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SITTING DAYS—2010

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FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SEVENTH 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. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Mrs Margaret Ann May 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. Anthony John Abbott MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alexander Michael Somlyay MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP and 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

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Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Tuckey, Hon. Charles Wilson</td>
<td>O’Connor, WA</td>
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<td>Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh</td>
<td>Wentworth, NSW</td>
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<td>Turnour, James Pearce</td>
<td>Leichhardt, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Vale, Hon. Danna Sue</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
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<td>Vamvakouinou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, Vic</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
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<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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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—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
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<td>Hon. Julia Gillard MP</td>
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<td>and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Chris Evans</td>
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<td>in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence and Vice President of the Executive Council</td>
<td>Senator Hon. John Faulkner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Simon Crean MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the House</td>
<td>Hon. Stephen Smith MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Nicola Roxon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous</td>
<td>Hon. Jenny Macklin MP</td>
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<td>Affairs</td>
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<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
<td>Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Albanese MP</td>
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<td>Government and Leader of the House</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy</td>
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<td>and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate</td>
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<td>Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Kim Carr</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Penny Wong</td>
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<td>Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP</td>
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<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>Hon. Robert McClelland MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary, Special Minister of State and Manager of Government</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig</td>
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<td>Business in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Burke MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Human Services and Minister for Financial Services,</td>
<td>Hon. Chris Bowen MP</td>
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<td>Superannuation and Corporate Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Alan Griffin MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Home Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and</td>
<td>Regional Services Delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs</td>
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<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
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<td>Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Justine Elliot MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and</td>
<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Sport</td>
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<td>Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP</td>
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<td>Assisting the Minister for Climate Change</td>
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<td>Minister for Employment Participation and Minister Assisting the Prime</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Mark Arbib</td>
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<td>Minister on Government Service Delivery</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional</td>
<td>Hon. Maxine McKew MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
<td>Hon. Bob McMullan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Byrne MP</td>
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<td>Secretary for Trade</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and Parliamentary Secret-</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens</td>
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<td>ary for Voluntary Sector</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement</td>
<td>Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP</td>
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<td>Services</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Employment</td>
<td>Hon. Jason Clare MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Health</td>
<td>Hon. Mark Butler MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry</td>
<td>Hon. Richard Marles MP</td>
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SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition  
Hon. Tony Abbott MP

Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Opposition  
Hon. Julie Bishop MP

Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals  
Hon. Warren Truss MP

Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate  
Senator Hon. Nick Minchin

Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate  
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz

Shadow Treasurer  
Hon. Joe Hockey MP

Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House  
Hon. Christopher Pyne MP

Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Water  
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP

Shadow Attorney-General  
Senator Hon. George Brandis SC

Shadow Minister for Defence  
Senator Hon. David Johnston

Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing  
Hon. Peter Dutton MP

Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services  
Hon. Kevin Andrews MP

Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage  
Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of The Nationals  
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion

Shadow Minister for Finance and Debt Reduction and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate  
Senator Barnaby Joyce

Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Food Security, Fisheries and Forestry  
Hon. John Cobb MP

Shadow Minister for Small Business, Deregulation, Competition Policy and Sustainable Cities  
Hon. Bruce Billson MP

Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy  
Hon. Tony Smith MP

Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship  
Mr Scott Morrison MP

Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP

Chairman of the Coalition Policy Development Committee  
Hon. Andrew Robb AO MP

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<td>Mr Steven Ciobo MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Apprenticeships and Training</td>
<td>Senator Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs, Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House</td>
<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for COAG and Modernising the Federation</td>
<td>Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Childcare and Shadow Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Sharman Stone MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Bob Baldwin MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Seniors</td>
<td>Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Special Minister of State and Scrutiny of Government Waste</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Population Policy</td>
<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport</td>
<td>Mr Don Randall MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Emerging Trade Markets</td>
<td>Mr Mark Coulton MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism</td>
<td>Mrs Jo Gash MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education and School Curriculum Standards</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Brett Mason</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray Darling Basin and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action</td>
<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Public Security and Policing</td>
<td>Mr Jason Wood MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Mr Stuart Robert MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services, Health and Wellbeing</td>
<td>Dr Andrew Southcott MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator Mitch Fifield</td>
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<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
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Tuesday, 23 February 2010

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 2.00 pm and read prayers.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Home Insulation Program

Mr ABBOTT (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts about the Minter Ellison report. The minister has previously told this House that the report was developed following a technical workshop held on 3 April but, yesterday, his officials testified that the same report was provided to his department on 9 April. Does the minister expect the House to believe that the report was completed in six days or would he now like to correct his previous statement to this parliament?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. My understanding is that ongoing work concerning risk assessment had been undertaken previously by Minter Ellison, and the report in question, as I have referred to it, and the dates in question to which I have referred are accurate. I make the point that at no time—

Mr Pyne—So, what are you saying?

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

Mr GARRETT—I make the point that I have always taken into account, during the course of the program, any elements that have come through in terms of risk identification, including those brought forward by my department in briefing, whether they have been identified by Minter Ellison or any other source, and I have always taken advice based on the issues that have been raised.

National Security

Mr TREVOR (2.02 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. What is the government doing to combat terrorism at home and abroad?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for his question. I would have thought that all members of this place would be concerned about appropriate actions to deal with the threat of terrorism at home and abroad, but it seems that those opposite find this in part a laughing matter; the government does not. On too many occasions my own predecessors in this position have stood in the parliament to mourn the deaths of Australians who have perished as victims of terrorism. As a nation we mourned the murder of 88 innocent Australians in the Bali bombing in 2002. We mourned also those who died in subsequent attacks in New York, in Riyadh, in Jakarta, in London and in Mumbai. These attacks have taken away the lives of far too many innocent Australians and cut down far too many Australians in their prime. Each of these individual stories is a human tragedy for their families and for those who have survived them. Our thoughts are again with them today.

The threat of terrorism has not gone away. The threat comes in the main from adherence to the distorted and militant interpretation of Islam that is espoused by groups such as al-Qaeda. Prior to the rise of jihadist terrorism, Australia was not a specific target of terrorist organisations. Now Australia is such a target. That is why, as part of our national security reform agenda, we have placed particular priority on combating terrorism. In a key milestone in that effort today the government is releasing the counterterrorism white paper, Securing Australia: protecting our community. It is the first white paper on counterterrorism to integrate the domestic and the foreign elements of the terrorist threat and the government’s response. Increasingly, this becomes a seamless threat.
The white paper outlines two key shifts in the terrorist threat to Australia. Firstly, there has been some counterterrorism success in South and South-East Asia, but these have been offset by new areas of concern, such as Somalia and Yemen, where a new generation of terrorists inspired by the message of al-Qaeda are taking root. Secondly—and I would have thought this is of particular significance to this House and the country—Australia now faces an increased terrorist threat from people born or raised in Australia who take inspiration from international Jihadist narratives. The bombings in London in July 2005 brought that starkly home to us. Home-grown terrorism is now a reality in many Western democracies. I note reports in the last two days. The United States Secretary of Homeland Security has commented on the rise of home-grown terrorist threats in the United States of America. It is an increasing feature of the threat landscape in Australia, and it is something of which the nation must take note.

The government is committed to concrete action to combat terrorism. No government can guarantee that Australia will be free from the threat of terrorism, but the government can guarantee that we will take all necessary and practical measures to combat the threat of terrorism. I am concerned that those opposed continue to find action against terrorism a laughing matter. There are four key elements to our strategy encapsulated in the words ‘analysis’, ‘protection’, ‘response’ and ‘resilience’.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The question has been asked; the Prime Minister is responding to the question. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr RUDD—The government is committed to concrete action to combat terrorism. We do so in four specific respects—and these are canvassed in the white paper, which I draw to the attention of honourable members—analysis, protection, response and resilience. Analysis of course deals with the question of the operation of our intelligence agencies, which once again the Leader of the Opposition seems to find a laughing matter; we do not. On protection, the government will need to embrace a range of additional measures to deal with the terrorist threat.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister has said that I find this a laughing matter. I do not and I ask him to withdraw.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I would have thought that the House would come to order when the subject matter was of importance. I suggest to those that feel aggrieved that less interjection would save them from their grievances.

Mr RUDD—The government’s response to the terrorist threat is encapsulated in four categories: analysis, protection, response and resilience. I was dealing with the question of analysis, which goes to the operation of our intelligence agencies. Protection concerns what we do to enhance, for example, the security domain at our airports and also other specific measures which we referred to earlier today. Response deals with having robust legal frameworks and enforcement agencies to assist in preventing terrorist attacks from taking place or dealing with them in the event that they do. On resilience, Australia’s strong and resilient community has a key role to play in arresting the development of violent extremism and terrorism on the home front.

Today, with the release of the white paper, the government has committed itself to new measures in this respect. In a major strengthening of our measures in this regard, the
government will invest $69 million over four years to introduce biometric checks for visa applications in around 10 countries. Under the new system people applying for a non-electronic visa in these countries will be required to present in person at a visa application centre to lodge their visa application and submit fingerprints and facial images. The government has also decided to establish a new multi-agency Counter-Terrorism Control Centre within ASIO to better coordinate our counterterrorism capabilities on the ground. These commitments today are in addition to the $200 million investment that we have made to strengthen aviation security.

As I said before, no government can guarantee that Australia will be free from the terrorist threat, but what we can do is take practical measures in order to reduce the threat, and that is what I have outlined to the House today. Home-grown terrorism is now a reality in Australia we must accept. We are advised by the agencies that home-grown terrorism in Australia is of increasing concern, and that is why we have announced the range of measures contained in today’s paper.

**Home Insulation Program**

Mr ABBOTT (2.10 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer the minister to his departmental secretary’s evidence yesterday that the $2.5 billion Home Insulation Program was the ‘subject of weekly discussions with the minister’. She further said, ‘Briefings that I was involved in with the minister continually referred to the risks in the program.’ Does the minister expect the House to believe that the Minter Ellison risk assessment report was never raised at any of these meetings?

Mr GARRETT—As I indicated in my answers in the House yesterday and as the secretary and other officials indicated when they gave evidence to the Senate committee, I have always received briefings from the department on the basis of risks that have been identified through a range of different sources, including those risks that were identified by Minter Ellison. Whether identified by Minter Ellison or any other source, I have always taken action on the basis of addressing those risks. I have never suggested that I was not aware of the risks in rolling out this program, including those identified by Minter Ellison, industry bodies, state authorities and others. A risk assessment process was underway and it was my responsibility to take advice from the department to determine how those risks, as identified, should be managed. Those processes included roundtables I attended, advice from my office, correspondence, direct discussion with officials and the like. It is important to emphasise that the very purpose of conducting risk assessments is to scope risks, identify challenges and put in place the right mechanisms to respond to them in the program’s final design, and that is what I did in this case.

The SPEAKER—Order! I ask the member for Ryan to remove his advertising. The use of that type of ambush marketing does not bring credit to the House.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The SPEAKER (2.12 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a parliamentary delegation from Bangladesh led by the Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh, the Hon. Mohammed Abdul Hamid. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
National Security
Mr RAGUSE (2.13 pm)—My question is to the Attorney-General. What is the government’s counterterrorism strategy, particularly on intelligence capabilities and coordination?

Mr McCLELLAND—As the Prime Minister has indicated, today the government has released the counterterrorism white paper. It has been prepared after extensive consultation and a review of contemporary events. For instance, a review of security arrangements in respect of the attempted bombing of the Northwest Airlines flight on 25 December last year shows that quite often information revealing a potential attack is available. The more difficult but critical task is drawing that information together and using it for operational purposes.

Accordingly, an essential part of the strategy is establishing, as the Prime Minister has indicated, a counterterrorism control centre, which will be established within the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, to improve coordination across government agencies in counterterrorism intelligence, decision making and operations. This centre will bring together senior officials—experts from Australia’s key intelligence and law enforcement agencies. The centre will drive a fully integrated national approach to counterterrorism by identifying specific counterterrorism priorities and developing a stronger fusion of intelligence community and law enforcement community effort. It will collate and analyse data, both from within Australia and overseas, before that information is distributed and applied for operational purposes.

As the Prime Minister has also indicated, the white paper outlines the increased threat posed by home-grown terrorism. In that respect it is instructive that since 2001 38 people have been prosecuted as a result of counterterrorism operations and there have been 20 people convicted of terrorism offences under our criminal laws. It is of note and, while some of these cases are still before the courts, it must be stressed that 37 of those 38 were Australian citizens and, of that 37, 20 were born in Australia. The unfortunate reality therefore is that, while, yes, it is only a small minority, violent extremism is active in our community. Successful prosecutions in Melbourne and Sydney demonstrate this only too clearly.

Research shows that there is no single pathway to violent extremism. The factors seem to indicate a reaction to overseas events, grievances with local and national issues and even individual circumstances such as poor education and socioeconomic factors. Clearly, there is a lot of valuable work that is already being undertaken right across the country at a state and territory level but countering extremism is a national challenge and requires a national response that focuses upon and develops best practice under an overarching strategic direction.

As a starting point the government has identified four key areas of work—that is, identifying and disrupting violent extremists, identifying at-risk groups and individuals and supporting them to resist violent extremism, maintaining the social cohesion and resilience of communities, and using effective communications to challenge violent extremist messages and supporting alternatives. In summary, the counterterrorism white paper shows that the threat of terrorism is regrettably real. It is persistent; it is evolving, but the white paper is a further step in delivering a safer and more secure Australia.

Home Insulation Program
Mr ABBOTT (2.17 pm)—My question is again to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. As the minister has
now admitted that he was made aware of the risks identified by the Minter Ellison report in his regular briefings with the department, will he now finally and definitively inform the House of the precise date when he was first informed about the Minter Ellison report?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question. Neither I nor my office received the Minter Ellison risk management plan until 11 February 2010 and it was not provided to my office until that time. Neither I nor my office saw the risk register dated 9 April and tabled in the Senate committee yesterday until it was provided to my office yesterday.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order to do with relevance. I asked when he was informed of the report not when he received the report.

The SPEAKER—The minister is responding to the question.

Mr GARRETT—I have said previously I am not suggesting for one minute that I was not aware of risks in rolling out this program, including those that were identified to my department by Minter Ellison, by industry bodies, by state agencies or by other experts. From the commencement of this program my office was kept abreast of how the program was developing, the risk assessment processes that were underway and the issues likely to be identified as part of that assessment process right through the design and implementation of the Home Insulation Program. That included not only the material that came through to me by way of advice from the department but also the material and advice that came through as a consequence of roundtables which I attended, advice to my office, correspondence and direct discussions with officials.

National Security

Ms GRIERSON (2.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Minister, what steps is the government taking to strengthen aviation security?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Newcastle for her question. Indeed, in the aviation white paper released last year we indicated that safety and security in aviation must be the government’s No. 1 priority. On 9 February the Prime Minister launched a $200 million aviation security package to respond to emerging threats. This is a comprehensive package. It includes improved passenger and baggage screening, improved passenger screening at regional airports and moving to a rational system based on the maximum takeoff weight of an aircraft rather than the previous system which was based upon the propulsion of an aircraft. It also includes improved policing at airports and an increase in the numbers of explosive-detection dogs, improved air cargo security and improved security at airports which are the last port of call.

At that time I made it clear that the government would be reintroducing regulations to improve cockpit security when the Senate next met and indeed this afternoon that will occur in the Senate. In September last year regulations to restrict access to the cockpit to persons with an operational, safety, security or training need were disallowed by the Senate with the support of the opposition. These regulations had been introduced in March 2009. They were operating effectively right through to September 2009 until they were disallowed by those in the opposition over in the Senate.

Since this disallowance, there have been no effective legal restrictions on who can enter a cockpit. Aviation security experts
advise that strict and consistent rules must apply as to who can open the hardened cockpit door and enter the cockpit. This government believes that the same security rules should apply to every flight, not differ from airline to airline and from pilot to pilot. This is too important an issue to rely upon self-regulation. The government will be introducing these regulations and later today in the Senate we will require Senate approval. Because of the timing in which you can reintroduce a disallowed motion, we require the support of the opposition in order to have these regulations introduced.

This is a test. Expert advice on security and safety is very clear. There is a very clear choice—you are for it or you are against it. Hardened cockpit doors and restricting access are the last line of defence to stop terrorists from taking control of a plane. The Leader of the Opposition has a choice to make this afternoon in the Senate. The government’s counterterrorism white paper makes it clear that the threat is real and therefore the response must be real as well. Of course, there must be some doubt about their response. Today Senator Birmingham said about the government’s counterterrorism policy that the greatest threat to safety in Australia is the Home Insulation Program—not terrorism but the Home Insulation Program. This is another example of how those opposite talk first and think later. They do not take these national security issues seriously because they are too busy playing politics.

I will say this about the former Prime Minister: John Howard would never have allowed the Liberal Party to make such a ridiculous argument. Unfortunately, this Leader of the Opposition has. I urge the opposition to come to their senses on this matter and support the government in its endeavour to be able to reintroduce regulations so that the national government—which has responsibility for national security—has some control over who enters or leaves a cockpit.

Home Insulation Program

Mr WOOD (2.25 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer the minister to the safety inspections that will now take place in up to one million homes across Australia as a result of his failed home insulation scheme. Can he confirm that the installers of the insulation under this scheme will now inspect their own work?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question and I refer him to the announcement I made yesterday concerning further details of the government’s safety inspections and rectification work relating to the terminated Home Insulation Program. I said in the House yesterday that the government is prepared to check as many houses as necessary through this process and that the process of checking will be subject to the necessary scrutiny as has already applied to inspections under the program up to this point. The government will expand its proactive risk based, audited inspection program. It will be expanded to some 15 per cent of homes under the program. Over and above this audit, a hotline will be established for households that are concerned about the safety of their—

Mr Laming—On a point of order, Mr Speaker: the minister has been asked a very clear question about whether installers will be inspecting their own work and this minister is just—

The SPEAKER—The member for Bowman will resume his seat. He can raise his point of order, but he cannot debate. The minister understands the requirements and he is responding to the question.

Mr GARRETT—As I said to the House yesterday, there will be an expanded audit
and inspection program focusing on households where there are significant concerns about safety risks, including a hotline which will be progressively rolled out from Wednesday. Additionally, where assessments show that there are significant potential risks, an onsite inspection by an accredited inspector will be arranged. Inspections will occur over time in priority order based on risk. The factors that will be taken into account will include the record of the installer, including any audits or inspections previously conducted; the location, age and nature of the home; roof space issues around ceiling fans; and the type and method of insulation installed—as would be the requirements expected under this inspection program. An accredited inspector is enabled to do the inspections under this program and, on that basis, the program of inspections will be rolled out.

Health Workforce

Ms BURKE (2.28 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. How is the government building a more sustainable health workforce and how is this an improvement on past approaches?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Chisholm for this question. She comes from an electorate which has a very large number of health professionals and has always been interested in making sure that the workforce needs of the country are well met.

Of course, since coming to office the Rudd government has been working very busily to clean up the mess left by the previous government and the previous health minister in the workforce area. For example, we have increased the cap that the Leader of the Opposition left on GP training places by 35 per cent, to over 800 places. We have increased the number of junior doctors to experience working in general practice by 10 per cent this year. We have invested in an extra 1,000 nursing places at university. Health Workforce Australia has been established to plan for the future needs and development of the health workforce, backed up by a $1.1 billion investment in clinical training. We have introduced new incentives to rural doctors, and this week I will introduce into parliament legislation which supports the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for 10 health professions, delivering for the first time a single system for states and territories to make sure of something that the previous government, under the Leader of the Opposition, was unable to deliver: that doctors, nurses and allied health professionals are recognised across the country, saving their resources and time and allowing them to move across the country.

Contrast our record of action in the last two years with the previous government—the good old days that the former Minister for Health and Ageing, the opposition leader, talks to. He ripped a billion dollars out of our hospitals, as we know. He capped those GP training places. The result was a nationwide workforce shortage stretching across 74 per cent of the country, affecting 60 per cent of the population.

What members—certainly on this side of the House—might not know is: as ‘closed for business’ signs were going up or GPs were telling patients their books were full and they could not be seen, what was the opposition leader’s response as the minister? Did he have a grand plan to deal with the medical workforce shortage? You would think that, after four years, he might have had some plan. But I have been able to—

Mr Dutton—Where’s Kevin Rudd’s plan from 2007, Nicola?

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson is warned.

Ms ROXON—I have been able to uncover—and the member for Dickson will
particularly enjoy this—the centrepiece policy that the Leader of the Opposition introduced to deal with this growing workforce crisis. He went straight to a hole-in-one solution. You might think that that is sort of a strange description, but his solution to the workforce shortage was golf balls. Golf balls might sound like a strange thing to do, but the minister—I have this here with me—produced, in response to the workforce shortages covering 74 per cent of the country, a golf ball—a golf ball which says ‘doctor vacancy’. A great help to finding doctors for every regional town across the country that needs a doctor!

Ms ROXON—could solve the medical workforce shortages across the country.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The minister is responding.

Ms ROXON—But, of course, what we have seen is that the former health minister, as the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Johnson interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Ryan is warned.

Ms ROXON—has now finally teed off with a health policy. This health policy is that there should be some local hospital boards in some hospitals in some states across the country. Obviously this is not a policy that is going to make the cut. I think that my colleagues over here might have to tell the Leader of the Opposition he will be playing minigolf with our children if this is the sort of approach that he is going to take to health policy rather than dealing with the problems that we are fixing—the problems he left us.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Those on my right will come to order.

Home Insulation Program

Mr ABBOTT (2.34 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. As the minister has now twice admitted that he was made aware of the Minter Ellison report during discussions with his department, will he finally inform the House of when he was first informed about the existence of the report? Why did he not ask for a copy?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question, and I refer again to the answers previously given by me in this place and also to an acknowledgement of the awareness of risks identified in the Minter
Ellison report and in other inquiries undertaken by the department and consultations and discussions with them prior to the delivery of the Home Insulation Program on 1 July of last year. I go on to say, Mr Speaker—through you—that the specific response on my part to any risks that were identified by the department and brought forward to me resulted in my actions in relation to establishing not only a national—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order on relevance: the minister has been asked on four occasions a specific question not about his responses but about the Minter Ellison report. Since it is clearly obvious that he will not answer the question, you should sit him down.

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The minister is responding to the question. He will bring his answer to a conclusion.

Mr GARRETT—I conclude by saying that the whole range of other advice I received from my department informed the final program design and final program guidelines for the Home Insulation Program.

Private Health Insurance

Mr GIBBONS (2.37 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Why is it vital that parliament pass the government’s legislation reforming the private health insurance rebate and Medicare levy surcharge?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Bendigo for his question. The government is committed to returning the budget to surplus as quickly as possible and to paying down debt. As a result of the global financial crisis having a very severe impact upon the budget, the government has to make tough decisions with respect to the budget position. Indeed, in the 2009 budget we did make tough decisions. Some of the critical tough decisions were application of a means test to the private health insurance rebate and an accompanying reform of the structure of the Medicare levy surcharge. These changes produced an estimated saving over the forward estimates of almost $2 billion and a saving for the budget over a period 10 years of just under $10 billion. Treasury modelling indicated that the net impact of these changes on the take-up of private health insurance would be very limited. They would be very, very marginal. They would mean that I would pay more and that people on incomes like mine would pay more for private health insurance. But I am afraid I do not see the logic of why ordinary working people on 50 or 60 grand a
year should have their taxes paying subsidies to my private health insurance when many of those same working people cannot afford private health insurance for themselves. I do not see the logic of that.

The conservative parties—the Liberal Party and the National Party—are blocking these savings in the Senate. They are now facing the second attempt by the government to get these changes through the Senate and they are continuing to play games, trying to avoid the issue but, in effect, blocking these changes in the Senate.

Mr TANNER—What the opposition is doing is protecting subsidies for higher income earners, doing great damage to the government’s budget settings at the same time as claiming that they would be more fiscally responsible—they would have lower deficits—than the government. Yet the impact of their position would be to add $10 billion to the government’s debt.

There has been one small glimmer of hope in this whole affair, and that is my opposite number, Senator Barnaby Joyce, the shadow finance minister, who on 12 January indicated that he was prepared to consider supporting the government’s position. Unfortunately, his view did not last very long and a few weeks later he indicated that he had retreated from that position. Over the past week or so, Senator Joyce has gone very quiet. I saw him on Q&A Monday last week and we have barely heard from him since; I am worried something has happened to him. I am worried he has been got at or something! I am concerned he might have been abducted by aliens or something! There is a real worry about whether Senator Joyce is now going to have an independent view on anything. He has made a career out of his alleged independent view on things; I would like to see him step back up to the plate on this issue and adopt the fiscally responsible position to move beyond the stream of consciousness stuff that we have had from him to adopting a fiscally responsible position that will assist the government to return the budget to surplus and to pay down debt.

It would appear that the shadow Treasurer, the member for North Sydney, has finally caught up with the shadow finance minister. He has gagged him, he has bound him and he has sat him in the corner, and now the shadow finance minister cannot express a genuine view. I have a message for the opposition: the task of getting the budget back to surplus is a fundamental priority for the government and, instead of claiming that, were you the government, you would actually get the budget back into surplus quicker, how about you behave in accordance with that as an opposition now? All we get is the bloviating from the giant windbags like the member for North Sydney, but they do the opposite in practice. So it is now time for the big test in the Senate: are you going to support the government’s efforts to return the budget to surplus or are you going to support ordinary working people paying subsidies for millionaires’ private health insurance?

Mr LAMING (2.43 pm)—My question is for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer to today’s revelation that it may take up to five years to complete the safety inspections arising from the minister’s failed Home Insulation Program. I would like to know whether the minister will commit to future buyers of homes whether their houses have been insulated under the scheme. Will they receive warnings as to
whether those inspections have been completed and will they receive warnings as to whether their ceiling insulation may prove a risk to their homes and their families?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question. My answer to the honourable member is that we will ensure that not only the rollout of ceiling insulation under the renewable energy bonus program but also the audit, compliance and inspection program of roofs takes place in an orderly and a timely way. I make a point through you, Mr Speaker, to members opposite: the risk assessment measures that have been put in place in this program from the start and the risk assessment mechanisms that will be in place for this program as it transitions in the future will ensure that public safety—

The SPEAKER—The minister will resume his seat. The member for Bowman has a point of order.

Mr Laming—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Future buyers of houses are waiting for an answer from the minister about whether they will receive a warning.

The SPEAKER—The member for Bowman will resume his seat. The member for Bowman is warned.

Mr Adams interjecting—

The SPEAKER—And the member for Lyons is not helping at all. The minister will resume his seat. By way of rebound interjection, I simply say to those who ask, ‘Why was he not warned?’, that it is for the same reason that they have not been warned.

Mr GARRETT—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I say to the honourable member, having noted his comments in the doorstop interviews this morning, that for the opposition to continue to raise the spectre of unnecessary high anxiety about insulation risks is to ignore a number of measures that have already been identified by the government and put in place in relation to both this program and the measures that we contemplate in the future. Prior to this, any householder who had a concern about insulation in their ceiling could call the department and have that matter considered and have an appropriate audit and monitoring take place.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The point of order goes to relevance. It was a specific question about the impact on houses and new home purchasers as a result the insulation program. The minister has not addressed the question.

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The minister is responding to the question.

Mr GARRETT—in relation to the honourable member’s question, I make the following observations: any householder who have safety concerns in relation to insulation in their ceilings already have access to a hotline. There is also a monitoring and compliance program that is being rolled out to ensure that risk identification takes place as a matter of consequence. In relation to the further delivery of ceiling insulation that the government has identified as necessary, householders who continue to have safety concerns are able to request a risk assessment for their home. If the assessment shows that there are any significant risks, on-site inspection by an accredited inspector can be arranged. Inspections will occur over time, as is appropriate, under the program in order to ensure safe delivery of insulation into ceilings.

Additionally, in relation to the announcements made previously, which the member is well aware of, we have identified a more significantly rigorous regime for installers, to enable them to meet the existing requirements under the register. In consultation with state authorities, work safety authorities and others, there will be the provision of quality
assessment and the provision of a specific bond, to ensure that any issues in relation to rectification are addressed. All of these matters have been identified as necessary to establish a strengthened regime for the installation of insulation, and householders can have confidence that they will be rolled out in a proper and appropriate manner.

**Economy**

**Ms REA** (2.48 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, what have been the recent comments about monetary policy in Australia?

**Mr SWAN**—I thank the member for Bonner for her question, because the Australian economy has outperformed virtually every other advanced economy during this global recession. I think that is something that all Australians are proud of—the performance of our economy during this global recession; the fact that we have created in Australia, together, over 180,000 jobs; and the fact that we continued to grow as other economies were falling into recession.

We have had some judgment about this from the OECD, who put a report out last week. They remarked particularly on the performance of the Reserve Bank—and of course on the performance of the government, in terms of the measures that we took to stimulate the economy. They highlighted the role that monetary and fiscal policy has played in supporting our economy during this global recession. We get some commentary from those opposite that the performance of the Australian economy is due to a whole lot of things other than monetary and fiscal policy. It is true that the very good regulation of our financial system has played a part. It is also the case that strong growth in the Asia-Pacific has been important. But what we see in the OECD report is their belief that monetary and fiscal policy domestically here was absolutely fundamental. They made this point:

This would not have been enough if monetary and fiscal policies had not been developed progressively to respond to the crisis. These have in no small part shielded businesses and citizens from the initial damaging impacts of the global recession.

Of course there has been a bit of commentary around monetary policy. We had the shadow Treasurer running around the place last week, peddling his phoney claims about some link between current spending and interest rates. As we know, Tinkerbell over there was repudiated fundamentally by the Reserve Bank governor in his evidence to the committee only last week—and, of course, was also repudiated fundamentally by the OECD. This is what they said about what interest rate rises in Australia have reflected:

... the relatively favourable trends experienced by the economy over the recent period and the reduction of the large global downside risk which prevailed until mid-2009.

So, like the Reserve Bank governor, they have completely repudiated the point that has been made by the shadow Treasurer. Of course, sometimes there is a little bit of honesty from Tinkerbell—

**Opposition members interjecting—**

**Mr SWAN**—It just slipped out. Sloppy Joe let it slip out.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! On this occasion, the Treasurer will withdraw and he will refer to members by their titles.

**Mr SWAN**—I withdraw. A letter from Joe Hockey, the shadow Treasurer, to the editor of the *Financial Review*, says:

The Reserve Bank of Australia recognises that this is no longer appropriate and is now in the process of moving interest rates back to more normal levels over a relatively short period of time.
He will tell the truth in the *Financial Review*, but he will not do it on talkback radio. He is constantly out there talking down our economy, and what he will not say is that interest rates are now 300 basis points lower than they were when the Liberals were last in government. I know he thinks he can wave that magic wand and put interest rates back at 1967 levels, but economic policy does not work like that. What we are getting from those opposite is a risky, extreme commentary which talks down the economy. On this side of the House, we will continue to support employment and small business to continue to support the Australian people and their continued employment.

**Resources**

**Mr OAKESHOTT** (2.53 pm)—My question is also to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you explain why, in December 2009, your Foreign Investment Review Board chose not to oppose the 70 per cent takeover of Australian owned Energy Metals Ltd by state owned foreign entity China Uranium Development, with this majority takeover involving control of nine uranium project sites covering a total of 4,000 square kilometres? Treasurer, in light of the unresolved energy security debate in this country around an ETS, unresolved home insulation and home solar hot-water plans, rejection last year of a private member’s bill for a national gross feed-in tariff scheme, a heavily distorted and currently flailing renewable energy scheme and an unresolved and inconsistent position on the use of uranium for domestic energy use—yet, perversely, the expanding of mines such as Angela Pamela and Olympic Dam for export demand, and added to this we now seem to be leaving sensitive waste management issues at these nine project sites to an overseas entity—how on earth, without so much as a press release, can you reconcile this majority takeover as being in the national interest when we look to be copping all the bad bits about this deal and receiving none of the good bits, such as the use of uranium to cheapen household electricity bills in our energy-security mix in the future?

**The SPEAKER**—Order! In future, the member for Lyne should take care about the amount of debate in his questions. I realise this may be an infectious disease from the member for Kennedy, but I think there is a degree to which I can give leniency.

**Mr SWAN**—I thank the member for his question. The first point I would make is that FIRB approval does not give foreign investors the right to mine or export uranium. It does not do that at all. I think the member may misunderstand this. We have a whole regime that deals with that and that is put in place by the Minister for Resources and Energy. It does not necessarily give them the right to mine at all and it does not give them the right to export.

In a sense, I fundamentally reject the point that the member is making. Nevertheless, let me deal with this very important question of foreign investment in Australia. This country has always required foreign investment to develop, and that is particularly the case in our resources sector. Because we are a capital-hungry country when it comes to resources, we operate a foreign investment regime. This government proudly apply a national interest test and we have proudly applied that particularly in circumstances where state owned enterprises are involved. Where necessary we have applied it. Both sides of politics have done this on different occasions. We all accept the need for foreign investment in this country. If it does not meet those guidelines, we do not necessarily approve it. Conditions may be put on a particular project.

I do not and cannot come in here and discuss the ins and outs of each project. On this occasion, the member says it was approved.

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**CHAMBER**
It was approved, but that approval does not have the impact the member has suggested, for the reason I said before: it does not give foreign investors the right to mine or export uranium. The right to mine or export uranium is based on our strict uranium policy, our bilateral safeguard agreements and our environmental and safety approvals. That is where all that occurs. This government will continue to apply our national interest test on foreign investment to maximise the benefit that flows to this country in terms of jobs and in terms of wealth creation.

Health

Ms GEORGE (2.57 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister explain the government’s investments in health, especially the importance of primary health care?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for Throsby for her question, as I know that in her part of Australia she places particular importance on the delivery of local healthcare services. Health and hospitals are a big part of the nation’s future because so many working families depend on them. Each year, Australians make 115 million visits to their local doctor. Every year our nation’s 768 public hospitals provide nearly 50 million hospital services to the Australian public. The workforce here is huge: some 60,000 doctors, 230,000 nurses and 134,000 allied health professionals. Taxpayers are currently spending $71 billion-plus each year to support the system.

Could I also go to the demands being placed on our system now and into the future from the increase in our population, the ageing of our population and the improvements in medical technology. We project a very large increase indeed in the period ahead in the total national investment in our health and hospital system. Based on current projections, that equates to an increase in average Australian government health spending per person from $2,290 per year today to $7,200 by 2050. That is the trajectory we are on.

The other point which is relevant here is the capacity of the states and territories in the future to fund the hospitals and the health services on which Australian families depend. The member for Lyne just asked a question. I visited the hospital in Port Macquarie in his electorate, and the message came through loud and clear that that hospital needs to be able to plan better and resource better for its future needs. Here is where the rubber hits the road: state outlays are being increased on health and hospitals right now by about 11 per cent per year and state own-source revenues are growing by about four per cent per year. That is why there is a funding crisis as well.

The honourable member’s question went to the government’s investments in this area. I refer again to the $64 billion investment that we have made already through the National Healthcare Agreement. That represented a 50 per cent increase on the agreement which preceded it; the agreement in which the then minister for health, the current Leader of the Opposition, extracted $1 billion from the hospital system. Also, we have invested $1.1 billion in training more doctors; in contrast to the then minister for health, the current Leader of the Opposition, who froze GP training places. We also have increased our investment in the provision for nurses and nothing was done to deal with the shortage of nurses during the previous minister’s occupancy of the position.

This also brings us back to how we fund responsibly the future needs of our health and hospital system. There is a piece of legislation up in the Senate called the PHI, which those opposite are standing in the way of passing, which would deliver some $2
billion to assist in the future injection of capital into our overstretched health and hospital system—$2 billion from the wealthiest Australians who are currently being cross-subsidised by poorer Australians and middle-class Australians. That is why we are proceeding with that reform.

Those opposite interjected before about primary health care and about GP superclinics. I would say to the shadow minister for health, the member for Dickson, or those members opposite who do not find health faintly interesting, that he should also have a clear look at how his GP superclinic is now performing in Strathpine; and the reporting in the local press from those who have been out there supporting it, as doctors and local users of the system, because it is providing flexible out-of-hours services. The other day at Ballan, in the seat of the member for Ballarat, we also saw reports from the local authorities about what was necessary and happening there in terms of flexible delivery of services in that community.

Mr Pyne—Where are the others? Blah, blah—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt is warned.

Mr Rudd—The government is proud of rolling out its reforms in primary healthcare. This is what we intend to do to make sure that our primary healthcare reforms are implemented on the ground and are helping the people of Strathpine, are helping the good people of Ballarat and are helping those where these GP superclinics are being rolled out across the country. I say to those opposite with their great reformist zeal on health: in their 12 years in office what did they do in terms of delivering a single GP superclinic? Zero. What did they do in capital funding for the health system? Zero. Our plans for the future are clear.

Home Insulation Program

Mr Bruce Scott (3.03 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer the minister to the case of Mr Greg Smith of Gympie who has been left with rolls of uninstalled insulation in the roof cavity of his home and a 1.6 metre hole in the ceiling from a botched insulation job under the failed Home Insulation Program. When can Mr Smith expect to have his insulation completed and his ceiling repaired?

Mr Garrett—I thank the honourable member for his question. As the honourable member would know, there is the opportunity for the person in question to make that complaint specifically known to the department and for the department to respond to that complaint, as it does to each and every complaint that is received under this program.

Mr Bruce Scott interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Maranoa!

Mr Adams—Put him out.

The SPEAKER—The member for Lyons is now warned. The member for Maranoa knows better than he does. It is an old favourite for those that are newcomers but I think that the member for Maranoa knows what I mean and he will not do that in future.

Mr Garrett—Through you, Mr Speaker, I respond to the honourable member by reminding him that under the Home Insulation Program it was a requirement of installers that they meet the guidelines in question. It also was a requirement that the householders signed the order form in order to satisfy themselves that that particular job had been done in accordance with the guidelines.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On the basis of the true relevance of this House, the member has asked the minis-
ter to answer a question relevant to his constituent’s needs and it appears that the answer is, ‘Make a phone call’. What is the use of this place?

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, on that point of order, that was a clear abuse of the standing orders in the guise of making an argument in the form of a point of order.

The SPEAKER—As I have said to the Leader of House, it is a judgment that the Chair has to make between whether somebody is using the standing orders to make a point of order or to interrupt proceedings. On this occasion I will indicate to the member for O’Connor that there is no point of order and that there is no power for the Chair to dictate the manner in which the minister answers the question. The minister is responding to the question.

Mr Garrett—The purpose of having an insulation hotline in place is to enable those who have any concerns about the quality of work, or any other matters in relation to this program, to have their concerns addressed. And that is what should happen in his instance.

Mr Bruce Scott interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Page has the call. I am not sure what the member for Maranoa is doing. Those in the right-hand corner will come to order. I can invite them all out for a cup of coffee if they like but they will come to order.

Pensions and Benefits

Ms Saffin (3.07 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and the Minister for Social Inclusion. What are the consequences of the coalition’s continued refusal to pass the student income support legislation and what commentary has there been about this legislation?

Mr Tuckey—You won’t give them any money!

The SPEAKER—The member for O’Connor had been warned earlier—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for O’Connor is now warned.

Ms Gillard—I thank the member for Page for her question, and I thank her for the opportunity to visit her electorate last week and to meet with community leaders and local schools. I believe that the member for O’Connor has indicated what may be motivating the Liberal Party to hold up the student income support bill in the Senate; that is, they simply do not understand it and they care so little about Australian students and Australian working families that they have not bothered to familiarise themselves with the details of it.

I point out to the House that, very significantly, those who care about education are urging senators to pass this bill. Yesterday Australia’s 39 vice-chancellors each signed a letter to every senator, calling on them to pass the bill—a truly extraordinary thing. And now, as I understand it, opposition members are hurling abuse about vice-chancellors. Thirty-nine vice-chancellors sent a letter calling on senators to pass the bill. In the letter the vice-chancellors said:

We, the undersigned, write on behalf of Australia’s universities and their students to seek your support for the passage of the bill.

And they go on:

The income support for students bill properly targets less well-off students across Australia for whom income support is critical. The increases to the parental and personal income thresholds will mean that more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds will be able to access the full rate of youth allowance.
I table a copy of the letter and the full list of 39 signatories to the letter. The government, at each and every stage of trying to reform youth allowance to make it fairer, have been willing to accept reasonable amendments. We have worked with the Greens and accepted amendments. We have worked with Senator Xenophon and accepted amendments. That means that, as of today—

Mr Pyne—The Greens want you to split the bill!

Ms Gillard—Perhaps the shadow minister for education might want to contemplate this: as of today, every vice-chancellor in this country is calling on the Senate to pass the bill; every state and territory education minister in this country is calling on the Senate to pass the bill; the Australian Greens want the bill passed; Senator Xenophon wants the bill passed; the National Union of Students wants the bill passed; and every Independent member in the House of Representatives wants the bill passed. In their caterwauling and arrogance they reveal how out of touch they are. I ask members of the Liberal Party to contemplate this: in taking the stance that they are taking they are saying, in their arrogance, that they know better than every Australian vice-chancellor, that they know better than struggling students, that they know better than the Liberal minister for education in Western Australia, and that they know better than the working families who need this support.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition, who is known to feign concern about cost-of-living questions for working families: how can he justify his senators’ refusal to pass a bill which would allow a middle-income family in the bush who earn $70,000 a year and have two kids, one who is already at university and one who is about to go there, to receive $13,300 in the first year for the student starting university and $10,300 for the student already at university? Under the current scheme they would receive next to nothing. How can he say to that family, in that income range, that they should not get those benefits? I am asking the Leader of the Opposition—who is now making a catastrophic error by seeking advice from the shadow minister for education—to have the courage to think this through for himself and to ask himself: can he credibly ever again raise cost-of-living issues if he does not pass this bill?

If he truly believes that people in income ranges like $70,000 a year deserve support, he should instruct his senators to pass this bill. If he does not, then he is standing by the scheme the Howard government stood by for its term in office, where a family earning $44,000 a year does not get full youth allowance whilst a family earning $300,000 a year, with a student at home, does get full youth allowance. It would amaze me that anybody, even members of the Liberal Party, could walk out and credibly say to the Australian people, ‘That’s fair.’ A kid who lives at home in a family earning $300,000 a year gets full youth allowance, even if they live in Carlton or central Sydney, 10 steps from the university, while a kid who needs to move away from home, who is from a family that earns $40,000-odd a year, does not qualify for full youth allowance. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to seriously contemplate this himself and to think it through. It is an important question for students who are trying to go to university right now.

Home Insulation Program

Dr Stone (3.13 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer to Cohuna Hardware, which serve my electorate and which have struggled to stay afloat during seven years of drought. They decided to participate in the home insulation installation program. They
complied with all of the requirements of the scheme and were underway with the work when the program was scrapped last Friday. Will the minister now guarantee compensation for such small businesses who, through no fault of their own, are seriously out of pocket as a result of the gross maladministration of this program?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for her question. I can advise the House that the government has indicated that it is prepared to consider appropriate transitional arrangements for legitimate participants and that a hotline is now available, the installer hotline, 1800—

Ms Julie Bishop—So you’ve indicated you’re prepared to consider—

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is warned! The minister has the call. The minister is responding to the question.

Mr GARRETT—in order to enable people to receive accurate information in respect of the ongoing transition in this program. The government is focused on providing support for those people who are retrenched. Any insulation workers who lose their jobs have access to assistance under the Compact for Retrenched Workers. In particular, the government is focused on helping any insulation worker who may be affected.

I must make the observation that it is the opposition that voted against the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan in its entirety; it is the opposition that opposed this scheme in its entirety; it is the opposition that called for the suspension of this scheme—

Dr Stone—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order about relevance. The question was about compensation for the small business—

The SPEAKER—The member for Murray will resume her seat.

Mr GARRETT—in relation to this scheme, the opposition are all crocodile tears. They opposed it at the start, they want it suspended, and we are moving immediately to work through transitional arrangements, mindful of the impacts on employment in this sector.

Business

Mr RIPOLL (3.17 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs and Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy. How is the government responding to the COAG Reform Council’s progress report released today and the need for further reforms to business regulations?

Dr EMERSON—I would like to thank the member for Oxley for his question and the fine work he does as Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services. Today the COAG Reform Council released its progress report on COAG’s National Partnership Agreement to Deliver a Seamless National Economy. This follows the release last week of an OECD report—the Prime Minister has it in his hand but I also have the quote—which concluded:

Australia represents in many ways a “role model” for OECD countries in its proactive approach to regulatory reform.

That is great; that is an endorsement of the reform program of the Rudd government.

A COAG working group which is co-chaired by my colleague the Minister for Finance and Deregulation and me has been working hard on COAG’s ambitious reform agenda, which covers no less than 27 different areas of business regulation. COAG Reform Council’s assessment relates the progress up to 30 September last year, and I am pleased to announce that COAG has already agreed on a response to the report that was released today, with the Prime Minister,
the premiers and the chief ministers adopting our working group’s recommendations within just four working days. Thank you, Prime Minister, thank you to the premiers and thank you to the chief ministers.

COAG, I can announce, is implementing all of the COAG Reform Council’s recommendations, and that is testimony to the commitment of the Commonwealth, the states and the territories to working together to advance this vitally important microeconomic reform.

Mr Hockey—What are they?

Dr Emerson—I am fascinated to hear the shadow Treasurer saying: ‘What are they? What are the 27 areas of regulatory reform?’ He has never heard of them. He has never heard of economic reform in this country and never heard of deregulation—and I will have more to say about that in a moment.

I thank the COAG Reform Council and the states and territories for their important work on these reforms. At least one-third of the reforms are approaching completion by the middle of the year, which is just 1½ years into a five-year agreement.

Mr Hockey—What are they?

Dr Emerson—The shadow Treasurer asks what the 27 reforms are, and I can say that they include 10 hot spots identified—

Opposition members interjecting—

Dr Emerson—wait for it, brother—by COAG under the previous coalition government. Those 10 regulatory hot spots were identified by COAG under the previous coalition government. And what did the Business Council of Australia have to say on progress by the coalition on these 10 hot spots? It said: ‘Eighteen months ago COAG released a plan to tackle 10 business regulation hot spots.’ It was referring to 2007. ‘Clearly they were so hot they burnt a hole in the piece of paper and we haven’t seen them since.’ That is an indictment of you, the coalition, for lack of progress on these 10 important regulatory reforms. Indeed, the Business Council of Australia further described the period covered by the previous coalition government as one of ‘the creeping reregulation of business’.

