have an enhanced role in providing quality care to patients. The bill will amend the Health Insurance Act 1973 and the National Health Act 1953. These amendments aim to support greater choice of access to health services for Australians. In particular, the bill proposes to extend the Medicare Benefits Schedule, the MBS, and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the PBS, to patients of appropriately qualified and experienced nurse practitioners and midwives, including diagnostic imaging, pathology services and appropriate referrals.

Under the Health Insurance Act, a participating nurse practitioner or a participating midwife will be able to provide or request particular medical services, while under the National Health Act an authorised nurse practitioner or midwife will be authorised to
prescribe certain PBS medicines. New MBS items for services will be created for participating nurse practitioners and midwives working with doctors, including antenatal, birthing and postnatal care. Participating nurses and midwives will also be able to refer their patients to specialists or consulting physicians under the MBS.

The bill requires the nurse practitioner or midwife to be an eligible nurse practitioner or midwife. The core requirement to become an eligible nurse practitioner or midwife is registration. Further, to access the MBS and PBS arrangements, midwives and nurse practitioners will have to show that they have collaborative arrangements with hospitals and doctors. The bill seeks to add authorised midwives and nurses as a new prescriber group. The list of prescription medications under PBS that they can prescribe will be limited and will correspond with the experience and scope of the authorised midwife or nurse. Of course, the extension of responsibility will also be in accordance with the relevant state or territory legislation.

It is estimated that the measures in this bill are expected to have a total cost of $111.3 million over four years, including administrative costs both for the department and Medicare Australia, and will be available from 1 November 2010. The costs, however, will be far outweighed by the overall responsiveness and efficiency of the health workforce with the introduction of these measures. These measures recognise our highly skilled and capable nursing and midwifery workforce by expanding their roles. Many other countries have already benefited from such measures. The definition of nurse practitioners as outlined by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council is, in part:

A registered nurse, educated and authorised to function autonomously and collaboratively in an advanced and extended clinical role. The role includes assessment and management of clients, using nursing knowledge and skills and may include, but is not limited to the direct referral of patients to other health care professionals, prescribing medications and ordering diagnostic investigations.

The definition of a midwife is:

A person who has completed a prescribed course of studies in midwifery and is registered or legally licensed to practice midwifery.

The midwife is recognised as a responsible and accountable professional, who works in partnership with women to give necessary support, care and advice during pregnancy, labour and the postpartum period.

I would like to point out this afternoon that, while members of the opposition have also recognised the quality of care nurse practitioners and midwives provide our community, for 11 years their recognition never extended to the formal legislative measures contained in these bills. I think it is important to note in this debate that it is the government, not the opposition, that is actually supporting nurse practitioners and midwives through these bills. It is the government, not the opposition, proposing measures to highlight the important role they play in our community and offering patients improved access to their services. The Consumers Health Forum noted in Health Voices that the review’s recommendations would deliver a more people-centred, flexible, team-centred health system. A people-centred, flexible, team oriented health system will surely provide improved patient care. The government is listening to the Australian people and delivering on major reforms across the board, including reforms in health and ageing.

The Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 will provide a government supported insurance scheme for midwives. It is important to note at this stage that midwives have not been covered by any indemnity insurance since 2002. This bill allows the Common-
wealth to provide affordable professional indemnity insurance to eligible privately practising midwives. Due to market failure it was impossible for privately practising midwives to secure indemnity insurance policies. This is another measure in the maternity reform package which improves access to midwifery services by extending indemnity insurance to eligible midwives. In 2008 the Council of Australian Governments agreed to establish a national registration and accreditation program for certain health professionals, and it is due to complete in July 2010. The main purpose of the scheme was to provide more flexible and accountable arrangements for health professionals including, but not exclusive to, those in midwifery and nursing. The first stage of the legislation was passed in 2008 and, after extensive consultation with stakeholders, the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council released the exposure draft of the second stage of the legislation. Under the proposed legislation, practitioners will be required to have ‘suitable professional indemnity insurance during the period of their registration’.

A government supported professional indemnity insurance scheme for those midwives will offer more midwifery services in rural and remote communities and more scholarships for general practitioners and midwives, as well as a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week telephone helpline and information service to provide greater access to maternity information and support before and after birth. These bills refer to the implementation of the first two items. Further to the midwife professional indemnity scheme, the government has proposed the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Run-off Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009 which will be offered to midwives who cease practice. Under the midwife professional indemnity scheme the insurance policy will cover, through a tax levy, future claims made against eligible midwives who leave the workforce. This measure provides extra protection to midwives for periods that they are non-practising. The two bills relating to indemnity for midwives are estimated to cost approximately $25.2 million over four years.

The opposition have taken issue with the proposed midwife professional indemnity scheme. However, they did nothing in government, as I said earlier, to improve the situation when private midwives, mothers and babies were left without indemnity insurance. This government aims to improve access and quality in our health system, and the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and related bills have received support from numerous stakeholders. The Maternity Coalition stated:

This is a historic breakthrough for Australia’s health care system. It promises to, over time, improve the accessibility, quality, safety and cost-effectiveness of Australia’s maternity services, by building a primary care foundation which is currently missing for most women.

While the legislation was welcomed by many groups, I acknowledge there is concern that the indemnity arrangements would effectively outlaw midwives assisting homebirth. In a recent meeting I had with a concerned mother and constituent, Robyn, she outlined the reasons why women choose homebirth and why it should continue without government restrictions—and I can understand that. In response to our meeting, Robyn put in writing to me her concerns and suggestions for midwives and homebirth and I would like to read out parts of her correspondence in this House today. She writes:

My main wish is at least to maintain the status quo. I want women to continue to be able to access homebirth with an independent midwife without this being unlawful or subject to $30 000 fines for consumers and midwives.

Robyn goes on to write:
It would be preferable for consumers and independent midwives to have access to indemnity insurance without that dictating a range of practice to the detriment of midwives’ informed professional opinion and women’s informed choices.

Robyn states that, ideally, homebirth should have equal access to funding and argues:

There is a growing set of evidence to support homebirth as a safe and arguably safer place for birth than hospital, there is a will within the government to reduce the burden on the hospital system and many women who would access homebirth if they could afford to.

Towards the end of her letter, my constituent states:

The loss of homebirth in this country would be a great loss for women who want natural style birth as well as those who want home birth.

One of Robyn’s requests to me is as follows:

Please call for any solution to recognise pregnant women’s autonomy as consumers with rights to informed choice, including informed refusal of hospitalisation.

I appreciate the concerns Robyn raised with me and I note that the minister responded to similar concerns by announcing last Friday, after consultation with the states and territories, that there will be a two-year exemption for homebirth midwives who are acting outside their state hospital system. I commend the minister for her swift and cooperative action with the state and territory health ministers on this issue. The exemption, however, does carry a number of conditions and requirements. The requirements include a number of reporting initiatives that will assist in accurate data collection. The data will provide further evidence based policy initiatives in the future. The reporting requirements may also highlight areas where further support could or should be given to midwives. It is important to reiterate that the minister’s priority is about seeking best possible patient outcomes.

This is another example of our government listening to the Australian people. Although homebirths account for approximately only a quarter of one per cent of all births in Australia, the choice of mothers concerning how to give birth and with whom is very important, and so is the paramount consideration of the safety of mother and child. Our government makes no secret of the fact that it endeavours to make our health system as efficient and effective as possible. That includes the significant investment in maternity care. Surely our health system, our maternity care framework, is worth this funding and investment proposed in these bills today.

Again I note that, since 2002, private midwives have not been insured. In a country as fortunate as ours, it is shameful that the opposition did nothing when in government to further assist midwives, particularly with indemnity insurance. It is a sad reflection of their dismissal of the important work of our midwives. The minister for health has announced a two-year exemption from indemnity insurance for private midwives. As I have previously stated, this will allow a closer examination of any possible alternative arrangements. However, it must remain that the health and safety of both mother and baby are paramount considerations in any decision. As stated by the minister, the government’s No. 1 priority is and always will be the improvement of patient outcomes.

The Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and related bills will be subject to agreement with states and territories on a national services plan, particularly the investment and provision of birthing centres and rural maternity units. The nurse practitioner reform will improve access to primary care services. Greater use of nurse practitioners will again help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the health services workforce. It is
obvious that there are chronic shortages in areas of our health system, despite calls from the opposition that these measures are unnecessary. So it is hardly surprising that, after some 11 years of neglect, members of the opposition do not support measures that aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our health system.

The proposed measures seek to improve productivity and harness the full capability of our well-trained nurses to complement and improve our health system. It is untrue to suggest that the measures seek to replace doctors and specialists. On the contrary—the measures will ensure collaboration between our health professionals. Nurse practitioners will be assigned roles comparable with qualifications and skills and will only enhance the quality of our health system, not endanger it. Proposed measures will require midwives to meet the eligibility requirements for both federal and state law.

In a media release dated 23 June 2009, the Australian Nursing Federation congratulated the government ‘for recognising the benefits that highly skilled and educated nurse practitioners and midwives bring to the health of all Australians’. Our government recognises the need for reform and recognises the need for improved access and choice in maternity care. I believe that this legislation has married very well the call for greater choice from mothers and the call for a more collaborative approach by the health professionals.

The bills before us today have been reviewed by a Senate inquiry. On 25 June this year the Senate referred the bills to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 7 August 2009. The committee subsequently presented an interim report on 7 August and on 17 August tabled its final report. Our government proposed these measures after extensive consultation, and the committee obviously recognised the benefits provided within these provisions. The committee received almost 2,000 submissions, and the final report states in its conclusion:

The Committee welcomes the initiatives contained in the three bills. The recognition of the professional skills and expertise of nurse practitioners and midwives is a significant step. In particular, the changes to allow these two groups of professionals to access the Medicare Benefits Schedule and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme will strengthen the health system and the delivery of maternity services in Australia.

Further, the recommendation reads:

The Committee recommends that the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Run-off Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009 be passed.

In conclusion, the committee appreciates the benefits provided under these bills, and even members of the opposition have conceded the positive proposals for maternity care in these three related bills. The Rudd government appreciates that midwives play an important role in the births of many children and that, although a small percentage of women choose homebirthing, it is an important decision. The two-year exemption gives sufficient time for any further consideration and changes to be made. I trust that these bills and subsequent amendments will ensure that Australians continue to enjoy one of the world’s safest health systems for both mothers and their babies. I commend these bills to the House.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (6.05 pm)—I rise to talk about this package of three bills. For those listening, there are actually three pieces of legislation being discussed together before the chamber. There is, of course, the one that is most topical, which many have
heard about, involving midwives and nurse practitioners—the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009—but there is also legislation relating to the midwife professional indemnity Commonwealth contribution scheme and the midwife professional indemnity run-off cover support payment scheme.

Essentially these three bills have separate aims. The first one is to amend the health legislation to provide for eligible nurse practitioners and midwives to request diagnostic imaging and pathology services under Medicare arrangements and to prescribe a limited range of medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The second bill, the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009, which is linked to the first bill, is to provide for a Commonwealth scheme with assistance for midwives in accessing indemnity for claims arising from their professional activities in a collaborative clinical setting. The third bill, the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Run-off Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009, imposes a tax on midwives’ professional indemnity insurance to cover run-on cover for midwives who have ceased practising. That is the package of bills before the House.

The first bill, in extending MBS and PBS access to nurse practitioners, is potentially a very valuable mechanism for a range of objectives. First of all, there are skills shortages in the medical field and doctor shortages, particularly in outer metropolitan areas and regional and rural areas. This is a trend that was started, in terms of expanding the role of nurse practitioners, under the Howard government. It is good to see that the Labor government is carrying on that tradition established by the Howard government. It reminded me a bit of the election campaign, where the Howard government seemed to make its views and election policies known and then those were echoed by the then Labor opposition. It is good to see that that practice is continuing now that Labor is in government!

The provision and coordination of patient care by medical practitioners is a really central issue for all of us concerned about good health outcomes. Naturally this legislation has safeguards about who can exercise these expanded responsibilities. They are all designed within a framework aimed at protecting patients, their care and welfare. Midwives are included in the measure as part of the government’s response to the maternity services review and also a considerable lobbying effort by midwives and a number of patients of midwives, who have been very positive and very upbeat in describing the services that they have accessed—particularly where they have been looking for a low-intervention pregnancy—and the important role midwives play not only in those low-intervention pregnancies but also in pregnancies in general. The Howard government was very interested in pursuing this pathway. I recall, quite vividly, hosting a meeting in my office with then health minister Tony Abbott to discuss the mechanics of this kind of idea. It is good to see that that momentum created by the previous government is being carried on here.

There is a significant amount of money attached to this, and that is appropriate. It has been characterised in a number of different ways in this place. Some of that funding is actually to put the machinery in place to enable the PBS and MBS access. It has been characterised differently by some people, as some direct change in services or money going to maternity. Some of it is going to those activities but there is also quite an amount going to putting the infrastructure in place to enable that expanded access to MBS and PBS services by nurse practitioners. So
it is encouraging that we are seeing a greater role for nurse practitioners and midwives.

I particularly want to point out some misunderstandings about the evidence. I think the body of evidence is absolutely clear that having nurses, nurse practitioners and midwives operating in a collaborative environment—recognising skills, qualification, experience and the input of other health professionals—delivers better health outcomes. That is why I am very keen to see an expansion of the role of midwives. I believe also that there are clear efficiency benefits. It seems to me that, in a highly skilled workforce, including a range of clinicians and medical practitioners, nurses are highly skilled and should be able to operate at their highest and best use. That is my understanding of efficiency—where people with those competencies and experience can fully exercise them. I am pleased to see that these measures go some way towards ensuring that that full contribution, using that full set of skills, that nurse practitioners and midwives can make can actually be made and delivered to the benefit of patients in a collaborative health system.

This is sometimes characterised as a response to workforce issues. Again, something that the Howard government pursued was a greater role for practice nurses and greater support for nursing generally. We had plans and took action to address the issues behind why nurses were not working in their profession. That not only included a range of issues around clinical support and opportunities but also related to poor hospital management, in some cases, where nurses were dissatisfied with the working environment and looking for an opportunity to fully exercise their skills. The Howard government had a plan and had an agenda for that. It is sad that some of those hospital management reforms, which would have increased the likelihood of ex-nurses returning to a career in nursing, have not been pursued quite as vigorously as I think they should have been. There is also an issue around greater support for nurses along with incentives to bring nurses back into the workforce. Again, that was an initiative implemented by the Howard government and carried forward by this Labor government.

I think it is also important to recognise the service enhancement potential of fully utilising the skill set of nurses, nurse practitioners and midwives. This is not solely about, as some would say, an alternative service delivery model where somehow a nurse may displace the activities of other medical specialists; it is actually about what nurses can bring to the task. This is about the way in which that skill set can work collaboratively in primary health care and the important collaboration with GPs and other doctors to have coordinated clinical support arrangements for better health outcomes.

I think the thing that struck me most in looking at this legislation was that it is all well and good to provide enhanced nursing access to the MBS and to the PBS but what I would have liked to have seen is some more action to enhance the availability of nurses. I am mindful of a very positive commitment the coalition made that, had the Howard government continued, we would have seen, for the first time, funding available for practice nurses to visit older Australians—veterans, war widows and widowers—in their home. You can imagine how enthusiastic I was, as the then Minister for Veterans Affairs, about that measure. I recognised that having the practice nurses undertake about 800,000 home visits over a four-year period would have made an enormous positive impact on the wellness and health care of that group in our community—many of whom may have found it difficult to visit their GP; many of whom may not have reflected on their wellness; and many of whom may not have been
guided and given the pastoral care of a prac-
tice nurse visit to access wellness, health
improvement and medical services to make
sure that their quality of life was optimised.
That was a great policy initiative. It is not
something that the Rudd Labor government
appears to have even addressed. If you be-
lieve, as I do, that nurse practitioners have
considerable talents and skills to offer then
let us not only expand their scope through
measures such as this but also actually im-
prove the availability of that through meas-
ures such as those proposed by the coalition
prior to the last election.

