INTERNET
The Votes and Proceedings for the House of Representatives are available at

Proof and Official Hansards for the House of Representatives,
the Senate and committee hearings are available at

For searching purposes use
http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au

SITTING DAYS—2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>24, 25, 26, 30, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>1, 2, 20, 21, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RADIO BROADCASTS
Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on ABC NewsRadio in the capital cities on:

- ADELAIDE 972AM
- BRISBANE 936AM
- CANBERRA 103.9FM
- DARWIN 102.5FM
- HOBART 747AM
- MELBOURNE 1026AM
- PERTH 585AM
- SYDNEY 630AM

For information regarding frequencies in other locations please visit
http://www.abc.net.au/newsradio/listen/frequencies.htm
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 Geoghanas MP, Mrs Margaret Ann May MP, Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP, Mr Rowan Eric Ramsey MP, Ms Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Mr Albert John Schultz 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 Patrick Damien Secker 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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
<td>Warringah, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry</td>
<td>Lyons, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman</td>
<td>Grayndler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Hon. Kevin James</td>
<td>Menzies, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey, Hon. Frances Esther</td>
<td>McEwen, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles</td>
<td>Paterson, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bevis, Hon. Archibald Ronald</td>
<td>Brisbane, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidgood, James Mark</td>
<td>Dawson, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick</td>
<td>Dunkley, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird, Sharon Leah</td>
<td>Cunningham, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen</td>
<td>Mackellar, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel</td>
<td>Curtin, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles</td>
<td>Prospect, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradbury, David John</td>
<td>Lindsay, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briggs, Jamie Edward</td>
<td>Mayo SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbent, Russell Evan</td>
<td>McMillian, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Anna Elizabeth</td>
<td>Chisholm, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen</td>
<td>Watson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, Hon. Mark Christopher</td>
<td>Port Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael</td>
<td>Holt, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, Jodie Louise</td>
<td>Bass, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champson, Nicholas David</td>
<td>Wakefield, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeseman, Darren Leicester</td>
<td>Corangamite, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester, Darren</td>
<td>Gippsland, Vic</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciobo, Steven Michele</td>
<td>Moncrieff, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare, Hon. Jason Dean</td>
<td>Blaxland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth</td>
<td>Calare, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, Julie Maree</td>
<td>Franklin, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combet, Hon. Gregory Ivan, AM</td>
<td>Charlton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coulton, Mark Maclean</td>
<td>Parkes, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay</td>
<td>Hotham, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danby, Michael David</td>
<td>Melbourne Ports, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’Ath, Yvette Maree</td>
<td>Petrie, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debus, Hon. Robert John</td>
<td>Macquarie, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreyfus, Mark Alfred, QC</td>
<td>Isleys, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig</td>
<td>Dickson, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine</td>
<td>Richmond, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Annette Louise</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony</td>
<td>Rankin, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer, Hon. Patrick Francis</td>
<td>Macarthur, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas</td>
<td>Reid, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM</td>
<td>Batman, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew</td>
<td>Hunter, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fletcher, Paul William</td>
<td>Bradfield, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest, John Alexander</td>
<td>Mallee, Vic</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM</td>
<td>Kingsford Smith, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gash, Joanna</td>
<td>Gilmore, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georginas, Steven</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George, Jennie</td>
<td>Throsby, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgiou, Petro</td>
<td>Kooyong, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbons, Stephen William</td>
<td>Bendigo, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen</td>
<td>Lalor, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Hon. Gary, AO</td>
<td>Brand, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grierson, Sharon Joy</td>
<td>Newcastle, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter</td>
<td>Bruce, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haase, Barry Wayne</td>
<td>Kalgoorlie, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hale, Damian Francis</td>
<td>Solomon, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Jill Griffiths</td>
<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartsuyker, Luke</td>
<td>Cowper, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawke, Alexander George</td>
<td>Mitchell, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawker, Hon. David Peter Maxwell</td>
<td>Wannon, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, Christopher Patrick</td>
<td>Werrinia, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict</td>
<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull, Kay Elizabeth</td>
<td>Riverina, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew</td>
<td>Flinders, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irons, Stephen James</td>
<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irwin, Julia Claire</td>
<td>Fowler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, Sharryn Maree</td>
<td>Haslucky, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenkins, Harry Alfred</td>
<td>Scullin, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey</td>
<td>Tangney, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Michael Andrew</td>
<td>Ryan, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katter, Hon. Robert Carl</td>
<td>Kennedy, Qld</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keenan, Michael Fayat</td>
<td>Stirling, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM</td>
<td>Eden-Monaro, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerr, Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun, SC</td>
<td>Denison, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King, Catherine Fiona</td>
<td>Ballarat, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laming, Andrew Charles</td>
<td>Bowman, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope</td>
<td>Farrer, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay, Hon. Peter John</td>
<td>Herbert, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livermore, Kirsten Fiona</td>
<td>Capricornia, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce</td>
<td>Barton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin</td>
<td>Groom, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKew, Hon. Maxine Margaret</td>
<td>Bemmelong, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise</td>
<td>Jugajaga, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMullan, Hon. Robert Francis</td>
<td>Fraser, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marino, Nola Bethwyn</td>
<td>Forrest, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus, Louise Elizabeth</td>
<td>Greenway, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marles, Hon. Richard Donald</td>
<td>Corio, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May, Margaret Ann</td>
<td>McPherson, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melham, Daryl</td>
<td>Banks, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabella, Sophie</td>
<td>Indi, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, Scott John</td>
<td>Cook, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor</td>
<td>Pearce, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Hon. John Paul</td>
<td>Lowe, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal, Belinda Jane</td>
<td>Robertson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neumann, Shayne Kenneth</td>
<td>Blair, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville, Paul Christopher</td>
<td>Hinkler, Qld</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakeshott, Robert James Murray</td>
<td>Lyne, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick John</td>
<td>Gorton, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Dwyer, Kelly Megan</td>
<td>Higgins, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owens, Julie Ann</td>
<td>Parramatta, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parke, Melissa</td>
<td>Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearce, Hon. Christopher John</td>
<td>Aston, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrett, Graham Douglas</td>
<td>Moreton, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price, Hon. Leo Roger Spurway</td>
<td>Chifley, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice</td>
<td>Sturt, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raguse, Brett Blair</td>
<td>Forde, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey, Rowan Eric</td>
<td>Grey, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall, Don James</td>
<td>Canning, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rea, Kerry Marie</td>
<td>Bonner, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripoll, Bernard Fernand</td>
<td>Oxley, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rishworth, Amanda Louise</td>
<td>Kingston, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO</td>
<td>Goldstein, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert, Stuart Rowland</td>
<td>Fadden, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxon, Hon. Nicola Louise</td>
<td>Gellibrand, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael</td>
<td>Griffith, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell</td>
<td>Berowra, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saffin, Janelle Anne</td>
<td>Page, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schultz, Albert John</td>
<td>Hume, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig</td>
<td>Maranoa, Qld</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secker, Patrick Damien</td>
<td>Barker, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorten, Hon. William Richard</td>
<td>Maribyrnong, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidebottom, Peter Sid</td>
<td>Braddon, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton</td>
<td>Cowan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil</td>
<td>Fisher, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn</td>
<td>Casey, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowdon, Hon. Warren Edward</td>
<td>Lingiari, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael</td>
<td>Fairfax, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcott, Andrew John</td>
<td>Boothby, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, Hon. Sharron Nancy</td>
<td>Murray, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan, Jonathan Harold</td>
<td>Longman, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell</td>
<td>Lilley, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symon, Michael Stuart</td>
<td>Deakin, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanner, Hon. Lindsay James</td>
<td>Melbourne, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Craig Robert</td>
<td>Dobell, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Kelvin John</td>
<td>Wills, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor, Chris Allan</td>
<td>Flynn, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truss, Hon. Warren Errol</td>
<td>Wide Bay, Qld</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuckey, Hon. Charles Wilson</td>
<td>O’Connor, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh</td>
<td>Wentworth, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnour, James Pearce</td>
<td>Leichhardt, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale, Hon. Danna Sue</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vamvakinou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Members of the House of Representatives

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

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

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry</th>
<th>Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Hon. Kevin Rudd MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment</td>
<td>Hon. Julia Gillard MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Wayne Swan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Chris Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the Senate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence and Vice President of the Executive Council</td>
<td>Senator Hon. John Faulkner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Simon Crean MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the House</td>
<td>Hon. Stephen Smith MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Nicola Roxon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Jenny Macklin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
<td>Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Albanese MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government and Leader of the House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts</td>
<td>Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>Hon. Robert McClelland MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary, Special Minister of State and Manager of Government</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business in the Senate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Burke MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services and Minister for Financial Services,</td>
<td>Hon. Chris Bowen MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation and Corporate Law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
RUDD MINISTRY—continued

Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Hon. Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Home Affairs
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs
Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Assistant Treasurer
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Ageing
Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport
Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency
Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP
Minister for Employment Participation and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Government Service Delivery
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
Hon. Maxine McKew MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water
Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction
Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance
Hon. Bob McMullan MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade
Hon. Anthony Byrne MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and Parliamentary Secretary for Voluntary Sector
Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services
Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Employment
Hon. Jason Clare MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Health
Hon. Mark Butler MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry
Hon. Richard Marles MP
**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

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Shadow Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Tourism and the Arts and Shadow Minister for Youth</td>
<td>Mr Steven Ciobo MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Apprenticeships and</td>
<td>Senator Mathias Cormann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs, Financial Services, Superannuation</td>
<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Corporate Law and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for COAG and Modernising the Federation</td>
<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Childcare and</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Sharman Stone MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs</td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Assisting Shadow</td>
<td>Hon. Bob Baldwin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs</td>
<td>Mrs Louise Markus MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
</tr>
<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</td>
<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Population</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport</td>
<td>Mr Don Randall MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Emerging</td>
<td>Mr Mark Coulton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Markets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism</td>
<td>Mrs Jo Gash MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education and School Curriculum</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Brett Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray Darling Basin and</td>
<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Public Security and Policing</td>
<td>Mr Jason Wood MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Mr Stuart Robert MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services, Health and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
<td>Dr Andrew Southcott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator Mitch Fifield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families, Housing and Human Services</td>
<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

TUESDAY, 9 MARCH

Chamber
Ministerial Arrangements .................................................................................................... 1991
Queensland Floods .............................................................................................................. 1994
President Of Indonesia ......................................................................................................... 1995
Member for Berowra ........................................................................................................... 1996
Questions Without Notice—
   Paid Parental Leave ........................................................................................................ 1997
   Hospitals ........................................................................................................................... 1998
   Paid Parental Leave ........................................................................................................ 1999
Distinguished Visitors ......................................................................................................... 2001
Questions Without Notice—
   Taxation ....................................................................................................................... 2001
   Paid Parental Leave ........................................................................................................ 2002
   Hospitals ........................................................................................................................... 2003
   Paid Parental Leave ........................................................................................................ 2005
Distinguished Visitors ......................................................................................................... 2006
Questions Without Notice—
   Hospitals ........................................................................................................................... 2006
   Taxation ....................................................................................................................... 2007
   Hospitals ........................................................................................................................... 2009
   Goods and Services Tax ................................................................................................. 2010
   Paid Parental Leave ........................................................................................................ 2011
   Hospitals ........................................................................................................................... 2012
   Economy ......................................................................................................................... 2013
   Drought ........................................................................................................................... 2015
   International Women’s Day ............................................................................................ 2016
Personal Explanations .......................................................................................................... 2018
Documents ...................................................................................................................... ..... 2019
Business—
   Rearrangement ............................................................................................................ 2020
Matters of Public Importance—
   Paid Parental Leave ........................................................................................................ 2020
National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment Bill 2010 .............................................. 2034
National Health Security Amendment (Background Checking) Bill 2009 ......................... 2034
International Tax Agreements Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2009 ............................................. 2034
Aviation Transport Security Amendment (2009 Measures No. 2) Bill 2009 ....................... 2034
Australian Astronomical Observatory Bill 2009 .................................................................. 2034
Australian Astronomical Observatory (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2009—
   Returned from the Senate ............................................................................................. 2034
Tax Laws Amendment (Political Contributions and Gifts) Bill 2008—
   Consideration of Senate Message ................................................................................... 2034
Statute Law Revision Bill 2010 ............................................................................................ 2034
National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment Bill 2010 .............................................. 2034
Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Re-registration of Providers and Other Measures) Bill 2010—
   Assent ............................................................................................................................. 2034
Speaker’s Panel .................................................................................................................. 2034
Committees—
   National Capital and External Territories Committee—Membership .......................... 2034
CONTENTS—continued

Fisheries Legislation Amendment Bill 2009—
   Report from Main Committee ................................................................. 2035
   Third Reading ..................................................................................... 2035
Business—
   Rearrangement.................................................................................. 2035
Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2010—
   Second Reading .................................................................................. 2035
   Third Reading ..................................................................................... 2053
Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010—
   Second Reading .................................................................................. 2053
Adjournment—
   University of Western Sydney: Women of the West Award 2010................. 2080
   Centre for Cerebral Palsy ................................................................. 2082
   Paid Parental Leave ........................................................................ 2083
   Native Vegetation Legislation ......................................................... 2084
   Ride Launceston ............................................................................... 2085
   Bass Electorate: National Bike Paths Projects ..................................... 2085
   Fisher Electorate: Palmview Residential Development ....................... 2087
Notices .................................................................................................. 2088
Questions In Writing
   AHS Centaur—(Question No. 1174)....................................................... 2090
   Medicare—(Question No. 1191) .......................................................... 2090
   Dichloroacetate—(Question No. 1192) .............................................. 2090
   Quarantine—(Question No. 1194)....................................................... 2091
   Building the Education Revolution Program—(Question No. 1215) .... 2092
The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 2.00 pm and read prayers.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I table the revised ministry list reflected in the changes I announced on 26 February 2010. I seek leave to have the document incorporated into Hansard.

Leave granted.

The document read as follows—

RUDD MINISTRY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Minister</th>
<th>Other Chamber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Kevin Rudd MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
<td>The Hon Lindsay Tanner MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Manager of Government Business in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Government Service Delivery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary</td>
<td>The Hon Anthony Byrne MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Education</td>
<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Social Inclusion (Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth</td>
<td>The Hon Kate Ellis MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
<td>The Hon Robert McClelland MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services</td>
<td>The Hon Laurie Ferguson MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Senator the Hon John Faulkner</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Vice President of the Executive Council)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Alan Griffin MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon John Faulkner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>Other Chamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon John Faulkner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade</td>
<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>The Hon Anthony Byrne MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Stephen Smith MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon John Faulkner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
<td>The Hon Bob McMullan MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon Nicola Roxon MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon Justine Elliot MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Sport</td>
<td>The Hon Kate Ellis MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Health</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Jenny Macklin MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing</td>
<td>The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services</td>
<td>The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction</td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for the Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
<td>The Hon Lindsay Tanner MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
<td>The Hon Lindsay Tanner MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (Leader of the House)</td>
<td>The Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government</td>
<td>The Hon Maxine McKew MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia</td>
<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
<td>The Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP (Research)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>Other Chamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry</td>
<td>The Hon Richard Marles MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP (Water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts</td>
<td>The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Water</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>The Hon Robert McClelland MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Home Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>The Hon Tony Burke MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nick Sherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources and Energy</td>
<td>The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>The Hon Chris Bowen MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Veterans’ Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.

I inform the House that the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion will be absent from question time today for health reasons. The Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport will answer questions in relation to education and social inclusion. The Minister for Finance and De-regulation will answer questions in relation to employment and workplace relations on the Deputy Prime Minister’s behalf. The Minister for Human Services and Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law will be absent from question time today as he is visiting flood affected areas in parts of south-west Queensland including the townships of Charleville and St George. He will be accompanied by the Special Minister of State and the member for Maranoa. The Treasurer will answer questions in relation to financial services, superannuation and corporate law. The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs will answer questions in relation to human services on the minister’s behalf. The Minister for Foreign Affairs will be absent from the early part of question time today to attend bilateral meetings with the Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Marty Natalegawa. The Minister for Trade will answer questions on his behalf.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.02 pm)—I inform the House that the honourable member for Barker has been appointed an opposition whip in place.
of the honourable member for Ryan, effective as of 26 February 2010. I thank the member for Ryan for his sterling service. I congratulate the member for Barker on this new appointment.

QUEENSLAND FLOODS

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.02 pm)—On indulgence, as members would be aware, Queensland has been experiencing significant flooding across the state. Fifty-eight local government areas in Queensland have been declared disaster areas following tropical cyclone Neville in January and tropical cyclone Olga in February. Some areas in Queensland have been in flood for many weeks. Our thoughts are with Queenslanders faced with flooding, including those members of the House and Senate with properties, and loved ones living in these areas, as well. At the moment the impact is particularly severe in the south-west of the state. Over the weekend I spoke with many mayors from the south-west of the state and they gave me their direct feedback on what was happening on the ground and the extra services and support they may need now and into the future. They spoke directly about the devastation of their towns and shires and also of the great stoicism of their local communities. Between 300 and 400 houses in Charleville remain affected by water; however, people are now returning home after being housed at the local evacuation centre. About 200 houses in Roma were affected by water above flood level. All roads to Thargomindah are currently cut and are expected to remain so for the rest of the month.

Meandarra, the town isolated by extensive floodwaters, has 16 houses and five businesses which have experienced internal flooding—about 50 per cent of the town. The Special Minister of State and the Minister for Human Services are today touring the area of south-west Queensland affected by the floodwaters, including Charleville and St George. As I indicated to the House before, the member for Maranoa, I understand, is with them. While the floodwaters are starting to recede in some areas of Queensland this means recovery efforts need to start. The Commonwealth is providing a range of assistance to Queensland to assist with relief and recovery efforts. This includes, under the Commonwealth and state Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, assistance to 58 government areas. Depending on the local government area, the range of assistance comprises personal hardship and distress grants, concessional loans, freight subsidies, counterdisaster operations and restoration of essential public assets assistance also to affected local government areas.

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has also activated the Australian government disaster recovery payment in a number of local government areas. Furthermore, in response to a request from the Premier of Queensland, I have also agreed to additional assistance for affected primary producers and small businesses. That assistance, jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments, will comprise clean-up and recovery grants to small businesses and primary producers to the value of up to $5,000 for tier 1 grants and $20,000 for tier 2 grants. The assistance will be provided under category C of the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. On behalf of all members, I say to those who are currently facing the massive clean-up in south-west Queensland that our thoughts are with you. To those who are about to bear the brunt of these floodwaters, I urge you to follow the advice of state government and local emergency services personnel.

The Commonwealth will continue to work closely with the Queensland authorities, lo-
cal government and community organisations to ensure all affected communities have the assistance they need. I am sure all members of the House will join me in expressing our thoughts and solidarity with the people of south-west Queensland today, as they are affected by these floods. Having spoken to so many of these mayors over the weekend it is plain that the locals are bearing up very well under the pressures they face. There is nothing like the stoicism of the local communities in and around these towns of south-western Queensland who have experienced floods many times before. They are deploying again the stoicism and the resolve that we have seen in dealing with these challenges today.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.06 pm)—On behalf of the opposition, I join with the Prime Minister in acknowledging the situation in southern Queensland. I thank the Prime Minister for the good work of his ministers and that of various officials of various governments in dealing with this emergency. I can inform the House that the member for Maranoa, who is absent today, has been keeping me regularly updated with developments, as has Senator Barnaby Joyce who, as members would know, is a resident of St George, one of the most affected townships.

As the Prime Minister has indicated, events like this are very traumatic for residents, but we admire the stoicism with which they have met this challenge. Obviously, events like this are very challenging for our emergency services personnel, but again we admire the professionalism with which they have met this challenge, as they have met so many other challenges in the past. Our thoughts and our prayers are with the people of south-eastern Queensland and they should know that the whole of this parliament will support them and help them as they deal with these difficult days.

PRESIDENT OF INDONESIA

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.07 pm)—Tomorrow in this House we will welcome Indonesia’s President, Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who will become the first Indonesian head of state to address a joint sitting of the Australian parliament. Dr Yudhoyono arrived in Australia this morning and was greeted by me, the Leader of the Opposition and Her Excellency the Governor-General. Tomorrow’s address will be an important milestone in the relationship between Australia and Indonesia, a relationship that goes back to 1947 when we supported the fledgling nation as it strove for independence. Tomorrow will symbolise how far we have come and how we are both committed to taking this relationship even further.

Our relationship today is between two democracies partnering together to tackle the common challenges that we face. We are working bilaterally to help Indonesia build a strong future for herself, including through a major contribution to education in Indonesia which I publicly acknowledge began in large part under my predecessor, John Howard, when he was Prime Minister. We are working together to promote shared values and ideals, be it in our commitment to tolerance and religious pluralism through our regional interfaith dialogue, or in working together to tackle challenges like people smuggling, transnational crime and people trafficking.

We are also close partners in the fight against terrorism. In that connection, Dr Yudhoyono today was awarded an honorary Order of Australia in recognition of the work that he performed on behalf of Indonesia in the response to the Bali bombings of 2002 and the extraordinary role which he then performed in the response to what occurred on the ground and subsequently in the tracking down of those who were responsible. I be-
lieve that event is still deeply seared into the memories of all Australians.

Dr Yudhoyono is a welcome guest to our country. I look forward to all members and senators being able to be present tomorrow to witness this historic address from a friend and partner of Australia both now and into the future.

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.09 pm)—Again I join with the Prime Minister in acknowledging the presence in our country of the Indonesian President and in wishing the President an extremely successful visit—very productive for Indonesia and very productive for Australia. As the Prime Minister has noted, there are few countries which are as important to Australia as Indonesia. As he has also noted, we have very good relations and a very strong friendship. I think that the opportunity for the President to address this House tomorrow is one that is eagerly anticipated by members on both sides, and all we can do is be extremely grateful for the visit and confident that relations will be on an even better footing as a result.

MEMBER FOR BEROWRA

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.10 pm)—On indulgence, I rise to acknowledge an important milestone that has been passed by none other than the Father of the House, the member for Berowra. Last week the member for Berowra became the third longest serving member of the House of Representatives in its history, with more than 36 years and five months continuous service. To think that the member for Berowra is still so enthusiastic and is still so revelling in service to his country and service to his constituents! The member for Berowra’s service is now only eclipsed by that of Sir Earle Page, who held the seat of Cowper for 42 years, and the unconquerable Billy Hughes, whose record of 51 years and seven months must surely stand for some time, depending upon the stamina which the member for Berowra wishes to display.

I should note that the member for Berowra was a highly effective minister in a highly effective government. As minister for immigration he helped to get our borders under control; as Attorney-General he helped to get our national security arrangements in good shape. Coalition MPs salute the member for Berowra. We acknowledge this latest milestone and we wish him many more years of successful service to our country.

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.12 pm)—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for drawing to my attention this long service on the part of the member for Berowra. This indeed is a long piece of service in this House of Representatives. Members on this side of the House who have preceded us always advised us that they had been here ‘almost as long as Philip Ruddock’, and they are no longer here. So in terms of the number of years that you have put into service in the Australian parliament, that of itself is worthy of recognition. Could I also say, in drawing attention to the Leader of the Opposition’s parallel with the Hon. Billy Hughes, Billy as you know had a greater dexterity in terms of his political affiliations than the member for Berowra, and I assume the member for Berowra will remain with the party which he joined this parliament in. But I acknowledge the length of his service to this place.

Mr Ruddock (Berowra) (2.13 pm)—May I thank the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister for their very generous comments. This is not a valedictory. I will leave others to speculate, but let me just say I thank the electors of Parramatta, Dundas and Berowra for their continuous support. I thought about this matter last week and I thought the person most deserving of
thanks was my wife, Heather. We have been married for 39 years plus. She has spent most of her married life as the spouse of a member of parliament—a very considerable obligation, accepted very willingly but imposing a very significant cost.

I thank my two daughters, Kirsty and Caitlin, both of whom I am very proud of and who have succeeded in their own careers. They have nevertheless known nothing other than politics, and that imposes a very significant demand and sometimes a penalty upon them, but they have exceeded my every expectation as a doting father. They bring great credit not only to their family but also to the nation. If I can just spend a lighter moment, Kirsty was asked what her father did for a living when she was three and she said, ‘He sorts papers.’ Caitlin was asked whether she wanted to be a politician like her father when she grew up and she said, ‘No, no, I’m no good at telling stories.’

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Paid Parental Leave

Mr ABBOTT (2.15 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the paid maternity leave scheme available to his own staff and to the employees in his own department, which provides for full salary replacement while on maternity leave and is therefore much more generous than the arrangements that he is proposing to give to Australian families. Why shouldn’t the future mums and dads of Australia be entitled to at least the same benefits as those of his own staff? Will the Prime Minister now join with the coalition to give Australian families a fair go by backing a paid parental leave scheme that will affect less than half of one per cent of Australia’s businesses but help up to 146,000 Australian families every year?

Mr RUDD—I take it this is the policy which the member for North Sydney was consulted on prior to it being announced by the Leader of the Opposition over the last 24 hours—and the shadow minister for finance as well was consulted. We understand there has been a pretty active debate in the joint coalition party room this morning because they were not consulted on this policy or ‘sort of’ policy before it was dropped out.

Can I simply say to the Leader of the Opposition as he seeks to try and rake over some of the difficulties which have arisen in what could be described as the ‘policy development process’ underpinning their approach to paid parental leave, paid maternity leave, that it follows that we on this side of the House are proud of the fact that we are the first government to introduce paid parental leave. For 12 years those opposite sat there and occasionally pontificated on the subject, occasionally bleated solidarity about the issue, but did absolutely nothing. The Leader of the Opposition of course was a cabinet minister in that government. One would have thought that if he was committed to paid maternity leave or paid parental leave that just something, just something, might have happened in the period when he was around the cabinet table. But nothing—until yesterday.

There was fun and games in the joint party room today as people scratched their heads and said, ‘Where did this policy come from?’ What happened within, shall we say, the economic leadership of those opposite in deciding whether the approach they put forward was financially sustainable? It did not happen because, once again, this was policy making on the run, ill-considered and without any costings attached to it.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—Regrettably, as they bleat their opposition, it would be nice to know that, just once, a fully costed and considered
policy was put out by those opposite. We have not seen one so far.

Hospitals

Mr HALE (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the government’s plan to reform the health system to ensure that it is federally funded and locally run in order to end the blame game?

Mr RUDD—I thank very much the member for Solomon for his question. When it comes to health and hospitals, I had the privilege recently of being in Darwin for the opening of the new integrated cancer care centre.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—Can I say to those opposite as they turn up the volume meter in this place—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The question has been asked, the question was in order and the Prime Minister is addressing the question. The Prime Minister has the call and he should be heard in silence. Prime Minister.