Now that they are in opposition, the coalition have sought to thwart perhaps the most important of these reforms, and of course I refer to a national system of occupational health and safety, for which the coalition opposed in the Senate the facilitating legislation not once, not twice but three times, such is their lack of commitment to economic reform in this country. I call on the Leader of the Opposition to rethink his strategy of opposing Rudd government reforms for the sake of opposition and to support the Rudd government’s economic reform program.

It is already well known that the opposition leader is a big risk to the Australian economy and so too is his sidekick, Senator Barnaby Joyce. Senator Barnaby Joyce wanders around Australia with a briefcase full of new regulations. He has the Birdsville amendment, the Blacktown amendment, the Richmond amendment and the Breakfast Creek amendment—amendments named after just about every pub in Australia. We know Senator Joyce will go, but what will remain is the opposition leader’s poor judgment—his poor judgment in appointing Senator Joyce.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on the question of relevance. I would ask him to answer the question. Go through the 10 hot spots.

The Speaker—The minister is responding to the question, but the minister will come to his conclusion.

Dr Emerson—It is revealing, is it not, that the shadow Treasurer, a member of the
previous government, does not even know the 10 regulatory hot spots that they failed to deliver on? Senator Joyce will go, but the opposition leader’s poor judgment will remain. The Rudd government is building a stronger economy for the future by supporting jobs and small businesses today.

Home Insulation Program

Mr ABBOTT (3.23 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the case of Mr Russell Browning, whose insulation business is in his electorate, and the 14 workers sacked yesterday because of the mayhem caused by the maladministration of the Home Insulation Program and I ask the Prime Minister: isn’t it the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Mr Garrett, who should be sacked, not those 14 workers in the Prime Minister’s own electorate?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. I would draw the honourable member’s attention to the employment which has arisen as a consequence of this program—a program which was opposed by those opposite at the very beginning. That is the first point.

The second thing I would draw to the honourable member’s intention is that the home efficiency rebate program, which is scheduled to commence on 1 June, represents continued investment on the part of the government in home insulation and solar panels. Thirdly, I would say in response to the honourable member’s question that, when it comes to transitional industry assistance, the minister has already indicated the form which that could take and that affected businesses are, of course, able to contact the minister. Fourthly, for those workers who are affected by the cancellation of the Home Insulation Program, specific arrangements have been put in place by the Minister for Employment Participation. I would also draw those to the attention of the House.

The Minister for Employment Participation has announced a $10 million commitment for 2,000 structural adjustment places in the Productivity Places Program for insulation workers affected by changes. Secondly, there are training places available to retrain insulation workers for new jobs. These are on top of the 4,000 places announced last year to help workers transition from the insulation industry—2,000 places in the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program and 2,000 Apprenticeships Access places. These have been announced previously. They were put in place because this program, when it was originally established, had a finite budget and a finite time line. That is why the government was concerned to provide mechanisms for those who had been employed within it to transition from it into permanent employment elsewhere.

These are the various measures which the government has put in place. I would again draw the honourable member’s attention to the fact that the employment which has been created by this program over the last 12 months was, frankly, opposed in every measure by those opposite, as they opposed every other stimulus measure put forward by the government in its February 2009 package.

Commercial Television: Australian Content

Mr PRICE (3.26 pm)—My question without notice is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. Minister, why is it important for the government to support Australian content in television? How has this support been received?
Mr ALBANESE—I thank the Chief Government Whip for his question and note that he, at least, supports Australian content on Australian television. The government will protect Australian content on commercial television by offering licence fee rebates to commercial broadcasters in 2010 and 2011. Licence fee rebates will be 33 per cent in 2010 and 50 per cent in 2011. The government estimates that the cost of the rebate will be some $220 million over the three financial years, subject to the revenue of TV stations. As part of its digital television switch-over package, the government has made provision for a range of related measures, and this greatly reduces the impact on the underlying cash balance.

The government has provided this assistance for three important reasons. The first reason is to protect Australian content on TV. Figures from ACMA show that, in 2006-07, commercial television broadcasters spent some $790 million, or 65.8 per cent of their total programming expenditure, on Australian programs, including some $96 million on Australian drama. That drama includes Underbelly on Channel 9, which had 2.9 million viewers, and Packed to the Rafters on Channel 7, which had 2.6 million viewers in 2009. Other important Australian content includes MasterChef on Channel 10, with some 2.3 million viewers. There is a second reason, which is that commercial television broadcasters are switching to digital television and will need to invest in new technologies. Digital TV involves converting equipment, broadcasting in a different spectrum, adding additional channels and promoting the Freeview platform. The third reason is that the Australian industry already pays significantly higher fees to government than comparable nations.

This is also consistent, it must be said, with precedent. Back in 2000, the former government offered TV licence fee rebates of $260 million to assist the rollout of digital TV in regional areas. We can go back even further. Commercial radio licence fees were cut by 50 per cent in 1992 to compensate for the expansion of radio services that occurred with the introduction of the Broadcasting Services Act. We on this side of the House are clear about our position, but I must also talk about how this has been received. It is fair to say that it has been received in a number of ways. Firstly, upon the announcement, the relevant opposition spokesperson, Tony Smith, the shadow minister, was reported on 8 February as saying:

Preserving quality Australian content is important and there is little doubt the cost of delivering that content is higher at present … That is a pretty clear position from the relevant shadow minister. Then, for some reason unknown to me, days later the Leader of the Opposition was out there revealing once again the old Abbott habit: talking before he thought. The Leader of the Opposition was out there accusing the government of bribing the commercial networks, and a bribe requires a two-way transaction that we knew what we were doing in bribing them and that they—the likes of Laurie Oakes, Mark Riley and Paul Bongiorno—were prepared to change the way that they broadcast the news on the basis of this bribe. I wonder why that occurred? Of course, you had one in favour and one against—and you will always have one in the middle over there. And the one in the middle, of course, was Tinkerbell.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Mr ALBANESE—The shadow Treasurer went on Meet the Press on Sunday and he had a bob each way; he was for it and he was against it. This is an important issue. It is subject to disallowance in the other place so
they will have to take a decision, and we await that decision with interest.

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

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.33 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr Abbott—Yes.

The Speaker—Please proceed.

Mr Abbott—I claim to be misrepresented by the Minister for Health and Ageing in question time today. To correct the misrepresentation I refer to an article in the electronic version of the Age yesterday by the minister’s former speech writer which suggested that the golf balls with logos were the product of her administration, not mine.

Ms Roxon (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (3.33 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Ms Roxon—Yes, by the Leader of the Opposition.

The Speaker—Please proceed.

Ms Roxon—Unfortunately, the creative material that the Leader of the Opposition is relying on led to the investigation which enabled me to clearly and correctly say in parliament today that these were part of a campaign in May 2007, which, as I understand, was a time when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health and Ageing—and they are his.

Mr Fitzgibbon (Hunter) (3.34 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr Fitzgibbon—Yes.

The Speaker—Please proceed.

Mr Fitzgibbon—Today Fairfax newspapers ran more stories featuring me, which are untrue and defamatory. Fairfax also reported that I had threatened legal action but had failed to commence that action. This no doubt was designed to question my intention to do so. I can assure Fairfax—and they know this—that I have made demand and I intend to go through with it.

Fairfax also mischievously reported today on court action taken yesterday by Ms Helen Liu but failed to say what it was about. I can inform the House that the action is seeking to force Fairfax to hand over for independent forensic testing documents it claims belong to her and on which it has published a number of highly defamatory stories. Fairfax refuses to hand over the documents. The question now becomes: what is it they have to fear from this independent forensic examination?

Mr Ripoll (Oxley) (3.35 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr Ripoll—Yes.

The Speaker—Please proceed.

Mr Ripoll—in the Tasmanian Examiner over the weekend there was a scurrilous story about travel expenses, carrying my photo but under the title of Senator Bushby from Tasmania—and I take great offence at being referred to as a senator.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Report No. 23 of 2009-10

The Speaker (3.36 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit report No. 23 of 2009-10 entitled Illegal Foreign Fishing in
Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

SPEAKER’S PANEL

The SPEAKER—Pursuant to standing order 17, I lay on the table my warrant revoking the nomination of the honourable member for Menzies and nominating the honourable member for McPherson to be a member of the Speaker’s panel to assist the chair when requested to do so by the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.37 pm)—On indulgence, before I present the documents I acknowledge that 50 years ago today a momentous occasion occurred. Fifty years ago to the day both the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water were born. On behalf of everyone in the House, I wish them a happy 50th birthday.

Ms Gillard—Are they twins?

Mr ALBANESE—‘Are they twins?’ the Deputy Prime Minister asks. Mr Speaker, documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Rural and Regional Health Services

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

The importance of Commonwealth involvement in regional health and aged care delivery.

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 OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (3.38 pm)—I thank members for staying behind to support this matter of public importance. It is time for the greater Commonwealth involvement that has been talked about for so many years not only in this place but right throughout the pubs and clubs of Australia for many years. There is now an urgent need for the Prime Minister and the government to deliver on their health and hospital reform package. The term ‘takeover’ is one that seems to have taken over this debate. I do not think it really matters whether it is a takeover not. What we all certainly want to see is greater Commonwealth involvement—in whatever form, but hopefully one showing greater care and responsibility for the taxes that Australians are paying and for the desire of the Australian community to see the money that washes through the Commonwealth deliver real and practical outcomes on the ground for residents and recipients of health care.

I start by noting aged-care concerns. On the mid-North Coast of New South Wales we are the litmus test for this country. We are Australia in 20 years time. We are the demographics that everyone is saying Australia will be in 20 years time. It is critically important that we get aged-care funding right on the mid-North Coast and that we get it right over the coming 20 years for this country. The Intergenerational report released in the last fortnight by government once again affirmed the importance of this issue.

I want to highlight the way aged-care packages are distributed to local communities such as mine. Whilst we all in this place would take more residential packages for our
The way of the future is the Community Aged Care Packages and the EACH packages, both of which provide for low-level or high-level care within the community to allow people to live as independently as possible for as long as possible. We have received on the mid-North Coast a good round of CACP and EACH packages, but if we are going to tackle this issue seriously there need to be greater resources provided through the Expenditure Review Committee and the budget process, particularly on the low- and high-care CACP and EACH packages. Please, Government, take that on board and find money wherever possible for regional aged-care living and for better independent lifestyle outcomes. Those two types of packages at a community level are critically important.

The other aged-care issue I want to raise in this health and hospital reform context is the enormous frustration in my community—and I imagine it is shared throughout the country—about aged-care type patients taking up beds in the public health system, which shows a complete breakdown of Commonwealth-state relations. There is this bed block because of a lack of aged-care places, therefore placing enormous pressure on the public hospital system and leading to less than optimum clinical outcomes for communities such as mine. If there is one change that the Commonwealth could make with regard to health and hospital reform, it is resolving the issue of aged-care type patients being in beds in the public hospital system of this country. It is a lower level of appropriate care for the aged-care patients involved, who do not need to be in hospital. It is also placing enormous strain and pressure on an already strained and pressured public hospital system. Please make sure that is part of this upcoming package.

The third issue I want to mention with regard to aged care is the national insurance scheme Bill Shorten has been talking about. Whilst it is targeted specifically at people with disabilities, if taken up it will be a complementary program with regard to many aged-care services. I endorse the scheme and I congratulate the member for Maribyrnong for the work he has done. It will expand the amount of resources available within communities such as mine and it will help deal with the full range of issues and challenges faced by people who are ageing. Please, Government, make sure the upcoming health and hospital reforms include improvements in all three: the community packages, the aged-care type patients in the public hospital system and the national insurance scheme for people with disabilities.

With regard to hospitals in particular, I want to get on record the importance of the Commonwealth starting to take a bit of care with and control over the way Commonwealth taxes hit the ground in communities, particularly growth communities such as, again, the mid-North Coast of New South Wales. Every state, in every department, has a resource distribution formula. It is their own formula. It is based on a whole range of demographics in the field and, before you come to a place like this and start to look at the detail of what government does, you would just assume that state governments followed their own funding formula. Sadly, in growth areas such as the North Coast—and the member for Page will endorse this as well I hope—the state government does not follow its own funding formula.

Ms Saffin—The RDF.

Mr Oakeshott—The RDF—the resource distribution formula. In the growth areas in New South Wales—south-west of Sydney and the North Coast of New South Wales, I am sure it is the same in other states in other growth areas—we are under equity by about two to four per cent which does not
sound like much in percentage terms, but in dollar terms that is about $50 million per annum.

Ms Saffin—Fifty to 60.

Mr OAKESHOTT—Fifty to 60, thank you, Member for Page. That is in dollar terms a substantial amount of money that an area that is growing and is already under pressure is not accessing based on the government’s own funding formula and based on the principle of fairness and equity. I do not think it is too much for members like me to come to this place and ask for nothing more or nothing less than fairness and equity.

At the moment in the delivery of health care in a region such as the North Coast of New South Wales we do not get fairness and we do not get equity. We do not have a state government that is following its own funding formula. Therefore, the role of the Commonwealth in this new environment of health and hospital reform—hopefully the greatest change that we have seen since the introduction of Medicare—is to place a value on the money trail through the system and to make sure equity and fairness is delivered on the ground. It involves hard decisions; populations move, governments have to move with them. It means taking away at times from areas where those populations move from, but that is the work of government. We may as well not be here unless we are willing to make those decisions. Sadly, in New South Wales today those decisions are not being made and, as a consequence, high-growth regions such as the North Coast suffer. That is unfair, that is unjust and I would hope, over the coming months when we see the health mandate of the Commonwealth revealed, that there is a strong element that says equity, justice and equal funding per head of population wherever they may live is a critical part of health reform for the future.

I also mentioned the upcoming cancer funding. We are sweating on the Minister for Health and Ageing, the government and the minister at the table to be serious about that regional cancer funding. For example, in a community such as ours a second linear accelerator would be of enormous value to people’s lives where there are still, despite one linear accelerator being in operation, way too many people going outside of the community for radiotherapy services and way too many demands on families and social networks as a consequence. This would be one of those situations where you save money in the long term by spending a bit of sensible money upfront and trying to get clinical services delivered as close to home as possible. In this regional cancer package that we are hopefully going to see sometime soon, again, I would urge the government to look at the high-growth regions, the ones with the high elderly populations, the lower socioeconomic communities—I have just summed up my region—and to make sure that we are part of the mix of the future because it will provide savings to the health service by doing so.

Another point I want to make is about efficiencies in the system. We have not had much to start with and have therefore learnt to do things in our region pretty efficiently. In Port Macquarie in particular, we have a legacy of going through a period of being a privately run public hospital where there was a buck to be made at the end of the process if you were efficient in the delivery of clinical excellence. The consequence of that was that the cost per bed, now that the hospital has been returned back to the public system, stands out as being significantly less than the seven peer review hospitals around New South Wales. The question is: why? Where are the inefficiencies in the other peer review hospitals and does that reflect inefficiencies in the system more generally?
We have an excellent standard of clinical care at Port Macquarie Base Hospital. It can be done; therefore to some degree it exposes the inefficiencies in the system at other locations that were supposed to be there to peer review the privately run public hospital. It is worth government looking at that because if we are going to have a sustainable health system into the future, efficiency needs to be an important part of it. At the moment, at the end of the financial year—there was something in the paper today about it—there is no rewarding those who are efficient in their clinical delivery. At the moment there is an attempt to either spend it or run over budget so that you do not get money taken back to consolidated revenue in the future. There has to be a better way of building in the efficient delivery of clinical excellence.

A final point is again directed to the duplication in the system where on the North Coast of New South Wales we have an infrastructure list and again Port Macquarie Base Hospital is the No. 1 priority capital works project on that list—despite the hospital at Grafton getting some Commonwealth money and getting some work at the moment. The frustration is that there is also a state infrastructure list that is at complete odds to what the list, which has been put together by local administrators and local clinicians, is saying is their priority. When I was elected I was on the back end of a government promise about the $10 billion Health and Hospital Fund and it was enormously frustrating trying to get the area health services capital works list, the regional list, treated as a priority in that process. Unfortunately, the fix was in or the deal was done between the Commonwealth and the state and the state infrastructure list was treated as a priority; therefore, what the region wanted and what the region was asking for was totally ignored.

This builds into the general theme from our region that we are pitching to government—that is, the idea of place based thinking. There is not a lot of care, compassion or ears for the views of people on the ground who are delivering—whether they be in health or in education. I ask for a better process for bottom-up views to get through to the bureaucracies in the big cities like Sydney, Brisbane or Melbourne, and for place based thinking to have a place in the healthcare mix of the future. On the North Coast we have a priority on the ground and it is the Port Macquarie Base Hospital, but it is not a priority for New South Wales Health. I would have thought that the clinicians and administrators on the ground are worth listening to on the subject of future funding models. At the moment they are not being heard. It is a critical step if we are going to see the proper and consistent delivery of health care into the future.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery) (3.53 pm)—I thank the member for Lyne, firstly, for taking the initiative to put this matter of public importance on the agenda and, secondly, for his thoughtful contribution. I and my colleagues—the Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Mr Butler; the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon; Minister for Ageing, Ms Elliot; and, most importantly, the Prime Minister—have been involved in consultations around the country concerning the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission proposals of Dr Christian Bennett’s team. There were 123 recommendations and 103 consultations with around 36 to 40 of those in regional parts of Australia. I went to the member for Kennedy’s electorate, but unfortunately was unable to be at the meeting.

Mr Katter—We appreciate your visit.

Mr SNOWDON—And I appreciate the fact that I was there; I learned quite a bit. We have been visiting places as diverse as Clon-
curry, Mount Isa, Ceduna, Whyalla, Murray Bridge, Ballarat and regional parts of Gippsland—all over Australia. I think the member for Lyne has shown an insight into what has been reflected in the discussions—that is, that people in the regions have a particular view about their communities and the way their health system operates and they want to be heard. It is very clear that they want to be heard. I think I can safely say we have been doing a lot of listening. We visited parts of the member for Eden-Monaro’s electorate like Bega and Batemans Bay and we had a lovely time.

Ms Saffin—We want you to come to Lismore.

Mr SNOWDON—And I will come to Lismore. The important thing is to note that we have gone across this country and talked to people. I am the first Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery in this nation’s history and I think that shows the commitment of the government to putting in place a process of going to talk, listen, learn and try and come up with policy options which meet those concerns. My most important observation is that everybody is different and everywhere is different.

I will use an example to explain the difference, one that I have used across the country and talked to people. I am the first Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery in this nation’s history and I think that shows the commitment of the government to putting in place a process of going to talk, listen, learn and try and come up with policy options which meet those concerns. My most important observation is that everybody is different and everywhere is different.

That is replicated across the country. In some cases, like Cloncurry in the member for Kennedy’s electorate, we have seen a very dynamic relationship between a private practice and the local council. The local council are working with the private practice. The local council have provided them with not only capital equipment, which remains on the council’s books, but also motor vehicles and three homes. This says the community take their primary care seriously. They see themselves as having a role in making a contribution. This is equally the case in Ceduna in South Australia where there is a similar approach. There is a different model because Queensland is different from South Australia, but clearly there was an effective relationship between the private medical practices in the town and local government where local government are providing accommodation.

That does not happen across Australia, but it is important to note that—and I make this observation despite the member for Lyne’s reservations about the way in which hospitals are run et cetera—the workforce is absolutely committed to getting an outcome. I want to take this opportunity to commend the whole of the health workforce who live in rural, regional and remote parts of Australia. There is no doubt about their dedication. Often they are working in isolation without a great deal of peer or professional support and they do so while making great personal sacrifices in committing themselves. This raises a significant issue for us, and perhaps one of
the most significant questions which we have confronted in this whole process of consultations is workforce issues: our ability to recruit and attract workers into the health system, to attract doctors to work in the bush—GPs in particular—and to attract nurses and allied health professionals to work in the bush.

We were not helped by the capping of GP training places by the previous administration under the guidance of the then health minister, Mr Abbott. Thankfully, this government has addressed that by upping the number of GP training places to 800 by the end of this year, a significant increase—a 35 per cent increase in the number of GP training places. And we have not stood still on the issue of what we should do in regional and remote parts of Australia, because we understand that, if we are going to actually address the needs of regional communities, we have to do something about investment.

We have done this in a number of forms, and one which I am sure the member is aware of is our concern for regional infrastructure programs. We have a National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program, NRRHIP, which has visited a local practice in Batemans Bay, which has got money from this NRRHIP—up to $500,000 in this particular case. It is a private practice which has used the resources which were made available out of this program to build a wing onto the practice which provides additional surgery and, at the same time, a place for teaching and training doctors and providing accommodation on site for those doctors. That is a program which is worth $45 million over four years. We have undertaken four rounds of funding thus far. They have been broadly distributed across the country, and that will continue.

It is important, I think, also to understand that that is not the only way we do our business. We are concerned about making sure that we actually work effectively with these local communities. I make this observation because it will be clear to the member for Kennedy, because of the nature of his electorate, that when we are talking about regional and remote Australia it is vastly different when we are talking about the Cape to what it is for the Central Coast of New South Wales, and the nature of the population we are serving is vastly different. With my electorate, if I talk about regional parts of the Northern Territory, I am talking about Indigenous health, largely. I know this is true for the member for Kennedy’s electorate and many parts of the north. So we are committed to making effective changes to the way in which we deliver these services across Australia, and we have made significant inputs into the developing of additional expenditures into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

But, in the context of rural health, the government is investing more than $700 million in targeted rural health programs. It is investing through the Medicare Benefits Schedule—MBS—in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the national healthcare agreements. It is providing a 45 per cent funding increase for rural programs compared to the $483 million in the last Howard government budget, when health responsibility rested with the then Minister for Health and Ageing, now Leader of the Opposition. This $483 million includes also $200 million to help tackle the shortage of doctors and health workers. Under programs which we will introduce as of 1 July of this year, 2,400 rural doctors will for the first time become eligible for grant payments to remain in rural and remote areas, a very important initiative. At the same time, that will affect the medical workforce in 500 communities across the country. That is a dramatic change from the way we have done our business in the past. It
will not solve all the problems, but it is an initiative which I think will provide significant change to the way in which we do our business and provide real opportunities for us to attract people into the bush and retain them there.

Another element of the workforce, of course—which I know the member for Lyne would be aware of—is that of overseas trained doctors. While I talked before about the workforce, what I do not think the Australian community properly comprehends is the importance of overseas trained doctors. In 2008 and 2009, there were 5,027 GPs working in rural and remote Australia. Forty-five per cent or thereabouts were overseas trained doctors—almost half. Frankly, we could not deliver primary care in the bush without overseas trained doctors. When I met these overseas trained doctors in South Australia—I met with them in Wilpena Pound—we had a very long discussion about the importance of these doctors and the respect they have within their own communities where they are working and the respect they have from their peers. I think that we need to get the message across to people that these doctors are very highly qualified and very well trained and sustain medicine in the bush. They do, and we have to recognise it.

I think that what we need to do is comprehend the total workforce picture. We need to talk about recruiting and training more doctors and having more GP training places. We need to think about how we deal with overseas trained doctors. We need to think about how we attract and retain allied health workers. We need to think about how we attract and retain nurses. We have made significant strides in that direction.

Whilst I know that the member for Lyne was not at all political in his contribution, it would be remiss of me if I did not make some observations about the Leader of the Opposition when he was the minister. We have lifted the Abbott cap and increased the GP training places by 35 per cent to over 800. We have increased by 10 per cent this year the number of training places for junior doctors to experience working in a general practice setting. We have provided additional opportunities for GP training in the bush—really important initiatives. I think they go unremarked by the opposition, I might say, simply because they are embarrassed by their own poor performance. We have invested in an extra 1,000 nurse university places. We have established Health Workforce Australia.

We know already that the Leader of the Opposition has over recent days been making fairly callous and mindless accusations on the question of ministerial responsibility. Yet we had a picture today of Abbott’s balls. He was responsible for a process of having golf balls as an initiative to attract doctors to work, and unfortunately he had forgotten about it. I just say to him: be very, very careful when making these accusations across the chamber if you neglect to think about your own opportunities when you were in government. I would say to him also that, when he is thinking about what we might do on health reform—going back to the health reform space—what he might do is look at his own poor performance, the impact of withdrawing the billion dollars, the impact of capping the number of GP training places and the impact of not addressing the issue of shortage of nurses and say what impact that total effect had on the health system.

You and I know that in rural Australia we have really felt those changes; as you rightly point out, the further away you are from the major metropolitan centres, the less you are in front of mind and the less access you historically have to the dollars. But we need to think about those things. I applaud the member for Lyne for raising them in the chamber.
The Health and Hospitals Reform Commission process has been enlightening and enlivening. I am sure you will see over coming weeks and months new changes and initiatives to the health system which will go a long way to addressing the concerns which have been raised by the member for Lyne. We will look very seriously at the 123 recommendations of the report from Dr Christine Bennett. I am absolutely, 100 per cent confident that the changes which we will bring about to the nation’s health system will be seen far and wide as bringing about the significant change that you require.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (4.08 pm)—When I first went into the New South Wales parliament in 1991, the proportion of the state budget that went to health was about 20 per cent. About one-fifth of the state’s budget was allocated to health. I am told that in New South Wales at this particular time, even though the budget is much larger, over 40 per cent is allocated to health. There would be a number of political debates as to how and why that occurs—whether the doctors or pharmaceutical companies are getting too much, whether it is management—but I think it is becoming very plain to most people that a portfolio area that is absorbing something like 40 per cent of the state’s budget cannot go much beyond that proportion. There are a number of things that have to happen there; probably the simplest one is that there has to be more money going into that system. Once you get to 50 per cent of the total in a budgetary sense, other things have to drop out: the vital necessities of the provision of services by the states, from police to education—the whole range of other activities that are demanded of the state’s budget.

So there has been this massive explosion in spending. From time to time the debate in this place is about who took what, who cut the budget and who did not do what they should have done, but there is no doubt that across Australia in the last decade or so there has been an explosion in health costs and expenditure. At some stage, I think, we as a population really have to look at what is actually going on here. There are a number of things that I think we possibly should look at, but one of them is that the Australian population may well have to pay more for their health care. It is the No. 1 issue; it always is the No. 1 issue; it will be the No. 1 issue at the next election. There will be a debate that goes on about who is going to do what in terms of health policy. At some stage the people have to recognise that, for the population that we have with the remote area issues that the minister spoke of and many other issues that we are all aware of in country areas, we are going to have to address this by injecting more money into it. Management can do only so much.

We will always debate whether we need local hospital boards or other boards, whether the Commonwealth takes it over or the states stay in charge. Those things may achieve something at the margin, but none of them are likely to achieve the outcomes that many people, particularly those who live in the country seats of the Independents who have put forward this motion today, deserve. I suggest that we either look at increasing the amount of money that we put in—and I mean that from the people rather than from the existing budget areas—or we look at other measures like the Medicare provider number that has been explored before. I know the AMA has a very large union in terms of health policy, but we have limited funds from the taxpayer and we have this, in my view, rather absurd system where the doctors can access a Medicare provider number that has been explored before. I mean that from the people rather than from the existing budget areas—or we look at other measures like the Medicare provider number and, hence, the public purse in any location they prefer rather than the location where the patient needs them. I think that is something we have to have a serious look at.
I know it is very easy to get into an argument with the doctors over that. I have nothing against private practice—doctors can practise privately wherever they are—but accessing a depleting public purse is something where I think the policy arrangements should come into play.

The minister would be well aware of the importance of the Tamworth Base Hospital redevelopment in terms of the training of medical students. The Leader of the Opposition copped a bit of flack a moment ago. I would like to pay him a compliment, because when he was Minister for Health and Ageing he came to Tamworth, looked at what was happening with the University Department of Rural Health, the relationship between the University of New England, the University of Newcastle, and the Tamworth Base Hospital and other hospitals as well, and recognised the importance of training for the future. There were many others involved, but I think the current opposition leader played no small role in the development of a medical school at the University of New England and the subsequent relationship with training facilities in Tamworth, Armidale and Taree.

I think we also have to recognise—and I am sure the minister does—the importance of the National Broadband Network to remote health, regional health, country health and health generally. This could be one of the significant ways in which costs can be saved. The delivery of some of the services that the member for Lyne mentioned could be changed in an enormous way. The National Broadband Network or access to high-speed broadband is to me the one thing that negates distance as a disadvantage of being in the country. It turns the tables. It will allow access to global specialist and teaching services in a medical sense. I see at the University of New England’s University Department of Rural Health some of the extraordinary communication services that are based there at the moment and linked into the Tamworth Base Hospital. There are some extraordinary initiatives occurring there, so I hope that at some stage we get some unity of purpose in a rollout of a national broadband network, particularly with how it relates not just to the individual but also to our health and education systems.

Another issue I want to raise briefly, if I could, is the way in which Aboriginal medical services are being treated. There have been issues, particularly in my electorate in Armidale. There is a real issue, Minister, and I am sure you would be aware of this. Given your background you would have a close look at it anyway—it is in the original documentation about the development—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—Can the member refer his remarks through the Chair to the minister. I just do not want to encourage a discussion to go across the table.

Mr WINDSOR—Okay. Thank you, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker. Through you, I ask the minister to have a close look at the terminology that was used in the original setting up of the Aboriginal medical services and the term ‘culturally significant application of health’. I think that has really dropped off in recent years. I have not seen an improvement since the change of government, but there are some very real issues there, in terms of the cultural appropriateness of the delivery of some services to Aboriginal people. Through you again, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I ask the minister would he have a look at that issue and particularly how it has impacted on the Armidale Indigenous community.

Small-town doctors are another issue that has been raised today. It is a very important issue, a critical issue. In my home town of Werris Creek, which has only 1,700 people, we are having difficulties with doctors again.
We have had some tremendous people in that particular area—and in Quirindi and other smaller communities around the region. I think it applies right across the board. We really are having difficulties with the ageing workforce. I understand the minister has said that we are very dependent on overseas doctors. We are, and we are very grateful for them. This is something we really need to concentrate on.

In conclusion I would just like to—through you again, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker—ask the minister if he would look at the arrangements in terms of the Council of Australian Governments’ 2006 through to 2011 program on suicide prevention and mental health and follow-up on where the suicide prevention arrangements are at, particularly some of the 24-hour hotline arrangements, because I have been told that in various states we are not achieving the outcomes that COAG set out.

In conclusion, I endorse what others have said, in terms of those who are in the health workforce. It is all very well from time to time for people to play politics with the health system, but I think we all have to remember that there are very hardworking individuals within all those systems, and the very great majority of them work extraordinarily hard for the benefit of our people. I think it is quite appropriate that a forum such as this recognises their work and thanks them for their efforts for our people.

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (4.18 pm)—We welcome the debate that has been initiated by the member for Lyne. That was the second speech that he has given in the chamber this afternoon; the first was in the guise of a question—

Mr Oakeshott—I learnt from the master, the member for Kennedy.
glaring inequities of access to health services in Australia. You can slice and dice those inequities a number of ways—for example, you can do it by ethnicity or by income—many of which apply in metropolitan Australia. But perhaps the most glaring inequity of access is geography. The most glaring graph I remember from the Bennett report is the one that indicated that the further away you get from a central GPO, the less MBS services you access as an Australian citizen every year. I would like to think that that is because the further away you get from a GPO the healthier you are, but we know that that is not the case. In fact we know that there are, if anything, greater health challenges for Australians living in inner-regional, outer-regional, remote and very remote Australia. There is a range of very clear recommendations that the government is currently considering from the Bennett report that go specifically to that inequity of access.

The Bennett report tells us that it is all well and good to have a universal entitlement through the Medicare system, and that universal entitlement is something that Australians cherish very deeply. But, if there is no equity of access—particularly for rural and remote Australians—as well as an equity of entitlement, then the universality of entitlement is a bit of a chimera. In addition to considering the far-reaching recommendations from the Bennett report, we are already acting on some of these inequities.

There are already a range of Commonwealth-led initiatives in rural and regional Australia. The minister has talked about a number of them, as have the member for New England and the member for Lyne. The workforce challenges in rural and remote Australia are perhaps the most significant legacy from the last 10 years or so. The minister talked about them as well. GPs are so important in rural and remote Australia. We know that in addition to the primary-care services they provide throughout Australia, they are often the front-line doctors in emergency departments and they are often the front-line doctors who do shifts in the broader hospital settings.

There is a particular challenge to get GPs to rural and remote Australia and to get them to stay. We know that the previous government’s program of rural incentives was a broken program. It was operating on the basis of 16-year-old data and it simply failed. We have overhauled that program and introduced a new GP rural incentives program based on up-to-date census data. We have introduced real incentives for GPs to shift from metropolitan Australia to rural Australia. If a GP shifts from a major city like Sydney or Melbourne to very remote Australia, that GP will now receive a relocation grant of up to $120,000—a very significant increase on the previous program. If a GP moves from a smaller city like Launceston or Hobart to very remote Australia, that GP will now receive a relocation grant of up to $60,000.

As well, we have introduced a range of supports for rural GPs to help them get through the very difficult burdens that they bear—burdens that metropolitan GPs just do not experience. Metropolitan GPs work incredibly hard. They have a range of support mechanisms that rural GPs just do not have—the capacity to take leave for professional development, the capacity to take leave to have a holiday and the capacity to take time off if a family emergency arises. These are challenges day in, day out for rural GPs. We have introduced the Rural GP Locum Program to allow locums to work with GPs in rural areas, including an urban GP incentive program, which will provide professional development opportunities for urban GPs if they undertake to spend four
weeks of paid time working as a locum in rural and regional Australia.

We also confronted very stark infrastructure deficits in the rural and regional health system in Australia. Notwithstanding that we have not yet made a formal response to the Bennett report, a range of programs are already underway trying to deal with that infrastructure deficit. Of the GP superclinics that are underway—and 28 of the 36 are under contract—half of the rural GP superclinics will be in rural and regional Australia.

I also want to talk about an experience I had with the member for Franklin last week when I was in Tasmania in relation to the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program, NRRHIP—a program from the 2008 budget involving $46 million over four years to build infrastructure, hard infrastructure or equipment, for communities in rural and regional Australia with fewer than 20,000 people. The member for Franklin and I visited a health service in Geeveston, which is within the Huon Valley in south-east Tasmania. Geeveston had struggled for a considerable amount of time to get a GP. With the cooperation of the Huon Valley council, they managed to upgrade the old GP office and get a range of cutting-edge equipment. Two new GPs—importantly, not just a male GP but also a female GP—were attracted to work in that area with the up-to-date equipment. They will service not only people who live in the area but also the 500,000 or so people who visit the airwalk—a major tourist attraction in Tasmania. Some occasionally fall off the airwalk and cut their heads open, as some poor tourist did when we visited the centre. These things are making real differences already in rural and regional Australia.

The regional cancer centres were mentioned by the minister—$560 million out of the health and hospitals infrastructure fund to try and close the shameful gap that Australia has in cancer outcomes between metropolitan cancer sufferers and rural and regional cancer sufferers. As members in this House know, the invitation to apply for those cancer centres closed in January this year and is now under consideration by the government, and in due course by the Health and Hospitals Fund assessment processes. These are very important things that will try and close the gap and do what I said earlier about improving the equity of access to health services.

A range of other training infrastructures are in place, and I would like to mention Charles Sturt University dental school, which has five new locations—and I have opened three of them. These schools will train rural doctors to work there, but while being trained they will also deliver up to 30,000 low-fee consultations in those areas which have gross shortages of dental procedures. There is a range of work we are already doing to try and close this gap. The gap is so significant and the challenges so immense in a country as big and diverse as Australia that we are not going to do it overnight. But we welcome the opportunity to debate these points in a constructive way through an MPI such as the one initiated by the member for Lyne and which was supported by the other Independents. This process takes resolve and the government have the resolve to do it. 

(Time expired)

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (4.28 pm)—We have a situation where the culture of the health department in Queensland has got particularly bad. They are simply closing hospitals. They closed the Gordonvale hospital—they call it a hospital, but it provided none of the facilities of an ordinary hospital. We are very afraid that Babinda will also close. Moves have been initiated to close Atherton and Mareeba. An area with nearly 100,000 people will be left with no doctors.
They will have to drive an hour down the road to Cairns to see a doctor, but that road is often closed during the wet season. It will be interesting to see what happens if the health department gets their way.

Minister, to a very large degree, I think your ministry will be decided on whether you overcome a problem that was created by, I think, the previous government—though maybe it was the Keating government. We always got first- or second-year doctors. They came to country centres where they got a wide range of experience and they fitted into the system very swiftly. They got very big incomes in these centres. Those doctors provided hospital treatment outside of the big capital cities. When the provider number was introduced it was not provided to a doctor unless he had spent two years in a major hospital, and that meant that our doctors who were going to the country areas were then not able to. They all had to go into the major hospitals, leaving us in a parlous situation. If you need any indicator of the failure of the former Deputy Prime Minister and the former Leader of the Nationals, Mr Vaile, you need only look to the big rally they had in his area and still nothing was done to overcome this problem. There has been a little bit done but very little.

The net result of that is that almost all of the doctors in the mid-west, gulf and Mount Isa are foreign doctors. We deeply appreciate them coming here and the work that they do. In fact, my own doctor in Charters Towers fits into this category and is a very excellent person in every way. But, by the same token, there is something terribly wrong with a country that cannot provide its own doctors—and the provider number is at the heart of this problem. We had the doctors there; now we do not. The problem that arose was the provider number. If you go to one of these country centres you will have a provider number whilst you are there but when you want to move out of those country centres you will not have a provider number—so you are two years behind the people who went to the city hospitals.

I represent the greatest number of aged-care facilities of any member in this place because, unfortunately, rural Australia is an ageing population. There are large demands put upon these aged-care facilities. There are places with only 20 or 30 employees who have had to employ another two or three people to meet audit requirements. They are not servicing the people who are in the aged-care facility; they are protecting the backsides of the public servants down here in Canberra. That is what is happening and that is the only purpose they are serving. It is simply a protective mechanism for people down here. When I have spoken to them, every one of my facilities has raised the issue of these huge administrative demands. In one facility there have been 10 audits—they call them support services—in a year. All of the senior people in the aged-care facility had to do nothing for a week whilst these people were sitting around doing nothing except protecting their own backsides.

The other phenomenon which I must bring to the attention of the House is that there are empty beds available in Brisbane but there are no beds in our areas. We have got a very great shortage. There is a great necessity to rebuild centres such as Mount Isa’s aged-care facility. It is 35 years old and was built in a most inappropriate manner in those days. These places need to be replaced—(Time expired)

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (4.33 pm)—I rise to speak in strong support of the motion moved by the honourable member for Lyne. The Commonwealth government is involved in regional health and in aged care, and under the Rudd government it is involved in a bigger way than ever before. I will give a few
examples and then I will turn to some of the comments from the honourable member for Lyne. I will also associate myself with the comments of the minister and the parliamentary secretary, and those from my colleagues from New England and Kennedy—I was going to say, ‘Katter’.

Mr Katter—Kennedy died with a dozen spears in his back. I am likely to go the same way.

Ms Saffin—Okay. We have a federal Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery. We did not have that before and that in itself speaks volumes. It is not just the name; he is a minister who is actually out and about in rural and regional Australia, and is coming to my electorate of Page—not that I am verballing. I cannot complain; I have had many visits. We have an Office of Rural Health. We did not have an Office of Rural Health before, and it is in Canberra. Normally I would say that is not a good thing but it is a good thing because health at an Australian government level needs to be here. It has brought together a whole range of programs—in fact, about 60—that were dispersed all over the place without any cogent plan around them.

We are putting more money into the Australian Health Care Agreement. I know the honourable member for Lyne in moving this motion was not attacking and was doing it as a supportive motion, but I do have to say that under the Australian Health Care Agreement the previous government—and the minister at the time was the honourable member for Warringah—ripped out a billion dollars plus some more. It would take me more than my five minutes to go through them all. The previous government froze GP training places. I know there are issues to do with provider numbers, as the honourable member for Kennedy said, but it is the freezing of GP training places that created this backlog. It is a problem that has started to unfreeze but it will take years for that to kick in.

We are delivering more training to regional centres and through various universities, particularly the university department of rural health in my area. The honourable member for Lyne and I share the North Coast Area Health Service and other health services. This is the same with the honourable member for New England. We have a border and we share Urbenville. We got money for the Urbenville medical clinic in the budget—nearly $300,000—so that we could keep the two GPs there. That was in the last budget. There is reform, such as the $560 million available for regional cancer care centres. From our area there are two submissions that have gone up. The honourable member for Lyne and I know about both of those and we hope that they get up.

The member for Lyne also talked in his contribution about the community packages and the aged people in hospitals who do not need to be there. I stand to be corrected, but I think that nearly 2,000 people nationally may be in hospitals who do not need to be there. It is a long-term problem and it has not been addressed before, but I do know that 12,000 new aged-care places have been allocated and that will go some way to start dealing with that problem. First, those people should not be in the hospital; second, it is not the appropriate care; and, third, it uses the wrong resources.

The member for Lyne talked about RDF. I made a submission to the Garling inquiry on that very issue, so I am in agreement with him there. Whatever happens, and we are going to see reform in health, we need RDF to kick in according to the formula as it is. So I am in complete agreement on that point.

The other issue is the Bennett report and the 123 recommendations which are being
worked through now for the major health reform. That work actually shows that one’s postcode makes a difference to one’s health outcome. That is a critical issue for rural and regional Australia and it is one that we have all turned our minds to in order to correct.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! The time for the discussion has expired.

EDUCATION SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS AMENDMENT (RE-REGISTRATION OF PROVIDERS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2009

Consideration of Senate Message

Message received from the Senate acquainting the House that the Senate does not insist on its amendments disagreed to by the House.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME) BILL 2010

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME) BILL (No. 2) 2010

SAFETY, REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT BILL 2010

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (NEW ZEALAND OVERSEAS TRAINED DOCTORS) BILL 2010

Assent

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

NATIONAL CONSUMER CREDIT PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 February, on motion by Mr Bowen:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (4.39 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment Bill 2010. The bill supports the referral of state powers under the National Consumer Credit Protection Act which was passed by the parliament last year. The credit act implemented a number of reforms, including a national licensing regime for all providers of consumer credit and services across Australia, including responsible lending conduct requirements for licensees. In principle, the coalition supported the credit act and the efforts to enhance the national regulation of consumer credit by harmonising laws across states and territories. We worked with the government to enhance the bill’s operation by making amendments in the Senate which would require credit providers to verify information provided in a preliminary credit assessment and provide reasons for rejecting applications for hardship variations and stays of enforcement.

Consumer credit is an important area of the Australian economy. Households need to know that they are borrowing with a strong national regulatory system in place. Demand for credit has dropped significantly over the course of the global financial downturn. RBA statistics on personal lending show a drop in demand of around 10 per cent since the peak in May 2008. This is a drop of some $16.4 billion over the 19 months to December 2009. It is estimated that consumer spending accounts for around 70 per cent of demand in the economy. Therefore, any significant drop in credit demand and the availability of credit has an impact on the economy as a whole. Consumers need the confidence of a national system to borrow and purchase under the backdrop of a stable regulatory environment. The Howard government recognised the need to standardise credit regulation and started the process of
uniformity by releasing the national consumer credit code in March 2006. In the two years after the code was released, demand for personal credit jumped by $32.8 billion to March 2008—around a 28 per cent increase.

The uniformity of credit regulation is the logical outcome of the introduction of the credit code and COAG discussions under both the Howard and Rudd governments. A stable regulatory environment for credit is needed, particularly when the government’s spending and massive debt threaten to push up interest rates and limit the ability of consumers to afford credit.

The amendment bill allows the Commonwealth to assume responsibility for national credit regulation by allowing an effective referral of state powers. This will allow the legislation to commence on 1 July 2010. The states agreed with the Commonwealth to modify the credit act in December last year to insert carve-out provisions allowing certain subject matter to be excluded from the state referral bills. The carve-out provisions allow the states to protect their constitutional rights over certain powers such as state taxes and duties as well as powers in relation to real property registrations. The states will have the option of adopting the Commonwealth’s legislation or enacting their own referral bill.

Under the amendment bill, a state’s referral will remain effective if the referral act provides that the referral will terminate in certain circumstances where the uniform regulation will impede upon state powers or where amendments to the credit act do not include excluded items. This will ensure that the states can refer their powers without limitation whilst ensuring their constitutional rights are protected. The amendments have no impact on the operation of the credit act and will simply allow an effective referral.

The coalition support the national credit regime and we support this bill, which allows the regime to operate effectively. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (4.43 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment Bill 2010, and thank the member for Cowper for his contribution. If you go up to level 2 of Parliament House, you will see a piece of legislation in one of the display cases there. It is a piece of legislation that came out of the British parliament and was signed in July 1900 by Queen Victoria. It is an act of the British parliament that creates a country called Australia. At the time, the colonies of Australia came together and went off to their parliament, their Queen, and said, ‘We’d like to be a country.’ They got together even though they had lots of differences. They had different customs houses, where there were lots of arguments between the states. I am sure most of us in our youth would have seen some of the remnants of those cross-border divisions, like the customs house in Brisbane, a beautiful old building, which is now used by the University of Queensland for functions and the like. My mum grew up in a border town called Goondiwindi, which I think is in your electorate, Deputy Speaker Scott. The customs house in Goondiwindi is where the New South Wales and Queensland governments squared off over putting excise on each others’ goods et cetera.

Back in 1900, when Queen Victoria signed off on the legislation to create Australia, state borders were significant; they meant a lot of things. In 2010, we look at state borders and see—I am sure the minister at the table would agree—that they are only particularly relevant on things like State of Origin night, when our border is very important. When we are transitioning to a modern economy capable of meeting the challenges of the future these borders have to become

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almost redundant when it comes to business. As we know, Australian businesses, large, medium or small, are not interested in state borders. They are interested in government getting on with cutting red tape so that they can continue to create jobs and keep our economy humming along.