Who knows what scope there may be to
carry forward that kind of idea when the next
election comes around. The way the budget
is being managed and the extraordinary
spending spree that federal Labor has gone
on might mean very little scope for service
enhancement initiatives such as the one that
the coalition advocated prior to the last elec-
tion. But let me just say that is an example of
nurse practitioners being not only able to
undertake a wider range of activities to sup-
port wellness and health services but also
having the resources to go out and deliver
that capability to a very deserving group of
Australians for whom access to an in-clinic
visit may have been difficult. I pay great
tribute to her mum, Kate, for her wonderful
work. I have seen very recently and close at
hand the work of midwives and I admire
them greatly. At Andy Griffiths’ practice, a
highly respected obstetrician on the Morn-
ington Peninsula, the midwife, Kay—if not
Andy’s foreman then certainly his con-
cierge—makes sure Andy does all he needs to
do. Then there is the remarkable team at the
Bays Hospital in Mornington and the mid-
wifery unit there—a remarkable group of
dedicated professionals providing out-
standing care. We thank them for their atten-
tiveness.

One of the reasons I raise that recent ex-
perience is that it reminds me of how the
care that is available to support the bringing
of a child into the world is very much related
to the situation, the assessment of risk and
the medical circumstances and conditions
which people face. In the case of my beauti-
ful and extraordinarily talented wife, Kate,
her blood group was rather mysterious.
Monitoring her circumstance and making
sure her blood type did not mix with Isab-
ella’s was a very crucial task that required a
high degree of monitoring, supervision, pa-
thology testing and the like. But all of that
went very well and we are very fortunate for
it.
That is not everybody’s story though. There are in Australia, including in the Dunkley community, numbers of women preferring a very low-interventionist model or even a homebirth. That is a choice that I being a Liberal, with my side of politics believing in personal choice, believe we should facilitate. It is not a choice without serious considerations though. The fact that we are talking about professional medical indemnity and the like illustrates that it is a choice not without some risk, but those risks can be measured and evaluated and a low-interventionist homebirth pathway is entirely suitable for many women who choose that option.

One of the things that has activated the Dunkley community is the way in which these bills conspire to actually make homebirth illegal. The legislation does not say it is illegal; it just says that if you want to be a practising midwife there are certain conditions. One of those conditions involves professional indemnity insurance. If you do not have that then you will be fined. So if the health minister wants to challenge the characterisation of this legislation as making homebirth unlawful, let us certainly say it makes homebirth unlawful, if that is more comforting to her. That is what has caused such outrage. The current arrangement of private practitioners providing midwifery services in the home as something that is undertaken between families, the mother and the medical practitioner, who is the midwife, is something that will be shut off by these bills.

This has caused great outrage. I know of a number of people from the Dunkley electorate who made the journey to Canberra. They got to feel the chill of a cold Canberra morning but did so because they feel strongly about this. I just want to put on the record some of those views. I will just pick a couple out. Meredith from Frankston conveyed to me:

I was upset to hear that Minister Nicola Roxon may take the advice of some ‘ill-informed others’ and make it very difficult in the future for a woman to choose a homebirth. The fact that women may not have the right to choose where they birth bothers me greatly. This unfortunately will make the normal and natural process of birth a mechanical and ‘risky’ one, not to mention the strain on the over stretched hospital system.

Meredith went on to say:

Healthy informed women should be able to birth at home, where they feel safe, nurtured and relaxed.

She went on to describe the advantages of that experience.

Other examples that were brought to my attention included one from Rita from Mount Eliza, who described her first birth in a clinical hospital setting and how through a process of further research and discussion she chose a homebirth for her second child. She said:

Needless to say, after much investigating, talking and reading I opted for a homebirth with my next pregnancy. I had continuous midwife care throughout the pregnancy and birth, and our baby was born calmly and joyfully at home. It was a far cry from the previous scenario. I felt comforted and empowered by my/our decision and I feel our baby was far better off with this start in life.

We also heard about other experiences. I will point to the insights shared with me by Kimberlie Furness. Kimberlie, who I have known for a very long time, conveyed to me her distress at the measures the health minister was putting in place—in her eyes, making a midwife-centred birth an option not available to her.

She contrasted the atmosphere and environment in Australia with what occurs in the UK, where low-intervention birthing, midwife-centred birthing and homebirthing are
far more common. She conveyed to me that a recent study in the Netherlands, where one-third of women choose the homebirth option, found, in comparing home and hospital births, that there was no difference in death rates of either mothers or babies in 530,000 births. She was very keen to emphasise that, from a funding perspective, in most cases homebirth makes sense as it is so much cheaper, involving fewer costly drugs and less surgery and intervention. She said:

It is unfortunate that currently only 1% of the birthing population choose this option, perhaps through lack of information and education about the choices available and the safety record …

The point that Kimberlie was making is that if this is the choice of women who are well-informed about their own health and the circumstances of their birth why is it not supported? Janelle in Balnarring wrote of her experiences and said that ‘a medical model of care’ that medicalises birth is not for everybody. She too called on me to act to make sure that the choice of a midwife-centred, low-intervention homebirth is available.

In responding to this kind of concern raised by the community, I know that the announcement made by the Labor government is viewed by the women who have been in touch with me—many of whom attended the rally here on Monday—as of no comfort whatsoever. All it is is a stay of execution for a birthing option that they are attracted to and that should continue to be facilitated in our country. They saw the announcement from Minister Roxon as nothing more than political procrastination.

I would characterise it as one of the most perfect backflips we have seen. In politics, backflips are often used to characterise a change of mind or change of heart. But when you think about it, when someone does a backflip they actually end up facing the same direction. This was truly a backflip in that we had the fanfare and the spectacle and all the activity, some delay in the date from which homebirth will not be lawful, but essentially absolutely nothing has changed. We had much movement, much excitement and a lot of ‘ooh-aahing’ from those on the Labor Party side, who were trying to make it sound like something had changed, but nothing has changed except that the end date for homebirthing as a lawful and safe option for women will be two years later than the Rudd Labor government originally planned.

The coalition has argued that there needs to be some genuine action in examining what the pathway forward should look like. The coalition will be moving amendments that recognise that a full and informed debate requires the minister to table the actuarial modelling that she points to as giving rise to an inability to provide professional indemnity for midwives providing birthing services outside a clinical setting. We need a full and informed debate about a review into the provision of medical indemnity insurance and a canvassing of what options there may be—whether there can be a pooling of risk and a coordinated pooling of practitioners operating outside a clinical setting and whether there is some scope, recognising the savings to the taxpayer, for the government to facilitate medical cover. We do not know because we do not know what the data is. We call on the minister to release the data. Above all, we should always have regard for the wellbeing of the mother and child so they are not put at risk. That framework might require a birthing plan—(Time expired)

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (6.26 pm)—This evening I welcome the chance to make a contribution to this cognate debate on the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Run-off Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009. With
thousands of Australian women, I welcome the Minister for Health and Ageing’s most recent backflip, which is that the government will offer a two-year reprieve—or, as the member for Dunkley said, a stay of execution—for midwives to attend homebirths. This was clearly the most controversial aspect of this legislation and, while it is not yet fully resolved, it is yet another embarrassing backflip for the Rudd Labor government.

The minister is all over the place on health decisions. Recently I spoke about the cuts to chemotherapy medication, following representations from several constituents—some seriously ill. Thankfully, the minister realised the error of her ways and backflipped on these plans as well. This government has had an array of shamefaced backdowns and has left serious uncertainty over a number of important issues—for example, private health, IVF treatment, youth allowance, funding for the National Academy of Music and cataract surgery. How can we forget the Deputy Prime Minister’s involvement in axing IVF funding after tabling a petition in 2005 calling for no changes to Medicare funding of IVF treatments. Ms Gillard said it is a cruel thing to do to Australian women, particularly older Australian women, whose only hope of falling pregnant is through the IVF process. But what did she do when she became a minister? Nothing.

The government’s hypocrisy is blatant and its approach to health is sickly. The shambolic decision making is the result of a government that is focused on re-election and focus group feedback rather than on the interests of the Australian public. If it were not for the public outcry, the 2,000-strong rally yesterday with women shouting ‘home birth rocks’ and the pressure from the coalition, the government would not be having a change of heart.

As we have heard, this legislation provides MBS and PBS access for nurse practitioners and midwives, which will commence on 1 November 2010, and Commonwealth subsidised indemnity insurance for midwives working in a ‘collaborative’ setting, to commence on 1 July 2010. These bills extend Commonwealth subsidised indemnity insurance to eligible midwives. It is the definition of eligibility that drew a strong public response. The indemnity insurance intention was not to cover midwives providing birthing services outside of a clinical setting, forcing homebirths underground and risking the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies. Coupled with the national registration and accreditation scheme to make indemnity insurance a mandatory requirement of registration, the unfortunate result made it effectively illegal for independent midwives to provide homebirthing services. Individuals who practised as midwives without registration could have faced a maximum penalty of $30,000.

The minister now appears to have adopted the position advocated by the coalition to maintain the status quo and allow midwives to continue to assist in homebirths. As I understand it, they will be exempt from holding indemnity insurance for the next two years, which will enable them to continue to assist in homebirths. While they can assist in homebirths, they will not be insured. I make this point: they will not be insured during that period, which is quite a problem. This is a step forward and it will allow for debate, costings and the examination over the next two years, but let us not forget that it should never have come to this in the first place.

Midwives and nurses are the cornerstone of health services. I am a proud father of two children and was present at the birth of my daughter and my son—I was not much help, by the way. The midwife in attendance did all the work. On a wet and rainy night, the
obstetrician turned up almost after the first birth had occurred.

Mr John Cobb—Pretty normal.

Mr RANDALL—That is right. We paid a large fee to the obstetrician, but the midwife did all the work. I take my hat off to midwives. Parents put great thought, time and effort into finding a birthing plan that is right for them. That is my point: choice. My wife chose to go to a major hospital. Many in my electorate who have contacted me about this want a choice. We on this side believe in choice. We are not part of the herd mentality; we believe in the individual’s right to choose. The Rudd government wants us to take such a nanny-state direction that fundamental choices are being taken away.

What right does the government have to determine how you give birth, one of the most personal and meaningful experiences in a woman’s life? I certainly do not profess to be an expert on the medical merits of birthing choices, but there have been plenty of experts who have entered the debate. The Senate Community Affairs Committee took over 2,000 submissions. The 2008 Review of homebirths in Western Australia commissioned by the Western Australia Department of Health looked into access and outcomes for homebirths. The report found that developing systems to support safe and satisfying systems of care that provide child-bearing women with diversity options are essential, and midwives are critical to this process.

Many women and families support homebirth because it is a safe, low-risk option for most women. They believe it offers continuity of care and caters for women who want to birth in the comfort of their own surroundings. Homebirths are a choice, I must say, for a relative few. Studies have shown that less than one per cent of Australian women have homebirths. So we are not talking about a huge cost here, particularly for a government that seems to want to throw money at everything at the moment. This has been a surprising potential cut. In fact, homebirths actually save money because it means that there is less pressure on public hospital systems.

Western Australia sees about 200 planned homebirths a year which are generally managed by the Community Midwifery program or by independent midwives. The Community Midwifery program offers a great service but does not extend beyond the Perth metropolitan area. This means that most women in my electorate of Canning rely on independent midwives because Canning has half its population in the metropolitan area and half in the outer metropolitan area. In terms of land mass, something like two-thirds of the electorate is outside the metropolitan area.

As an aside, I would like to take this opportunity to speak about midwifery training in my electorate of Canning. We are extremely lucky to have the Peel Campus of Murdoch University in Mandurah which specialises in nursing. The school offers a Bachelor of Nursing, which has been highly successful. It also offers masters of midwifery and advanced nursing. The best outcomes are that many of these locally trained nurses and midwives stay in the local area, working in hospitals in the Peel region and south-west corridor—and that was its intention.

Industry groups have been highly critical of the government’s initial attack on midwives. Homebirth Australia was outraged by the decision that would have seen homebirths with a privately practising midwife essentially made illegal. The organisation has acknowledged that Minister Roxon’s backflip is a step in the right direction but the failure to provide indemnity insurance remains highly unacceptable. The Australian
Medical Association, the AMA, the peak body, said:

Actions by the government which favour one particular new model of care over another will generally not be in the interests of patients, will restrict real choice and will be inequitable.

The Australian Private Midwives Association’s Liz Wilkes considered the decision ‘highly disappointing’ and said:

It looks like the voices of more than 2,000 women speaking out on fundamental women’s rights have been ignored and given the sheer magnitude of the evidence put forward and the results the committee has come up with, it looks like we are getting to the end of the line when it comes to options.

Ms Wilkes believes the government’s change of heart is merely a bandaid solution. Women and their partners do not make homebirth decisions lightly. Great consideration goes into this important decision and people make that on the basis of informed advice and knowledge.

Many Canning constituents have approached me, appalled by the government’s attempt to take away their choice. These women have either had a homebirth or support the option of homebirth. They support the choice. One said to me:

It is unacceptable that women are unable to choose the care of a registered midwife to give birth at home. I don’t understand how the Government would want to take away a safe option that saved them money in the long term as we are not using the hospital system.

You might have noticed in the media today there was quite a contingent of women from Western Australia at that rally yesterday. I can assure you they travelled a long way and at great expense to come to Canberra on a bleak, cold day. A Mount Nasura woman said to me:

If midwives in private practice are not assisted, they will be prevented from registering. If they practise unregistered they will face a jail term. If national registration proceeds as planned, women choosing homebirth will be unable to access a registered midwife and essentially the practise will go underground. It is not acceptable that women are unable to choose the care of a registered midwife to give birth at home. Homebirth is a nationally funded option in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and the Netherlands. I ask that you support a women’s right to choose where and with whom she gives birth.

Similarly, Mrs Cole from my electorate has said to me:

It is unacceptable to me and all women that any government has the right to control our bodies and take away the choice of where and with whom we give birth.

I conclude by saying that the coalition strongly believes that this is an issue which fundamentally is about choice. As I have already said, we are a party that believes in choice, whether it be in health, education or many other life areas. We do not believe in the herd mentality that comes from the other side. It should be for parents, in consultation with health and medical professionals, to make the very important and personal decision of the model of care for childbirth. We look forward to the health minister releasing the government’s costings, complete actuarial modelling and policy detail—and hope that this stay of proceedings is not just that; we hope that there is an eventual resolution to both the insurance and choice issues. I thank the House.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (6.38 pm)—In speaking to the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and related bills, I must say that, as somebody who has seven daughters and 15 grandchildren—and two more on the way—I think I have some knowledge, if not of having children then at least of dealing with those who do. I have been approached by midwives and mothers, some who are both and some who are one or the other. While I
have to confess that, being a nervous father and grandfather, I would always prefer my children and their children who have children to do so with everything around them, I totally accept that a woman has a right to have a child in her own home with the assistance of that midwife and within a reasonable distance of further aid. I do not think any midwife—none that I have spoken to, anyway—has suggested for one second that they should be longer than the time period I mentioned away from further help should the unexpected arise. I am sure no mother would want to be.

Most people, be they doctors or midwives, say to me that you really should be no more than three-quarters of an hour or so from more extensive help, should it be required. That seems to me pretty reasonable, because quite obviously an experienced and trained midwife will know reasonably early if there are likely to be any complications. During the course of a pregnancy, if it is likely to have any complications, I would hope nobody would go into labour outside of ready access to a doctor, hospital and everything that goes with them.