Mr RUDD—When I visited Darwin with the member for Solomon, what we did together was open a new integrated cancer care centre, which was at the Royal Darwin Hospital. Question: ‘What happened under the 12 years that those opposite were in government in terms of cancer services for the good people of the Northern Territory?’ What I was told on the ground in the Northern Territory is that, including for the four or five years when the Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Health, for cancer related services people had to jump on the plane to Adelaide, drive to Adelaide—get to Adelaide somehow. But now, through the practical work on the ground by the minister for health and others and in response to the representations from the member for Solomon, we have delivered that real service for people on the ground.

On health and hospitals, the health minister and I have been consulting public hospitals around the country over the last six months, including the Nepean in Western Sydney and hospitals in Lismore and Port Macquarie. The overwhelming response from doctors, nurses, patients and working families is that they want fundamental reform to the future of the hospital system of Australia. They do not want half-measures, they do not want bits of sticky tape, they do not want band aids; they want to see the health and hospital system fundamentally reformed.

When we look at the needs across the country, all of our hospital system is being confronted with this core challenge—an increasing population, an ageing population, an increase in chronic diseases as well as chronic workforce shortages. That is why we as a nation, including the state and territory health budgets, face this growing funding gap between the demand being put on our system and the existing supply of hospital and health services, including an inadequate supply of doctors, an inadequate supply of nurses and an inadequate supply of nursing beds. Yet some in this country still say that fundamental reform is not necessary. We say they are wrong.

That is why the government, in the course of the last week, has announced the establishment of a new National Health and Hospitals Network, which will be funded nationally and run locally. That is the plan that we are putting to the Australian people. This is the single biggest reform to Australia’s health and hospital system since the introduction of Medicare to deliver better hospitals and better health care for all Australians, nationally funded, locally run. The Australian government will, for the first time, be-
come the dominant funder of the buildings, the equipment, the teaching, the training and the operating costs of Australia’s public hospital system. That has not been the case in the past.

The national network will enable all hospitals in Australia to comply with tough national standards on quality, performance and clinical standards. It also means that patients will not be shunted from one health service to another—one federally funded, one state funded—because, for the first time, we will have a single dominant national funder. Beyond that, we will have, through these local hospital networks, a national system which is capable of being run locally—run locally because local clinicians, local doctors, local nurses and local health experts are the individuals in the best position to know how local health services should be delivered. This is about maximising local decision-making power. That is why we have had the Australian Medical Association come out in support of the government’s proposal. The president of the association said that this decision maximises local decision-making. The Australian Nurses Federation has come out and said:

The move by the Commonwealth Government to become the majority funder of health care will help stop cost shifting and duplication in hospital funding.

That is our plan for the future.

Beyond hospitals, the Australian government is now becoming the 100 per cent funder of non-hospital health care in GP and GP related services. That is what the government proposes to do. The Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health and Ageing for five years. What did he say to the Australian people back then? He said that the Australian government should take over the health and hospital system of the country. He had five years as health minister to act on that and he did not a thing—except this: when he had the opportunity, he reached into the pockets of the public hospitals of this country and ripped out $1 billion worth of funding. He then froze GP training places and, on top of that, he gave us all that rock-solid, ironclad guarantee that nothing—repeat: nothing—about the Medicare safety net would change. That is the Leader of the Opposition’s record as health minister for four or five years. This government is getting on with fundamental reform of the health and hospital system and I recommend that those opposite get behind this important reform for the nation.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: could you please ask the Prime Minister to table the document from which he was reading?

The SPEAKER—Was the Prime Minister reading from a document?

Mr Rudd—Yes.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister indicates he was reading from a document. Was the document confidential?

Mr Rudd—Yes.

Paid Parental Leave

Dr STONE (2.25 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, a young woman employed as a chef on a salary of $68,000 will only receive $9,788 for the 18 weeks spent on parental leave under Labor’s scheme—a reduction in her usual wage of over $14,000 for that period. Under the coalition’s plan, the same young woman will receive 26 weeks leave at her full salary plus superannuation, giving her real time with her new baby and no cut to her income during that period. Prime Minister, why will you not support a real paid parental leave scheme that lets young families spend real time with their new babies without having to take a pay cut?
Mr Rudd—I thank the member for Murray for her question which began with the financial impact of the government’s proposed paid parental leave. She asked why people would only get $9,788. I say to the member for Murray: that is $9,788 more than your government ever provided to anybody. That is because those opposite, in their 12 years in office, refused to lift a finger and do a thing for paid parental leave—not a thing.

This debate about paid parental leave is particularly interesting because it goes to the credibility of those opposite on two fronts. Let us simply go to front number one, which is about this minor promise which those opposite, led by the Leader of the Opposition, gave on taxes. Six weeks ago, the Leader of the Opposition said he would not raise taxes to fund policy proposals. He said:

We won’t increase taxes. There will be no new taxes. There will be no increased taxes.

Now there is to be a 1.7 per cent levy on businesses in Australia. How can the Leader of the Opposition stand there with any credibility on the question of his commitments about no new taxes when, six weeks later—he did not even make the 100 days mark—he is in there fundamentally violating one of his first commitments to the Australian people? He says, ‘No new taxes’ one day and then, suddenly, whacks a huge tax on business the next day.

There is a more fundamental question of credibility because—those opposite and the member for Murray know exactly where I am going with this—the Leader of the Opposition has said in the past that there should be no such thing as paid maternity leave. Several years ago, he said:

I am dead against paid maternity leave as a compulsory thing.

That was the position of belief. That was ‘straight-talking Tony’. That was the Leader of the Opposition who says he never changes his position, but suddenly, it seems, the circumstances change. Having been challenged on it since he became Leader of the Opposition, he went out and said, ‘Well, of course, we would not be funding that from business.’ Then the member for Murray says, ‘Of course, he would not be funding it from business.’ Now we find that they do propose to fund it from business.

Dr Stone—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. We were asking: why should this woman take a pay cut under his crummy scheme.

The Speaker—The question went to why the Prime Minister would not adopt a certain policy. The Prime Minister is addressing the question.

Mr Rudd—On the $10,000 or thereabouts that the member for Murray referred to in her question, I go back to what I said at the outset—it is $10,000 more than was ever, ever offered by those opposite. Secondly, the member for Murray has asked why would working families want to receive such a small amount relative to what they suggest. Can I suggest that those same working families might be interested in something else—it is called penalty rates. It is called their basic working conditions. It is called unfair dismissal. It is called the introduction of AWAs. It is called Work Choices. When you take home your pay at the end of the week, you are confronted with a few things. One is whether your fundamental conditions of work have been blown apart, and working families depend on penalty rates. Those opposite have said that they will take them away. Secondly, if paid maternity leave is drawn upon, the $10,000 we are speaking of, taking the number at face value from what the member for Murray has just said, is $10,000 more than was ever offered by those opposite. It comes back to credibility. The Leader of the Opposition said he never be-
lieved in it—now he does. He said he would never increase taxes—now he will. The member for Murray said it would never be taken from business—now it is. Is it any wonder we all wonder what will next come forth from the mouth of the Leader of the Opposition, given that his crack economic team did not know about this scheme until he opened his mouth about it yesterday?

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.32 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a delegation from New Caledonia: Mes amis du Pacifique, vous etes tres welcome—my French deserted me for the last word! On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Taxation

Mr DANBY (2.32 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Does the government support proposals to increase taxes in order to fund new social spending?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Melbourne Ports for his question. The government is committed to restraining growth in government spending to two per cent real per annum once trend growth in the economy resumes, partly in order to avoid raising taxes and also to ensure that the government can continue to honour its commitment to keep taxation as a proportion of our total economy at or below the level we inherited from the former Howard government. I note that the Leader of the Opposition has just announced a new policy of increasing company tax on Australia’s biggest employers in order to pay for an open-ended paid parental leave scheme. It is somewhat difficult to pin down the details of the proposal from the Leader of the Opposition; indeed, it is somewhat difficult to pin down the authorship of this proposal as well. It would appear that the opposition cannot agree whether this is a tax or a levy. The shadow finance minister, Senator Joyce, says it is a tax; the member for Murray says it is a levy.

The Leader of the Opposition cannot even agree with himself about what the threshold is—one minute he says the threshold is $5 million per annum in income for the company and the next minute he says it is $5 million of tax paid by the company. He did not consult his shadow finance minister about the scheme, even though he has just indicated that he was on the phone to the shadow finance minister about other matters. It appears that nobody quite knows whether this proposal has been to the shadow cabinet. The member for Fadden says that it has, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition says it has not but it will, and the shadow minister finance is not quite sure whether or not it has. The Leader of the Opposition has admitted that he has not consulted major business about this proposal, even though, according to the member for North Sydney, this proposal constitutes a huge windfall for big business. So somehow we are expected to believe that a huge windfall is something they want to hide from major business. Of course, most significantly of all, in all this chaos and confusion on the other side there is one fundamental point, and that is that only a few weeks ago the Leader of the Opposition stood up and swore with his hand on his heart, ‘We will not increase taxes; we will not introduce any new taxes.’ Within a month or so of that commitment, when we are still months away from the scheduled election, he has now broken that commitment.

Even if some of the complete chaos and confusion that reigns on the opposition side about this proposal is clarified, it still contains within it fundamental problems. The $5
million threshold for taxpaying companies is a major problem. Companies, by the sheer nature of fluctuations in the economic cycle and the business cycle, will move in and out of range. There is a disincentive for companies that are slightly below the threshold to grow, to add new workers and to increase their investment, and of course there is a fantastic incentive for artificial avoidance arrangements like the kind they encouraged on the waterfront with Chris Corrigan and Patrick in order to ensure that companies can be broken up into constituent components to avoid this additional tax slug.

The key point is this: for all of their posturing about debt and deficit and all of the blowhard performances we have had to put up with over past years, all we get from the opposition is big new spending commitments—three spending commitments alone worth $18 billion over the next four years—and when finally, after still not having come up with one single spending cut and not one single savings measure, they are shamed into actually explaining where the money is coming from, guess where it is coming from? A big tax increase. They still are unable to specify any spending cuts that they would put in place. They block the spending cuts that the government put in its budget, and their only answer to financing their big spending, freewheeling promises is to increase taxes. Tax to the max, Tony’s strategy, is not going to help Australian workers; it will slug businesses and jobs in order to provide more money for higher income earners. The Leader of the Opposition’s cavalier approach to economic management demonstrates that he cannot be trusted to manage the Australian economy and the public finances of this nation, and his chaotic approach to managing the affairs of his own party shows that he cannot be trusted to manage the affairs of the Australian nation.

**Paid Parental Leave**

*Mrs MIRABELLA* (2.37 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, a young woman employed as a sales account manager on a salary of $55,000 will receive $9,788 for the 18 weeks spent on parental leave under Labor’s scheme, a reduction in her usual wages of nearly $10,000 for that period. Under the coalition’s plan, the same young woman will receive 26 weeks leave at her full salary, giving her an extra eight weeks at home with her new baby, no pay cut and no loss of superannuation. As the Prime Minister has refused to commit to a real paid parental leave scheme for Australia, can he explain why he is supporting big business over working families?

*Mr RUDD*—I think working families are interested in a couple of things, one of which is to make sure that the work laws of this country are fair. They are interested to know whether they will still be paid penalty rates. They will be very interested to know whether they are still going to be protected from unfair dismissal. They are going to be very concerned about whether or not they are going to be forced onto new style AWAs. That is what working families are concerned about, because each and very one of those things means dollars in the pay packet and the ability to put food on the table.

The second thing they are concerned about is people being fair dinkum about what is going to be delivered to them. What we have said is that we are delivering not through a tax on business but through the government stepping up to the plate and providing the paid parental leave scheme that the government proudly announced during the course of last year. We have costed it; we have done the right things about it. It is in the forward estimates for us to deliver. It comes into operation in 2011. That is what normal policy development is about. That is what we
have done, that is what we stand for, and it is $10,000 more than was ever, ever put on the table by those opposite. Those opposite duck and weave around this fundamental breach in their commitment about no new taxes. This morning we heard the member for Murray asked about this—‘Well, we don’t call it a tax; we call it “an investment in human capital”’. Good old Barnaby Joyce, when asked the same question, said, ‘Um, certainly we have to acknowledge that this is a tax.’ Thank you, Barnaby. We got it nailed in one from Barnaby. Those opposite are squirming because they have sought to try and put forward a policy snapped out of thin air.

Mrs Mirabella—Mr Speaker, a point of order on relevance: the Prime Minister was asked why he preferred big business, his mates, over working families.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Indi will resume her seat. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr Rudd—The government is committed to some $731 million for Australia’s first comprehensive paid parental leave scheme from 1 January 2011—the first in this country’s history. Secondly, the scheme will cost approximately $260 million per annum and will not be imposed on business. Thirdly, the scheme will provide the primary carer with 18 weeks postnatal leave paid at the adult federal minimum wage, currently $543.78 per week, more than those opposite had ever proposed when they occupied the Treasury bench. This is a real commitment; it is not a Leader of the Opposition thought bubble which is plucked out of space on a Monday morning.

If those opposite were concerned about the question of paid parental leave, why is it that in their entire period of office Australia ended up as only one of two OECD countries not to have a comprehensive paid parental leave scheme? That is the legacy those opposite left Australians, that is the legacy those opposite left working families, and they now stand up here and pretend that this has been their concern all along. The Leader of the Opposition has been on the record a thousand times saying he never believed in it, then he changed, then he said he would bring it in but not tax people for it and now he is bringing it in and taxing people for it. Is it any wonder that people scratch their heads and wonder what will next come out of the mouth of the Leader of the Opposition as he simply makes one piece of policy up after another? The government’s commitment is real. It is $10,000 more than was offered by those opposite. The government stands by its policy.

Hospitals

Mr Symon (2.44 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. How will the government’s health reform plan drive efficiency and eliminate waste in the health system? Will there be any impact on regional and rural hospitals as a result of the plan?

Mr Laming interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Bowman is warned! In warning him, I would ask that somebody explain to him what looms over him if he continues to interject at every possible occasion.

Ms Roxon—I thank the member for Deakin for his question on health. I must say it comes as some surprise that not a single member opposite has asked a question on health, when the Prime Minister announced last week the biggest change to our health system since the introduction of Medicare more than three decades ago. The National Health and Hospitals Network is going to change the way the Commonwealth funds hospitals. We will be funding local hospitals directly, through the local hospital networks, for each service that they provide. Gone are
the days when the Commonwealth would simply hand over a blank cheque—something that the member opposite used to do, or he used to pull a few zeroes off the end of it first before he handed his cheque over—hoping that the funding would end up at the front line, where it is needed.

With our hospitals network, there will be funding nationally but there will be control and running of these services locally. Funding hospitals on this basis will make sure that health funding ends up where the patients are, so it is particularly appropriate that the member for Deakin would ask this question, representing our growing suburbs, where there has not always been the hospital infrastructure that is needed. This is a way of directing funding to where the patients will be. It will not be directed through a centralised bureaucracy that might farm the money off elsewhere.

The health reform commission estimated that the introduction of activity based funding alone—just that change—could lead to savings of between $500 million and $1.3 billion every year. This equates to between 1,300 and 3,150 hospital beds a year. That is at a minimum. That is the equivalent of adding the capacity of four Sunshine Hospitals—where the Prime Minister and I, with the member for Maribyrnong, visited on the weekend. Through this system, we will be able to see why, for example, Victoria’s hospital costs are lower than other states’ costs and apply any lessons learned across the whole health system.

The price for each service is going to be determined by an independent umpire operating at arm’s length from the government. It will draw on expert advice and will, of course, strike an appropriate balance between reasonable access, clinical safety and efficiency. Very importantly—because we understand that the cost of delivering services varies significantly around the country, especially in rural and regional areas—country prices will not be set with city assumptions. There will be a national efficient price with special loadings for rural service delivery.

I would like to focus a little bit on this very important change to the system. I have noticed, for example, that the National Party is already out—desperately looking for relevance—pretending that this is going to close country hospitals across the country, when in fact the establishment of local hospital networks is a way to reinforce local autonomy for hospital decision making.

I would like to tell you that we have received some support from within this parliament for the reforms. I would like to read to you just a short excerpt from the member for Lyne’s press release. The member for Lyne and his local doctors made a very great impression on the Prime Minister at Port Macquarie, because the Prime Minister has been referring to them ever since. The member for Lyne said in his press release:

The Prime Minister’s announcements this week very much reflect the advice of doctors, nurses and other health professionals at that meeting and are therefore very much welcome on the mid-North Coast.

He went on:

By placing an emphasis on efficiencies at local hospital network level, these reforms are a slam dunk for our region and deserve the parliament’s support.

Hear, hear. But we have also had support from other quarters within the parliament. I would like to read you another endorsement of this idea:

For instance you could fund the public hospital system on a case mix basis. That would force them to focus on services rather than on global budgets and it would mean that you would be getting what you paid for in a way the Commonwealth can’t be sure now.
I think if we focus on funding services, rather than just shovel the enormous pot of money into the State’s coffers, we’re more likely to get good services delivered to patients.

I wonder who said that? I am happy to run a TAB if anybody wants to guess who might have said that. Of course it was the Leader of the Opposition, back in the good old days when he was the health minister—at a time when he actually thought about health, even if he actually never did anything to reform the system. It might have been a reflective moment, on The 7.30 Report in 2007, but his words are very clear:

… if we focus on funding services … we’re more likely to get good services delivered to patients.

Now, Mr Abbott, it is time for you to decide if you can still stick by those words and support this plan in the nation’s interests.

The SPEAKER—Order! I remind members that they must refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Paid Parental Leave

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.50 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, a young woman employed as a childcare worker on a salary of $40,000 will receive $9,788 for the 18 weeks spent on parental leave under Labor’s scheme, a reduction in her usual wages of almost $4,000 for that period. Under the coalition’s plan, the same young woman will receive 26 weeks leave at her full salary, plus superannuation, giving her real time with her new baby and no cut to her income during this period. Why won’t the Prime Minister join the coalition and Unions New South Wales, which has announced it supports the coalition’s scheme as the right benchmark for Australia?

Mr RUDD—It is pretty interesting that during this question time we have not had a single question on health. We announced the biggest reform to the health and hospital system across the nation and the Leader of the Opposition woke up yesterday and said, ‘How can I possibly not engage in this debate? I know; I’ll take a thought bubble out there on paid parental leave and, whack, we’ll stick it out there.’ Let us just call a spade a spade: that is exactly what is happening here.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked a question about why a person in a given income category would put trust in a system which we say will provide $10,000. I would say again to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that the $10,000 that we provide is $10,000 more than she ever provided, $10,000 more than the Leader of the Opposition ever provided and $10,000 more than the Liberal Party ever thought of in the past—because, historically, the Liberal Party has been opposed to the very notion of paid parental leave and paid maternity leave.

Look at the ideological position of the Leader of the Opposition where he has said time and time again over the years that he does not believe in this one bit. How do we go about trusting a bloke who said four weeks ago, ‘No new taxes,’ and four weeks later here is a big new tax? How do we trust a bloke who a few weeks ago said, ‘We’re only going to have paid parental leave but no impost on business,’ and then a few weeks later turns that on its head? How do you trust a bloke who says throughout his life that he has never believed in this and then suddenly, as we move into an election year, he has discovered conviction and commitment and has believed in it all along?

People are beginning to ask themselves some questions about this Leader of the Opposition but one of the biggest questions over here at the moment is: why has the good old member for North Sydney been so silent during all this debate? Joe has been left to one side in all the deliberations on this recent
thought bubble. Barnaby has said that he was not consulted—but maybe there is a virtue in that—and Joe was not consulted. It was only Tony out there with the thought bubble of the day in order to take attention away from health and hospitals. I would suggest that the Leader of the Opposition frame a question on health and hospitals, given that as health minister he conspicuously failed to do anything at all about health and hospitals.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS
The SPEAKER (2.53 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a parliamentary delegation from Rwanda led by the President of the Senate of the Rwandan parliament, the Honourable Dr Vincent Biruta. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Hospitals
Ms RISHWORTH (2.53 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. What are the critical economic and financial reforms central to the government’s plan for a national health and hospital network and why is it important that reform be undertaken in a considered and consultative way?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Kingston for her question. Fundamental, long-term economic reform is required in this country to deal with the funding of our health system and the ageing of our population. Fundamental, sustainable, long-term reform is needed to assist families get the balance right between work and family. But these things must be sustainable. They must be done in a thoughtful way and they must be done in an economically responsible way. That is what the government is doing with health at the moment. Our health and hospitals reform plan puts in place a sustainable funding model which will deliver reform over the long term. We will get rid of the old, fuzzy responsibilities and blank cheques of the old system and replace them with a new system that is long overdue.

We know from the Intergenerational report which was brought down some months ago that health costs are expected to grow from 9.1 per cent of GDP in 2007-08 to 19 per cent of GDP in 2050. So there is a very big reform task ahead of this country—a reform task that was squibbed by those opposite when they were in government. We had two Intergenerational reports during that time and we did not get any fundamental reform at all flowing from those reports—most particularly in this urgent area of health, where the now Leader of the Opposition ripped out $1 billion from the health system, making the funding model even more unsustainable over time. But, of course, we have seen in this House today that those opposite are not interested in long-term reform. They would rather see the health system buckle under its own weight than put in place a sustainable funding model to shape up to the big challenges for the future. We on this side of the House are facing up to those challenges. A responsible opposition would have said, ‘We’ll examine this in some detail,’ before they replied. But what actually happened? Dr No over there said no even before this policy was published. He said no even before we published the proposal. What that demonstrates is that those opposite are not interested in fundamental, long-term reform. Our proposal is fully funded over the forward estimates. Our proposal is consistent with the fiscal strategy. Our proposal can be implemented over time. That is why we are going out and talking to the community about its importance and talking to the states—because the country simply cannot afford to not put this reform in place.
We are going about this in a considered way. Compare and contrast this to those opposite. First of all, the Leader of the Opposition said no. He was not even going to consider what was in a document he had not yet even read. But, of course, now we have seen further evidence of this confused and erratic approach from those opposite. What we have here from those opposite is a proposal which is going to put a large tax on business—and it has not even been run past the shadow Treasurer. It did not go anywhere near the shadow Treasurer. When the shadow Treasurer was questioned about this tax he called it a ‘windfall gain’. Not even Barnaby would be that stupid! Not even Barnaby would call a new tax a windfall gain to the business community. Let us look at what the business community has said today. John Roskam said today that ‘ultimately taxes on businesses’—whether they are big business or small business—are passed on to the consumers.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The opposition has put up with the frontbench calling members of the opposition by their first name for most of question time because we assumed that you would call them to order. I think you should call the Treasurer to order on the most egregious example so far and do so for the rest of question time.

The SPEAKER—Members will refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Mr Swan—Mr Speaker, I was referring to the sloppy behaviour of the shadow Treasurer. That is what I was referring to. He is somehow wanting to pretend that a very significant increase in the company tax rate is a windfall gain for companies. Fair dinkum; these people have simply lost the plot! And it does not matter where you look. We had three spokespeople this morning who could not define whether or not it was a tax. Barnaby finally, for once, got it right—he said it was a tax; the shadow minister over there said it was not; and the shadow Treasurer said it was a windfall gain. How Orwellian can you get!

This is the least qualified economics team from an opposition in this parliament in decades and decades and decades. And it has been on display in this House day after day, and on display in the Senate day after day. Of course, that brings us to the Leader of the Opposition, who thinks that economics is boring. Well, there is proof positive of that today, isn’t there? This is an opposition leader who changes his mind like he changes his shirt. He simply cannot be believed in anything that he says. He said three weeks ago, ‘There will be no new taxes,’ and today he pops up with a new ‘windfall gain’. Fair dinkum! They have no credibility and no standing and no rigour.

I was asked by the member for Kingston why this country needed long-term reform. It needs long-term reform because of the ageing of our population. It needs long-term reform so that we can maximise the opportunities for wealth creation that will come from growth in this region in the decades ahead. We on this side of the House are putting forward a serious program to deliver that to Australia. But we have a destructive, untrustworthy, risky opposition, who are simply trying to torpedo the serious long-term agenda every step of the way, and for that they will be condemned by the Australian people.

Taxation

Mr Hockey (3.01 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer to the Prime Minister’s statement last week in which he suggested he was too busy to release the Henry review into Australia’s tax system. Now that the coalition has levelled with the Australian people by announcing a generous paid parental leave scheme, and a levy on less than half
of one per cent of businesses to pay for it, when will the Treasurer have the guts to come clean with the Australian people about the Henry tax review and what taxes this government is going to impose on the Australian people to pay for all of its promises?

Mr SWAN—My Speaker, the member for North Sydney must be concussed. He must have done a couple of rounds with Barnaby—fair dinkum! I mean, this is just completely irrational.

Mr Truss—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In spite of your specific advice to the Treasurer, he has continued to refer to members not by their proper titles.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—There are other things that demean the parliament as well, Member for Sturt.

On an earlier occasion during this session, or late in the last session, it was raised with me whether the use of unparliamentary expressions towards members of the other place should be tolerated. On that occasion I accepted that my initial response was wrong—I am responding to a point of order; if it is taking time, I apologise. On that occasion I indicated that my initial response was wrong and that there was protection about the use of unparliamentary expressions towards members of the other place. I am in a serious dilemma about whether parliamentary titles as they are used have ever been required in relation to senators in this place. But, if that is the indication that we have and if that is to be the procedure, then the use of a title, being the senator’s name with the title before it, is what I will ask the Treasurer to place in his answer.

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

The SPEAKER—I thank the young member of the public in the gallery for his assistance.

Mr SWAN—It is good to see your family-friendly practices, Mr Speaker.

It is a bit rich getting a question on tax from those opposite in today’s environment, where they cannot work out whether they are going to fund their new levy by having a tax on companies that turn over $5 million or on companies that pay tax on $5 million, thereby having a difference of 2,500 companies that were lost.

Mr Hockey—My Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to remind the Treasurer of the question: when will he release the Henry review? It is simple.

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

Mr SWAN—we will release the Henry review in plenty of time for a full discussion in this parliament and a full national debate, which we on this side of the House absolutely welcome. It will be out there in plenty of time for a full public debate. We welcome that debate because of all of the incompetence that has been demonstrated by those opposite here today. They have not got a clue what they are doing in terms of economic policy. We will release this report, prepared by an independent committee chaired by Dr Henry, in good time and in plenty of time for a debate. I welcome the debate in this parliament with those opposite. I welcome it because it goes to the very core of the long-term challenges facing this country.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SWAN—we will see whether we get the same mad, populist response from those opposite when this debate comes out or whether we can as a community and a country have a mature debate about something as fundamental as the long-term reform of our
tax system. But, from their behaviour today, I do not think we have a chance in hell.

**Hospitals**

Ms HALL (3.07 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. How has the government’s health reform plan been received by the community?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Shortland for her question. She was a member of the cross-parliamentary committee in the last parliament that delivered the *Blame game* report, a very important report which the national plan that was released last week deals with—and which the previous government neglected to respond to. The National Health and Hospitals Network announced by the Prime Minister last week has been shaped and informed by the work of the ‘blame game’ committee that the member for Shortland and others were part of, the detailed work of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission and the work of health professionals, front-line doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and, most importantly, the community—the people who are the patients in our health and hospital system.