Late last year I was pleased to address the South West Chamber of Commerce in the electorate of Moreton about the government’s reform agenda. This is a terrific group representing the interests of local businesses and community groups, and I am proud to be its patron. Thanks to people like their president, Alice Langford, their vice-president, Robyn Kennedy, their Treasurer, Scott McDonald, their secretary, Ian Dorrepaal, and their publicity officer, Travis Windsor, the South West Chamber of Commerce are supporting business people throughout my electorate. They are good, they are getting better and they are also getting bigger. For any minister who wants to come along, I am sure I can arrange a meeting with the South West Chamber of Commerce. It is groups like this that are telling government we need to succeed in cutting red tape and introducing other measures to boost our nation’s productivity. I am sure anyone who read the Intergenerational report, or even the media coverage of it, would know that it is a horror story—though not a work of fiction—and that we need to do what we can to improve productivity.

Increasingly, companies operate across state borders, and the various state laws that have evolved since Federation are one of the major hindrances to productivity. That is why, through COAG, the Rudd government is shredding red tape, removing duplication and delivering greater consistency across the country. It has been said that Australia, a nation of 22 million people, has more red tape than the European Community where there are approximately 300 million people. That is a bad accusation and unfortunately too accurate. Part of the Rudd government’s cooperative approach to deregulation, rather than the big stick style of our predecessors, is always to reach for the carrot first. We have the big stick in the other hand, just in case, but it is best to get the states working cooperatively.

All Commonwealth, state and territory governments signed an agreement for one national credit law in December last year, and we have already passed our national credit legislation in this parliament. This bill is another part of this process and part of our commitment to a uniform national credit law. It delivers on a request from state governments that we modify the referral bill to exclude certain matters, such as state taxation—I think that was a particular concern of the Victorians, and we have to keep them happy whenever possible—and it does so by amending the National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009 to limit the scope of the referral power.

While these measures are relatively insignificant, they demonstrate the Rudd government’s commitment to working with the states and responding to their needs rather than steamrolling them through a Commonwealth agenda. The Commonwealth does not have constitutional authority to legislate in these matters, so without the agreed referral from our progressive state and territory governments these reforms would not have been possible.

Unified national credit laws are another cog in the flywheel of achievement for Australian businesses. We know that business is the engine room of the economy, so in response to the global financial crisis the Rudd government passed key measures to protect our small and medium-sized businesses especially. The government reduced quarterly PAYG instalments for small businesses dur-
This initiative gave small business a cash flow boost when they needed it most. The government provided direct assistance to small businesses through a special small-business tax break. Small businesses were able to claim an additional 50 per cent tax deduction for eligible assets purchased before the end of 2009 and installed before the end of 2010. The tax break provided small businesses with even greater incentive to invest in new capital items, such as computer hardware and business vehicles, to ensure competitiveness for the recovery—and they did invest. I am sure the member for Dawson, who is in the chamber, would note in his morning walks around his electorate that there are a lot of new utes out there. A lot of tradies took advantage of the initiative—the dual cab ute seems to be the ute of choice in 2010—and certainly the businesses in my electorate that sell such utes thank the Rudd government for that initiative.

Other Rudd government measures included an on-time payment guarantee for contracts of up to $1 million between small business and the Commonwealth government, a $4 million investment in small business advisory services, and making it easier for small business to participate in tenders to sell such goods and services. I am sure the member for Dawson, who is in the chamber, would note in his morning walks around his electorate that there are a lot of new utes out there. A lot of tradies took advantage of the initiative—the dual cab ute seems to be the ute of choice in 2010—and certainly the businesses in my electorate that sell such utes thank the Rudd government for that initiative.

Other Rudd government measures included an on-time payment guarantee for contracts of up to $1 million between small business and the Commonwealth government, a $4 million investment in small business advisory services, and making it easier for small business to participate in tenders to sell to the government. It is all part of the Rudd government’s efforts to build a seamless national economy by reducing inconsistent and overlapping business regulation.

Our reform program covers an unprecedented 27 areas of overlapping and inconsistent regulation across the Commonwealth, states and territories. For example, under one of the reforms, businesses that operate across state boundaries will no longer need to register their business names and pay a separate fee in each state and territory. They will have to register only once at a central national registry. And tradespeople who move from one state to another—and there are many of them—will not have to apply and pay for a separate licence in each state.

This is what we call the end of ‘rail gauge economics’. Things have moved on a little since the colonies came together back in 1900, when Queen Victoria signed that British act of parliament. Deputy Speaker, can I take you to a part of your electorate, Wallangarra, just south of Stanthorpe, which is a town that straddles the border. Once upon a time trains used to stop there to switch to the Queensland gauge, but now things have moved on. Wallangarra is a town with a great pub—I have spent a night there—but it is not as significant as it once was, even during World War II, when so many people had to get out of the train and get onto another one. Things have changed since then. Acacia Ridge in my electorate is similar.

Reforming business regulation by freeing up time spent complying with red tape obligations and restoring incentives for entrepreneurship is crucial to the success of the Rudd government’s productivity-raising microeconomic reform agenda. This bill is another step along the way. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (4.52 pm)—in reply—I thank the member for Cowper and the member for Moreton for their contributions and I acknowledge the support of the opposition for this bill. The purpose of the National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment Bill 2010 is to amend the Commonwealth’s recently enacted national consumer credit legislation to ensure an effective referral of power from the states to the Commonwealth in relation to consumer credit. This bill will provide the flexibility sought by the states to enable them to refer their powers for consumer credit regulation to the Commonwealth.
In particular, this bill amends the National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009 to recognise certain exclusions to the scope of the amendment power in the state referral bills and to enable an effective reference of the state power to be made either with or without any exclusions to that power. The bill will also allow the states to refer their regulatory powers in relation to consumer credit by adopting the Commonwealth’s national consumer credit legislation. Following the Commonwealth’s enactment of this bill, the states wishing to refer powers, excluding certain subject matters or using the adoption approach, will be able to do so by enacting their referral bills. As I noted in my second reading speech to this bill, the scope and effectiveness of the national credit protection regime will not be affected by any such variation to the referral or whether states refer or adopt the national credit legislation.

I am pleased to say that we are close to realising our vision of a single national credit regulatory framework. The development of this landmark reform has only been possible through the commitment of the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments, working in a spirit of cooperation, to realise this important COAG reform—a single, uniform, national consumer credit law, which is so important for productivity, efficiency and consumer protection. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (4.54 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT (FINANCIAL MARKET SUPERVISION) BILL 2010

Cognate bill:

CORPORATIONS (FEES) AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 February, on motion by Mr Bowen:

That these bills be now read a second time.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (4.55 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Corporations Amendment (Financial Market Supervision) Bill 2010 and the Corporations (Fees) Amendment Bill 2010. These bills give effect to the government’s announcement in August 2009 of their intention to provide the Australian Securities and Investment Commission with powers to perform supervision of trading on Australian domestic financial markets. Both sides of this parliament have had similar intentions for some time. The bills provide that ASIC will consolidate the current individual supervisory responsibilities by imposing market integrity rules on each market operator. ASIC will recover the costs of supervision by levying market operators, who will recover the fees from brokers in a manner similar to the way the ASX currently funds the enforcement of its existing rules.

The legislation has a direct impact on the ASX, which is by far the largest market operator in Australia. By transferring responsibilities to ASIC, the legislation will end the perceived conflict of interest that the ASX has as a market operator and regulator. Whilst the industry has constantly pointed out that the ASX has discharged its obligations very well over the years, the perceived conflict of interest is an issue, particularly for foreign investors. The current system also effectively precludes foreign market opera-
tors from operating in Australia. The current regulatory arrangements allow the situation where the market operator’s competitors would be supervised by the ASX. Because of this situation, the government has not granted an Australian operating licence to a market competitor at this point in time.

By removing barriers to entry for market operators, we can promote competition and encourage best practice between market operators. Allowing foreign investors to enter a more competitive Australian financial market is an important step towards improving Australia’s standing as a global financial centre. The financial services sector is already an important part of the Australian economy, accounting for 7.5 per cent of Australia’s GDP and employing over 390,000 people. Improving the sector’s performance and opportunities on a global scale should be a goal for both sides of parliament.

The Johnson report, entitled *Australia as a financial centre: building on our strengths*, which focused on establishing Australia as a financial hub, demonstrates that Australia has some excellent opportunities for expanding our financial sector, but we need to ensure that our markets are competitive and working efficiently so that we can confidently promote the competitive advantage of our financial sector to the rest of the world. Encouraging competition between market operators is an excellent starting point. It will allow brokers to choose the most appropriate forum and it will encourage the ASX to evolve into an internationally competitive operator.

However, the ASX did raise number of concerns with the legislation which have largely been addressed by Treasury. For example, there is the issue of whether foreign markets should be subject to ASIC’s market integrity rules. The current regulations provide that an overseas market can only be granted an operating licence where the minister is satisfied that the regulatory regime in the foreign jurisdiction is sufficiently equivalent to Australia’s. Whilst we can debate which kind of oversight in Australia will provide the most competitive market, it is not the legislation’s intention to consider the issue.

Importantly, the legislation provides ASIC with alternatives to civil proceedings as a means to enforce the rules. The measure will give ASIC similar powers to those held by the ASX to deal with breaches of the rules, including the power to require a person in breach of the rules to make a payment or an undertaking to institute remedial measures as an alternative to civil proceedings. The provisions will prevent the courts from dealing with additional litigation relating to market operators. ASIC have had some high-profile failures in the courts recently and the merits of ASIC pursuing each case are being questioned by some. During Senate estimates, ASIC Chairman D’Aloisio indicated that ASIC took the public interest and deterrence aspects into account when deciding to pursue cases of this nature. Transferring supervisory powers to ASIC will allow them to work with the government to address the public interest and deterrence aspects of enforcing market operating rules. This will reduce costs when considering the legal merits of pursuing certain cases.

Comments have been made as to whether ASIC is equipped to handle market regulation. It is true that the responsibilities of ASIC have grown under this government. Too often ASIC have been forced to stretch their resources as a result of the government’s interference in the market. The bank deposit guarantee is an example. ASIC have been forced to administer withdrawals from mortgage trust accounts on hardship provisions after mortgage trusts froze redemptions because of the guarantee-initiated mass
withdrawals from investment funds and into deposit accounts. The government’s actions forced mortgage trusts to freeze redemptions to prevent mass depreciation of their funds. Investors still have their money frozen away unless they can assess it under hardship provisions through ASIC.

ASIC should not be required to mop up unintended consequences of Labor government policies. Like with regulation of short selling and margin lending, too often ASIC has been required to get involved in policy rather than using its resources for its core responsibility of administering regulation. ASIC already have market powers to investigate misconduct such as insider trading, and they are the logical choice to assume supervisory responsibilities. Through committee oversight and estimates hearings, parliament will have a role to ensure that ASIC is discharging its responsibilities effectively.

How ASIC deals with the then stakeholders in the industry is essential to enforcement of the rules. The majority of industry stakeholders say they are already in a good relationship with ASIC. The industry is urging parliament to pass this bill to provide certainty and confidence to the sector. The coalition supports the measures. They will improve competition in the financial sector and free the ASX from its perceived conflict of interest. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (5.01 pm)—I am pleased to speak in support of the Corporations Amendment (Financial Market Supervision) Bill 2010 and the Corporations (Fees) Amendment Bill 2010. Australia has one of the most robust financial systems in the world. We saw that through the global financial crisis, and we also see that in the movement of funds to Australia over the last few years as Australia, particularly Sydney, I would suggest, moves towards becoming a financial hub of Asia through some of the initiatives of the Rudd government—initiatives that were mocked during the 2007 election campaign, I seem to recall. However, there seems to be some egg on the faces of those opposite as funds do move to Australia because we do have such good regulation and such good governance. It shows foresight on the part of the Rudd government to see what we might be. There is no greater proof of this than how we performed, obviously, in the global financial crisis. I will take my hat off to the former member for Higgins and Treasurer, Peter Costello, for some of the initiatives that he brought in in terms of making sure we do have a strong financial system. He was following on from the work and reforms of Paul Keating and Bob Hawke, but I do acknowledge some of his contributions, which did help us during the global financial crisis.

However, the Rudd government believes that more can be done to ensure the integrity and transparency of the financial markets. In August last year the Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law announced that the responsibility for supervision of Australia’s domestic licensed financial markets would be transferred from market operators, which is essentially self-regulation, to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. Anyone who operates a financial market in Australia must obtain a licence to do so or otherwise be exempted by the minister. This bill ensures that licensees are no longer required to supervise the markets. If you like, in shorthand, there will no longer be Caesar judging Caesar. Under this bill ASIC will be responsible for supervising trading activities by stockbrokers which take place on a licensed financial market. Individual markets, such as the Australian Securities Exchange, will continue to have responsibility for supervising the entities listed on them.
The government believes that there is no need to change the way ASIC and the Australian stock exchange currently work together to supervise listed entities. ASIC is well placed to take on the role of whole-of-market supervisor. Unlike some of the members opposite, I actually have a lot of faith in ASIC. I acknowledge that there have been a couple of legal hiccups lately. It is interesting that some of the prosecutions that were launched under the previous government actually ended up not being successful, and now those opposite say, ‘I don’t know why they took this on.’ It is a typical case of Monday’s experts saying, ‘No, I wouldn’t have done that.’ It is easy to be an expert on Monday. Obviously you need to pick the form on the Friday before the game. As I said, some of those prosecutions were commenced under the Howard government. I do actually have a lot of faith in ASIC. The balancing act of the public interest test is difficult to get right. You also have to be able to prove in the court, to the satisfaction of the judicial system, some things which are very complicated. Recently, as part of the caucus economics committee, I went for a tour of the ASX. I had no idea how complicated the cheats out there can be, but the ASX are even more complicated at tracking down these irregularities. It is incredible. I was very impressed. So that will continue.

Not only will ASIC provide transparent and independent oversight of the market; as a government agency it also removes any perceived conflict of interest. This is in line with Australia’s G20 commitment to protect the integrity of financial markets by avoiding any such conflicts. A discussion topic quite focused my understanding, at the G20 meetings. It also mirrors the trend towards centralised or independent regulation in other countries. Instead of a situation where all licensees act as supervisors, ASIC will consolidate this responsibility into one entity, streamlining supervision and enforcement and providing unified supervision. One whole-of-market supervisor will provide far greater stability and integrity for Australia’s financial market.

The bill also empowers ASIC to set market integrity rules, with full enforcement powers to respond quickly to emerging market situations. Any breach of these rules can be enforced through the courts. Once up and running, this new function is expected to cost around $1.8 million a year, which will be met through cost recovery. The related bill before the House, the fees bill, ensures ASIC will be able to recover the cost of supervision. Under this provision ASIC will be able to collect fees from the financial entities which they regulate. I am sure most people would agree that the costs of financial regulation should be borne by those who benefit from it. How these fees will be calculated will be contained in the regulations which are currently being developed. This bill needs to be passed soon to ensure ASIC has enough lead time to prepare for its new role from October this year and to ensure a new era of transparency of our financial markets. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (5.07 pm)—I rise to lend support to the National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment Bill 2010. This bill seeks to amend the credit act that was passed in November 2009. I acknowledge the Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law across the table and thank him for his generosity. The purpose of the bill is to refer powers or allow powers to be referred from the state to allow the bill to be enacted. The bill will seek to implement a uniform law for the regulation of consumer credit. It will implement phase 1 of the Council of Australian Government’s agreements from the beginning of 2008 to allow the responsibility to be
assumed for the regulation of consumer credit.

The original bill that came to the House in November last year was intended, and I believe still intends, to be the final act to bring all of the consumer credit and financial matters from the state across to the Commonwealth. This will be the last move to ensure that all issues with respect to financial regulation regimes, consumer credit and the like will be governed and taken care of by one power set within the Commonwealth. This in itself is a good thing. One has to argue that it took the global financial crisis for the states to realise that the need for credit to be regulated by one body within one power was indeed a good and necessary thing. The credit act will commence on 1 July this year. However, it is noted that the government cannot enact a uniform regulatory framework in the absence of referral of powers from the Senate. Section 51 of the Constitution requires a move for those powers to be referred. The states—

Mr Bowen interjecting—

Mr ROBERT—We have moved on? Well, the states have referred their powers and that is a good thing!

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (5.09 pm)—in reply—I do thank those honourable members who have contributed to this debate, the member for Cowper, the member for Moreton and in his own very special way the member for Fadden. While I may quarrel with some of the points the member for Cowper made, I will not on this occasion go through those and I would acknowledge the constructive approach he has taken to this very important legislation. The Corporations Amendment (Financial Market Supervision) Bill 2010 does give effect to a government decision to transfer responsibility for supervision of Australia’s domestic licensed financial markets from market operators to ASIC.

The reforms as set out in the bill will change the way financial markets in Australia are supervised. These changes will further enhance the integrity of Australia’s financial markets and will contribute to the goal of making Australia a financial hub. It is important that the supervision of Australia’s financial markets be transparent and independent. It is also important that any actual or perceived conflicts of interest be avoided. Consequently, it is appropriate for an agency of the government to perform this important function.

The decision to transfer responsibility for supervision of Australia’s financial markets to ASIC is a significant one which will stand the operation of Australian financial markets in good stead into the future. By removing the requirement for markets to supervise themselves, this bill meets Australia’s G20 commitment to protect the integrity of financial markets by avoiding conflicts of interest. This reform is also in line with the move towards centralised or independent regulation in leading jurisdictions. ASIC is well placed to take on the role of whole-of-market supervisor and has been fully resourced to perform this role. ASIC’s role as whole-of-market supervisor will enhance the stability and integrity of the market.

In addition, the bill provides ASIC with a wide range of enforcement options which will enable ASIC to respond swiftly to emerging market situations. Supervision by ASIC will consolidate the current individual supervisory responsibilities into one entity, streamlining supervision and enforcement and providing unified supervision of trading on the market.

To enable the shadow Assistant Treasurer some time to get into the chamber for the...
next bill I might just take one or two more minutes to explain that this is a reform which is extremely important for the operation of Australia as a financial services hub. It is important, as other honourable members have commented, that the integrity of Australia’s financial markets not only be completely transparent but be seen to be completely transparent. The government took the view, correctly, that this is a role best played by a government instrumentality in the form of ASIC and that it was inappropriate for the Australian Securities Exchange to supervise itself. Should the government take the decision to introduce competition, it would be inappropriate for the ASX to supervise its competitors. Therefore, this is an appropriate bill which I commend to the House.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (5.12 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

CORPORATIONS (FEES) AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 February, on motion by Mr Bowen:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (5.13 pm)—in reply—The Corporations (Fees) Amendment Bill 2010 amends the Corporations (Fees) Act 2001 to allow a fee to be charged to market operators in respect of market supervision functions which the main bill vests in the corporate regulator ASIC. At present market operators are responsible for supervision, the cost of which they pass on to participants. In taking on this role ASIC will pass on the cost of supervising markets to the market operators on a cost recovery basis. The regulations will specify how the fee will be calculated and when it will be imposed. I commend this bill to the House.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (5.14 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (5.14 pm)—I move:

That consideration of government business order of the day No. 4, Higher Education Support Amendment (University College London) Bill 2010 be postponed to a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2009 GST ADMINISTRATION MEASURES) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 February, on motion by Dr Emerson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (5.15 pm)—I am pleased to speak on the Tax Laws Amendment (2009 GST Administration Measures) Bill 2009. This bill was introduced into the House on 25 November 2009 and implements some of the 46 recommendations made by the Board of Taxation from its re-
view of the legal framework for the administration of the GST. I would like to say at the beginning that the coalition is supporting the passage of this bill through the House and the other place as it continues, substantially, a legislative program that was set in place by the last government.

There are six schedules in the bill and I will only briefly address each one. Schedule 1 implements recommendation 20 of the board’s report by introducing a four-year time limit for taxpayers to claim input tax credits and fuel tax credits. Schedule 1 will require taxpayers to claim any input tax credit or fuel tax credit within four years of the date that the credits are attributable. It was considered reasonable that beyond four years such claims probably should not be made. Schedule 1 also contains some exception to the four-year time limit to provide for the circumstances where the GST liability of a taxpayer changes. The amendments in schedule 1 take effect from budget night 2009.

Schedule 2 implements recommendation 31 of the board’s report by allowing residents of Australia’s external territories to claim refunds of GST and wine equalisation tax under the Tourist Refund Scheme if the goods are exported to the external territories after they are acquired. The changes in schedule 2 will apply to acquisitions that take place from 1 July 2010.

Schedule 3 implements recommendation 40 of the board’s report by allowing intermediaries that are not recognised by the common law as agents to act as principals for GST purposes and use the simplified accounting provisions. These amendments will apply to those who facilitate acquisitions and supplies between parties but who do not actually make the supply. Business would welcome that. Those changes do cut down on what would otherwise be some quite convoluted arrangements for the accounting and record-keeping provisions. The changes in schedule 3 will apply to acquisitions that take place from 1 July 2010.

Schedule 4 implements recommendation 41 of the board’s report by clarifying the uncertainty in the law regarding the application of GST to gambling operators who make GST-free supplies. The amendments ensure that the GST treatment of GST-free gambling supplies is consistent with other GST-free supplies. The amendments reflect the way that the Commissioner of Taxation currently administers the law. The changes in schedule 4 will apply from the first quarter after this bill receives royal assent.

Schedule 5 implements recommendation 44 of the board’s report by clarifying the law to specify that overclaimed refunds are due and payable on the same date that the overclaim is made. Schedule 5 ensures that there is a consistent treatment of the overclaimed refund to match the underpaid liability. And schedule 6 implements recommendation 46 of the board’s report by removing the inconsistent outcomes that arise when supplies are made to associate entities.

As I said at the outset, the coalition supports the measures in this bill, and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (5.18 pm)—I speak in support of the Tax Laws Amendment (2009 Budget Measures No. 1) Bill 2009. I will not speak for very long in relation to this matter, but it is important to get a bit of history into this.

The government did not want to review the scope of the GST, nor the amount or level of GST that is charged on goods and services throughout Australia. On 11 June, the then Assistant Treasurer, the Hon. Chris Bowen—and I see he is in the House—announced that the Board of Taxation would undertake a review of how to make the GST work better.
for all of us, how to ensure flexibility for small business and how to make sure it does not act as an impediment to the operation and integrity of the tax system.

As part of its scope, it was to look at the application of the GST, the rulings process, the period of review, how overpaid tax refunds are dealt with and also how to simplify other aspects. On 12 May last year, the then Assistant Treasurer announced the release of the board’s report with 46 recommendations, 41 of which were taken up by the government. The current Assistant Treasurer, Senator Nick Sherry, also announced the release of a draft bill on 6 October 2009 and that the government would take up the recommendations of the board—not in whole, but certainly substantially.

There were one or two changes to the draft bill as a result of representation that were made. But as is the case with so many tax bills, the amendments are done by schedule, and I will quickly go through those. Schedule 1 deals with the four-year review periods for credits. In its report, the Board of Taxation recommended that the law be amended to ensure input tax credits and the fuel tax credit be claimed within a four-year period. That is important; these things should not go on forever and the credit should be claimed within a period of four years. People’s tax situations should not drift and procrastinate. It is important that if you are going to claim the credit you should do it within a specified period of time. That is important for the good governance of the tax system as well.

Presently, all indirect tax liabilities and entitlements are subject to a four-year limitation period, but the absence of any restriction on input tax credits and fuel tax credits is an irregularity. The bill gives effect, as I said, to one of the board’s recommendations. The states and territories have advocated strongly for this change. It amends the fuel tax law with effect from 1 July 2010, and that is a worthy amendment in the circumstances.

Schedule 2 deals with the refund collection system. Currently external territory residents must claim refunds of GST and wine equalisation tax through the Tourist Refund Scheme for accompanied luggage. The amendments allow those residents, for example people who live on Norfolk Island or on Christmas Island, to claim refunds under the Tourist Refund Scheme on goods exported other than as accompanied baggage. The amendments generally commence on 1 July 2010 and apply to goods purchased on or after that date. The measure extends that scheme to allow residents of Australia living in those territories to get access, and it addresses any difficulties those residents have.

Schedule 3 also deals with agency provisions and makes some important amendments to remove anomalies. It extends the range of entities that can use the agency provisions with respect to GST law and helps facilitate supplies and acquisitions. It helps make sure our tax system is better. It is supposed to reduce the compliance costs for entities, particularly intermediaries, principals, agents and third parties. I commend this aspect of the bill as well.

Schedule 4 deals with gambling activity for entities outside Australia and clarifies how the GST law may apply to those people who are gambling operators. The commissioner administers the GST in this way and I think it is important that we reduce uncertainty. I acted for quite a few people in the gambling industry when I was a practising lawyer. They always have trouble with the taxation system. It is not always easy for them to operate their businesses, whether they have casinos or they are simply engaged in the racing industry. We should do anything we can to make things easier for those vital
industries operating pursuits that many Australians find very enjoyable. In my electorate of Blair there is a great racecourse, Bundamba, and Brett Kitching is an old mate of mine. My two brothers and I used to play basketball with him and his brothers. He runs that racecourse. It is an important part of the fabric of Ipswich and the Ipswich Cup is attended by thousands every year. I had many clients in the racing industry and the gaming industry so I know it is important to clarify how the GST law applies to gambling operators that accept wagers from entities outside Australia.

Schedule 5 deals with recovering overpaid refunds. The commissioner applies the Taxation Administration Act 1953 to treat overpayment refunds of a net amount on luxury car tax credits and fuel tax credits by administering overpayments with the general interest charge—they always seem to get more money out of us and interest. These are calculated on a resulting running balance account deficit debt when the administrative overpayment is allocated to the running balance account. There is some suggestion that case law makes this whole area a bit uncertain. I have read that the measure will ensure consistent treatment between taxpayers who incorrectly determine their liability to pay GST or other indirect taxes and taxpayers who incorrectly determine their entitlement to a refund. The commissioner always has discretion with respect to remitting GIC in part or in full and should do so if the error is innocently made. The measure forms part of the government’s response to the Board of Taxation review and should be commended.

The final schedule is schedule 6. The GST law sets out the requirements for a supply to be a taxable supply, including that supply made for consideration. It deals with associates who supply each other for no consideration. It fixes up an anomaly and it should be commended as well. This is reformist, non-contentious law supported by both sides and in the circumstances I commend the bill.

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (5.26 pm)—I thank the members for Farrer and Blair for their contributions on the Tax Laws Amendment (2009 GST Administration Measures) Bill 2009. The amendments in this bill implement a number of government measures developed in response to the recommendations of the Board of Taxation in its review of GST administration, as the member for Blair said. The measures seek to reduce compliance costs, to streamline and improve the operation of the GST administration provisions and to remove anomalies.

The measure imposing a four-year limit on import tax credit and fuel tax credit claims contained in schedule 1 to the bill removes an anomaly in the current indirect tax law. These amendments ensure that, like all other indirect tax liabilities and entitlements, GST input tax credits and fuel tax credits cannot be claimed after four years. It contains appropriate exceptions to avoid disadvantaging taxpayers where there may be liabilities imposed outside this four-year period or where they are otherwise unable to claim credits in time and notify the Commissioner of Taxation.

Amendments in schedule 2 extend the current Tourist Refund Scheme to ensure that residents of Australian external territories such as Norfolk, Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas islands can claim refunds of GST or GST and wine equalisation tax under the scheme for unaccompanied baggage as well as accompanied baggage. This allows Australian external territory residents to purchase bulky goods in Australia, export them home and make a claim for a refund of GST or wine equalisation tax. The amendments to the domestic agency provisions in schedule 3
allow those who facilitate supplies and acquisitions but who are not common law agents to use accounting procedures in the subdivision 153-B of the GST act. These procedures are simpler for many intermediaries to use than the current procedures.

Schedule 4 clarifies the GST law relating to monetary prizes payable on GST-free bets including those bets accepted from entities outside Australia. The continued use of a global approach reduces compliance costs of gambling operators compared with the standard rules. Schedule 5, which deals with the GST, the luxury car tax and the fuel tax refunds and payment provisions, ensures that overpaid refunds are due and payable from the date of the overpayment and that they are subject to the general interest charge from the date of overpayment. This ensures consistent treatment between those taxpayers who incorrectly determine their liability to pay GST or other indirect taxes and taxpayers who incorrectly determine their entitlement to a refund.

Schedule 6 improves certainty and clarifies the application of the GST, the luxury car tax and the fuel tax laws for taxpayers. This measure deals with the interaction of the GST associates provisions ensuring that supplies between associates for no consideration are treated under GST law as if the supply was for consideration. This removes anomalous outcomes where a supply may be treated differently for GST purposes depending on whether it is for consideration or not. This measure also improves certainty and clarifies the application of the GST law for associated entities. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (5.30 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Bill read a third time.

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 February, on motion by Mr Clare:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (5.30 pm)—I rise to speak on the Higher Education Support Amendment (University College London) Bill 2010, which will enable the university to operate as an education provider in Australia for the first time, to be located in my home town of Adelaide. The amendment in this bill will allow the university to offer an industry focused master’s degree to students in the much-needed area of energy and resources by inserting the university into table C of providers within the Higher Education Support Act.

The coalition welcomes University College London to Australia. We are a party of choice and diversity, and we have long argued that diversity among institutions gives students greater opportunity, encourages innovation and increases competition and excellence. Just as Australia is establishing branches, campuses and collaborations in other countries, foreign countries are also looking to expand their investment and their markets overseas. University College London joins a growing list of foreign universities to establish branches within Australia. Students will be able to enrol in a range of programs to address areas of skills shortages
identified by industry and government. Through its partnerships with energy company Santos, the university will offer the exciting opportunity for students to undertake world-class learning.

University College London is a very high-quality research institution and education provider. It ranked third in the UK and seventh globally in the Times Higher Education rankings in 2009, and it has had several Nobel Prize winners. UCL has a distinguished history. Founded in 1826, it was the first institution in the United Kingdom to offer access to students regardless of their religious beliefs and the first to welcome both men and women equally. It is no surprise, then, that in 1888, at the age of 19, Mohandas Gandhi attended UCL to study law and train as a barrister. He was just one in a long list of notable alumni to attend UCL.

It is worth remembering and reminding the House that it was the coalition government who first paved the way for overseas higher education providers to operate in Australia. It was a coalition government that first amended the legislation to enable the table C provision for approved overseas higher education institutions. It arose from a proposal by Carnegie Mellon University to establish an Australian campus in 2004, also in Adelaide. The Carnegie Mellon proposal was to offer postgraduate courses in information technology, public administration and business management in Adelaide, and we faced criticism at the time. Some were concerned that opening up the market to private providers would undercut public universities. My colleagues at that time Alexander Downer, Brendan Nelson and Julie Bishop pressed on, and in 2005 the act was amended to provide the framework for all approved overseas higher education institutions to operate a branch in Australia. Subsequently Carnegie Mellon was able to open its first offerings in Adelaide in 2006.

Dr Stone interjecting—

Mr Farmer interjecting—

Mr PYNE—Indeed, I note the keen interest of my colleagues in the coalition in this speech that I am giving to the House today. Both of the members on my side of the House are quite gripped by the speech that I am giving on UCL!

Indeed, without the coalition’s ambitious goal of opening up the market to private higher education providers—enabled through the key policy instrument for reviving diversity, FEE-HELP—I do not believe such initiatives as the one brought before the House today would be possible. While on the subject of FEE-HELP providers, I want to point out to the House yet again that until recently this used to be a varied group with both public and private institutions being able to offer full-fee-paying places for Australian students. The relaxing of caps on both Commonwealth supported places and domestic full-fee-paying places under the coalition government gave universities much more scope than had previously existed to set the mix of courses they offered. We also saw the value in opening up the education market to private providers such as small, locally operated colleges to provide some immediate competition to public universities, and we knew that opening the door for international providers would also contribute to diversity in the sector and drive healthy competition.

Sadly, Labor shackled the public education sector last year by abolishing fee-paying places for Australian students despite promising an ‘education revolution’. It is outrageous that, despite overseas students being entitled to study as full-fee-paying students, Australian students do not enjoy the same privilege. We have argued ever since this decision was taken that the minister’s and the Labor Party’s ideological abolition of full-fee-paying places for domestic students
should be reversed. Recommendation 35 of the government’s own Bradley review stated that full-fee-paying places should be reinstated for all university providers, because it seems that, like the Coalition and the sector, everyone except the minister knows that full-fee-paying places actually allow more students to attend university overall. The extra funds from full fees pay for extra places for publicly funded students.

We are already seeing the consequences of this decision, with the recent spike in demand and reports that some universities are unable to accommodate that demand with the government supported places only. It is rank hypocrisy that today the minister welcomes University College London onto Australian shores, knowing that they will be offering Australian students full-fee-paying places while our public universities have had their hands tied.

It is critical that Australia not remain insular within this international environment. Unlike Labor, who talk big, only the coalition truly understands that universities need flexibility over student places. This joins a long list of policy failures in the education portfolio, including the youth allowance fiasco, which the government has finally decided to deal with this week after leaving students hanging since last year. The mismanagement of these legislative changes has been breathtakingly bad. First, the minister abolished Commonwealth scholarships despite the warnings of the coalition that, without having an alternative in place, students might be left with nothing. Second, the minister has made no effort to negotiate with me, as education spokesman, to attempt to address the coalition’s concerns. Third, the minister has come into this place and berated the coalition, claiming it is all our fault and refusing to accept any responsibility when the truth is that this is entirely a mess of her own making.

The coalition does not control the legislative agenda. We did not make the decision to abolish Commonwealth scholarships without having what everyone knew would be a contentious piece of legislation in place. We have offered to consider splitting the scholarships to ensure students have funds to start this year—an offer the government continue to ignore. The coalition is standing up for our constituents, who are truly concerned about these changes; and, while some of the neediest students have had to put their university ambitions on hold, the government refuses to budge. In fact, the member for Farrer, who is in the chamber, would know exactly the response of her constituents to the government’s changes to youth allowance and their failure to split the scholarships from the youth allowance.

I challenge the minister to answer this question: where is a rural student meant to find the 30 hours a week of work for 18 months to qualify for the independent rate of youth allowance under Labor’s changes? I am sure the minister has flown over a few country towns. Where is the work for these young people? The coalition is committed to the development of a robust, high-quality higher education sector that is internationally competitive. We believe this underpins Australia’s cultural, social and economic development.

As we know, higher education is becoming increasingly competitive in a global context. Australian universities, to remain competitive globally, need to be exposed to different forms of educational methods if they are to remain internationally relevant and not get left behind. The entry of foreign universities such as Carnegie Mellon University, Cranfield University and the University College London will support Australian universities in comparing their methods and specialties with other institutions that are well regarded internationally. It is worth mention-
ing here that for a university to establish itself here in Australia it needs to meet the same accreditation, quality and accountability requirements that exist for our own higher education providers. It is important to note that Australian universities are not deprived of any funding by doing this. The introduction of not only this university but also, hopefully, more foreign universities in the future will increase diversity and choice within the Australian higher education sector.

Some still ask us why we support the introduction of foreign universities into Australia. It is because it will make Australia more competitive and increase our standing in the global higher education marketplace. We hope Australia continues to be seen as open and receptive to different educational pathways, including the establishment of branch campuses of foreign universities. It will elevate the international standing and attractiveness of our country as a preferred choice education destination and it will attract students from around the world who are seeking a high-quality education experience in a safe and unique environment through either an Australian provider, of which we have many, or an internationally recognised university. With those words I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (5.41 pm)—It is again a privilege to rise and speak on another higher education bill brought to this place by the Rudd government. I have spoken on almost all of the higher education bills in the first term of the Rudd government because I have a particular interest in higher education and our higher education system. My interest, of course, stems from a range of reasons. Firstly, I am interested in contributing to what the Rudd government is doing, and this is one of the great reforms that we are introducing. The Rudd government is setting the higher education sector up for challenges of the future. Therein lies the second reason for my own interest. Deakin University is one of the key institutions within my region. It brings high-tech, knowledge based industries to our region. The third reason is my personal interest in the higher education sector, particularly through my time at the University of Ballarat. I am very pleased today to be able to speak and put my efforts into supporting some great Labor reforms.

The Higher Education Support Amendment (University College London) Bill 2010 provides for an amendment to the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to add the University College London as a table C provider which can offer assistance to eligible domestic students through the Commonwealth’s FEE-HELP assistance scheme. It is anticipated that this bill will commence on 1 September 2010. In order not to disadvantage any existing students wishing to seek FEE-HELP assistance for units of study they undertake with the University College London during semester 1 of 2010, this bill has a retrospective provision that commences from 1 January 2010.

This comes as a result of a request from the institution itself. In 2009 the University College London made a request to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to be included as a table C provider. I think this application by the college is a big tick for our higher education system. It shows that some of the world’s best and most regarded higher education institutions want to be integrated into the Australian system. The University College London is, of course, ranked fourth in the 2009 UK tables of higher education, which I think is a fantastic contribution that they have made.

Quite a lot of work has been undertaken by the department to sort through the issues of quality assurance. The University College London has worked with the Department of
Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to make sure that they meet the same quality and accountability requirements that private higher education providers in Australia are required to meet. The University College London will continue to be required to meet the quality and accountability requirements and will be audited by the Australian Universities Quality Agency every five years, in compliance with the act.

This is a pretty straightforward bill. There is nothing particularly controversial in it. I will not, therefore, take up my full allotment of time. But I would like to take this opportunity, as we are discussing a bill of this nature, to mention that there is going to be further internationalisation of higher education institutions, and I think that is fantastic for Australia. This is particularly important in light of recent episodes which have captured state, national and international headlines with regard to the Indian student situation.

International commerce and student education is now big business in our region, in Australia and across many countries of the world. I believe the overseas students who come to our shores add significantly to the richness of our culture as well as to our local economies. In the Greater Geelong area, we have thousands of students who come to study at Deakin University, which now has a growing international reputation. About 25 per cent of the 32,000 students who study at Deakin come from overseas. Many of these people come to Geelong to study, and many of them stay on afterwards. This adds significantly to our culture, but it also adds significantly to our communities—for instance, by contributing in many ways to sporting clubs.

Our region and Australia have some wonderful opportunities in developing a massive export industry by marketing the quality of our higher education system to the rest of the world. This is one of the great industries of Australia, and it has really grown up over the last 30 years. We have a great higher education system that has real quality to it, and it is contributing to the international debate on quality in education. We also have qualities in Australia that enable us to be world leaders with respect to international education, particularly in terms of our wonderful landscapes and communities. Our education providers paint Australia in a fantastic way to many international communities, and I continue to support Deakin University and others in developing a fantastic export product, which not only builds our economies but also builds our role internationally. This bill is just a small piece in Labor’s reform agenda for higher education. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (5.48 pm)—This is a small piece of legislation but it is for a good purpose, and it has the support of the opposition. It is an opportunity for me to address a number of issues related to education—as other speakers have done. An interesting aspect of the Higher Education Support Amendment (University College London) Bill 2010 is its retrospectivity, which accommodates any students who wish to commence in the first semester, taking account of the fact that the legislation may not have completely passed all processes in that time. It is not often I find myself voting for a piece of retrospective legislation, certainly not in the area of taxation, but this is a positive move and should be recommended. As the minister said in his second reading speech, this legislation provides eligibility for FEE-HELP for students attending University College London as a type C provider. FEE-HELP assists eligible domestic students studying for all higher education courses, ranging from diploma to PhD by providing a loan for all or part of their tuition costs. That
has been welcomed by students to help them get through these processes.

It is also interesting that University College London is a non-profit organisation established under UK law and has been approved to operate as a higher education provider in Australia by the South Australian government under the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes. There is a point in there that is part of a culture I have never been able to understand—that is, the reference to ‘non-profit organisation’. I have never been able to see why, if a profit based education entity is giving a high standard of service and charging fees for the purpose, there should be a difference in the entitlement of a student to receive the support that this parliament provides. I know that there were times when our side of politics would have liked to have addressed that anomaly, but it has always been opposed vigorously by the Labor Party. There is this hang-up somewhere that, if a body is ‘for profit’, it offers a lesser service or in some other way is not to be trusted. Nevertheless, it is a minor issue and not really managed under this piece of legislation.

The member for Corangamite informs the House that this new university in the legislation before us is highly rated in the United Kingdom. I am delighted to see that the first enrolments will probably be for a Master of Science in energy and resources. To my mind this qualification is to be applauded, as we have seen a decline in enrolments in this type of tougher university course. It is one that Australia so desperately needs to carry us forward. It is very discouraging to read that the LNG plant for the major Gorgon gas project will primarily be designed overseas. Chevron, the promoters of that scheme, said in the newspaper that the capacity to do the work just does not exist in Australia, yet it would of course represent a very substantial amount of additional economic activity for the country.

We are constantly lectured about the government’s attempts to improve the training and skills of Australians. I do not disagree with that, but I am somewhat bemused by the constant lecturing about how much money the government are spending. Today, in a different circumstance, the minister proudly said that they had resolved the 10 hot spots, but the minister could not tell us one of them. It seems to be the case that the Minister for Education measures excellence by expenditure. There seems to be this argument that if you chuck enough money at it, it must get better. The only evidence of it getting better would be in the number of graduates in higher levels of learning, as is proposed with the University College London. They are very welcome to set the bar so high with their first intake.

It is a matter of grave concern to us, because they are always telling us how much money they have spent, be it in health—an area of grave concern to you, Mr Deputy Speaker Washer—or in other areas, but we so infrequently get the numbers. There was a claim that 8,000 nurses would be attracted back from retirement by giving them more money and that that was a good idea. I understand that the number who have taken up the offer is only in the hundreds. Yet, we are still told about all money and therefore it must be a successful arrangement. This legislation in itself is to be applauded. It resolves some outstanding issues with the creation of the University College London as an eligible entity for FEE-HELP by categorising it as a class C operation.

As I said earlier, there are issues that I have an opportunity to raise in this regard. A very significant area of concern for me I believe I had addressed some years ago during the Howard government with then Minister
David Kemp—an issue about which I am rightfully proud given my long career in this place. I approached him in the knowledge that there was to be another issuance of fee-paid places for our universities and I asked whether a number of places, which turned out to be 30, could be allocated to Geraldton in my electorate. There was nothing in Geraldton; no facility whatsoever for university courses. One of the great advantages that flowed from the Kemp decision was that a large number of mature-age, married women became nurses. Quite clearly, 300 miles away from the nearest university, there was little chance of them saying to their husband and young children, ‘I want to go out and become a nurse. There will be a positive outcome for the health system, but I am going to leave home and go and live in Perth to do the course.’ Obviously, they could not do that. I was so proud that the first group of graduates were almost all in that category. So a service and a positive outcome were provided.

The issue I want to address is that then Minister David Kemp said, ‘Yep, Geraldton has 30 places.’ But the universities involved had to go and chase them. They had to service the places. As they committed themselves, a $3 million building was constructed and everything progressed from there, as I described with regard to the first group of graduates. As a consequence, then Minister Kemp looked at other areas—and I think the regional campuses in Ballarat and Bendigo might have been included—and he made some positive geographic allocations. Remember—and I stand corrected only on the figure—that when governments have made allocations to major universities, there is an obligation to distribute 15 per cent to so-called regional campuses. But they had to choose where. At the time, Rockingham, virtually a suburb of Perth in this day and age, was considered regional. If you are running around the place keeping an eye on your campuses, where do you send the money? Do you send it up to Geraldton, 300 miles north of Perth, or do you send it off just around the corner?

I believe fundamentally that there should be, by decision of the department, the minister and government, a continuing allocation of these places on the basis of geography. Whether it slipped away under Howard or under this government, I am not sure, but I have not been able to see evidence of ministerial decisions in this regard. Let me give the example which is enraging me at the moment. As you would know, Deputy Speaker Washer, two iconic campuses in Western Australia were the Muresk Agricultural College and the Kalgoorlie School of Mines, with the latter probably having the higher level of importance. As the university system changed they became the property of Curtin University, which was originally the Western Australian Institute of Technology. It is not surprising that they picked up those sorts of hands-on academic activities.

The reality is that Curtin has now decided that they do not want Muresk and they want to move those people onto the Bentley Campus in the metropolitan area. That has gone to a virtually irretrievable position. Now I am getting rumours as the new representative of Kalgoorlie that they are up to their old tricks there. Their vice-chancellor has this economic drive on—and why you would pay people a bit extra to live and teach in Kalgoorlie? Let us not worry about the fact that it is the ultimate mining centre where you can go into deep mines and into the biggest open pit, I think, in the world. You can see all the processes of mining—not only gold but also nickel down the road and other developments in the region.

My one attitude to life has always been that, unless you have got hands-on experience, you have not learnt much at school,
whatever level of schooling is involved. So why would anyone want to relocate the teaching processes of mining out of what is probably the mining centre of Australia, notwithstanding the others that exist? I have made a preliminary approach to our shadow minister for the coalition to promise the people of Kalgoorlie that upon election we will guarantee tertiary training in mining to Kalgoorlie. I would like to think that a similar consideration would be given to Muresk.

If Curtin University does not like it then let one of the other universities take it on. That is what happened in Geraldton, when two or three of them went rushing up there—and, of course, 30 becomes 60 and 60 becomes 90 in the normal process of events in a three- or four-year course. In the end I think they then took a backwards step and aggregated the responsibility under one or two of the universities in Perth. If the University College London wants to take over those places in Kalgoorlie, in the absence of a willing Western Australian or Australian university, that is alright with me provided the economic activity and the appropriate teaching environment is retained for Kalgoorlie. As I said, I am not talking about some bright new idea; the precedent was established by Minister Kemp in the circumstances I have described.

When we talk about fees and new university organisations, here is an opportunity for the government to beat the opposition to the point and tell the workers and all those people interested in mining throughout Western Australia, ‘We are going to ensure that the Kalgoorlie School of Mines is retained as a campus in Kalgoorlie by the allocation of fee-paying places to that locality’. This is what occurred in Geraldton and I am aware that a similar allocation at that time was given to the existing places in Albany, another part of my electorate. I am sure that when the announcements came out later the minister had taken that view about a number of regional campuses and made sure they got their fair share and did not leave it to the vice-chancellor moguls, whom the Minister for Education was quoting again today—and I want to make a few comments about that with regard to the Youth Allowance and the university scholarships.

I find it outrageous—and I will write to them individually—that a group of vice-chancellors put the profit of their organisations ahead of the rights of the kids in my electorate, some of whom sometimes have wealthy families, but those families bet their entire wealth on one crop each year. They bet against the weather, they bet against the prices and they bet against the pests. Yes, on paper they might appear to have some money, but to fully fund their kids’ university education away from home is beyond their resources. One has to be very careful about means testing.