Having the far west of New South Wales as part of my electorate and having lived in the western division of New South Wales virtually my whole life, I know the tyranny of distance is quite a frightening thing. There are times when mothers and fathers are damned glad to have medical help of any kind. I think that is the main thing. I implore and plead that nobody has a child or allows themselves to be in a position where they have to give birth without medical help, be it a midwife or anything else. In particular, I would never be in favour of a mother putting herself in a position where she has to be out in the outback or anywhere else. I know these things happen—sometimes through misadventure. I will talk about some of those in a minute. But I believe that within the confines of which I speak a registered and trained midwife, having taken all due precautions to ensure that, everything being equal, there should not be undue complications, a woman should have the right to have a child in her own home with the assistance of that midwife and within a reasonable distance of further aid. I do not think any midwife—none that I have spoken to, anyway—has suggested for one second that they should be longer than the time period I mentioned away from further help should the unexpected arise. I am sure no mother would want to be.

I very much support the right of midwives to practise and mothers to make that decision with all of those safety valves in place, but I have to take this opportunity to talk about the current situation. The debate about midwives being able to continue to assist in homebirths brings up the Third World situation facing women in quite a lot of my electorate—certainly in the western part of my electorate, where they cannot have babies at their local hospital because there is no maternity service. Cobar, for example, is a town of 6,000 people. I believe that in this day and age in a town of 6,000 people in our country, let alone in New South Wales, you have a right to feel safe. I do not mean that things cannot go wrong; they can always go wrong, even if you are in Prince of Wales Hospital or whatever. I believe that in a place of that size you have a right to feel you are safe and you can have a child.

But women in Cobar have to wait until the last minute and call an ambulance to help with the delivery of their child, because they know that if they have not already gone they are not going to make it to Dubbo—which is the only serious medical centre there. There is nothing between Broken Hill and Dubbo, which is a distance of 800 kilometres. Cobar itself is 460 kilometres from Broken Hill and about 300 from Dubbo. Despite that being such a big centre and despite it being that far from the other cities, they do not want you to
have children in Cobar. Those who decide to make the 300-kilometre trip to Dubbo do not always get there in time, and that is pretty understandable. More than one baby has been born on the side of the road.

A couple made it only as far as the Never-tire pub, which is about an hour or so from Dubbo, and it is just fortunate that the proprietor of that hotel happened to be married to a wonderful Irish nurse. I do not know if people actually thought, ‘I wonder if I can make it to Nevertire instead of Dubbo,’ but this has happened. And, as I said, when you have to leave a town of 6,000 people and rush to Dubbo 300 kilometres away, it is not good enough. Unfortunately, I believe that the Irish nurse who is married to my good friend who used to have the Nevertire Pub is no longer there, so I hope nobody thinks it is still an option.

In places like Nyngan, Trangie, Narromine, Warren and Brewarrina there is also no service for the delivery of babies. Even though they have a magnificent maternity section that is attached to the hospital in Condobolin, you are not allowed to have babies there either, you have to go to Parkes. There is nowhere in between Parkes and Broken Hill to have a baby, and that is a damn long way. There is no hospital between Wilcannia and Dubbo, a distance of over 500 kilometres, that would take a pregnant woman. There is a maternity unit at Broken Hill but it is the bare minimum. They do not have services to look after premature births and there is no guarantee that you will have a doctor. Broken Hill is a town of around 23,000 to 25,000 people. Bourke has a part-time service, which is lovely if your baby comes during the allocated hours, but it is not a good idea to have your baby out of hours.

Homebirthing is not an appropriate option for all women, but it is also far from appro-

priate for women to be forced to deliver their baby on the side of the road because the medical services are not available in a town, especially a town of up to 6,000 people. There are a couple of points here. Firstly, what is Kevin Rudd doing about this serious problem? He promised to fix the health sys-
tem in August and November 2007, when he was the prospective Prime Minister. He promised he would fix it. He said, ‘The buck stops with me.’ He was going to have it fixed by June. But of which year? Was it 2010, 2011, 2012 or 2013? No, it was June 2009, two or three months ago. Secondly, if the government wants to change the status quo with regard to midwives helping in home-
births, they must provide appropriate medi-
cal services for pregnant women in rural ar-
eas. Midwives are incredibly well-trained people. Before we had RNs, we had nursing sisters. I remember that they used to be tri-
ple-certificate nurses, and midwifery was one of the certificates that they used to do.

As the previous speaker, the member for Canning, the colleague of my Western Aus-
tralian friend here the member for Kalgoor-
lie, said just a minute ago, more often than not it is the nurse who delivers the children, even in a hospital. No-one can question the competency of our medical profession and particularly those who are trained as mid-
wives. I do not have a problem with the de-
sire of women within reasonable distance of help to have their children at home with the attention of one of those registered and very competent people. But I do have a problem with the fact that we have all these hospitals in western New South Wales with no provi-
sion for women to have their babies in their hometown. In New South Wales you are not allowed to have a child west of Parkes, you are not allowed to have a child west of Dubbo. If they can, they will not even leave you in Parkes or Forbes; they will push you on to Orange, which is the only place in cen-
tral western and western New South Wales with a proper medical service.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (6.49 pm)—There is no more deeply personal experience for most women than giving birth to a child. For most men who participate in or witness a birth, especially where it involves their child and their wife, there is no emotional experience that can replicate that event. What we are discussing with the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and related legislation is something that goes to the very meaning of life. It goes to our sense of being. It goes to the values of this government.

These bills extend Commonwealth subsidised indemnity insurance to eligible midwives. According to the bills an eligible midwife is a person who:
(a) is licensed, registered or authorised to practise midwifery by … the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory;
(b) meets such other requirements … as are specified in the Rules …; and
(c) is not included in a class of person specified in the Rules for the purposes of this paragraph.

From the minister’s second reading speech we learnt that Commonwealth supported professional indemnity cover will not respond to claims relating to homebirths. The impact of the bills as presented to this parliament, which are in response to recommendations of the maternity services review, is that indemnity insurance provisions will not cover midwives providing birthing services outside of a clinical setting. The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme will make indemnity insurance a mandatory requirement for registration as of 1 July 2010. Therefore, under the terms of the bill as introduced into this parliament, it will be effectively illegal for independent midwives to provide homebirthing services from this date. Indeed, individuals who practise as midwives without registration face a maximum penalty of $30,000 in accordance with the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009 exposure draft.

The response to these proposals was an outcry not only from midwives but from many members of the community. Most people do not choose to have a childbirth at home. Most choose to use the services of the major hospitals and allied clinics throughout Australia. Indeed, it is a statistic which, perhaps, we ought not to be so proud of that we have one of the highest rates of caesarean births in the world, far above what world health authorities regard as an acceptable level. But the reality, nonetheless, is that most women choose to make use of the services of major hospitals. Increasingly, some have chosen birthing units which are associated with those hospitals, which are a kind of halfway house between the traditional clinical birth and a homebirth experience; indeed, my wife and I did that for our last child. However, many people still believe that a parent—a mother in particular—ought to have the right, if she chooses and the family chooses, to have a birth at home. After all, this is not an uncommon experience in either human history or, indeed, the world of the present time.

Indeed, there are some studies from the World Health Organisation and others that suggest that there is no greater danger, in normal circumstances, for a birth at home than there would be for a birth within a hospital setting. A recent study of over 500,000 births showed no difference in the mortality rate for the baby and mother between home and hospitals. That was the 2009 study by de Jonge. Also, research by the World Health Organisation found that a homebirth is as safe as a hospital birth for healthy women having their first baby and that, for women having subsequent children, the result of a
homebirth is significantly better than the result of a hospital birth. That was the report by Wiegers et al in 1996.

The result of this outcry and the protests we have had—I have had women from my electorate come to see me about this matter, as I suspect most members of the House have—is that last Friday the government partially backed down on this controversial provision when the Minister for Health and Ageing announced a two-year delay in regulations that require private midwives to have indemnity insurance for homebirths. Of course, private insurers will not cover homebirths and the government will not subsidise indemnity insurance for homebirth midwives. Midwives must tell their clients that they are not insured and must get informed consent from pregnant women who want a homebirth.

What troubles me about this partial backdown is that it is not clear what the government’s intention is in putting in place this two-year delay. Is it for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not indemnity insurance can be provided—I understand the reason it is not provided is not the risk factor or the risk ratio but that there is not a large enough cohort of midwives in this situation for insurers to provide that insurance—or is it because the government actually believes, as would have been the effect of this legislation, that homebirths should be banned? If it is the latter then the government should say clearly that is the case. This should not be a backdoor method of banning homebirths in Australia.

The two-year delay has been put in place. I would hope that during this two-year period we have proper evidence provided to us—that is, where homebirths are taking place there should be proper reports of those circumstances, including any complications which arise. I understand that we are not just dealing with the mother. Many members have spoken about the woman’s rights, but the reality is that we are also dealing with the life of the child who is being born. That therefore leads one to having to balance in consideration the circumstances of both the mother and the child. If the evidence is overwhelming that this is a much more unsafe circumstance for the birth of a child that cannot be ameliorated by other measures such as the proximity of a hospital or other more intense clinical services, that can lead to a particular conclusion. But if the evidence—I have cited some which is available to me from global studies—is that there is no greater risk factor for homebirths than there is for births that occur within a hospital then there would seem to me to be no reason for what appears to be, on the face of it, discrimination against homebirths. That is evidence which I believe we as the opposition—and, I am sure, other members and senators—will be interested in as to what is produced over the next two years, after which this matter is ultimately coming back to the parliament. As I said, the situation in relation to hospitals is not entirely ideal either. I am not sure that we should be satisfied with the very high levels of caesarean births which occur in this country, but I have not seen any great examination of why that is occurring.
There could be many factors in play with that.

But that is not the purpose of my contribution tonight. It is simply to say that I understand that, yes, you have to balance the situation of both mother and child, but at least on the evidence available to me it would seem that it is not a more unsafe practice in normal circumstances to have a homebirth. And, if the reality is that the government is providing a subsidy for indemnity insurance to other medical and health professionals, it does at least seem on the surface that there is some discrimination being practised or that some discrimination was about to be practised towards those midwives who were assisting those mothers who chose to have a birth at home.

I will conclude my observations on this note: the ball is in the government’s court over the next two years to produce that evidence and to come forward with a proper rationale based on evidence. This is clearly an area where policy should be based on evidence, not based on the prejudices of anyone who happens to have a particular view about this matter.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (7.00 pm)—On the face of it, there is much to support in the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and cognate bills. There is even more to support following the minister’s spectacular backflip on the position of the government in relation to midwives. I shall have more to say on that later. It is very much an example of the government rushing to legislate on issues without paying attention to the detail and without thinking through the consequences of the government’s actions. For the moment, I will say that I welcome the minister’s partial backdown, which will allow the status quo in relation to midwives to continue until 2012.

For many years the Commonwealth has battled with the problems of labour shortages in the health services, particularly in regional Australia. We are familiar with the efforts made to increase the number of training places for doctors and nurses, to encourage the newly qualified to pursue a career in areas where they are most needed, and to attract suitably qualified practitioners from abroad to come to Australia to work. As in many areas of the health service, it is debatable whether we will ever be able to do enough to generate the size of workforce that we need to satisfy an ever-growing demand. Combined with the difficulties of providing costly services in sparsely populated areas, we have the problem of an ageing and therefore more demanding population with rising expectations of what the health service should deliver and new treatments being ever more complex and ever more expensive and requiring ever more highly trained practitioners to deliver.

The 2005 Productivity Commission report drew attention to the fact that there was no single solution to meeting the demand for health services and a multipronged approach was needed, so I welcome the moves contained in these bills to enable midwives and nurse practitioners to make a greater contribution to patient care. The Australian Medical Association and other medical professionals clearly have reservations, but I fully support the principle of enabling other health practitioners to share the load and to help ensure that people throughout Australia receive timely and effective health care.

Experience in the UK suggests that patients were generally satisfied with nurse practitioner consultations and that there were few differences in clinical care and clinical outcomes. Better utilisation of nurse practitioners could help to ease the load on our overstretched GP workforce. If we are running our GPs into the ground, we cannot ex-
pect them to be able to maintain the highest quality services for our communities, when they are just overworked. Patients would be treated more quickly, chronic conditions would be better supervised and health resources would be used to maximum benefit if we were to maximise the capabilities of our entire medical workforce. It is all about providing the appropriate level of care with the appropriate level of competency and the appropriate level of supervision. Why should a patient have to wait to see a doctor when their ailment or complaint could be quickly and effectively treated by a nurse or nurse practitioner, suitably supervised and under the watchful eye of GPs?

The principle of this legislation is good but, as with so much else that the government produces, when it comes to the detail it falls down. Let us look for a moment at the government’s mercifully short track record on getting the detail right—or, unfortunately, getting the detail completely wrong. When we had the global financial crisis, we needed a bank guarantee scheme. The air was thick with warnings that the scheme should not be unlimited, but the government, driven by its compulsion to be seen to be doing something and the need to grab the day’s headlines, went for an unlimited bank guarantee, and the result was chaos.

What about the changes to Youth Allowance? The lack of attention to detail threatened to derail the financial plans of many students in their gap year. What about the tax bonuses? Too many people thought they were going to receive a payment from the government when in fact, when you looked at the fine print, they missed out. What about computers in schools? What about flood relief payments? All too often, people were denied the assistance they needed and their rightful entitlements because the government schemes were not properly thought through. There were the issues of petrol prices and the failed Fuelwatch scheme. There was the failed GroceryWatch scheme. It was an election promise to put downward pressure on grocery and petrol prices, and the only responses to that were two failed schemes by this government.

The health service was going to be fixed by 30 June 2009 or the government was going to take it over. The government was going to step in. The buck stopped with the Prime Minister on health. The Prime Minister made a very clear, very unequivocal promise that if it was not corrected by 30 June 2009 he would step in and fill the gap. Sadly, it has not been fixed. The health service still faces severe challenges, and the government is rapidly backing away from its promise that the buck stopped with the federal government in relation to health services.

As I said earlier, the issue of extending the role of midwives and nurse practitioners is all about providing the appropriate level of care with the appropriate level of competency and the appropriate level of supervision. This is one of the areas where the legislation falls down. The coalition believes that GPs will continue to be the foundation of primary health care. They are called ‘general’ practitioners because their training enables them to properly assess the whole range of ailments and to recommend the most suitable next step for treatment. Of course, for the sake of patients and GPs, we should be trying to ease their burden. Transferring some of their work to midwives and nurse practitioners is one way of making sure that we maximise the output and clinical outcomes from our workforce.

While I have the utmost confidence in the professional judgment of medical staff to recognise the limits of their own training in diagnosis and treatment, what we need from the government is some idea—indeed, any
idea—of the arrangements that will make these measures work. Who will decide whether a patient sees a nurse or a doctor—the GP’s receptionist? What level of supervision will the GP be expected to provide? How can that be provided given the GP’s own workload? Unless these details are considered, we could be moving toward a two-tier health service where a patient agrees to be seen by a nurse simply because it is quicker and more convenient. Surely there needs to be some clinical input at a very early stage to make all of this work, but the government has given us no guidance in relation to these crucial matters.

Before turning to the second area in which this legislation fails, the issue of midwives and homebirths, I will briefly mention costs. No one likes putting a price on health care but, as demand and costs rise, we have to do just that. In mid-2007, the coalition was spending some $6.4 billion a year on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and $11.7 billion on the MBS at a time when we were running a surplus. Those figures will inevitably grow at a time when the government is in the process of racking up a debt of over $300 billion. Against that background we need more clarity on what the government’s proposals are in relation to costs.