This plan will make all Australians stakeholders in the reform of our health system. The Prime Minister, other ministers and I conducted more than 100 consultations across the country following the release of the reform commission’s report, to road test the recommendations of the report and to seek the views of staff and patients on the front line. It is why we have developed a plan where the health system is funded nationally but run locally. The response from stakeholders, which I have been asked about, has been very enthusiastic. The AMA, the ANF, the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association and the Business Council of Australia are just some of the key stakeholders who have backed the National Health and Hospitals Network.

This network is a bold reform. Like all health reform, we know that it will unleash much debate. The government welcomes this debate. After more than a decade of complete inaction and neglect of health reform by the former government, it is well overdue. This is why it is disappointing, but not particularly surprising, that the Liberal Party has chosen to oppose our plan from the outset. As I think some other ministers have already mentioned, Mr Abbott said in December that he was going to oppose any health reform—

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

Ms ROXON—I beg your pardon. He was the Leader of the Opposition, but only just, in December. That would make up for my mistake. The Leader of the Opposition, as he now is, said that he would oppose any health reform plan that was released by the government. He has no intention of playing any constructive role in health reform. He did not do so as minister and he clearly is not going to now as opposition leader. When it comes to health reform, I fear he is a leopard who cannot change his spots.

The Leader of the Opposition, when he was the health minister, did see some of these problems. In fact, he is on the record as having called our health system and its funding arrangements a ‘dog’s breakfast’, but he took no action to fix any of the problems. I do have to confess to the parliament that when I was in opposition I used to wonder how the health minister had time—in fact, weeks at a time—to go off on bike rides around the country and to actually do his job. Now, as the health minister, I have uncovered the answer to that. It is simply because the Leader of the Opposition was not actually doing his day job. He was never inter-
ested in health reform. He had plenty of time to go off bike riding, just as he has had plenty of time to be out playing Leyland brothers this week—

Mr Randall—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. I do not think it is appropriate to slur somebody who is raising money for charity in this place.

Ms ROXON—I am sure that there are a lot of people on this side of the House who would pay a lot of money to not see Tony in his lycra ever again.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister is not assisting. The minister must refer to members by their titles. These asides are not assisting. The minister will respond to the question. The Manager of Opposition Business will assist himself by not interjecting on everything that happens in this place.

Ms ROXON—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was asked about the community response and the broader response to our health reform plan. Because the Leader of the Opposition was away last week in Central Australia, he left the shadow health spokesperson in charge of the Liberal Party’s response. Of course, this was always going to be a risky thing to do. The member for Dickson’s first response was to claim that doctors and nurses spent all their days on Facebook. This was an absolute insult to hardworking doctors and nurses, and he should be ashamed of himself for having that as his first response. To the member for Dickson’s credit, he then actually bothered to read the plan that had been announced, and he told 2UE and 2SM last Friday, ‘There are parts of this that are positive and that we could support.’ I would like to ask the member for Dickson or the Leader of the Opposition to tell us which parts they are.

The Leader of the Opposition returned from his time in Central Australia to declare that in fact he opposes all of the package. We are struggling to understand what the opposition’s alternative health policy is. Of course, there are many of us on this side of the House who remember what this Leader of the Opposition’s approach to health reform was when he was a minister. I do not think there is anyone on this side of the House who cannot remember the Mersey hospital. At the previous election, the then Minister for Health and Ageing had a plan for one hospital. Now that plan has been vastly expanded. The Leader of the Opposition now has a plan for about 20 or 30 hospitals, some in Queensland and some in New South Wales—not even 10 per cent of our public hospitals. This just is not good enough. He also said that he wants to revisit local hospital boards, to have every single hospital compete with each other for staff and for funding. This is a policy that is so far past its use-by date that the Leader of the Opposition should have left it in Fossil Creek, where he was last week, because that is where it belongs. He needs to come clean with the public. He needs to tell us what his view is on health reform. He was not prepared to reform the health system when he was the minister for nearly five years. Now he is the Leader of the Opposition and he should get out of our way and let us do the job in the nation’s interest.

Goods and Services Tax

Mr DUTTON (3.14 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the comments of Ken Baxter, the former head of former Premier Bob Carr’s department in New South Wales, who said, ‘I do not think there is any doubt, if you read the government’s health document, that the GST would most likely have to increase, probably from 10 per cent to 12½ per cent.’ Can the Treasurer rule out an increase in any tax—yes or no?
Mr SWAN—I certainly rule out an increase in the GST and I also repeat the pledge that we have given, which is to keep tax as a percentage of GDP at the level that we inherited.

**Paid Parental Leave**

Ms JACKSON (3.15 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. How is the government supporting new parents, and how confident can they be that this support will improve in the future?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Hasluck for her question. She is one of those members who have been campaigning for paid parental leave for a very, very long time, because she understands that giving mums and dads extra support so that they can spend more time with their babies means that babies will get a better start in life.

That, of course, is the fundamental reason why the Rudd Labor government is introducing the first national paid parental leave scheme in our country’s history. It is a reform that Australian parents have long been waiting for. They know that for 12 years the current opposition, when they were in government, did nothing to deliver paid parental leave. Even more so, this opposition leader campaigned for years against paid parental leave. For years he campaigned against paid parental leave, and of course parents now know that it was this Leader of the Opposition who said that over his dead body would he introduce paid parental leave.

By contrast with the Leader of the Opposition, we are actually delivering paid parental leave. We asked the Productivity Commission to develop a scheme that was in Australia’s best interests. We asked them to consult employers, unions and, most importantly, families. We also asked them for recommendations that would underpin strong economic growth as well as provide support for families, and that is exactly what we are delivering. Our scheme is based on the expert recommendations of the Productivity Commission, it is economically responsible, it is fair to families and fair to business and it is fully costed and fully funded. Unlike the opposition’s scheme, which you would have to say is just on the never-never, our scheme is going to start on 1 January 2011, and Australia will finally get its first national paid parental leave scheme.

Over the last few days we have seen the opposition trying to catch up, but if there is one thing that Australian families know it is that they cannot trust this Leader of the Opposition on paid parental leave. They know that this is just another policy con job from the Leader of the Opposition. Here are some of the responses to his latest thought bubble from members of very important industry groups and members of the media. Peter Anderson of ACCI—not someone who normally knocks the Leader of the Opposition—said that this is ‘a mistake’, that it is ‘wrong’ and that it is ‘unfair’. Heather Ridout from the Australian Industry Group—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The House will come to order!

Mr Morrison—Oh, shock us! What did Heather Ridout have to say? Say it’s not true.

Ms MACKLIN—Of course they just want to ignore all of the companies that are members of the Australian Industry Group—all of those employers doing a great job making sure that they help their companies get out of the difficult times they have been in. What Heather Ridout said is that this is ‘bad policy’ and went on to say it is ‘the sort of policy you have when you are not serious about having a policy’. Peter Hartcher in today’s *Sydney Morning Herald*—

Mr Dutton—Heather Ridout and Peter Hartcher—who’s next?
Ms MACKLIN—No wonder they don’t want to hear this, because he said it was ‘a pile of policy rubbish’. Michelle Grattan in the Age—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume her seat. The minister has the call. She will be heard in silence.

Ms MACKLIN—Michelle Grattan in the Age summed it up this way:

This will reinforce fears Abbott is flaky …

Mr Pyne—What about Germaine Greer?

Ms MACKLIN—Samantha Maiden in the Australian: ‘a policy that is just too dumb to fly’. The opposition leader wants to throw out the Productivity Commission’s serious piece of substantial work and replace it. This is his policy—just a couple of pages of ramblings from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Anthony Smith—What about John Pilger?

The SPEAKER—The member for Casey is warned.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt is warned.

Ms MACKLIN—This is more evidence of the Leader of the Opposition talking first and thinking later. No costings, no detail, no time line—there is nothing that is just too dumb to fly. The opposition leader wants to throw out the Productivity Commission’s serious piece of substantial work and replace it. This is his policy—just a couple of pages of ramblings from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Anthony Smith—What about John Pilger?

The SPEAKER—The member for Casey is warned.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt is warned.

Ms MACKLIN—This is more evidence of the Leader of the Opposition talking first and thinking later. No costings, no detail, no time line—there is nothing that is just too dumb to fly. The opposition leader wants to throw out the Productivity Commission’s serious piece of substantial work and replace it. This is creating massive uncertainty for Australian families and Australian businesses. They want certainty. They want to know that they are going to get Labor’s paid parental leave scheme delivered on 1 January next year. They have been waiting for decades for this scheme. It is time the opposition delivered their support.
ory, one at Wauchope and the other one being at—

Mr Oakeshott—Kempsey.

Mr RUDD—Kempsey—there you go. Therefore, what we have said in the document, if the Leader of the Opposition would bother to read it, is that we would envisage somewhere between one and five hospitals within a local hospital network. Secondly, I would say to the Leader of the Opposition that we would fund this on the basis of no net addition to bureaucracy. We have said that quite explicitly.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—Those opposite obviously stand behind the current health system, which has far too much money wasted in state health bureaucracies. What the Australian people want is that money to be dedicated increasingly to front-line services with doctors and nurses, as well as extra hospital beds. Instead, those opposite seem to be defending the current situation, which they seem to regard as fine and dandy. What did the Leader of the Opposition say recently? ‘It would be good to get back to the good old days.’ That is his forward vision on health.

We have put forward a considered plan for the future. It is funded for the future. What we have had from those opposite was, firstly, an idle commitment five or seven years ago that the Australian government should take over the system. They did not act on that. Secondly, the Leader of the Opposition said, ‘What I will do instead for you is rip $1 billion out of the public hospital system.’ That was real action on the part of the Leader of the Opposition. And, thirdly, he then whacked a cap on GP training places.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition on the health and hospitals debate that we welcome it. I notice it took him until question 8 or 9 to even raise the question of health and hospitals in this place. We are proud of the plan we put forward. Australia is crying out for fundamental reform for our health and hospital system for the future—one funded nationally and run locally. I suggest to the Leader of the Opposition, with his five years of wasted experience as a health minister, that he get behind this program, which is designed to work for working families across Australia.

Economy

Mr SULLIVAN (3.25 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. What are the main take-outs from the national accounts released last week? What do they say about the state of our economic recovery and the importance of responsible economic management?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Longman for his question. I was just wondering whether we could send out a search party for the shadow Treasurer, who seems to have disappeared. I would be delighted if he came in to listen to this very important question about the national accounts last week. I can say to the member for Longman and to all of those, certainly, on this side of the House that the Australian economy continued to outperform the rest of the advanced economies right around the world.

I know that is welcomed by many on this side of the House because we know that what it means around Australia is that there are businesses with their doors open that would have otherwise closed. This is a consequence of the measures that have been put in place and working with the Australian people to boost our economy during calendar year ’09. What it means is that there are tens of thousands of tradies out there in small businesses working on projects that otherwise would not be in existence right now and they would be out of work as well.

Our economy grew by 0.9 per cent in the final quarter of 2009 and by 2.7 per cent over the year. That is an exceptional figure, con-
sidering what a devastating year it was in calendar year ’09 in the global economy. It was the worst since the Great Depression and the second worst in modern global economic history. So it is an exceptional outcome. I think all Australians are proud of these numbers because this is something that we as a country did together: employers and workers came together, and businesses and their employees came together. Community groups all got behind a united effort not just to support jobs and business but to underline the importance of confidence. At the end of the day, that is what is so exceptional about Australia as we have come through this episode.

The strength of confidence in our community and our belief in ourselves is something that we should value and it is something that we need to work with as we move forward. This is why this country needs the sort of reform of our health system that we have been talking about today, the sort of reform of our skills base that we have been talking about today and the serious reform of infrastructure and so many other areas of our economy, so we can maximise the opportunities and the wealth creation capacity of this country as we move forward to take advantage of the Asian century.

In year average terms we grew by 1.4 per cent in 2009, and we ought to measure that against what occurred collectively in other advanced economies. They went backwards by 3.2 per cent—1.4 per cent in Australia and minus 3.2 per cent for other advanced economies. The fact that we grew for every quarter of 2009 is exceptional when all of the other countries that we compare ourselves to contracted. Of course, part of this message here is stimulus. Stimulus was supporting jobs and small business. Without that stimulus we would have contracted for three of the four quarters in 2009 by something like 0.7 per cent. That is the report card of calendar year ’09 that we saw in the national accounts from last week.

There are just a couple of areas I want to draw attention to because they do point to opportunities and challenges as we move forward. The accounts point to the importance of infrastructure stimulus because it is certainly doing an exceptional job in areas of the economy that are soft. Our nation-building investments in our schools, roads, railways, ports and housing drove a 10.2 per cent increase in public investment in the quarter. This helped offset weakness in private building and construction activity, which fell by more than 20 per cent.

What that means is that in so many communities around this country without that essential investment, many of those tradies who are pulling up each morning outside those school construction sites would not be pulling up anywhere else because of the weakness of private sector activity. So you have a very vivid demonstration here of the importance of the pipeline of activity to confidence and activity as we move forward. As we know, it is the policy of those opposite to cancel those contracts. What they will be doing is fracturing that pipeline of activity which is so important to wealth creation, so important to small business and so important to the employment outcomes that we are getting. It is simply stunning that in the last little while something like 180,000 jobs have been created in this country. And we celebrate every single one of them. However, we are not complacent about that because, while unemployment is at 5.3 per cent, we know there are many people in the community who are working fewer hours than they would like to work. Of course, that means a cut to their income. So we should not be lulled into a sense of false security by that one figure because the number of hours that are reduced in our community is the equivalent of 260,000 full-time positions. That means
there is still spare capacity out there in the labour market.

That investment—that infrastructure investment that this side supports and which is opposed by those opposite—is so important in securing those outcomes. Strong, sensible, well-judged economic policies are at the core of this outcome. And, of course, what we did not have when community groups got together and when employers came together with their employees, was the support of the opposition. I, for one, remember vividly the activities in this House last February when every one of them over there voted against the February stimulus package and then it was voted down in the Senate. In our hour of national need they went back to this negative, carping, oppositionist tone. If that had prevailed, they would have failed Australia. Fortunately for Australia, it did not prevail. The stimulus was put in place. The stimulus which they said would not create one job has created 180,000 jobs by the ABS figures. So it has been proved that they have comprehensively misjudged the Australian economy, just as we are seeing them comprehensively misjudging the very critical issue of paid paternity leave in this House. They are not able to fund it, they are not able to explain how they are going to fund it and they are not coming to grips with the fundamental incentive structures that are required to drive investment in this community, as well as having family friendly work practices and policies to support it. We have had today another demonstration of the monumental misjudgement of the Leader of the Opposition, his Shadow Treasurer and the shadow finance spokesman. They should be condemned for their irresponsibility.

**Drought**

**Mr KATTER** (3.32 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Whilst the Australian people, particularly those 70,000 employed in the beef industry, appreciated yesterday’s stand by the government to protect Australia from mad cow disease, the government’s decision, however, to abolish EC drought funding could only be logical if agricultural development banks still existed. Since the Commonwealth Development Bank, the Commonwealth Bank, the Primary Industry Bank of Australia, the AIDC, the state banks, the QIDC and the Rural Bank of New South Wales have all been sold off, could the minister advise how our agriculturalists are expected to ride future trade and interest rate cycles and the perennial drought and flood cycles when there are now no financial mechanisms left to facilitate survival? The minister would be aware that Australia’s commercial banks in adverse circumstances invariably apply punitive interest rates, often exceeding 20 per cent. In light of this, can the minister advise how the government can justify farmers currently being charged 8.5 per cent whilst Reserve Bank interest rates are only 3.5 per cent, particularly when American and European competitors, who are enjoying a 42 per cent subsidy tariff assistance, are being charged only a 4.9 per cent interest rate?

**Mr BURKE**—I thank the member for Kennedy for his question. There are a few issues and I will go through them in turn. First of all, I will clarify what was contained in the question concerning any future abolition of the interest rate subsidy. The government has consistently said that any reform of drought policy is about how we deal with the next drought. It remains extremely important that people currently on assistance know that the work the government is doing on reform of drought policy is not about a change in how we would deal with people who are currently going through the toughest period of their lives. That guarantee, which has been given previously by the Prime Minister and
myself, is important to keep in the framework on anything about how future drought policy should go forward.

Secondly, the member for Kennedy refers to the banks and the best way to help farmers. Certainly, since the experience some years ago in both Victoria and South Australia, there is not a great appetite for government-run banks and the agricultural development banks. I am aware of the work that the member for Kennedy is very proud of during his time in the Queensland government and the legacy that was there, but it is not a pathway that the government is currently looking at. The pathway that has been adopted to date has been one of allowing lending decisions to be made by commercial banks and an interest rate subsidy then being paid. I want to point out a couple of challenges we have had with that. First of all, 30 per cent have been accessing the EC and 70 per cent have not. The vast majority of farmers have either not been eligible or have not been able to benefit because they have not had sufficient debt. One of the drivers of the current policy is the farmer who during good times makes some very tough decisions, who is not in a situation of large debt when a drought hits and who therefore actually receives no government assistance at all. That is one of the inequities in the way the current system works and the government is trying to find a way forward. The second of the two challenges regarding the way the system currently works is with declarations, as the member for Kennedy knows all too well with the experience of trying to get a declaration in the Gulf. The declaration process takes a very long time and hardship goes for a long period before anyone, even those 30 per cent, get any assistance under the current rules.

The other thing is there are many areas of real hardship that are not covered, and the trade cycles that the member for Kennedy refers to are not reasons that someone is currently able to access EC. It simply does not become available to them, even though it may be a hardship completely beyond their planning or control.

The way forward that the government is working its way through involves looking at how the government can have an engagement when people are in good times which will then lead to fewer people ever hitting a crisis. It is a harder point of policy to drive at because there is no pressure on government to do anything during good times, but that is the process that the government is trying to work through—to see how we can have a level of engagement during the good times so that, rather than waiting for the crisis and just holding people in that period of crisis for the duration of the hardship, we can actually work with farmers in the good times and fewer people will hit that hardship in the first place.

On the final point raised by the member for Kennedy, where he referred to the high subsidies in the United States and Europe, I have to say that one of the outcomes of the highly subsidised farming systems in those parts of the world has been massive inefficiency. I would rate an Australian farmer against any United States or European farmer any day, because we farm smarter and we farm more effectively. A subsidy system runs completely counter to that.

**International Women’s Day**

Ms COLLINS (3.38 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Status of Women. What action is the government taking to promote the equality of women in Australia?

Dr Stone—Particularly the gender pay gap.

Ms PLIBERSEK—I want to thank the member for Franklin for her question. In fact, the member for Franklin is the first female member for Franklin since the establishment of the seat in 1903. It is great to
have this opportunity to talk a little bit about the government’s achievements in this area following International Women’s Day yesterday, because International Women’s Day is an opportunity for us to celebrate the great advances that have been made but also to focus on the challenges that remain before we have truly achieved equality for women in Australia.

Dr Stone—In particular in the pay area?

Ms PLIBERSEK—We are a longstanding leader in gender equality. Everyone knows that Australia was one of the first countries to introduce votes for women. Today we should be proud that we have a Deputy Prime Minister who is a woman, a Deputy Leader of the Opposition who is a woman, a female Governor-General and three women on the High Court. We also have the highest representation of women ever in our parliament today, and that is certainly something that all members, I am sure, would be proud of. But of course we should be proud but not complacent. We still have a long way to go. There is still much work to be done. As the member opposite mentioned, we continue to have a gender pay gap. I am sure all of us still agree that women experience violence in much too great numbers.

We believe as a government that we need to support practical measures that give women options, allowing them and encouraging them to make the right choices for them in their stage of life, in their circumstances. We have returned fairness and flexibility to Australia’s workplaces, including for the first time a right to request flexible and part-time work for parents. It is important that these conditions are available to men as well as women because we know that, without a better sharing of the joys and responsibilities of domestic life, women will not be able to achieve professionally all they deserve to achieve. We have made it much easier for parents to afford to return to work by increasing the child care tax rebate to 50 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses and making those payments quarterly instead of annually.

For the first time, we have introduced a paid parental leave scheme, which will commence in January next year—a scheme that allows women to remain connected to the workforce while easing the financial burdens of taking time off to care for very young babies. The government’s scheme is a fully funded scheme, a scheme that particularly supports financial security for the lowest paid women, and it contrasts very sharply with the scheme that the Leader of the Opposition floated yesterday. It is well worth asking why, in 12 years of government, the previous government never introduced paid parental leave, leaving us and the United States to be the only two developed countries that have never had paid parental leave schemes. At the same time, they introduced workplace laws that made it much, much harder for parents to balance their work and caring responsibilities. They reduced penalty rates. They got rid of unfair dismissal provisions. They introduced AWAs, which we know were phenomenally bad for working women.

Of course, it is also worth asking why the Leader of the Opposition said that paid parental leave would be introduced ‘over this government’s dead body’ when he had the opportunity to do it. It is worth commenting that the broken promise on taxes has meant that no business group in the country supports this proposal, particularly as they are struggling to emerge from the global financial crisis. It is not clear yet whether this is opposition policy or not. It is not clear whether this is another thought bubble or whether we now have a commitment from the opposition that this policy will be introduced. But what I can tell you is that there are women in the community now who are planning to have children next year who
need certainty. They are planning their family finances now. They are trying to work out how the mortgage will be paid next year. They need certainty that the opposition will back the government’s scheme and pass the government’s scheme so payments can commence in January next year. Heather Ridout said of this scheme, ‘It is the sort of policy’—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Ms PLIBERSEK**—It is worth quoting Heather twice, because she is so on the money. She said this is ‘the policy you have when you are not serious about having a policy’. This policy is thinner than a pair of spandex bike shorts and everyone can see that.

*Mr Randall interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Canning!

**Mr Randall**—Is she on the payroll?

**Ms PLIBERSEK**—The member for Canning is warned!

*Ms PLIBERSEK*—The paid parental leave scheme, I am sure, is one that will have significant community debate over coming months, as people see how thin this proposal is. But it is worth saying that there are many, many good policies that do have bipartisan support, including the work that the Australian government is doing with business to encourage family-friendly conditions in workplaces.

It was great to be with the Treasurer yesterday at the National Australia Bank as we announced the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency ‘Employer of Choice for Women’ award recipients—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Ms PLIBERSEK**—I know. It is shocking, isn’t it, that 95 businesses around Australia would provide family friendly conditions for their employees! I can understand why that would have that sort of reaction from those opposite. We are committed to improving women’s voices in public life and today I have announced the establishment of six new alliances that will contribute to that work.

Finally, I want to say that all members of the House, and I am sure of the other place as well, and all members of the Australian community, understand that rates of violence against women in this country remain unacceptably high. Just, for example, in the last week the government has expanded programs run by the NRL and the AFL to work with players to encourage them to develop respectful relationships with women. This sort of work on the ground will complement the release later this year of our national plan to reduce violence against women and children. It is work that we can all be proud of.

Of course we have a lot to be proud of in our record. We still have a long way to go. As Anne Manne said at The Sydney Institute: We will truly have equality when women no longer have to make impossible choices. When they are everywhere in public life and when both men and women are respected for their contribution to love’s never-ending labour.

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

**PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS**

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.46 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**—In question time today the Prime Minister claimed that as health minister I had neglected cancer services in the Northern Territory and he big-noted himself for recently opening a new cancer ser-
vice in the Northern Territory. I inform the House that on 29 March 2007 the Territory health minister and I announced the investment in cancer care in the Territory and the service that the Prime Minister opened the other day, and I seek leave to table the relevant press release.

Leave not granted.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (3.47 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr NEVILLE—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr NEVILLE—This is my first opportunity to address this matter. On 19 August, as part of a question on ceiling batt insulation, I tabled papers outlining 14 rorts and doubtful practices as conveyed to me freely by the office manager of AllSafe, a reputable franchise ceiling installer in Bundaberg. On 16 September, three days after I had left for the UN in New York, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, quoting David Jordan, the franchisor of AllSafe, from a letter the minister had been holding for 3½ weeks, accused me—

The SPEAKER—The member will not debate his personal explanation.

Mr NEVILLE—of having misrepresented the comments from AllSafe’s Bundaberg franchisee. I was accused of making incorrect statements, point-scoring and having hurt the stimulus factor of the package. Nowhere did the minister or his correspondent—that is, the correspondent that was being quoted—detail where I was incorrect or how I had misled. In fact, the content of the 14 items given freely in writing to me and tabled openly in this House was not disputed. They dealt with, amongst other things, the nonprovision of quotes prior to fitting, forged signatures, overstating metreage and so on. I am just illustrating what was in them. I will not delay the House with a point-by-point analysis of the accusations—

The SPEAKER—No, the member must explain where he has been misrepresented.

Mr NEVILLE—That is what I am saying. I am not going to try to debate the 14 items—

The SPEAKER—No, because you are not allowed to.

Mr NEVILLE—other than to say that the 14 points and countless instances since made by me have proved to be accurate and subsequently confirmed by admissions by the government and its minister, even to the point of the involvement of the Auditor-General and potential police involvement.

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (3.49 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mrs IRWIN—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mrs IRWIN—In an article in the Sydney Daily Telegraph on 27 February it was claimed that I had made only two speeches in this parliament in the previous year. A check of the Hansard records clearly shows that in fact I made 26 speeches last year, which goes to show you cannot believe everything you read in the Daily Telegraph.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.50 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:
Commonwealth Grants Commission—GST revenue sharing relativities—2010 review

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.50 pm)—I move:

That:

(1) the House invite His Excellency, Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of the Republic of Indonesia, to attend and address the House on Wednesday, 10 March 2010, at 2 pm;

(2) unless otherwise ordered, at this sitting of the House:

(a) notices and orders of the day, government business shall have precedence until 12 noon when the sitting of the House automatically shall be suspended until the ringing of the bells;

(b) the sitting will resume at approximately 2 pm when the proceedings shall be welcoming remarks by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and an address by the President of the Republic of Indonesia, after which the sitting of the House automatically shall be suspended until the ringing of the bells and so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the order of business for the remainder of the sitting until the adjournment debate commences at 7.30 pm being as follows:

(i) documents

(ii) Ministerial Statements

(iii) notices and orders of the day, government business.

(c) the provisions of standing order 257(c) shall apply to the area of Members’ seats as well as the galleries;

(3) a message be sent to the Senate inviting Senators to attend the House as guests for the welcoming remarks by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and address by His Excellency, Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of the Republic of Indonesia; and

(4) any variation to this arrangement be made only by an action by the Speaker or by a motion moved by a Minister.

His Excellency Dr Yudhoyono will address this parliament on Wednesday, 10 March at 2 pm. The House will meet as usual at 9 am to consider the introduction of bills and government business. The parliament will then suspend at 12 noon for the official luncheon in the Great Hall. The President will address the House of Representatives at 2 pm with both members and senators present. The parliament will again suspend following the address of His Excellency and resume at approximately 4 pm with the tabling of documents, statements and the resumption of debate. There will be no question time. Parliament will adjourn as usual at 7.30 pm.