I might say—as I have made a couple of comments on health—that we were being lectured today about rich people receiving a subsidy for their private health cover. Of course, the argument is that they will still stay in the process. I can tell this House positively that I know of a prime minister, on a prime minister’s salary, who did not have private health insurance. It was Paul Keating. He boasted about it, so I am not telling any secrets about him. Nevertheless, when his wife had a gall bladder operation she had a private room at Calvary and a doctor of choice—which only goes to prove that if you are big enough you do not need private health cover. But everybody who does not have private health who goes into a public hospital, —as they do—shoulders aside the ones who have no muscle: the pensioners and others whom the public hospital system should take as their priority.
Years and years ago I was at a conference of doctors and I listened to a leading administrator from New Zealand who said, ‘Waiting lists are a part of the management of the public hospital system’ and then went on to complain about the administration of waiting lists and the abuse—and I think this might have come up in the public arena just the other day—with some people being pushed up the queue because they have a friendly member of parliament or because they know someone.

I want to take the last couple of minutes to come back to the issue of the rights of country kids to have the protection of the Howard government’s youth allowance system. It was fair, it allowed them to go out and earn money within their notified period—the gap year—and then attend university with the protection and the assistance of youth allowance in the following year. As the shadow minister has just said, the concept of any person in my electorate—with the exception of the very large centres—getting employment at 30 hours a week continuously for 18 months is impossible. It is just like Julia Gillard writing to those kids and saying, ‘We don’t want you in university.’ Furthermore, if there is an issue of means testing, why not just put that in the legislation? And if it is an issue of finding the money—(Time expired)

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (6.09 pm)—in reply—I thank the members for Sturt, Corangamite and O’Connor for their contributions to this debate on the Higher Education Support Amendment (University College London) Bill 2010. This bill makes a minor amendment to the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to list University College London as a table C provider, which will allow it to offer FEE-HELP to eligible domestic students. The government wants to see more Australians, regardless of their socioeconomic status, attending higher education institutions. FEE-HELP assists students with the cost of undertaking courses of study with providers who charge full fees, thus playing a vital role in increasing the number of Australians who are able to enter into higher education.

The addition of University College London to table C of the Higher Education Support Act will increase the number of providers who can offer FEE-HELP as well as increasing course choices for students. University College London is a university based in the United Kingdom and, in 2009, it was ranked fourth in the world in the UK Times university world rankings. Its desire to be listed, along with Carnegie Mellon University of the United States, as a table C provider in Australia reflects the high quality of Australian higher education. I commend the bill to the House. Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (6.10 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time. Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING ACCREDITATION) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 22 February, on motion by Ms Roxon:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (6.11 pm)—Diagnostic imaging is a wonderful technology that medicine has these days and it is certainly expanding in all sorts of directions,
making it much easier to diagnose problems with patients. Of course, as all things in the health system seem to do, the cost expands commensurate with the expansion of the technology.

There is a term, ‘positron emission tomography’, and there are perhaps only two people in this parliament tonight who know what that actually is—with apologies to the parliamentary secretary; perhaps there may be three. Of course, this is the technology for PET/CT scanners. It is just wonderful technology used by the medical profession to look at potential cancers in the body. Its main attribute is that it is so sensitive that with one scan it can pick up information that other technologies might take several scans to do. It helps patients because a diagnosis can be made much more quickly—and if you are a potential cancer patient, you need to know what is happening as quickly as possible.

There are not many of these machines around Australia. In the great state of Queensland, the sunshine state, there is no PET scanner north of Brisbane. Australia’s largest tropical city, the capital of Northern Australia, Townsville, has no PET scanner. Patients who are serviced by the Townsville Hospital and by the Mater Private Hospital have to fly to Brisbane if PET scanning is ordered by their doctor. Currently there are 500 patients a year going through the trauma of having to fly to Brisbane to have a PET scan—and it is increasing. The carers will often fly with the patients or they may have to be put up in Brisbane, and the cost just grows. I looked at this problem and said, ‘What can we do?’ That is why I am particularly pleased to be supporting this bill, the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009, tonight.

I spoke to an imaging provider, who happens to be accredited, and that provider is keen to establish a PET scanner. They already have on their staff a doctor trained in nuclear medicine, so it was a no-brainer to see what we could do. I spoke to Queensland X-Ray and they agreed that they would fund half the capital cost of a PET scanner in North Queensland. It meant a great deal to the Commonwealth of Australia because it was a firm offer to have a publicly funded, bulk-billed PET scanner in North Queensland with $2 million put towards the cost of that machine.

In September we got a letter back from the Minister for Health and Ageing and, unfortunately, while she understood the need for North Queensland, she said that the government had announced $560 million in funding to build a network of up to 10 best practice regional cancer centres associated with accommodation centres. That is us in Townsville, but the problem is that it has to go through a tender process, which takes forever. The problem is that we do not have a resolution of that yet and it is now February. It seems to go on and on. Sometimes I have a bit of suspicion that bureaucrats delay these things to save money. Well, hello; there are patients out there—there are people in need. We cannot have the whole of Northern Australia without one of these wonderful machines. In the Townsville Bulletin in September, the editor was straightforward about it. He wrote:

Put bluntly, North Queenslanders are dying because we don’t have this piece of sophisticated medical equipment. Once again, geography is discriminating against the people of the North. That is not fair. We are not second-class citizens in the north of Australia. We contribute so much to GDP with what we have in the north, and it is unfair that our communities do not have the same facilities as communities further south have. I sometimes wonder whether the line that was drawn in World War II called the Brisbane Line actually still exists, with the discrimination we see.
The PET scanner is a nuclear medicine facility that can determine the presence, progress and severity of cancers, neurological conditions and cardiovascular disease. PET images reveal the chemistry of organs and other tissue, such as tumours. There is certainly growing evidence of the usefulness and cost-effectiveness of PET scans for the treatment of cancer sufferers.

When the health minister responded to my letter she indicated a number of conditions to establishing a PET scanner in North Queensland. She said the views of the Queensland government would need to be established in order for funding to be considered. That is code for: the Townsville Hospital and their staff would have to be prepared to use a PET scanner in a private consultancy. I am very happy to say that the management of the Townsville Hospital are entirely, 100 per cent, supportive of this project. Their doctors and other staff know the benefit of securing a PET scanner in North Queensland and they are not going to have a turf war, as so often happens between public and private hospitals. They are pleased just to get a PET scanner. If it is not in their hospital they do not care; they are worried about the patients. What a wonderful approach. I thank the good people at the Townsville Hospital for adopting a common-sense view. Of course, Queensland X-Ray will take the public patients and do what a public hospital would do for them, so there is no disadvantage at all in having a PET scanner located in a private consultant’s rooms.

There has to be, according to the health minister, access to a secured and reliable source of radiopharmaceuticals. That is already the case. In Northern Australia we have those radiopharmaceuticals available. A further condition was the facility’s ability to meet the requirements outlined in the current PET determination 2008, and it does already. The facility would only be eligible for general PET items on the Medicare Benefits Schedule, and the consultant agrees with that as well. That really clears the way, and we have written back to the health minister guaranteeing that that is the situation. As we go from problem to problem in the Townsville Hospital—longer waiting lists, workforce issues, no beds—this is one bright star where we can provide a service if only the health minister will turn on the green light. I appeal to the health minister to think of us in Northern Australia and provide this much-needed machine.

On a related issue—and you, Mr Deputy Speaker Washer, will understand this better than most—specialists who consult in the private system and the public system continually say to me, ‘We’re twice as efficient in the private system,’ meaning that if there is a procedure happening you can do two in the private system in the same time as you can do one in the public system. And, by the way, I think the staff are happier in the private system as well. Why is that so? These kinds of workforce issues have to be looked at. You have to ask why in the private system there are three people in an operating theatre and in the public system there are 14. Why would that be? It is extraordinarily inefficient.

If a patient in the private system comes into the operating theatre and one piece of paperwork is not quite right—there might be something not filled in, a number missing or something—everybody in the operating theatre in the private system gets it fixed there and then. They jump on the telephone from the theatre, get the information that is needed, fill in the form and away they go. But what happens in the public system? If something, even the smallest detail, is missing, the staff down tools and send the patient back to the ward, and the operation gets cancelled and then rescheduled.
Mr Craig Thomson interjecting—

Mr Lindsay—It does, Member for Dobell. I have a litany of evidence which indicates that it happens in Queensland. Perhaps it does not happen in New South Wales.

Mr Bradbury—Put the evidence on the table.

Mr Lindsay—Ring up any specialist in Townsville who consults and operates in the public and private system. They will tell you the same thing.

Mr Bradbury—No, no—specifics.

Mr Lindsay—I will get you a statutory declaration. It is easy.

Mr Bradbury—Just give us the details.

Mr Lindsay—I am not here to mislead the parliament. This is what the specialists tell me. They say, ‘Why can’t we do in the public system what happens in the private system? It would be so much more efficient.’ If you could do that in the public system, you would drop the waiting lists because you would be doing double the number of procedures. Why would you oppose that? Surely that is okay?

Mr Bradbury—So it is pretty easy? Is that why you did it?

Mr Lindsay—It is pretty easy for you to stand up for your union mates—that is the problem. The unionisation of the public hospital system is half the problem. Earlier, I carefully said, ‘workforce issues’, but, if you like, I will spell it out plainly: unionisation in the hospital system is causing extended waiting lists, and the staff hate it. The staff want to look after the patients. You know as well as I do that the first responsibility of medical staff is to the patient. They are such caring people, but they are held back by all these rules. You go in the operating theatre, where there are 14 people, and somebody says, ‘Oh, I better do this job—I will tidy this up,’ and another person rushes over and says, ‘Don’t you do that; that is my job.’ That is no way to run an operating theatre. It is just wrong.

I have used this contribution to appeal to the government. Let us not get off the subject, which we all just did, but let us understand what this appeal is about. Minister Roxon, we need a PET scanner in North Queensland. We need it sooner rather than later and we need it to be part of the very important medical diagnostic imaging that is now available in this country.

Mr Craig Thomson (Dobell) (6.25 pm)—Well, what a contribution that was! It highlights the absolute hypocrisy that we constantly get from the other side in the health debate. First of all, we get eight or nine minutes of a contribution complaining about the fact that they do not have a PET scanner in Townsville. They were in government for 12 years and what did they do about it? They did absolutely nothing. This is so typical of the opposition. They might promise something, but they will not deliver a cent for health. In fact, it is quite the opposite—what they do in health is rip money out of the system.

You are absolutely right to be scuttling out of here with your tail between your legs, Member for Herbert, given that abysmal contribution you just made on health. Not only did you not deliver at all for the Townsville electorate in 12 years—and Labor is going to deliver—but you complain about a tendering process. I forgot, of course: we are talking about the opposition that love the Regional Partnerships program and rorts. They do not like tender processes. They do not like an objective way of choosing the best project—a project which is going to be delivered in a proper manner so taxpayers’ money is spent correctly and which is going to benefit the most people. No, we have opposition MPs who are actually going to go out and choose.
They do not like this tender process because there is ‘too much paper work’, we hear—too much paper work in doing these things the right way.

Mr Bradbury—‘Too many rules’.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON—‘Too many rules’—yes, that was the phrase. The member for Herbert then went on to talk about public hospitals, saying, ‘There are too many rules in public hospitals’—gosh, when there are problems in an operating theatre, suddenly there are all these rules that mean things cannot get done. The public hospital system is the backbone of the health system in this country. Having represented health workers in both the public and the private health sectors—and my union’s membership was equally divided between the two—I can say that health workers, whether they work in a public hospital, a private hospital, a private clinic or a public clinic, are committed to the work that they do and try to deliver the best outcomes they can for patients. For putting a general slur on the workforce in public hospitals, the member for Herbert should hang his head in shame. For too long we have had people like the member for Herbert out there badmouthing people who are working hard to deliver great health outcomes, without a lot of resources, to people in our public and private hospital systems. To go on some philosophical crusade about unions in the health sector is simply ignoring the facts.

I rise in support of the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009. This bill amends the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Act 2007, which I will refer to as the DIA Act, to provide transitional arrangements for new entrants in the broadened scope of the diagnostic imaging accreditation scheme. The legislative framework for the diagnostic imaging accreditation scheme is being implemented in two stages. Stage 1 of the scheme commenced on 1 July 2008 and covered only radiology services. Stage 2 of the scheme will commence on 1 July 2010 and will cover all diagnostic imaging services—both radiology and non-radiology services—listed in the Health Insurance (Diagnostic Imaging Service Table) Regulations 2009.

This means that from 1 July 2010, for the purposes of Medicare, all diagnostic imaging
services and the diagnostic imaging services table would need to be carried out at an accredited practice, or deemed accredited practice, to be eligible for Medicare benefits. This bill will amend the DIA Act to provide transitional arrangements that will allow practices providing non-radiology services and practices combining non-radiology and radiology services not accredited under the scheme in operation before 1 July 2010 to register for, and enter into, stage 2 of the scheme. From 1 April 2010, for unaccredited practices which provide non-radiology services, the transitional arrangements proposed in this bill will provide a registration period which would operate for around three months from 1 April 2010 to 30 June 2010 and which would give deemed accreditation to practices for 12 months, and an application process which would allow a deemed accreditation practice to submit documentary evidence for 12 months from 1 July 2010 to 1 July 2011. The arrangements will also provide for an accreditation decision to be made by an approved accrediter. Presumably, these rules and regulations are things that would cause the member for Herbert some difficulty.

The stage 1 scheme was introduced on 1 July 2008 to ensure Medicare funding was directed to radiology services that are safe, effective and responsive to the needs of healthcare consumers. The stage 1 scheme only applied to sites rendering radiology services. These sites accounted for around 84 per cent of the total number of diagnostic imaging services performed annually under Medicare. Non-radiology services, such as cardiac ultrasound and cardiac angiography, obstetric and gynaecological ultrasounds and nuclear medicine imaging services, account for around 16 per cent of diagnostic services performed annually under Medicare. These were not included in the stage 1 scheme. This was because prior to 1 July 2008 non-radiology services were managed by three separate memorandums of understanding which—unlike the radiology agreement that did not mandate the introduction of an accreditation scheme—links to the payment of Medicare benefits by 1 July 2008. Each of these memorandums expires on 30 June 2008. Consequential amendments will be made to the Health Insurance Regulations 1975 which currently exclude non-radiology services from the scheme.

The Rudd government is committed to making our health system better for all Australians. That includes the infrastructure, the training of doctors and other health professionals and Medicare, just to name a few aspects. This government is committed to improving the public health system. Let us start with hospitals, which are the most visible face of the health system. It is not a secret that many of our public hospitals are under severe pressure as our population ages and the burden of chronic disease takes hold. Having said that, if I were to get sick, Australia would be the country that I would want to get sick in because, despite the problems and the areas that we need to improve and despite there being a large amount of work to be done, Australia has a world-class and a first-class health system. That is something we should acknowledge right from the start whenever we enter into this health debate.

In my area, the Wyong Hospital is the fifth busiest emergency department in the state of New South Wales. As we are coming into autumn, it is going to become even busier. The Rudd government is strengthening our health system after years of neglect and buck passing by the former Howard government. The government is investing $64 billion in the hospital and health system across the country over the next five years. That is a 50 per cent increase on the previous agreement which the coalition entered into. We are investing $600 million in our elective surgery
program. Stage 1 committed to a target of 25,000 extra elective surgeries in 2008 and delivered more than 41,000 procedures. Under stage 2, more than 150 hospitals across Australia will receive funding. We have invested $750 million in taking pressure off emergency departments and more than 30 hospitals will benefit directly. We are also now undertaking historic investment in nation-building health infrastructure. We are investing $3.2 billion in 36 major projects across our hospitals and medical research institutes, including $1.2 billion in world-class cancer centres. The government has provided $275 million to construct 34 GP superclinics across the country.

In my electorate of Dobell on the New South Wales Central Coast, one of these GP superclinics is being established. It has already been well received and although it is only on a temporary site for the moment, it has over 1,700 patients on its books and sees close to 1,200 patients a month. This is only while it is in its present temporary capacity. The operators of the GP superclinic have well-advanced plans. In fact, the site has been finalised and the operators have exchanged contracts for the land on which the new and permanent GP superclinic will be built. It will be built in Hamlyn Terrace, just near the new town centre of Warnervale.

In relation to that investment, the way in which this government has invested in GP superclinics has been to involve the private sector. We saw a great partnership here with this GP superclinic in my electorate; the federal government spent $2½ million on the GP superclinic and that encouraged the successful tenderer to spend $16 million. So in my electorate we are getting a GP superclinic which is going to employee 104 staff, is going to cost $18.5 million and which has only cost the taxpayer $2½ million. That is a great scheme. Furthermore, it has encouraged the provider so much and they are so committed to this model of the GP superclinic that they have provided a further $14 million to build a similar project at Tuggerah in my electorate. So, for the Commonwealth’s $2½ million investment on the Central Coast, we are getting $30 million being spent by the private sector on the GP superclinic.

This government is also providing $500 million for subacute care to help older people leave hospital and free up beds. As for the workforce, the government will invest $1.1 billion in training more doctors, nurses and other health professionals. This is the single biggest investment in the health workforce ever made by an Australian government. It will see 812 additional ongoing GP places from 2011 onwards—a 35 per cent increase on the cap of 600 places which has been imposed since 2004 by the opposition. So this government is making sure more GPs are trained and out there so that they can help deliver the vital primary care that is needed in our towns, cities and right around the country, whereas the previous government put a cap on them.

We are increasing by 50 per cent the spend in terms of the agreement between the states and the Commonwealth on public hospital funding. Those opposite, when they were in government and when the current Leader of the Opposition was the health minister, ripped a billion dollars out of health. The difference between the two in health is stark. If we go back to the contribution of the member for Herbert, we can see why there is such a different approach in terms of this particular debate.

This government will deliver $134.4 million for better targeting existing incentives and providing additional non-financial support to rural doctors. The reform introduces these incentives on the principle that ‘the more remote you go, the greater the reward’. Under the initiative 2,400 more doctors and
500 communities around Australia will become newly eligible for rural incentive payments.

Recognising that prevention is better than cure, the government will invest a record $872 million, the single largest investment ever in preventative health, to help keep people fit, healthy and out of hospitals. We are providing child health checks for four-year-olds to promote early detection of chronic disease risk factors. There will be $12.8 million to fund 190 schools around the country to construct either a kitchen or a garden under the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program.

Dental care is an issue that is very close to my heart. In my previous job before I was elected I spent a lot of time campaigning to make sure that Australians got proper dental care. Our commitment as a government is a total of $650 million for two dental programs. The teen dental program commenced last year and provides a $150 annual payment to eligible families. To the end of December, 258,203 teenagers had received a dental check-up under the program, with 7,598 dentists—that is, 70 per cent of all dentists—providing services.

Unfortunately, due to the coalition standing in our way in the Senate, the Commonwealth dental program, which would provide up to one million consultations, has not been able to commence. We are putting money into dental programs. The first thing that the other side did when they came to government was cut the Commonwealth Dental Scheme, and what they are doing now is frustrating this government’s attempts to make sure that dental care is provided in a better manner to those in our community who cannot afford dental care. So, again, we have a stark contrast between those on this side of the House and those on the other side of the House.

In aged care, we are committed to providing $44 billion over the next four years to aged and community care. No government has invested more. This has already seen a record amount of aged and community care places allocated. We are rolling out an additional 2,000 transitional beds: a $293.2 million program to reduce the pressure on hospitals. Construction work is underway due to the government’s $300 million zero real interest loan program to create more than 1,300 new beds. We are providing $192 million in a year for the National Respite for Carers Program, which funds a national network of more than 600 community based respite services. Since being elected we have improved and strengthened quality measures by increasing announced and unannounced visits to homes by 3,000 a year and by investing more than $127 million in the aged care workforce.

For the future, the government has also embarked upon a path to build the health and hospital system that Australia needs for the 21st century. The government has committed to an overhaul of the health system to ensure that it can cope with future challenges, including an ageing population and rising health costs. Unlike those opposite—including the current opposition leader—who neglected health during their 12-year term in government, this government is about taking real steps to make sure that our health system is the best we can possibly have.

My electorate of Dobell on the lovely New South Wales Central Coast is a good example of the demands on our health system. Not only do we have a fast-growing population of young families who have moved to the area to seek new opportunities including a great lifestyle, but we have many senior citizens in the area, and the ageing demographic is increasing quite quickly. I mentioned young families. Many of these
people are having children for the first, second or third times. Of course, they need their health services to be of the best standard possible. When mothers are expecting children, they deserve to have safe, effective and responsive services when it comes to diagnostic imaging.

This bill will provide transitional arrangements to enable approximately 1,400 unaccredited practices around Australia that are currently providing non-radiology services—and these make up around 16 per cent of the total diagnostic imaging services under Medicare—to register for ‘deemed accreditation’ and transition incrementally into the stage 2 scheme by 1 July 2010. Accreditation is a way of ensuring that patients receive a quality diagnostic imaging service irrespective of who provides the service or where the service is provided. There is no doubt that accreditation is important when it comes to diagnostic imaging.

This legislation is important in terms of making sure we have proper accreditation. It is part of the Rudd government’s agenda to make sure that in Australia we take concrete steps, as we have done in the last two years, to ensure that we have the best health system that we possibly can. We are coming from some way behind because from those on the opposite side we had 12 years of neglect. We had billions of dollars ripped out of the system. There was neglect in dental care and there were caps on GP places. These are all issues that we have addressed squarely and fairly, straight off. We have record investments in hospital infrastructure. This particular bill is part of that broader picture of the Rudd government addressing the health needs of this nation, and I commend it to the House.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (6.44 pm)—I rise to speak on the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009, which aims to broaden the accreditation scheme for diagnostic imaging to cover all diagnostic imaging services. This legislation will amend previous health insurance amendment acts to establish the Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation Scheme, which requires radiology services to seek accreditation. This bill, when passed, will require practices providing non-radiology services or a combination of radiology and non-radiology services, which are not currently covered by the scheme, to obtain accreditation and will provide the relevant enabling transitional arrangements.

Whilst the coalition do not oppose this legislation, we do seek assurance that an evaluation will be carried out to ensure the scheme is working reasonably without an onerous cost burden being passed on to consumers. Given the importance and cost of health services, particularly in regional areas such as my electorate of Forrest—which, as you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker Schultz, is one of the three fastest growing regions in Australia and has a significant amount of seniors—this evaluation and review process is extremely important. I call on the government to commit to an evaluation process and timetable.

This legislation has been and continues to be a work in progress. Historically, management of diagnostic imaging services was undertaken by the Department of Health and Ageing cooperatively with the diagnostic imaging sector. This management was carried out through a number of agreements known as ‘quality and outlays memoranda of understanding’. In 2007 the coalition introduced legislation to initiate an accreditation scheme for radiology, which accounts for 80 per cent of diagnostic services covered by Medicare. That accreditation scheme began on 1 July 2008, at the time when the MOUs expired. The legislation established an accreditation framework for most diagnostic
imaging premises and the basis for mobile imaging equipment to make sure that organisations met defined quality and safety standards in the delivery of their services.

The Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation Scheme is being implemented in two stages. Stage 1 establishes the framework and operational arrangements for the scheme and is due to expire on 30 June 2010, when stage 2 is due to commence. The transitional accreditation process proposed by this bill is broadly similar to that introduced under stage 1 of the scheme in that it involves two main steps. The proposed transitional arrangements would apply to providers of non-radiology diagnostic imaging services in the following ways. First, they establish a three-month registration period from 1 April 2010, during which time a practice can lodge a notice with an approved accreditor for a premises to be registered for ‘deemed accreditation’. Second, deemed accreditation would cease on 1 July 2011. A practice with deemed accreditation will have 12 months to achieve accreditation either by demonstrating compliance with three entry-level standards or the full suite of 15 standards or by obtaining accreditation under the Medical Imaging Accreditation Program. Under this legislation, a practice that fails to achieve accreditation by 1 July 2011 will no longer be eligible to render Medicare rebatable diagnostic imaging services.

As we are aware, ‘diagnostic imaging’ refers to a broad range of technologies that allow medical professionals to diagnose a wide range of medical conditions—a very important process. Through consultation with stakeholders, some concerns were raised about the suitability of a single accreditation model across a diverse range of medical practices, and also about the potential for duplication, costs and administrative burdens. However, I note that stakeholders—and that includes the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists and the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association—in general have not voiced any major concerns with this legislation and accept the scheme. Some have even stated that its extension was an ‘expected development’ and part of a ‘many staged process’, in their words.

The costs of participating in the scheme and becoming accredited will be met by the practices that provide non-radiology services under Medicare. The explanatory memorandum for this bill contains information regarding some of the costs that practices will incur by participating in the scheme, as derived from the business cost calculator. The calculator estimates the likely administrative cost to practices in lodging the registration forms. These are expected to vary depending on the type of labour resources used by the practice to lodge the registration form. Practices using administrative staff to lodge the forms would face the lowest cost burden, of approximately $47, whereas those using technical staff would face a cost of around $84. Practices using a diagnostic imaging specialist to submit the form would face the highest cost, estimated at around $600. It should be noted that the cost of any lodgement fees levied by accreditors is not included in the cost calculator estimates.

One of my constituents currently works for an independent diagnostic imaging network that provides general radiography, computed tomography, ultrasound, MRI and nuclear medicine services—a practice that employs nearly 100 full-time equivalent workers throughout a network of clinical bases in regional and remote Western Australia. We asked this particular constituent about this legislation and this is what he had to say:

Although this particular constituent about this legislation and this is what he had to say:
lieve all Australian radiology practices should already be operating at this level. Patients should be able to walk into a practice and be confident that it uses high quality imaging equipment, adequate sterilisation process and a comprehensive method of reporting.

That is a view I imagine is shared by the many patients who undergo diagnostic imaging, whether it be an X-ray, CT scan, MRI or ultrasound to name just a few procedures. There is a continuing need for innovative health care providers who are focused on delivering services to patients irrespective of their location, something that in Western Australia is particularly important, given the size of the state, providing not only innovative health care services but also services that provide exceptional care, communication and support. Referring doctors also need to have absolute confidence in the services provided by such diagnostic providers.

In conclusion, the coalition does not oppose this legislation, which has been labelled as an ‘expected’ development. However, we certainly seek assurances that an evaluation will be carried out to ensure the scheme is working reasonably without an additional onerous cost burden being passed on to consumers.

Ms Livermore (Capricornia) (6.53 pm)—The Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009 amends the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Act of 2007. It is being introduced to provide transitional arrangements to allow practices providing non-radiology services—for example, ultrasound and a combination of non-radiology and radiology services not accredited under the Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation Scheme—to register for deemed accreditation in the three months prior to commencement of the stage 2 scheme which will start on 1 July 2010.

Stage 1 of the Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation Scheme commenced on 1 July 2008. This scheme meant that all existing diagnostic imaging practitioners offering services covered by the Radiology Memorandum of Understanding were required by the Department of Health and Ageing to register for deemed accreditation. Stage 1 of this scheme covered only radiology services. Just over 2,700 sites are participating in the stage 1 scheme. The department is monitoring the implementation of stage 1 which has been well received within the sector. Stage 1 of the scheme did not, however, include non-radiology services such as cardiac ultrasound, angiography, obstetric and gynaecological ultrasound or nuclear medicine imaging services. These account for 16 per cent of the total number of Medicare funded diagnostic imaging services performed annually.

This bill will allow a transitional arrangement for the roughly 1,400 currently unaccredited practices that are providing non-radiology services to register for accreditation and transition incrementally into the stage 2 scheme by 1 July 2010. That is the commencement date of stage 2. It is planned that all diagnostic imaging services—radiology and non-radiology—listed in the diagnostic imaging services table of the Medicare Benefits Schedule will need to be provided at a site accredited under the stage 2 scheme. Practices who have been accredited for radiology services under the stage 1 scheme will not be required to register as they will be automatically accredited until 30 June 2012.

In the lead-up to the introduction of this legislation in March last year, the department consulted with professional organisations representing the providers of non-radiology services. They were consulted about the proposals to broaden the scheme and to provide transitional arrangements. The proposal was supported by these organisations. As we have
heard from other speakers, the government has introduced a system of accreditation for providers of diagnostic imaging services because it is a way of ensuring that patients receive a quality service irrespective of who provides the service or where it is provided. This gives assurance to patients and ensures value for money for the government. Gaining accreditation will guarantee that all patients will receive quality service across the board, regardless of who is providing the service or where it happens to be provided.

This is very important to me and to the people of Capricornia, my electorate. It means that Central Queenslanders will be receiving the same level of treatment as someone in Melbourne or other major capital cities. The gap between health services in Central Queensland and those in the capital cities has been made a bit smaller thanks to the Rudd Labor government. It is an ongoing battle for regional and rural members of parliament to get the medical services and medical staff we would like to have in our electorates. That was particularly the case in my electorate when our needs were ignored by the previous Liberal-National government.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the struggle to obtain a Medicare licence for a full-time MRI machine located in Rockhampton. Why is an MRI machine so important and why did we battle so long to get one? Magnetic resonance imaging uses magnetic fields to generate images to help diagnose illnesses. An MRI scanner produces an extraordinarily stable and powerful static magnetic field that combines with radiofrequency pulses and rapidly changing smaller magnetic fields to manipulate the hydrogen molecules in our bodies to generate images. It is especially effective, I am told, on soft tissue. For example, the MRI machine is useful for attaining good images of spinal, brain and abdominal lesions. As such, it is an important tool for identifying and monitoring conditions such as stroke and cancers.

This government recognises that patients and communities throughout Australia need to have access to convenient and affordable MRI services. Labor recognised the need for such valuable diagnostic equipment in Rockhampton many years ago. I am pleased to say that in February 2008 this government announced that a fixed licence for a diagnostic imaging machine—an MRI—was granted for the Rockhampton Hospital. It was a welcome announcement which honoured our election promise to the people of Central Queensland. In fact, one of the most important commitments that we made in Capricornia at the 2007 election was to grant a full-time licence for an MRI machine at the Rockhampton Base Hospital. Following the federal Labor government’s commitment, a $70 million-plus investment was made by the Queensland state government, which included a building to house the MRI machine. The MRI machine is now being operated by Queensland Health on the basis that the licence from the Commonwealth government allows the cost of the service to be billed back to Medicare.

I am very happy to say that the MRI machine has now been operating in Rockhampton for five months. It has been up and running at the Rockhampton hospital since September 2009. The official opening of the first public MRI machine in Rockhampton took place on 12 September 2009 by the Queensland Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, Mr Paul Lucas. I am told that clinicians have found the MRI to provide excellent quality images which assist in the diagnosis and treatment planning of neurological and orthopaedic conditions.

The $6½ million three-tesla MRI scanner, which is one of the best in the country, will deliver an expanded service to people living
in Central Queensland, doing up to 20 scans a day. It is predicted to scan between 3,000 and 4,000 patients per year. All patients receiving Medicare eligible scans are being bulk billed. This is great news for the people of Central Queensland. The MRI machine has already provided over 800 scans to Central Queenslanders and the hospital has successfully recruited two permanent MRI operators and one medical imaging nurse. As I said, the permanent licence for the MRI machine is something that we have fought long and hard for in Rockhampton at both the state and Commonwealth levels. We were ignored by the previous government, but it is fantastic that the MRI machine and the funding the Commonwealth government is attaching to it through the Medicare licence is now a reality.

Health is a very important policy area in which people are looking to the Rudd government to address some of the critical deficiencies of the previous Howard government. The history of this matter is a very good example of the failures of the previous government. It was in the lead-up to the 2004 election that Labor promised that if we were successful in winning government we would grant a licence for a full-time MRI machine at the Rockhampton hospital. Of course, we were not successful in that election, so instead the Howard government granted that full-time licence to a private sector operator. I remember at the time that I was asked by the applicant for that service to provide a letter of support. I did provide one because following the 2004 election the Howard government made it very clear that that was the only game in town. But there were problems with the level of service provided by that private MRI machine. The private sector operator put the MRI machine into a mobile unit that spent its time between Rockhampton, Gladstone and Bundaberg. In effect, Rockhampton, the major health hub in Central Queensland, only had access to an MRI machine on a part-time basis, which was completely unacceptable to me and my constituents.

It was a very anxious time for many of my constituents. Quite frequently I was told stories by local people of their wait for the MRI machine to come back into Rockhampton. They had been diagnosed with something or were concerned about a particular health condition and their doctor was anxious for them to get an MRI scan to make an accurate diagnosis but they were literally waiting for weeks for the MRI machine in the mobile truck to come back up the coast of Queensland to allow that to take place in Rockhampton. Throughout the time I was calling for a permanent MRI machine to be licensed and located in the Rockhampton Base Hospital, the Queensland government, particularly the state health minister at that time, Stephen Robertson, was also very vocal in saying that this was a priority as far as the Queensland health department was concerned. But we were ignored throughout by the then health minister at the Commonwealth level, who is of course now the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott.

As I have said, this was something that Labor were determined to address for many years and when we got the opportunity as a result of coming into government in 2007 we took immediate steps to make sure that Rockhampton would get a licence for a permanent MRI machine. There is no doubt that this new MRI machine will save lives. It proves that this Labor government takes the health needs of people in rural and regional Australia seriously.

I also wanted to touch on some positive developments that are happening at the local university on campuses in Rockhampton, Mackay, Bundaberg, Emerald and Gladstone. The Central Queensland University has a
new vice-chancellor in Professor Scott Bowman. He is absolutely determined to expand the range of courses that are offered at the university. He has a particular interest due to his own background as, I believe, a radiographer—I hope I have that right—and an academic in that particular field of medical imaging. He is very keen to provide courses at the Central Queensland University that will give graduates careers in medical imaging and as medical technicians. He is going to be very important in supporting the expansion of services not only at the Rockhampton Base Hospital but also throughout Central Queensland.

There is a very strong partnership developing between our health providers in Central Queensland and the Central Queensland University, who are working very hard to try to bring in allied health and medical imaging and medical technology courses. The university has well and truly put its money where its mouth is. It has appointed a deputy vice-chancellor for development, Professor Mark Burton, who is coming to us from Charles Sturt University where he had a great deal of success in establishing a similar direction for that university. I look forward to working with both the vice-chancellor and the deputy vice-chancellor of Central Queensland University as they take the university in this new direction that will provide a much more stable enrolment base for the university but also make sure that we have a highly qualified workforce that is home grown and able to fill positions in Central Queensland.

Coming back to the bill, I welcome the changes that the bill represents. They guarantee equality across Australia in providing these important diagnostic imaging services and patients will be comfortable to know that there is a standard of care that is being assessed, accredited and delivered. Stage 2 of the scheme will guarantee that diagnostic imaging services supported by Medicare are provided by organisations that are able to meet these transparent and specific standards. It ensures that the $2.2 billion of taxpayers’ money that funds these services is being used effectively. The government can be assured that these services are being provided by organisations that meet this stringent set of standards. The scheme has been well supported by all those in the industry, who know that this is an important way of ensuring quality of services and good value for money. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (7.08 pm)—This Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009 is important legislation, notwithstanding its minor nature, in as much as it extends the accreditation processes associated more particularly with non-radiology services such as cardiac ultrasound and angiography, obstetric and gynaecological ultrasound, or nuclear medicine imaging services. Of course, when one is dealing with public health and people’s welfare, having these very expensive pieces of equipment operated by properly accredited operators must make a lot of sense, and the opposition welcomes this initiative to extend from scheme 1, which was introduced in 2008, when the accreditation arrangements only covered practices providing radiology services. We are now expanding the accreditation regime. It is not to be implemented until 1 July but there is to be a deeming provision, which is also a very sensible approach to taking up early opportunities for the operators to get accredited.

It is, nevertheless, an opportunity also in discussing this matter to look at many other issues relating to health services. I noted that the member for Dobell, who spoke earlier in this debate, was running the line that during the years of the Howard government nothing was done. I mean, it has got so repetitive it is an outrage. The Minister for Health and Ageing should go back to her office and have a
look at herself on television and listen to herself as she carps away day after day after day attacking the opposition for its past faults— and I reject that there were faults—they knew about those when they made their promises at election time. In fact, in government and as a leader of the opposition the Prime Minister made all sorts of promises about how he was going to fix the health system.

I found it quite interesting that the member for Dobell mentioned the $1 billion that was apparently removed, pulled back, from the hospital system. He never mentioned the GST and the massive revenues that that has delivered to the state governments. He never mentioned the fact that the Labor Party opposed it bitterly and, might I add, in a political sense. I hear them from time to time saying, ‘You only say these things to play politics.’ Play politics! The GST, or VAT as it is known in many parts of the world, is a universally proven means of raising consumer taxes that removes a lot of the silly things relevant to sales tax and other methods of consumer taxation. They came in here day after day with kids’ clothing and cream cakes and vegetables attacking the GST. Politically, that was successful. The Howard government lost something like 18 seats in the subsequent election. Remember that they went to the Australian people and said if you re-elect us we will bring in a GST. And we told them in detail what it would apply to, what the charge was going to be, 10 per cent, and so on.

The other thing that was said at the time was that whatever amount of money was to be raised through this taxation would be given to state governments—lock, stock and barrel. The Commonwealth takes all the odium, the Liberal Party lost a lot of seats and gave all the money to state governments. Why did we do that? To quote Prime Minister Howard at the time, it was so that the states had a growth tax, which it certainly demonstrated that it is, and it was to allow them to get on with their principal responsibilities of health, education, and law and order. But that is never counted. It is never counted in education and it is never counted in health. It has a growth characteristic, it is not specific, and unfortunately it was given to state governments without any instruction how to spend it. The then opposition made another big issue about the blame game: don’t blame the states; it is all our fault— the Australian government’s. One of the promises made by the then Leader of the Opposition was, ‘If I can’t get the states to fix it, I will take it all over myself.’ That would be an interesting issue of the economy because, as I said, the GST was provided, with great political pain, to the states primarily to assist them in running their hospitals.

I do not know how this agreement will come out if there is to be additional funding coming from the Commonwealth. But, again, what happens: do they get some of the GST back? The GST was supposed to also cancel out some rather nasty and unproductive state taxes. The states just did not do that; they just took the money. And now they are arguing amongst themselves as to who gets too much and who does not get enough.

The reality is that that money has never been counted in. There was that disgusting ad by the teachers union, with the Comcar driving past the little public school kids, suggesting that the Prime Minister was there. Taking into account the specific grants that relate to private sector education and government schools, no account whatsoever is made of the contribution of the Australian taxpayer, the consumer, through the GST, which does not go to private schools but goes in spades to public schools. Anybody who wants to check the record historically and over time will find that the Australian
taxpayer, through the services of this House, pays about 50 per cent of the revenues of every state government in Australia—maybe 48, maybe 51.

So how can it be that the Australian government under John Howard paid less than half the costs of the states in running their hospitals? How can it be otherwise? Yet we get this chatter every day from a minister who cannot point to one improvement in the delivery of health services, who tips buckets all over us in her nasty, catty way. As I said, she should go and listen to a recording of herself in this place. The fact of life is that she cannot point to one improvement. She can point to all the money they have spent. The Prime Minister gets on it. I refer to it as a process of measuring excellence by expenditure.

The member for Dobell, as he ran out all the issues, said, ‘We have done great wonders with superclinics.’ I think he said he has got one in his electorate—in temporary premises. After two years I think there are only two functioning superclinics in Australia. But there is all this money ready and waiting to be consumed for that process. We have invested in this, we have invested in that, we have invested in something else: where are the results? Where are the shorter waiting lists? They are longer. Where is the total removal of instances of elderly persons and others who have fallen over and broken their leg being put on a trolley in the corridor for a lengthy period without assistance? Surely the promise should have been: ‘I will stop that.’ It is about time this government learned that you do not fix health by chucking money at it.

The member for Dobell had his list of criticisms and another myth—that the Howard government discontinued the Commonwealth Dental Scheme. The Keating government’s Commonwealth Dental Scheme went for four years and it was Paul Keating who said publicly: ‘John Howard is mad to give the states untrammeled access to the GST. He will get no value for the Australian taxpayer by so doing.’ He brought in a cash payment to the states to get rid of the waiting lists for public dental services. What happened? Did the states go and hire $200 million worth of dentists or dental nurses? No, they did not. In fact, I think if anyone checks the record they will find that they hired hardly any more. So where could the additional services be? The money disappeared straight down the hole. Of course at the end of it the Howard government could see that the waiting lists were just as long and nothing had been achieved, so we stopped it. And we agonised over it in our party rooms, as you, Mr Deputy Speaker Schultz, would know. Elderly people with severe dental problems were unable to get into the state services funded significantly by the Commonwealth—50 per cent—in the normal course of events.

We said, ‘It’s no good going back.’ We checked the numbers. There were not enough dentists flowing out of the universities who wanted to work for state governments. So if you just gave them the money, the service was not going to improve. So what did we do? Isn’t it interesting. We are virtually, through accreditation, improving the opportunity for people to gain services from the various imaging technologies through Medicare. The Howard government said, ‘We will create a Medicare number for dental services.’ It was not universal but it was done in a way so that people with very serious problems could go to their GP, get a referral and go and spend $4,000 with any dentist—the ones that were in practice, the best—which those people deserved as much as anybody else.

What was the response of this government when they came into office? They came in
here with a piece of legislation to take us back to the bad old ways, and they are still whinging about the fact that all of the opposition parties in the Senate opposed that shift—the Greens, the Independent members and the coalition. Why? Because they all knew that that other proposal would not work. But, of course, it would have saved them money. These are the people who said, ‘We will spend as much as is necessary to give people the health services they need.’ The solution is good and it was the proper solution. But it did not stop the member for Dobell carrying on about it as some criminal act against elderly people needing dental services. They are getting them—not for the odd filling—and they were not getting any of them under the old system. So why did that have to change? It is a good policy.

Then we had the promise of all promises. We said, ‘You can’t trust Labor with health.’ Under Blewett they got to the precipice of destroying the private health system and that was their policy. And it was the Howard government which could see this system crashing down—and I want to come back to a special example in that regard—and we started subsidising persons, typically at 30 per cent, who chose to take on private health insurance, other than for some people over age 70 and 75. That means the person involved pays two-thirds of their costs of health services and that is apparently a bad idea, despite the fact that they might be wealthier, on high incomes. And, when you take the rebate away, they will keep paying. I gave an example in an earlier speech today.

A former Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, boasted that he never had private health insurance. Why would he bother? Because, when his wife got sick, surprise, surprise, she ended up in a private room in an ACT hospital with surgeon of choice. I gave an example of a speech I heard from a leading administrator of health services in New Zealand, who said, ‘Waiting lists are part of the process of managing the budget of a public hospital.’ She then went on to complain about the administration of waiting lists and how they could be sorted and how, because of the good nature of a member of parliament, they could get people jacked up the list. It should not happen, not if it is true—and of course there is an example of that currently floating around.

The facts of life are that private health contributors pay two-thirds of their health costs. But, again, when we were told that there was a probability that the administration of public hospitals would be taken over by the Commonwealth I had to have a bit of a giggle because, as shadow minister for veterans’ affairs, I watched the Keating government dispose of the Veterans’ Affairs repat hospitals. They gave them away to the states, and two states—Western Australia and Queensland—said, ‘Thanks, but no thanks.’ The Ramsay Health Care group stepped into the breach, and I had representations from RSL members in WA, saying, ‘Wilson, how are we going to manage with nasty private enterprise?’ Three weeks later they said, ‘Wilson, don’t say a word; this is the greatest thing for us since sliced bread.’ Ramsay had reopened the hospital kitchens. The generous Australian government gave the veterans frozen TV dinners. The waiting list for a veteran to have elective surgery at the Hollywood repat hospital in Perth was 10 months. How did Ramsay Health Care fix that? They opened up their operating theatres on a Saturday. Labor got rid of the hospitals.

The Australian government saved $1 billion by giving away those hospitals. That was how much extra it cost the Commonwealth to run six hospitals. They were run thereafter, but the Commonwealth still paid for them. But they paid a fee for service, as do private health contributors. Take it from me: the bigger the subsidies we pay for peo-
ple to go into private health the less money it will cost the Australian taxpayer and of course the service will be better. There is a fundamental in public hospital funding—it is called the block budget. The hospital is given a budget and that makes a patient a liability. You cannot have too many of them! They cost you money; they erode your budget. And you wonder why there are waiting lists. You wonder why people cannot get the orthopaedic items they want for hip joint replacements and all those sorts of things. That is the issue. The system is wrong, and I get angry about this. I watch people throwing money at a system that will never work in the shape it is currently in. Yet I watch people with a culture, with a philosophy that, if it is not run by the government, it is no good, thereby undermining a system that brought private health membership up to almost 50 per cent when it was just about to fall over and that gave people the right to pay two-thirds of the cost and to access medical services when they needed them. That is why, if there is any move by the Rudd government to make deals with the states, the ongoing system will not work.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (7.28 pm)—It is with great pleasure that I follow that rather interesting contribution of the member for O’Connor that was all over the place. It was very difficult to understand what he was saying and where he was going because they were rambling words of a man that were said in order to insult the Minister for Health and Ageing. When a person’s contribution to a debate is based on pure denigration I do not think they have much to contribute to the debate or that they really understand the issue.

The Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009 amends the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Act 2007 to provide transitional arrangements to allow practices providing non-radiological services—that is, services such as ultrasounds—and a combination of non-radiological and radiological services not accredited under the Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation Scheme to register for deemed accreditation in the three months prior to the commencement of the stage 2 scheme, which will commence on 1 July 2010.

Transitional arrangements for deemed accreditation will be required to be registered through them from 1 January 2010. Therefore, this legislation is time sensitive. This is because this would ensure that Medicare eligibility continues from 1 July 2010, when for the purpose of Medicare all diagnostic-imaging services listed in the diagnostic-imaging service table of the Medical Benefits Schedule would need to be rendered at a site accredited under the scheme.