The proposals will give nurse practitioners the ability to refer patients to specialists. Currently, GPs only refer a small proportion of their patients to specialists. It seems reasonable to assume that referrals will increase but the proposals give no clue as to the effect on specialists’ waiting lists, how this might fit into a collaborative model or the impact on costs. Neither is there any detail of the workings or consequences of the new ability of midwives and nurse practitioners to order pathology and diagnostic services with a Medicare rebate. With the government strangely reluctant to release its economic modelling on this and other matters, one is left with the conclusion that they have something to hide or that they have nothing to hide because once again they have rushed out with another policy decision without fully examining the cost, without having done their homework.

I now turn to the failure in this legislation which has caused the greatest concern and the greatest controversy: that of midwives’ professional indemnity and homebirths. Again, we have a situation where the government has displayed a lack of attention to detail. Because of the interaction between these bills and the national registration and accreditation scheme, from July next year midwives would have been prevented from assisting at homebirths, effectively removing the option of women giving birth in their own home.

I acknowledge the great work done by the Coffs Coast Maternity Action Group in my electorate in defending the mother’s right to choose, and I know that they and many other groups around the country will be welcoming this humiliating—but welcome—backflip by the minister, albeit a temporary reprieve, until 2012. It is hard to tell whether her initial position of banning midwives from homebirths was an intended consequence or an unintended consequence of this legislation. Given that their brief legislative record is littered with unintended and unwanted consequences, it seems more likely that this was the result of the government’s habitual bungling.

The fact of the matter was that, under the new registration scheme, practitioners would have been required to have suitable professional indemnity insurance. While the government proposes to provide insurance to midwives in a clinical setting, it would not have extended to cover homebirths. Furthermore, the exposure draft of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009
(Bill B) states that an individual who practises as a midwife without indemnity insurance and is therefore unregistered may be subject to a maximum fine of $30,000, effectively making the choice of a homebirth illegal. It is absolutely astounding. It is highly unlikely that it would be practicable or viable for a midwife to arrange her own insurance to cover for homebirths.

From July next year, having a baby at home would have ceased to be an option. It is true that only a small proportion of mothers choose to have their baby at home. However, with the benefit of medical advice it should surely be the right of every mother to give birth in their own home rather than in a hospital. Indeed, given the parlous state of many of our hospitals, and the current pressures on staff—both matters that the government has pledged to fix—one would argue that mothers should be encouraged to give birth at home if that is their choice. By removing the midwife, the government was removing the right to choose for the mother.

However strongly they may feel that home is the right place to give birth, few mothers would feel it was in the best interests of themselves or their babies to give birth at home without a midwife. There was also the worrying aspect that policy on health care was being driven by the matter of insurance. If the government believes that homebirths are undesirable from a medical point of view, it should have said so. It appears that the government now believes, as we do, that subject to medical advice, homebirths are a suitable option for many mothers.

It has adopted basically the position that has been proffered by the coalition. We certainly welcome that backflip that has delivered the status quo, at least for the time being. This decision has been very much a subject of some controversy. Certainly, people within my electorate have expressed very strong views about this. But it has been an embarrassing climbdown for the minister, an embarrassing backflip, but welcome all the same.

We still have to wait and see what happens after 2012 and what the situation will be in relation to the choice for mothers after that date. But we certainly, as I said, welcome the change that has been made. In my area we have a range of smaller hospitals that see their level of services constantly being downgraded. The maternity unit at Bellinger hospital has been the subject of a great deal of attention as to whether services will continue there. I know many people in the Bellinger valley would welcome the opportunity to continue having the option of homebirths for their children.

We do welcome the change of heart by the minister. Unfortunately it has caused a great deal of anguish amongst many people in my community who wish to maintain the option of homebirths. We are concerned about what the situation will be after 2012 but certainly the changes by the government have been welcomed.

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (7.13 pm)—On Monday this week I went down to Old Parliament House, where I was met by over 1,000 protesters who were greatly concerned at the changes for the medical indemnity insurance for midwives, which will prevent midwives from providing care outside a clinical setting by restricting their access to insurance. I say right from the outset that this is an absolute disgrace.

It was quite amazing to see these protesters standing there in the rain—the majority were ladies, a number were actually pregnant, and there were a number with babies and small children—most without umbrellas, getting soaked for the simple reason that they deserve the right to choose how they wish to have a baby. That is an absolute disgrace.
I would like to mention some of my local residents. Jacinta Munn, Iznaya Kennedy, Narelle Key, Melanie Cane, Karyn Peverill and Donna Sheppard-Wright were amongst the 100 from my electorate who attended the protest. I have been a member of parliament for five years, and there were a number of very contentious issues faced by us in government and there are a number that we face now in opposition. I have never seen so many people from my electorate visit Parliament House to have their voices heard on one issue. Why did they come? Because the Rudd Labor government would deny them the right to choose the method of delivering their children. The Rudd Labor government is denying women the choice of how they have their babies. It is just ludicrous.

I have been a strong supporter of the rights of families to choose homebirths since day one. Last October I attended the mothers and babies family picnic hosted by the Homebirths in the Hills group in support of homebirths. I met parents including Carolyn and Serge Charles, Tom Murdoch, Jan Deany, Gypsy O’Dea, Jade Leak, Kate Schultz, Sharizaar O’Heart, Linden Holder and Margaret Duncan, to name a few. I listened to their incredible stories of giving birth in their own home, with their loved ones surrounding them and a caring midwife on hand to provide assistance.

The Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and related legislation will force women into overcrowded public hospitals and strip them of their right to choose the best method of birth for them. That is their choice, not a government’s. It is a personal choice, and it is not a decision they take lightly. The Federal Labor government claim they are acting in the best interests of mothers and their children. However, what they are actually doing is taking away mothers’ choice and turning Australia into a nanny state. It is not the government’s right to decide how a mother should deliver a baby; it is the mother’s.

Last Friday the government dished up a half-baked backflip to midwives and parents by exempting homebirth practitioners from needing to have indemnity insurance until June 2012. However, after June 2012, without proper intervention from the government by subsidising medical indemnity insurance for midwives, their goose will be cooked. The costs of getting indemnity insurance are prohibitively high for independent midwives, meaning that many will not be able to assist in homebirths. The Minister for Health and Ageing has admitted that requirements to have insurance could force many practitioners underground. That is the minister’s view.

Midwives who practise without registration could face a maximum penalty of $30,000, so the cost of practising homebirths without a licence is extremely high. Either way, the costs are too great, meaning that this option is effectively off the table for thousands of Australian women. Cynically, the government are pretending they are supporting the midwives by saying, ‘If you get insurance, you can practise and help deliver babies at home,’ knowing damn well midwives will never be able to get that insurance in the first place. And, if you do try to do it without insurance, you will get slugged $30,000. Why would the government ever consider this a way to treat mothers-to-be?

Providing an exemption for midwives until June 2012 is simply a stalling tactic. The government are delaying making a decision about the future of homebirths until after the next election. They are treating Australian women with contempt, hoping that their anger will subside over the next two years. I tell the minister and the Rudd Labor government this: the women who travelled 800
kilometres from my electorate of La Trobe and the thousands of women who travelled thousands of kilometres from across Australia to stand in the pouring rain to have their voices heard are outraged by the government’s proposed changes. Many have written to me about how concerned they are, and they will not let the government forget. I can tell the minister now: when I met the mothers down at Old Parliament House, even after the government’s decision on Friday, they were not happy.

For some women, giving birth in a hospital is not an option. They may live quite far away from the nearest hospital or may feel uncomfortable in the hospital environment. For others, it is a choice made to ensure that their child is born into a loving and peaceful setting and provides some comfort from the stress and noise of a hospital environment. Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand are amongst the many countries that publicly fund homebirths. A homebirth is not the best option for every mother-to-be, but to deny every woman the right to choose a homebirth will place even more pressure on our already underfunded public hospitals. No-one wants to see babies’ health jeopardised. However, for the majority of risk free pregnancies homebirth is a safe alternative method to hospital admittance. This is about ensuring women have control over their bodies and a choice in the way their child is brought into the world. It is not the government’s right; it is the mother’s right.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (7.20 pm)—I rise to speak on the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and related bills, which have caused hundreds and thousands of women to come to Canberra this week with their families in tow to protest and to have their voices heard. Admittedly, these women form a very small minority of women, but it was quite heartening to see their determination and their strong belief in the rightness of what they were doing. In our great democracy too often people accept government decisions and bureaucratic decisions and say of the state or a department: ‘They’re too big for us to fight. We know they’re wrong, we know they’re ignorant, we know they’re prejudiced and we know they haven’t got all the facts, but it’s all too hard.’ I find that very frustrating as someone who believes in the importance of engaging everyday Australians in decision making and not just leaving it to politicians, powerful interest groups and lobby groups. It is quite sad that this attitude of helplessness and apathy often pops up right across the nation when we discuss controversial issues.

But on this occasion, in relation to what would have been a severe limitation, if not a de facto banning, of homebirths in Australia, we did not see that: we saw something else. We saw something that was very encouraging, something that was very uplifting. We saw the determined spirit of so many women around Australia, from every corner—many from rural and regional Australia, including 80 from north-east Victoria, from my part of the world. We saw them come to stand as one and to have their voices heard. I think it surprised a lot of people. The publicity they have managed to generate for such a small group of women stands as a testament to their determination, their organisation and their intelligence. I am sure it surprised a lot of people around the country and it surprised the government.

I want to mention specifically my local support group, the North-East Victoria Homebirth Support Group, who came to see me with a local midwife, Wendy Buckland, and we discussed their concerns. They told me about their support network and they told me about some of their experiences. But what was critical was that here were these women, local women—you could not distin-
guish them from other women in the street—who were quite distressed but were determined to do something about it. They wanted not only to retain the choice that they had but also to ensure that that choice, regarding where woman would give birth in north-east Victoria and indeed right around the country, was maintained for the foreseeable future.

We have seen the hospital systems around the country collapse and we have heard the scandalous stories of what happens in the hospital system, particularly to some pregnant women. We heard the promise made by the then opposition leader at the 2007 federal election, when he promised to fix hospitals and health by June 2009 or he would seek a mandate to take hospitals over. That deadline has come and gone. Hospitals are not fixed and we see the same problems perpetuated but no solution to fix them. We see all of this and we see medical resources taken away in many parts of rural and regional Australia.

I will give one small example from my part of the world, in north-east Victoria. Under the government’s new remoteness area classification scheme, many parts of my electorate are going to be disadvantaged in trying to attract GPs to practise in towns that will be classified under RA2 as ‘inner regional’ areas—towns such as Myrtleford, Rutherglen, Euroa, Violet Town, Nagambie, Yackandandah, Beechworth and Chiltern. These towns are going to be forced to compete with medical clinics in larger areas for medical experts and for GPs. At a time when the public hospital system continues its decline and continues to come up with scandalous stories and when the government are changing the rural and remote index classification, they are trying also to severely limit homebirth—in fact, to outlaw it. That is what they should have said from the outset. They should have been honest in saying, ‘Well, we believe this homebirth thing isn’t on; we don’t like it, so we’ll ban it,’ instead of using the backdoor way of this new legislation.

At this time it is even more important to give women, particularly in rural, regional and remote areas but also in the cities, increased choices about their health care and increased choices about how they are going to give birth. The government introduced this legislation to provide some carrots—to provide MBS and PBS access for nurse practitioners and midwives. We saw the indemnity insurance provisions that, up until last Friday, were causing particular consternation. The provisions did not cover midwives providing birthing services outside a clinical setting. That would really take away the choice of many women to employ an independent midwife, because it would effectively make it illegal for midwives to provide homebirthing services, as the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme was going to make indemnity insurance a mandatory requirement of registration from 1 July next year. Midwives without registration would have faced a maximum penalty of $30,000, and we saw many anxious mothers and mothers-to-be. Currently, in many parts of Australia, women who do have a homebirth contract privately with midwives without indemnity insurance. Here we had the big nanny state moving in and saying: ‘We don’t think you’re smart enough to make that decision. We don’t think you’re smart enough to make the choice about homebirth and to come to an arrangement with your midwife.’

At the 11th hour last Friday, in a joint communiqué from the Australian health ministers, we saw what appeared to be a two-year breathing space from this exclusion of midwives. What the Minister for Health and Ageing has tried to do, really, is to buy some time. It was all too hard: this small group of women who she thought would not make much of a noise, who would not cause too
much of a problem. She thought, ‘Maybe if we provide a two-year exemption for them, up until 2012, from holding indemnity insurance then maybe we’ll be able to see it through the next election without too many hassles.’ I am sure the Prime Minister knocked on her door and said: ‘Minister, this is all too much. I don’t need this problem. Fix it.’ In the fashion of this government she is trying for a very short-term fix. The argument has been ‘Let’s maintain the status quo for some time’ but we really do need to ask questions. Does it really maintain the status quo or does it actually introduce additional restrictions—that is, we will not have a situation that maintains the status quo up until June 2012 but additional hurdles will be introduced for some women around the country? These matters do need to be investigated. Part of the requirements to access the exemption includes, and I quote from one of the dot points in the communiqué:

Participating in a quality and safety framework which will be developed after consultation led by Victoria through the finalisation of the registration and accreditation process.

But within the quality and safety framework there needs to be provision for a woman to make an informed choice so that she can still access a midwife if she falls, for some reason, outside the framework. We know this framework does not currently exist, so if there is a framework imposing certain conditions, by definition it introduces new restrictions on the practice of homebirths with the use of midwives.

This would be consistent with medical practice, which allows patients to exercise their right to refuse treatment. I think it is very important for the minister and the government to know that homebirth mothers and midwives around the country have not been fooled by these provisions in the joint communiqué. They will watch very closely to see that the framework and guidelines that come out of it do not actually limit the genuine and real choice that mothers and midwives have.

There are some questions as well as to whether these provisions will actually apply to all jurisdictions. We do not know what the government means by some of the wording in the communiqué and whether some jurisdictions are excluded from having these provisions and if the so-called quality and safety framework applies to them. That really does need to be examined and looked at.

I have spent a lot of time over the last few weeks and months speaking to many concerned women, and it is interesting that there are a lot of women who are not homebirth mothers, who have not had that experience, but who feel so passionately and strongly about supporting the choice of women. We hear so much from the other side of politics, on convenient occasions, about the choice for women, but where is the Minister for the Status of Women? If I have missed something, could someone on the other side please correct me? She has probably been silent because she is embarrassed by the mismanagement and the arrogance with which the Minister for Health and Ageing has conducted this debate. The government needs to make sure that consumers, who have really been left out of the equation to date and ignored, do get included—they are critical to this debate. As we have seen this week, they will not let the government or anyone forget that they are important and that they do matter.

In order that the choices for women—the intimate and personal decision that they make in consultation with their families—do not just get swept under the table and, effectively, banned, we do need to take some steps to look at these issues in the intervening period over the next two years. Although the government’s recent changes allow for a temporary reprieve, we do need to look at
what more we can do. The first step would be for the government to release the actuarial modelling associated with the indemnity insurance scheme. Why have we asked for this? Because it would allow for informed consideration and actual debate—not just silence and backroom deals, but actual debate about the feasibility of including midwives providing homebirth services in the category of eligible midwives for the purposes of indemnity insurance. We know that is what the vast majority of women supporting homebirths and their midwives want. This is also consistent with the recommendations of the minority report of the Senate committee. I do not know why it has fallen on deaf ears; perhaps people power this week will make the minister listen to this particular request. To date we have only seen a very limited explanation as to why the feasibility of extending indemnity insurance to midwives providing homebirthing services has not been considered. The coalition continues to call for the release of this information.