The visit by the recently re-elected Indonesian President, and his address to the House, are deeply significant. Such an invitation is reserved for a very small number and it reflects the strength and importance of the Australia-Indonesia relationship. Indonesia is emerging not just as a regional strength but as a global influence, as its G20 membership reflects. Its strategic, social and economic importance to Australia in this century cannot be overstated. We look forward very much to the address to the House by President Yudhoyono. I commend the changed arrangements to the House.

Question agreed to.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Paid Parental Leave

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

The Government’s failure to recognise the true value of women’s participation in the workforce. 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 ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.53 pm)—Every year about 280,000 Australian women have children. All of those women deserve help and, under the former government, all of those women did receive help. Today’s debate is about a subset of those women. It is about the 62 per cent of those women who are in paid employment immediately prior to having their baby. That is 170,000 employed women who have children and who, under the regime which this government proposes to put in place, will inevitably suffer a serious loss in their salary. They are the women who should be helped. They are the women who the coalition wants to help. They are the women who Unions NSW wants to help. They are the women who members opposite know ought to be helped but who, they know in their hearts, will not be helped by the mickey mouse paid parental leave scheme that this government has introduced.

Of the 170,000 employed women who have babies every year, some 60,000 return to work within the recommended six months. They return to work too soon, invariably because of financial pressure. They are the women who desperately need help. They are the women who the coalition will help. They are the women who will miss out under the mickey mouse scheme which is being put forward by this government. Labor’s mickey mouse scheme gives those women just 18 weeks, not the 26 weeks which everyone knows is the minimum that should be spent at home by mothers with newborns. It gives them just the minimum wage, not the wage that those women are earning, not the wage that those families need and not the wage that those families need if they are to sustain the kind of life that they are used to and if they are to meet the commitments that every Australian family almost inevitably and necessarily has.

Unlike the government, this coalition is proposing a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme. Our scheme is for 26 weeks. Our scheme is at the actual wage of the mother, capped at $150,000 a year. It is real money, it is real time and it is a real benefit for the women of Australia—a benefit that they are not getting from this government.

Government members interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT—The reaction of members opposite in question time and now betrays the fact that they have been completely unnerved, completely unsettled and completely taken aback by this scheme which we have introduced—a scheme which has been widely welcomed by the employed women of this country.

Let us examine the government’s scheme for a moment. As I said, it is for just 18 weeks and it is at just the minimum wage. Labor’s scheme costs just $260 million. It offers just an extra $2,000 on top of additional benefits. Any paid parental leave scheme which offers just an additional $2,000 to cover the absences from work that are inevitable when a mother has a baby is a mickey mouse scheme. A scheme which offers just an extra $2,000 is not a scheme which is going to establish real justice for the women of Australia. It is not a scheme which is going to drive up participation in the workforce. It is not a scheme which is going to give women the real choice that they need—to have a career and to be mothers at
the same time. It is, in short, a cruel hoax on the families of Australia.

I understand that giving real benefits to the working families of this country is expensive, but our scheme is funded. We will make less than one per cent of Australian companies pay a modest levy on their tax. We will make this small minority of companies, this tiny minority of companies, pay a modest levy on their tax so that 170,000 women every year can get the help, the assistance and the justice which they need and for which they have been crying out for so long. No-one likes paying more, even in a good cause. I accept that. We all think that other people should pay for the good things that society needs.

I am not surprised that we had a succession of big business representatives stand up yesterday and say that they would prefer that this levy not be imposed. The ancestors of those same big business representatives stood up 20 years ago and criticised the superannuation guarantee levy, which they now accept, and 40 years ago they stood up and criticised the imposition of holiday pay and sick pay and all the other things which are now part and parcel of life. I am not criticising those big business representatives who stood up yesterday to say what they had to say, because all they were doing was representing their constituency. I am just disappointed that they did not think first as Australians, first as citizens, and only then as representatives of big business. The time has come for paid parental leave to be as much part and parcel of working in this country as sick pay, holiday pay and retirement benefits. The time has come and we will implement a fair scheme.

Let me say to the representatives of big business who spoke yesterday that, if Labor had not blown the surplus, if this government had not turned a $20 billion surplus into a $30 billion deficit in just 12 months, things could have been done differently. If Labor was not wasting money hand over fist on Julia Gillard memorial school halls and on a pink batt program which has been the most comprehensive administrative disaster in recent Australian history, if all this waste and management was not happening, we could have funded this scheme in a different way. I say to members opposite, I say to the Australian people, that if we want a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme now, this is the fairest way to have it.

I also say to the representatives of big business who spoke out yesterday that the coalition does have a plan—a prudent, fiscally responsible plan to get the nation’s finances under control. First, we will pay off Labor’s debt, then we will reduce personal taxes and then we will reduce general taxes. We would like to be able, in the medium term, to reduce company tax so that this levy constitutes only a temporary increase in the taxation even of big business. If we are going to have a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme, it has to be funded. Everything has to be funded, and if this scheme is going to happen any time soon, this is the best way for it to be done. It has to be funded by business because if it is not funded by business it is not fair dinkum parental leave. It has to be funded by business generally because if it is funded by particular businesses on the basis of the leave taken by their own staff, it will inevitably discriminate against younger women who do not deserve to be discriminated against in the workforce, and it has to be funded by big business because big business has the greater capacity to pay. This coalition that I lead will never be party to anything which involves discrimination against the employment prospects of younger women or anything that involves putting an added burden on small business, which is the economic engine room of this country.
The scheme that the coalition put forward yesterday is pro-family, because it takes the pressure off the budgets of tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of families every year; it is pro-women because it gives them the real choice that they have not had in the absence of a fair dinkum scheme; it is pro-children because it acknowledges the real cost of having children and acknowledges the real need that children have, particularly newborns, to bond with their parents; and it is pro-small business because, effectively, larger business will be paying for the parental leave costs of small business and for the first time many women will have the opportunity to be employed by small business because they will have their parental leave met under this scheme. It is actually pro-big business too, in the long run, because if we have more people, and we should have higher fertility with a scheme such as this, big business will have larger markets and we will have a higher participation under this scheme and higher participation means a much more productive economy.

There has been a lot of talk in this parliament over the last few months about the demographic destiny Australia faces of an ageing population, a situation where we will have not five employed people to pay for every person on benefits but just 2½. There are three keys to avoiding the so-called demographic time bomb. The first is a higher population, the second is higher participation and the third is higher productivity. This scheme that the coalition announced yesterday is absolutely central to achieving two of those three things. If we have a meaningful, fair dinkum paid parental leave system we will have greater participation by women in our economy and we will also have higher productivity because women who have been in the workforce will be able to stay in the workforce, and they are some of the most productive workers we have.

This is a visionary scheme. What we saw from members opposite today was the carping of small-minded men and women who know that they have been trumped by something that is truly visionary. What we had from those opposite today was almost ludicrous talk of this 1.7 per cent levy on total company incomes over $5 million somehow leading to artificial avoidance, as if a 1.7 per cent difference in a rate is going to lead to massive avoidance—and these are people who have personal income tax rates varying from about 15 per cent to something like 45 per cent. Then we were told that the fluctuations in income were somehow going to make this scheme administratively possible, as if people’s incomes do not fluctuate all the time and as if people and companies and the government that rely on tax revenue cannot cope. It is as if those on the other side are supporting a flat rate of tax for everyone, because that is the only thing that prevents tax minimisation schemes and revenue fluctuations.

Then we heard that there had been insufficient consultation—the charge of insufficient consultation from a government whose cabinet ministers come into the room and are told that some star chamber has decided already what is going to happen to their submissions and the charge of lack of consultation from a Prime Minister who announces health reform to the premiers who are necessary to its carriage with a take-it-or-leave-it letter an hour before he gets up to announce the reform. That is a joke. Then there was the accusation that there was no detail from a government which is proposing a $30 billion health reform, almost none of which can be detailed at this point in time—from a government that is experimenting with the health of Australians.

This is a very important new policy from the coalition, but it is certainly not the last word from us when it comes to helping fami-
lies. We are the party of Australian families. We are the party that has helped Australian families. We were the best friend of Australian families in government—we were, we are and we will be again. This is outstanding policy and I challenge members opposite—

(Time expired)

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (4.08 pm)—I think the one thing that the Leader of the Opposition got right just then in this matter of public importance debate was that this is not going to be the last word we hear from him. We know it is not going to be the last word because a month ago he said that he would not be increasing taxes to fund policy promises. Now he wants to introduce a tax to raise $2.7 billion to pay for his latest thought bubble. So you are dead right about one thing, Leader of the Opposition: we know this will not be the last word. In a month’s time we will have another backflip from you. We know that this Leader of the Opposition has absolutely no consistency not just on the issue of tax but fundamentally on the whole question of paid parental leave. We can go back to the time when he was a minister in the Howard government. Back in 2002 he said:

I am dead against paid maternity leave as a compulsory thing.

He went on to say:

I think that making businesses pay what seems to them two wages to get one worker. Almost nothing could be more calculated to make businesses feel that the odds are stacked against them.

I think that really says, in a rather convoluted way, that he is against it. He was against paid maternity leave then. He said then—and this has become the famous quote from him: ‘Compulsory paid maternity leave, over this government’s dead body. Frankly it won’t happen under this government,’ and, of course, it did not. When they were in government, for 12 years they had the opportunity to stand up for families in the way that he just described in his flowery language, but we know who the real Tony Abbott is. This is all about him trying to say to Australian women that he really is their friend.

Australian women, Mr Abbott, are a wake-up to you. They know that this is a complete and total sham from the Liberal Party—no detail at all, no timing. We have heard nothing about when this is going to be introduced. We have nothing from the shadow Treasurer—who I gather did not know anything about this policy—about when this great new tax is going to be introduced. When is it going to be introduced, Joe? When are we going to see this great big tax from the Liberal Party? This is the great new tax from the opposition—a $2.7 billion tax. That is what this is about.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Ms MACKLIN—Oh, it is now temporary. This is a new development in the policy. The policy changes every minute. As the Leader of the Opposition said at the end of his remarks, this will not be the last word. He is just making changes as he goes along. It is a levy; it is a tax. Some people like the shadow minister, the member for Murray, say it is not even a tax or a levy; it is something to do with human capital. Goodness knows what she was thinking when she was asked that question. What everybody out there in Australia, and every business person, knows is that this is a new tax. It is already a broken promise from the Leader of the Opposition, who said that he would not introduce any new taxes. As he said to Neil Mitchell, ‘No, no, we will go to the election campaign, Neil, with a list of promises, a list of commitments, and we will fund them without new or increased taxes.’ Was this said 10 years ago or even one year ago? No,
on 3 February 2010, the Leader of the Oppos-
iton said ‘No new taxes, no increased
taxes’. Here we are just a month later with a
massive new tax of $2.7 billion to be paid by
companies, who will then pass it on to con-
sumers.

In contrast to the ramble from the Leader
of the Opposition, who basically cannot be
believed on this issue of paid parental leave,
what we have from the government is a very
detailed and carefully worked out proposal.
As I said in question time, when we came to
government we asked the Productivity
Commission to conduct a major inquiry into
support for parents with newborn children
and they delivered a very substantial piece of
work. It was the result of a considerable
number of consultations and submissions
that they received from businesses, unions
and many families who talked to them about
the type of support that they wanted when
they have their babies.

We announced that the government would
commit itself to the first national paid paren-
tal leave scheme in this country, and we
made the announcement in the budget. I
gather that the Leader of the Opposition had
a bit of trouble finding the reference to this
in the budget. Just in case he is still having
trouble finding the reference, the Leader
of the Opposition might like to know that it
was actually in Budget Paper No. 2, on page 236.

By contrast to those opposite, who think
that they can just deliver a major policy in a
few sheets of paper, we have based our pol-
cy on this very substantive piece of work
that the Productivity Commission did for us.
The shadow minister is maligning the Pro-
ductivity Commission and does not seem to
have actually read the recommendations of
the Productivity Commission. Right at the
front it says:

**Key points**

- The Australian Government’s statutory paid
  parental leave scheme should be taxpayer-
  funded, and should:

  - provide paid postnatal leave for a total of 18
    weeks that can be shared by eligible parents, with
    an additional two weeks of paternity leave re-
    served for the father … who shares in the daily
    primary care of the child

**Dr Stone**—With business making up the
rest.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE
Burke)**—The member for Murray will get
her turn later—or not.

**Ms MACKLIN**—Plainly she has not read
this. It goes on:

  … provide the adult federal minimum wage (cur-
  rently $543.78) for each week of leave for those
  eligible, with benefits subject to normal taxation.

The government is introducing a statutory
paid parental leave scheme, taxpayer funded—

**Mr Hockey**—Taxpayer funded!

**Ms MACKLIN**—fully funded in the
budget, with no extra tax on companies of
$2.7 billion, which the shadow Treasurer
must now have signed up to.

**Mr Hockey interjecting**—

**Ms MACKLIN**—Oh no. He laughs at
this, so maybe that is not true. Maybe the
shadow Treasurer still has not signed up to
the $2.7 billion tax. Maybe they have not
signed up to it yet. The shadow Treasurer
plainly did not know anything about this
proposal. It has not gone to cabinet. The fi-
nance spokesperson did not know anything
about it either.

The government is delivering on the key
recommendations of the Productivity Com-
mision report for a taxpayer funded scheme
of 18 weeks at the federal minimum wage.
The legislation is being drafted now and will
come into the parliament shortly.
Ms Bird—Will they support it?

Ms MACKLIN—The question for the opposition is exactly that: will they support the government’s scheme—which has been carefully worked out, with the advice of the Productivity Commission? Will the opposition provide support to make sure that parents have some certainty and that businesses also have certainty about the introduction of this very important scheme?

Parents right now are thinking about having a baby, bringing a new child into their family, and they want certainty. They want to know whether or not, on 1 January next year, there will be a paid parental leave scheme introduced. The government’s scheme will be introduced into the parliament shortly. The question for the Leader of the Opposition and those opposite is: will they provide certainty to Australian families so that they know that they will get a paid parental leave scheme, which those opposite were never prepared to deliver when they were in government?

Mr Hockey—What about the baby bonus? The baby bonus doesn’t exist anymore!

Ms MACKLIN—I am very pleased that the shadow Treasurer has raised the baby bonus, because this was actually a subject on the Alan Jones program today. I am so pleased that the shadow Treasurer has introduced the whole question of the baby bonus, because not only are those opposite making policy on the run on paid parental leave; they are also making policy on the run on the baby bonus—the other form of support for mothers who have new babies. Alan Jones said:

You’re removing the ceiling that the Rudd government put, a ceiling of $150,000, so the baby bonus is available to all women who have babies. Tony Abbott: Well, well, what I’m talking about at the moment is paid parental leave. I’m not re-

visiting, at this point in time, the government’s decision to put a means test on the baby bonus.

Alan Jones: I thought you said you’d scrapped that yesterday.

Well, so did we, but of course that was last week’s policy. Now we are into a new week and a new policy from those opposite—once again, policy on the run, just endless thought bubbles coming out of those opposite. They certainly cannot be trusted when it comes to paid parental leave. They cannot be trusted with other family tax benefit policy. They cannot be trusted with the baby bonus—all of these issues, different positions, different policies, different places. Australian families deserve so much better than that.

Of course, it is a Rudd Labor government that is going to deliver the first paid parental leave scheme to this country. You had the opportunity when you were in government to introduce paid parental leave, but you did not want to do it. In fact, the current Leader of the Opposition said he was dead against it. He said it would be over his dead body. Now, somehow, parents are supposed to believe what he says—that he somehow has had a complete transformation and that somehow he is actually supporting paid parental leave. Australian parents are not going to be conned. They are not going to be conned by this latest thought bubble from the Leader of the Opposition.

Not one business group supports it. Plainly they were not consulted. Not one business group was consulted. We have had the Business Council of Australia, ACCI, the Australian Industry Group—all of these people—are there making absolutely clear that they think that this latest thought bubble from the Leader of the Opposition just is not serious. They know that the truth about this is that it just is not serious. It cannot be believed. It has a massive new tax at the centre of it. It has absolutely no detail and no tim-
We have no idea when this is going to be put in place. We have no idea whatsoever when the tax will apply. Some people in the opposition call it a tax and some do not call it a tax. Some people—they include, of course, the economic spokesperson opposite—have no idea how many companies it is going to apply to.

There are so many questions that remain unanswered, because it is all about policy on the run. We have seen all of the main media commentators today showing us what it absolutely is: policy on the run. It is a complete sham, and Australian parents know exactly that. They know that the Leader of the Opposition cannot be trusted when it comes to family policy. This government will deliver the first national paid parental leave scheme in this country. It is what parents deserve. They deserve nothing less.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (4.23 pm)—Oh, Jenny; how you have sold your soul! One would have thought that a left-wing member of the Labor Party would have welcomed the opportunity to remove discrimination against women in the workforce. You would have thought the same of Tanya, the member for Sydney. How welcome this initiative should be to remove the in-built discrimination against women in the workforce! Under our proposal, businesses will no longer have a significant financial disincentive to employ women.

Overwhelmingly, women are the ones who take parental leave. Overwhelmingly, women are the ones who take time off to care for a newborn child. Every business during the course of employment ultimately considers behind closed doors the potential costs associated with turnover of staff and maternity leave payments. Under our scheme, whether you are BHP with a small proportion of women workers or you are Woolworths or Coles with a very large proportion of female workers, you are treated exactly the same and there will be a financial incentive to put in place mechanisms that treat women as the equal of men.

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

Ms Macklin—It is a sham, Joe.

Mr HOCKEY—I say to the cowiring members of the government—the ones who are so loud; the plethora of left-wingers who are parading as neocons today—that they should understand that this is an opportunity to address what has been a structural flaw in the economy for some time. This government has been talking for months and months, and the Prime Minister has been talking for years, about improving productivity. But what has the Prime Minister done about it? Nothing. He has done nothing about improving productivity. The government brought forward the Intergenerational report two years in order to say, ‘We are going to do something about the economy and about productivity.’ The three key aspects of the Intergenerational report are population, participation and productivity in order to drive an increase in real GDP. This government’s solution is to say, ‘We’ll have a big Australia with 36 million people.’ I am just not sure that Australians are willing to embrace it. Do you know why they are not willing to embrace it? They are worried that the next generation of Australians are going to inherit a lesser quality of life than that which we have if the population goes to 36 million.

If you want to know how you can improve GDP growth and participation, I can tell you that one of the ways to do it immediately is to encourage people—those people who have been trained and educated at great cost to the economy—to get back into the workforce and to give them a real incentive to stay in employment. As my leader today enunciated in this place, there is a significant dropout by women once they have a child. One of the
things that we need to bear in mind is that, if we want to improve the participation rate in Australia, we have to encourage women to come back to the workforce. One of the ways to do that is to have a generous parental payment scheme that puts in place a mechanism that ensures that those people, if they have a second child, a third child or even, happily, a fourth child or more, will have an opportunity not to be financially punished for having a child. That is what this is about. On no issue in the last two years have I been more convinced than on this issue. I will tell you why. It is because for so long I have worked and fought against discrimination against women in the workforce.

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY—I have always believed in that.

Ms Macklin—For how long?

Mr HOCKEY—The louder they are, the more embarrassed they are about the fact that they are trying to oppose a policy such as this. We came to the conclusion that, if we were going to do something about the structural challenge facing the Australian economy over the medium and long term, we had to do something about participation rates and we had to do something about productivity. Here is a policy that does not discriminate against the fast-growing employment centres of small business or against businesses that are generous in their maternity leave payments to women today. Significantly, this is a policy that removes the structural discrimination against the employment of women. You receive the opportunity to continue to have financial security for the six months immediately after the birth of a child—an incentive to keep going—and, at the same time, the cost to Australia is borne by the slightly more than 3,000 companies that are the biggest company taxpayers in the country. We are talking about the biggest company taxpayers in the country—for example, BHP, Rio, the Commonwealth Bank, National Australia Bank, ANZ, Westpac, Telstra and Optus. These are the biggest company taxpayers in the country. We are saying that we are going to increase, as a levy, the contribution of those companies so that we can put in place a structural change that will deliver greater participation in the workforce and, significantly, will grow the economy—and, as it grows the economy, it will pay for itself and the benefits will flow.

The hypocrisy of the Labor Party is once again writ large. It is writ large when they talk about ‘funding promises’. Oh my goodness! You remember the $1 billion computers in schools program that is now $2.2 billion and the Julia Gillard memorial halls that were $14.3 billion and are now $16 billion. How about the blow-out in Medicare—$1.4 billion? How about pharmaceutical expenses—a blow-out of $1.8 billion? How about the Labor Party’s $150 million solar panels program that is now $1 billion? Hello! There are no interjections now!

Government members interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY—The National Broadband Network—what a cracker that was! Wasn’t the National Broadband Network going to be $4.7 billion? Now it is $43 billion. Oops! That is an Ian Thorpe ‘Oops’. What happened to it? What happened to those tens of billions of dollars? And, by the way, what about the great iconic moment when the now Prime Minister said, with his hand on his heart, in those ads with Brisbane as a backdrop, ‘My fellow Australians, I am a fiscal conservative’? Well, in those days we used to have budget surpluses. In those days, we actually had money in the bank. What happened to those days? The $30 billion deficit—seven years of deficits—to fund one-quarter of negative growth. ‘And, by the
way, sometime in the 2020s we will manage to pay off that debt.’

Kevin Rudd will never deliver a surplus budget. Kevin Rudd will never pay off Labor’s debt. Ultimately, the buck stops not with the Prime Minister—in his own words—but with taxpayers. That is what Labor does, writ large. Labor spends and says: ‘It comes out of this tree. It falls from the tree like the leaves in autumn. The money comes down and we will scoop it up and we will dish it out to the poor.’ Well, it does not quite work like that. Money has real value. The money that comes in is taxpayers’ money. It is not Kevin Rudd’s money, and thank God it is not Wayne Swan’s money. It is actually real money. We are saying: if you want to grow the tree into a forest, if you want to grow the economy, you have to invest. When you invest, Australia reaps the rewards. Our policy is costed, it is funded, it is real and it removes discrimination. The louder the Labor Party protests, the more I am convinced this is a damn good policy.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DS Vale)—I call the Minister for the Status of Women.

Mr Simpkins—How many houses have you built, Tanya?

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women) (4.33 pm)—We have more than 8,000 underway at the moment. Thanks very much for asking. What an extraordinary question.

It is great to have this opportunity to talk about paid parental leave. I went to see Alice in Wonderland with the kids on the weekend, and it feels like I am still there. The only thing that is missing here is the 3-D glasses. We had the Red Queen, the member for Indi, talking earlier about big business and how appalling big business is and how they should be punished with greater taxes. It is like everything has turned upside down. And just then we had the member for North Sydney, the shadow Treasurer. The character he probably reminded me of most was the Cheshire Cat, because he would sort of start off on one train of thought over here and then disappear suddenly and turn up here on the National Broadband Network or on something else—I do not even remember where he went.

He went through the discussion of whether the Prime Minister was a fiscal conservative. We certainly know who is not a fiscal conservative. We know that the shadow Treasurer is not a fiscal conservative. We know that the shadow finance minister is not a fiscal conservative. We know most of all that the Leader of the Opposition is not a fiscal conservative, because every time a thought pops into his head he makes some half-hearted announcement, some uncosted, unfunded announcement that sometime in the future, perhaps, they are going to levy something—I do not know whether we are describing it as a ‘temporary levy’ now or as a ‘new tax’. Is it a temporary levy? Oh, it is a tax, because the shadow finance minister said it was a tax today. They are going to levy that sometime in the future. We are not sure when. There is no start date for this. There are people out there now considering whether they will have a family next year. They do not know whether they will benefit from this policy that has been floated by the opposition. We know that they are not fiscal conservatives.

It was extraordinary to hear the shadow Treasurer talk about the structural inequalities in the Australian workplace. Wow! Where did those inequalities come from? After 12 years in government, yes, there have been structural inequalities in the Australian workplace. There have been structural inequalities in the Australian workplace for years, as the shadow Treasurer said. He very
conveniently neglected to say how many years he was talking about. The other extraordinary thing the shadow Treasurer said in his disjointed comments was that this is a scheme that pays for itself because of increased workforce participation. I reckon that there have been women in the Australian community for decades saying that paid parental leave will pay for itself because of increased productivity over time. They were saying it every single day of the previous 12 years of the coalition government. They were knocking on John Howard’s door, they were knocking on Tony Abbott’s door, they were knocking on Joe Hockey’s door, they were knocking on Barnaby Joyce’s door, they were probably even knocking on Sharman Stone’s door and they were saying, ‘It is an outrage that Australia is one of only two developed countries in the whole of the Western world that has no paid parental leave scheme.’ Women and men in the Australian community have been saying for years that it is wrong socially, it is wrong for babies, it is wrong for mothers, it is wrong for families—and—guess what—it is wrong for the Australian economy and for the Australian workplace not to have this benefit available to families.

And what did Labor do? On coming to government we said immediately that we would provide this paid parental leave scheme. We asked the Productivity Commission to examine the best way of doing this to allow maximum benefit for babies, for families, for mothers and fathers, and for business. The Productivity Commission undertook extensive consultation right across the country. They talked to business leaders, community members and families about what they need in their lives, and they came up with a very sensible proposal. It was a proposal that this government was prepared to back with a fully funded, fully costed scheme that would, absolutely guaranteed, be introduced from January next year—unless, of course, the opposition vote against it. We do not know yet whether they are going to vote for the paid parental leave scheme that they know is a commitment of this Labor government.

Ms Macklin—You can tell us, Sharman, in your remarks.

Ms PLIBERSEK—It would be terrific if the shadow minister were to confirm, in her remarks, that the opposition will be backing this paid parental leave scheme that the government has proposed. Now let us just say that sometime in the future, in years to come, Tony Abbott does become Prime Minister. He would be able at that stage to introduce a different, expanded paid parental leave scheme should he wish to. But I will tell you what: there are Australian families out there now trying to work out how they are going to pay the mortgage next year if they have a baby. If the Labor scheme, the government’s scheme—

Dr Stone interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK—Oh, the minimum wage is not good enough to pay for people’s rent or mortgage! There are a lot of people who are surviving on the minimum wage, and you fought every increase in the minimum wage when you were in government. Every increase in the minimum wage was opposed by the previous government—and now you are saying it is not enough for people to pay the mortgage or the rent. It might have been worth remembering that when you opposed increases to the minimum wage at every opportunity you got.