This is important legislation. This is stage 2 of the legislation. Stage 1 of the legislation passed through this parliament in May 2007. At that time I spoke in support of the legislation, but I was a little critical of the way the minister went through the stages of preparation and of the reliability of costing. It was a bit all over the place. There was no attention to detail. We all know that with the then Minister for Health and Ageing, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, you have to look very carefully at anything he does, because quite often you will find out that what he says and what he does are very different things. We stood in this parliament on many occasions when he gave rock-solid, ironclad, rolled gold guarantees that he would not downgrade our health services in this country, yet he ripped $1 billion out of our hospitals. In addition to that, the first act of the Howard government—and one that the now opposition leader continues to support from when he was the health minister—was to close down the Commonwealth dental scheme. I will talk a little bit more about that
as I continue with my contribution to this debate.

This is, I think, good legislation. There has been good consultation with people within the community, and due process has been observed. Currently there are 1,400 practices providing non-radiological services, and they will enter into stage 2 of the scheme, as opposed to ones at stage 1, which dealt with those practices and services of a radiological nature. This is really important because it will have a particular impact in rural and regional areas. So it is important that this stage 2, which will be positive for those areas, is passed through the House in the time that it needs to be passed through the House.

I thought that this might be a good time to pick up on some of those arguments put forward by the member for O'Connor, who, I might add, did not ever refer to the legislation. But I was quite happy to listen to what he had to say. I now feel that my contribution to the debate will pick up on some of the issues that he spent a lot of time on. He talked about dental. I must say that the Howard government’s record in relation to dental care and dental health was very poor. There was the introduction of enhanced dental care, which allowed for people with chronic health needs or illnesses to access dental care—this is a very small percentage of people—whilst thousands of people languished on waiting lists. The opposition have continued to frustrate reform of the dental system since they have been in opposition. There was the introduction of enhanced dental care, which allowed for people with chronic health needs or illnesses to access dental care—this is a very small percentage of people—whilst thousands of people languished on waiting lists. The opposition have continued to frustrate reform of the dental system since they have been in opposition. The government committed a total of $650 million for two dental programs. The teen dental health program commenced last year, and it provides $150 million annually to eligible families. The other program that we put to the parliament is the Commonwealth Dental Health Program. Unfortunately, due to the actions of the opposition in the Senate, that has not come into effect. Instead we have the enhanced dental health program, which pays up to $4,100 over a two-year period to people with chronic illnesses. That leads to a situation where a large section of the community on low and middle incomes that would be able to access the Commonwealth health dental scheme that the government has put to the parliament are missing out, whilst a small number of people with chronic illnesses are able to access dental care.

Even worse than that, a number of people have been deemed to have chronic health problems because their doctors and dentists know that they need this vital dental health program. So you have a system being exploited simply because there is not a suitable, proper system in place for all Australians to utilise. I do not know how the member for O’Connor can stand up in this place and say that the Howard government’s record on dental health is something to be proud of. I am ashamed to think that he would speak in this parliament and condemn thousands and thousands of Australians to suffering because he will not support the Commonwealth Dental Health Program that the Rudd government took to the last election, which was supported by the Australian people and which the opposition is frustrating in the Senate.

I thought it would also be interesting to touch on the workforce issue. In the last parliament, the then health minister, who just happens to be the Leader of the Opposition now, gave terms of reference to the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing to do an inquiry into health funding and cost shifting within the health system. His underlying assumption was that he was going to prove that there was cost shifting by the states to the Commonwealth. The report showed that there was cost shifting in a number of different areas within the health system. There were a number of recommendations that were made in this report. The report was ta-
bled in the parliament in November 2006 and I know you will be shocked to learn, Mr Deputy Speaker, that when we went to the election in November 2007 the government still had not responded to the blame game report. I see this blame game report as a blueprint and as a really good starting place to look at the health system and to work through some of the problems in the health system.

One of the issues identified as being a problem was the issue of workforce shortage. Under the control and leadership of the then health minister and now Leader of the Opposition there was allowed to develop a chronic workforce shortage in Australia—doctors, nurses and all allied health professionals. He ignored this chronic shortage and did nothing about it. Since the Rudd government was elected a very tangible policy has been implemented and action has been taken. I will say for the member for O’Connor’s benefit that there has been a 40 per cent increase in the number of doctors being trained. It takes a while for that to flow through, but eventually it will.

The Shortland electorate, the electorate I represent in this parliament, has the 11th oldest population of any electorate in Australia. As such, there are fairly high health needs in that electorate. Overall, it has the 18th highest number of people receiving an income below $650 a week. This shows an older population with a very small disposable income. During the time that the Leader of the Opposition was minister for health there was a drastic decline in bulk billing. That has improved enormously since the Rudd government has been in power. There was an increase in out-of-pocket expenses under the reign of the then health minister, now the Leader of the Opposition. Doctors were closing their books and it was a very sad story. Still there is a shortage of doctors in Shortland electorate and throughout Australia, so this will take time. That 40 per cent increase in the number of doctors training will eventually filter through the system, but until that happens we are going to be confronted with this shortage of doctors and the impact that it has on the health service within Australia.

I thought I would mention some of the achievements of the Rudd government just for the benefit of the member for O’Connor, who virtually challenged me to do so when he stood in this House and made his contribution to this debate. The prime aim of the Rudd government in the area of health is to strengthen it after years of neglect and buck passing by the former government. I think this blame game report and the reason it was commissioned—to prove that the problems in health were all caused by the states—are a really good example of buck passing and a government failing to take responsibility for what is its responsibility. Then, when they got the report, they did not respond to it. That is the first point I would like to make.

The Rudd government has invested $64 million in hospitals and the health system across the country since being elected—a 50 per cent increase on the previous government. We have invested $600 million on our elective surgery program, with stage 1 committed to a target of 25,000 extra elective surgeries. That was achieved in 2008 and delivered more than 41,000 procedures. In stage 2, more than 150 hospitals across Australia will receive funding. The hospitals in my own area have benefited from this extra funding.

We have invested $750 million to take the pressure off emergency departments in more than 30 hospitals, and a number of other hospitals have benefited. My daughter-in-law works in an accident and emergency department, and I know just how busy that accident and emergency department is. I also know how valuable extra money is in those acci-
dent and emergency departments. When I visit my local hospital, I can see how we have moved to a situation where we value the work that is done in hospitals. I value the work that is done in hospitals, both public and private. I believe that private hospitals make a valuable contribution to our health system and I am very lucky to have an excellent private hospital within the Shortland electorate—the Lake Macquarie Private Hospital. It has particular expertise in the area of cardiology, and it will be one of the hospitals that will need to register under stage 2 of this program.

Private health insurance is an issue that is brought up all the time by members on the other side of this House. I support private health insurance. I have already talked about the income level of people living in the Shortland electorate. The majority of people there will not be impacted on in any way by the changes that we are proposing to private health insurance in this parliament. I do not see why a pensioner living down the road from me should have to subsidise my private health insurance—I think it is indecent. I urge the opposition to get behind the legislation we have in the Senate, pass it and ensure that the pensioners in the Shortland electorate and in the states and territories no longer subsidise their private health insurance. We support private health insurance. We support private hospitals; we support public hospitals. We believe that to have a strong health system you need a mix. That does not mean that governments should pay a subsidy to high-income earners to help them pay their health insurance.

The Rudd government have made some enormous investments in infrastructure within the health system. The member for Dobell mentioned the superclinics and I know that the superclinic in his electorate will also service people in the southern part of the Shortland electorate and I really welcome that. As I mentioned, we have made some big inroads into addressing the issue of doctor shortage and also one of the initiatives that I find particularly exciting is the move towards a greater use of nurse practitioners. Once again, that is a piece of legislation that is languishing in the Senate.

When the opposition in this parliament talk about opposition, they mean opposing everything that comes before them. They have no thought of the impact this opposition will have on everyday people. The opposition have a policy of just saying no. They have refused to pass landmark legislation giving more support and recognition to midwives and nurse practitioners. They have refused to make private health insurance fairer. They have refused to allow more dental health services to be delivered to hundreds and thousands of needy Australians. Their stance on the preventative health agency leaves them open for condemnation. Last year they opposed and delayed a number of government reforms. They are an opposition that opposes everything, has no ideas and has an appalling record in the area of health, one that has delivered a lot of suffering to a number of Australian people. I commend the legislation to the House. *(Time expired)*

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) *(7.48 pm)*—Before I speak on the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009 I would like to draw attention to the member for Shortland’s seeming preoccupation with the member for O’Connor. I just hope that it is purely platonic. While she is dwelling on the voting record of this side of the House, I would draw her attention back to the time she spent on this side of the House and her party’s continued opposition to every economic reform that was brought in by the previous government.
I rise to speak tonight on the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009. Let me say it is generally a good piece of legislation. The original accreditation scheme was implemented under the previous government. We could argue about the way that this new accreditation program is being rolled out but, by and large, it is right that people should know when they go to a medical-imaging establishment they are going to get a quality service. It is my understanding that in South Australia we have one major medical-imaging company that has already met the accreditation standards and I look forward to the rest doing the same.

My major issue with this bill is the sad story of unfulfilled commitment to my electorate which I have brought to the House before. It concerns a commitment from the government to establish a medical resonance imaging service at Port Augusta to service not just Port Augusta, which has a population of 14,000 people, but also Whyalla, which has 22,000 people; Port Pirie, 15,000; Port Lincoln, 14,000; the greater Eyre Peninsula, around 13,000; Roxby Downs, 5,000; and the Mid North, with probably another 8,000—in total more than 90,000 people. This machine, along with another 12, was committed by the Howard government in the second half of 2007. About an hour ago in this place I heard the member for Capricornia waxing lyrical about the government’s commitment to the MRI machine in the Rockhampton Hospital. Well she might, but it is a shame that the government have not shown the same commitment to the medical resonance imaging machine that they had promised to the people of Grey.

The tenders for the installation and operation of this service were due in by mid-November 2007. In February 2008 the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon, as the representative of the new government, informed us of the new government’s commitment to delivering the service and I applauded that decision. She reaffirmed that commitment in May 2008 when announcing an extension to the tender process. I understand there were three tenders. The tenderers initially expected the announcement of the awarding of the contract within six months, but they have suffered no fewer than three extensions, eventually being informed in September 2009, almost two years after the tender was lodged, that the government had decided none of the tenders were suitable and was cancelling the project.

At no stage had the tenderers been asked for additional information, to make any alterations or had it adequately explained to them why they had been rejected. In fact, one tenderer who has confided in me said that during a debriefing after the rejection he was told his submission ticked all the boxes. He was told it was an excellent submission. These tenderers have had their lives on hold for almost two years, and they are financially committed to property so they can deliver what they promised they would deliver, only to be informed at the end of the process that the government was not interested in meeting this commitment that was made repeatedly from early 2008. The tenderers were required to meet a number of prerequisites including public access, professional standards, business plans, staff training programs et cetera.

Since the election I have inquired of the minister on a number of occasions when we could expect this service to commence and was continually referred to the minister’s January 2008 statement affirming her commitment. So it was that following the news of the cancellation in September last year I contacted the minister’s office and sought a meeting as a matter of urgency. At the meeting I explained that I believed her department had made an error of judgment. She
committed to review the process and I committed to work with the minister. On 22 December, after the country’s media had gone to sleep for Christmas, I received information from the minister’s office reaffirming her decision to slash the project.

By this time I had been privy to one of the tender documents. Whilst the tender document requested start-up finance, it clearly stated that if it were not forthcoming then the proponents were prepared to meet the whole cost. This is where it gets mysterious: what is the cost to the taxpayer if the proponents are prepared to put all the money upfront? Where is the risk to the taxpayer? All they were asking for was the operating licence and the Medicare fee for service of payments, the same as every other MRI in Australia. The financial risk was all the proponents. If their business were to fail, what would the taxpayer have lost? Nothing. The taxpayer would not have funded the machine or the premises. Surely this is just a bureaucratic stuff-up. You just cannot believe that a department would give this recommendation when they had been offered this kind of deal. I am very pleased to note that the Minister for Health and Ageing is in the House as I am speaking.

I wrote twice more asking her to take a personal interest in this issue. Her last reply is interesting. It alleged no tender had reached the four measured criteria. Those criteria were (a) a proposed pricing structure/patient charging policy, (b) hours of operation, emergency services and after-hours availability, (c) patient accessibility and (d) an ability to demonstrate an ongoing business plan. I have seen the tender and, in my opinion, it addresses all of those criteria. It is an excellent tender, as the tenderer was informed by the debriefing people from the department. However, the minister claimed that no tender reached a satisfactory level. The letter I received from the minister said:

You suggest in your letter of 8 January 2010, that if it is the case that all of the people in Port Augusta—

and I must make the point that we are not only talking about the people of Port Augusta but talking about most of the population of Grey—

who currently require MRI services are travelling to Adelaide for those services, the location of the MRI unit in Port Augusta would have no impact on the Government’s health budget.

That is what I said and it was quoted back to me. The letter went on to say:

However, previous experience clearly demonstrates that the provision of Medicare eligibility to an additional MRI unit results in additional Medicare rebateable MRI scans being provided, thus resulting in additional costs to the Government’s health budget. Therefore, the provision of Medicare eligibility to an MRI unit is not cost neutral. So it comes back to money. The government’s commitment that they would spend whatever was needed to give the Australian public the health services they deserve comes back to money. And it would seem that the service we deserve in the country is less than that received in the city. This is preposterous. It makes second-class citizens of country people. Everything can be equal as long as it does not cost money. The nub of the problem seems to be about money and not the cost of delivery, but it costs more to get the same level of service in the country. That is not because the service costs more but because we are going to start receiving the same level of services that those in the city receive. The letter went on to say:

It was never the Government’s intention that supplementary funding over and above the necessary extra Medicare funding would be required to support the MRI business.

This was exactly what the tender I have seen offered. It said that if no extra funding were forthcoming they would meet the full costs of the installation of the MRI at their ex-
pense. It is a sorry tale of promises abandoned to go with all the other commitments that this government seems to be running away from by the day. I have suspicions that there are other complications. The South Australian Department of Health—SA Health—and Country Health SA have an interest in this. The state minister says he supports the MRI machine being positioned in Port Augusta. He has been visited by the mayors of Whyalla, Port Augusta and Port Pirie to support this proposition, but I am not so sure. This may be what the South Australian Minister for Health, John Hill, said, but I am not so sure it is fact. The Port Augusta hospital currently has no medical imaging contract. The contract expired last year and a call for a tender was unsuccessful. This could be just a coincidence or can we perhaps assume that there is a little more to this, that SA Health are recommending against the MRI in Port Augusta because they want to see more funds come back into their system? I am not convinced that SA Health are not trying to alter the deal to suit themselves. The minister went on to say in the letter:

I am considering other options which might be available to the Government and am consulting with relevant agencies. One possible alternative would be to redirect some of the Medicare funding planned for an MRI unit in Port Augusta to other worthwhile health projects in Port Augusta. Some possible projects, identified with the assistance of the South Australian Department of Health and Country Health SA, would involve the expansion of the day surgery waiting and outpatient consulting areas within the theatre and consulting suite at the Port Augusta Hospital, and the replacement of theatre equipment.

Apart from missing the point that this MRI machine is not only about Port Augusta and the 14,000 people who live there but about the 90,000 people it would service. Who benefits from this redirection of funds? The South Australian health department.

It is very interesting this arises in the middle of the South Australian election campaign, and I might bring to this House the state of the seat of Stuart. Stuart has been held by the retiring member, the Hon. Graham Gunn, who is retiring after almost 40 years—in the last few elections, by a knife point. So we have two new candidates running for the major parties in the seat of Stuart: our candidate, Dan van Holst Pellekaan—a very fine man who is committed to this MRI machine in Port Augusta—and the Labor Party candidate.

What chance is it that in fact the funds that were to be directed to the MRI machine in Port Augusta will come out in a grand announcement in the next five weeks and support the local Labor candidate as we lead forward into the election? The fact is that the Port Augusta Hospital has no medical-imaging contract and I suspect the South Australian health minister has passed judgment that this machine should not be located there because he would like to see those resources put into the South Australian hospital system. It is about the federal government bailing out state government mismanagement.

I ask the minister to take the opportunity to come clean here. The state Liberal Party leader, Isobel Redmond, recently committed $2½ million to the establishment of this MRI unit in Port Augusta. This would cover all the set-up costs. All we need then are the Medicare operating fees. So will the health minister stand by her 2008 commitment and supply the operating licence? There is no risk. The funding will be met by other parties. The only difference is that the people of the region will start to receive the same level of service those who live in the city receive.

In short, to come back to this bill, I will not be opposing the bill but I would dearly like to see the minister deliver on her com-
mitments to my electorate so we too can enjoy the benefits of an accredited magnetic resonance imaging service within the electorate, thus avoiding the thousands of kilometres of travel to access this service in the city, and address the admitted shortfall of service to my constituents.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! The question is that this bill be now read a second time. I think the member for Chifley was seeking the call.

Ms Roxon—It’s not like the whip to seek the call when he’s not on the list.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I call the member for Chifley since the minister has given way to the member for Chifley.

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (8.03 pm)—I appreciate the courtesy, Mr Deputy Speaker. I did not want to take up too much time of the House. I certainly support the legislation that the government is bringing forward, the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009. I was very interested in the comments about an MRI machine, because in Blacktown, with a population of about 300,000 people, Blacktown Hospital was provided with an MRI machine in the last few years.

I am very impressed with the department at Blacktown. Blacktown Hospital is twinned with Mount Druitt. Radiological and non-radiological services are offered at both campuses. The MRI, I am happy to report, is operating at capacity. We have now started using it on a Saturday. More particularly, we provide a same-day service, so it treats not only those patients who may be in hospital but also patients who are referred to the hospital for an MRI. Of course you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that MRIs are a much less invasive form than the traditional X-ray machines and CT machines.

I make no secret of the fact that it would be really good, given that machine now is reaching capacity, if we had an MRI machine at Mount Druitt. What would happen there is that the state government would provide the capital for the purchase of the machine. The federal government provides the licence and, of course, with usage it gets repaid.

Why am I anxious to have it at Mount Druitt? Well, there has been a significant change at Mount Druitt Hospital. It is to become an elective surgery specialist centre of excellence. At the moment we have 1.5 operating theatres—I believe it is only one actually operating—and we have four theatres, one of which was being used as a storeroom. But that has all changed. There is going to be an endoscopy unit provided for Mount Druitt Hospital and, as I say, we certainly hope that non-complicated elective surgery which otherwise would have been performed at Nepean Hospital, Westmead Hospital or other public hospitals will be able to be performed at Mount Druitt.

Judging from the briefing I received, it will be a challenge, I guess, trying to attract some of the doctors to Mount Druitt to do the operations, but they will be able to have guaranteed slots. I think one of the most disappointing aspects of elective surgery is when you are all prepped up ready to go into an operating theatre and you are told, ‘No, sorry; we can’t do it today because there’s an emergency being done ahead of you.’ One of the advantages of having a centre of excellence for elective surgery is that doctors who do their elective surgery there will have guaranteed slots, so patients who front up on Monday, Tuesday or whatever day wanting to have an operation will indeed have an operation.

I know the minister has been very generous in listening to my pleas for an MRI. She explains that she has a whole country to consider when it comes to MRIs. But I think, to be frank, this radical change for the New
South Wales health system—going to elective surgery centres of excellence, as we are doing in Mount Druitt—would be immeasurably boosted by the provision of an MRI at Mount Druitt. We do more MRIs at Blacktown Hospital than are done at Nepean or even at Westmead. It is more fully utilised. We will get value for money. The other thing I should say is that it is a very modest fee that the hospital charges to referred patients. From memory, it is in the order of just over $200 for an MRI. But if you go to a private provider you can pay anything upwards of $1,000. So it would be really good for patients if we had it there; certainly the one at Blacktown is really good for patients.

Health is going to be an issue, and I want to finish on this point. I find it very difficult for the opposition to be believed in health when they ripped a billion dollars out of the health system. I know what a catastrophic impact that had just in Western Sydney, and you can replicate that in south-western Sydney as well. Not only did they rip a billion dollars out of the public hospital system but also they froze doctors’ places and they did not provide enough training places for nurses. I put on the public record my deep appreciation of the efforts of the Minister for Health and Ageing. I think she is doing an excellent job; she has inherited a mess and is working her way through it. I think the people of Australia can have confidence in Nicola Roxon as the minister for health, but they can have no confidence in the Leader of the Opposition, because in four years he took the billion dollars out of the public health system, he froze the doctors’ places and he did not provide enough nurses.

Much has been said about hospital boards. I was a foundation deputy chair of Mount Druitt Hospital and am very proud of that association. I used to be driven mad trying to work out budgets. I think back on what happened at Hawkesbury Hospital, which also had a board: they used to routinely blow their budget and always got supplementation to make it up. But there have been really significant and important changes that have occurred between Blacktown and Mount Druitt Hospital that I think a board might not have been able to achieve—for example, Mount Druitt Hospital has the palliative care unit shared between the two hospitals. It has the paediatric ward, which Blacktown does not have. It has rehabilitation that Blacktown does not have. Of course Blacktown has some things that Mount Druitt does not have, but the provision of these services and making them specialties of the hospital has in the long run, I think, continued the hospital and ensured its future.

Frankly, if I look back and think about how we were just a board, I see that it would have been so easy to close Mount Druitt Hospital, because it sits between Nepean Hospital, Blacktown and then Westmead. Whilst I enjoyed my time as a deputy chairman of a hospital, boards do not make up for a lack of money and they do not necessarily contribute to or have the ability to manage the huge changes and costs occurring in the health system. I think people ought to put their faith in the work of the minister for health and, of course, the Prime Minister and our commitments in this area. I commend the bill.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.11 pm)—in reply—I thank all of the members who have spoken and contributed on the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009, particularly the last two speakers. I will address briefly the comments that have been made. I know that the member for Chifley has been a very staunch advocate of an MRI licence being provided at Mount Druitt Hospital. He never fails to take the opportunity to raise it with me—and, as a good member committed to his local area, it
is his job to do that. I think he and the hospital at Mount Druitt are building a very significant case for why the changed structure that is being introduced in the region would mean that an MRI could be well utilised. But he also rightly points out what I have said to him and many other members: there is not a national process for the automatic allocation of MRI licences based on population or an automatic process where, if a machine is purchased, it will be recognised in a particular way. There is a fair amount of fairly ugly political history from the previous government, which is the reason that there is not a system in place, but obviously we are keen to make sure that we look at needs very carefully. If there are changing structures or demands, we are always interested in seeing if there is a way that we can assist members on both sides of the House.

That is why I am particularly interested, before I give a short summing up speech on this bill, in addressing the issues that have been raised by the member for Grey, who is indeed also a very difficult situation, as we believe we are as well in these circumstances, where a commitment was made to deliver an MRI licence. A tender process was undertaken. That tender process did not present an application that met all of the requirements. I listened very carefully to the member’s presentation because I know that he is genuinely committed to trying to make sure better services can be provided in Port Augusta. Unlike the situation that you are in when you run a tender process as a minister, we are not the assessors of the applications. There is an arm’s-length process. It is undertaken very carefully and there are strict regulations for how it is done. Of course it is proper that I would act on the advice, and I am concerned—and we have had a number of discussions and correspondences, some of which were read into the House—that that leaves both the local member and the community frustrated that an opportunity may have been missed.

From our early contacts, I asked my department to go back and reassess the process. They have still advised me that none of the applications meet the requirements, and the most recent letter I wrote to the member was to say that we acknowledge that, if an appropriate tender had been available, it would have had a cost impact. That is fine. That is something we were committed to doing. Given that there has not been, did the member want to be involved in identifying other health projects of an equivalent value that can be of benefit to Port Augusta? It is absolutely a matter for the member for Grey whether he wants to be engaged in that process or not.

I do take exception to the allegation that this is somehow being used politically. I do not think it is the behaviour of a government or a minister that is behaving politically to write to a member of the opposition and say, ‘We are interested in your views on whether money can be spent locally on health for the benefit of your community.’ I can assure the member for Grey that, despite his queries and worries that something nefarious is occurring with the South Australian government, the South Australian government do not participate in the tender process, they are not part of the tender panel and they have no capacity or ability to interfere in that process. But in the situation we are now in—where we have money that we were prepared to spend in Port Augusta on an MRI machine and no successful tenderer to be able to pay that to—we are wanting to engage with the local member and the state health services to gather information for any existing projects.

I can also assure the member that he is not the only member who has been in this position. In fact, a very similar situation occurred in the seat of Braddon. A commitment had
been made for an MRI service to be provided in Burnie, and a similar negotiation process—when there were no successful tenderers—was gone through with the member for Braddon. Discussions were had with the local health community as well as with the Tasmanian government about whether there were any options for providing additional health services. That was also not an easy thing for the community, but I think we ended up with quite a good resolution.

Of course, if the member for Grey tells me that he does not want this money to be invested in health services in his area, he is more than welcome to stand up and say that. In the absence of him telling me that, I look forward to a reply to the letter, which was quoted extensively, for any ideas or views that he has. It is tempting as a minister, when you hear these very heartfelt pleas, to again ask my department to go back and see if there is anything in the tender process that should be revisited, but I am very wary of doing that, having already been down that path once and assured again that there is no appropriate tender application that could be awarded.

I look forward to having future discussions. I can assure the member for Grey that there is nothing mysterious or political going on. We have been open with him and quite encouraging of him to be involved in this process, and I hope he will take that opportunity. It is a very legitimate consideration for Australians, no matter where they live, to want to be able to access decent health services—and MRI processes are becoming much more common. We are interested in doing all we can to make sure that, where there is a viable option, we would help establish these services. So I am sure there are going to be many other discussions, and I hope that we can continue to work with the member for Grey to find a resolution for Port Augusta and the surrounds. This bill does not actually deal directly with those issues raised by local members, but it is a good opportunity to put those issues on the record. A number of other members took the opportunity to raise similar issues in their local areas and of course the government takes note of those issues.

On behalf of the government, I would like to acknowledge the opposition's support for the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009. It amends the accreditation act of 2007 to broaden the scope of the Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation Scheme. The bill establishes transitional arrangements for existing diagnostic practices providing non-radiology services or a combination of non-radiology and radiology services not accredited under the scheme to enter stage 2 of the scheme from 1 July 2010. These arrangements will enable non-radiology practices to transit into stage 2 of the scheme, with minimal disruption to the business of providing Medicare eligible diagnostic imaging services to patients. Through the implementation of the stage 2 scheme, the government and community can be assured that the 19.5 million or so diagnostic imaging services that are supported by Medicare annually are being provided by organisations that are able to meet specified standards and that taxpayer funded investment in those services totalling over $2.2 billion per year is being used effectively.

The government acknowledges that the success of the stage 2 scheme is dependent on the support of stakeholders. I would like to assure members, particularly those who raised this issue in the House, that the stage 2 scheme model has been developed and informed by an evaluation of the stage 1 scheme undertaken in 2009. The results of this evaluation will be released publicly soon. It is the government’s intention to ensure that the stage 2 scheme remains practical and affordable, by continuing to monitor
and evaluate the scheme and, in the future, by conducting a review of the scheme. I am happy to confirm for the member for Boothby that the findings from that review will be made publicly available.

On behalf of the government, I restate our appreciation for the collaboration of all the affected medical groups that have enabled the government to reach agreement on the proposal to provide transitional arrangements and to enable the structure of the accreditation regime to cover all diagnostic imaging services. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.20 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WELFARE REFORM AND REINSTATEMENT OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 25 November 2009, on motion by Ms Macklin:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (8.21 pm)—The Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform and Reinstatement of Racial Discrimination Act) Bill 2009 has a number of objectives. Primary among them, as the title of the bill suggests, is the reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act to the legislation pertaining to the Northern Territory intervention. It also proposes to change the income management measures now in operation in 73 Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Under the existing arrangements, welfare recipients in the 73 communities in the Northern Territory have their income managed. The legislation specifically excluded the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. It also provided that measures were ‘special measures’ for the benefit of Indigenous people. The income management was made subject to social security appeals by the government in 2008.

Under this government’s bill, income management will be extended to the whole of the Northern Territory and it will be subject to the Racial Discrimination Act. Other measures such as alcohol and pornography restrictions will be maintained—‘special measures’ for the purposes of the Racial Discrimination Act. It is also proposed to extend it nationally at some time in the future. However, the income management will be applied in more limited circumstances than present: firstly, for people aged 15 to 25 in receipt of youth allowance, Newstart allowance, special benefit or parenting payment for more than 13 weeks in the last 26 weeks; secondly, for people aged 25 and above and younger than age pension age who are in receipt of the above benefits for more than 52 weeks in the last 104 weeks; and, thirdly, for people assessed by social workers or Northern Territory child protection workers for reasons including vulnerability to financial crisis, domestic violence or economic abuse. In addition, people can voluntarily opt into the system.

These restrictions will be open to exceptions: for people studying full time or with a reasonable pattern of work; for parents of school-age children who can demonstrate no more than five unexplained absences from school; and for parents of preschool children who have met a range of requirements, in-
including immunisation and medical check-ups. The exemption will last for 12 months then be reviewed. The decision to place a person on income management and to grant or refuse an exemption will be subject to a social security appeal. Income management can be applied to areas outside the Northern Territory by the legislative instrument. The government proposes an evaluation in 2011–12 before considering the exemptions.

Income management has been successful. In its report to the minister entitled Closing the gap in the Northern Territory, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs stated: Income management is a central measure in the Northern Territory Emergency Response. It ensures that Commonwealth Income Support and Family Assistance payments are used for the benefit of children and to increase the financial security of people raising children.

Moreover, the Final stores post licensing monitoring report found that the overall impact of income management has been positive for these communities. The report found: Customer shopping habits have changed significantly in most stores, with 68.2 per cent of store operators reporting an increase in the amount of healthy food purchased. This includes items such as fruit and vegetables, as well as dairy foods and meat.

... ... ...
Community residents, particularly women, are telling store operators that they now have more control over their money, with greater capacity to manage humbug.

Store operators reported that feedback is generally positive, especially from women, once people understand how it works. Most money was allocated to food, 65.4 per cent; community housing rent, 8.4 per cent; clothing and footwear, 5.9 per cent; and store cards, 5.3 per cent. School nutrition amounted to 2.9 per cent. Accordingly, income management should only be changed if there is a compelling case to do so.

Writing in his recent book The politics of suffering, the anthropologist Peter Sutton, a long-time friend and supporter of Indigenous Australians, observed this: The first consideration must be to focus on those conditions that are conducive to the emotional and physical wellbeing of the unborn, infants, children, adolescents, the elderly and adult women and men. It is remarkable how many people living in the comfort, affluence and healthy surroundings of Australia’s suburbia have in the debates over Indigenous policy and especially the intervention covertly promoted the view that respect of cultural differences and racially defined political autonomy takes precedence over a child’s basic human right to have love, wellbeing and safety. It is as if political feelings and political values are more important than one’s emotional feelings and moral values as fellows of those other human beings in the ghettos.

He continued: I believe that considerations of care should be put before considerations of strict justice as a matter of principle. There are times when one of these might have to yield to the other. In general, I am inclined to give priority to care and to tough out the storm of complaints about flawed justice. Others take a different view. In the case of conflict between care and appeasement, there should be no argument. Appeasement of vested interest groups goes.

This is someone long associated with Indigenous people on these issues. It is born of an insight into the failures of decades of public policy and a rejection of a failed philosophy that prevailed for so long about Indigenous issues. Returning to Sutton, he said: Do-goodism can take many forms. One is saccharin sympathy but another is self-redemptive legal and political crusading on behalf of marginal citizens that proceeds on the assumption that the emotional wounds will be healed by laws and documents and covenants signed in Geneva.

CHAMBER
This brings me back to the bill. It is born of Labor’s insistence that the Racial Discrimination Act apply to income management. According to this belief, specific measures for Indigenous communities are inappropriate, although I note that special measures are being retained in other parts of the proposed legislation. Moreover, it is lawyers and courts who will decide the application of discrimination measures rather than the people through their parliamentary representatives.

Special measures are measures that provide a benefit to a particular group so that a group can secure adequate advancement and exercise and enjoy human rights on the same basis as others in the community. The measures contained in the response do not seek to take away rights and freedoms; rather, they aim to rebuild social and economic structures and therefore give meaningful content to Indigenous rights and freedoms.

Many Indigenous people in the Northern Territory continue to face significant social and economic barriers to the enjoyment of their rights to health, development, education, property, security and culture. Instead of protecting human rights, this bill will return many honourable Indigenous people to exploitation by others, the inadequate protection of social workers and a maze of legal contests. Indeed, the government has not tabled its illegal advice about the impact of these changes on the viability of the proposed measures. As Sutton wrote:

Caring measures based on the vital human right of freedom from abuse, the right to adequate nutrition and medical treatment, the right to economic and spatial mobility rather than documentary measures based on increasingly stratospheric rights and international covenants lie at the effective end of realistic processes of improvement.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 8.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Roads: Goodna Bypass**

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (8.30 pm)—A little over 2½ hours ago on Channel Nine News in Brisbane, Queensland viewers were informed by reporter Alex Smith that the Rudd government had, to use his words, ‘probably lied’ to the people of the western suburbs in the Ryan electorate. The options were at best ‘misled’ or at worst ‘lied’, to quote Mr Smith. It has come to the attention of Mr Smith, to my attention and to the attention of the constituents of the western suburbs, Brisbane and all of Queensland through freedom of information searches that a little over a few days after Mr Rudd was sworn in as Australia’s 26th Prime Minister, a little over a few days after Mr Albanese was sworn in as the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and a little over a few days after the entire Rudd government took over the reins, the honour, the prestige and the privilege of being the custodians of the Australian people’s future there was a meeting held between the Queensland Minister for Transport and the new federal minister for transport that overturned the commitment not to build the Goodna Bypass. All those in the western suburbs would know of the Goodna Bypass. It was a battle royal for me as the sitting local member as I carried the flag for the Howard government and acted in what was deemed to be the interests of the western suburbs and of greater Queensland to construct four bridges across the Brisbane River, including into the Ryan electorate.

I want to outline the timetable that clearly shows the Rudd government and the Labor Party candidate for the Ryan electorate knew full well that there was every prospect of the...
Goodna Bypass decision being overturned. On 24 November, on election day, the Howard government was defeated and Mr Rudd took the reins of office. On 3 December 2007, Mr Rudd was sworn in as Prime Minister. On 11 December 2007, Mr Albanese wrote to Mr Pitt—this is eight days after the election. On 14 December, Mr Albanese and Mr Pitt met. Mr Albanese offered $200 million to the Queensland government to acquire the Goodna Bypass corridor. On 23 January 2008, senior Main Roads officials briefed the Queensland government and suggested a joint media statement that Mr Albanese and Mr Pitt should issue together, that they hold hands and say, ‘We regret the commitment at the election but now we must have a Goodna Bypass.’ On 30 January 2008, Mr Pitt wrote to Mr Albanese again.

The hollow words of the Labor candidate’s campaign commitment ring loud and clear. The hollow words of Mr Rudd, as the opposition leader and as the man who sought to have the trust of the Australian people to become Prime Minister, ring true. This government’s history of broken promises and of commitments unmet can now clearly be said to be part of its DNA. I have letters and documents galore here from the freedom of information search that was carried out—not by me, not by the opposition, not by an extreme Liberal or an extreme National but by a media commentator, Mr Smith from Channel Nine. Tonight he told the people of Bellbowrie, of Moggill, of Pullenvale, of Chapel Hill and of Kenmore Hills that the commitment to abandon the Goodna Bypass corridor was not worth the words on the piece of paper they were written on. I say very loud and very clear to the people of Ryan that quite clearly the government of Mr Rudd really has lied. I make that grave statement with a heavy heart—

Mr Byrne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: if you are accusing a member of parliament of lying I think it is unparliamentary and I ask you to ask him to withdraw it.

The SPEAKER—The member for Ryan will withdraw.

Mr Johnson—I rephrase my words and say that the commitment—

The SPEAKER—The member has to withdraw.

Mr Johnson—I will not withdraw. I decline to withdraw.

The SPEAKER—The member for Ryan really places himself in an invidious position, but on this occasion his time has expired.

Climate Change

Mr Turnour (Leichhardt) (8.35 pm)—The member for Ryan is sounding a bit rattled over there. He has turned a very safe Liberal seat into a marginal seat and I think he is a bit concerned about that. We have heard a bit of ranting and raving from the other side this evening about roads, but I am talking about climate change. I come from Far North Queensland and I know it is a very important issue in my electorate of Leichhardt. I also know that it is a very important issue in electorates like Ryan—inner city electorates where there are some progressive Liberals. These are the sorts of people that in the past have voted for the member for Ryan, but I know they will be looking at the current Leader of the Opposition and the extreme Right in the Liberal Party and be very concerned about his position on climate change. I think that is part of the agitation that we have seen from the member for Ryan this evening in his real concern about his political future and turning a safe Liberal seat into a marginal seat.

We need action on climate change. I have spoken about this issue twice already this year because it is a real threat in electorates like mine of Leichhardt. We have an electorate dependent on the tourism industry. Our
economy and our way of life are dependent very much on our environment, on our Great Barrier Reef and on our wet tropical rainforests. We have got great coastal communities in the northern beaches of Cairns, up on the coasts of the Cape York Peninsula and in the Torres Strait that are under real threat from climate change, particularly from rising sea levels in the Torres Strait.

The Rudd government believe in action on climate change, and that stands in stark contrast to the opposition, because they are currently led by Mr Abbott, who has said, ‘climate change is crap’. Those are his words, not mine. Senator Minchin is on the record as saying that human beings have not had an impact on climate change; it is just a natural process. The climate is changing, but the science is clear that humans are having an impact. We need a policy response that is going to take real action—not the con job that we see being brought forward by the opposition.

It is important to remember that prior to Mr Abbott’s leadership of the Liberal Party, going back through Mr Turnbull, Mr Nelson and previous opposition leaders to the Howard government, there was general bipartisan agreement that an emissions trading scheme, a market based scheme, was the best way to tackle climate change. An emissions trading scheme reduces emissions by putting a price on carbon pollution. It does this by requiring emitters to buy a permit for each tonne of carbon pollution they produce. This ensures that the cost of pollution is factored into the cost of production. It is the case that the Rudd government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the right way to go about reducing carbon pollution, because it does three things in contrast to the opposition’s scheme. Firstly, it puts a cap on carbon emissions so that we know that they will reduce over time. Secondly, it establishes a carbon market that makes the big polluters pay rather than the taxpayers. Thirdly, it uses the revenue raised from polluters to compensate those on low to middle incomes, like pensioners and working families. They are the people that our policy will compensate, enabling them to adjust to increased costs in the economy. The reality is that there is not a cost-free response to climate change.

The Rudd government’s climate change policy stands in stark contrast to Mr Abbott’s con job which will not work as it places no cap on carbon pollution, so emissions will continue to grow. The Department of Climate Change has made it clear that emissions will continue to grow under the opposition’s con job. Their plan slugs the taxpayer, not the big polluters, and will cost more than $10 billion over 10 years—and it is unfunded, which means higher taxes or cuts to services like schools and hospitals. So you have got the opposition talking about being fiscally responsible while announcing policies like their response to carbon pollution, which is basically regulations, picking winners, and systems that do not provide a direct response. We know that a market based system is the best way to tackle climate change. That is what the Rudd government is committed to, that is what the Australian people want, and that is what I know that we will deliver—if not in this parliament then, I am sure, at some stage in the future.

Drought

Health

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (8.40 pm)—In just over a month, on 31 March, much of western New South Wales—my electorate and others—the most drought-affected area in the whole of Australia over the last eight years or so, comes to the end of its current exceptional circumstances declaration.

In November last year, the Rural Advisory Council was ordered by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to do a sur-
vey of the region to determine whether or not it would remain in exceptional circumstances after March of this year. I hope that the minister will not unilaterally cancel that; there has been a bit of rain around. I do not see that he can unless he sends the committee out to have another look. I very much hope that we do not find, on a Friday evening when nobody is in parliament and when he hopes the media are not, that he will make an announcement regarding the cessation of exceptional circumstances in that region.

The situation has always been that, six weeks before exceptional circumstances are due to cease in an area, Centrelink sends out notices advising people. In times past, and I concede that it happened in our time too, people got a notice even though exceptional circumstances were going to continue. To his credit, the minister wanted to avoid that so he sent the committee out last year. But I must confess that I have concerns about some areas, like Parkes and part of Forbes, which did not have the big rain at Christmas time. They may have had good rain since, but it has not rained money, and it is not going to rain money ever, but it does create a lot of expense. Whether or not they have had rain, the central west and the far west are in a terrible situation. The cost of superphosphate is growing out of sight, crops are soon to be worked up and planted, and people need the assurance—as their banks do—that the interest rate subsidy, in particular, will continue in the near future. I think the minister needs to make his intentions known about whether he is reconsidering the situation. We believe he already has—and has since January—a recommendation from that committee. We need to know what decision he will make.

I also want to make quick reference to the health situation, particularly in my area in western New South Wales. Labor has totally bungled health. The Prime Minister made the statement prior to the last election:

When it comes to improving Australia’s health and hospital system, as Prime Minister if elected, the buck will stop with me.

He actually stated that by June 2009, some seven or eight months ago, he would have the hospital situation under control. There is also the fact that in New South Wales the Greater Western Area Health Service admitted that it does not have a health plan past 2010. We are the part of New South Wales, if not Australia, with the biggest problem. It is a huge health area with no local input into it and no plan. I must congratulate the Mayor of Bathurst, Paul Toole, for speaking out against the current situation: not enough money in GWAHS, too big a region, no local input into hospitals or the provision of health services and, for far too long, not enough money even to pay the bills for local health services. I call upon Kevin Rudd and the New South Wales government to create a plan to let western New South Wales know that it is not the poor person of health in Australia.

Hon. John Kilday ‘Jock’ Ferguson

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (8.45 pm)—Tonight I would like to pay my respects to the Hon. John Kilday Ferguson, better known to many of us as Jock Ferguson, member of the Legislative Council of the Western Australian parliament, who suddenly and tragically passed away in the early hours of Saturday, 13 February 2010. Jock was only 64 years old.

Jock was elected to the Legislative Council in September 2008, commencing his term on 22 May 2009. He represented the East Metropolitan Region, which encompasses many of the suburbs within my electorate of Hasluck. He was born on 15 January 1946 in Possilpark, a poor, working-class area of Glasgow, Scotland. Jock was raised by his grandparents, thinking for many years that they were his parents and not knowing that
his sister was actually his mother. She had given birth to him as a single mum and such was the prejudice at the time that it was kept a family secret, as was the birth and adoption of his younger sister, Monica. It is fortunate that Monica was a persistent Scot. She actually found Jock before his death and they had some years together.

Jock undertook an apprenticeship in Glasgow, becoming a fitter before joining the merchant navy and leaving Scotland. We were fortunate that Jock’s travels eventually led him to the resource-rich north-west of Western Australia. Always a proud member of his union—perhaps sponsored by his grandfather, who was the convenor of the boilermakers union in Possilpark—Jock became an active shop steward and later a convenor for the Metal Workers Union. He was subsequently elected as an organiser, then as assistant secretary and, finally, as State Secretary of the AMWU in 2000, a position I know he held with great honour.

Jock understood how important a good job is to a person’s self-esteem and their sense of worth. He was passionate about the rights and dignity of working people. He was also passionate about securing and sustaining the manufacturing industry in Australia and the need to ensure local content and jobs in our national economy. He advocated and lobbied for tenders from big business and governments to be broken down into smaller contracts so that local small and medium enterprises could bid for the work on a fairer basis.

Jock worked tirelessly with industry and with governments of all political persuasions to ensure investment in our industries and our people, and I think he was successful at that and highly regarded by both sides, in the sense of not only Liberal and Labor but also employers and industry in Western Australia. He was a member of the WA State Training Board, reforming apprenticeships and trade training in WA to make sure that we had the workforce with the right skills to keep jobs and manufacturing in WA. He was appointed to the State Supply Commission, where he ensured that WA industry was supported by government in government procurement policies. He played a crucial role in the development of the Australian Marine Complex, or Jervoise Bay as some of us remember it. The Australian Marine Complex is a common user facility with open access for companies servicing our diverse marine, defence and resource—especially oil and gas—industries in Western Australia. Again, he was working to ensure, always, WA jobs and industry.

Jock was a true champion of the Western Australian labour movement. I know he will be sorely missed by members of the Australian Labor Party, his colleagues in state parliament and also by the union movement, especially the AMWU. My great sympathy goes to his partner, Tina, who had to put up with a lot in the busy life of a union official and parliamentarian; his sister, Monica, whom I know he was grateful to meet; and his eight children and three grandchildren. Jock remarked in his first speech to the WA parliament what a joy they all were to him.

My thoughts go to Steve McCartney and the staff, officials and members of the AMWU.

Jock was a proud unionist and a proud Scot. He never lost the accent. He was the only trade union official I know who needed subtitles on the local commercial news so we could understand the depth of his feeling on an issue. If he had put on a kilt and painted his face blue he could have stepped off the set of Braveheart. Vale Jock Ferguson.

Green Loans Program

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (8.50 pm)—In a week in which we have seen the government rocked by scandals in the home insulation
sector, I rise tonight to speak about another epic tale of government failure that has hit people in my electorate of Mitchell. I refer of course to the green loans scandal that is plaguing this government, which again is affecting real lives and real people in our community, particularly in my electorate.

Kevin Rudd and Peter Garrett went to the last election promising to:

- Offer low-interest loans of up to $10,000 to make at least 200,000 existing homes more energy and water efficient, with subsidised environmental audits and free Green Renovations packs.

It was a worthy objective and of course something which many in our community would laud. In the 2009 budget, however, this was quietly downsized. Their promise went from providing 200,000 green loans to instead providing 75,000 green loans. While this is a massive cut—in fact a 62.5 per cent cut to the number of promised loans—it was, again, a worthy initiative and something which we could all support and laud. However, seven months into this financial year, only 1,008 of the 20,000 loans budgeted for have been provided—let alone the 200,000 that were promised in 2007.

In his 8 May 2009 media release, Peter Garrett said that there would be ‘1,000 home sustainability assessors’. On 20 August 2009 the secretary of the environment department also told the Australian Economic Forum that the program would be delivered through ‘training 1,000 home sustainability assessors to undertake 360,000 audits’. I rise tonight to say that, instead of training 1,000 assessors as promised, Peter Garrett and the Rudd government have trained 3,648 assessors without ever announcing their intention to increase this number. What we see here is the reduction from 200,000 loans to 20,000 loans, with only 1,008 loans being delivered; yet, with a promise of only 1,000 assessors, we have 3,648 assessors who have been trained. Little wonder, then, that we have mismanagement and the creation of a crisis which has affected real people hard in my electorate.