We also call for a review into the provision of medical indemnity insurance for these midwives to be tabled in the parliament on or before 1 June 2012, prior to the conclusion of the proposed transition period under the draft national registration and accreditation legislation. We believe these measures are essential and, despite many opportunities to actually engage on this issue, the minister has failed to be a true minister of the Crown and take leadership on this issue. This has been dragging on for months and we are looking to take positive steps. That is why I will move the amendment circulated in my name, in an attempt to progress this issue—not to sweep it under the carpet but to ensure that we continue to investigate, to use the facts, to use the research and to use the information to see what we can do to facilitate real choice for women.

As shadow minister for, amongst other things, women, it gave me great pleasure this week to see the exercise of ‘woman power’. I know that the government and I can count on one thing: these women, who are well informed and well equipped, will not cease this campaign—and nor should they, because as consumers they have been left out of the equation and as homebirth mothers they have been ignored and pushed aside. But they have shown the government and the Australian people that it matters not that you are part of a small minority; if you believe in something strongly enough, and you have got the facts and figures to back you up, you can succeed. I believe they can, and I urge the government to support the amendment that has been circulated in my name. I move:

That all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

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

(1) acknowledges that the bill does not:

(a) facilitate a full and informed debate by requiring the minister to table all actuarial modelling relating to the extension of Commonwealth medical indemnity insurance to midwives providing birthing services outside of a clinical setting;

(b) further facilitate a full and informed debate by requiring a review into the provision of medical indemnity insurance to midwives providing birthing services outside of a clinical setting, with the review being tabled in parliament on or before 1 June 2012;

(c) have in its objects the goal of not restricting the rights of women to choose home birth as an option provided the wellbeing of the mother and child are not put at risk; and

(2) calls on the government to make such amendments to the bill as would rectify these flaws.’

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Is the amendment seconded?
Mr Pearce—I second the amendment.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (7.37 pm)—In summing up I want to thank the very large number of members of this House who have taken the time to contribute to the debate on these three bills. I think it is a measure of the community’s interest in midwifery and in changes to the workforce that allow recognition for midwives and nurse practitioners that we have heard so many members speaking on the bill, and I am very proud to be summing up the debate on these bills because they do introduce landmark changes for Australian nurses and midwives. This is something that for decades has been campaigned for. Under the long period of the previous government these pleas fell on deaf ears. It is a little surprising to hear contributions such as the one from the member for Indi, who never took any action as part of the government for 11 years to make any of these changes but is now demanding not only that these bills be introduced and these changes made but that every range of other issues that she thinks should now be raised must be delivered instantaneously by this government. It is pretty extraordinary that it has taken us until today to find out whether the Liberal Party would in fact support these bills. That is fantastic news for nurses, for midwives and for consumers across the country in our health system, which of course we all are at some point in our lives.

The bills enable patients of appropriately qualified and experienced midwives and nurse practitioners to access benefits under the Medicare Benefits Schedule and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, opening the way forward for improved access to maternity services, improved choice for women and improved access to services provided by nurse practitioners. For example, these bills will lead to better access to breastfeeding support for many thousands of women across the country. They will lead to better access to midwifery support during pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. These bills will lead to better access to services for those hard to reach sections of our community such as those with mental illness, residents of our aged care facilities and Australians living in our rural and remote communities. Of course, they will not deliver all of the solutions to those people, but they will enhance the workforce response that can be provided to servicing those many people in our community who need and want the assistance of nurses and midwives.

Alongside the further development of secondary legislation there are a range of activities taking place which will enable these arrangements to be put in place and onto the Medicare Benefits Schedule by November 2010. This includes consultation on the detailed development of the new arrangements with professions and other key stakeholders, the conduct of a tender for a provider of indemnity insurance, and Medicare Australia systems development and the communications activities required to implement these reforms. To some listening, that might sound like a long period of time, but I can assure people that the introduction of new Medicare benefit items is always a slow process. When you are introducing items for an entirely new group of health professionals, and when an indemnity insurance product also needs to be established, this does take time.

After having listened to the debate over the last few days I think it is important to clarify some misconceptions about the effect of these bills, particularly on homebirth in Australia. The three bills before the House expand Commonwealth support for midwives and nurse practitioners in our commu-
nity, as I have said, improving choice and extending Commonwealth funding for a range of midwife and nurse practitioner services for the first time ever. These three bills do not take away any current rights and none of these bills make homebirth unlawful. There is, however, a separate exposure draft bill for the national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals. This bill is in exposure draft form, prepared for all jurisdictions via a COAG agreement, and is not yet before any parliament. The exposure draft of that separate bill currently carries a proposal that will require all registrants across 10 professions covered, including nurses and midwives, to carry insurance. This is an important part of raising the standards and providing public protection for patients and consumers across 10 different professions within the health sector. However, amongst those 10 professions, midwives are in a unique position because indemnity insurance has not been available for midwives operating outside public health services in Australia since 2002.

I might note in passing, given the animated way that a number of members opposite have contributed to this debate, that since 2002—which, if I recall correctly, was when the Howard government was in power—no action was ever taken by the previous government to rectify the absence of indemnity insurance for midwives. We, of course, through the introduction of these three bills, intend to change that. However, we were concerned that an unintended consequence of the requirement in the national registration and accreditation draft bill might be that homebirths would be driven underground. That is why I have been working for some months with the states and territories on the potential options to prevent this from happening. And, as I advised the House yesterday and am pleased to be able to advise again today, on Friday at the health ministers’ meeting, the meeting between the states, the territories and the Commonwealth, I was able to achieve the agreement of all health ministers around the country to a transitional clause in the current draft national registration and accreditation scheme legislation.

What this means is that a two-year exemption will last until June 2012 from the requirement to hold indemnity insurance for privately practising midwives who are unable to obtain professional indemnity insurance for attending a homebirth. In order to access this exemption, it will be a requirement for midwives attending homebirths to provide full disclosure to and receive informed consent from their patients that they do not have professional indemnity insurance. They will be required to report each homebirth and to participate in quality and safety frameworks, which will be developed after consultation, led by Victoria, through the finalisation and accreditation process. This has been achieved with all governments working together to obtain an outcome that is progressive for the sector but that will not make homebirths illegal. It is vital to emphasise a point—which I think the Liberal Party has now acknowledged—that to vote against this package of bills would prevent a major expansion of services to many hundreds of thousands of women and prevent establishment of any type of indemnity insurance for midwives. This is an outcome I know, from my meetings with many homebirth advocates, they would not want to see eventuate.

The government is committed to supporting Australia’s nurses and midwives, the backbone of our health workforce. The changes in these bills are significant and are a practical step in improving access and choice for Australians. I can indicate to the House that the government will not be supporting the second reading amendment moved by the member for Indi. We are very proud of the steps we are taking to expand
and support services provided by midwives and nurse practitioners. We believe the agreement that has been reached with the states and territories ensures that no woman who chooses—with the proper information being provided to her—to birth at home will be disadvantaged. The current arrangements will continue. The support activities and care provided by the midwife at home—if a mother has chosen to have her child at home and has been properly informed that the activity will not be insured, as is currently the case—will not be able to be deregistered and will not be made unlawful.

I know there are people who would like this to be different and would like the government’s reforms to go even further. It is something that the Liberal Party has been arguing with passionate—although, I have to say, without much of a record to show that this is something they truly believe in, no action having been taken ever in the time that they were in government. We certainly understand that some people would like the legislation to go further. They would like us to provide not only MBS and PBS rights for midwives who are undertaking a whole range of services but who do not attend homebirths but insurance cover to homebirthing midwives as well. But that was not recommended to us as part of the maternity services review. We accept the advice provided to us as a result of the detailed process and review conducted by the National Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, Rosemary Bryant. Therefore, we will not be supporting the amendments that are moved and we remain extremely proud of the new choices we are providing for thousands of women across the country and of the midwives who want to provide care for these women and the nurse practitioners who will have access, for the first time ever, to MBS and PBS entitlements.

Mr Bruce Scott—The question is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question. A division is required. In accordance with standing order 133 the division is deferred until 8 pm. The debate is therefore adjourned until that time.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (7.49 pm)—I understand—although the opposition will correct me if I am wrong—that the division will just be on this particular bill, in which case we might be able to conduct the business on the remaining bills, given that we need the debate to be adjourned until 8 pm for a division. But I am in the hands of the opposition if they would rather do all of them together. Perhaps you could provide us with that guidance.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (7.49 pm)—On indulgence, we are happy to oblige to help the order of business in the House and are happy to assist in relation to this matter as well.

MIDWIFE PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY (COMMONWEALTH CONTRIBUTION) SCHEME BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 7 September, on motion by Ms Roxon:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (7.51 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
Tuesday, 8 September 2009

MIDWIFE PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY (RUN-OFF COVER SUPPORT PAYMENT) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 7 September, on motion by Ms Roxon:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (7.51 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

AVIATION TRANSPORT SECURITY AMENDMENT (2009 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 24 June, on motion by Mr Albanese:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (7.52 pm)—I would like to begin my remarks on the Aviation Transport Security Amendment (2009 Measures No. 1) Bill 2009 with a few general comments on aspects of the aviation industry and remind the House of the enormous contribution that aviation makes to Australia’s overall economy and especially to the lives of those who live in regional and remote communities.

Australia’s aviation industry contributes over $6 billion a year to the economy and directly supports nearly 50,000 jobs, a significant proportion of which are in regional areas. Steady economic growth, particularly during the years of the previous coalition government, increased tourism and a more efficient airline sector have driven the expansion of Australia’s aviation sector. In the 2007-08 year Australia’s domestic airlines carried 49 million passengers. In the same year, more than 23 million international passengers went through Australian airports.

A century ago, the only way to arrive in Australia was by boat but things have changed. Things have changed dramatically also in the aviation industry. The way in which our airlines operate, the efficiency of their businesses and the competitive nature of the industry are a far cry from the old two-airlines policy, protected arrangements and an industrial relations climate which was completely unconducive to running an efficient business. All of those changes have meant that it is now possible for Australia to have an airline industry which is not only safe and reliable but also capable of operating at a profit.

The 23 million passengers who arrived from around the world represent a gain of over five per cent on the previous year. A significant proportion of these passengers are tourists from other parts of the world. The millions of short-term international visitors represent a valuable contribution to the overall economy through the tourism sector.

Ours is a big country, and with such long distances to cover and so few people aviation frequently fills a critical gap in places where road or rail transport is not available or distances are too great. Aviation makes a significant contribution to tourism, mining and other industries in the regions. In 2007 regional airlines carried 5.8 million passengers, a figure that represents an increase of 11 per cent over the previous years.

The operation of many of these airline services for fly-in fly-out mining operations and businesses has meant extensive new networks across the continent. As a result we have services linking communities on a regular basis that, in fact, previously could never
have expected to enjoy air services. I know that that has had implications of its own. The fact that large mining operations are employing thousands of people and earning huge amounts of money—billions of dollars—without there being the development of a local town and local community is a matter of concern to people who live in many regional communities. They have not got the benefit of the wealth that has been produced in their areas, because so many of the workers simply fly in and fly out, leaving little behind. That is a regrettable change in our lifestyle. It would be better as a nation if we had a lot more of the people who work in these communities actually living there, making it their home and decentralising our nation in a much stronger and more practical way. In recent times there has been a lot of attraction to the idea that some of the royalties from these projects should be returned to the regions so there is at least something left there when the mines close or in recognition of the enormous contribution that these facilities and these operations make to our national income. That is popular in regional areas because people believe they have a right to a fair share of services, and I think this is a principle that we need to extend more widely across the provision of government services both at a state level and nationally.

The millions of passenger movements that we have are on top of the millions of shipments made by the air cargo industry in and out of Australia. In 2007-08 international air freight traffic totalled about 780,000 tonnes. Both inbound and outbound air freight traffic have shown increases in recent years. The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics estimates that over the next two decades air passenger movements in Australia’s airports will grow by an average of four per cent per year. Air travel is now a fundamental part of Australia’s national life. There are many fundamental services that need to be encouraged and supported to bring together the network of our nation. The aviation industry plays a particularly important role in that regard.

Over the years the aviation industry has had its ups and downs. Swine flu and the economic downturn have battered airlines in Australia and around the world as revenues dropped. Few airlines worldwide have been able to return a profit in the last year. Just recently Qantas, our national carrier, announced a drop in profits of 88 per cent. That is bad but at least they still had a profit.

Worse still, some communities have experienced a loss of air services as airlines have cut some of their operations in order to ensure that they have a return to their shareholders. Rex recently announced that it had to terminate some of its smaller routes linking Dubbo to Burke, Cobar, Coonamble, Lightning Ridge and Walgett, and the Mudgee to Sydney run, citing increasing costs, ever increasing regulatory requirements and the government’s termination of the end-route rebate. As a result, the short flight between Dubbo and Lightning Ridge is now a four-hour drive. If the road links into a regional town were cut, you could be sure that the government would take action. For some isolated communities, air links are just as critical. It is important to us to ensure that the aviation sector can continue to contribute to the economic base of communities and reduce the sense of isolation that those in rural and remote areas constantly face.

Unfortunately, Labor has never been a friend of regional aviation. For the seven million Australians who live outside our capital cities, regional aviation is an especially important link to the rest of the nation, providing transport and goods and services from large centres. It is important therefore that regional aviation is encouraged, particu-
larly since many regional routes are of limited commercial value.

In this context, I appeal to the government again to reconsider its decision to abolish the Enroute Charges Rebate Scheme. This is a huge blow to regional Australia. I find it incredible that a government that can find billions and billions of dollars in a cash splash, that can find billions for school buildings and putting pink batts in people’s ceilings, cannot find $3 million or $4 million a year to maintain this vital Enroute Charges Rebate Scheme. It shows a total lack of sensitivity about what it is like to live in a community where daily, or even weekly, air services mean so much to improving people’s capacity to access medical and other services. I think the government is being cruel, thoughtless and inconsiderate in its decision to axe this program which, for very little expense, has made a significant difference to many communities. From 1 July 2008, Labor has limited the Enroute Charges Rebate Scheme to existing routes and service frequencies. From 30 June 2012, the scheme will be abolished altogether.

Regional aviation is struggling with ageing aircraft and the burden of red tape. Yet, in spite of these issues, Labor has chosen to close down the industry action agenda—the common voice of general aviation and the means by which the sector could advocate directly to the government. The previous government established the industry action agenda. We were determined to try and do something to improve the circumstances under which the general aviation sector operates in this nation. Labor has turned its back on it. Its white paper process just continues to put off and put off key decisions that are essential to the viability of this industry.

Labor has refused to consider new schemes to encourage the smaller aviation sector to accelerate its purchase of new aircraft. Moreover, in a style typical of the tax-and-spend approach of Labor governments, this one continues to regard the passenger movement charge as another revenue raiser. The PMC was established in 1995 as a measure to recoup the cost of the customs, immigration and quarantine processing of passengers entering and leaving Australia. In his first budget, the Treasurer increased the passenger movement charge from $38 to $47 and, at first, went as far as to apply this tax hike retrospectively. That $9 extra is going to cost airlines, travel agents, tourism operators and the flying public, and it hits the aviation sector at a time when it is struggling with rising costs and an uncertain economic environment.

Incredibly, in spite of the increase in the passenger movement charge, Labor has actually decided to reduce the number of quarantine inspections. The number of cargo consignments arriving into Australia to be inspected is to be reduced by 4.7 million. So, instead of putting this extra money into doing better in relation to customs and quarantine inspections, Labor is going to cut the inspections and reduce the scrutiny of goods and passengers arriving in this nation. Again it demonstrates something of Labor’s priorities. It claims it is doing job creation schemes, yet it is going to lay off several hundred quarantine and customs workers whose responsibility has been to help keep our country clean and green.