Let us talk a little bit about the record of the opposition when it comes to Work Choices. It was fascinating to hear the questions today from members of the opposition who were asking, ‘How are these people on middle wages going to survive when they are on paid parental leave?’ When they were in
government, did they ever take the opportunity to improve people’s pay and conditions? Every single change they made was detrimental to the interests of workers, particularly low- and middle-income workers. Let us think a little bit about what happened under Work Choices and AWAs. Sixty-three per cent of AWAs cut penalty rates, 52 per cent cut shift work loadings, 51 per cent cut overtime loadings, 48 per cent cut monetary allowances, 46 per cent cut public holiday pay, 40 per cent cut rest breaks, 36 per cent cut declared public holidays and 22 per cent provided workers with no pay rise—some for up to five years. It is worth remembering, isn’t it, what happened when they were in government and the record that they have for delivering worse pay and worse conditions than previously.

Dr Stone interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK—The shadow minister is defending Work Choices because it is actually Liberal Party policy to reintroduce it. We know that. They might change the name, because the name does not poll very well, but they are not going to change the policy, are they? Women working full-time on AWAs took home on average $87.40 less per week than their colleagues working on collective agreements.

Ms Macklin—That was equal!

Ms PLIBERSEK—It was very good, wasn’t it? The former minister over there is very proud of that record. Women working on AWAs in casual jobs earn $94 per week less than women on collective agreements—another proud moment for the Howard Liberal government. Do you remember the examples of AWAs that we had? There were workers at Chili’s Restaurant in Wollongong who had to pay out of their own pockets if a customer left without paying their bill. Sixteen-year-old Amber Oswald, who worked for Pow Juice, was presented with an AWA that dropped her hourly pay rate from $9.52 to $8.57 and abolished her penalty rates altogether—sign up or lose your hours. Remember Spotlight’s Annette Harris? She was told that she was going to lose shift penalties and other benefits worth $90 a week in return for a pay rise of 2c an hour. Do you remember the six mums from the mushroom farm who were sacked after they refused to sign up to AWAs with a 25 per cent pay cut?

When we hear this concern for the working women of Australia, I do not believe it, and I will tell you what: the working women of Australia do not believe it, because they remember your record in government.

Dr STONE (Murray) (4.43 pm)—Australia and the United States are, shamefully, the last two countries to introduce mandated paid parental leave. Therefore you would think that, when Labor introduced their paid parental leave policy in May 2009, there would have been universal rejoicing in this country. You would think that there would have been full-page ads from the unions. You would think that there would have been women, children and family advocates popping champagne corks around the country. Instead, there was an eerie silence. There was embarrassment. There were shamed faces and there was mass disappointment amongst those who had put in a careful submission to the Productivity Commission, who had begged Labor to present a paid parental leave policy that would make a difference for families who wanted to have children and maintain their careers.

In fact Labor ignored the advice of the Productivity Commission, international experience and the pleas of families. What did it produce? A cheapskate, miserable 18 weeks of paid parental leave at the minimum wage. You are actually being encouraged to take out a calculator to see if you would be better off remaining on a baby bonus pay-
it depends when you have your baby—than taking Labor’s new paid parental leave option. That is how cheapskate and mean-spirited Labor’s policy proposal is. Since it is such a miserable, cheapskate scheme costing only $280 million for a year, why is it not coming in until 2011, after the election? Because I do not think anybody in the Labor Party wanted the public really to focus on what their paid parental leave consisted of. You are ashamed and the public out there are disappointed.

The coalition have said: ‘Enough is enough. We have to have a paid parental leave scheme which gives families the opportunity to have children and for the primary carer to take six months off work but still be able to pay the mortgage.’ That is not the case under Labor’s policy. Can you imagine a teacher, a nurse or someone else on the average Australian wage asking: can I survive with our $200,000 to $300,000 mortgage, on average, with a huge drop in income over six months—Labor offers only four months, of course—on the minimum wage? It is simply not on. We would see primary carers in families unable to take up parental leave. We do not think that is good enough for this country, so we have offered six months paid parental leave at a person’s wage, up to a salary of $150,000.

Advocates of big business might be out there saying, ‘We don’t like that,’ but why are we surprised? Big business has stood apart from paid parental leave and have refused to offer it, except in a very small proportion of cases, for women in the workforce, so why would it now be embracing the notion that we would extend paid parental leave across the economy to all families and asking it to make a contribution if they have a business taxable income of over $5 million? We are not surprised at the way the business sector has responded—that is, the big business sector. Let me tell you how a microbusinesswoman has responded. Anita Tuttle is a fantastic small business woman with a great little hairdressing business called The Barber Shop in Corio Street, Shepparton.

Ms Plibersek—Will she get it if she’s self-employed?

Dr Stone—Of course she will. Listen up! Indeed, in your program she would not have had superannuation. Anita is in her early 20s and has one employee. Under our scheme she will be able to have her income replaced for six months, which means that she will be able to continue to employ her one employee and she will be able to keep her business open. When she looked at Labor’s policy she said, ‘I can’t have a second child.’ She had to work up to the day before she went into labour with her first child and she went back to work after five days. She could not afford to take more time under Labor’s policy, nor could she afford to keep her other worker in place on the minimum wage. Under our scheme, Aneeta will be able to continue her small business, she will be able to continue to pay her employee and she will, in fact, encourage her employee to start her family. That is the way it should be. That is the way it will be under the coalition. We commend Labor to rethink their policy.

(Time expired)

Ms Jackson (Hasluck) (4.48 pm)—I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate. This morning I was interested to note some of the comments of members of the opposition as they came in through the Parliament House doors. On Sky News a member of the Leader of the Opposition’s own team, the member for Fadden, when trying to explain the Leader of the Opposition’s backflip on paid parental leave and his broken promise on no new taxes, said:

Tony Abbott has been on a journey …
I guess my question is: to where and on what substance? It certainly is a substantial change—

Mr Cheeseman—More like a trip.

Ms JACKSON—Quite a trip! It is quite a change in policy from the Leader of the Opposition and almost as big a joke, frankly, as the shadow Treasurer trying to lecture us on economics. This is a party that had 12 long years in government to truly value women’s participation in the workforce. Whilst I know there are many women members of the Liberal Party who would like to see a substantial improvement in and a recognition of the value of women’s work, it is fair to say that, if we look at the evidence of the last decade or more, the position of women in fact went backwards. I know this from recently having chaired an inquiry into pay equity and matters associated with women’s participation in the workforce where we had 150 or more submissions over 29 public hearings and 17 months consideration of what actions we should take as a government to improve the position of women.

In terms of the previous government’s record, I know that they were criticised for abolishing the Affirmative Action Agency, one of the agencies that had been committed to advancing women’s employment status; that they were criticised for relegating the Women’s Interests portfolio from Prime Minister and Cabinet to the portfolio of family and children’s services; and that they oversaw the introduction of Work Choices and other employment policies that saw the rights and living conditions of many women workers go backwards. For me, of greatest concern was that the gender pay gap widened.

So much of our life is involved with work, whether working for someone or for ourselves. One constant—at least until the Howard government’s so-called Work Choices legislation—was the minimum award safety net. No matter what type of employment arrangement you were in, there were legal minimum payments below which it was unlawful to go. Of course, Work Choices changed that. We know from question time today and from the Howard government’s own review of AWAs in May 2006 that under AWAs 64 per cent cut annual leave loading, 63 per cent cut penalty rates, 52 per cent cut shift work loadings, 51 per cent cut overtime loadings and 48 per cent cut monetary allowances.

I referred earlier to the inquiry that led to the Making it fair report of the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations. I am sad to say that, of the 63 recommendations in that report, only some, not all, were supported by members of the opposition. But I am pleased to see what appears to be a change of heart. I would say that, if people had listened to or read the submissions, they would know that there are many changes occurring in the workforce, particularly towards the participation of women. Many are being initiated, especially by large companies, and many people are trying to attack the barriers to women’s greater participation in the workforce. Frankly, it is a much broader issue than simply that of paid parental leave.

I am disappointed that today there was no reference made to changes in child care. There was no reference made to flexible working hours and the new right that women have under the Fair Work Act to request part-time work. There were no comments other than, I think, from the shadow minister for the status of women about pay equity, an issue I know she is passionate about. There was no discussion of the need for greater professional development and training, and there was nothing in any of the presentations today about the discrimination that we still need to address in the workforce.
The Rudd government is determined to make real progress in advancing the status of women in the workplace and we are leading by example, with women occupying and excelling in many of the most senior positions in the government. I know that there is further work to be done but I look forward to—hopefully with this new change of heart—some bipartisan support for the recommendations of the Making it fair report so that we can genuinely begin to tackle and properly value women’s participation in the workforce. *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DS Vale)—Order! The discussion has now concluded.

NATIONAL CONSUMER CREDIT PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL 2010
NATIONAL HEALTH SECURITY AMENDMENT (BACKGROUND CHECKING) BILL 2009
INTERNATIONAL TAX AGREEMENTS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2009
AVIATION TRANSPORT SECURITY AMENDMENT (2009 MEASURES No. 2) BILL 2009
AUSTRALIAN ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY BILL 2009
AUSTRALIAN ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY (TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS) BILL 2009

Returned from the Senate

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

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND GIFTS) BILL 2008

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 and has agreed to the amendments made by the House in place of them.

STATUTE LAW REVISION BILL 2010
NATIONAL CONSUMER CREDIT PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL 2010
EDUCATION SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS AMENDMENT (RE-REGISTRATION OF PROVIDERS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010

Assent

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

SPEAKER’S PANEL

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Pursuant to standing order 17, I lay on the table my warrant revoking the nomination of the honourable member for Barker and nominating the honourable member for Grey 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.

COMMITTEES

National Capital and External Territories Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER—I have received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip that he has nominated Mr Johnson to be a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories in place of Mr Secker.

Mr BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (4.55 pm)—by leave—I move:

That Mr Secker be discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories and that, in his place, Mr Johnson be appointed a member of the committee.
Question agreed to.

FISHERIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Report from Main Committee

Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (4.56 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 BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (4.56 pm)—I move:

That order of the day No. 1, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 24 February, on motion by Mr Brendan O’Connor:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (4.57 pm)—I rise to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2010, which will strengthen the existing child sex tourism offence regime and make amendments to child sex offences committed outside Australia. I welcome the fact that the bill also introduces new offences for steps leading up to the actual sexual activity with a child. The coalition has previously called for a strengthening of the current system.

Sexual offences against children are an extremely serious and growing problem that affects children themselves as well as their families in Australia and in every country in the world. The Child Wise website reports that over the past two decades trafficking in human beings has reached epidemic proportions and that no country is immune, estimating that one-third of the world’s human trafficking takes place in Asia and that 30 per cent of the victims are children. Sex trafficking is one of the largest forms, with the majority of victims being young women between the ages of 12 and 18. The site also notes that between 50 and 80 per cent of the children rescued from brothels in parts of South-East Asia are infected with HIV.

Accurate statistics and the full extent of child sex trafficking are impossible to calculate because it is an illicit trade. The United Nations in 2003 estimated that 1.2 million children are trafficked annually around the world and that one million children—the majority of whom are girls—become part of the commercial sex trade every year. Some are as young as five years old. I also note that World Vision states that an estimated two million children are enslaved in the global commercial sex trade. The physical and mental effects on the child involved can and do last a lifetime. They are wounded physically and emotionally and, as I said earlier, many have HIV and AIDS. Depending on their background and nationality, many will experience rejection by their families as well as their communities, in addition to abject fear, immeasurable shame and absolute despair.

The coalition is committed to strengthening the existing child sex tourism offence regime. In 2005 the coalition government
enacted a range of offences directed at the use of a carriage service, such as the internet or a mobile phone, used for the exploitation of children. But the challenge for the Australian Federal Police, the state police and various law enforcement agencies is that the rapidly and constantly advancing technologies, the anonymity, the speed and the international coverage of the internet and the involvement of organised crime groups are now providing unprecedented opportunities for child sex offenders and online grooming of children by sexual predators. This bill will see the introduction of new offences for using a postal service for child sex related activity, increasing the coverage of offences for using a carriage service for sexual activity with a child or for child pornography or child abuse material, and a new scheme to provide for the forfeiture of child pornography and child abuse material and items containing such material.

In 1994 new Commonwealth offences were enacted to target Australians who engaged in the sexual abuse of children overseas. The events have extraterritorial application which, of course, means that Australian citizens, residents and bodies corporate can be prosecuted even if they commit these offences whilst overseas. To put it simply, as the Australian Federal Police states very clearly:

It is a crime for Australian Citizens or Permanent Residents to engage in, facilitate or benefit from sexual activity with children (under 16 years of age) whilst overseas. These offences carry penalties of up to 17 years imprisonment for individuals and up to $500,000 in fines for companies.

Such offences have provisions applying that enable offences committed overseas to be investigated and prosecuted within Australia itself. The Australian Federal Police actively monitors and prosecutes child sex tourists, often resulting in significant jail sentences. Through the Bali Process the AFP also provides training to law enforcement agencies within the region to help combat child sex tourism and related offences. I saw this very appropriate quote on the World Vision website:

Abuse a child in this country; go to jail in yours.

Possessing, producing or distributing child pornography material or child abuse material within Australia, or unlawfully importing such material into Australia, is currently a criminal offence by Commonwealth, state and Territory offences. However, these existing child pornography and child abuse material offences do not have extraterritorial effects with many countries not having effective laws that prohibit child pornography and child abuse material or lack the capacity to actually enforce them. This means that an Australian could travel overseas and make or purchase child pornography or child abuse material and escape punishment even though the very same behaviour, if committed in Australia or through the internet, would be a serious criminal offence. Part 1 will introduce new offences for possessing, controlling, producing, distributing or obtaining child pornography or child abuse material outside Australia.

My involvement with the member for Riverina in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications inquiry into cybercrime has highlighted for the member for Riverina, me and others on the committee, the very serious and growing role the cyber environment is providing for sexual predators, for cyber bullying and for cyber tourism offenders. A study conducted last year by AVG found that Australia had the highest incidence of cybercrime in the world, with more than 39 per cent of Australian users having experienced cybercrime compared to 32 per cent in Italy and 28 per cent in the US. To ensure that internet related child sexual exploitation is comprehensively covered
in the light of such rapidly changing technology and the anonymity that the internet provides, this bill will make a range of amendments to ensure that the Commonwealth carriage service offence regime reflects modern offending, such as offending on mobile phones and the internet. These enable the more recent practice of ‘live’ internet child abuse and child sex tourism.

A 2004 study entitled Broken promises, shattered dreams: a profile of child trafficking found that a disproportionate number of these young people come from an ethnic minority background. Forty-five per cent of trafficking victims have never been to school or only partially completed primary school. Most of the girls who make up the 60 per cent of trafficking victims come from rural areas in their countries. One issue, however, is what impact these provisions have right across Australia. In my regional and rural electorate of Forrest, children constantly use the internet as a source of communication, particularly with friends and relatives who often live either close by in metropolitan areas or anywhere where they have friends. Furthermore, regional areas tend to have, in some instances, a more relaxed social atmosphere. At times you can be quite trusting of members of the local community with your children. You rely on this often in a sporting environment. I am concerned, really, that the combination of children in regional areas in a trusting environment and their constant use of the internet for social interaction may well lead them to becoming a target for predatory online sex offenders.

Whilst awareness and recognition of child pornography has increased over the past two decades, this emotive issue is, unfortunately, far too common in Australia and worldwide. I am aware that some Australians do travel overseas to sexually exploit children, as do other international travellers who are totally focussed on simply taking advantage of prostituted children. As stated by World Vision, some engage in actual sex tourism, expecting the anonymity I referred to earlier, the low-cost prostitution, the easily accessible children and the potential immunity from prosecution. I commend and acknowledge the role of the Australian Federal Police and the state police. I want to thank dedicated people like Mike Hickey from the High Tech Crime Operations section of the AFP and Detective Sergeant Jamie McDonald from the technology crime investigation section of the Western Australian Police.

The AFP annual report of 2008-09 states that 150 people were arrested that year with several operations led by High Tech Crime Operations. Operation Centurion led to the arrest of 138 Australians as result of a referral from the Croatian police via Interpol. Another 22 Australians were arrested during Operation Resistance, which began with a referral from Brazilian authorities and which resulted in the seizure of more than 15,000 videos and 500,000 images of child abuse. The AFP also collaborated with the High Tech Crime Operations area of Child Sex Tourism to facilitate a workshop in Phnom Penh, Cambodia with law enforcement counterparts in the human trafficking arena. The AFP’s work to combat transnational and online child sexual exploitation with international agencies such as Interpol, the FBI and the UK’s Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre is strengthened through membership of the Virtual Global Taskforce. Collaboration with these international partners has seen the AFP identify and charge numerous offenders for child sexual exploitation and child sex tourism offences.

In my state of WA, the AFP works very closely with and has co-located with the Western Australian police to form a joint online child exploitation team. They work collaboratively on Commonwealth and state child protection investigations, and it works
well. Their efforts protect our trusting children and those who are most vulnerable in society. No matter where they are in the world, they are all our children and it should matter to every one of us. They protect the most vulnerable, and I think their wider federal and international efforts should be respected and valued right throughout our communities and within this parliament. Quite often they provide the unseen intervention and they work continuously in an environment where at times they frustratingly witness the sustained abuse of children. I acknowledge and thank them for their dedication.

This bill has been referred to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, which is due to report on 15 March this year. The coalition believes very strongly that protecting children from all forms of predatory sexual offenders and exploitation through child pornography should continue to be a priority for every government.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (5.09 pm)—How sad it is that we should be standing in this chamber raising these disgraceful facts, knowing that Australian men are inflicting such extreme abuse on children. The fact that this bill, the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2010, needs even more strengthening is an indictment of those who would commit crimes against children. The fact that we are strengthening the offences for Australians who are dealing in child pornography and child abuse material overseas is a very good thing, and I congratulate the government for bringing this forward. I note that the purpose of the amendments in part I is to ensure that all behaviour relating to sexual offences against children by Australians within Australia covered by state and territory offences is also criminalised when Australians commit these crimes overseas.
It was that that led me to believe that there is a powerful load of work that the Australian people and the Australian parliament can be involved with in the protection of children. It is sad that not enough men are prosecuted within developing nations purely because families do not have access to legal representation. They cannot afford to acquire legal representation to prosecute somebody who has taken their children from them and sold them into unspeakable acts.

It is a sad occasion. I hope that eventually, when I can spend more time on this issue, we can change the access arrangements. I hope that, from within our AusAID budget and our aid proposals for developing countries and our Asia-Pacific neighbours, we can offer the provision of legal aid to people—to families who have no means of getting food each day for their children, let alone means to acquire legal representation to prosecute somebody who has committed the greatest atrocities on their children. Some day I hope that I can galvanise enough pro bono offers from international lawyers not only from Australia but from other countries interested in the Asia-Pacific and that we can start to make inroads in giving a voice to children in developing countries, where legal representation is clearly not available to them.

In looking at such countries I am very interested in the way in which Cambodia works. When you are in Cambodia you see great big advertisements on the backs of buses saying, ‘Child sex abuse is not acceptable.’ You see warnings on this issue. The government is trying to do the best they possibly can in the interests of the children of Cambodia, but how can the government prevent so much from happening when poverty is so great? It is a fact that human trafficking is the fastest-growing crime in the world, second only to the sale of illegal drugs. That is why they are up against such a major hurdle and obstacle. And this does occur in most countries in the world.

In Cambodia, hundreds of thousands of girls and boys are bought, sold, kidnapped and then forced to have sex with grown men. Many of these men come from Australia. Many of these men come from developed nations and go there purely to commit atrocities on children for their own gratification. The more that we can strengthen our laws to cover international boundaries and the more that we can ensure that Australians will be prosecuted for the crimes that they commit on children in another country, the better it will be.

In looking at the issues that affect those children, we find that many of them are born into poverty and sold for sex. The people who go to places like Cambodia, Indonesia, many of the islands in Indonesia and Thailand, and other developing nations think that they are involved in nothing more than a prostitution ring. They think it is a prostitution process, just an exchange involving prostitution. In fact, they are committing rape of the worst kind: they are committing rape of a child. It is a fact that there is no shortage of children offered for tourists when they go into developing countries.

We often see programs on how, in many countries—for example, in places like Bangkok and Amsterdam—prostitution is widely accepted. It is a multibillion-dollar industry. We assume that prostitution is about consensual adult sex, but the fact is that the business is not about adults. The real business, unfortunately, has come to be the business of sexual predators on children. It is a crime.

I have talked a bit about the parents’ extreme poverty. Parents may sell their children to traffickers in order to pay off debts or to gain some income. They may be deceived. Most times they are deceived, because somebody comes to them and says, ‘We will
put your child into servitude in a house. We will teach them to be housemaids or to mind children’ when in fact most of them end up in the serious situation of sexual servitude in the worst possible places.

I was recently shown a program in which a contrived situation was set up in the US where people were entering into inappropriate conversations with young people on the internet. An entourage of men were turning up to houses where they thought there were young girls and boys, who had stated they were as young as 11 years of age. These men knew exactly what they were there for; they were there to have unlawful sex with young boys and young girls. The program, which might have been Dateline, was able to highlight and expose the many perpetrators of crimes on children in the US. When you go into developing countries the situation is far worse and children literally have no choices.

It is wonderful to see the work that the Australian Federal Police and other units do. As the member for Forrest has explained, the House Standing Committee on Communications is currently conducting an inquiry into cybercrime. We are hearing significant evidence associated with how people are inadvertently attracted on the internet, how young people are exploited and how crimes are committed against young children using the means of the internet.

It has also opened our eyes to how you can be unwittingly harbouring somebody’s graphic internet pornography sites within your own computer and not even know it. Your own home computer could be a botnet for a site that is used for the dissemination and distribution of child pornography. It is a very interesting inquiry indeed and I am sure that every member who is involved in this inquiry is becoming vastly aware of just how dangerous the internet can be. It is a very good tool if it is used in an appropriate and proper way, but it can most certainly be an enormous danger to our children.

This bill specifically talks about the distribution of child pornography and child abuse material overseas. On many occasions, evidence has been heard about the worst of child abuse and child pornography and the worst acts committed on young children—we are talking seriously young children here. This material has been distributed throughout the world to other sick people who think that they have a right to view these profoundly indecent acts on our children. There are hundreds of thousands of children who have been subjected to the most disgraceful acts. We have to put in place stronger and stronger legislation. It is sad that this country of Australia is required to continually try to beat the people who would commit abuse on children. It is an indictment of the people who believe, as I said at the start of my speech, that a baby’s life is nothing more than a commodity for the use of sexually depraved people.

The bill also talks about the means of child trafficking and how this feeds into the whole process of sexual abuse. It has become such a business that—and it has become a little more difficult to get children out and into this arena now because there is a bit more of a watchful eye over it—we are now seeing pregnant women being trafficked across borders. This is because it is easier and the child is safer—it is in utero. The ‘goods’ are in better condition than if they were put in a styrofoam box with a few holes punched in the lid. These children are in better condition when they go in utero in their mum. They are trafficked across the border and then the babies are born. In fact, the speech from the LAWASIA Conference that I referred to earlier described going to a house and finding babies—the mums had given birth and the babies had been payment for debts owed by families. There were other
pregnant women there waiting to give birth and waiting for their child to be given as a payment for a debt in the family. In other cases, the mother had no choice—she had been trafficked herself and had no rights. When we see this type of behaviour and we see the advertisements for, and the hawking on the streets of, virgin children—young virgin children being the product that is sold—then the world really does need to take a good look at itself.

So it is with regret that I think we need to have this type of legislation, but it is with thanks that we are strengthening it. Men travelling from Australia looking to abuse children in other nations are on notice that there are people who will catch them and who will prosecute them. Those men will pay for the acts they are committing on children—and so they should. I stand today to support this bill in its entirety and I say to those who would commit atrocities on children that some day, hopefully, each and every one of you will be caught and each and every one of you will be judged in accordance with the crimes that you have committed.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (5.27 pm)—More than 200 years ago, horrified at what he saw, William Wilberforce stood in the House of Commons denouncing the slave trade. He declared:

So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did its wickedness appear, that my own mind was completely made up for the abolition.

Yet even today, 200 years later, the trade in human lives continues. Unfortunately, today much of it is covert, more dreadful and entirely wicked. Society’s most vulnerable and innocent are victims. Rather than playing, discovering and developing their minds, children worldwide are being sexually exploited for money. UNICEF conservatively estimates that 550,000 children—and I suspect this is just the tip of the iceberg—are at the moment the victims of commercial sexual exploitation. It truly is a horrible business. It is inexcusable that this trade continues, and I have seen firsthand the plight of victims. I was the leader of an Australian delegation, of which the member for Riverina was also a member, to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I commend the member for Riverina for her speech on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2010. She has outlined very well some of the worst of what happens to children in this terrible trade.

While I was leader of the delegation we travelled to Cambodia and we met a child sex victim. This story is repeated many, many thousands of times throughout the world, but one girl’s story has haunted me ever since that visit. At the age of four, not even old enough for preschool, she was sold into a brothel. There she was forced to work, coming in contact with tourists and others. In her teens she contracted HIV. At 19, she had full-blown AIDS. No longer profitable for the brothel, she was tossed into the streets and left to fend for herself—and presumably to die. Thankfully Caritas, the Catholic aid organisation, of which I cannot speak highly enough, working in that country, took this young woman in, along with many others who had suffered a similar fate. With good nutrition and medication, this young lady was thriving, producing craft work for sale and saving and looking forward to a future.

Constituents within my electorate also know the horrendous reality of how vulnerable children can be to trafficking. Norman and Adelia Bernard established the One Heart Association, funding the essential needs of up to 90 orphans in the Sang Khan Buri orphanage on the Myanmar border. They have relayed to me a shocking event, and this happened just recently—in fact, I rang the office of the Minister for Foreign
Affairs last sitting week and asked for a briefing. Due to the violence against the ethnic Karen, the children cross into Thailand, not knowing the fate of their parents. The orphanage is headed by a Buddhist nun, the Venerable Maetchee Pimjai Maneerat, who was recognised as an Outstanding Woman in Buddhism in 2008 for her efforts assisting children, including teaching the children the Thai language.

Six months ago a young man offered to help teach the children at the orphanage as a volunteer and, as you can imagine, his efforts were appreciated by all. Then, early in December, another man visited the orphanage, bringing a gift of one sack of rice. He offered to help the Venerable Maetchee and asked to photograph 10 of the young girls naked. The man was turned away. But on the night of 28 December 2009, nearby villagers saw and reported that a large truck entered the orphanage. It left before the morning light, and in the morning 50 children were missing. The boys and girls were aged between 10 and 16. Three of the missing girls had chosen to become Buddhist nuns. The volunteer teacher was missing as well. Local police were informed of the kidnapping. Village elders agreed to assist in the search. Here in Australia, Norman and Adelia contacted the Foreign Affairs office and the Thai ambassador, and talked to the Catholic Church. The children have vanished without trace. The reality is both appalling and upsetting. Child sex offences are universal but children’s protection, I am sorry to say, is not universal. I do not think that any society has the right to call itself a civil society when it fails to protect the most vulnerable in our community.