People in my electorate have contacted me in recent weeks about this program. I want to relate the stories of some of those who have approached me and what they feel about how this government is handling this program and mismanaging it. A gentleman from Baulkham Hills approached me and said:

After interviewing 5 solar hot water panel company reps (a total of about 6 hours) and spending about a dozen hours reading material on relative panel efficiencies, and having had the mandatory home assessment done in October 2009, I last week submitted my Green Home Loan to Westpac. Today (22 February) I am informed that the Government Home Loan website is down, has been thus for three weeks and so my application cannot proceed at this time.

Take the example of the Baulkham Hills woman who contacted me this week and said:

I have not been able to get through or book any assessments since before Christmas. I have tried many times without success. For example today (2 February) I have tried 5 times.

There was also a retired woman who found that, due to the global financial crisis, her investments were not going well and were unable to provide her with a level of support. She comments about this program:

I am facing financial ruin and saw this program as a way to earn an income and make a contribution to conserving the resources of the planet.

Then there was the Castle Hill homeowner who wanted to take up this program and who said:

We were in the process of having the assessment done to apply for a $10,000 loan to install a 3kw solar energy system. If the Government is serious about encouraging people to switch to greener forms of energy there must be financial incentives to enable this to happen. I feel that stopping the
Loans Scheme is a real step backwards along the road to making Australia a more sustainable pace. I want to record that these people are not rent seekers or disgruntled Liberals; these are real, aspirational people, working to do better for themselves and trying to make a difference to the future of our planet. There are many more examples across Australia.

I want to record that I believe this to have been a good policy idea—good because it was self-funding and good because it enabled people to act on their good instincts and do the right thing by the environment. However, this program has failed because of horrific mismanagement by this minister and the government. The most serious consequence of this mismanagement is that it is a huge step backwards for the idea of self-funding initiatives that give people a hand up and not a handout. We know that governments cannot and will not fund a sustainable future. It must be achieved by citizens taking action, and the failure of this program will make this task all the more difficult.

Chisholm Electorate: Manufacturing

Mr Bernard (Bernie) Burke

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (8.55 pm)—Tonight I want to talk about our great state of Victoria, a state built on a manufacturing base. Sadly, we have seen that manufacturing base decline over time. In my electorate of Chisholm, we used to have a thriving manufacturing centre. Some people may find this interesting, given that nowadays my seat is probably considered almost inner city. In the Clayton end of my electorate, we had large car component plants. There was a very large biscuit factory—the Arnott’s biscuit factory. I, of course, remember it more fondly as Brockhoff’s. Sadly, they have gone. There are now very few manufacturing outlets in my electorate. Not only have those jobs gone but the downstream jobs which supported those manufacturing hubs have gone as well.

Those jobs have not been replaced and those manufacturing bases have not been replaced. I am now faced with another large employer in my electorate—another large manufacturer who is fearful that they will no longer be able to sustain the productivity of their industry and the 500 associated jobs in downtown Box Hill. I am talking about SCA Hygiene Australasia. Most of you will not know SCA, but a lot of you will use their product—Sorbent toilet tissue. In 2008, with Kimberly-Clark, SCA brought an application to the Australian government about dumping of toilet tissue from Indonesia and China. In December 2008, the then Minister for Home Affairs, Bob Debus, indicated that dumping had occurred.

We consider that dumping has occurred when an exporter sells the bulk of a product in an overseas market at prices below production cost and/or below what it charges on its home market. Anti-dumping duties are often imposed by a country to help counter dumping. Material injury is generally defined as ‘harm which is not inconsequential, immaterial or unimportant’. In the first instance, it was found that dumping had occurred and a dumping duty was imposed. This was then appealed by the Chinese and Indonesian importers, The Attorney-General announced in January this year that he would investigate and the dumping duties were then revoked. The review found that the goods exported to Australia from China and Indonesia had been dumped and the Australian industry producing these goods had suffered to some extent. However, the injury was said to have been caused more by factors other than the dumping of the goods exported from China and Indonesia. The injury suffered was caused more by competition between Australian industry members and not by the dumping. This is disputed by both SCA and the union representing the 500 members on that site.
Last week I received a delegation of CFMEU members from the site at Box Hill who were very concerned about the future of their jobs and the future of manufacturing in Victoria. I share this concern. The union has called upon the government to review this decision and to look at what we can do. SCA Hygiene Australasia President Paul Thompson has stated:

When the product is sold at 45 per cent below cost there is no way a local manufacturer could be competitive and that leads to loss of jobs and loss of industry.

I do not want to see more manufacturing lost in Victoria. I do not want to see more jobs gone.

As I said when the Arnott’s biscuit factory closed in my electorate, it is probable that, if I had been in South Australia or a country town, there might have been a rescue package, but in metropolitan Melbourne that is ludicrous because there are other jobs to go to; however, they will not be other manufacturing jobs—they will not be created. We need to ensure that we are doing everything in our power to protect these jobs. The CFMEU’s Michael O’Connor has said:

Exporters from China and Indonesia are hurting the tissue-making industry by selling product at a lower price.

We are seeing this on our supermarket shelves. Something needs to be done. I want to support the guys in my electorate—most of the people at the factory are males, funnily enough—and to ensure that we keep manufacturing and keep jobs within my electorate.

In the short time I have left, I want to pay tribute to my greatest fan and my biggest critic. My dad died just before Christmas. I was all geared up not to cry. I want to say to him: ‘Thank you for all that you did.’ He was a rather unique and tough character, but he has gone at the age of 72 and I just wanted to say thank you.

House adjourned at 9.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Ms Roxon to present a Bill for an Act to make amendments consequential on uniform legislation relating to the regulation of health practitioners, and for related purposes.

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to combat people smuggling, and for other purposes.

Mr Martin Ferguson to present a Bill for an Act to make provision in relation to the selection of a site for, and the establishment and operation of, a radioactive waste management facility, and for related purposes.

Ms Kate Ellis to present A Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to family assistance, and for related purposes.

Mrs Hull to move:

That the House:

(1) notes that:

(a) many ageing parents and carers of disabled children are in:

(i) crisis, or face crisis due to the lack of accommodation for their disabled children; and

(ii) need of aged care accommodation for themselves;

(b) ageing parents of a child with a life long disability are commonly required to provide care for the duration of the child’s life—in many cases over 50 years of care responsibility without a break;

(c) due to limited available accommodation options for disabled people, many aged carers of disabled people are significantly disadvantaged;

(d) there is an urgent need to assist ageing parents and carers of disabled children with accessing longer term accommodation options for their children;

(e) families unable to provide financially for the future care of their child with a
disability not be disadvantaged by their lack of financial capacity; and
(f) in October 2005 the then Prime Minister the Hon. John Howard announced a $200 million package to assist parents establish private trusts for the future care of their disabled children;

(2) calls on the Government to advise the House on the action taken to progress the establishment of these private trusts; and

(3) calls on the State, Territory and Federal governments to work together to urgently resolve these accommodation and care crises.

Mr Chester to move:
That the House:

(1) acknowledges the tragic impact that bushfires have on communities throughout Australia, particularly regional areas and the urban interface;

(2) notes the importance of prescribed burning as a means of reducing fire intensity throughout Australia; and

(3) highlights the need for the Federal Government to work in partnership with State and Territory Governments; natural resource management agencies; and fire authorities to develop national standards to reduce the impact of bushfires on our community.

Mr Forrest to move:
That the House:

(1) recognises that a crisis is emerging in respect of debt recovery across the primary production sector of the Australian economy as a consequence of more than seven years of drought;

(2) acknowledges the need for debt recovery protocols in commercial lending similar to those that exist for mortgage lending;

(3) supports the concept of compulsory debt mediation prior to lenders exercising their rights to pursue recovery through legal processes; and

(4) agrees that the Federal Parliament could legislate in respect of other commercial business arrangements.
Tuesday, 23 February 2010

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 4.01 pm.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Greenway Electorate: Infrastructure

Mrs MARKUS (Greenway) (4.01 pm)—I rise to speak on behalf of residents in my community who feel let down by their state Labor government representatives. People on the outskirts of Sydney, in the Greater Western Sydney region, including the Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains, feel they have been treated like second-class citizens—and this has been happening for too long now.

In line with the federal Labor government’s lead of repeated broken promises, the state Labor government has broken yet another promise and scratched its bungled Sydney metro plan, which has wasted $300 million—and there has still been nothing achieved by Labor for the people of the Greater Western Sydney region, who have helped to fund this bungled plan with their taxes. Under a recently announced state Labor government plan, a long awaited express rail to Richmond, Windsor and the Blue Mountains region would not even commence work until 2015, 20 years after Labor was first elected to government. Without even a commitment from Labor as to when the work on the line would be finished, it could reasonably be up to 30 years before the work is committed and the people of Greater Western Sydney can catch an express train to work.

People in my community want to be able to return home in a timely manner, to spend time with their families and to participate in their local communities. They do not want to be stuck on public transport for anywhere from three to five hours a day, and many choose to drive, only to find that road infrastructure is inadequate and that they are joining queues in parking lots at their place of work. The people in my community deserve better. They have put up with unacceptable transport infrastructure for far too long. Labor have only a record of promise and then promise broken, election after election. The same promises are made and the same promises are broken. And they have shown disinterest in people of the Greater Western Sydney region, particularly those living on the outskirts of Sydney, over almost 15 years. Enough is enough.

If state Labor think that this announcement is going to win back disgruntled commuters, they need to think again. My question is this: will the Western express rail proposed by Labor be just another pipe dream which inevitably will be shelved and reshelved, just like the $300 million failed Sydney metro plan, and again cost money for the taxpayers living in my community? It is clear that federal Labor are no different from state Labor. This is just another example of their broken promises and bungled schemes, with the people on the outskirts of Sydney in my region paying for Labor’s mistakes.

Maribyrnong Electorate: Workplace Safety

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction) (4.04 pm)—My electorate of Maribyrnong covers some of the industrial heartland of Melbourne, areas where workers have historically worked in tough, dangerous jobs. One of the most disappointing aspects of the opposition’s recently confected attacks on the Rudd government is the crocodile
tears they have cried on workplace safety, as their record in government contradicts their recent new-found interest. In my work in the union movement I sadly attended the funerals of people killed at work, needless deaths that we have tried to stop happening again. There is no consolation for the death of young people in the full bloom of their health and all of us know it. There can be no consolation at all for the families of these young people who get killed at work.

Over the years and the decades, things have become better in Australia. Through the hard work of royal commission after royal commission, coronial inquest after coronial inquest and union action after union action, and the seismic decisions on asbestos, tobacco and the polluted waste dumps and waterways, we have inched our way forward towards more safety on the job in our nation. We have got OH&S, but it took years of local research into local danger, years of workers pushing and agitating for change. These improvements are one of the proudest achievements of the union movement and its members.

We got OH&S and in 1996 the previous Liberal government greatly disliked it. They did much to avoid it and the record reflects this. Everything was done to soften regulations, to reduce the power of watchdogs and to take the voice of workers out of the safety debate. They talked instead of OH&S culture, safety management, management of acceptable risk and risk assessments. The one thing that they never talk about is talking to the workers. That was their no-go zone; that was their taboo. Their ideological opposition to unions is typified by the mindless and destructive zealotry that was Work Choices. It meant they could not bring themselves to discuss safety with the people who dealt with hazards every day. They gutted Worksafe Australia and did not replace it.

After a decade of neglect, we are now trying to bring occupational health and safety back through Safe Work Australia. We are working with the states to harmonise national OH&S laws, which will put an obligation on employers to provide a safe workplace and punish those who do not, and to give workers the power to stop unsafe work, a power currently available to only 14½ per cent of the Australian workforce. This seems like common sense to me and it is common sense, unless of course you are still wearing the Work Choices blinkers, as too many on the other side are. Ensuring that workers come home to their families in one piece and are not exposed to chemicals that can destroy their health and poison their retirement is part of what the Australian people expect. Each year, 800 people die from workplace related injuries. Approximately 2,200 die from industrial disease. This needs to stop and I am proud to be part of a government that is working to rebuild workplace health and safety in this country. The way to do that is through working with the workers and listening to their voices, rather than just relying on a poor record of 12 years of Liberal government. (Time expired)

Swan Electorate: Australian Organ Donor Awareness Week

Swan Electorate: World’s Greatest Shave

Mr IRONS (Swan) (4.07 pm)—I rise today to talk about a couple of upcoming community events in the electorate of Swan. This Sunday I will be hosting a community walk around Tomato Lake in Kewdale to raise awareness of organ donation week 2010. I think it is particularly important to talk about organ donation in Western Australia because Western Australia has the lowest rate of donation in the country. Nationally, there is never enough supply of organ donors to meet demand. In 2009, there were 850 organs transplanted in Australia; however, on 4 January 2010, there were still 1,770 people on the Australian organ transplant wait-
ing list. In 2008, only one-third of the demand for solid organ transplantation was able to be met.

One of the main reasons for the shortfall is the low family consent rate for organ donation to proceed. Families must always give the final permission to go ahead with the organ donation but, because 30 per cent of organ donors do not discuss their wishes with their family, almost half of the donations do not proceed. I understand it is often a difficult issue to discuss with family and friends, but it is important to do so. As we have heard so often, one donation can change lives. One donor can save the lives of up to ten people. I have previously registered as a donor and I have spoken to my son Jarrad about the issue, encouraging him and his mates to become donors. I hope that the walk on Sunday will raise awareness in Kewdale and across my electorate of Swan and encourage more people to register to donate their organs and discuss their desire to donate with their loved ones.

The second event I want to talk about is the world’s greatest shave, which I will be participating in this year. There are two options: either to get coloured or to be shaved—but I am going to go for the shave. I am taking part to encourage people to either join in or at least donate to the Leukaemia Foundation. Leukaemia is the sixth most common disease in Australia and it is estimated that every two hours someone loses their life to the disease. The Leukaemia Foundation is dedicated to the care and cure of patients and families living with leukaemias, lymphomas, myeloma and related blood disorders. The foundation does very important work by supporting people who have been diagnosed with leukaemia and the valuable research work they do benefits our society. The community should join in on this day and have some fun along the way.

The shave day has become a national event that has raised many thousands of dollars for the foundation. I look forward to the shave day at Carousel Shopping Centre and invite people from my electorate who want to donate to attend on the day. Prior to that day, they can visit my office or contact the Leukaemia Foundation direct. Anyone who attends the shopping centre on the day to see me get shaved can come along and get a photo with their new stream-lined look politician and at the same time make a donation to the Leukaemia Foundation.

Lowe Electorate: Communities for Communities

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (4.10 pm)—I take this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding fundraising achievements of Communities for Communities which has recently reached its $1 million fundraising target. Communities for Communities is a local non-profit based organisation in my electorate of Lowe run by volunteers who raise money for both local and global projects. It was founded by my inspirational constituent Mr Lance Brooks in 2002 after he spent 30 days and nights in the desert. He was without shelter, warmth, running water or contact with his family. He wrote of his experience:

I lost 11kg and was essentially starving. A single grain of rice, a drop of water became amazingly precious. My companions and I agreed that the best way to survive was to help look after each other. I realised as I sat there, cold and hungry, that this was the reality for a large proportion of our planet’s population.

On his return, Lance took up the challenge to make a difference both at a local and global level. Last month I had the pleasure of attending the announcement and celebration of this amazing $1 million fundraising milestone with 100-plus supporters of Communities for Communities. The evening was a night to recognise the strength of unity and the value of
community. The vision and determination of one man has led to a remarkable community following which now proudly has over 400 volunteers and hosts events that have to date attracted around 30,000 attendees.

During the evening I spoke with Miss Anne Roberts, the Principal of Lucas Gardens School, a local primary school which cares for children with severe mental and physical disabilities. The school received over $50,000 raised at the first ball hosted by the organisation in 2007 for additional paediatric physiotherapy and has since received further donations from Communities for Communities for important equipment and services. On an international level, Communities for Communities has helped to build nine schools for Burmese refugee children, 320 homes for families living on rubbish tips in the Philippines, as well as homes, a school and community centre for families currently living on a rubbish tip in South Vietnam. The organisation is particularly proud that the voluntary structure ensures that the proceeds go directly to the target projects.

Lance Brooks founded Communities for Communities with a view to building, experiencing and celebrating community, reaching out and helping other communities and raising awareness and understanding of the needs of others. Lance is truly an inspiration and I congratulate him for the outstanding contribution he has made in my electorate of Lowe and around the world. Most importantly, Lance would like to encourage other communities to establish their own Communities for Communities model so that others may enjoy the gift of receiving and giving the experience of the joy of community, and I challenge others with enough courage and determination to follow Lance Brooks’s shining example.

**Flinders Electorate: Phillip Island**

**Electorate: Balnarring Pedestrian Crossing**

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (4.13 pm)—I congratulate the 3,000 Phillip Island residents who have organised and signed a petition to ensure that the former Warley Hospital site is either purchased or leased by the state government to create an accident and emergency centre in addition to a bulk-billing clinic. Phillip Island has been in desperate need of better health services since the closure of Warley Hospital, following the change of government at federal level. Warley had run well. It had run with federal assistance. That federal assistance was withdrawn. The hospital was forced into liquidation. The building remains a perfectly serviceable 14-bed hospital. It retains much of its equipment and space, facilities and structure. It should be the site of an accident and emergency centre and the petition calls upon the state government to bring this accident and emergency centre into being. It calls upon the state government to ensure that there is a bulk-billing medical centre on the site of Warley Hospital and that the losses which the island has suffered in its health services after the closure of Warley Hospital will be reversed. I support and endorse and will fight for and believe in those things which this petition supports.

I also want to speak about the Balnarring pedestrian crossing. Balnarring is a beautiful town on the edge of Western Port in my electorate. There has indeed been a very strong need for a pedestrian crossing across Frankston-Flinders Road. I know it well. My wife’s family spent much time living in Balnarring. The crossing would allow safe access between Balnarring Village Shopping Centre and the community hall, kindergarten and school. It would help parents who are escorting their children to the playground, it would help parents who are walking their children to the kindergarten and it would help seniors who need to cross the
road. I am delighted that the petition which was prepared by residents, with some support and suggestions from my office, has been passed to the state government. We have received a response from the state, which is heartening, that in light of the concern VicRoads has been instructed to monitor pedestrian safety and to determine the need for improvements in this area. We will continue the fight, we will continue to push and we will continue to battle to ensure that the Balmarring pedestrian crossing is successful so that there is adequate protection for local residents.

The last thing I want to mention is that I am delighted to hear that the people of Somerville, the workers and management of Inghams, along with Neale Burgess, the state MP, and also with some help, hopefully, from me, have been successful in securing a long-term future for the Inghams chicken factory which was burnt down recently. I thank the state for their support on Neale’s request. I thank the management for agreeing— (Time expired)

Blair Electorate: Springfield Central

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (4.16 pm)—I warmly welcome the residents of Springfield Central into the electorate of Blair. Springfield Central, which is south of Augusta Parkway and the Springfield Greenbank Arterial Road, has been added to the electorate of Blair. Founded in 1992, Springfield is Australia’s largest master plan city and community development project in single private ownership.

The Greater Springfield area is the vision of Maha Sinnathamby and his business partner Bob Sharpless via their corporate vehicle, the Springfield Land Corporation. The ultimate objective is to create a city with a population of 105,000 people by 2031. Currently, over 20,000 people live in the Springfield area. Springfield is a vital part of the city of Ipswich, where I was born and have lived all my life.

I want to acknowledge the presence of Bob Sharpless, Managing Director of Springfield Land Corporation, and Russell Luhrs, the Executive General Manager, Planning and Infrastructure of Springfield Land Corporation, who are in Parliament House today. They are here to talk about further community infrastructure development for Springfield. The federal government is partnering with Springfield. The Springfield Town Centre Parklands has received a $10 million contribution from the federal government. This is an important initiative—important for the recreational and sporting lifestyles of the people of Springfield and Ipswich Central.

Springfield is located in the western corridor, between south-west Brisbane and Ipswich Central. The economic development of Springfield is vital to the city of Ipswich. According to the University of Queensland’s John Mangan, the economic and social contribution of the Springfield project will be an annual gross output regional turnover of $1.15 billion—an enormous sum of money—and it will support or create over 5,000 jobs.

Springfield is a mere 10 minutes drive from where I live in Flinders View, on the south side of Ipswich. The area contains many suburbs and estates, including Brookwater, Augustine Heights, Springfield Lakes, Spring Mountain and Springfield Central and, of course, many wonderful precincts—Education City, Health City Springfield, Springfield Technology Park, Parkside Business Address and the fast-growing Orion Shopping Centre in Springfield Central.
I am thrilled that part of Springfield is in my electorate of Blair. I wish the residents well, and I will fight hard to deliver community infrastructure for the people of Springfield. Also, I welcome the application which has just been made by the Mater Private Hospital and Radiation Oncology Queensland for regional cancer centre initiative funding for Springfield under the Health and Hospitals Fund. I wish them every success in their application.

**Paterson Electorate: Mr Ron Elworthy**

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (4.19 pm)—I rise to acknowledge and pay tribute to a bus driver whose quick thinking and skill protected 80 schoolchildren who attend class in the Paterson electorate. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* it was Mr Ron Elworthy’s cool nerve that saved these students from a potentially disastrous situation. Allow me to paint you a picture of the frightening event that took place in my electorate earlier this month. Mr Elworthy was on his usual school run, picking up the children from Irrawang High School at Raymond Terrace on a Monday afternoon. The trip was going as usual until the bus reached a left-hand bend along Richardson Road. As the bus turned, the two back wheels became dislodged and flung off, leaving the bus lopsided with the axels digging into the ground. The wheels dangerously rolled into oncoming traffic and then off into Grahamstown Dam. The bus began to swerve dangerously across the road, making it nearly impossible to control.

The safety of the passengers was compromised, as the bus could have crashed at any moment, but Mr Elworthy fought to get the bus and all of its passengers to safety. He dropped the gears down until he was eventually able to bring the bus to a stop. Police officers at the scene noted that it took great skill to exercise such control. As a result of Mr Elworthy’s expertise at the wheel and his quick thinking in the face of danger, all of the students made it off the bus without any injuries. As the *Nine News* reported on 9 February, the Principal of Irrawang High School, Mr Col Elliott, walked around the school the next morning to check up on the students involved. As he told AAP: ‘None of them were upset. They didn’t require any counselling.’

I consider the actions of Mr Elworthy very heroic, and I am sure that my feelings are shared by all of the children that were on the bus and by their friends and their families. Without him, things surely could have been far worse. It is for this reason that I wish to praise Mr Elworthy’s efforts. As the member for Paterson, the safety and prosperity of my constituents is my No. 1 concern. I am extremely grateful to have such a competent individual looking after them. It is important to acknowledge local heroes like Mr Elworthy. Too often we forget to thank the everyday people who make our lives safe. While Mr Elworthy is a modest man and claims that luck was on his side, it is possible that a less-capable driver would not have been able to save themselves or the students on board. I would again like to thank Mr Elworthy for his actions in preventing a possible tragedy and for keeping our kids safe on their way to and from school.

**Calwell Electorate: National Language Curriculum**

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (4.22 pm)—I rise today to speak on an issue that is very close to my heart. That issue involves the role of languages in the development of our national teaching curriculum. I want to strongly support the inclusion of languages other than English in the framing of the national curriculum and, indeed, congratulate the government on taking this very vital step in developing our first national curriculum policy that commences from kindergarten and goes to year 12. I want to speak on the second stage of the development of
our national curriculum, in which the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority will deal with the issue of languages. I want to speak in favour of putting into the national curriculum a language that has already been deemed a priority language through the 1987 national policy on languages and the 1991 Commonwealth priority languages incentives scheme, a language spoken by a large number of Australians—me included—and a language that has become an important part of our nation’s cultural, educational, social and economic objectives. The language, of course, is the modern Greek language and it has a valuable role to play in a national curriculum.

The importance of modern Greek as the basis on which fundamental texts that we use today were developed cannot be overstated. An understanding of the Greek language will serve to allow us to develop Australia’s research capabilities, because it is in understanding the fundamentals of language from which theories are developed that researchers are able to understand the roots of ideas that are relayed to us through theory. Having taught modern Greek in an accredited course for our secondary school curriculum, I myself have been a part of the development of the use of the Greek language in Australia. I was able to teach thanks to the formidable language teaching infrastructure, for which the Greek community in Australia deserves plenty of praise and credit. I was able to do so with the creation of the department of modern Greek at the University of Melbourne in the seventies, which served to provide a learning pathway for Greek language at the tertiary level—which in turn helped to train modern Greek language teachers.

As we move into the Greek-speaking community’s third and fourth generations, the Greek language has become a significant resource for our nation from which we are able to stay in touch with the rest of the world. Having said that, modern Greek is not only a language confined to the Greek-speaking community but a modern, working language that is one of the five official languages of the European Union and one of the top five spoken here in Australia. We need to get the balance right when choosing languages for the national curriculum. A balance between community and trade languages is required. The reality is that we have here in Australia resources and a capacity from which we can go forward with a strong national language curriculum, and it is on this basis that I say that the Greek language should be included in the Australian national curriculum.

Fisher Electorate: Kawana Hospital

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (4.25 pm)—It is important that governments of whatever political colour recognise the needs of people in their communities regardless of how those people voted at the state or federal elections. On the Sunshine Coast we have had a string of media reports with horror stories that relate to the health system, which is struggling after years of neglect by the state Labor government. Premier Anna Bligh should hang her head in shame for allowing the local public hospital system to degenerate to what at least one newspaper blogger described as ‘Third World’. It is an issue which must again be brought to the attention of the Australian people because it is becoming alarming and developing into a situation that is dangerous and possibly life threatening—and recently reported incidents attest to that.

The community has a solution: the overdue Kawana hospital should be fast-tracked. It is an issue that has been highlighted time and time again to the Queensland Labor government, including a peaceful protest march last November in which some 1,500 concerned coast residents participated. I was proud to take part in the march. The hospital was originally due for
completion in 2014 but has been put back to 2016-17. This is in an area where the population will grow by its current size to about 500,000 in the next 10 years. We are desperately short of beds now and our high population growth means the need will be even greater in six years time. I suggested at the time of the cancellation of the Traveston dam in November 2009 that the billions set aside for that project could be redirected to the Kawana hospital.

This is a situation where people’s health is being endangered. The state Labor government is simply ignoring local needs and punishing the people of the Sunshine Coast for voting for the Liberal-National Party at state and federal elections. A former Labor candidate exhibited sour grapes after the last state election. She wrote in a letter to the local newspaper:

… we need to work in the system to protect our interests and have a productive role in the governing of our beautiful region.

And she went on to say:

Sadly, we will reap what we have sown as we have now lost the opportunity for the next three years …

That was by Jody Tunnicliffe in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* on 26 March 2009.

People have had a gutful of governments playing politics with people’s health. Regardless of how people in the particular area voted, if there is a health need it is important that it is met, particularly when the state Labor government promised a hospital and then, after people voted for the LNP, promptly reneged on the promise. The government broke the promise and put the hospital off for a period of time, endangering people’s health and lives.

Newcastle Electorate: Colonial Landscape

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.28 pm)—I would like to share with the House a very special event that took place in the Newcastle electorate last week. I had the great pleasure of speaking at a reception to welcome back to the Newcastle Region Art Gallery the newly restored, nationally significant artwork *Inner View of Newcastle* by convict artist Joseph Lycett. This landscape dates back to 1818 and depicts early Newcastle. The reception was not a grand occasion, but an intimate gathering of members of the Art Gallery Society and the Gallery Foundation, as well as representatives from Newcastle City Council, to allow us to have first viewing of the Lycett painting. However, the painting will feature in a special exhibition, *Curious Colony*, in July so that many more people will be able to enjoy it.

For Novocastrians, supporters of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery and Australian art historians, this work commands a special reverence and respect. There are few Australian landscapes of this age, scale and importance amongst our nation’s art treasures. To Novocastrians, this portrayal of early Newcastle—which shows a fledgling city with urban form and design; our iconic headland, Nobbys, in its original state; a kangaroo hunt with Indigenous people and white settlers together; and the original church, now the city’s landmark cathedral—is a very special work. It now has a renewed radiance, thanks to David Wise, the head conservator of the National Gallery of Australia, and his skilled team who worked on this painting for almost two years. Having now heard David speak about the challenges involved, I have great appreciation and respect for, and pay tribute to, the art conservation team for their craft, magic and witchery that restored this beautiful work of art.

As the federal member for Newcastle, I am also pleased to be able to acknowledge the wonderful contribution that the National Gallery of Australia made by allowing their conservation team to work on this painting. It is an unusual thing to occur. At the welcoming I said it
was a conspiracy by the two Rons of the Australian art world to whom I am very grateful. The two Rons I refer to are the Director of the National Gallery, Ron Radford, and the Director of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Ron Ramsey. They obviously understood that this painting deserved their very special professional attention. For that we are grateful.

Joseph Lycett’s life was a colourful one. He was an artist turned forger, convicted of forgery in 1811 and sentenced to transportation for 14 years. He was not satisfied with that. He managed to upset his Sydney masters by flooding the city with hundreds of forged five-shilling bills that he skilfully executed on a small copperplate press. He was punished by being sent to Newcastle. But Lycett’s misfortune was our good fortune. That is the sort of punishment that most of us in Newcastle would approve of. In my experience, Newcastle still pays little heed to its Sydney masters. I must also pay great tribute to Newcastle City Council, which, many years ago, in 1961, had the foresight to acquire this painting, with the help of the National Art Collection Fund in London. (Time expired)

Main Committee Clocks

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (4.31 pm)—Briefly, on indulgence—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—There is no indulgence. You have one minute of the constituency statements debate left.

Mr SLIPPER—I was going to say that I participated in the 90-second statements yesterday and I noticed that the electronic clock was not used—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—It does not run.

Mr SLIPPER—I am wondering whether, Madam Deputy Speaker, as the presiding officer responsible for this place, you might consider whether it would be possible for it to run in the future, to assist members.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Fisher will resume his seat. As everybody knows, in this place the clock has never run for 90-second statements. It never ran downstairs. We do not have the capacity to set it for that time. If someone wishes to pursue it through the Standing Committee on Procedure they are most welcome to do so. I note the member’s interest. Others have raised it with me. In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members’ constituency statements has concluded.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 3) 2009-2010

Cognate bills:

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4) 2009-2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 22 February, on motion by Dr Emerson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (4.32 pm)—From the outset, I want to declare my utter satisfaction with the digital clocks. I think you have done an excellent job in the timing of this chamber. I also take this opportunity to congratulate David Elder, the clerk at the table, for his promotion to Deputy Clerk. We value the contributions of both the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk. It is true to say that they are the two key positions in the House. I wish him well in his service to the House in his new position.
Last Saturday I was privileged to witness the first ever elite AFL game to be played at the new Blacktown Olympic Park venue. I confess that I have an interest in it because it is in my electorate. It is great partnership between the AFL, whom I congratulate, Cricket NSW, the state government and Blacktown City Council. This was a historic event for us. I was absolutely delighted that something like 10,000 people turned up. Lots of them were like me—rugby league addicts but wanting to give AFL a go.

I need to make a personal explanation at this point, Madam Deputy Speaker, because you know that a mutual friend of ours, Koula Alexiadis, is a devoted Carlton supporter. Whilst I thought that they perhaps played best in the first two quarters of the game, the Sydney Swans overtook them in the latter two. I do apologise—I am not gloating here—but it was an excellent game. It really did showcase AFL to an audience that had not previously had the opportunity to see it. I am sure that as the Greater Western Sydney team develops and gets its new name it is going to have an army of supporters out there.

It has always been a fact that AFL attracts much greater crowds than Rugby League does, and for a preliminary game in the AFL NAB Cup, in Sydney, to get 10,000 people is really something special. During the game, as inexpert as I am in the formalities of the game, I think it is true to say that the Sydney Swans unearthed a star in the making, Lewis Jetta. He was simply magnificent.

Ms Marino—Are you sure you’re not from WA?

Mr PRICE—That is good; my wife is from WA, so I do have an affinity with people who come from that great state. I must say that at half-time I was rather thrilled that some primary schools in my electorate who had participated in an Auskick clinic prior to the game ran out and had a game. They were Plumpton Public School, Shelley Public School, Blacktown West Public School, Hassall Grove Public School, Blacktown South Public School, Tyndale Christian School, Walters Road Public School, Crawford Public School and Mountain View Adventist College. I am very impressed with the way the AFL are supporting their code by encouraging kids at school. This is inevitably going to pay dividends.

Another innovative idea from the AFL was to have a citizenship ceremony at half-time, and some were done prior to the game by the mayor. The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship had been invited and, while he was not able to participate, I am happy to say that he asked me to represent him and so I broke my duck and performed my first citizenship ceremony. In all, 30 people from 20 different countries became citizens. They came from countries including Turkey, Brazil, India, Syria, Sierra Leone, Fiji, China, Slovakia and Lebanon. Amongst them was Syrian-born Guss Kewan, a biomedical engineer who arrived with his architect wife and two young children in 2007.

I want to express my sincere thanks to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for their organisation of, and in particular for mothering me through, the ceremony. It is a little daunting to do it in front of 10,000 people, not all of whom are taking as keen an interest in the ceremony as they might. But again, I just want to say I thought it was a great initiative by the AFL. What a wonderful thing to become an Australian citizen in front of a crowd of 10,000 people. Those people were part of history on that day and I am sure they will treasure the memory of that ceremony for a very long time.
There is another matter that I wish to raise, and that is the rebuilding of the Serbian Orthodox Church at Rooty Hill. It has been rebuilt, and they wanted to get frescoes painted on the church. For a long time they were experiencing a lot of problems in trying to—

Mr Hayes—And you did that?

Mr PRICE—No! I wish I had the skill, but I must say to the honourable member for Werriwa, no, I did not. But I certainly was approached by Father Slobo Miletic to see what we could do to get Deacon Miodrag Tomic out here to Australia. I took up the case with the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Evans, and I want place on the record my appreciation to him and the department for being able to cut through and get Deacon Tomic out here.

By the way, Deacon is a professor. After the fall of the communist regime he went to Russia to study and then he also went to Greece. He is a professor in the art, is highly qualified and is a lovely man. I was pleased to go back to the church. We got him out here late last year and this month the church had a bit of a banquet, and I was able to walk through the church. I cannot believe the progress that Deacon Tomic has made, with one assistant, to this church. It is unbelievable. In fact, I was a bit worried about whether I needed to remind him about our industrial laws. The church is going to be absolutely magnificent. Given his skills, there is some suggestion that perhaps after the completion of the church he may be able to set up a school so that the orthodox tradition of painting, whether it be Greek, Serbian or Russian can be taught here in Australia.

While I think about the Serbian community, late last year I celebrated 20 years of the aged-care facility which Lionel Bowen had opened in 1985 when I was the local member. I suppose it is a rare opportunity for a member to be at the opening of something and at the celebration 20 years later of its completely successful operation.

I have always enjoyed strong support from the community. I cannot think of a time I attended a function where there was not a presence of the community. I am deeply grateful for their support and encouragement in my time as federal member.

On Friday last week I had the great pleasure of having the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, visit my electorate. We started off with a function at the Mount Druitt TAFE hospitality kitchens and commercial restaurant, the Greenview Room, where I had invited all the school captains and principals to meet the Deputy Prime Minister. I am pleased to say that they all turned up. The Deputy Prime Minister was able to speak with each set of captains and I am sure they will treasure that. On the way out we saw the hospitality kitchens and spoke with the students there that were learning their craft. I certainly thank them for the hospitality they afforded us and our guests.

There were a couple of things I particularly wanted the Deputy Prime Minister to see. Loyola Senior High School is getting a $9 million trade training centre. There had been a successful application under the previous government which later on collapsed. This is a really exciting project for the diocese.

For the last five years, Loyola Senior High School has been running the Nicholas Owen project. This is for students who are likely to drop out at year 10. It is a board certified course just for year 11 students with the aim of giving these students the skills and motivation to enter the world of work, a traineeship, an apprenticeship or a job. It is highly successful. I have
to report a number of students drop out of the course on the way and do not complete it but for a very good reason: they have got a job. I have tried to interest the state government in a similar approach but I must confess that I have not been successful. The success rate of the Nicholas Owen year 11 course is over 90 per cent. I think that is outstanding. I think we have something to learn from it.

Interestingly, when we were discussing the project with students, with Bishop Manning; Greg Whitty, the CEO of the Catholic Education Office; Rob Laidler, the principal; and Cathy Larkin, the deputy principal, they said they have learnt so much about the Nicholas Owen project. It has taught them so much. They do not segregate the students and they all wear the same uniform so they are an integral part and a valued part of the school. They have learnt so much that will assist them when we get the trade training centre up and running.

I particularly wanted to show the Deputy Prime Minister Plumpton High School and the Plumpton Educational Community. What is the Plumpton Educational Community? Certainly, in New South Wales—and I suspect Australia wide—we have all experienced great efforts in recent years to assist the transition from grade 6 in primary school to year 7 in high school. Early on when I was a member it is true that high schools did not talk to primary schools. There was no interaction whatsoever. I commend those initiatives. I think the community concept takes it a significant step further—to where the principals voluntarily meet. The high school principals and the primary school principals meet and develop joint approaches to things so that you can have from K to 12 a common approach to citizenship, bullying and a whole range of things. There is joint in-service training, so you have primary school teachers and high school teachers in the same room receiving the same training.

There are lots of benefits. I could go on. For example, they use primary school teachers to develop learning plans for the high school. The primary school teachers obviously know the students who are graduating to year 7, so they have a firm picture—it is not a mystery—and year 7 can be tailored to the needs and the educational attainment of the students at the time. I could go on and on. I know that the Plumpton Educational Community would like, for example, to be a centre of excellence for new teachers who are entering the profession so that they can be mentored into the profession.

Whilst we were there it was also an opportunity to again meet the school captains from Plumpton High School; the principal, Eric Jamieson, who I have enormous admiration for; and the school principals and captains from Plumpton House School, Plumpton Public School, William Dean Public School and Glendenning Public School. I congratulate these schools on the way they are so focused and are cooperating. I hope there are opportunities, either through the states or federally, to develop the concept. I am not sure whether this approach exists in other states—I am not sufficiently across it—but I do believe there is much to commend it.

In addition to the meeting on Friday I was able to visit 14 schools in my electorate, both primary schools and high schools. It was an absolute joy to see all the construction activity and how welcomed all that construction activity is by the schools. I saw the new science blocks. I remember what the old science blocks looked like. They were dark, dim, middle-aged rooms. Now you see bright science labs with segregation between the benches and the learning facility. There is even a huge change to the prep rooms. There is not one bit of graffiti.
on any of them. The students and the teachers very much appreciate it, and I am sure we are getting positive outcomes.

I have never before seen the size of some of the COLAs that are being constructed. They are just mammoth buildings. As the honourable member for Werriwa would know, in Western Sydney before Christmas we were getting temperatures up near 47 degrees, so having these areas of shade, where you can take students out from school classrooms into the shaded areas or play in shaded areas, is very critical.

I took the opportunity to talk to them about the My School website. As we all know, this is something that is here to stay and the parents and the community have voted with their feet. But it does not mean that there are not some issues surrounding it, and of course the website is a salami slice of school activity. The great thing about the next time it is uploaded is that we will be able to see the students as they progress through the different grades. We will be able to see five-year-olds as year 3s. We will be able to see how schools have added value, and I think that this is a very critical aspect of improving the website.

I have discovered some anomalies on my trip that can be addressed by directly approaching ACARA and seeking to have the demographics refined. But it is very clear that the old debate about whether we can trust the public or whether they are entitled to have information about school performance is a dead issue. I also believe that school principals and schools will be proactive next time the My School information is uplifted and tell parents exactly what the data means and what is being measured. It does give a slice of activity of what is happening in a school but it is not the total story.

So I welcome the fact that schools will be even more proactive than they have already been. I suppose I should say that I am very proud of the fact that currently I have $140 million being spent on the Building the Education Revolution and I have not found a dissenting voice amongst the principals, much less from the parents and the students. They are absolutely delighted.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (4.52 pm)—Good afternoon, colleagues. I am very pleased to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 before us because it gives us an opportunity to highlight some areas of expenditure. I would like to localise it for my particular electorate of Braddon, which takes in the north-west coast of Tassie, down now into the west coast, and also includes King Island. It is a fantastic slab of earth and paradise in Australia.

I am really pleased to be part of a government that has brought us through very difficult times, times that are often ignored by those opposite. There have been difficult financial demands on this nation and, in relative terms, we have come through much better than other parts of the world. During all this time of economic pressure the government made decisions to stimulate the economy to keep it working, to keep people in this economy working, and to keep communities working. These appropriation bills, in part, deal with how that stimulus came about and how it is continuing to come about.

In particular I would like to highlight two areas, if I may. The Building the Education Revolution is one aspect of the stimulus. It was designed of course not just as a jobs and community stimulus but also as an intellectual stimulus as well, and in terms of construction in my electorate the Building the Education Revolution has indeed been that. As so many
members on all sides of the House have noted, there is construction, there is activity, there are jobs going on all around our local communities.

The Building the Education Revolution contains many aspects but, in particular, computers in schools, Primary Schools for the 21st Century, the National School Pride Program, trades training centres, and science and language centres. I am very pleased to say that in my electorate there has been considerable activity in all of these areas. On the other side of the ledger, in terms of stimulating the economy and getting and keeping the place working, and adding to our community infrastructure, we have had the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program along with other local community infrastructure programs.

I would like to very briefly take the House through some of these as they affect my electorate. For instance, King Island and its local infrastructure—$635,000 and the BER $135,000; Circular Head $1.1 million in local community infrastructure and $9.4 million in the BER; Waratah-Wynyard Council $854,000 in local community infrastructure, $8.3 million in the BER. And so on it goes, even the west coast with $924,000 in local community infrastructure projects and $3 million in Building the Education Revolution. In all, in my electorate $22.2 million is provided in local infrastructure programs and $84.6 million for the Building the Education Revolution for a total of something like $106.8 million, which is a massive investment in infrastructure, a massive investment in jobs, and a massive investment into community capital in my region.

On top of that, there is something like $49 million worth of special projects that have been allocated to Braddon and some of these have taken on a much broader regional role as well as a state role. For example, on the weekend I was joined by the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism, the honourable Martin Ferguson, when we turned the sod for a $15 million investment in the renewable energy demonstration project on King Island. This project has pioneering prospects for renewable energy for the whole of remote and rural Australia. An autism centre has been launched, based in Burnie, to a value of $4.8 million. We have two GP superclinics allocated to our region—Burnie-Cooee at $2.75 million and Devonport at $5.5 million—the latter well and truly under way. The Sisters of Charity received counselling service funding for their excellent work to the value of $2 million. Enterprise Connect has been established at Burnie for manufacturing as a centre for the state and the wider region and that has a value of $12 million. The O Group training project, based in Devonport, has a value of $900,000. There is also improved and increased patient accommodation at the North West Regional Hospital with a value of $3.1 million; an integrated health-IT project to the value of $1.2 million; improved cancer services to the value of $1.4 million; and the tarmac upgrade which we recently opened at Queenstown airport to the value of $700,000. They are just some of the projects that make up the special projects to the value of nearly $50 million in my electorate. There is the other commitment by this government from the election of $180 million to the Mersey Community Hospital over three years. That gives an indication of the commitment of this government to growing jobs, growing the economy, to construction and to community infrastructure development in Braddon.

I know I share those commitments with many in this House, particularly on this side of the chamber. I hope to speak in more detail on a number of those activities as time goes on. I just wanted to highlight some of those because it gets lost in the day-to-day combat of what goes on in this place and, certainly, what goes on in the media.
If you believe some of the media, we do not do anything. Yet time and time again members come into this House to share how this government is helping to keep this nation working, to keep our communities working and to keep our schools growing and improving, yet little of this is dealt with in the media except stories which highlight any potential weaknesses. We do not claim to be the be-all and end-all in providing answers to a lot of our challenges, but what I can say is that we will not die wondering. I was really happy to enunciate some of the many activities going on in my electorate. I have not had one person tell me that they did not want any of the Building the Education Revolution constructions nor any of the community infrastructure programs which are at record levels in my electorate. So I am very pleased about that.

In the time remaining I would like to thank the Minister for Sport, Minister Ellis, for an excellent program which exists in many of our electorates—that is, the Active After-school Communities program. I have an excellent program in my electorate. Something like 12 government and two independent schools are involved. There are three out-of-school-hours care services, with 541 participants, averaging 28 participants per session per site and nearly 2.05 sessions per site. These are spread from Sheffield to Stanley to Strahan. There are something like 79 programs ranging from AFL to aquatics, badminton, basketball, circus skills, cricket, dance, golf, hockey, lawn bowls, multi-skilling, netball, orienteering, soccer, softball, surf lifesaving, tennis, touch football and volleyball, just to name some of the many activities. I would like to share the basis of the program because I regard it as one of the most excellent programs that this government is participating in and supporting. The Active After-school Communities program targets children—it is very important we note this—who are not traditionally active or involved in mainstream sport. That is at the heart of it.

The Australian Sports Commission initiative aims to inspire a love of physical activity which creates a pathway to local sporting clubs, a preparation ground, if you like, to get people who are generally inactive to be active and hopefully to send them on their way to a local sporting club. The free program is running at capacity with up to 150,000 children nationally taking part in each term in over 3,200 schools at out-of-school-hours care services. It reaches all corners of and populations in Australia and is a genuine national program.

In an environment where the prevalence of overweight and obesity in Australian children is increasing alarmingly, unfortunately, and is higher among lower socioeconomic groups, Indigenous people and some ethnic populations, the Active After-school Communities program has proven to be an efficient and effective vehicle to increase physical activity levels of primary schoolchildren. It has three direct focuses. It engages inactive children in sport. I have been really pleased to attend six to seven sites where the kids are involved in these activities and it is all go, go, go, which is terrific. It delivers a quality program which inspires children and their families and coaches to continue their involvement in sport outside the program. Each program contributes to the growth of local sports clubs through facilitating the transition of children, their families and coaches to the local club environment. That is at the heart of the Active After-school Communities Program.