It is also important that the Australian aviation industry is safe. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the coalition, in government, took action to improve aviation security. Since that time, over $1 billion has been spent to enhance aviation security. The previous coalition government expanded the screening of passengers and checked baggage to ensure consistent security screening treatment of all passengers and baggage carried on jet aircraft departing
from anywhere in Australia. Additional funding was provided to improve security in the air cargo industry.

The coalition also created the Air Security Officer Program, in December 2001, which placed sky marshals on selected domestic and international flights. Unfortunately, Labor has failed to confirm that funding for this program will not be reduced, and the number of sky marshals seems certain to be cut by at least a third. The sky marshals program is a valuable program and it is worth fully supporting.

When the government brings legislation into this place, allegedly on the grounds of improving security, but at the same time it is taking the security officers off aircraft, you wonder how sincere it is in its approach. You cannot wind back the sky marshals program and claim to have a credible record when it comes to improving security issues. So I call on the government to stop playing fast and loose with the lives of the flying public to save a few dollars.

Last December the government issued the aviation green paper and promised a further period of consultation before issuing a national aviation policy statement in the second half of this year. Like many of those involved in the aviation industry, I am looking forward to the release of this paper. I hope it will resolve some of the issues facing the sector at this critical time. The government has procrastinated now for almost two years. Action programs that were in place have been put on pause, and it is time that the government addressed the responsibilities that it has and made decisions so that the industry can plan ahead with confidence.

As part of the response to aviation security challenges, the coalition introduced the Aviation Transport Security Act 2004, which involved aviation industry participants in maintaining aviation security and required them to develop and comply with a transport security program. That legislation strengthened the regulatory framework surrounding aviation security and provided the flexibility necessary to respond to a rapidly changing air security environment. It is this legislation that the bill currently before the House proposes to amend.

Because of actions taken under the coalition government, Australian skies are safer. The Aviation Transport Security Amendment (2009 Measures No. 1) Bill will continue the work begun by those on this side of the House, and the coalition is happy to support it. The bill will allow a security controlled airport to be assigned to a category that prescribes specific requirements reflecting the risk profile of each airport. The Aviation Transport Security Act 2004 gives the secretary of the department the power to designate an airport as a security controlled airport. Such a designation requires an airport to fulfil certain security requirements.

Currently, any airport which is declared to be a security controlled airport faces the same security requirements regardless of their location, size or security situation. This means that a small regional jet airport is subject to the same security requirements as an airport in the biggest capital city. Transport security programs are currently written to comply with a very prescriptive regime, and many smaller airports would benefit from a more flexible and appropriate system. Allowing an airport to be assigned to a particular category will enable security resources to be targeted in a more appropriate way rather than applying a ‘one size fits all’ solution. If costs can be reduced through a more appropriate security regime, the viability of some air services will be enhanced. This can only benefit the communities that depend so much on the lifeline that aviation provides. Under the bill the details of security measures of the various categories will be prescribed under
regulations, and the departmental secretary will assign airports to categories. Obviously, a lot of the devil may therefore be in the detail and we will be monitoring the regulations made under the ATSA to ensure that the prescriptions that are provided are appropriate.

The bill will also enable an aviation security inspector in the course of duty to enter and inspect premises of an aviation industry participant that are not on an airport site. At the moment inspectors are only able to exercise their powers without notice within the boundaries of a security controlled airport. This amendment will extend their inspection powers without providing prior notice to sites not located at airports. Many aviation industry participants such as air cargo agents have sites that are not located on the grounds of an airport. To ensure that they are able to effectively carry out their duties without hindrance, it is entirely appropriate that inspectors should have access to such sites. Such an inspection would only be carried out at a time when the site is open and operating and would only be carried out at sites directly associated with aviation security. The bill does not propose to grant undue or inappropriate powers to aviation security inspectors but simply seeks to extend their current powers to non-airport sites related to aviation security.

The bill will also create enforceable undertakings as a midrange sanction against contravention of the act. A variety of sanctions currently exist which are available to aviation authorities. If an aviation industry participant contravenes the act or breaches their transport security program, the authorities are currently able to issue an infringement notice, which has few teeth and is seen by some as just a slap on the wrist. If a stronger response is warranted, the next step up is court action, which may require shutting down the activities of the aviation industry participant. That is obviously a harsh punishment.

Enforceable undertakings would provide an appropriate midrange sanction in some cases. They would require aviation industry participants to take specified actions or refrain from taking specified actions. The bill proposes that the secretary of the department may accept an enforceable undertaking but does not state that he may force an aviation industry participant to enter into such an agreement. The department would establish the terms of an enforceable undertaking in consultation with aviation industry participants. This would mean that the views and concerns of airlines, air cargo agents, airport operators and other industry participants would receive their due attention in the process of resolving security issues. Providing enforceable undertakings as an option will enable authorities to take more decisive action in certain cases without being too draconian or imposing undue or excessive punishments. I believe it is preferable to involve aviation industry participants in improving the security regime and to encourage voluntary and cooperative solutions to minor security problems rather than taking a heavy-handed approach.

The breach of an enforceable undertaking would enable the secretary to apply to the Federal Court for an order to direct compliance. In most cases, however, I suspect such action would not be necessary and that the airline concerned would want to honour its enforceable undertaking. The options for stronger action still remain. If a serious security breach is discovered, aviation authorities would still have the same enforcement options open to them as they currently have under the act. This bill would simply add another option, which would be useful in certain cases.
The bill will expand the ability of aviation security inspectors to issue compliance control directions to airport operators or screening authorities. Control directions can currently be applied to aircraft operators or pilots, and the act currently states:

… an aviation security inspector must not give a compliance control direction unless the direction is necessary for ensuring compliance with this Act.

The bill would allow control directions to be applied to airport operators or screening authorities. This would enable inspectors to direct screening authorities or airport operators to take specified actions in relation to the airport or to screening points at the airport in the same way that they are currently able to direct pilots or aircraft operators. For example, if an inspector believes that a passenger has not been properly screened at a security checkpoint, at the moment the inspector has no authority to direct screening authorities to take any action. The only option would be to issue a control direction to the airline or the pilot preventing them from allowing the passenger to board or preventing the flight from taking off. Under the bill inspectors would be able to direct screening authorities to rescreen the passenger.

No wholesale expansion of the powers of aviation security inspectors is proposed by the bill. It simply extends their existing capacity to issue directions to airport operators and screening authorities on the same terms as those under which they can currently issue directions to pilots and aircraft operators. Overall, the bill will provide a more flexible and appropriate security regime that will enhance aviation security without imposing undue or excessive restrictions on industry participants.

In recent years, aviation security in Australia has gone through drastic changes in a very short time. These changes were necessary in order to ensure that Australian skies remain safe. Given Australia’s record in aviation security, we may conclude that the changes we have made have been effective. I do appreciate that the legitimate demands of aviation security have at times imposed costs and inconvenience on both the industry and the flying public. It should be the goal of governments and aviation security authorities to ensure that our skies remain secure without imposing excessive regulations and costs on the aviation industry and the flying public. This legislation will build on the strong foundation left by the coalition and enable us to maintain an aviation security apparatus that is both flexible and effective.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—I took the view that the deferred division should not be proceeded with until the member speaking at 8 pm had completed his speech, so I did not interrupt the member. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for a later hour.

HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (MIDWIVES AND NURSE PRACTITIONERS) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—In accordance with standing order 133, I shall now proceed to put the question on the amendment moved earlier today by the honourable member for Indi on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with standing orders. No further debate is allowed.

Question put:

That the words proposed to be omitted (Mrs Mirabella’s amendment) stand part of the question.
The House divided. [8.19 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. BC Scott)

Ayes............ 71
Nees............. 58
Majority......... 13

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. Bevis, A.R.
Bidgood, J.
Bowen, C. Bradbury, D.J.
Burke, A.E. Burke, A.S.
Byrne, A.M. 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. Emerson, C.A.
Fitzgibbon, J.A. Georgians, S.
George, J. Gibbons, S.W.
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. Maries, R.D.
McClelland, R.B. McKew, M.
McMullan, R.F. Melham, D.
Murphy, J. Neal, B.J.
Neumann, S.K. O’Connor, B.P.
Oakeshott, R.J.M. Owens, J.
Parke, M. Perrett, G.D.
Plibersek, T. 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.
Snowdon, W.E. Sullivan, J.
Symon, M. Tanner, L.
Thomson, C. Thomson, K.J.
Trevor, C. Turnour, J.P.
Zappia, A.

NOES

Andrews, K.J. Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F. Bishop, B.K.
Bishop, J.I. Briggs, J.E.
Broadbent, R. Chester, D.
Cobb, J.K. Costello, P.H.
Coulton, M. Dutton, P.C.
Farmer, P.F. Forrest, J.A.
Gash, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A. Hawker, D.P.M.
Hockey, J.B. Hull, K.E. *
Hunt, G.A. Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A. * Katter, R.C.
Keenan, M. Laming, A.
Lindsay, P.J. Macfarlane, I.E.
Marino, N.B. Markus, L.E.
May, M.A. Mirabella, S.
Morrison, S.J. Moylan, J.E.
Nelson, B.J. Neville, P.C.
Pearce, C.J. Pyne, C.
Ramsey, R. Randall, D.J.
Robert, S.R. Ruddock, P.M.
Secker, P.D. Simpkins, L.
Slipper, P.N. Smith, A.D.H.
Somlyay, A.M. Southcott, A.J.
Stone, S.N. Truss, W.E.
Tuckey, C.W. Turnbull, M.
Vale, D.S. Washer, M.J.
Windsor, A.H.C. Wood, J.

PAIRS

Campbell, J. Irons, S.J.
Garrett, P. Bailey, F.E.
Swan, W.M. Schultz, A.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.28 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs) (8.29 pm)—I move:
That the House do now adjourn.

Ballarat Electorate: Violence Against Women

Ms KING (Ballarat) (8.29 pm) — I would like to outline the hard work that has been happening in my electorate over recent years to speak out about violence against women. Almost 500,000 Australian women have been subject to some form of violence from a partner or ex-partner. In my local electorate of Ballarat, one particular centre, as a result of domestic violence, provided 122 women and 223 children with crisis accommodation in the last year alone. Another local centre received contact from over 200 local women who were subject to family violence, and I could go on.

Violence against women occurs in all states across all family types and it knows no boundaries. The majority of women affected do not have their voices heard and in most cases the violence occurs in their own homes. The majority of their voices are not heard because many women fear that if they speak out the violence will escalate, fear that speaking out will not make things better and fear that they may lose their homes or income or children.

Men who are violent towards women tend to destroy their self-esteem and shift the blame onto the woman. Imagine living in fear in your own home from the very person you should expect to care for you. This is one of the greatest silent crimes of our times. Most acts of violence towards women are never spoken of and the issue is difficult to talk about. But, for those affected, it is even more difficult to experience. Sadly, there are still thousands of silent voices across our nation.

On the local front, the entire Ballarat community is getting behind the campaign to stop violence against women. The Ballarat White Ribbon Day Committee was established in 2004 to create a local force campaigning to eliminate violence against women. The number of Ballarat White Ribbon Day ambassadors is growing, with 40 ambassadors expected by year’s end and a target of 100 set for the near future. The Ballarat White Ribbon Day Committee has been driving various local programs, such as the introduction of a young ambassadors program in 2008 involving Ballarat High School, Daylesford Secondary College and St Patrick’s College, all having young secondary school students campaigning on this very important issue, with 2009 looking equally successful. Primary schools across the electorate have also been getting involved in a postcards project where young students produce postcards with personal drawings about the importance of positive family relationships. It is encouraging to see local primary schools and secondary schools showing leadership in this area.

The Ballarat Football League is another example of a local community leader in the fight to stop violence against women. The league’s CEO, Rod Ward, who is also a local White Ribbon Day ambassador, has worked hard to put this at the forefront of the league’s agenda. Throughout the last season the league has sold over 100,000 footy records with a message about stopping violence against women featured in every edition. Parents, coaches, staff volunteers, local supporters and the 9,500 footballers and netballers in the Ballarat Football League have also stood firmly in support of this issue all season. Last Saturday the Ballarat Football League saw two hard-fought semifinals occur between Darley and Lake Wendouree and between Redan and East Point.

To further address the league’s determination to break silence on this issue, the league dedicated these semifinals to stamping out family violence. White ribbons and wristbands were sold at both matches and all foot-
ball and netball players wore white armbands during the game. There was a minute’s silence to recognise the issue prior to the Darley and Lake Wendouree matches. Furthermore, the weekend before, East Point Football Netball Club themed their president’s lunch on the importance of White Ribbon Day. The Ballarat committee is looking to soon launch a local website to give women and men across the region a better understanding of the issue. The website was produced by students of the University of Ballarat as part of their curriculum.

This really is a whole-of-community effort, a community driven campaign. The work of local groups throughout the Ballarat electorate to address family violence and more specifically violence against women is highly commendable and I commend the hard work of the Ballarat White Ribbon Day Committee for assisting many women to have their voices heard. I congratulate the local primary and secondary schools, the University of Ballarat, Ballarat Football League, the many volunteers and the White Ribbon Day ambassadors for setting the foundations for the Ballarat region to pave the way for changing community culture.

We have all had enough. It is unacceptable that women live in fear and silence, and women should not feel alone. Only when the community speaks out will this feeling subside. Only with a change in culture and passion to be heard will communities come together to stamp out what is an absolute, basic violation of human rights.

Gilmore Electorate: Youth Allowance

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (8.33 pm)—I am appalled but not surprised at the complete lack of regard the government has shown for regional and rural young people in its city-centric, budget-saving youth allowance changes. The government plans to change the criteria for the independent rate, forcing young people under the age of 25 from next year to work 30 hours per week consistently for 18 months over a two-year period in order to be eligible. This is a completely unrealistic expectation to place on young people from communities where employment, transport and extensive tertiary opportunities simply do not exist. With an unemployment rate of 9.6 per cent in the Shoalhaven alone, work for unskilled young people is extremely hard to come by, let alone a consistent 30 hours a week. Transport is also non-existent, with the train line actually stopping at Bomaderry. Study options locally are few. I fear that as a result young people will be forced to move in the search for more options or to meet the unreasonable demands put on them by this government.

It is pleasing to see that, while the government has finally listened to the coalition’s cries and the correspondence from countless young people everywhere in delaying the introduction of the changes to independent youth allowance criteria, I am concerned that they are continuing to give with one hand and take with the other. The government has agreed to delay the changes for those currently undertaking their gap year until June next year, but only if they can trade off positive changes like increasing the income threshold for youth allowance recipients, where young people can earn more without their entitlements being affected.

The rise from $236 to $400 per fortnight, announced in the budget, will not come into effect now until June 2011, which is 18 months later than planned to allow for additional cost. This is all because the Rudd government is trying to make $1.8 billion in budget savings from the pockets of young people to pay for its reckless spending. I cannot understand why the government is comfortable going into $315 billion worth of debt to hand out money to everyone, including dead people, people in jail and Australians
The third issue I see here that needs to be addressed relates to the time frame of the 30-hour working week. The proposed legislation states that the work must be undertaken for at least 18 months and makes no provisions for students to complete the hours or earn a certain amount sooner so they can still have a chance of starting uni in the 15 months after they leave school. Stating that they must do their time for 18 months regardless will prevent many young people from being able to go to uni as they can defer their enrolment offer for only one year and they could miss out if forced to reapply. If this government is serious about making access to uni easier for disadvantaged young people, it must seriously consider the inflexibility of its own legislation and listen to the countless young people who are raising their concerns right now very loudly.