I commend this bill as another step towards protecting children, and I only wish that the government could move faster and be tougher. I know that our AFP officers have done an outstanding job, that we have seen some prosecutions and that penalties have been increased. I think one person a couple of years ago was jailed for 25 years. Why do people in this country, who would not want to see their own children or grandchildren or nieces or nephews abused in this country, think they have the right to go overseas to countries where people are poor in order to abuse the children of others? I have no idea what kind of mindset people have. These are husbands, fathers, brothers and sons of people in this country, and it is shocking to think that this still goes on—that they do not necessarily do it here but go overseas to some poor country and exploit the children there. It is truly disgraceful.

In 2007 the former coalition government introduced the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Child Sex Tourism and Related Measures) Bill, with nearly the same measures as those proposed in this bill. Unfortunately the bill lapsed with the proroguing of parliament. Now, over two years later, we have the opportunity to put these measures in place. Commonwealth, state and territory laws currently criminalise child abuse and child pornography material within Australia. In 2005, the former coalition government responded to perpetrators using new technology, strengthening the provisions of the Commonwealth Crimes Act and targeting the use of carriage services such as mobile phones and the internet. This bill builds on those reforms to ensure that the laws continue to remain effective and meet the needs of law enforcement agencies, combating contemporary offending. Without us as legislators in this place insisting on tough legislation to both track these people down and then prosecute them with the full force of the law, we will not stamp out this practice. We need a great deal of political will to do that and to give our AFP officers, who do an outstanding job, the ability to stamp out this pernicious practice.
This bill enhances the offences for using a carriage service for sexual activity with a child, child pornography and child abuse material, and new offences are established for using a postal service. Significantly, the bill introduces new offences for Australians, both citizens and residents, dealing in child pornography and abuse material overseas. Such abhorrent behaviour is intolerable and illegal for Australians in Australia and should, and now will, be illegal for Australians overseas—just as it ought to be. Australians who commit child sexual offences overseas will now be able to be punished even where foreign countries have deficient laws or are unwilling to prosecute.

Policing and prosecuting crimes against children is a tough business. In 2003, under the coalition government, the AFP’s Transnational Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Team was established to investigate offences relating to both slavery and sexual servitude, as well as child sex tourism. Further funding for AFP investigations was announced in the 2007-08 budget. The AFP’s child protection operation team investigates as well as coordinates multijurisdictional and international online sexual exploitation operations. They liaise with internet service providers and content hosts, the Virtual Global Taskforce, Interpol and the public. AFP officers sift through mounds of material chaising those attempting to groom children over the internet. They are also exposed to the graphic reality of child abuse. An officer must sit and look at each image seized, whether in hard copy, on computer drives or in any other form. They see the years of abuse suffered by children, and we should pay tribute to them for the work that they do. I know from talking to some of them that it is tough and difficult work and they need the support of us in this House to make sure the laws are strong and they can act.

I have been fortunate to meet AFP officers on the front line of combating trafficking overseas. Their dedication to identifying and prosecuting offenders and rescuing the children is commendable. The AFP has certainly led the way, showing great leadership throughout the Asian region and in developing partnerships with some of our neighbouring countries to make sure these people can be tracked across borders and brought back if they are Australian to face prosecution in this country.

UNICEF is another organisation that I must highlight for its proactive protection of children. Through partnerships with governments, the private sector and civil society, those in UNICEF advocate and advise on protective social practices and empowering children, as well as providing oversight and monitoring. Their information is invaluable to governments and their assistance to children who have suffered abuse is often unacknowledged. They work in very difficult conditions because of the lack of strong legislative instruments in many countries.

Those fighting to end child sex exploitation cannot do it alone. They require the assistance of governments worldwide. They need proactive legislators. They need the support of law enforcement agencies. Children can all too easily be spirited across borders. Offenders jump between jurisdictions, utilising loopholes in the laws of other countries. Each state must take a stand and pass necessary legislation and, if necessary, complementary laws ensuring that no jurisdiction is safe for child sex abusers and traffickers.

I did have an opportunity with the member for Riverina to attend a conference in Bali in 2006. There I met a number of women from South America and Africa. Indeed, there is a report by UNICEF on the particular problems on the African continent. The women of South America told me that
the rate of disappearance of children on that continent is alarming and there is no mechanism, or there was not at that time, to chase these people across borders and bring down on them the full force of the law. They told me the problem was so acute that the Save the Children Fund had set up a website to try to track missing children on the South American continent. It is a terrible problem.

In 2007, with the member for Riverina and other members of the delegation across party lines, I attempted to establish the World against Abuse of Children, a list of like-minded parliamentarians who would work across borders to establish legislation to stamp out this pernicious practice of child trafficking. There are many agencies working to support victims and to try to ensure that people are prosecuted for these crimes, but what we do not seem to have is an organisation that asks parliamentarians around the world to become active within their jurisdictions and to make sure the laws are tough. There must be greater political resolve to ensure complementary legislation and general legislation which prevents the movement of children to jurisdictions which do not have robust protection laws.

We wrote a letter signed by all members of our delegation. There were 140 parliaments represented at that Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Bali and 13 countries responded to the letter. They included Cambodia, Chile, China, Croatia, Ghana, Indonesia, Jordan, Monaco, New Zealand, Namibia, Singapore, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Thirteen countries out of 140 showed concern about the trafficking in children. Frankly, I think that is a terrible indictment. It is a very disappointing response. But those who did respond were passionate about it. I heard from the young woman who runs the Hong Kong office for Microsoft trying to track down internet pornography, much of it involving babies and most of it too horrendous for me to relate to members in this House. It was really and truly shocking. I think the member for Riverina has made reference to some of those practices. I just do not know that the Australian public are aware fully of what is going on in some of these developing countries that are our neighbours.

As I said, I hoped to start an international effort and urge the members of different countries to seek to push their governments to legislate to stamp out child abuse and trafficking. I urge members of this House to reach out to their international counterparts and say that together we can—we must—stop this activity. The protection of children has to be a priority in a civilised society.

As William Wilberforce stood in his parliament, describing the enormous, dreadful wickedness of the slave trade, he started its downfall. It starts with one step. He changed perceptions, resolutely advocating for the parliament to protect those most vulnerable. Anyone who has read the story knows what a difficult time he had and how many years it took him to stamp out these practices—and the personal toll it took on him. In 200 years, those people most vulnerable may have changed, but the role of this parliament has not. We are continuing to protect those most vulnerable—our children—and I am resolute in pledging my full support for this bill and even tougher measures and tougher penalties and more work with the international community across borders. I pay tribute to the men and women who dedicate their professional lives to stamping out this pernicious practice.

There have been many reports, many conferences and many books on this, and the UN has been extremely active, but none of this has resulted in diminishing this trade. One has to wonder where the resolve is. At a Pan American Health Organisation conference in Washington in 2007, governments from
Around the world came together to try and do something about violence against children. In speaking to this, Dr Paulo Sergio Pinheiro said:

For me, it is very shocking to see the high level of acceptability of violence against children, not just socially, but legally.

He is an independent expert and leader of the UN study. He said:

This is a key challenge: how to overcome the acceptability of violence against children.

I think it is a shocking state of affairs. He also said:

... it is Governments that have the responsibility to build a solid legal framework and to provide the support needed by families, schools and communities to adequately fulfill their role.

This is a very serious piece of legislation. It is a very serious issue. I hope that all members of this parliament will join me in a resolve to see the pernicious practice of child trafficking stopped.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (5.47 pm)—I have listened to the speeches of previous speakers on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2010. It is always something that is impressed upon you as a parent that, but for the grace of God, these things could have an impact on any of our lives. When we have a country and a parliament utterly committed to the stamping out of the trafficking and abuse of children, you have to ask the question: why is it that something which is seen so clearly by us does not seem to be so clear in other parts of the world? I am not saying that we have a completely clean slate in this country. Obviously there are evil people within this country who have preyed on children here and overseas. We have a complete disregard for them. But why is it that there are some places in the world where there is such acceptance of this that it is almost to the point of an industry? I wonder why that is.

I offer the suggestion that it happens in places where the democratic spirit and the governance of true democracy are not as strong as they are here and in other places in the developed world. I think that that is an important element in all this. In some places it might not be a central government; it might be a provincial government or it might be the administration of justice in a small town, in Asia or Africa. It is in those places where, as I said, the democratic belief, the governance and the controls are weak and corruption can result in these problems.

It would be right to say that in this country there is no offence, no crime, more disturbing than crimes against children. This is particularly so where sexual offences are those crimes. It is right that we have a disregard for offenders in these matters. We call them rock spiders and we call them subhuman, because they use power and trust to take advantage of those that are weaker than they are. These evil people cause damage that will last for the whole life of the victim. There are few victims that will ever be able to recover completely and go on to lead a normal life.

Indeed, I would say that there is great doubt that, on the other side, a person that has committed such a crime can ever be trusted in our society again. Those that I have met working in the prison system will often just confirm that view, that such offenders are beyond rehabilitation. Although I have spoken before against the death penalty, I think that it is appropriate that those who commit sexual offences against children languish in prison for as long as possible, to reflect on their inhumanity and their evil so that they can come to know a sense of the greatest shame, which will be with them for the remainder of their lives.

We are united in this place against such evil and to impose not only the greatest penalties but also the greatest certainty of of-
fenders being caught. Although I will go into the bill in more detail, the point I would particularly like to make is that it was through the previous government’s action on these matters that we saw the creation of the Australian Federal Police team to combat online child sex exploitation, which comprises experienced investigators, forensic analysts, psychologists and IT experts. I believe that the AFP’s role is absolutely critical in the safety of our children both here and overseas. I say that because it is through the internet that those with perverse or sexual interests in children can be identified. The AFP can identify those whose internet searches reveal such interests. I also believe that it is through the internet that these suppressed evil urges are let loose and, if these people can be identified and prosecuted for offences to do with child pornography, they can be stopped before they try to actually assault a child.

In Australia we have had legislation regarding these specific matters for some time. Commonwealth child sex tourism offences were placed in the Crimes Act 1914 via the Crimes (Child Sex Tourism) Amendment Act 1994 and some amendments were made in a 2001 amendment act. On 18 December 2001 the then federal government signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It was ratified on 8 January 2007, entering into force one month later, on 8 February 2007.

I welcome this opportunity to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2010 and I join with other members in support of every attempt to provide the means to fight the evil that is out there. While we may have concerns about the practical applications of these offences outside Australia, the Australian people can always be certain of bipartisan support in the parliament when these matters are debated. Indeed, I understand that there was strong bipartisan support for the establishment of the Australian Federal Police Online Child Sex Exploitation Team in March 2005 by the then Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator the Hon. Chris Ellison. I would also say that Senator Ellison and I had some conversations at the time, and I share his views and his great concerns about dealing with these evil crimes.

With regard to bipartisan support, I also understand that there was support for the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Telecommunications Offences and Other Measures) Act (No. 2) 2004. In that act, new offences were prescribed for persons involved in the sexual abuse of children in a number of contexts. Those offences introduced by the Howard government included producing, distributing and accessing child pornography and child abuse material, taking away the anonymity of the internet. Those offences introduced included targeting and online grooming by sexual predators. Indeed, section 474.19 of the Criminal Code covers the use of the internet for child pornography—and that was part of the amendments in the 2004 act. Section 474.20 prescribes an offence as being possessing, producing, supplying or obtaining child pornography material for use through a carriage service.

The Crimes Legislation Amendment (Telecommunications Offences and Other Measures) Act (No. 2) 2004, and then the establishment of the Australian Federal Police Online Child Sex Exploitation Team in March 2005, represented a strong effort by the former coalition government in the area of protecting children. Nevertheless, in response to developments in technology as well as the ever-changing threats to children from the evil inherent in some people, governments must always be on their guard to ensure that the legislation meets the threat. That is why, on 13 September 2007, the pre-
vious government introduced into this place the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Child Sex Tourism Offences and Related Measures) Bill 2007. That bill, which lapsed when the election was called, included in its purpose provision for the forfeiture of child pornography and child abuse material and equipment containing such material. It also intended to update the language and structure offences regarding child sex tourism. It included a preparatory offence to capture the behaviour of people preparing to commit a child sex tourism offence. It intended to add new child sex tourism offences to capture the procuring and grooming of a child for the purposes of child sex tourism. It would also have made it an offence for Australian citizens and residents to possess, control, produce, distribute or obtain child pornography or abuse material while overseas.

That brings me to this bill, which aims to strengthen the existing child sex tourism offence regime. What is clear is that there are already a number of federal and state laws criminalising the possession, production or distribution of child pornography or child abuse material within Australia or illegally importing such material into Australia. A number of countries around the world, however, do not have effective laws against child pornography and child abuse material or lack the capacity to enforce them. As a result, an Australian traveller overseas can make or buy such pornography or abuse material and escape punishment, even though this same behaviour, if committed in Australia or through the internet, would be a serious criminal offence.

In particular, this legislation imposes penalties upon those planning and taking steps toward child sex tourism, with penalties of 10, 12 or 15 years. The penalty for the carrying out of sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 16 will now be increased from 17 to 20 years in jail. I also appreciate the new aggravated offences which impose up to 25 years in jail for the sexual abuse of children by a person in a position of trust, where the child has a mental impairment. Other aspects of the legislation include strengthened postal offences for distribution of any form of material and the forfeiture of child pornography regardless of whether an offence was proven. As I said before, the only concern we have is the ability to implement some aspects of these laws. Apart from that and what may come out of subsequent inquiries, this has our support.

It was reported today in the Courier-Mail and other media that the Australian Privacy Foundation has asked the minister to rule out charging youths for sexting—that practice where photos of young people in various states of undress are sent by themselves to others they know. The Australian Privacy Foundation wants no criminality involved in this situation. I agree that sexting is not in its original sending intentionally child pornography, yet it may be the next time it is transmitted or the time after that. I think that, when you look at the intention involved, there could be an offence. I would, however, say that it is not healthy behaviour of teenagers to win favour with their friends by sending them fully or partially naked photos, nor is it right for so-called friends to pressure other young persons to have their photo taken and send it to others. How often have we heard of rising actresses who have gotten their big break only to be embarrassed by the emergence of compromising photos taken some years earlier? I think there is a need for some penalties in these cases in order to discourage this unhealthy behaviour. I would, however, say that, given that the intention was not originally to be child pornography, the distinction can be made.

I reiterate that I support this legislation, as I will always support legislation that takes steps to protect children. It is a harsh reality
that there are evil people out there who will destroy the lives of vulnerable children for the sake of their own depravity. These less than human people exist in every nation and, sadly, there are some Australians who prey on children. Perhaps they try to prey on children here, or perhaps they pursue their depraved ambitions overseas via child sex tourism, or perhaps they use the internet, but through this legislation and the build-up of legislation, particularly since 1994, they are criminals and they are a threat, and it should be the intention of all Australians to pursue them, to identify them and to confine them in the prisons of this nation. They deserve only the full force of our laws, and they should remain in prison. Some people say that everyone deserves a second chance. What I would say is that there are some mistakes you only make once. Crimes to do with children are those ‘no second chance’ options. In the same way the damage and the hurt committed against children will affect them for the rest of their lives, so should be the consequences for evil action. I look forward to the passage of this bill.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (6.00 pm)—There will be no disagreement in this chamber, or from the overwhelming majority of Australians, that we should be supporting every component of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2010. I want to acknowledge, as a Queensland MP who was very closely involved with the debates around the placement of Dennis Ferguson in 2008, that feelings run extraordinarily high, both about this kind of domestic sexual offence and about the fact that it can be committed, regrettably, by Australians overseas.

I want to acknowledge Hetty Johnston, who has worked very hard in this area for a number of years. I want to acknowledge the gravity of the offences that we are talking about and the fact that those who are involved are in many cases—though it is not for me to define—people who are unable to be rehabilitated. They present extraordinary and complex challenges both to the law and to incarceration facilities. A significant proportion of people involved in sexual offences of this kind have low IQs and are extremely difficult to deal with from juvenile level and upwards. That makes the challenge even more complex. Our support for the AFP would also be completely unquestioned. As you speak to people in the streets, they say, ‘Whatever funding is required to do this job, we would support that.’ I think the AFP could take that message on board: that, of all the inquiries the AFP engage in, there are some—not all, but some—for which there is uniform support. This would be one of those situations.

The community has a right to expect some form of safety and to know that the state will act on known risks to minimise those risks wherever possible. A question I often hear is, ‘There are thousands of these kinds of people, so how can you expect the state to find a solution for everyone?’ The state is responsible for every safety risk it is informed of and that it knows of. So, in this sort of instance, we have legislation maximising the ability of the state—in this case, the AFP and its investigation units—to apprehend these individuals. We are talking today about overseas offences. I note that Australia is a wealthy country. It is a country that is proud of its international reputation. It is a country whose citizens travel greatly and which has an obligation to make sure that this never be-smirches our reputation. Australians travel often, they are wealthy and they are in a position to buy all sorts of goods and services. Unfortunately, an extremely tiny minority use this to their own advantage to possess, control, produce or distribute this kind of material.
I am very keen to see these kinds of changes implemented. They come in two parts. The first schedule is that all types of behaviour relating to these kinds of sexual offences committed by Australians are just as applicable before the law if committed overseas as they are if they are done before state and territory authorities within the country. Part 2 of schedule 1 introduces new offences for the use of a postal or similar service for these kinds of activities, because at the moment it is basically limited to ‘menacing, harassing or causing offence’, which in itself carries a two-year penalty. This legislation clears up those inconsistencies about the use of carriage or postal services in child sex activities. Also, in part 2 of schedule 1, there is now coverage of offences that use a carriage service such as the internet for child pornography. That is obviously important in relation to the news issues we have heard over the last couple of years. Changes relating to any distribution of child pornography, child abuse material or sexual activity with children were made in 2005—inserted in the Criminal Code—and that has been extended and improved. In part 3 of schedule 1 there are minor consequential amendments—changes to the Surveillance Devices Act and the Telecommunications Act—to further enable law enforcement agencies to be at the cutting edge of tracking down these kinds of activities by a small number of individuals. Schedule 2, noting that there is currently no specific Commonwealth scheme for dealing with child pornography or abuse material that is seized in investigations, sets out that that can now occur and that material can be forfeited.

I would be just like every other member of this place except that in Queensland in 2008 we had the local experience of having a known sex offender—one who did not have existing charges before the courts—placed in our community without any notification whatsoever. I would extend the debate around this bill today to say that it is my strong view that we should not patronise Australian communities and assume that they cannot deal with the fact that individuals like this have to be placed somewhere. I think every family out there would expect that the state can find somewhere safe for these individuals. I do not think that is too much to ask. We are looking at weighing up the respective rights of individuals. One side of the equation is a demonstrated risk to children; the other side is the community. So I think it is completely unacceptable to move an individual silently and secretly into a location and then expect the community not to react with abhorrence. All that one can ask is that these locations are not within walking distance of a childcare centre, a primary school or where young people gather. I do not think that people are asking too much. I do not think they should be called ‘rednecks’. I do not think they should be criticised for having those kinds of basic and completely justifiable fears. For all of the psychiatric evaluations telling us that the current location is ‘safe’, I can understand if a community does not quite share those feelings.

What we saw in 2008 was greatly disappointing not because it was done but because our community was turned into—as I described it then and I would describe it again—a Guantanamo Bay. It got to the stage where there were so many police trying to protect the community from a sex offender—but in many respects it was more like they were protecting a sex offender from the community—that we had a massive diversion of police resources to one location. It was unsustainable. It was disappointing that at the community rally there was absolutely no indication that the state government would respond to the community’s concerns. They effectively stonewalled the community. I think that was unacceptable and it further
inflamed the situation. It presented lessons for other communities that will have the same problem in the future. When we finally did ask for a meeting and put simple requests to the minister, we were again stonewalled—but not before some hand-picked members of the community were brought up, given tea and scones, massaged by the minister and then encouraged to support the status quo. That was disappointing, but then a week later we realised that the feet were moving much faster than the body above the water and things were eventually moved, and this poor unfortunate individual was moved.

In that time, Crikey had a feast as well. I was disappointed to see their mid-June 2008 article where they referred to politicians ‘seizing upon the issue to boost their political stocks’ and obtaining plenty of coverage by referring to this location as Guantanamo Bay—when they had not actually even visited to see exactly what was going on. They then referred to it as ‘a moment in the sun’ and ‘an opportunity to boost a political margin’. Without reading this in depth, you could see the author word-crafting himself into complete irrelevance to a community’s concerns. The dubious contribution from Crikey did very little except attempt to highlight, if not isolate, members of elected parliaments in this country who simply stand up for a very basic concern that the community holds.

I do not pretend that there are any easy answers, but my one line is: do not deceive people, do not keep secrets, do not try to hide people and, for goodness sake, do not secrete them into ordinary parts of the community and expect local people not to find out and be absolutely aghast when they do discover what is going on. We have to find a solution. State legislators will have to find a solution. Federally I think we have done the right thing with Commonwealth legislation. But I make my final point: if the intent is purely to deny elected members a victory in finding a solution to a problem like this then Crikey has done ordinary people no service, although it might well have earned a few laughs from political people who enjoy reading its columns. There is a bigger issue at stake here, and that is that there are very few simple solutions but legislators need to be supported to develop what has been put to this chamber today and the equally challenging but far more widespread concern of domestic child abuse right here in Australia. This will not be easy for state legislators, but there is one thing that I as a federal member will not stand for, and that is state agencies secreting these individuals into communities quietly, silently and secretly and not treating communities like adults. We need to have this debate. We need to find locations for these individuals and protect the safety and the rights of communities that, after all, have not broken the law or engaged in these abhorrent acts.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs) (6.10 pm)—in reply—I thank all members for their respective contributions to the debate on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2010. I would like to particularly thank the member for Stirling for his indication that the opposition supports these reforms. I would also like to thank the members for Werriwa and Calwell and the opposition members for their comments in support of this bill. The government agrees with all members that this is an important set of reforms. They will ensure that children in Australia and internationally are better protected from these heinous crimes. I particularly note strong endorsement by the member for Werriwa and the member for Farrer of the new aggravated offences in the bill, including those that apply to persons in positions of trust.
The member for Stirling referred to the bill introduced in 2008 by Senator Bernardi—the private member’s bill. I also indicate, to place this in some historical context, that in 2007 Senator Ludwig introduced the Criminal Code Amendment (Anti-Child Abuse and Pornography Materials) Bill 2007. This pushed the then Howard government, after a few years of inaction, into introducing, in its dying days, the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Child Sex Tourism Offences and Related Measures) Bill. However, the Howard government was too slow to act and the bill was in the parliament when the parliament was prorogued. That bill did not address the full range of issues that have been experienced by law enforcement in dealing with these offences. Therefore, the government has examined best-practice approaches and operational experience, both domestically and internationally.

In developing the bill before us, the government has also taken into account other factors, including the 2008 New South Wales Sentencing Council review of child sex offences, subsequent New South Wales reforms, experience from international investigations into global child pornography rings and developments in technology and its consequences for children. This has resulted in a more comprehensive and progressive set of reforms, including further expansion of the child sex tourism offence regime to ensure consistency with child sex offences applying domestically and new offences targeting sophisticated online child pornography networks and sexual activity committed online.

I welcome the comments made by the members for Stirling, Werriwa, Forrest, Riverina, Pearce, Cowan and Bowman on the AFP’s efforts to combat sexual offences against children. The government has dedicated $125.8 million over four years to improving cybersafety. The cybersafety plan consists of a comprehensive range of measures encompassing education, international cooperation, research, law enforcement and filtering. This includes increased law enforcement capacity through the expansion of the AFP’s High Tech Crime Operations team by a further 91 officers. This will ensure that law enforcement is fully equipped to carry out its work in addressing online child sexual exploitation. The Australian Federal Police, through its High Tech Crime Operations team, actively investigates child sex tourism and online child sexual exploitation. The AFP has forged strong relationships with international law enforcement partners, allowing for considerable collaboration in combating transnational exploitation.

The government also believes prevention and awareness-raising strategies are vital. One important initiative is the ThinkUKnow program, which I recently launched in Brisbane, with the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police and the member for Brisbane, at the Ithaca Creek State School. The program is a collaborative effort between the AFP and Microsoft, providing education for families on how to create a safe online experience for the nation’s youth. These initiatives complement legislative measures, ensuring a multifaceted approach to combating child sexual exploitation.

The member for Stirling and the member for Indi raised the need for offences to carry penalties reflecting the seriousness of sexual offending against children. During the development of this bill, the government undertook an extensive review of state, territory and international child sex offences and penalties. Penalties in the bill are consistent, as far as practicable, with comparable state and territory offences. It is also important that penalties are internally consistent with the offences criminalising other types of behaviour under Commonwealth laws. The bill raises a number of existing penalties and introduces new, high penalties for offences.
involving aggravated circumstances. In particular, under the bill those participating in organised online child pornography networks will be subject to a maximum penalty of 25 years imprisonment. These penalties indicate the high level of seriousness of such offending and will ensure that sentences are set accordingly.

I note also the comments of the member for Cowan in relation to so-called ‘sexting’. There are already Commonwealth offences which criminalise the transmission of child pornography material over the internet or by mobile phone. The bill will increase the maximum penalties for the transmission of child pornography material from 10 to 15 years imprisonment. The changes to the maximum penalties are not targeted at sexting but are intended to ensure laws address the contemporary nature of online adult offending. Excluding the sending of child pornography or child abuse material by young people from the proposed offences would be inappropriate, as it might reduce protections for young people. For example, instances of young people sending sexually explicit images of themselves or other young people may in some cases be malicious or exploitative. Although the child pornography offences could potentially apply to young people, there is scope for law enforcement and prosecution agencies to take the circumstances of a particular case into account before proceeding to investigate or proceeding to prosecute.

Child sexual exploitation is a devastating and widespread form of criminal activity. Australia has always played a strong role in addressing the sexual exploitation of children, both domestically and through supporting international efforts to promote the rights of children. Australia already has in place an extensive framework to prevent, investigate and prosecute all forms of child sexual exploitation, including offences which occur within Australia and those committed by Australians overseas. However, it is important to ensure that Australia’s child sex related offence framework remains comprehensive and able to address new patterns of offending. This bill will build upon and improve the existing framework in a number of ways. It will strengthen existing child sex tourism laws and introduce new offences for dealing in child pornography and child abuse material overseas. This will ensure that the full range of behaviour that is criminalised domestically by state and territory laws is also criminalised when committed by Australians overseas.

The bill will also strengthen carriage service offences by increasing maximum penalties for existing online child pornography offences and introducing new offences for indecent communications or sexual activity with a child online. These measures will ensure that the carriage service regime responds effectively to contemporary offending. The bill will also introduce a number of new measures. These include a new suite of postal offences directed at the use of the post for child sex related activity such as the distribution of child pornography. These offences will mirror online offences and ensure that offenders are subject to consistent penalties notwithstanding the medium they use to engage in the offending.

The bill will provide a comprehensive scheme for the forfeiture of child pornography or child abuse material, or articles containing such material, derived from or used in the commission of a Commonwealth child sex offence.