The Australian Sports Commission works collaboratively with sporting organisations at national, state and local levels to assist with the delivery of the Active After-school Communities Program. Over 44,600 local people, many of them sport affiliated, have been trained free of charge by the Active After-school Communities Program to become community coaches.
and deliver activities. For the government’s investment of around $350 per year per child, each child receives up to 80 free sports sessions, up to 80 free healthy afternoon snacks, a qualified coach, access to sports equipment and a supervisor. That sum also includes the supporting national framework that provides quality training, ongoing support, free resources for schools and continuing research and evaluation, all of which are facilitated by locally based regional coordinators. These regional coordinators really are the glue between the schools, the children and the sport. I cannot speak more highly of my regional coordinator, David Munns, and the program that he so enthusiastically and professionally oversees.

The Active After-school Communities Program is a unique example of a successful national initiative that is delivered locally by a federal agency, with established strategic partnerships with state and local government and non-government organisations to support implementation at the community level. This approach and this structure has proven to maximise impact and minimise duplication, enabling the delivery of a high-quality program which addresses the government’s priority areas. I understand there continues to be significant levels of unmet demand for the program, with more than 500 schools and out of school hours care services waiting to participate in the program. The program currently only reaches 25 per cent of primary schools nationwide, and approximately 50 per cent of childcare benefit approved out of school hours care services.

The government’s current funding commitment for the Active After-schools Communities Program ceases in December 2010 and I am very happy to lobby my minister and others to see that this program continues into the next funding round. I know that there are colleagues on this side of the House that have this program going on in their electorates and regions and are very supportive of it. I know the minister is also very proud of it, but I just want to put on the record the importance of this program, particularly in my electorate, where unfortunately we still have too many kids that are essentially inactive.

It is interesting looking at some of the evaluation and research that has been done on the efficacy and efficiency of the program. The role of the regional coordinator is a highly valued role and is seen as important to the delivery of the program in the schools, and the out of school hours care services and overall satisfaction with the performance is at its highest level ever. So I congratulate all of those coordinators. I believe there is evidence that the Active After-school Communities Program is decreasing sedentary behaviour after school. Nearly half of the parents of children registered in the program through a school say their child would be engaged in sedentary behaviour if they were not participating in the program. Children who would have been physically active if they were not attending the after school program would mainly have been physically active in an unstructured way.

Importantly, the program is not a replacement program for after-school sport or other organised sport, so it is not negating and it is not duplicating. I think some people have lost sight of that. Ninety-one per cent of children participating in the program through a school reported they would not otherwise be participating in after-school sport or other organised physical activity. Of significant importance is the impact the program has had on a growing community capacity in stimulating local community involvement in sport and structured physical activity. Over half of the schools evaluated agreed that the program leads to increased links between the schools and supporting clubs or other sporting organisations in the community.
Almost two-thirds of schools believe that the program leads to more people skilled to deliver sport or other structured physical activity programs to children in the local community. Something like 78 per cent of schools overwhelmingly agreed that the program has increased their organisation’s ability to provide sport or other structured physical activity to primary-age schoolchildren. Almost two-thirds of school representatives believe that the program leads to greater local community awareness of sporting clubs and other structured physical activity and organisations. Another interesting statistic is that over half of the school representatives—some 56 per cent—believe the program leads to more opportunities for children and families to join local sporting clubs and other structured physical activity. About half also agree that the program leads to more children joining local clubs.

In conclusion, I want to congratulate the minister for overseeing this excellent program, the Australian Sports Commission initiative for taking on this program and all those who deliver the Active After-school Communities program so very well, particularly David Munns and the Tasmanian organisation.

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (5.12 pm)—I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. As is the tradition, perhaps, with appropriations bills, with a fairly wide-ranging debate, I wanted to focus today on the issue of climate change. This is an extremely important issue to me and to many constituents in my electorate of Hasluck. I recall very well the 2007 election, where the majority of people in my electorate wanted action on climate change, particularly following what had been almost a decade of inaction on climate change. I note that the current opposition—the then government—actually changed its traditional policy position and went to the 2007 election with a climate change policy that included an emissions trading scheme.

I think the debate in 2010 has shifted but I am still convinced that the majority of Australians are concerned about our environment and the challenges of climate change and water. Weather related concerns are part of everyday conversation. Once upon a time we just used to ask about the weather as a way of starting a conversation; now people are very much concerned about the weather. From a Western Australian perspective, we have just experienced the hottest January on record—an average of 35 degrees—and 2009 was the second hottest year in Australia on record. Of course, the last decade was the hottest in Australia on record, hotter than the previous decade. In WA we have had no rainfall for December or January and in most of WA we are having less rainfall, more droughts and water shortages. Across the nation we are experiencing more extreme weather events—storms and bushfires. Australians do feel an obligation to future generations. They are concerned about the kind of country and the environment that we will leave for our kids and our grandkids. We certainly want to leave them with a better and a stronger world.

The stakes in this debate are high. As Rupert Murdoch simplistically described the challenge of climate change and where doubt existed about the science of global warming, he said, ‘Give the planet the benefit of the doubt.’ Taking the critically important step of starting the transformation of our whole economy to a low carbon emission economy is, I think, an absolute necessity for Australia. We need to become a less polluting nation. We need to acknowledge that there is a cost to polluting and we must learn to live greener. We need to invest in and expand on the use of renewable energy for industry and for households.
I am delighted to be part of a government that has increased the mandatory renewable energy target, or MRET, to 20 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2020, that has seen significant investment in large-scale solar powered generation and carbon capture and storage, and that has established a scientific framework for climate change research and better ways of investing in it. I am also pleased to be part of a government that sees significant support for energy efficiency, water conservation and living greener—a $3.2 billion investment.

Of course, last but not least, there is the creation of a climate change adaptation fund to assist with the management of the impact of climate change. These are just some of the key achievements of the Rudd government so far.

The government has seen not only the ratification of the Kyoto protocol but also the implementation of a $12.9 billion national water strategy. We have seen a $200 million commitment to the Reef Rescue initiative to protect the Great Barrier Reef. We have seen the installation of a record number of solar panels onto Australian rooftops. We have seen the Solar Schools Program. We have seen the $100 million commitment to develop a new smart grid energy network, and we have recently signed the National Strategy on Energy Efficiency with all state and territory governments. The sad thing is, however, that these measures alone are not enough to cut Australia’s emissions, and that is what we must do. As the Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change said in his second reading speech, when the CPRS bills were reintroduced to the House:

However, projections show that even with these measures Australia’s emissions will continue to rise, reaching 120 per cent of 2000 levels in 2020. That is why we need the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme—an effective mechanism to reduce carbon pollution at the lowest possible cost. Cutting and reducing our emissions is the imperative.

The single, biggest flaw in the opposition’s latest alternative policy proposal is that it will not reduce carbon pollution. I am sure many of us in this chamber have seen the Department of Climate Change’s analysis of the opposition’s policy and the graph showing the level of carbon emissions increases if the opposition’s policy is implemented. They have abandoned a policy that previously acknowledged that an emissions trading scheme was and is the best mechanism for undertaking this major economic reform. The Howard government’s climate change report, the Shergold report, as well as the Garnaut review, came to the same conclusion that an emissions trading scheme was the most effective mechanism to reduce carbon pollution and to tackle climate change. The current Leader of the Opposition, in his book *Battlelines,* acknowledges what the Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and others have pointed out when he says:

The Howard government (in 2007) proposed an emissions trading scheme because this seemed the best way to obtain the highest emissions reduction at the lowest cost.

There is a global scientific consensus that the climate is warming and there is an increasing concentration of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere—in other words, climate change is real and it will inflict severe costs on Australia.

I believe there is also a growing global economic consensus that the cost of inaction on climate change will be greater than the cost of acting now. The two extremes in this debate are represented by, firstly, those who are sceptics—unfortunately, perhaps, overrepresented in the current opposition—and those who claim that drastic change is necessary, even at the cost of...
jobs and/or of inflicting large cost increases on households budgets. Both views are evident in my own electorate.

To the sceptics, I say that, if you cannot accept the global scientific consensus or the Rupert Murdoch philosophy, surely you must acknowledge that it is desirable for many, many reasons that we reduce the level of pollution our society pumps into the atmosphere and that we conserve our water sources and our forests for the future wellbeing of our community and our country. These are honourable objectives and we should be able to agree to implement these objectives in a way that minimises the adverse impact on families, industry and jobs. I am convinced the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme that is before the parliament is the best way to do this.

At the other end of the debate, there are those who are angry that the majority of Australians are not prepared to take dramatic action. They are angry that pollution is not stopped immediately, despite the cost to industry and jobs, and they are angry that the government’s CPRS does not go far enough on targets or polluters. They say they would prefer no action to the CPRS currently before the parliament. Whilst I am sympathetic to their passionate desire to act now and to bring about rapid change to protect our planet, I reject entirely the notion that no action is better than the detailed policy that is proposed by the government. Given the lack of will to act demonstrated by the majority of opposition members, they may well get an outcome of no action. I cannot see the benefit for the nation in such an outcome.

I am fortunate to have within my electorate Peter Langlands and Jane Genovese. Peter and Jane come to meet with me every six months or so. They are climate change activists who are campaigning for action with great heart, and they are passionate about the future and the environment. During their last visit they presented me with a piece of black coal because they were angry at the agreement that had been reached at that time by the government with the opposition to pass the CPRS. They were angry because they believed the CPRS did not go far enough quickly enough. I urged them to try and understand that the economic transition to a low carbon polluting economy that is needed must happen in a way that cushions Australian households, working families, industry and jobs. I have urged them to try and understand the diversity of views on climate change in our community and I have urged them to understand the reality of the political make-up of the parliament, particularly the Senate—perhaps the most difficult task of all. I think it is a shameful indictment of this parliament that we appear unable to deal with the challenge of climate change in a bipartisan way.

The misinformation that has crept into the public debate and the absurd need for 10-second grabs for modern media on this issue are also extremely unfortunate. I accept that the government’s scheme is detailed, comprehensive and complex, which I believe reflects the nature of the reforms required. To suggest the opposition’s alternative is simple or effective is to completely misrepresent it. I have to comment on the coalition’s recent focus on the so-called cost of the CPRS on households and their attempt to present it as nothing but a tax on households. These comments are hypocritical and opportunist. It is dishonest to suggest that their own policy will have no cost impact on taxpayers. It is also hypocritical to feign concern for the costs and charges on Australian households when their own party and state government in Western Australia are slugging Western Australian families and households with increased fees and charges. Increased this financial year alone by the Western Australian government were electricity prices, car registration, public transport fees, high school fees, boat registra-
tion and boat mooring licences, gas prices, recreational fishing licences, third party insurance, city car parking fees and local government rates.

The infamous Western Australian Treasurer announced in the state budget last May that new household fees and charges would add approximately $334 to household budgets. However, the massive increases in electricity, water, gas, sewerage, landfill and transport prices on top of the loss of the $100 high school subsidy and the $200 It Pays to Learn allowance mean that families will need to find more than $1,000 to foot the bill. Seniors copped it in the state budget as well. On top of electricity, gas and public transport increases, the Liberal-National Party coalition cut pensioner concessions as well. It is almost unbelievable that they did this at the same time as the Rudd government was acting to increase pensions and assist seniors with the cost of living.

The Western Australian Council of Social Services, WACOSS, stated in its recent report entitled *The rising cost of living in Western Australia* that families on minimum wages have been $31 per week worse off over the last 12 months. That is over $1,600 per year taken out of the hip pockets of Western Australia’s most vulnerable families. The opposition’s word play on costs is opportunistic. Genuine concern would acknowledge the Western Australian government’s fees and charges hike and demand action to remedy it immediately. I ask: what actions are the opposition taking to rein in these cost attacks by their state counterparts in Western Australia on Western Australian households? None. And some of their members are probably already out there blaming the Rudd government and the CPRS.

In contrast, the Rudd government has been open and public about the cost impact of the CPRS and will compensate nine out of 10 households to meet these costs. The contrasts between the current opposition policy and the Rudd government’s plan are stark. As the Minister for Climate Change and Water, the Hon. Senator Penny Wong, said in her opening remarks at the Press Club a couple of weeks ago:

Firstly, our plan caps and reduces Australia’s carbon pollution for the first time ever.

The alternative put forward by the Opposition would see emissions rise by 13 per cent by 2020.

Secondly, our plan tackles the root of the problem by making polluters pay for their carbon pollution.

The alternative lets the biggest polluters off scot free and potentially ties Australian business up in yet-to-be announced red tape.


And finally, our plan takes the money raised from polluters and provides cash assistance to 8.1 million working families—660 dollars a year on average.

Lower income households get more assistance, and higher income households get less.

The alternative doesn’t deliver a single dollar in assistance to working families. Instead working families bear the cost of new subsidies to polluters, through higher taxes or pared-back services.

In my electorate of Hasluck people are taking individual action all over the place, responding to the challenge of climate change in their own lives and doing their bit to tackle this significant problem. Over 4,300 households in my electorate have taken advantage of the insulation program. We have also seen both the federal and state government fund the Perth Solar City program. Constituents are accessing rebates for rainwater tanks or buying green power or, like some, installing solar panels or accessing green loans.
One example of people accessing green loans are Barry and Karry-leeanne, who live in Gosnells in my electorate. I was pleased to be able to join them in January when their new solar panels were installed. Not only are Karry-leeanne and Barry now a carbon-neutral household, but in the 40 days since they installed their system some 743.4 kilowatts of power have been produced and they are looking forward to a future without electricity bills at all. As a Western Australian I can say that that is probably a good thing, given that the state government has another 22 per cent increase in electricity charges planned for this financial year. I would like to congratulate them for participating in the Green Loans Program and I am delighted that they are so pleased with their solar panels. I urge more of my constituents to take advantage of these programs and opportunities.

I also urge my constituents who have concerns about the CPRS or any aspect of the proposal to consider the very comprehensive information available on the website www.climatechange.gov.au. If you do not have access to the web or would like more information or want to talk through what the possible cost implications are for your household, please come and see me, and I or my staff would be delighted to assist you to access information about the scheme and its potential impacts on your household. I also urge all members in this place as well as in the Senate to weigh up the science, the bipartisan advice and reports regarding the best mechanism for reducing carbon emissions, the future of our planet and the wellbeing of future generations of Australians, and support the introduction of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme at the earliest opportunity.

In the couple of minutes that I have left in this speech on the appropriations bills there are other things that I would like to refer to where my electorate has benefited from increased government funding or government programs. I am delighted to see a significant job being done towards building a stronger community and a stronger Australia for the working families of Hasluck and indeed the rest of the country. I am particularly pleased about the support that we have had through the national stimulus package. Funding has been provided to the Shire of Kalamunda for the Kalamunda Community and Cultural Centre. There has been significant funding, some $2.4 million, for the Swan Riverside Regional Park development. Also, the long overdue upgrade to the interchange of the Great Eastern Highway and Roe Highway has begun. I am looking forward to that being concluded sometime during 2012.

I have already commented on how pleased I am that the federal government have decided to contribute $180.1 million towards the building of the new Midland Health Campus, the public hospital designed to replace the existing Swan District Hospital. The state government indicated that they had a $100 million shortfall. We have provided more than required, and I hope to see construction commence shortly on the new Midland Health Campus. In addition to that, I also congratulate the Minister for Health and Ageing on the terrific job she has done in bringing about the substantial increase in GP training places. This will certainly assist in my electorate and complement the newly funded Midland GP superclinic. I understand that construction of that is due to start in the second half of this year.

They are just some of the projects that I would like to draw to the attention of the House. I could go on, given the schools funding that we are enjoying in the electorate of Hasluck. This afternoon I have tried to cover some of the important issues to me and to the electors of Hasluck, especially those constituted by the challenge of taking action on climate change.
Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (5.32 pm)—Today I take pleasure in having the opportunity to speak on a wide range of issues in this debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. I would like to comment on some key issues facing our nation, particularly in the coming decades, and some of the plans that I have in the coming years for my role in representing my community.

Queensland, as everyone knows, is an absolutely fantastic state and a great place to live. It is as simple as that. It is the sunny state; it is the lucky state. It is the state that everyone moves to—for very good reason, because it is a beautiful place. I am as parochial as the next person. There is no question about it. But it does lead me to speak about some very serious issues. Population growth is a very well-known part of Queensland life, particularly in the south-east, where it puts enormous pressures on our infrastructure and our ability to provide services such as energy, roads, health care, education and so forth. We love the growth, we like people coming to Queensland, but they are very big issues for us to deal with and I want to make particular note of that here.

We are dealing with those issues. Not only is the state government dealing with those issues but so is the Commonwealth—really for the first time since Federation. It is almost that long. Over the past decade and a half it was the case that the Commonwealth decided that it was not its role to play a part in infrastructure development in local regions. I have certainly held the view for a very long time that that should not be the case. The Commonwealth ought to play a role. That is certainly what the Rudd government have been doing, and I am very proud of that. I am proud of the achievements we have made in my part of the world, through the western corridor of South-East Queensland, and the great things those achievements bring to the state.

The population growth has been reflected through the latest Australian Electoral Commission federal redistribution. We had one in Queensland. It has been the case for quite a number of years now that at every election Queensland gets a new seat. We take one off one of the other states, which is fine by us. Within the western corridor, which is still driving much of the growth in South-East Queensland, it is no surprise that the electorate of Oxley has condensed in geographic size because it is growing in population density. I have lost a number of suburbs to the east of Brisbane—places like Acacia Ridge, Parkinson and Algester.

I just want to put on the record my thanks to those people, whom I still represent—they are my constituents up to the next election—and thank them for the support they have given me. I really do appreciate and value the work that we did together in those regions. I will formally be the representative—should the voters have the grace to re-elect me!—of new areas I have picked up: the centenary suburbs of Jamboree Heights, Jindalee, Middle Park, Mount Ommaney, Riverhills, Sumner and Westlake. I will look forward to looking after them, as I have done from time to time for a number of years even when they were not my constituency, when they might not have been being looked after by someone else. I certainly eagerly await the opportunity to work much more closely with the constituents and the families in those suburbs within the new parts of Oxley. I know we will have a great relationship, I am very proud to represent all of my electorate, those who have been with me since 1988, and I welcome those new constituents I will have in the future.
I am committed to the western corridor because I think it is a place that we should all be very proud of. I am certainly very proud not only to represent the western corridor of South-East Queensland but also to live there—to live there and enjoy all the benefits that it has, like our beautiful beaches. Many people may not know that in the western corridor we have beautiful beaches: they are only an hour away, on the Gold Coast! We have got some great motorways that take you straight there. We have got beautiful countryside. We have really got a great environment. I want to keep pushing home the idea that the western corridor is a great place to live, and it is proven day in, day out by the number of families that move to the region. They make a conscious decision to live there. It is a place that thrives on community spirit and it has real soul. It is a wonderful place to represent.

Of course, there are challenges for us, and nothing could better articulate that than the recent release of the latest Intergenerational report, looking at Australia over the next 40 years. I do not think there is a single more important document than this report. It probably has not got the attention it deserves in the media, but I will do my best to promote this report because of its significance to our economy and the things we ought to be doing in relation to it. I also want to congratulate the Treasurer on his work and his efforts in this area and on the great speech that he made upon the release of the report—about the importance he in his role places on that report and the challenges we will face in the future, and what we as a government will be doing to ensure that we look way beyond the electoral cycle to the next 40 years. Governments are often criticised, parliaments perhaps as well, for looking just at the next two years in the electoral cycle. Sometimes that may be a valid criticism, but I am very proud of the fact that we are paying serious attention to and doing things about the next 40 years as well.

As we all understand and as reflected in the Intergenerational report, the major challenges are the ageing population, employment participation and balance in the economy—three core factors determining where we might be in the future. If we want to maintain the standard of living we expect as people living in a wealthy country like Australia, we actually have to take action; we have to do something. We cannot just get the report and look at it. If we want to maintain our health services, including private health insurance schemes, and educational standards, we need to do things about them now. We heard the Treasurer speaking about the small changes you make today having large impacts in the future. Most people understand compound interest; this is a compound policy approach—small changes today, very large consequences in the future.

In particular, we need to understand just how significant the issue of an ageing population is. Between now and 2050, the number of people aged between 65- and 84-years-old will double. Even more startling is the revelation that the number of people aged 85 and over will quadruple. You can imagine, Deputy Speaker Georganas, the sort of pressure that will put on our health system and our aged-care system, on private health insurance schemes and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. We have to make sure that we manage those schemes well or we face the prospect of not being able to afford them in the future, as has happened in other countries. I am very focused on the need for us to do that properly.

This will mean that by 2050, there will be nearly 1.4 working Australians for each person over 65 years old compared to 2.7 people working today for those compared to five people who are currently working to support people who are over that age today. What that means is there will be significantly less people working, contributing revenue and taxation, to provide
for those who are no longer working. In the future the population will be going from 22 million people to over 36 million people in 2050. These are significant numbers. People will understand very quickly the importance of those.

That means that our standard of living rather than falling will grow at a lower, slower rate. That will mean we will have less and less opportunity to maintain the standard of living we enjoy today. If you do not grow, you literally go backwards. So we need to make sure that we do everything we can. There are only a couple of ways you can do this; you can either tax people more or become more efficient and productive. I know what I would rather choose and I know what this government is about: it is about being more efficient and more productive. It is about employment participation and all of those things. We need to encourage more people in the community to work where they can for longer, to better manage retirement savings and to better manage our health system to make sure we can maintain the standards we are used to in this country. We have done that through a number of areas today, through our tax reforms, through our child-care rebates to ensure that Australian families have more opportunity to participate in work and to ensure older Australians have tax incentives and other incentives to continue to work if they choose to. The way that retirement and superannuation systems are structured best reflects the way that people want to participate in work as well.

I do not want to get into the debate of climate change in terms of who is in favour and who is against. I think there is a much more critical debate at hand and that is that climate change is real. People are doing something about it globally, people are acting and they are doing things. The most critical thing for Australia is that if we do not act, we will be one of the ones most affected. It is a dry country. Even if you leave the climate change debate to the side, we need to act in terms of our climate, our crop development and the way that this country can manage itself into the future and manage the huge challenges that will face us. I have talked about these issues in other forums as well.

What the Intergenerational report does show us is that over the next few years we need to make some critical economic decisions to maintain where we want to be in the future. The bottom line of that is sustainability in everything we do: the pharmaceutical benefits scheme, health and the aged care sector and also in terms of budgets. We need to make sure that we manage risk whether it is climate, food security or our health care system. We need to make sure that we are part of any global solutions that are out there. People when they talk about climate change say it is complex. People just do not understand it. Some people would like to make it complex but it is really quite simple.

There are really just three things that people ought to know about climate change. The three Cs of climate change: putting a cap in place, charging the right people—the polluters—and it is about compensating people. That is all it is: it is as simple as that. It is a market based solution. It is something you would expect that the Liberals on the other side would be the first to support. Not so long ago they did support it and it was their policy. The reality is if you are going to have any system in place, it ought to be market based. Let’s have the market decide just how this will work because we know that will give it its best opportunity to work and work efficiently.

You put a cap in place, you set a benchmark and you go about setting a standard. We have put in a modest but a reasonable and achievable standard. We are working through that. The other one is to charge the right people. We should not be charging the average punter or tax-
payer in the street. We should be charging the big polluters. Let them get charged through the market system. Where people need compensation, and that is the third C, the government can play its role. It is a fair market based system and one that can work. It is simple and is in fact what the rest of the world is currently doing, investigating or will be doing very shortly. We are ready know there are over 32 countries in the world that have an ETS and US, China in development. Whether they agree, do not agree or whether Copenhagen was a success or a failure, the reality is everyone is moving forward.

As I said before large-scale change that will come in the next 40 years is significant but it is the small adjustments that we make today that will make the big difference for our children into the future. Regarding the future, what we have done today and how we have gone about it in the last couple of years, there is no question that the Rudd government, coming in to government, faced a number of challenges such as a global financial crisis of almost unseen proportions for some 75 years.

I am very proud of our record and the things we did in terms of bank guarantees, stabilising the economy, the stimulus package, and dealing with the critical issues of infrastructure, housing and a whole range of other areas. The critically important thing that really sticks with me is the 200,000 jobs that we faced losing across our economy. We say ‘jobs’ and ‘economy’, but we are talking about people, their livelihoods and their ability to repay their mortgages. We saved those jobs through our stimulus packages. Through our efforts we not only maintained people in employment but also did something very important—we left a legacy through infrastructure, and I am very proud of that.

This is about investing in productivity, employment participation and maintaining spending discipline, which we have done through our budgets. Fiscal sustainability will be the key to the future. Every country must manage debt—there is no question about that. Australia is one of the best placed, if not the best placed, economy in the world not only to manage it but to sustain it. We are at the lower end of debt ratios, GDP and debt liabilities. We are at the good, sustainable end of that. If you were to compare the percentages—we are at 15 per cent; the United States is now approaching 90 per cent; Japan is quickly approaching 200 per cent, which is almost the critical fall-over point; and Greece is at the same sort of number—you can see that we are placed at the very low end. It is what you would call a normal leveraged position. It is manageable, sustainable and something we can deal with in coming budgets.

I want to congratulate again the Treasurer for his very good work in making sure that we can sustain all the services that are critical for people’s livelihoods and their wellbeing, such as our healthcare system, the aged-care system that deals with pensions and the aged, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and other things we have to maintain. There is always growing pressure on budgets and fiscal policy. Every year you want to do more. Every year you lift the bar, you lift the standards. That is what we are attempting to do. But at the same time we are making sure it is sustainable into the future.

I want to also talk briefly about Australia as a financial services hub. We can be a real driving force in the future in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia has obviously done very well compared to just about all of our neighbours and globally after the financial crisis, and that was not by accident. Australia has a very strong, robust regulatory system. We have good governance and a range of other mechanisms—prudential regulation and so forth—that place us well ahead of our competitors. We need to capitalise on that. We need to make best use of that. It is
a growth sector and a growth industry. It is where a whole range of new, innovative jobs for the future can be created, and we can do that through a structured process.

I want to congratulate the Australian Financial Centre Forum on the 10 major recommendations it put forward in the *Australia as a financial centre* report, the Johnson report. It looked at what we can do to make that happen. I will not go through all of them, because I do not have time. We can do it through: investment manager regimes; offshore banking units; regulatory stability and certainty; funds management vehicles; liquidity; the Islamic finance products market, which is an emerging market in Australia; removing state taxes and levies on insurance, which I think is a critical issue on its own, but we can deal with it here as well; and avoiding unnecessary repetition of regulation. We need to lower costs and compliance burdens. We need to make sure we do it well.

I think there is a real opportunity for government to play a very strong role in this area, to lead the charge, to bring it together as one sector and to say to our neighbours: ‘Look at our expertise. Look at the funds under management here. Look at how well we have managed. We have that managerial skill and that expertise.’ That is something I think we should sell to the rest of the world. We can do that through export markets. I congratulate Minister Bowen as well for his ongoing good work in this area.

There are plenty of reforms underway. This is a reform government. It is a government that has been very focused on doing a range of things. There has been some work done through some committees and we have looked at the financial services sector as a whole. I look forward to the changes that will come about from the Henry, Cooper and other reviews—the reports of which are currently with the ministers.

In the couple of minutes I have left I want to finish off by saying that I think we have a real opportunity for strong sustainable budgets into the future with some really good ministers, Minister Tanner, the Treasurer and others working on a strong plan for the future for all Australians so we can all share the benefits that this country has to offer.

There is another issue, a global issue. I have spoken many times about global food security, but I want to divert slightly to something that is very close to Australia. I read recently a report of a study that was carried out throughout Greater Melbourne on type 2 diabetes, now the fastest-growing and most common disease killing people in Australia. It has enormous impact on ordinary people. In some parts of Melbourne, as this survey showed, as many as one in three adults actually has type 2 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes, and the crisis with obesity and all those other related issues, actually had a starting point about 30 years ago with the development of high human-intervention foods, processed foods, fructose concentration and the changing of the food we eat, so much so that in the last 30 years you can really track this and see what a massive impact it has had on our lives. Type 2 diabetes is a reasonably new occurrence. It is really just 30 years old, in a sense.

I think that there is a lot more we can do. I think that people need to refocus their efforts on whole foods, on real food. Food generally does not come in a cellophane packet that you can jingle. This kind of food is full of three things basically—fat, sugar and salt—and has literally no food value whatsoever. It is no longer real food.

I will be campaigning on this issue for the rest of this year in my local community, building up to a challenge that I want to do to get people to focus back on the things that their parents

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and their grandparents used to eat. I am sure that, if you asked your grandparents if they rec-

ognised some of the foods today compared with when they were children, they would not.

Everything that comes in cellophane packets today does not have the same sort of value. It is

processed. I think that if we can educate people about those small changes and show them that

there is a better way and that it is affordable, we can make a big difference in this really criti-
cal health area.

It links back to the things I talked earlier before about sustainability in our budgets. The big

challenges of the future will be health care and issues such as type 2 diabetes. I think that

there is something we can do about it and that we all ought to play a role. That is certainly one

of the ways I think I can contribute, and I look forward to the opportunity I will have to work

with my community and with others in trying to encourage people to get back to a wholesome

lifestyle. (Time expired)

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (5.52 pm)—I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the Ap-

propriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 because it gives

me an opportunity to talk about the delivery of the Rudd government’s economic stimulus

plan in my electorate of Parramatta. I am pleased to report to my fellow Parramattans that the

Rudd government’s Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan is on track to be delivered in

Parramatta.

The Rudd government is investing more than $200 million in the Greater Parramatta re-

gion, including $158 million in the Parramatta electorate, for more than 1,500 Parramatta pro-

jects that support jobs and small business and keep the west working. Parramatta is the beat-
ing heart of Western Sydney’s economy, the regional capital of small retail and manufactur-
ing, and in Parramatta we understand the stimulus—we actually get it. I would say that I have

not seen business as engaged with government as it is at the moment. Business understands

the damage that the global financial crisis could have inflicted on it and on the community

and it understands the work that the government has done on its behalf in acting so quickly to
deliver stimulus.

They also know that the world crisis is not over yet and that the economy needs a steady

hand to see us through along the recovery path. They tell me on a regular basis now how they

are going, and I am very grateful for that feedback. Families in my community understand

that our region has weathered the global financial storm relatively well without the dramatic

increases in unemployment that usually plague Western Sydney when the economy slows and

they see the evidence of the stimulus working in the mushrooming of small construction sites

in our schools and suburbs.

You need to understand two things about Parramatta to really get it. Firstly, we always do it
tougher than the averages for large cities. The choices that governments make to support and
stimulate the private economy in tough times have starker results in Western Sydney than in
the rest of Sydney or Melbourne, for example. In areas like ours people are the first onto the
dole queue when things go bad and they are the last ones off. In Parramatta we understand
that reasonable, affordable debt is better than massive unemployment, that action is far better
than inaction or delay.

Secondly, we do not have the inherited personal wealth of other places. Parramatta is a city
of firsts where families get their first university degree, migrants come to live for the first
time, they buy their first home or they open their first business. We simply do not have the
buffer in Parramatta that you might see in other areas. We are vulnerable. People in Parramatta take risks and calculated chances to advance their prosperity. Unemployment devastates families in this condition.

The $42 billion Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan represents the largest Commonwealth infrastructure project in our nation’s history. It is not just good for Parramatta, it is essential. The government’s decisive action through our infrastructure stimulus plan is protecting jobs through over 28,000 individual projects nationwide. We are keeping the economy strong and we are supporting working families in the here and now. The government introduced the plan with two key goals. We knew when we were elected that we had to build for the future. We inherited an infrastructure deficit and a skills deficit that would delay future growth in Australia. We knew we had to act. Through the stimulus package, we have protected Australia from the worst global recession in 75 years, but we have also built Australia’s future with investment in long-term infrastructure.

One year on, these objectives are being met in Parramatta. During the past 12 months the Australian economy has received relief from the Reserve Bank’s emergency low interest rates and from ongoing growth in the Chinese economy. But let us be absolutely clear: the difference between the strengthening growth in the Australian economy and being engulfed by the global recession, like eight out of our top 10 trading partners, is the government’s economic stimulus strategy. The difference between having generated 112,000 new jobs in the past year here and the hundreds of thousands of job losses overseas is the government’s economic stimulus plan. The difference between the increasingly confident business outlook and small business going to the wall in communities across the nation is the government’s economic stimulus plan. The Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan is delivering on what it promised—jobs for today and infrastructure for tomorrow.

Half of the $42 billion stimulus has now been injected into the economy through businesses, households, state and local government allocations and construction projects. Almost three-quarters—71 per cent—of almost 50,000 infrastructure projects have been completed or are under way. The Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan is transforming schools, community facilities and neighbourhoods across the nation and is building lasting foundations for Australia’s future growth and productivity.

One year ago, Australia was facing the most hostile global economic conditions in three-quarters of a century. The collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 and subsequent events on Wall Street had reshaped the landscape of American finance and what had begun as a seemingly small tremor in American financial markets gathered force as the inter-bank lending markets turning the wheels of the global financial system effectively shut down. By the beginning of 2009, an earthquake was rocking the entire global economy. World trade collapsed by nearly 45 per cent on an annual basis in the last three months of 2008. Entire banking systems needed to be rescued around the world, recapitalised, and, in the case of individual banks in many countries, nationalised. Stock markets slumped, many losing more than half their value. Financial institutions that had survived a combination of world wars and world recessions were swept aside and even the finances of nations themselves were threatened, with one nation state declaring itself to be officially bankrupt.

We were truly looking at the prospect of the total failure of the global financial system, the collapse of global economic growth and the real possibility of a global depression of indefi-
nite severity and duration. The jobs of hundreds of thousands of Australians were at risk and the Australian government faced a stark choice. We could simply fold our arms and allow businesses to fold and unemployment to rise, or we could act decisively by providing a major stimulus to the economy that would cushion Australia from the full force of the global economic recession.

We had a very small window of opportunity within which to make that decision. The government weighed the arguments and the evidence of past global crises and we concluded that we must do everything that we reasonably could to cushion Australia from the impact of recession, to project jobs, apprentices and businesses and to protect our economy from the full impact of the economic cyclone. The government’s first urgent step was to guarantee deposits and to guarantee wholesale funding for APRA-regulated banks, building societies and credit unions. This was an essential move for without it credit for major projects would have largely seized up and construction projects across the nation would have stopped in their tracks.

In the months that followed, the government rolled out $77 billion in stimulus and investment packages to support the economy in the immediate, medium and long term. The centrepiece of this $77 billion stimulus and investment is the $42 billion Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan. The government’s strategy began with immediate stimulus through cash payments, support for first home owners and tax breaks to encourage investment by small business. But it had to be fast. Our rationale was that these measures would trigger key drivers of growth in the Australian economy—in particular, household consumption—at a time when we faced the risk of a free fall in retail spending due to a collapse in consumer confidence. We in this place all know the concentration of Australian jobs which lies in the retail sector—some 15 per cent of the entire Australian workforce and a major part of the economy of Western Sydney.

I have received enormously positive feedback from retail business in Parramatta on the effect of that early cash stimulus. Business generally has commented positively on the tax incentives for small business capital equipment, which was introduced shortly after, designed to bring forward business expense on capital equipment. The tax incentives and cash stimulus had a huge positive impact on Auto Alley in Church Street, Parramatta. Michael Wentworth of the Motor Traders’ Association spoke of this impact while I was visiting Holden heartland in Parramatta to speak to apprentices in the Group Training in the Trades Program. Mr Wentworth said that the car industry in Parramatta was thriving because of three forms of government stimulus: the cash handouts, the tax breaks and the direct apprentice training support. Mr Wentworth said that without these three forms of government stimulus Auto Alley in Parramatta would have been shutting down hoists and laying off workers. Instead, they were booming throughout 2009.

The next stage of the strategy was to provide medium-term support for the economy by investing in school modernisation, energy efficiency and social housing. The third stage which follows is investment in major long-term infrastructure projects in rail, roads, ports, education, research, clean energy and broadband.

From the beginning the government recognised that, if a plan were to be effective, timing was critical. It was essential that funds flowed quickly. For this reason, in February 2009 the Council of Australian Governments agreed to ambitious delivery time frames. This has been a herculean task, with Commonwealth, state and territory coordinators-general overseeing the
development, approval, construction and completion of around 50,000 major construction projects across Australia. This is virtually unprecedented in our country’s history. Now, one year on from the announcement of the plan, we are well into the delivery phase. Of the major building construction projects being rolled out, 49,179 projects have been approved, 34,800 projects have commenced and over 8,300 have been completed.

In Parramatta I set up a ‘Keep the west working’ campaign which has organised regular roundtables of Parramatta’s key economic leaders, forums for small business and forums for school principals. This was all to ensure that we stayed on track to meet our targets and to feed in feedback on the delivery to government as swiftly as possible. I was pleased last month to welcome Treasurer Wayne Swan to Parramatta for the most recent ‘Keep the west working’ roundtable at the headquarters of Rheem Australia in Rydalmere. The rapid delivery of the plan has been critical to its effectiveness.

By comparison with other nations Australia acted early and decisively in implementing stimulus measures. For example, the United States government currently estimates that only 34 per cent of its stimulus package announced last year has been paid out. That is $269 billion out of $787 billion. The Australian government was acutely aware of the need to bring forward stimulus at a time when economic growth was under acute stress. Unlike other nations, Australia’s speed in acting before our economy plunged into a deep downward spiral and before a surge in unemployment had a significant impact prevented the loss of skill and capital that comes with deep recessions and therefore the need for a long, painful rebuilding. Early and decisive action was critical and that is why the impact of the stimulus peaked in mid-2009 and continues to phase down as the economy recovers.

The Building the Education Revolution program is the most visible part of the stimulus package in my area and represents the single largest school modernisation project in Australian history. There are 12,467 National School Pride projects underway and 4,434 have been completed. Five hundred and three science and language centres are underway and the first three are finished. Of the 10,087 Primary Schools for the 21st Century projects, 5,334 are now at the on-site construction phase and many have been completed.

In Parramatta, $110 million has been invested in 145 projects at more than 50 Parramatta schools, including 14 new school halls, 16 new covered outdoor learning areas, 11 new libraries, four science and language centres and 22 new classroom facilities. These projects are making a significant difference in classrooms across the country. In schools such as St Monica’s, North Parramatta, it is making a very real difference.

St Monica’s received $3.5 million for a new multipurpose hall; however, the advanced planning and the commitment of their broader school community have seen St Monica’s add enormous value on top of the Rudd government’s contribution. They had been planning major development work for a long time in anticipation of funds and the opportunity. The Building the Education Revolution provided that opportunity and allowed St Monica’s to incorporate their new stimulus hall at the heart of an entirely rebuilt school. St Monica’s were first off the mark in Parramatta with construction and had the first ribbon-cutting ceremony performed under the package. I would have to say that when I went there not much of the school was left; it was a very large construction site, but it looks really wonderful now. St Monica’s is a classic example of the Rudd government’s education revolution working to achieve outstanding results and an example of communities working together to multiply the value of

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government investment to deliver truly 21st century learning environments for Parramatta students.

I have visited an enormous number of smaller schools in Parramatta who simply would not have qualified for infrastructure investment in school halls without the Building the Education Revolution. It is these smaller schools that I am particularly pleased for, generally small primary schools, where an enormous legacy is being created by the nation-building economic stimulus in Parramatta.

In my area 20 schools have been completed or are nearing completion and 150 projects are under construction. Of the 283 projects approved in central Western Sydney, 90 per cent are on track to be delivered by the end of this year. The Building the Education Revolution in central Western Sydney is currently employing more than 1,800 people working for more than 220 businesses. Laurie Foy, Director of Brookfield Multiplex, recently spoke at my Keep the West Working summit with Treasurer Swan and reinforced the outstanding impact of the Building the Education Revolution on Parramatta jobs. Laurie commented that Brookfield Multiplex currently has 140 employees directly engaged on the Building the Education Revolution program in central Western Sydney, with approximately half this number being employed as a direct result of the BER program. He commented that without the Rudd stimulus Brookfield Multiplex would have been looking down the barrel of substantial job losses.

It is not just schools that the Rudd government is stimulating with construction work. Laurie Ferguson and I had the pleasure of announcing a $4 million investment at the North Parramatta campus of the University of Western Sydney late last year. The $4 million investment is targeted to assist UWS begin the construction of a world-leading innovative science and technology precinct on the North Parramatta campus. Also, the Sydney Institute of TAFE has been the beneficiary of the stimulus, with a $2.1 million refurbishment at the Granville TAFE campus.

Social housing is also benefiting, with the Rudd government investing $32 million in the construction of more than 130 new Parramatta family homes. Furthermore, the government is investing approximately $4 million in the refurbishment and maintenance of 1,000 existing homes. Nationwide, work has been completed on 42,000 of the 70,000 dwellings approved for repairs, and some 19,000 dwellings have been approved for construction, with 6½ thousand underway. We expect to have 75 per cent of these houses completed by the end of this year. Our investment in social housing is critical to supporting businesses right across Australia. It is providing jobs for the hundreds and thousands of workers involved—the builders, plumbers, carpenters, electricians, brickies and carpet layers, and many more in the building and construction industry.

The importance of the investment in jobs was reinforced for me by local tradie John Bini, whom I spoke to while visiting a stimulus housing project in Isabella Street, Parramatta. That particular project is building 24 apartment dwellings specifically designed for people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Mr Bini said that prior to the stimulus he and his friends in the construction industry had real concerns about how they were going to put food on the table because they had seen construction virtually grind to a halt, but with the stimulus there has been more than enough work available. In fact, John said that the stimulus had put him and his fellow tradies in a position to work as often and as much as they needed to support their families.
The stimulus has also included significant funds through local councils. Under the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program we are providing new and upgraded facilities to address different needs of communities across the nation. In all, 3,220 approved projects are underway, with an impressive 2,654 projects having been completed. Of the larger strategic projects, 102 of the 137 are underway.

In Parramatta the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan has invested more than $5 million in 16 community infrastructure projects. The centrepiece of this investment is the $5 million revitalisation of Granville town centre with a $2.1 million contribution from the Rudd government. Just last weekend I had the opportunity to inspect construction work while holding one of my regular mobile offices at the Granville shopping centre. I can inform my community that construction is well underway and well past the halfway point. In speaking to local small business people the feedback was that this local infrastructure investment will be a fantastic boost for local business and is well and truly overdue.

Taken as a whole, all of these measures constitute the most ambitious nation-building plan in Australian history. Without the stimulus package there is no doubt that Australia would have plunged into a technical recession. Australia’s growth may have been as low as minus two per cent over the year to the September quarter. Instead Australia has a stronger rate of economic growth than any of the major advanced economies, growing by 0.6 per cent over last year to September 2009. The International Monetary Fund is now forecasting that the Australian economy will grow faster than initially expected this year, predicting that the Australian economy will grow by 2.5 per cent this year, up from the two per cent the IMF forecast in October last year. The IMF says Australia’s economic growth is likely to reach three per cent next year. The latest official forecast suggests a peak in the unemployment rate of 6.75 per cent in the June quarter 2010, which is around 1.5 percentage points lower than the projected unemployment in the absence of the stimulus. In fact Australia’s unemployment rate of 5.3 per cent is lower than any of the major advanced economies except that of Japan. Industry groups such as the Master Builders Association of Australia have acknowledged the key role that the stimulus package has played in turning around the economic outlook. Specifically the MBA has estimated that the stimulus measures are helping to maintain up to 50,000 jobs in nonresidential building that would otherwise have been lost.

The economy is still in need of support as we move into economic recovery and as the focus of the stimulus plan shifts to the long-term infrastructure projects. Those projects are critical to lifting productivity growth and tackling the long-term economic challenge of an ageing population as outlined in the third Intergenerational report. The Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan has laid a strong foundation for tackling those long-term challenges and it has cushioned Australia from the greatest economic threat we have faced in our lifetime. I know that my community knows that many of our neighbours are still working and supporting their families because the stimulus package was delivered fast and effectively. My commitment is to keep the focus on jobs. (Time expired)

Mr BEVIS (Brisbane) (6.12 pm)—The Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 form another part of the impressive Rudd Labor government’s commitment to building a strong economy for Australian families. They build on previous financial initiatives in budgets and economic statements and, of course, most notably the efforts of this government in seeing Australia through the greatest financial global crisis
we have witnessed in more than 70 years. The government has done that in a manner that now sees Australia as the economic envy of the world, the only advanced economy not to go into recession.

As I commented here a day or so ago, it is a performance that those on the opposition benches and the leadership of the opposition have simply failed to comprehend. It is difficult to believe that a little over a week ago the Leader of the Opposition, the person who would be the Prime Minister of Australia, asserted that, instead of adopting the approach this government has taken, which has seen Australia perform so well, we should have adopted the approach of the New Zealand government. The approach in New Zealand resulted in the New Zealand economy going into recession for five quarters. It is an approach that sees the New Zealand economy today still some 2½ to three per cent smaller than it was before the global financial crisis; an approach that has seen the Prime Minister of New Zealand acknowledge Australia’s wonderful performance and assert that he would like New Zealand to be in a position to catch up to Australia’s economic performance by the year 2025. Yet the alternative Prime Minister in Australia, the Leader of the Liberal Party, seems attracted to that model. I am not sure that many constituents or many voters in Australia, and certainly not the millions of ordinary working men and women of Australia, would see that as a more attractive option.

I want to refer to a number of the initiatives that this government has taken, many of them fulfilling election commitments in 2007. At the outset, I want to refer to the impressive record of this government in looking after, in particular, pensioners and those who are less well off in our community. On 20 September 2009, single pensioners on the maximum rate of pension received an increase totalling $70.83 a fortnight. That brings their total pension to $671.90. In the Brisbane electorate, in excess of 12,000 pensioners benefit from this very significant improvement. Pensioner couples combined on the maximum rate received an increase of $29.93 a fortnight, taking their payments up to $1,013. Importantly, these increases include indexation under the new Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index. For as long as I can remember, whenever matters involving pensioner payments occurred, pensioners have argued that the general CPI, consumer price index, that we tended to apply in the past did not accurately reflect the actual items and costs of living as they affect pensioners in their normal weekly purchases. We have remedied that. We have put in place a special pensioner cost index. That index does take into account the basket of goods that pensioners buy, which on this occasion was actually higher than the consumer price index. This is one of the great achievements over the last two years.