I have held two youth allowance information sessions in my electorate in the past two months to inform young people of how these proposed changes will affect them, and have had an overwhelming response. The young people I have spoken to are very concerned that these changes will primarily benefit metropolitan youth and make life harder for them. The wellbeing officer at one of our local high schools said that these changes would have an adverse effect on her students, and that many would be forced to move and find work in order to be eligible for the full independent rate and able to support themselves at university.

While I acknowledge that there are some positive changes being put forward—like the increase in parental income threshold and the reduction in age of independence, although this will be happening in stages over three years—the fact is that the changes will leave many young people in my electorate of Gilmore worse off. In short, while I welcome the backflip the government has made in relation to the retrospective nature of these laws, ensuring that they do not disadvantage anyone currently working towards their gap year, it does not go far enough. More assistance needs to be provided for regional and rural young people in the form of special provisions or scholarships, as the coalition will propose, and the timing of the 18-month working criterion needs to be made more flexible to stop young people losing their university places.

These changes are critical for the 15,000 15- to 24-year-olds in Gilmore who are our future, and I will not rest until they get the support they need. It should also be noted that, when I specifically asked the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, a question about this issue during question time, she totally ignored the issue of the 30-hour working week and the lack of work opportunities in regional areas. I once again call on her to ensure that the students of Gilmore will not be disadvantaged and to reconsider the eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance for young people in rural or regional areas.

Moreton Electorate: Sherwood Bus Depot

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (8.38 pm)—Over the last few weeks I have been contacted by more than 100 residents in my electorate concerning a Brisbane City Council bus depot proposed for the leafy community of Sherwood. The Brisbane City Council wants to spend $90 million to build a depot for 200 buses at 496 Sherwood Road, 500 metres from the Sherwood State School and the thriving retail district of Sherwood. Overwhelmingly, the emails and letters I have received and the people I have spoken to are opposed to this bus depot going in on their doorstep. They also feel like the Brisbane City Council is steamrolling the issue.
Obviously there are concerns about student safety, and the impact on local streets; environmental and noise concerns; and also concerns about Oxley Creek being possibly impacted on by diesel spills. But, putting aside the long list of legitimate concerns that residents in Sherwood, Graceville and Corinda have, it seems that the lord mayor’s community consultation process is nothing more than a speed-bump to his plans to build the depot.

In the suburb of Sherwood, Campbell Newman is acting like the Sheriff of Nottingham. It was reported that a recent community meeting—which was held on Saturday 15 August and which, unfortunately, I could not attend because of an RSL function—was overrun by Young Liberals, or, because it was in Queensland, I should say, ‘young Liberal and National Party members,’ in party T-shirts, who prevented the actual locals of Sherwood from having their say. They were actually wearing party T-shirts at a community meeting.

This is why I have written to the Lord Mayor—here is a copy of my letter—to pass on the views of the local residents and to get their questions answered. It has been said that Lord Mayor Newman will reconsider the proposal if there is enough community opposition. I hope he is true to that commitment and takes on board the concerns of my community. Tomorrow I will be meeting with the Brisbane Lord Mayor—the second most powerful Liberal in Australia—and others when I catch up with the South-East Queensland Council of Mayors. They are in Canberra this week meeting with various ministers and opposition members to advocate for their communities. Rest assured that I will raise this issue again with the lord mayor at this event.

I am a strong supporter of public transport; don’t get me wrong. Obviously, with our CPRS legislation, we are committed to changing emissions, and public transport will play a role in that. However, I hope that more of us on Brisbane’s south side will get out of our cars and onto buses and trains and other public transport options. The Brisbane City Council undoubtedly has a big part to play in ensuring that our public transport network is adequate and meets the needs of our commuters. So I welcome the lord mayor’s efforts to improve the public transport network. However, first and foremost, I will always stand up for my electorate whenever I feel that their views have not been listened to appropriately.

The Sherwood community is a beautiful suburb, in a leafy part of Brisbane, nestled between the Brisbane River and the Oxley Creek Common—a truly significant water course, even though it is right in the middle of Brisbane. I often take my young children to the Sherwood Arboretum, one of the great treed areas of Brisbane. I also go every year to the Sherwood Community Festival, where people like Cameron Miller, Jenny Golden and many others make a significant contribution in organising a wonderful street festival. The festival is held every year in November in the Sherwood shopping precinct on Sherwood Road—the same road on which Councillor Newman plans to house a 200-bay bus depot. There will be 200 buses, and also numerous bus drivers coming in at all hours of the day and night, turning into a busy street, uphill. It is already a busy intersection, as anyone from that area knows.

*Honourable members interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—** The member for Moreton has the call.

**Mr PERRETT—** Over the last 13 years this Sherwood festival has become a community institution, and it is a great way to build social capital, to foster community
spirit and showcase local talent and culture. Most importantly, it is coordinated and run by volunteers doing their bit for the community—as I said, people like Cameron Miller. I look forward to again being at the Sherwood street festival in November, and I hope that, by then, we will see some positive community engagement from the Brisbane City Council and that the lord mayor will stop his Sheriff of Nottingham ways on this bus depot proposal. And I will be having a street stall at that intersection on 19 September where the residents will be able to express their views.

Queensland

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (8.43 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, it is a pleasure to be speaking in the House of Representatives on an occasion where you are in the chair again on a successive occasion. It was very interesting to hear my Queensland colleague there, the member for Moreton, from the government’s party. I wonder if he has seen the front page of today’s Courier Mail which goes on about the absolutely decrepit state of Queensland Labor and the Queensland health department. Queensland currently is a dog’s breakfast of a state and, in particular, the Queensland health department is a dog’s breakfast of a department. It is about time that the Queensland government, the government of Premier Anna Bligh, and the Queensland bureaucracy, got their act together and served the people of Queensland. And in no area more than the area of health do they need absolutely first-class service.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member for Ryan has the call.

Mr JOHNSON—For anyone around the country who may not be aware of the issue that I am talking about, the front page of today’s Courier-Mail revealed a story that is really quite unbelievable. It is that the policy of the Queensland health department for tired doctors is to drink lots of coffee. It is to drink five to six cups of coffee, according to the policy document from Queensland Health. The article says:

“The recommended dosage for a prolonged and significant reduction in sleepiness during a night without sleep has been suggested at 400mg of caffeine … equivalent to about five to six cups of coffee,” the document states.

So if you are a doctor in the Queensland health system and you are tired then the recommendation of the Queensland health department is to drink lots of coffee. This is just absolutely absurd. Queenslanders were promised all kinds of things at the last election, and they were also deceived by the Queensland Premier. It is time for Queenslanders to realise that this is exactly what they have here in Canberra. They have a federal Labor government which, as sure as night follows day, is heading down the path of the Queensland Labor government.

I say to all Queenslanders: if you need any persuasion whatsoever of what Australia will look like with a prolonged Labor government, look at New South Wales and, for Queenslanders, look at George Street. It is about time that the Queensland government delivered. We want Premier Anna Bligh to be at the wheel. We do not want her to be in front of the camera cooking on some program trying to raise her profile. Everybody knows who she is. Everybody knows that she is the Queensland Premier, responsible and accountable to the Queensland electorate for delivering good services, and the Queensland health department is telling tired doctors that what they should do is drink coffee, not just one cup of coffee—or two, three or four—but five to six cups of coffee.

In the article in the Courier-Mail an international professor of global repute, John Saunders, slammed this advice, saying that it
would ‘turn doctors into addicts’. This is a health expert of global reputation, of significant international esteem, and he is condemning this absolutely absurd policy. The article says:

“They’re suggesting 400mg is a perfectly fine dose? I would absolutely dispute that,” said Professor Saunders, the Pine Rivers Private Hospital alcohol and drug program director.

“For a health department to suggest that doctors use caffeine like this is the height of irresponsibility.”

This is the first decade of the 21st century. In this rich country of ours we have a Queensland Labor government telling the Queensland health department that its advice to tired doctors should be: drink more coffee. Even the most one-eyed of Labor supporters in Queensland, those with substantial affection and loyalty to the Labor Party, would surely have to contest that this is good advice. I am sure that in the homes around the Ryan electorate those who voted for the Labor Party at the last election would say, ‘My goodness, I wish I had not voted for them.’ In particular they might say, ‘If my mum or dad was in a hospital or if my children were in a public hospital and the doctor that was about to treat my relative had just come on duty after drinking lots and lots of coffee, I probably would not want him looking after my relative.’ Surely that is just untenable in this day and age. I say to all Queenslanders: look where federal Labor is going. This is a place that we do not want to be in. I say to all Queenslanders: please ring your Labor MP—ring the member for Moreton if you live in Sunnybank, and tell him otherwise. (Time expired)

Cluster Munitions

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (8.48 pm)—Cluster bombs are one of the most lethal weapons used by armed forces in the world today. Cluster bombs can launch more than 2,000 smaller bombs, each of which can contain hundreds of lethal shards. While they are effective against lightly armoured vehicles, cluster bombs are most lethal against unarmoured personnel. Their use against targets where civilians are present is therefore almost certain to cause large numbers of civilian casualties. While these weapons are designed to explode on contact with the target, a large proportion fail to detonate and remain deadly for many, many years after their use. More than 300 people each year die from cluster munitions incidents in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia more than 30 years after the munitions were dropped. A similar number have died in Lebanon since Israel used US supplied cluster weapons in its attack on Lebanon in 2006.

While cluster bombs have been in use since the Second World War, their greatest use was by the United States, with thousands of tonnes of these munitions dropped on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Later large-scale use of cluster weapons includes the US and NATO deployments in Yugoslavia in 1999 and in Afghanistan and Iraq and the Israeli supplied cluster munitions used by Georgia against South Ossetia in 2008.

Shocked by the barbaric use of cluster munitions and in response to the maiming and slaughter of civilians at the time of the attacks and for many years following, civilised nations of the world, including Australia, acted to ban the use of cluster munitions. The Convention on Cluster Munitions was agreed to by more than 90 countries after conferences in Oslo, Wellington and Dublin. Australia is a signatory to the convention but so far it is not one of the 14 countries to ratify the convention, which will not come into force until 30 countries ratify it. While the United States has not signed the convention, it has imposed a ban on the export of cluster munitions.
While countries using cluster weapons would argue that their use is limited to military targets, the frightening level of deaths and horrific injuries they cause when used in areas with a high concentration of civilians suggests they are part of a strategy which has more to do with political rather than military outcomes. Their use in recent conflicts has been designed to cause terror in civilian populations. By one estimate, in the last days of its invasion of Lebanon, Israel dropped more than one million cluster bombs. This tactic had little impact on the effectiveness of Lebanese forces but has left a terrible legacy for civilians in south Lebanon.

Given Australia’s support for the campaign to ban cluster bombs, it came as a shock to see that, according to the Melbourne Herald Sun, an Australian government sponsored resource kit encourages students to plan the use of cluster bombs. In the Melbourne Herald Sun of 28 May this year, concern was raised about a kit prepared for the defence department for year 9 and year 10 students. That kit includes a task requiring students to put crosses on a grid to represent the location of cluster bombs. The Herald Sun quotes the kit as saying: ‘The aim is to create maximum disruption through the strategic placement of cluster bombs.’

I took a look at the kit, and I must say that I found it to be a very informative resource which asks students to engage in the decisions faced by governments on the use of cluster munitions. It certainly does not encourage students to recklessly plan the use of cluster bombs. The kit sets out the substantial arguments in favour of a ban on cluster weapons and informs students of Australia’s status as a signatory to the international Convention on Cluster Munitions, which forbids the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster bombs.

On Tuesday, 18 August 2009, the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, Kelvin Thomson, tabled in the parliament the committee report on the convention. It said: The Committee is of the view that ratification of the Convention would reaffirm Australia’s commitment to limiting the impact of armed conflict on civilian populations, and will significantly improve the lives of people affected by cluster munitions.

It now remains for the government to proceed to ratify—(Time expired)

Dandenong Ranges

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (8.53 pm)—Tonight I wish to talk about a national heritage application which my office has put together for the Dandenong Ranges landscape and Puffing Billy Railway. I seek leave to table that document.

Leave granted.

Mr WOOD—I am obviously very passionate about the Dandenong Ranges. It is one of those amazing places to live, but it also has a fantastic historical component to it. That is why I have taken the time to put this application together.

I would like to thank Tom Harley, Chairman of the Australian Heritage Council, for his ongoing support with this application. I would also like to thank two former staff members, Joe Magee and Scott Fyffe, and the current staff member, Sara Magyar, who have worked on this application for over three years. It is a 10,000-word document, but it is one of those things I passionately believe is necessary to protect the Dandenong Ranges. It will give extra protection for the environment and also enable extra federal and state funding to look after this amazing area.

If we go back in time, the Dandenong Ranges have some amazing historical aspects. The first of these is that, in the early 1900s, we had Puffing Billy, which is Aus-
We have had strong support from the local community with this. I must thank Dandenong Ranges Tourism, Michael Axel and the now president, Ron Hurley, and previous members involved in that; Lou Hesterman; and others in the local community. The community really wants this. It is one of those things that as a member of parliament you really push for very hard. In fact, I have submitted the application three times. The first time the department said, ‘Really focus on the flora and fauna, not Puffing Billy.’ That was unsuccessful, and they said, ‘Next time, concentrate on Puffing Billy, not so much on the flora and fauna,’ so I did that. It missed out again, and they said, ‘What you should do’—which we had removed the first time—‘is the famous Australian landscape artists.’ So we put it in again, and again we were told we were unsuccessful.

To me, the Dandenong Ranges are one of the most amazing places in Australia. Look at the fantastic heritage, from Puffing Billy to Horatio’s house to CJ Dennis and all those famous international and local artists. It deserves recognition, and that is why I am so passionate about this. I can tell the House that I will never give up until we actually get it listed.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 8.58 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Ms Kate Ellis to present a bill for an act to amend the Higher Education Support Act 2003, and for related purposes.

Ms Kate Ellis to present a bill for an act to amend legislation relating to higher education, and for related purposes.

Mr Laurie Ferguson to present a bill for an act to amend the Migration Act 1958, and for related purposes.
Mrs Bronwyn Bishop to present a bill for an act to amend the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000 in connection with emerging technologies.

Mr Tuckey to present a bill for an act to amend the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000 and for related purposes.

Ms Owens to move:
That the House welcomes the news of recent progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular:
(1) recognises there has been a substantial decline in the proportion of people living on less than US$1 dollar a day and a substantial increase in the proportion of people with access to clean water;
(2) acknowledges that despite some progress, a number of MDGs are off-track and that a business-as-usual approach will mean the MDGs will not be met globally by 2015;
(3) notes its concern that in a world of plenty there are still unacceptably high child and maternal mortality rates in the developing world;
(4) recognises that progress toward the MDGs is being hampered by the global financial crisis, the global food crisis and the global effects of climate change;
(5) welcomes Australia’s progress on developing a global partnership for development while recognising that our progress falls short of the aspirations we expressed when joining with the nations of the world to set the MDGs; and
(6) acknowledges Australia needs to turn its aspirations into actions that draw us closer to achieving the MDGs by 2015.