Finally, the bill will introduce aggravated offences designed to target offenders who engage in particularly serious offending, including overseas child sex offences, where the offender is in a position of trust or the child victim has a mental impairment; and
carriage service offences involving participation in online child pornography networks. These offences will carry high maximum penalties of up to 25 years imprisonment, sending a strong message to potential offenders that such behaviour will not be tolerated.

The government is committed to taking all necessary action to protect children from sexual exploitation. The measures in this bill complement other government initiatives in this area, including the government’s cyber-safety plan, which I referred to earlier. This bill represents another significant step as part of the effort to prevent, investigate and prosecute child sex related offences. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs) (6.21 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (CLOSE OF ROLLS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 25 February, on motion by Mr Byrne:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (6.21 pm)—When we were last here debating the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010 I made reference to the rather fanciful comments of the member for O’Connor. Those allegations about massive corruption in Australian political life owe more to parallels with US bossism, whether it was Huey Long, Doc Prendergast or Joseph Curran, and more to the films of Edward G Robinson et cetera and gangland Chicago than they do to the realities of this country. The truth is that we have a system in this country which has an unparalleled independent Australian Electoral Commission. We have heard in the course of the inquiry of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters their view of some of the reforms that are being introduced in this bill.

The United States can have gerrymanders administered by state administrations, whether Democrat or Republican. They can basically just gerrymander within that state to their own advantage. I was a member of a study group that was invited by the US government back in the early nineties and when we went to Nancy Pelosi’s office we were shocked to see a system which depended on election day on volunteers to run the polling booths rather than public servants. Older people are increasingly unable to do that. That is the kind of system that we do not have in Australia. As I say, we have an independent commission.

For many of those opposite what this issue is really about is the internal divisions on the conservative side of politics over compulsory voting. The reality is that deep down much of their agenda is to minimise participation in the political process of this country. There are those, predominantly in South Australia, who in the past have driven the need to get rid of compulsory voting. They cannot accomplish this because the National Party in particular has historically had a different view and there are elements in the Liberal Party who support compulsory voting. They cannot get away with that, so what we have is a pattern of undermining the credibility of the political system in this country. They are constantly coming up with the most exagger-
ated, extreme possibilities such as, ‘If this happened and that occurred, and maybe this also occurred and someone said this to another person, maybe this particular seat in the Australian parliament may be affected.’

When we look at the concerns those opposite have, there is not much credibility in the figures. Between 1990 and 2001 there were 70 cases of false enrolment. The truth is that multiple voting has been shown to be accidental, a person with an intellectual disability or an error of electoral officers rather than something perpetrated through fraud. The member for O’Connor was talking about people having trucks full of false clothes, moustaches et cetera running around the suburbs of Australia, turning up at polling booths and coming in and impersonating people. The truth, as I said the last time we were here, is that political parties in this country are finding it increasingly difficult to staff polling booths. Apart from branch stacking and factional fights, both parties find it very difficult to motivate the electorate to participate in our political life.

Obviously that is not just related to political parties. It is a reality of many community organisations in our society, from the Girl Guides to the Country Women’s Association to the local Rotary to the football clubs and to the tuck shops. These groups find it very difficult to involve people. The reality was put in a recent article in the London Review of Books by Peter Mair titled ‘The Parliamentary Peloton’ on 25 February this year. His description of political life in Britain is the reality to a large extent in this country:

The mainstream parties meanwhile struggle to gather the resources necessary to compete effectively for office. Parties can no longer rely on the efforts of eminent democrats, those activists who once persuaded voters to turn out on election day. Instead, they rely on professionals, experts, pollsters, marketing gurus and consultants, all of whom cost money and all of whose advice costs money to implement. Parties are now capital intensive, rather than labour intensive. But lacking activist labour, they have problems raising capital so they find themselves turning to a relatively small number of donors. The donors then lean on the party and the party, being organisationally weak and short of members, gives way.

He further commented—and obviously we know it is a system which is not compulsory: Turnouts at elections have never been so low, while support for mavericks, populists and other ostensibly anti-party politicians has never been so high. Party membership has dropped significantly. Back in the 1960s when comparable cross-national data was first collected, more than 10 per cent of registered voters in European countries were members of a political party. Today, the figure is less than five per cent.

And if we delete Cyprus and Austria, which are characterised by high membership, it would be four per cent. This is the reality. For people to come in here and put forward some theory that the political parties have got the time on election day to organise this level of corruption and fraud, and to have people out there getting around, putting people on false enrolments, is preposterous. What this really is about is trying to reduce participation and trying to make sure that those groups that are most likely to be eliminated, those groups most likely to vote and those groups most likely to be disenfranchised are targeted.

If you look at page 148 of the committee’s report, for instance, it is interesting to read about the 10 most Indigenous seats in this country compared to the national situation. The average number of provisional votes in the 10 most Indigenous seats in this country is 1.76 per cent of the total vote and the national average is 1.23 per cent. In other words, it is half a per cent higher on average. It is not just one or two seats; it is not an aberration. In the most Indigenous seats in this country the level of provisional voting is half a per cent greater. It is a very significant dif-
ference. That is the kind of person that is targeted by many of the conservatives’ provisions. The attempt to make voting more difficult and the attempt to limit voting times for registration are all things essentially aimed at minimising participation. The most sorry example of this was in the 2004 US presidential elections in Florida where secretaries of state Kathleen Harris and Sandra Mortham managed to eliminate one per cent of the electorate. The member for Mitchell, who is very much a protagonist of this style of politics, smiles in agreement at their success in eliminating one per cent of the electorate and three per cent of the Afro-American vote by very duplicitous practices.

Mr Hawke—I was there. It is nonsense, absolute nonsense.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON—Absolute nonsense, he says. As I say, these are measures that the government now attempts to introduce so as to ensure that people have the maximum possibility of exercising their role. In the 1920s, in a very swift debate in this parliament, both sides of politics essentially agreed to introduce compulsory voting. This is a society which has very liberal rules with regard to citizenship and permanent residency and which essentially has emphasised participation by saying to people, ‘We want you to be part of our political system; we want you to participate; we want you to be a citizen. We don’t want you to be marginalised in a corner, hostile and ambivalent.’ That is the spirit in which this legislation has been introduced—to make sure that the time people have to change their enrolment is reasonable and that it is not a situation in which people who, for a variety of reasons, do not have the opportunity to get their enrolment changed are basically denied participation in the political process.

What they do over there under the guise of some false concern about corruption and manipulation is an attempt to basically make it difficult for people. It is not only with regard to the enrolment period, and it is not only with regard to transferring during the election process; it is basically with regard to a broader philosophy of making it difficult for people to turn out on election day and for them to cast their votes. They are putting on restrictions and putting on requirements and making it more difficult. That is the agenda because, essentially, based on socioeconomic circumstances, they believe that the majority of people who would be less inclined to vote and more affected by these kinds of restrictions are those who will not vote for their side of politics. The figures in the report indicate just how massive the problem can be. If the last election had been called a day or two differently, or if they had closed on 15 October, only 17,208 of the electoral transactions numbering 279,469 would have occurred. It was a sorry enough figure anyway, but for the day on which it was called it would have been far worse.

I quote from the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. The report said:

The committee can see no valid reason why it should be necessary to continue with close of rolls arrangements that serve to disenfranchise electors and that require unsustainable levels of funding to be expended in order to partly mitigate their effect.

In conclusion, this measure is not about protecting corruption, and it is not about basically ensuring which side of politics can win the seats; it is about people participating in our democratic processes, in a system which has, historically, had that fundamental emphasis.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (6.32 pm)—I rise tonight to speak on the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010. I want to start by rejecting many of the comments of the mem-
member for Reid in his typically bleak fashion. He sought to paint a picture of the electoral roll and the agenda of the coalition in relation to the measures proposed by the government. In that bleak assessment perhaps the main criticism I would have of the member for Reid and his arguments was that he suggested that somehow our opposition to many of these changes, particularly the voter identification and other scheduled changes proposed in the bill, was that we were seeking to disenfranchise people, or not have a group of people vote. Of course, the significant problem with the member for Reid’s contention in this regard and with the Labor Party’s contention in this regard is that the argument that more voters were disenfranchised under the coalition’s changes to voter identification in the seven-day grace period is erroneous. The facts tell a different story.

In 2004, under the previous system where there was a seven-day grace period, there were 169,000 people who missed out on the enrolment deadline. But, of course, in 2007, at the last election under the coalition’s changed three-day grace period, there were only 100,000 people who missed out. These are not estimates from us; these are the AEC’s figures. So this argument that somehow this is an attempt to disenfranchise a body of people is of course erroneous and the member for Reid knows it.

The changes proposed by the government today seek to reinstate the seven-day grace period, and this is an argument that I oppose, because the integrity of the electoral roll is something that is paramount to the functioning of our democracy. It is the member for Reid’s assessment that everything is fine and rosy with the electoral roll—that it is fine to contend in this parliament that there is no need to be rigorous in our ongoing examination of the roll and of the system that we have of voting in Australia and that, somehow, just by encouraging everybody to participate, participate, participate, we have a benevolent democracy where everything will end up just fine. Of course, the reality is very different. That is, we do have to have a strong system in place. We have to have a system of ensuring that the right people are casting votes in the right way and that people do not attempt to manipulate our electoral system. We do have examples of people attempting to manipulate the electoral system in recent history. Perhaps you should not take it from me—I know the member for Reid and I have a history in relation to politics which is different—but noted communist author Frank Hardy wrote a book called *The Stolen Election: Australia 1987*. Maybe the member for Reid would care to read what he had to say about the 1987 election and the potential for manipulation in that election. Frank Hardy is the famous author of *Power without Glory*. In that work he suggests that there is a propensity in Australia for people to attempt to manipulate the electoral system at various selections. When you consider many of the results in marginal seats or seats where elections are very tight and come down to a handful of votes one way or another, I think it is proper that the parliament ought to remove any opportunities for fraud and seek to constantly improve the system we have in place to ensure that the opportunity for fraud is minimised.

I will oppose schedule 2 and the amendment relating to the evidence of identity for provisional votes. The previous government, in line with longstanding policy, moved to prevent fraudulent voting and impersonations by requiring that people who claim a provisional vote in an election produce evidence of their true identity and enrolled address either on polling day or in the week following polling day. I think that is a proper mechanism. People who live at a location for 21 days are, by law, required to enrol and, if they do not, they are breaking the law. But,
as we know, the reality is that many people
in our community choose not to enrol within
that 21-day period. It is true that they may
not be aware of any changes to boundaries
which could affect the electorate in which
they now reside. However, people are aware
of the fact that they have changed address, so
they are making a choice in relation to that—
that is, not to re-enrol or not to be on the
electoral roll—they simply forget or there are
other reasons for them not to re-enrol.

However, effectively the changes that are
being proposed in schedule 2 mean that there
is no consequence for breaching the Elec-
toral Act. The benefits of correctly enrolling
are reduced to nothing and there is no disin-
centive for any person who fails to correctly
enrol. That leads to a situation where the
whole basis for the continuous roll update,
which was something brought in by the coa-
lation in 1999, is severely undermined.

Any proposal to weaken the rules in rela-
tion to the identification requirements for
provisional voters should be opposed. It
should be opposed because it gives the im-
pression that if you do not obey the law and
seek to put yourself on the roll, which all
responsible citizens should do, somehow you
should be rewarded for not maintaining cor-
rect enrolment for a substantial period of
time. That is a very important argument. The
integrity of the roll does matter. While we
have a compulsory voting system we should
discourage people from choosing not to be
on the electoral roll.

I note the member for Reid challenged the
coalition, saying that our opposition to the
bill is really part of some sort of secret
agenda of ours to bring in voluntary voting,
which I find a weak argument in relation to
this legislation. I can publicly put on the rec-
ord that I do have a view that voluntary vot-
ing is something that we should look at as a
nation. We ought to have a free society
where people are allowed to choose whether
or not they want to vote. Currently in Aus-
tralia we only compel people to attend a ballot
box and mark off their name on election day.
There is no such thing as forced voting. You
cannot force a person to vote. We simply
force attendance at polling booths, and many
people register their votes in an informal way
or take another way of not voting. We simply
force attendance, and some people suggest
that is a good thing. I do not violently object
to that system; however, if we are continu-
ally to push to have a freer society, voluntary
voting is a mechanism we should look at.
Indeed, looking at the United Kingdom and
the United States, there are many good ar-
uments for voluntary voting. However, that
is not the agenda of the coalition today and it
certainly is not the topic we are presented
with in the legislation before us.

Many of the proposals here weaken the in-
tegrity of the Electoral Act. The member for
Reid said that he was not aware of any ex-
amples or any matters which caused him to
be concerned about our current electoral sys-
tem, which I again find to be an unusual con-
tention. The HS Chapman Society was set up
in 1996, meets regularly in Sydney and is a
society with which I have had something to
do. Other members of this place quite regu-
larly have interaction with the HS Chapman
Society. That society was purely set up to
examine and look at our electoral system.
Included in their objectives are:

- To promote public understanding of the …
electoral systems
- To monitor the operation of the Australian
electoral system and … recommend changes
to the law and practice of elections
- To compare the Australian … systems with
those of other democratic countries

That is a fine body of objectives for any or-
ganisation. It is good to see that we have pri-
ivate citizens taking an interest in the elec-
toral roll and the operation of our electoral system who are prepared to meet in their own time, examine proposals for improvements and make recommendations. Indeed, along the way they have certainly highlighted a number of cases where there have been concerns with the roll. The member for Reid said there have only been 71 instances of people multiple voting or conducting voting fraud. Considering that many of these elections have very close results, I think that is a reason why we should have strong electoral provisions and should constantly look at ways to improve them.

Identification is an important issue. I still find it a very odd situation that if you go to the bank you are required to have 100 points of ID, if you want a passport you have to prove your identity and if you want to hire a video at a video store you have to prove your identity with a licence, but there is no real identification required at a polling booth on election day. However, that is a different matter.

There are some amendments within this legislation that we can support, and the coalition has provided its support for schedules 3, 4 and 5. In relation to the proposed Electoral Act provision that a political party cannot nominate multiple candidates, that is a valid and worthy amendment to the act. It has grown out of recent examples, particularly in the Bradfield by-election, where a political party sought to, I think, deliberately manipulate the electoral process by nominating multiple candidates. The Christian Democratic Party nominated nine candidates for the Bradfield by-election. There has been plenty of speculation about the motives behind that, but it is the case that the AEC records over many elections and many years that the more candidates you have the higher the informal rate. I note from the member for Bradfield’s contribution earlier in this debate that there was an unusually high rate of informal voting in the Bradfield by-election, which should be of great concern to all members in this place. So it is easy for us to support such an amendment. A political party ought not to deliberately seek to manipulate the electoral system in that fashion. Therefore, that is a good amendment.

Schedules 3 and 4 relate to provisional voters and are certainly an improvement in administration for the AEC. Provisional voters certainly caused a lot of difficulty for the AEC and scrutineers alike in terms of the time it took for administrative checking in the weeks following polling day. The proposal to treat them as ordinary voters is a worthy one and something that we support.

The bill before us has some worthy provisions. However, schedules 1 and 2, as they relate to particularly the close of the rolls but also the changes to identification for provisional voters, are changes that I cannot support. The electoral roll is an enormously important mechanism and the administration of it is something that we should constantly be seeking to tighten. The government’s proposals certainly weaken the administration of the roll. As we saw in 2004 and 2007, the coalition’s tightening of the three-day and seven-day periods was not of any impact upon the number of people that missed out on voting; in fact it was reduced. I am happy to support schedules 3, 4 and 5, noting the great concerns that the coalition has with the weakening of the electoral roll.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (6.44 pm)—I rise to support the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010. I wish to speak in support of a number of aspects of the bill but I begin by making the obvious observation: there is an old expression ‘horses for courses’ and I must say that I am just a little bit surprised that the Liberal Party would send in to bat on this important issue the
member for Mitchell, who has hardly distin-
guished himself as a paragon of virtue and
integrity when it comes to the democratic
processes both externally but also internally
within his party. I think his efforts to branch
stack are held in wide acclaim by those who
admire these matters. I do not consider my-
self to be one that does admire those activi-
ties. Certainly, there is a vast array of mate-
rial on the public record that demonstrates
that the member for Mitchell is coming to
this debate with less than clean hands.

It is through the prism of his contribution
that the contribution of those opposite should
be viewed. Be very sceptical when the Lib-
eral Party come forward with amendments to
electoral laws without any valid basis for
doing so. That is what happened back in
2006. In particular I refer to the close of rolls
and the changes that were then put in place
that moved the close of rolls date from being
the evening of the date that the writ was is-
 sued from where it was previously, which
was seven days after the issue of the writ. Be
very sceptical when the Liberal Party come
forward with proposals, as they did back
then, because there was no valid argument
for reducing the period available for people
to update their enrolment or to put them-

CHAMBER

ures at the last election and we look at the
figures at the last election and we look at the
figures of the election before, there was not
really a material difference in the number of
people who were left off the roll. If that is
the argument then I would ask the member
for Mitchell and all of those members oppo-
site: what is the harm in allowing that extra
time so that people who are not on the roll
may be able to regularise their enrolment
details so that they can then exercise a vote?
In a country that has such a rich tradition in
valuing our democratic tradition, I do not see
why we would be trying to put additional
barriers in front of individuals that might be
simply wishing to do what I think everyone
in this place would expect all citizens to do,
and that is to exercise their democratic duty
and to vote in an election.

If there were evidence of rorting, not even
widespread rorting, then there may be some
argument to try and limit the ability of indi-
viduals to get on the roll. I would also raise
the point that if someone were looking to rort
enrolments on the electoral roll, they do not
have to wait until an election is called in or-
der to do that. Clearly, no-one in this place
is going to condone that sort of activity but it
seems to me a fairly specious argument to
come forward and say, ‘We’re going to pre-
maturely close the rolls so that all that rort-
ing won’t occur.’ Everybody knows that
2010 is an election year. If people were look-
ing to enrol people illegally and to engage in
skulduggery, there is nothing to stop them
from going out and doing it today. What is
the magic about the evening of the issuing of
writs as opposed to seven days later?

Let us not forget that we live in a political
system where we actually do not know at the
federal level when the next election is going
to be down to the day. We do not know that
and we will not know that until the Prime
Minister goes off to seek the Governor-

General’s concurrence with the date. That
means individuals in our community wanting
to maintain their enrolment or to enrol for the first time may be left in a situation where they are stranded having been caught short not knowing that the Prime Minister was about to go to Yarralumla and not being able to get their act together in the handful of days between that and when the writ is issued.

It seems to me that it pays, in a country that values its democratic traditions, to try and expand opportunities for people to participate in the democratic process. There is no greater exercise of one’s democratic rights than to cast a vote on election day. The argument that has not been put by those on the other side is why it is that closing the roll on the night of the issue of the writs is going to maintain any greater integrity than doing it seven days later. The other side of the coin, put very simply, is that clearly there will be people who will not be able to get their details updated within that short period who will benefit from the extra seven days. So what is the evil that we are seeking to eliminate here that we would go to the extent to deny individuals the opportunity to vote in an election? It seems to me that it is only as a result of the fact that those on the other side somehow believe that they get some political advantage out of this.

I know that there have been those on the other side on occasions who have suggested that younger voters are more likely to vote for the Labor Party than to vote for the coalition. I would suggest that that is not always the case, but I know it is a suggestion that has been made by people in the past. When you look at the percentage of people that missed out on updating their details on the roll, they are predominantly young people. If that is the argument, let those on the other side be fair dinkum enough to come forward to make that point.

I am surprised that the member for Mitchell and his associates on the other side have sought to make integrity on polling day and integrity in election campaigns the issue in this debate. I note that the particular measures that are contained within this bill are in large part recommendations coming out of the inquiry into the 2007 federal election and matters related thereto by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. There is an interesting chapter within the report that details some of the goings-on, some of the shenanigans, that occurred in the electorate of Lindsay, the seat that I represent, at the last election. I am disappointed that at this stage we have not been able to take sufficient action to try and correct what I think is a real shortcoming in the Commonwealth Electoral Act and that is the very small, the very meagre, penalties that are applicable to the sorts of acts that we saw carried out in the Lindsay electorate at the last election.

I know that that is a recommendation coming out of this report, and I hope that that is dealt with in the near future, but I think that these matters are just as relevant to this discussion as they will be to that discussion when it comes before this place. Those on the other side seek to come forward and suggest that somehow disenfranchising individuals by limiting their ability to get themselves on the roll is driven by this mass rorting, this lack of integrity in the way in which other parties conduct themselves during and in the lead-up to election campaigns when we have on display evidence of what I think were disgusting activities engaged in for the Liberal Party Lindsay campaign. One of the issues that concerns me is that an article published on 9 December 2007 in the Sunday Telegraph relayed some comments on the involvement of the Leader of the Opposition in the management of the Lindsay leaflet scandal under the headline ‘Abbot blamed for flyers fallout’:
According to senior Liberal sources, it was Mr Abbott who advised former Liberal MP for Lindsay Jackie Kelly to defend the leaflet as a Chaser-style stunt.

Her remarks sparked further outrage, and Mr Howard was forced to publicly repudiate her. I guess we can see that the former Prime Minister, Mr Howard, at least had the decency and good sense to distance himself from these activities. It seems as though that was not entirely the case for the Leader of the Opposition, as he now is.

Mr Slipper—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: the member for Lindsay has made a very serious aspersion on the character of the Leader of the Opposition. I would ask that you bring him back to order and request him to withdraw the outrageous statement he just made.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr MJ Washer)—For the benefit of the parliament, would the member for Lindsay please withdraw.

Mr BRADBURY—For the benefit of the parliament, and for the great respect I have for the Deputy Speaker and the office that you hold, I was quoting an article and the comment that followed the quote merely reinforced what had already been quoted from the article. To the extent that I have said something that offends someone because it is not true, then I certainly withdraw that. I wish to continue to quote the article:

According to senior Liberals, it was Mr Abbott who suggested the Chaser defence during a strategy conference early on that day the story broke.

His advice was rejected on the grounds that the leaflet was deeply offensive and could not be dismissed as a prank.

I would have thought that that was an entirely reasonable conclusion for one to draw in those circumstances, notwithstanding the position at least asserted to be Mr Abbott’s position so far as this article is concerned.

The article goes on to say that when Mr Abbott was asked about this he said about Jackie Kelly:

“Jackie’s a great mate of mine, and the Warringah Conference (Mr Abbott’s fund-raising arm) bankrolled to the Lindsay campaign.”

In the context of the discussion about integrity in democratic processes, I am disturbed by that comment because one of the unanswered questions not only through the various criminal proceedings that were undertaken in relation to this matter but also in the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into these matters was where these leaflets came from. Who printed these leaflets? I know that there is a lot of speculation going around, and there has been for the last couple of years, that they may well have been printed using taxpayers’ dollars. To one of those that has seen these leaflets, it does appear that they were produced using something along the lines of a Riso-graph machine. Were any taxpayer dollars used to fund these pamphlets? If taxpayer dollars were not used, then I think, given the quote I have just read out that Mr Abbott’s fundraising arm bankrolled the campaign in Lindsay, it begs the question whether there was any connection between the funds that were provided by Mr Abbott and his electoral conference and the conduct that was the subject of these criminal prosecutions—that is, the Lindsay leaflet scandal. I think this is a question that should be answered. It is a question that I have been asking for the last two years, but I think it is of even greater importance not just in the context of the current debate about integrity and democratic processes but also now that the member for Warringah is the Leader of the Opposition.

These are unanswered questions. I would be horrified if public dollars—taxpayer dollars—were used to print or produce this material—I think we all would be. But if it was not produced using taxpayer dollars then I
Mr Slipper—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The honourable member for Lindsay should refer to the Leader of the Opposition by his title, and not by his name. But, more importantly, the member for Lindsay is skating very close to making very serious allegations against the Leader of the Opposition which, of course, are disorderly. He ought to withdraw them and he ought to be brought back to the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Lindsay will use appropriate parliamentary names.

Mr BRADBURY—Yes—the Leader of the Opposition who, of course, was the member for Warringah back at the time. It does raise the question of who produced this material and what resources were used to produce that material. Those questions have not been answered. What we do know is that the pamphlet was produced and distributed by Liberal Party operatives in the Lindsay area. We do know by the Leader of the Opposition’s own admission that his electorate conference bankrolled the Lindsay campaign, but we do not know whether there is a connection between the two.

I think it is a legitimate question for me to ask on behalf of the residents in my community, who the Liberal Party treated with such contempt in relation to this issue at the last election. I think it is reasonable for me to come forward and to ask for the Leader of the Opposition to come forward and to disassociate himself and the funds that he and his electoral conference provided to the Lindsay campaign from those activities which I think that all fair and reasonable minded Australians would see as one of the lowest acts in our democratic history. I think it is important that we do have confirmation from the Leader of the Opposition on that point.

I wish to support the bill in all other respects. There is one other aspect of the bill that I would like to comment on very briefly, and that is in relation to the administrative provisions that would allow for those votes cast as pre-poll votes within the district for which those votes related to be allowed to be counted on the evening of the election. The figures I have seen are that somewhere in the vicinity of 660,000 more votes would have been counted on election night at the last election had that arrangement been in place. It seems to me that it makes perfect sense that if those votes have been cast and if they are located in that particular district that they should be counted on the night so that not only do the candidates and the parties have a better idea of the result on the night but, most importantly, that the Australian people have the most timely indication of what the result is going to be because, obviously, it is on them and their future that the result has such a great impact. I wish to support the bill.

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (7.03 pm)—It is important that whenever an election is called, the government that is elected as a result of the counting of the votes is in fact the government elected by the Australian people. That is why the Liberal and National parties when in government, and now in opposition, have always sought laws which maintain, protect, encourage and enhance the integrity of the electoral roll.

There are five elements to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010, three of which the opposition is prepared to accept and two of which the opposition is not prepared to back under any circumstances. The five schedules will, firstly, restore the close
of rolls period to seven days after the issue of a writ for an election; secondly, repeal the requirement for provisional voters to provide evidence of identity before their votes are admitted to scrutiny; thirdly, enable pre-poll votes cast in an elector’s home division to be counted as ordinary votes whenever practicable; fourthly, allow the Australian Electoral Commission to process enrolment transactions outside the division for which the person is enrolling and enable electors to update their enrolment details electronically; and, fifthly, restrict the number of candidates which can be endorsed by a political party in each division.

The opposition strenuously opposes schedule 1 and schedule 2, but is prepared to support the amendments proposed as a result of schedules 3, 4 and 5. Consequently, I will focus my attention on the two schedules which the opposition is not, in any shape or form, prepared to accept.

It really is important, as I said at the outset, to guarantee that we have an election result which is what the people voted for. The amendments moved by the former government, when in office, sought to improve and maintain the integrity of the electoral system. There is no doubt that there is an ongoing obligation on the part of Australians to enrol to vote. It is an obligation under Australian law that when a person moves to a certain locality within a certain period of that move the person is required to register to vote either for the first time or to move his or her enrolment from the previously enrolled address.