These changes will lift the single pensioner base rate from 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings to 27.7 per cent by March 2010. That is a very significant increase. If memory serves me correctly, it was the Whitlam government that first established the 25 per cent benchmark as a policy of government. It was subsequently legislated for by other governments, but it has taken a further Labor government to increase that benchmark. I know that there are thousands of constituents in Brisbane who are appreciative of this initiative and of the Rudd government for delivering on that commitment.

I have long had a keen interest in and a concern for those people who suffer from type 1 diabetes, particularly children. I think all of us in this place have been involved in meetings with representatives from the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. I have had the great pleasure of keeping in contact with a number of constituents in my electorate of Brisbane who
have type 1 diabetes. I am very pleased that the Rudd government has taken further initiatives recently to provide support for them. Families with children who have type 1 diabetes are going to benefit from the government’s decision to increase the subsidy for the purchase of the insulin pump for children who are under 18.

The Type 1 Diabetes Insulin Pump Program is an innovative initiative, and it is a good initiative. It was started under the Rudd government, and it delivers relief for families trying to manage the complexities that are part and parcel of living with someone who has juvenile, or type 1, diabetes. The maximum subsidy under the Type 1 Diabetes Insulin Pump Program has been raised from $2,500 to $6,400. That is 80 per cent of the price of a pump. It is available to successful applicants who have an annual family income of up to $64,240. The level of the subsidy operates on a sliding scale, gradually reducing to $500 or 10 per cent of the pump cost, whichever is the greater, for families who have an income of $101,045.

I have also had the great pleasure of visiting Medtronic, one of the global leaders in the production of insulin pumps and, I should say, a range of other extremely advanced medical devices. I had the honour of opening their new premises in Brisbane just recently. They are a very professional organisation that works very closely with the hospitals, the surgeons and those involved in diabetes—as they do in other areas. It is very pleasing to see the government’s commitment to assisting the families of those who have type 1 diabetes. For children who suffer from type 1 diabetes the opportunity to have an insulin pump greatly improves their quality of life and enables them to participate more fully, whether it is in the playground or the classroom, and certainly reduces the trauma of regular testing and injections.

I am also very pleased to see the commitment of the Rudd Labor government to assist families with childcare assistance. The government has honoured its election promise to increase the childcare tax rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses. The annual cap has also been increased from $4,354 to $7,500 per child. The rebate is now paid quarterly, to give parents assistance closer to when they incur the actual out-of-pocket expenses. The Child Care Rebate is not means tested, as it is also designed to make it easier for people to re-enter the workforce. In that respect, it is unique amongst the payments that governments typically make. The support that Labor has given in that increase in the tax rebate is very substantial and will make a significant difference to families meeting their weekly budget requirements.

I want to mention the enormous investment this government is making in education. As a former teacher, as a parent and as a legislator, I have long had a commitment to the importance of education in our society. Before I do, I want to anticipate and respond to some of the arguments those in the opposition might make and have made whenever these programs are mentioned. Typically, they say, ‘That’s all good and well but you’re creating this massive debt.’ If you walk around this building, you will see on Liberal Party and National Party offices posters talking about the terrible debt that Australia faces and the ruin we are all going to confront. My attention was drawn on 8 August last year, when the opposition endeavoured to run that argument, to an article in the Age written by Ross Gittins. At that time, Malcolm Turnbull was the Leader of the Opposition, so he is mentioned in the article. It read:

So, how worried should we be about that debt? Much less than Turnbull wants us to be. He is exaggerating the size of the debt, misrepresenting the cause of the debt, exaggerating the difficulty we’ll
have repaying it, misrepresenting its effect on our prospects and pretending we’ll end up with little to show for it.

This was the commentary about the former Leader of the Opposition, who was actually the responsible one. This was before Tony Abbott was elected as leader. This was before Senator Barnaby Joyce became the finance spokesperson. This was a commentary on a Leader of the Opposition who, it could be said, had some degree of credibility, particularly in financial circles. Against that commentary, consider the sorts of things presented by the current Liberal frontbench and the alternative ministry in this parliament. In fact, Ross Gittins in that article of August last year went on to say:

Nor is the debt ‘massive’ or ‘mountainous’. The typical home buyer borrows two or three times their annual income and manages the repayments without great stress. At the projected peak in the net debt of $203 billion in June 2014, it will be equivalent to just 14 per cent of the nation’s annual income …

Ross Gittins is not the only person who has belled the cat on this issue. He is not the only one who has come out to say that the Liberal opposition argument about debt is simply fallacious and untrue. That is not even going to the comments of Senator Barnaby Joyce, who talked about the United States going bankrupt and Australia going bankrupt. We saw that only a couple of weeks ago. That was from a person who would be the finance minister. He is clearly challenged to comprehend the difference between ‘millions’ and ‘billions’. It really does cause concern.

More recently, in the Financial Review on Tuesday, 9 February there was an article written by Tony Harris, the former New South Wales Auditor-General. He also commented on the arguments of those opposite on economic management. I quote from his article:

The real expert in misleading the electorate is the shadow treasurer, Joe Hockey. For many months Hockey has been waging war against the government by claiming that its spending forces the Reserve Bank of Australia to lift interest rates.

Hockey knows—or should know—that the central bank’s present target rate of 3.75 per cent is half a percentage point lower than the lowest rate seen in the 11 years of the Howard government. It is also 3.25 percentage points below the highest rate in the period of that government. If Hockey wants us to believe that very low interest rates are the mark of a good ministry, the Howard government failed.

They are the comments of a former New South Wales Auditor-General published in the Financial Review earlier this month. I will not go further, to Senator Barnaby Joyce and his comments or to some of the comments that the Leader of the Opposition has made. It is important, when we talk about the programs that I have mentioned and the funding programs for schools that I am about to move to, that the only criticism that those opposite are able to muster is that it creates a debt and a burden which is a problem for the future. It is an untrue, hollow argument and there is ample evidence from economic commentators to demonstrate that.

I mentioned before that as a former teacher, a parent and a legislator I am really excited about the investment this government is making in education. It is across the board, but I am very pleased to see the investment going into primary education. There is no shortage of reports, including parliamentary reports, but also in the literature within the education fraternity, talking about the importance of early intervention and of resourcing early schooling as an important way of dramatically improving the outcomes at the end of schooling. Yet government after government has failed to act on it. This is the first government that has actually invested in our primary schools in a way that is enabling every primary school in the country to ensure
that its capital infrastructure is first class. It is not just primary schools; a large range of secondary schools have also benefited.

I want to place on record my thanks to the government for the change this is making to the educational opportunities for students in Brisbane, because across the electorate there are very worthwhile programs. I will mention just some of them. The list is reasonably long but I am touching on only a very small percentage of them. All Hallows’ School in Brisbane received $2 million for a new music room conversion. Ascot State School, which I visited at the end of last year, has a new $3 million classroom block going in. At Ashgrove State School, I had the pleasure of announcing at their fete last year that they would receive $3 million for a multipurpose hall and a resource centre. Brisbane Central State School, a small inner-urban school, is receiving $2 million for a resource centre and a multipurpose hall. Brisbane Grammar School will have a new $2 million multipurpose centre. Clayfield College will get a $3 million junior school building. Eagle Junction State School—I am going out there next week and I was there at the end of last year—is getting a $3 million resource centre. Enoggera State School will have a $2 million resource centre. Fortitude Valley State School will receive $250,000 for new library facilities. Hamilton State School will receive $850,000 for a new library. Hendra State School is getting $850,000 for a new resource centre. Holy Cross School at Wooloowin is getting $2 million for new classrooms. Holy Spirit School down at New Farm, a school I visited a number of times last year, including to talk about this very program, is receiving $2 million for a new hall and a new library. Ithaca Creek State School, my old primary school that I attended, is receiving $2½ million for a new multipurpose hall and a resource centre. I was at that school only last week and they are keenly looking forward to the opportunity to use that facility. I might say that the community is keenly looking forward to it as well because it will be a resource not just for the school but for the wider community.

Mr Debus—So much for the sneering about it being a mere program of school halls.

Mr BESIS—Indeed! The program has delivered meaningful outcomes for school communities. At Kedron State High School, a school I visited at the end of last year, they are constructing a new languages centre for about $2 million. Kelvin Grove State College are getting $2.7 million for a multipurpose hall. Marist Brothers, Ashgrove are actually conducting a number of programs, the major one being $2 million for new classrooms. Milton State School are getting a new library, and how central is that to the education of our children—a $3 million new library? Newmarket State School are getting $2 million for classrooms and a resource centre. Oakleigh State School, which I visited a number of times last year, are very excited and are getting $2.5 million for a resource centre and a multipurpose hall. That is one of the schools where they have been able to tailor-design the building to fit the site, and it is going to be a fantastic facility for all who are involved.

St Agatha’s Primary School at Clayfield are building a new hall for $2.5 million. I was at St James’s College on two occasions last week and they are putting in new general learning areas, walkways and a shaded roof for $2 million in a very restricted, urban building site. That is a college that actually caters for a wide range of families including, I have to say to their credit, people who come here from other shores as refugees. The money they receive will be very appreciated by all of the students there. Stafford State School are also getting a new resource centre and other buildings totalling $2 million.
Time does not actually allow me to even go through the limited list I had with me today, but there is one thing that needs to be placed on the record and said again and again and again. With respect to every single one of those projects, every single member of the Labor Party supported it, every single member of the Labor Party voted for it. It is equally true that in respect of every single one of those projects, every member of the Liberal Party voted against it—every single program, every single building. That is not going to be lost on the people of Brisbane and later this year it will not be lost on the people of Australia. I commend the government for its good work in building a strong economy for working Australians.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery) (6.32 pm)—I endorse the remarks made by my colleague, the member for Brisbane, for his contribution and particularly for the last points he made about Building the Education Revolution and the capital infrastructure expenditure. It is a matter of some moment to me because my own electorate—which of course as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker Secker, is all of the Northern Territory except Darwin—has some of the most impoverished people in Australia who have educational facilities that are really wanting. As a result of the Building the Education Revolution every school in my electorate will be substantially improved as a result. Of course, a substantial number of these projects, in fact the majority of them, are servicing Aboriginal communities.

Who have the poorest educational outcomes in Australia? Aboriginal people do and, indeed, Aboriginal people living in rural and remote parts of the Northern Territory. So it seems passing strange to me that the shadow spokesman on Indigenous affairs, a senator from the Northern Territory, chose to vote against improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, let alone for the broader population, as my colleague has said in terms of the opposition voting against every one of these initiatives.

So I want to endorse the remarks made by the member for Brisbane and say that they reflect broadly what the community thinks: how appalling it is to have this massive infrastructure investment going ahead, providing employment and business opportunities for Australians across the country and, most significantly, improving the educational infrastructure of the nation now and for future generations! Despite what the opposition have said about school halls, they will come to rue the day that they described this investment as investing in school halls. You only have to travel in your own electorate—and Mr Deputy Speaker Secker, I know you do because I spotted you there fairly recently—to see the impact of the investment on your own communities.

I am aware that this is a broad-ranging debate. It is one of the few occasions I get the opportunity to participate in this sort of debate. Prior to getting onto the details of the legislation before us, I want to talk about a number of people in the Northern Territory. I want to do this for a very particular reason: these are people who were friends of mine, and a very close friend in one case, and they have all passed away over the last three or four months. I want to mention them in this place.

The first is a woman, Carol Burke, who until she passed away in December worked with me every day I have been in this parliament, which is 20 years. She was here the first day I got elected, 23 years ago. Prior to that, she had worked for a Northern Territory government senator for nine years. So she worked for me for two decades, spending three decades in total of her adult life working for the Labor Party and Labor members of parliament. Unfortu-
nately, she has passed away. Every member of this place knows how important their staff is. They watch your back. They look after your interests. When you are not at home, they are tilling the soil. I have to say that Carol was the epitome of loyalty and trustworthiness. She loved a good yarn and she had a great sense of humour. She was indeed a great friend of mine.

She was not a native of this place. She was actually born in England and brought up in New Zealand, where her father moved when he was in the Air Force. She had a very interesting adult life prior to working in the parliamentary sphere. She trained in office skills and management after she left school and then returned to England before securing a job with Schweppes in the then newly independent Zambia. It was in Zambia that she met her husband to be. Whilst there, she worked with the Zambian government, including as a personal assistant to two Zambian cabinet ministers, both of whom, interestingly, ended up in jail. I know her record in Australia was a lot better than that. Neither of the members she worked with in the Northern Territory has ended up in jail!

When she left Zambia she went to live in New Zealand for a short while and worked with her husband, Jim, who had secured work with the department of native affairs. When they came back from New Zealand they lived at Bamaga and Kowanyama in Queensland. Then they moved to the Northern Territory in 1976 and Carol took up work with Ted Robertson. She was, as I said, truly the heart of my office. Without her, I would not be here; it is as simple as that. She was a Catholic, so she may well be listening, and I do want to say how much we loved her and how much we miss her. She had an unprecedented knowledge of politics, bureaucracy and government processes. She cared for everyone regardless of their background and of who they were. In the Northern Territory we have people who are called long-grassers. They are not always, though generally, Aboriginal people who live it rough and who are sometimes on the grog. On more than one occasion she would jump to their defence when she saw a member of the constabulary approaching. She was a very, very fine woman. Carol died at the young age of 61 from liver failure. She was survived by her husband, Jim Burke. Unfortunately, they had no children.

The second person I want to refer to is another very, very fine woman: Margaret ‘Peg’ Nelson. Peg’s husband was a former member for the Northern Territory in this place, and his father was the first member for the Northern Territory in this place. Both were Labor members of parliament. Peg died recently, on 2 February, at the age of 96. She lived a very full life. Thinking about her life, I find it difficult to explain to someone who lives in Sydney or Melbourne what it is like to live in the bush. But just think about this. Peg’s father, Louis Bloomfield, was a ‘horseman’—a term from the last century—who lived in the Finke area of the Northern Territory at the turn of the 20th century. Her mother was a woman by the name of Lillian Kunoff. When they married they bought Love’s Creek Station, at Ross River, east of Alice Springs, and bred horses for the Indian army. Think about it.

Peg was born in September 1913 at Oodnadatta, in northern South Australia, which was three weeks by horseback from Alice Springs—a long way. Lou and Lil had three children: Peg, Jean and Harry. Peg grew up with many of the pastoral families whose names are prominent in Central Australia. Think about this place, think about us, think about what we do, think about our communication systems—and think about Peg as a small girl growing up in Central Australia. They had no air-conditioning and she was living reasonably rough. She was
a very accomplished horse rider herself. In fact, she was a jockey at many picnic races, which are still popular.

Peg traversed a century of Territory life. She was born two years after South Australia gave the Territory back to the Commonwealth to look after. It was back then—and think about this—that there was a promise of completing the Alice Springs to Darwin railway, which, as we know, was only finished in the last decade. During her life, Peg saw the first plane land in the township of Stuart, as Alice Springs was then known. She married Jock Nelson in 1934. The couple moved to Tennant Creek, where Jock operated the butcher’s shop. He later worked sinking bores, before joining the Army during the Second World War and serving in the Top End. During that time, Peg worked for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. After the war, Peg and Jock started Stuart and Lloyds and the Dalgety agency in Alice Springs.

Peg was integrally involved in public life in the Northern Territory in part because of her partner. Jock was a member of the Legislative Council for the seat of Stuart from 1947, before being a member of the House of Representatives between 1949 and 1966. He was the first Mayor of Alice Springs in 1971 and was Administrator of the Northern Territory in 1973. Peg was involved in many organisations: the CWA, the Alice Springs Memorial Club, the Alice Springs Netball Association and the Red Cross. She was a very proud member of the Labor Party. For me, she was a person who really counted. If you tweaked her ear—and she was a bit deaf—she would say, ‘Listen, my son, what’re you up to?’ She would make sure that she passed her point of view on to me. She was a great woman, a gentle woman, who touched many lives. She was survived by her daughters, Pat and Lowan, both of whom live in South Australia.

The third person I want to refer to is someone of more recent vintage, someone I knew extremely well, someone who made a great contribution to the education scene in the Northern Territory and someone who I know would have been appalled at the lack of support by the opposition for the government’s education reform initiatives. This person is Greg Jarvis. He was born in Bowral and educated at Bowral primary and high schools. He got his diploma of education here in Canberra. He began teaching in the Northern Territory in 1979 on Groote Eylandt. He subsequently taught at Gapuwiyak, Milingimbi and Maningrida—names which may be unfamiliar to many people, but Gapuwiyak, Milingimbi and Maningrida, where he was principal, are in Arnhem Land. He had a very strong personality but he was a very fair man, who thought very deeply about his job and was greatly committed to it. He later moved to Darwin, where he was principal of Malak Primary School and then Moulden Primary School. He was a long-time member of the ALP and the Australian Education Union. It was in that context that I met him. I was a very active union member in the Australian Education Union, then the Northern Territory Teachers Federation. In his later years he became a member of Darwin City Council and was alderman for the Chan ward—for the Greens, as it happens. This man made an extraordinary contribution to education in the Northern Territory and to community life. He is survived by his wife, Trish Joy, and their daughter, Thea. My condolences go to them. He was buried only a week or so ago.

I mention those people because we do not often get an opportunity to talk in this place about people who matter to us. These people mattered to me for a range of reasons. They were outstanding citizens of this country. When we think about public policy and the contributions we each make in this place in public policy debates, we are in a sense, as we all know, talking
on behalf of all our constituents and representing their interests. When we participate in debates about appropriation bills, we can get carried away with the minutiae of the bill. Let’s be clear about it, most of our constituents do not read the minutiae of bills, but they are concerned about the direction of our policies and about the outcomes that will be achieved as a result of what we do in this place.

I want to finish by referring to one element of the legislation. Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 includes funding for small-scale renewable energy systems. There are many innovative and important projects in my electorate, including one at Gawa, which is a small outstation community of Galiwinku, Elcho Island. It was started in 1986, by Ngulpurray and his daughter Kathy Guthadjaka. A number of people—26 men, women and children—cut a 10-kilometre road, using axes, shovels and fire. It took six months. This is the bush. This is not Tuggeranong, where you get your bitumen laid. This is the bush. Kathy began a school in this community in the 1990s under a tarp. Sometimes, from what you hear in this place, you would think Aboriginal people do not have an interest in education. This is a very fine example of the desire of Aboriginal people who live on outstations in the Northern Territory to have their kids educated.

They had a problem with the diesel generator in the community because it cost them a lot of dough, for a start, and it was too expensive to run at night. It cost them 80 grand per year in fuel. Ultimately, after many trials and tribulations, and working with the NT Christian Schools Association, they designed a 24-metre wind tower and turbine. With the help of a Danish company, the Wind Factory, the project was developed to its completion and commissioned on 27 November 2009. What was the result of this? Cheap, efficient, sustainable energy, 24 hours a day. This is a small Aboriginal community in the Top End of the Northern Territory, a very isolated bush community, but people saw the opportunity and with the assistance of outside help were able to build this generating system. And what the outcome has meant, of course, is that the community is thriving. In a very small school, over 60 kids are now enrolled and they have attendance rates of 80 per cent. Six students have completed their HSC and one is working as a police officer at Galiwinku.

When asked what the turbine and the 24-hour power means to her community, Kathy says that the main thing is the school will have extra money to spend in the classroom instead of on diesel and everyone now sleeps well—as you can imagine. I can. It is a very, very tough life, but here we have a small community that we need to congratulate. We need to recognise the work of Kathy and the Gawa community, the NT Christian Schools Association and its principal, Geoff Bateman, because what they have shown is true leadership. When we talk who will benefit from the government investments announced in the budget and then recently through the process of the Building the Education Revolution, it is these people. Yet the opposition opposed it. As I said at the outset, what a shame it is that the opposition spokesman on Indigenous affairs, who is a senator from the Northern Territory, would oppose an investment in a school like this.

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (6.52 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to rise in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. In considering what I would say in speaking to these bills, I had the opportunity to look at the speeches made by those opposition members who chose to speak on these bills. There certainly seemed to be a clear theme in their statements. What the opposition members concentrated on was the gov-
government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme policy and the bill put forward in this House. The problem with the speeches made by the opposition members was, of course, that they concentrated their entire time on the government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and failed to address in any way what the opposition themselves are putting forward to deal with climate change. In fact, if anyone reading Hansard were to go back and read those statements what they would see is that in some cases those opposition members were disputing the science completely, which is incongruous with what the Leader of the Opposition is saying. He is saying, ‘Here’s our policy to deal with climate change,’ but at the same time he has members of his own party saying that the science is not in and that in fact there is no justification as yet to do anything about climate change.

The problem with the opposition’s policy in relation to dealing with climate change is that it lacks any real substance. It does not work. It does not require anything of polluters. There is no cap on pollution. It slugs taxpayers instead of big polluters. It is unfunded, which would mean higher taxes or cuts to services like schools or hospitals. The opposition will not come forward and say exactly where those funds will come from—what they are going to cut and what they are going to increase. The challenge for Tony Abbott and Barnaby Joyce is to explain how they are going to pay for the climate change con job they are putting forward to the Australian people. Of course, there is a bit of a pattern forming here. We have seen it with the recent announcement of their health policy. We have seen it with the paid parental leave policy. We have seen it with the opposition’s response to the global financial crisis. Policies are being thrown out with no substance to them and, quite often, no actual policy document. The paid parental leave policy was just a couple of lines fed to the local media. In fact, it seemed to be an announcement that they would go off and create a policy document. But they were happy to go out and champion this policy.

Despite the policies the opposition are throwing out to get attention, they are not talking about how they are going to increase employment, training opportunities and skills. The only reference we are hearing to jobs is about how they are going to make workplaces more flexible again—and we have certainly heard this before. They say they are going to create individual contracts again and more flexibility. There has already been reference to scrapping penalties on weekends. That is what the Australian people have to look forward to with Tony Abbott and his band of merry men in charge of our economy and our future.

There has been no mention of education at all. We have heard much criticism from the opposition of the Rudd government’s Building the Education Revolution policy. The spending at schools has been widely criticised. They have opposed just about every initiative this government has put forward. They have opposed all the spending in schools. Yet we have heard nothing at all about what the opposition would do in relation to an education policy into the future.

In contrast to this, the Rudd government has put forward a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme that makes polluters pay for their pollution and thereby encourages them to invest in cleaner technologies like wind and solar power. The Rudd government has proposed a market based scheme, which is widely recognised as the best way to reduce carbon pollution. John Howard, Malcolm Turnbull, Joe Hockey and most of the mainstream members of the Liberal Party actually support the CPRS despite what their leaders are now saying. More than 30 countries—including all of the European countries, Japan and New Zealand—have either in-
Introduced or are introducing a CPRS. The government’s market based scheme is the lowest-cost way of reducing emissions. The Rudd government’s scheme ensures that the impact on household costs would be just above one per cent, and our compensation plan means that 92 per cent of all households would receive assistance, with low-income households and 90 per cent of families receiving FTB(A) being fully compensated. But those on the other side are saying there are not going to be any costs on polluters and consequently there will be no flow-on costs so they do not have to talk about compensation or assistance for households. Various sectors, including the electricity sector, are saying they are not sure that there will not be a cost but, if there is, they will pass it on to consumers and householders will pay. But there is no talk of assistance to households from those on the other side.

Over the last couple of days in this House I have also been listening to other debates from members of the opposition. They complain about roads they want fixed and rail projects they want done. We have even heard from the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion that opposition members have approached her about students in regional towns who need income support. The opposition are concerned that these students will not go to university because they cannot get the scholarships the government is seeking to provide to them. I find it amazing that members of the opposition from both chambers are saying to the government that they are concerned about their students not getting scholarships. Opposition members seem to be completely ignorant of their own actions and of what they are blocking. It is within their hands to ensure that important bills like the income support for students bill are passed in the Senate.

Let us compare that which the Rudd government has achieved in its first term with these claims about what has been done and what the opposition has not been doing. The government is funding 1,000 new nurse training places to ensure patients get the care that they deserve. It is supporting record investment in solar and wind power to protect our environment for future generations. The Rudd government is helping to secure our water supplies by providing funding to help build recycling, desalination and stormwater harvesting projects; helping the health of the Murray-Darling by implementing the first ever purchase of water entitlements by the federal government; investing in new cancer research and treatment centres; funding a 30 per cent increase in GP training places to help address shortages, especially in regional and rural areas; creating 130,000 new training places and granting 290,000 new computers for schools; establishing a single national curriculum focusing on the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, and the Minister for Education has recently announced a national literacy and numeracy program. The government is funding new trade training centres for high schools to give kids practical skills for work, providing tax cuts for working families and making record infrastructure investments in roads, highways, hospitals and schools—there are currently more than 28,000 infrastructure projects underway and the largest schools building program ever, to ensure our children have a better place to learn.

I ask the opposition: which of these projects do you consider not worthy of funding? We keep hearing accusations from the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Treasurer and the shadow finance minister that the government is misspending revenue—it is throwing money around. My question to the opposition is: which of these projects are not worthy of funding? Maybe I can assist by refining that list a little bit more, to the electorate of Petrie, in which there are 120 projects, 33 schools, and about $85 million in funding under the National...
School Pride, Primary Schools for the 21st Century, and Science and Language Centres programs. There is additional funding for VET for my local TAFEs of over $683,000. In my electorate of Petrie alone there are 374 properties and over $1.5 million refurbishment money for existing social housing. Forty-three new units of social housing worth over $15 million and 32 new defence housing units worth $12 million have been constructed in the electorate of Petrie alone. We could also look at the funding that is provided to Brisbane City Council and Moreton Bay Regional Council to build community infrastructure and at the money from the Jobs Fund which is helping the Urban Land Development Authority with Fitzgibbon and Guide Dogs Queensland with new guide dog trainer cadetships. I ask the opposition: having refined that list, which one of the Petrie projects do you consider not worthy of funding? Which one of these, if you were in government, would you scrap? Many of our halls and resource centres are almost complete—some are complete but some are still in progress. Some of our social housing is still underway. Which of these would the opposition put an end to? Our GP super clinic? I want to know so they can be honest and go forward to the people of Petrie and tell them what they would lose under a government led by Tony Abbott, Joe Hockey and Barnaby Joyce. These are the questions I believe need to be answered.

The government continues to stand by its commitment to build a strong economy—through its budgets in 2008 and 2009, through its stimulus package released in late 2008 to help pensioners and low-income families, through its stimulus package to help build infrastructure for the future and to help create and support jobs with the 2009 stimulus package and the nation building package. These are the things that the Rudd government is getting on with. This is what the appropriation bills are about—stepping up and taking action to ensure that not only is our economy strong but there is an equal share across our economy.

While we talk about equal share, I cannot help but make reference to the private health insurance legislation which the opposition continue to oppose. When we talk about equal share, the opposition’s approach is that everyone should get a 30 per cent rebate on their private health insurance—‘Even if you are the highest paid CEO in a large multinational company in Australia you should receive a 30 per cent government subsidised rebate on your private health insurance. So let’s not worry about the lower and middle-income earners who really need that support. Let’s not worry about making sure there are sufficient funds to go back into the public health system. Let’s just make sure that we are looking after those at the higher end of our society.’ The reality is that those approaches are not sustainable in the long term.

We cannot continue to subsidise such high-income earners. We need to ensure that we are being accountable to the people of Australia by means testing entitlements. It is fair and reasonable to means test the private health insurance rebate. That is what we should be doing. That is what I am talking about with people in my local community. A sensible government would ensure that money is going to where it is most needed. That is the case the government have put forward with income support for students and with private health insurance. Our Carbon Pollution Production Scheme is about making sure the big polluters pay and that we assist households. That is what schemes should do. We should make sure we are capping our emissions.

These are decisions a government which is serious about the long term—not just a one-term government—makes; this is about sustainability. We have heard about the Intergenerational report. We have heard about the need for the government to look over a range of poli-
cies, ensuring we provide a skilled workforce for the future and that we are managing funds in a way which strengthens our economy through infrastructure, health and good education. Funding and commitment to education are absolutely paramount. This is an area in which this government, unlike the previous government, has stepped up and taken the reins to ensure that our education system is the best.

We are looking not just at halls and libraries. We are looking not just at facilities to get skills. We are looking across the whole gamut—with the national curriculum, with the MySchool website. Everything the Minister for Education is doing is about a holistic approach to ensure that our children, from early childhood education right through secondary school and beyond—those who go off to TAFE, to apprenticeships or to university—have the best opportunities available to them. That requires a government which is responsible in the way it spends and allocates funds, ensuring that those who are most in need and the areas which need strengthening are where funds are going. That is what these appropriation bills are about and it is my pleasure to support them today.

Ms KING (Ballarat) (7.09 pm)—I too rise in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010, which seek to appropriate funding for decisions in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook and for decisions taken since it was released. There was a community cabinet in Ballarat last week and it was a good opportunity to reflect on the strong work this government has done to set Ballarat up for the future. Prior to the community cabinet, a number of my parliamentary colleagues, including the honourable member for Hinkler from the National Party, who has unfortunately been absent for some time from this place, told me about how great these events have been for their local communities. I would have to say they were not wrong. Following the visit from the federal cabinet, local residents have emailed and called my office with very positive feedback. Comments such as ‘it was great to be able to have my say’ and ‘I enjoyed being involved in the conversation with government’ are just two examples of the feedback I have received.

The community cabinet started with a terrific performance from Ballarat High School, and I want to congratulate the students and the school for highlighting the talents at that school and for really doing Ballarat proud by hosting the Prime Minister and the cabinet at their school. I spoke about the long history of democracy across the Ballarat region and the importance of the community cabinet to local residents. The Prime Minister spoke about the important role the federal government has played in supporting jobs across the Ballarat electorate through investment in infrastructure. He also spoke of the government’s commitment to making sure that members of parliament were accessible through processes such as the community cabinet.

The 500-strong crowd raised questions with the Prime Minister on when the election is going to be, with Anthony Albanese on rail infrastructure, Peter Garrett on renewable energies and Wayne Swan on job security and taxation, just to name a few. I spoke to the Prime Minister afterwards and he enjoyed his discussions with local groups, such as the Ballarat East Community Men’s Shed, the Committee for Ballarat and Hepburn Wind. A local small business owner told me how great it was to have a face-to-face meeting with Minister Conroy to talk to him directly about the rollout of the National Broadband Network. Local councils talked to Minister Albanese about their plans for moving into the future. Minister Wong discussed the government’s approach to climate change with an active group of locals who are

MAIN COMMITTEE
committed to reducing greenhouse emissions around the Ballarat region. It was a fantastic opportunity.

The access to cabinet ministers proved to be extremely successful with local residents, and holding a community cabinet in regional Australia in a city like Ballarat is really a great reflection of Australian democracy. Ballarat holds a special place in Australian history and, since the Eureka rebellion, the Eureka flag has been used as a symbol of protest by organisations and individuals at both ends of the political spectrum. It is a healthy sign of our democratic tradition that people continue to demonstrate on issues that they are passionate about today. It was wonderful to experience firsthand the interest and enthusiasm of the Prime Minister and the cabinet ministers for our region and its residents, and their curiosity and willingness to engage with us.

What was clear from the community cabinet, from the meeting that the Prime Minister had with the four local government mayors and CEOs and the visit across the electorate itself, is that the investments we have made have not only put our nation in a better position than others in the developed world; they have also meant a number of things locally. Throughout my electorate we have been supporting families by creating opportunities for employment. We have also supported communities by investing in infrastructure. But, more importantly, the Rudd government have worked to set our region up for the longer term. We have only been in government for two years and we have achieved in our region more than the Howard government did in its 11 years in office. There has been more investment in my region in the last two years than there was in the 11 years the Howard government was in office. As a local member my focus and that of my team has always been to try and set up Ballarat for not just the next election but the next 10, 20 or 30 years, when people such as me are long gone from this place, and to put in place the infrastructure to develop our educational skills base and build tomorrow’s jobs in the electorate of Ballarat.

The first thing we needed to do on coming to office was to secure Ballarat’s water supply. That was one of the core promises I made in the lead-up to the 2007 election because without water Ballarat was absolutely in dire trouble. Businesses could not operate, let alone expand. Households could not function properly with day-to-day activities, let alone the recreational opportunities we were being denied because of our lack of access to water. In 2008, the water supply in Ballarat, which is a major regional city of some 95,000 people, got down to 7.7 per cent, which is just extraordinary. Securing Ballarat’s water supply for the longer term was my top priority and the then Leader of the Opposition and now Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, and the then shadow minister for water, Penny Wong, absolutely understood the dire situation we were in.

During the election campaign, we made a commitment to fund the $90 million Goldfields Superpipe. We proposed that in opposition, and the funding was delivered in our first year in government. The Goldfields Superpipe was built, and it became fully operational in May 2008. Since that time, the superpipe has provided 24 billion litres of water into the region. Thanks to the Rudd government’s investment in the Goldfields Superpipe, the White Swan Reservoir is now at 84 per cent capacity. This is the highest level it has been since 2004. The Ballarat region now has 2.4 years of water supply secured. We now have the infrastructure in place to allow water to be piped within the available grid within Victoria to make sure that the dire situation that we faced with seven per cent capacity in Ballarat’s reservoir never happens.
again and that we never have to face the situation where businesses say that they are worried about having to pull out of Ballarat because we could not guarantee a secure water supply. That was just one promise and one investment that we made in the lead-up to the last election. We have also tried to look at ways to assist communities in recycling and reusing water. Unfortunately, that was never going to be enough to quickly rectify the situation in Ballarat, and that is why the Goldfields Superpipe was absolutely necessary.

We have also recently announced $2.37 million of funding to capture stormwater in Ballarat. The Ballarat project was one of 13 around Australia to receive funding under the first round of the stormwater harvesting and reuse project. It is a great example of how the government is trying to support local communities to tackle an era of extended drought and the effects of climate change. The project will make better use of water currently available in the region. With projects like the Goldfields Superpipe and stormwater harvesting, we are working to secure our most important asset, certainly in a regional community—water. We have done more in the last two years in government for water in the Ballarat region than the former government did. Obviously, we have not done this by ourselves. The local community has made an enormous effort to reduce its water consumption. I do not think we will ever face a situation in Ballarat where people view water and use it as though there is an endless supply of it. After the recent drought, we will certainly always treat water as something that is very precious.

Last Thursday, the Prime Minister and I visited the site of the realignment of the Western Highway at Anthony’s Cutting to turn the symbolic first sod of the works. The project, which has received some $160 million from this government, provides vital infrastructure for the Western Highway. It is certainly a vital infrastructure project for western Victoria in terms of safety, jobs and removing infrastructure bottlenecks. On the other side of Ballarat, there is the duplication of the Western Highway from Ballarat to Stawell. The Rudd government has contributed some $404 million to improve road safety and freight efficiency in this area. The Western Highway is an incredibly important corridor. It is the main corridor between Melbourne and Adelaide, and thousands and thousands of trucks and people travel on it every single day. I am sure the member for Mallee has driven on the road from Ballarat to Stawell, and at night it is not a great road to be on.

The two projects—for Ballarat and western Victoria—show that over half a billion dollars of investment is being put into road infrastructure in Victoria. This is a huge investment, with half a billion dollars being put into the Western Highway alone. We are trying to set up Ballarat as a major regional infrastructure hub for western Victoria. The region will be better connected to our regional counterparts through the implementation of these road projects. It is good news for Ballarat businesses, who will have better access to industry and trade from Melbourne right through to the South Australian border. It is also good news for consumers, with the improvement in freight efficiency. This is good for jobs and good for our local economy.

While I am talking about road infrastructure, on the local road front the government’s black spots program has proven to be pretty successful in my electorate, with some 18 projects at a cost of $5.4 million. Many of these projects have now been completed and the others are well underway. We have boosted this funding to ensure that local roads are safer and that we have the connectivity through our city and also to some of the major infrastructure arteries. Since I
announced the funding, we have seen roundabouts and traffic signals being rolled out across the region, and that is positive to see.

On top of this money for roads, we have also seen improvements at six important level crossings across my electorate, in Wallace, Elaine, Sulky, Cardigan, Windemere and Burrumbeet. Residents in these areas know all too well the importance of improved road and level crossing safety. Initiatives like the Black Spot Program and the boom gates funding are examples of the range of initiatives the government is undertaking to improve road safety locally.

A main contributor to Australia’s vision for our future has also been investing in education. Since elected in 2007, the government has provided an unprecedented injection of funding into education. The government has been determined to support education investment because we know the importance of investing in local skills. It is absolutely vital if we are going to set our communities up for future jobs growth—jobs many of us cannot even imagine yet—that we actually ensure that our population has access to the best possible education it can.

I am certainly working with the community to skill-up our region and to set us up for the future. By investing in skills and education today, we are investing to improve our productivity into the future and to set our local economy up for the longer term. Our education revolution has seen an injection of $9.5 million as part of the National School Pride program in my electorate and $104 million for the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program, as well as $1.19 million for a science and language centre. That is a total of $116 million for 168 projects across 85 local schools. Many of these projects are now coming to fruition, and I am looking forward to visiting these schools over the coming months to see first-hand how this is making a difference in local communities.

We have also seen investment in the Ballarat electorate across other levels of education. Six projects are being funded locally as part of the Teaching and Learning Capital Fund for Vocational Education and Training. Four of them are: BRACE Education Training and Employment, $1.5 million; Bacchus Marsh Community College, also $1.5 million; Daylesford Neighbourhood Centre, $239,000—and I have been told that the local community has recently advertised for tenders for the building of that project; and Finding Futures, $145,000 to provide improved access for people with disabilities to employment and training services. These organisations would not have imagined they would have access to that level of capital funding to improve their facilities.

The other two projects have been driven by the TAFE division of the University of Ballarat: $2.98 million for the refurbishment and extension of the primary industries training facility at Wendouree and $2.3 million for the construction of an equine centre at Mount Rowan, which is being done in partnership with Riding for the Disabled and so providing not only a great educational facility but also a great community facility at the same time. Not only has University of Ballarat received funding for these two important projects but also, as part of the Teaching and Learning Capital Fund, the Rudd government has announced $18.1 million for the new Manufacturing Technology Training Centre and $39.97 million for the Science and Engineering Precinct at the university. Again, we are trying to set Ballarat up as a regional educational hub, which is something that the University of Ballarat is well equipped to do for the whole of western Victoria, in my view. The construction of these facilities will stimulate economic activity in the Ballarat region and, once completed, will help the region’s industry to skill up for the future. That is what the government is about—building our region
for the future and setting up regional Australia so that places like Ballarat will be sustainable for the longer term.

In our two years in government we have been investing in positive education projects. A further $2.1 million has been invested into secondary schools across my electorate as part of our Digital Education Revolution to provide computers in schools. The National Secondary School Computer Fund has seen Ballarat Secondary College receive $140,000 for new computers and Sebastopol Secondary College $195,000 for new computers, as well as other schools that have been finding it quite tough to fund their computer programs. Sebastopol college was also successful in their bid for a Local Schools Working Together pilot program and has received $2.4 million to build a community hub in that part of my electorate.

On education and skills, the Ballarat based businesses have well and truly embraced the government’s Apprentice Kickstart bonus. I understand that some 14,000 apprentices have been signed up since the bonus started, and it is due to expire on 28 February. In the Ballarat electorate alone there have been 100 apprentices signed up during that period. That is 100 kids who potentially would have missed out on getting apprenticeships because businesses were concerned about the global financial crisis. It was really important for that group of kids leaving school at the end of last year that businesses were provided with an incentive to ensure that they did not miss out. But, more importantly for regional economies, we know that after things such as a global financial crisis it takes a long time for the number of apprentices to build up again. It was really important that we acted in order to make sure that did not happen so that we do not have another skills crisis some four or five years down the track. I would certainly encourage any local businesses listening in to this debate—not to miss out and to make sure that they sign up if they are thinking of getting an apprentice. The bonus is available until 28 February, so it is important that they do so quickly.

I will turn briefly to a few other matters in my electorate. Social housing is something that I feel very passionately about. As someone who worked in the welfare sector—a long time ago now—I have seen firsthand the terrible, terrible circumstances that occur to people when they find themselves without a home. I am really proud to be part of a government that has made an investment in public housing. I know we call it social housing—I am still a bit old school; I still think of it as public housing. But I certainly think it is something that this government can be enormously proud of, that we are actually expanding the amount of social housing stock that is available in local communities, as well as investing in affordable rental accommodation and putting more money into the maintenance of the existing social housing so that that is also online. I know it is a small amount to tackle the huge problem we have in homelessness here in this country, but at least we are doing something, at least we are actually trying to tackle the problem and at least it is a start.

Since being elected, the federal government has also been committed to improving outcomes across the health sector. In my own electorate there has been a really strong investment in health. Ballan has seen the successful rollout of a GP superclinic, with $1.4 million provided to Ballan District Health and Care. That superclinic is fully operational and built and it has made an enormous difference to the people of Ballan. They now have access to a female GP for the first time. They have two more GPs who are now in that community. They have dental care for the first time ever in that local community. They also have a psychologist,
which they did not have previously, and a multidisciplinary service which has really made a huge difference to the people of Ballan and surrounding districts. We have also provided $2 million to the Djirriwarrh Health Services, the Bacchus Marsh and Melton Regional Hospital, as well as $500,000 to the Hepburn Health Service. We have also provided money to the Bacchus Marsh Medical Centre and the Creswick Medical Centre to expand their services—really vital health services in local communities.

I have said this before in this place, but I am now working with the local community to try and deliver funding for the Ballarat regional integrated cancer centre. The government committed some $560 million to building 10 regional cancer centres and establishing a network of those around the country. It is incredibly important for regional health. As we know, there is a discord between the health outcomes of cancer patients in regional and metro areas, and it is really important that we improve regional cancer services. We are certainly in with a good show, but obviously it is an incredibly competitive process.

The government has also committed through local councils to improving local community infrastructure. We know that local communities are more than roads, rail and ports and we know that social and community infrastructure is incredibly important. So the money that has gone into the projects across my electorate has been really important. Some of it is small amounts and some of it is large amounts, but it is all going into recreation and community facilities that otherwise would not have had that opportunity for funding.

These appropriations bills really do show that the Rudd Labor government is acting. It is investing to ensure the long-term sustainability of our nation and I am very proud to be part of a government that has invested such a large amount of money in such worthy projects in regional Australia. I certainly hope that members opposite are going to support these bills and I commend them to the House. (Time expired)

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry) (7.29 pm)—I rise to bring the debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 to a close. I start by thanking those members who have made a contribution to this debate on the way in which these bills are having an impact on their electorates. We have heard a fantastic example of that from my neighbour the member for Ballarat.

The additional estimates bills seek appropriation authority from parliament for the additional expenditure of money from the consolidated revenue fund in order to meet requirements that have arisen since the last budget. The total additional appropriation being sought through additional estimates bills 3 and 4 this year is a little over $2 billion. It is worth taking a little time to remind the House of some of the more important measures.

The government will provide the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts with the following amounts: an additional $510.8 million to meet commitments under the Solar Homes and Communities Plan and $290 million which will be brought forward from 2011-2012 to meet an increase in demand for household energy efficiency initiatives. The Department of Health and Ageing will be provided with a total of $71.2 million for the government’s response to the H1N1 influenza virus. This amount will replenish an appropriation that was diverted to manage the response and will enhance our preparedness for any future pandemics. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will be provided with the following additional amounts: $40 million to meet an increase in demand for assistance from the General Employee Entitlements and Redundancy Scheme due to a rise in
bankruptcies and insolvencies; $20.3 million to establish environmental and heritage trading and work experience placements lasting 26 weeks for young people aged between 17 and 24; and $10 million as a one-off grant to the Trade Union Education Foundation for the development and delivery of national workplace education programs.

Additional appropriation is proposed for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship as follows: $63 million will be provided to meet the costs of increased irregular maritime arrivals and a further $11.2 million to expand accommodation capacity on Christmas Island in response to increased irregular maritime arrivals. The government will streamline arrangements and introduce efficiencies in Centrelink operations to deliver substantial savings over the next four years, as follows. An amount of $12.4 million is proposed to scan paper forms to reduce the cost of transferring documents and also the cost of storage. This initiative is expected to deliver net savings of $131.3 million over four years. And $14.5 million is included to implement electronic lodgement of fortnightly income reporting requirements, which is expected to deliver net savings of $95.2 million over four years. The government also proposes an additional appropriation of $167 million for the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. This includes funding for the establishment of the Local Government Reform Fund to help councils manage their infrastructure and to plan for their future needs, and funding under the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program to support investment in community infrastructure such as libraries, community centres, sports grounds and environmental infrastructure.

In conclusion, I note that the Australian economy has performed better than expected since the 2009-10 budget, with growth now expected to be stronger and unemployment lower than forecast. The improved outlook reflects the monetary and fiscal stimulus that has been put in place by the government in response to the downturn. It also reflects a stronger than expected recovery in the world economy underpinned by stimulus efforts globally. Australia has the strongest growing economy in the developed world and this is expected to continue. These bills are important pieces of legislation which support the government’s budget initiatives and deserve widespread support.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4) 2009-2010
Second Reading

Debate resumed from 26 November, on motion by Dr Emerson:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Main Committee adjourned at 7.36 pm

MAIN COMMITTEE
Mr Ciobo asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, in writing, on 2 February 2010:

What involvement has the Government had in responding to the *Apis cerana* incursion in Cairns?

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

Because Asian honey bees (*Apis cerana*) are not listed under either the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement or the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, the Commonwealth Government has no formal obligation or requirement to contribute to the response. However, through the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer within the department the Commonwealth has provided expert technical assistance to the on-the-ground response in the areas of epidemiology, digital mapping and ornithology (location and monitoring of Rainbow Bee Eaters).

Further DAFF has assisted Biosecurity Queensland in the preparation of their response plan and has convened the Consultative Committee on Asian Honey Bees to consider the response plan, develop a nationally coordinated response to the incursion and lead discussions on the potential for cost-sharing the response between industry and governments. DAFF will also lead deliberation within the National Management Group (representing governments and industry) to reach a consensus recommendation as to whether a cost-sharing arrangement between governments and industries to fund the response plan should be undertaken and provide such a recommendation on cost-sharing to the Primary Industries Ministerial Council.