Ms Rea to move:
That the House:
(1) applauds the Government’s increase of total health funding in the foreign aid budget and an increase in spending to maternal, newborn and child health, which is much needed when in our region, including South Asia, 200,000 mothers and 3.2 million children are dying every year from preventable causes;
(2) notes that:
(a) Australia still requires an increase in total health funding in the foreign aid budget to meet its fair share by 2015 to reduce Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5;
(b) Millennium Development Goal 4 to reduce child mortality by two-thirds and MDG 5 to reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters have made the slowest progress of all MDGs and are off-track to being achieved by 2015;
(c) Millennium Development Goal 5 has made virtually no progress globally and has reversed in most of sub-Saharan Africa in the last 20 years—it is the only MDG not making progress of any significance;
(d) the health MDGs are achievable but require increased effort and greater cooperation from all developing and developed countries; and
(e) evidence indicates that successful proven, cost effective strategies exist that can reduce child deaths by at least 60 per cent and maternal deaths by 75 per cent, which would save the lives of 240,000 children and 26,000 mothers in our immediate region each year;
(3) acknowledges the importance of the Australian Government increasing its support for health systems in the Asia Pacific region and in Africa (though coordinated mechanisms including the International Health Partnership) to ensure that adequate, coordinated, long term and predictable donor resources are available to support effective basic and reproductive health plans and systems in each developing country in our region; and
(4) recognises that:
(a) greater focus must be placed on training health professionals and midwives to ensure significant reductions in newborn, child and maternal mortality;
(b) system strengthening must also be ensured to provide incentives for staff to
be retained in countries and areas of need; and

(c) an increase in Australian support for maternal and child health related spending is required to support the provision of basic health services and health system strengthening and reflect Australia’s fair share of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, which will demonstrate Australia’s leadership and commitment to ending the preventable deaths of children and mothers globally.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Visas
(Question No. 794)

Dr Stone asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 24 June 2009:

For the financial years 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09: (a) how many visas have been (i) cancelled, and (ii) refused, under section 501 of the Migration Act 1958; and (b) what (i) number, and (ii) percentage, of these decisions were made by the (iii) department, and (iv) Minister.

Mr McClelland—The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

Section 501 of the Migration Act 1958 provides the Minister with a delegable power to cancel or refuse a person’s visa on character grounds.

To strengthen the quality and consistency of section 501 decision making, all character cancellation and refusal cases are referred to specially trained section 501 decision makers based in the National Character Consideration Centre and the Brisbane Character Assessment Unit.

Section 501 cases involving violent crimes are referred to Senior Executive Staff level decision makers. Very serious or sensitive cases are decided by a designated Deputy Secretary in the National Office.

This arrangement provides for greater transparency in section 501 decision making by ensuring that a person whose visa is cancelled or refused on character grounds has access to both merits and judicial review of the decision.

(a) Total number of visas cancelled and refused under section 501

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total s 501 Cancellations</th>
<th>Total s 501 Refusals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
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<td>103</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(b) Breakdown of section 501 visa cancellations by decision-maker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Decisions by Minister Number Percentage</th>
<th>Decisions by Delegate Number Percentage</th>
<th>Total Number Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>189 79.4%</td>
<td>49 20.6%</td>
<td>238 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>17 15.2%</td>
<td>95 84.8%</td>
<td>112 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>14 8.0%</td>
<td>160 92.0%</td>
<td>174 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>4 7.4%</td>
<td>50 92.6%</td>
<td>54 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>46 39.7%</td>
<td>70 60.3%</td>
<td>116 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>36 35.0%</td>
<td>67 65.0%</td>
<td>103 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>82 100%</td>
<td>82 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(c) Breakdown of section 501 visa refusals by decision-maker

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
**Employment Services**  
(Question No. 806)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment Participation, in writing, on 25 June 2009:

In respect of the tender for the Employment Services Contract 2009-12 and employment services providers who were offered business on 2 April 2009 but were not a preferred tenderer on 16 March 2009:

(a) in which site localities did this occur;

(b) in how many site localities did this occur

(c) in each site locality

(i) what was the reason for adding an additional provider or providers and

(ii) how were the providers who were offered business chosen; and

(e) what was the business share of these providers in each site locality in which this occurred.

Ms Gillard—The Minister for Employment Participation has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

Business allocation under the Request for Tender for Employment Services 2009-12 was made on an Employment Service Area basis, not on a site locality basis.

**Employment Services**  
(Question No. 807)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment Participation, in writing, on 25 June 2009:

In respect of the progress briefings by the department to the former Minister for Employment Participation on the tender for the Employment Services Contract 2009-12 and employment services providers who were offered business on 2 April 2009 but were not a preferred tenderer on 16 March 2009: how many (a) sites, (b) Employment Service Areas, and (c) Employment Service Providers were added to the progress briefings of 9, 13, 20, 22 and 27 March 2009, and to the final decisions of 31 March 2009.

Ms Gillard—The Minister for Employment Participation has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

Consistent with normal processes of government it would be usual practice to provide regular update briefings to the Minister.

**QUESTIONS IN WRITING**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Decisions by Minister Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Decisions by Delegate Number</th>
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<th>Total Number</th>
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<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>98.2%</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Brisbane Character Assessment Unit (BCAU), the centralised unit for processing section 501 visa refusal cases, was established in 2003 and recorded the outcomes of cases from July 2003 onwards. There is no reliable statistical data from the financial year 2002-03 readily available.
On 3 March 2009, the department made its decision regarding preferred tenderers. The department’s decisions of 3 March 2009 were advised to preferred tenderers on 16 March 2009. There were no changes between the department’s decision on 3 March 2009 and the advice to preferred tenderers on 16 March 2009.

No decisions on additions were made until the department made its final decision on 31 March 2009. The department informed the [previous] Minister’s office of its final decisions in relation to the tender on 31 March 2009.

The [previous] Minister received a verbal briefing for information of the department’s final decision on the morning of 1 April 2009 just prior to his announcing the high level results that afternoon. A written brief for noting dated 1 April 2009 was provided.

The department’s final decision saw four organisations which were not initially identified as preferred tenderers that subsequently received an offer of Job Services Australia business and nine organisations which received business in additional Employment Service Areas.

The Employment Service Areas where these changes were made were: Canterbury Bankstown NSW, Fairfield NSW, Inner Sydney NSW, Liverpool NSW, Macarthur NSW, Nepean NSW, Wollongong NSW, South Brisbane Qld, Northern Adelaide SA, Western Adelaide SA, Peninsula Vic, Westgate Vic, Central and West Metro WA, North Metro WA and East Metro WA.

Detailed consideration, assessment and quality assurance, all overseen by the probity adviser preceded the department’s final decisions being made.

**Employment Services**

(QUESTION NO. 808)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment Participation, in writing, on 25 June 2009:

In respect of the tender for the Employment Services Contract 2009-12 and employment services providers who were offered business on 2 April 2009 but were not a preferred tenderer on 16 March 2009: (a) in which Employment Services Areas did this occur, (b) in how many Employment Service Areas did this occur, (c) in each Employment Service Area; (i) what was the reason for adding an additional provider or providers and (ii) how were the providers who were offered business chosen; and (e) what was the business share of these providers in each Employment Services Area in which this occurred.

Ms Gillard—The Minister for Employment Participation has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

Final decisions had not been made at the time of the advice to preferred tenderers on 16 March 2009. Consistent with paragraph 4.14 of the Request for Tender (RFT), the period between 16 March 2009, when preferred tenderers received the without prejudice advice of their status, and 31 March 2009, when final decisions were made, gave preferred tenderers the opportunity to bring any issues, or other relevant matters, to the Department’s attention. This was particularly critical where some organisations could have proposed to use the same subcontractor.

Also, around that time the release of the new unemployment figures provided a more detailed picture of the extent of the impact of the Global Recession.

A final review was undertaken to ensure that the level of service available in those locations was consistent with the demand for the service, and that job seekers, would be well serviced into the future by providing new services that would deliver better, more tailored assistance to job seekers, particular disadvantaged Australians, and place greater emphasis on assisting employers in addressing skills shortages.
The department’s final decision, made in accordance with the rules of the RFT, saw four organisations which were not initially identified as preferred tenderers that subsequently received an offer of Job Services Australia business and nine organisations which received business in additional Employment Service Areas.

The Employment Service Areas where these changes were made were: Canterbury Bankstown NSW, Fairfield NSW, Inner Sydney NSW, Liverpool NSW, Macarthur NSW, Nepean NSW, Wollongong NSW, South Brisbane Qld, Northern Adelaide SA, Western Adelaide SA, Westgate Vic. Central and West Metro WA, North Metro WA and East Metro WA.

Detailed consideration, assessment and quality assurance, all overseen by the probity adviser preceded the department’s final decisions being made.

Providing a breakdown of business shares would disclose information relating to the business affairs of identifiable organisations and it is not appropriate to disclose this information without consulting them in case its disclosure could substantially and adversely affect the business, commercial or financial affairs of these organisations.

North Korea
(Question No. 855)

Ms Julie Bishop asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 11 August 2009:

(1) Has the Government contacted other countries, urging sanctions against individual members of North Korea’s leadership; if so, (a) which countries, (b) on what date/s, (c) at what level, and (d) what specific sanction/s were discussed on each occasion.

(2) What specific action has Australia taken to increase pressure on North Korea’s leadership to adhere to United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding nuclear weapons and missiles.

Mr Stephen Smith—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) Following North Korea’s nuclear test on 25 May 2009, the Government has had discussions with a range of countries at ministerial and officials level urging the imposition of further sanctions against North Korea. Following the adoption on 12 June 2009 of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874, the Government has made representations to a large number of other countries urging full enforcement of the sanctions mandated by that resolution and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 of 2006. Consistent with the practice of successive Governments, I do not intend to elaborate further as it would be inappropriate to provide details of confidential discussions with other governments.

(2) As I announced in a media release issued on 12 July 2009, the Government has amended relevant regulations to implement in Australian law the sanctions mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874, with effect from 11 July 2009. Australia has also implemented the non-mandatory provisions of Resolution 1874 calling on countries to restrict financial assistance to North Korea. The necessary frameworks are also being put in place to enable relevant Australian Government agencies to give effect, as required, to the other non-mandatory measures called for under Resolution 1874.

These new measures are in addition to Australia’s full implementation of the sanctions mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 of 2006, and the autonomous measures Australia has had in place against North Korea since 2006, including a general ban on visas for North Korean citizens, a ban on entry into Australian ports by North Korean-flagged vessels and financial restrictions against 12 North Korean entities and one individual. Australian bilateral development assistance to North Korea has been suspended since 2002.

In addition to Australia’s own implementation of sanctions against North Korea and our urging of other countries to fully enforce United Nations Security Council sanctions against North Korea, the
Government has made direct representations to the Government of North Korea urging it to comply with all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions. Most recently, on 9 June 2009 during a visit to North Korea, Australia’s non-resident Ambassador to North Korea, H.E. Mr Sam Gerovich, made direct representations to H.E. Mr Kim Yong-nam, Head of State and President of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, H.E. Mr Pak Ui-chun, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and senior North Korean officials, urging North Korea to comply fully with UN Resolutions.

Royal Australian Air Force: Sale of Boeing 707s

(Question No. 876)

Mr Lindsay asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 11 August 2009:

In respect of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Boeing 707s that were taken out of service before being sold to a private company: (a) is the Minister aware that more than one year after the sale, three Boeing 707s still remain on the tarmac at the RAAF Base Richmond; (b) does the Minister realise that the longer they remain on the tarmac, the less likely it is that experienced RAAF staff can be found who can ensure that the aircraft are airworthy to be flown to the owner’s destination of choice; (c) why have these aircraft been allowed to remain on the tarmac for so long; and (d) will the Minister direct urgent completion of the disposal process.

Mr Combet—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(a) Yes.
(b) Maintenance and airworthiness are the responsibility of the owner of the aircraft. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) has no ongoing liability with respect to this.
(c) The owner of the aircraft has entered into a contractual agreement with Defence for the removal of the aircraft within a specified timeframe. However, the exact details of this arrangement are Commercial-in-Confidence and cannot be publicly released.
(d) No. There is a process in place to enable the sale contract to complete in 2009.

Royal Australian Air Force Base Richmond

(Question No. 877)

Mr Lindsay asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 11 August 2009:

In respect of the aircraft painting facility at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Richmond: (a) what, if any future, is planned for the facility; (b) is he aware that there is a need for more working accommodation on the Base; and (c) will the Defence Materiel Organisation release the building to provide more working accommodation on the Base.

Mr Combet—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(a) A final decision on the future use of the building has been postponed pending the outcome of a review into the ability of existing Defence and commercial aircraft painting facilities to meet the annual demand for Defence aircraft repainting. A decision is expected by late October 2009. In the interim, part of the aircraft painting facility is being used in support of overseas operations pending the refurbishment of permanent facilities elsewhere within RAAF Base Richmond.
(b) It is acknowledged that there is pressure for suitable maintenance accommodation at RAAF Base Richmond. As such Defence is considering the adaptive re-use of the aircraft painting facility including the option to utilise it as a maintenance hanger.
(c) If not required for Defence aircraft repainting, upon its adaptive refit, the facility will be available for reallocation to other users based on the highest priority requirement.

**Australian Defence Force: Entitlements**

(Question No. 878)

Mr Robert asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 11 August 2009:

If a member of the Australian Defence Force (full-time or reserve) is killed on active service, does his/her estate receive the total sum of allowances, including full pay, for the entire tour of duty (which is the case if a member is wounded in action); if not, what is received by the estate.

Mr Combet—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

No. For the purpose of salary and allowances, the estate of a member who is killed on active service will receive the salary and allowances calculated to midnight on the day the member dies. This will include, where appropriate, pay in lieu of long service leave and recreation leave calculated to the day the member dies. Separate to salary and allowances, superannuation benefits will also be paid and dependants of a deceased member are entitled to compensation under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*.

**Family Tax Benefit**

(Question No. 881)

Mr Abbott asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 11 August 2009:

In respect of the Family Tax Benefit (FTB) now being claimed through Centrelink, rather than through the Australian Taxation Office (ATO):

(1) How many people who have previously claimed the FTB through the ATO will claim it through Centrelink in the 2009-10 financial year.

(2) Will these people have to complete a Centrelink form in addition to their tax return in order to obtain the FTB.

(3) What average length of time will it take to receive the FTB payment after submitting a claim, and how does this compare with the length of time taken to obtain the FTB payment when it was claimed through the ATO.

Mr Bowen—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) It is estimated that 160,000 customers who previously claimed FTB as a lump sum payment through the ATO will claim it through Centrelink or Medicare Australia in the 2009-10 financial year.

(2) All customers who claim FTB as a lump sum payment through Centrelink or Medicare Australia are required to complete a claim form. Customers who previously claimed FTB as a lump sum payment through the ATO were also required to complete a FTB claim form, which was separate from their tax return.

(3) FTB claims are generally processed within 21 days from the date they are received by Centrelink, provided all required information is available to assess the claim. Additionally, customers can now claim FTB online. Online claims are generally processed within 14 days from the date they are received, provided all required information is available to assess the claim. From 1 July 2009 customers are no longer able to claim FTB through the ATO. Prior to 1 July 2009, FTB claims lodged with the ATO were subject to timeframes as outlined in the Taxpayer’s Charter.
Grey Electorate: Magnetic Resonance Imaging Unit
(Question No. 952)

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 17 August 2009:
In respect of the Government’s commitment on 12 February 2008 (see her media release NR08/16) to provide funding (and licences) for additional Medicare-eligible Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) units across Australia: (a) why have operating licences been granted for all of these MRI units except the one in Port Augusta, South Australia; and (b) by what date will the MRI unit in Port Augusta, South Australia, be licensed to operate.

Ms Roxon—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(a) Progress with the granting of Medicare eligibility to the relevant Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) units has varied depending on the application and other processes relevant to each location listed in media release NR 08/16. The assessment process in relation to Port Augusta has required more extensive follow-up than other locations.
(b) It is not possible to specify this date.