I am someone who personally believes in voluntary voting. I think that it is quite wrong that in a democracy people can be jailed, as has happened in the past, for failing to vote. People are often fined, and if they do not pay the fine then they go off to jail for a default period. I see that as being the antithesis of democracy, and I think Australia is one of only two or three English-speaking countries throughout the world which has compulsory voting. I do, however, support the concept of compulsory enrolment. There is a requirement under the law of Australia that people who are eligible to do so enrol at the address where they are currently residing. I support that, and if people observed the law of Australia then they would be enrolled whenever an election was called.

This particular bill seeks to give people a window of opportunity of seven days after the issue of the writs for an election to get on the electoral roll or to amend enrolment arrangements. The difficulty with that, of course, is that it means that people who are ill intentioned are able to, using nom de plumes, lodge a multiplicity of enrolment applications and, because of the imminent arrival of the election date, the Australian Electoral Commission, which is highly professional, simply will not have the time to check out the bona fides of those people seeking to get on the electoral roll.

It would be very easy for someone in a marginal seat who wanted to rort the electoral roll to simply sit down with a few friends and think of a few hundred nom de plumes, post away the enrolment forms and get on the electoral roll in the period between the issue of the writs and seven days after. The Australian Electoral Commission, which would be flooded by these applications for enrolment, both genuine and nongenuine, simply would not have the manpower to process these applications, taking into account all of the checks and balances which ought to be applied.

So essentially what would happen is that these people would automatically go on the electoral roll, the election day would arrive, and these people—or their nom de plumes—would be able to vote. What could happen is
that an army of people could be organised, particularly since the abolition of subdivisions voting. That is, subdivisions seem to have gone from federal divisions. Once when a person voted outside his or her subdivision it was necessary to cast an absentee vote. Now, of course, people in a division are able to go to any polling booth—and many divisions have anywhere between 30 and 90 polling booths—and cast a vote.

Unfortunately, given the laxness which the current government wants to introduce into the Electoral Act, it would make it much easier for the government to hold the large number of marginal seats which it holds as a result of the 2007 election. So it could be that this particular provision is designed to enhance the possibility of the return of the Rudd government at the election later this year. If this particular schedule becomes part of the law of Australia, it will be a green light to people to rort the electoral roll. It will be a green light for people to think of any number of nom de plumes and get them onto the electoral roll, because the Electoral Commission will simply not have the time to dot the i’s and cross the t’s. As a result, we will see a significant threat to the electoral roll of Australia and, of course, that increases the chances of the result as declared on polling day not representing what people actually voted for.

The present arrangements seem to be ones which are working well. The electoral roll presently contains a high degree of accuracy and integrity, and what the government is proposing will give the opportunity to the rorters to in effect reign supreme and will enable those who want to bring in fraudulent enrolments to do so with impunity. What will also happen, of course, if we return to the pre-existing arrangement that there will be a seven-day window of opportunity to enrol, is that citizens will become more relaxed about updating their particulars and maintaining their enrolment during the ordinary course of the year, as they will have the opportunity to delay any action until an election is called. This position was reaffirmed in the Liberal-Nationals senators’ minority report on the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters committee inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 federal election and matters related thereto.

So we are not going to apologise in any way, shape or form for opposing schedule 1, dealing with amendments relating to the close of the rolls. We also oppose, as I indicated before, schedule 2, which relates to amendments concerning evidence of identity for provisional votes. The previous government, in our effort to make sure we had integrity of the electoral system, moved to stop fraudulent voting by persons impersonating other voters by requiring that people who claim a provisional vote at an election be required to produce evidence of their true identity and their enrolled address, either on polling day or, if they did not happen to have it on polling day, in the week following.

Who on earth, if he or she is a reasonable person, could object to that particular arrangement? Do the government really want anybody to come up and say that they are John Smith, Jane Doe or Joe Bloggs and claim a provisional vote in the name of that person and be able to do so without proving that he or she happens to be the person that he or she is claiming to be? I find it breathtakingly amazing that the government can stand up in the House and say that they support amendments of this nature—amendments which in effect will help to tear up the integrity of the Australian electoral roll.

There has been a great deal of cynicism in relation to politics, and we saw the One Nation and Pauline Hanson phenomenon. Ordinary, decent Australians felt disempowered
from the political process. They felt disconnected from the political process. They felt that they could not have a say. They felt that politicians were not listening to them. They felt that the thought police were out there, stopping people from talking about issues that ought to be talked about. While I do not want to revisit the issues raised by Pauline Hanson in the parliament or in the media, I think it is important that we have a situation where people can have confidence in our electoral system. People will not move to extremist forces if they have confidence that the government of Australia is in fact the government that the majority of the people of Australia actually voted for.

That is why it is incumbent on all of us, regardless of where we happen to stand in the political spectrum, to strongly support laws that maintain the integrity of the electoral system. We only have to turn our television sets on any day of the week or any night of the year to see that in other parts of the world elections are contested and in some cases international election observers are called in because there is a worry by the people in the country that the electoral system does not have integrity. As an Australian, I am particularly proud that we do have in our electoral system more integrity than most other countries. I think that we can always continue to improve—to dot the i’s and cross the t’s in our Electoral Act. It is a work in progress, of constantly improving the accountability and integrity mechanisms.

The Howard government was prepared to do that. I find it incredibly concerning that the current government seems to want to roll back the clock to give, in effect, open season to the rotters in the same way that their open door policy and their demolition of our border protection policy has laid out the welcome mat for people smugglers. That is a matter that is increasingly of concern to the Australian people. Under the arrangement proposed by the government under schedule 2, there will effectively be no consequence for breaching the Electoral Act, the benefits of enrolling correctly will be reduced to nothing and there will be no disincentive for anyone who fails to correctly enrol, leading to a situation where the whole basis of the AEC’s continuous roll update program is severely undermined.

Any proposal such as that contained in the bill before the House—to weaken the rules relating to proof of identity for provisional votes—should be opposed because it rewards people who have been lazy and helps make fraudulent voting easier. Regardless of where we stand politically, any action by any government to bring in laws which encourage fraudulent voting ought to be strongly opposed. The policy of the former government was strongly reaffirmed in the opposition senators’ minority report of the Report on the conduct of the 2007 federal election and matters related thereto.

Frankly, Australia embraces an electoral philosophy that gives all eligible citizens a right to cast a vote on polling day. I believe they should have a right and not an obligation, but under our law they have a right ‘and’ an obligation. That means that they are required to exercise their democratic responsibility to help choose a government of the day. It does nothing to encourage confidence in the electoral system when we have a government which is prepared to introduce amendments to that electoral system which clearly militate against the integrity of the electoral roll. I have often said that Australia is the envy of nations throughout the world. The integrity of our electoral system is another attribute of this nation which enables us to strut the world stage and help encourage sound governance, good electoral practice and democracy around the world. If the amendments proposed by the government are brought into effect, it means that we as Aus-
tralians will have slightly less ability to say that we are a country which has one of the best systems in the world, because we will have a government which is moving down the same road that many governments overseas have gone down. Those governments have, of course, been quite rightly criticised by the current and former governments in Australia.

It is very important that we know that people on the electoral roll are real Australians. We need to know that they are really entitled to being on the electoral roll. We need to cut back every opportunity for electoral fraud by reducing the chances for dodgy names to make it onto the electoral roll and by making sure that each voter casts only one vote. I know it has often been said in relation to those on the other side that it is important to vote early and often! I do not believe that most of our colleagues opposite would support that, because I believe that most of our colleagues on the government benches share our wish to have integrity in the electoral system. But their wish is totally at odds with the proposals contained in schedules 1 and 2 of the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010. Nobody in the House wants cats, dogs and goldfish having their names registered on the electoral roll. It does not help the integrity of the electoral system. I am not suggesting we are going that far; however, what we are seeing is death by a thousand cuts. We are seeing the integrity of the electoral rolls slashed by schedules 1 and 2, currently before the chamber. If these two schedules become law then the government will be emboldened to further erode the integrity of the electoral system.

I believe that it is important that the government reconsider this matter. While many things separate the approaches of the government and the opposition to life and politics and our visions for the country, there are overriding principles which should bring us together as a country. Let’s face it: we are one of the oldest democracies in the world. Someone told me we are the sixth-oldest democracy in the world. We have freedom, stability and a way of life that makes us the envy of people throughout the world. We have an electoral system which, up until this bill, has been respected around the world. I am not saying we cannot make it better, but we should be moving in the direction of improving the integrity of our electoral system and not in the direction of shredding the integrity of our electoral system. So the amendments before the House are, in fact, extremely unhelpful. They undermine our capacity to stand at world fora with integrity. They undermine our capacity to be seen as paragons of best practice. They undermine our capacity to hold our heads high amongst the ranks of those who support democracy. I see the bill that is before the House as sad, because it is a first step in undermining the integrity of our electoral system. No doubt there are many countries in the world that have electoral systems with less integrity than our electoral system would have even if schedules 1 and 2 became part of the law, but this is a nail in the coffin. This is a first step towards tearing up the integrity of the Australian electoral system.

I see this particular change as bizarre, undesirable and just something that the government ought to reconsider, because our core values as a nation support the principles of integrity and electoral justice whereby when people vote for a government that is the government that is actually elected. I just believe that trying to force through the parliament these amendments contained in schedules 1 and 2 of the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010 is an action which ought to be opposed. I think these amend-
ments are retrograde. I think they are unacceptable. They will be repudiated by the people of Australia and they do no credit to this government. They do no credit to the electoral consensus in this country, which has sought to maintain a bipartisan sense of integrity in the electoral system. I oppose schedules 1 and 2, I support the other three schedules and I hope that the government will reconsider the retrograde, undesirable elements of the bill before the chamber.

Ms REA (Bonner) (7.23 pm)—I rise to add my very clear support to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010. In doing so, I would like to focus particularly on the first four schedules of the bill that deal with amendments arising from the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. In doing so, I say to the previous speaker, the member for Fisher, and the other members of the opposition who have spoken on this legislation that the one point I do agree with them on is that Australia has a very proud democratic tradition and that our electoral process and the electoral institutions upon which our democracy is built have stood the test of time and demonstrate that we are one of the most progressive democratic countries and have a longstanding and proud tradition when it comes to democratic elections. But it is there that I part ways in terms of agreement because I actually believe that these amendments, rather than eroding the integrity of the electoral system, restore the integrity that was taken away by the changes that were made by the Howard government in 2006, particularly when looking at the issue around the closure of rolls.

I think it is important to note—and I suspect that everyone in this House would agree—that there unfortunately does appear to be a growing cynicism about and a level of disinterest in our electoral system. Whilst many suggest that perhaps it is our antics and behaviour in this House that contribute to people’s cynicism about the electoral process, it may well be the way that government sometimes takes the community for granted and makes decisions that do not have community and electoral support that allows voters to develop feelings of frustration with the process. But I actually believe the ability to give everyone in this country, every citizen who is of voting age, full and free access to the electoral system is the only way in which we can restore the support and the interest once again of voters in this country. I believe that in fact the amendments that were introduced and the laws that were changed in 2006 helped fuel this disinterest by making it harder for people to enrol to vote and to make their way through the electoral system. Therefore, whilst there may be a perception about other political decisions that affected their disinterest, I believe that those changes were the cement that prevented people from feeling fully engaged in the electoral process.

What is important is that once you start to disenfranchise ordinary people and discourage their participation in the electoral system you only increase the influence of elites, of powerful lobby groups and of certain sectional interests within our community that start to dominate the political debate within this country and influence governments and their decisions. It goes fundamentally to the principle of democracy—a principle that was fought for long and hard by many of the founders of the Labor Party but which I think is shared by those who support all political parties in this country—and that is the right to vote.

But we must remember that that principle must also go with true representation. The right to vote and the support for democratically elected parliaments can only have a strong grounding in a representative parliament if all people within a community are entitled to vote and have easy access to the
electoral system. We cannot have a truly democratic parliament if it is not representative, and we cannot have a representative parliament if certain sections of our community are excluded from voting and from the electoral process. That is why I believe that the first two schedules in particular—those which are the source of contention—are the most significant in this particular debate. I am very pleased that Senator Ludwig has brought these amendments to the parliament and I am very pleased that he has the support of the government to introduce these amendments to see the removal of the change to the close-of-rolls period and to open up the opportunity for people who would be provisional voters to participate in the electoral process.

The first schedule, as I said, restores the close-of-rolls period. The changes that were made in 2006 meant that rolls closed at eight o’clock on the night that the writs were issued. This was a significant change because it disenfranchised quite a number of people. It disenfranchised people who might not necessarily contribute to the parliamentary or democratic process in any way other than by simply exercising their vote. Unfortunately, not everybody in this country is a political animal. They do not stay glued to the news, The 7.30 Report, Lateline, A Current Affair, 60 Minutes or all of the other media that endlessly discuss politics day in and day out like we do.

Often, people are only reminded of their need to enrol or the need to change their enrolment because they hear of an election being announced. That is not a reason to disenfranchise them from the electoral process. In fact, it means that if we do not support these amendments, there will be a number of those people—key people within the community—who will be excluded. The current estimate is that there are now around 1.4 million people who are not on the electoral roll. Two-thirds of those people are aged between 18 and 39. If we are going to get young people involved in the political process and if we are going to maintain the integrity and strength of our democratic institutions from here well into the future, we must get people engaged in the electoral process as soon as possible. That begins by casting a vote. It begins by the rite of passage when you are 18 of walking into a polling booth and making a choice about the person who you wish to represent you in the parliament. It is an important part. We hope that as a result of casting that vote many people, particularly young people, will become further engaged in the democratic process and will become more actively involved in parliamentary and political debates, whether it is through their workplaces, through their field of study or whatever. But it begins with the right to vote and it begins with the exercising of that right to vote. That is why this amendment is so important.

I have been advised that in 2007 it was estimated that more than 50,000 people were prevented from enrolling because of the change in the close of rolls. It is actually quite significant that that number of people were excluded from the electoral process because they were not a 24/7 political animal and because they only get switched on by key events—and often the calling of an election is a key event. It does not mean that their vote is not important, that their contribution is not important and that they should not be given the right to participate. The second change that is proposed in this bill is regarding the rules around provisional voters. Apparently around 27,000 voters were rejected in 2007 because they did not turn up with the proof of identity that was required in order to cast their vote under the previous government’s amendment. This was a change that was only made a few years ago. The integrity of our electoral system over the past 100 years prior to that had not seen major
upheavals or major rorting of the system. All that change did was, once again, exclude a further 27,000 voters from exercising their democratic right to vote. When you put those two figures together you start to talk about a significant section of the Australian community. When you consider the number of people who sit in this House on very, very slim margins, you realise that the exclusion of those people could have actually changed results in a number of key marginal seats on both sides of the House. That is when we start to talk about the importance of including everybody in the electoral process and giving them as much access and opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

The other thing I am particularly concerned about, and one that I would really like to support in these particular amendments, is the ability to change enrolment details electronically. This is a new initiative by the government. I am pleased to see the minister is embracing the digital age. Once again, if we are going to talk about having all Australians as part of the democratic community engaged in the electoral process, if we are going to get young people thinking about their democratic rights and exercising their right to vote, we have to start looking at ways in which we can use electronic media opportunities, such as via the net and other means, to encourage young people to participate. If this legislation is passed, people will be able to change their enrolment details electronically which therefore enables the electoral process on the day of voting to run much more smoothly because people will have been enrolled correctly. That will not only have a significant impact on increasing the number of people that exercise their right to vote, it will also encourage and demonstrate to people that this government wants to give them every opportunity to participate.

I am pleased that in order to enrol it is still a requirement that the form is filled out physically and that a signature is required, but once you are part of the system this government is not going to disenfranchise you simply because you moved house, you changed jobs, or for whatever reason you were no longer living where you were first enrolled. If we make it easier for people to change their enrolment details, we increase representation in this parliament because we increase the number of people who are exercising their democratic right to vote. On top of that, that particular amendment also makes it much easier for the Australian Electoral Commission to do its job and to do it properly. It ensures that our rolls are protected and accurate, that the information is properly processed and that the data is accurate at the beginning of the election cycle. These changes will not only involve more people and give them a greater right to participate, they will, importantly, encourage electronic amendments and make it much easier for people working within the electoral commission.

The other amendment to this bill that was put forward by the minister was to include a pre-poll vote as an ordinary vote on election night. I think that this is a very exciting and quite progressive initiative by the minister and it is one that I am more than happy to support. Once again, if we are talking about expanding the franchise and encouraging more people to be involved, we all know that in this day and age people are busy, that people work on weekends and that for religious reasons or a whole range of reasons people cannot vote on the particular day but want to vote within their electorate and want to make sure that their vote is counted. They exercise the option of pre-poll voting. In fact, apparently around 15 per cent of voters in the last election were pre-poll voters. This initiative means that those pre-poll votes that are cast in the electorate in which the voter resides or is enrolled will be counted on the night. They
are not bundled up with all the other provisional votes to go through the fairly arduous bureaucracy that goes around envelopes, section votes and all of the things that can often delay the counting and the electoral process for days, or weeks in some cases, when it comes to election results. Those votes can be counted on the night.

I know that many people in this House will realise that their scrutineers on the day may not be so happy about having a few more votes to count but, if it means that in some of those very, very close results we can get a clearer outcome on the night because votes that have exactly the same status as those cast on the actual day can be counted that night, it could make for a much easier time in the days and weeks to come. In fact, it is estimated that, if those votes had been able to be counted on the night in the last election, there were some 667,000 votes that could have been counted that night. As we know, with the very close margins that occurred on both sides of the House in some cases, it could have meant that there was actually a result that night rather than an enormous amount of anxiety for candidates but also an enormous number of commitments having to be made by volunteers, scrutineers and the like as well as commission staff in the days afterwards, counting votes that really should have been counted on the night.

Those four schedules within this bill go to the heart of improving the integrity of our electoral system. They do not reduce the integrity. They do not open the system up to rorting. They do not in any way undermine or diminish the integrity of our electoral processes. Those amendments existed prior to 2006, as I have said. We had many general elections prior to that, and I am sure that many in this House who have been here a lot longer than me would know that the integrity of the system has never been questioned to the extent that required the draconian amendments that were designed to simply exclude, discourage and disenfranchise certain sections of the community rather than encourage people to participate in the democratic process.

If there are concerns about the integrity of an election, if there are concerns about the electoral process and if there are concerns of certain outcomes being the result of an abuse of the electoral system, there are mechanisms which deal with that. The underpinning of our democratic system is that there are legislative and other mechanisms that ensure the integrity of the electoral process. It is fundamental to our democratic process.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—The member will be heard in silence.

Ms REA—It is interesting that the member opposite interjects with certain examples. Can I say that, as somebody who has been a member of the Australian Labor Party for many years, someone who has participated at the student union level and in many other activities which require elections, I am well aware of how fundamentally important it is to maintain the integrity of our electoral process. I am well aware of the abuses that may well be perpetrated in other countries.

If we did not have a strong democratic system in this country, if we did not have an electoral process that had stood the test of time over decades—indeed, well over 100 years—I would be the first one standing here to say that the system had to change. But I am sorry—I believe that the changes that were made in 2006 disenfranchised people in this community and discouraged them from exercising their democratic right to vote. I do not believe that those amendments were about fixing rorts in the electoral system. I do not believe that they were about protecting the integrity of the electoral system. I
believe they were about excluding people. I believe they were about disenfranchising people. I believe that they were about discouraging and playing on the frustration of the Australian community when it comes to both the electoral process and their elected representatives, and I believe that these amendments will do much more to encourage people to participate democratically but will continue to maintain the integrity of our very great and strong democracy. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (7.43 pm)—Before I begin, can I pass an observation that the day after International Women’s Day I am the only male MP on the floor of the chamber at the moment. It is a great reflection on modern Australia that we have a minister at the table, a shadow minister being very boisterous and active, a deputy speaker in the chair, a speaker and—no offence to the member for Newcastle—a quorum holder here, but more power to you and more power to Australia because of it. It is a great reflection—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—And Hansard.

Mr OAKESHOTT—Yes, and Hansard as well.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—I think the point has been made.

Mr OAKESHOTT—It is a great practical example of the day after International Women’s Day.

I understand that the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010 is the first part of a two-part reform process. This is part of structural change and I will focus on that in my comments tonight. It is also my understanding that we are expecting a financial bill with regard to electoral law reform. As I think any member in this place would attest, it is where the money flows that we have a great deal of interest in; therefore, I flag to everyone to keep a good, strong eye on the financials. I will make a couple of references tonight to this legislation being the first in a package of electoral law reform, both structural and financial. Whilst there is a level of comfort with elements of this piece of legislation, I think there are some deep concerns, not only personally but also within the community, about the financials and the way in which our democracy is being bought by too many people with an interest that is not the national interest but that may be a self-interest or a business interest. No-one in this debate speaks with clean hands with regard to the financial elements of what it takes to play in our democracy today.

I hope that we see this as genuine reform that upholds parliamentary democracy for the long term and that it is not about some short-term deal between the two major parties, in particular, in trying to wrestle for power and influence in Australia today. I start with the broad principle approach that all of this is a lot more important than quite often it is given credit for because it is the essential elements, the recipe, for what our parliamentary democracy is today. You only have to watch what is happening in a very interesting House of Commons debate at the moment, where we are seeing some pushback on behalf of backbenchers, both government and opposition, who are taking on the executive and taking on the philosophical questions around who really does run a parliament, who really is responsible and who really are the gatekeepers for democracy. I am pleased to see that debate in the House of Commons and I await the day when we have a similar debate here in Australia.

Having been here for only 16 months, I can say that there seem to be a great many norms that are accepted as part of, for example, House of Representatives practice, the way electoral business is conducted, the way rolls are kept and the way election funding is
done. There seem to be an awful lot of norms accepted by the process and by Australia which are not necessarily contrary to but are certainly a long extension of some definitions of parliamentary democracy and certainly a long way from the original definitions around the very essence of the role of a parliamentary democracy. I know I am starting wide with some broad principles, but I think it is important when we are considering just how we structure a voting system and just how we allow MPs to raise and spend money. We do need to start wide with who we are and what we are and what we want to be.

I also say—it is probably unusual for an unaligned MP to say it after 16 months in this place—that I have yet to meet an MP who wants our democratic process to be the plaything of the rich. Certainly as individuals, there is a general belief that our democracy can be and should be better than that. Whether they be my unaligned colleagues or members of political parties, nobody wants the logical extension of that to be that the democratic process, the parliamentary process, is the play toy of political parties. I would hope there is a general belief and a general principle that it is inclusive of all-comers—members of political parties or not. I am not one to whack political parties around. There is a right and a role for association of members in this chamber to get things done but, vice versa, there is also a right and a role for those who choose to align based on issues. I would hope the process recognises that and the concerns I will express tonight that we are potentially just reaffirming some norms from previous systems that provide a substantial advantage to those who stand as candidates as members of political parties as compared to those who do not.

It is extremely concerning to hear conversations in this building about the next round of electoral reform that seems to be placing a greater ability for a member or a candidate standing for a political party to spend up to $300,000 per division, per electorate, compared to someone who is not a member of a political party, who looks like having their spending capped at $100,000. If that is the dirty deal that is being done behind the chair, I think that is a disgrace. I would hope anyone in this place, regardless of whether they are a member of a party or not, particularly the backbenchers from both sides, would give some push-back on this. As hard and as uncomfortable as it is to give up the advantage that money provides, I would hope that push-back comes from across the party lines and says, ‘No, in the long-term interests of our system of government, of our democracy, of our parliamentary democracy, it is in all our long-term interests that the amount raised and the amount spent and the way that is accounted for is fair and equitable to all.’ I do not think it is asking too much for unaligned or aligned members to have the same rules.

The example that I currently use is the September 2008 Lyne by-election. There was a period of, I think, 30 to 60 days during which all the candidates had to declare how much they raised and how much they spent in that Lyne by-election. Please do not take this as me having a crack at one political party. There was really only one major party that stood. I would suspect all would have been guilty if they had stood. However, the party in question and the individual involved as a candidate were able to declare ‘zero’ on their Lyne by-election return under the guise of some global annual return that came out early in February. None of us know the evidence trail—exactly what was raised for the Lyne electorate and what was spent in the Lyne electorate. It gets lost in the wash of this global figure. This is obviously to the advantage of the major parties involved who
can argue a case that, ‘We are national parties; we therefore have national budgets, blah-de, blah-de, blah.’

There is, if not a legal imperative currently, certainly a moral imperative to allow a voter to know what was spent and to draw some conclusions or ask some questions as to why it was spent. To the credit of the Greens candidate in the Lyne by-election, she did exactly that—she declared locally. To the credit of Malcolm Turnbull, he did that in the Wentworth by-election—he declared what was raised locally and what was spent.

There is an accountability and transparency trail wrapped up in that. I think that is the best we can do under a ‘buyer beware’ principle. I know, however, that there is still a great deal of frustration on the mid-North Coast of New South Wales because, 16 months after the event, an individual voter from that by-election can ask how much the major political party raised and spent but will still not get an answer.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

Mr OAKESHOTT—It was the National Party, so it is not the—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Lyne indicated he wanted to speak on general principles. I ask him now to come to the bill.

Mr OAKESHOTT—I am coming back to the structural. It is important because it is part of the package—it is financial and structural. This is leading in to the structural changes.

Again, the general principle I would hope we stand by is to be as inclusive at the ballot box as possible without losing the integrity of the rolls. I accept the position of the coalition, post-2006, about the importance of the integrity of the rolls, but I do not see this change, going back to the pre-2006 rules, as directly challenging that integrity. I would hope we have an inclusive process. I think 600,000 people turned up to cast a provisional vote at the 2007 general election and were unable to. That is unfortunate. I would hope that we would have some back processes, whether based on signatures or any other means or improvements in technology, which would allow provisional voting to be a valid way to vote. If that is the fundamental change that we are seeing, then I do not see that as a change which will cause the world to collapse if it goes through.

I understand that there are some changes to pre-poll voting as well. There are changes to provisions requiring that pre-polling places must now include compartments for voting—these are to fall within the same definition as compartments used for polling on election day—and must have a ballot box for votes. This is acceptable. Voters can vote at pre-polling places within a division or at other places declared to be used for pre-polling as long as the list of voters is delivered to that place. Essentially, the four or five points on pre-polling are, as I said, eminently sensible on the surface. Unless I hear otherwise from others, it all looks fair to me.

There are amendments relating to processing of enrolments. I think there are some interesting changes worthy of note, including allowing 17-year-olds to register in specified circumstances. There have been ongoing debates throughout my years in both state and federal politics on the rights and wrongs of various voting ages. I would be interested to see the detail of those specified circumstances in which 17-year-olds can now register.

The issue arising out of the Bradfield by-election is also worthy of note. That election saw an extraordinary effort by one smaller, but still very active, political party in standing nine candidates out of 22. Whilst the Christian Democratic Party certainly did not achieve an outstanding result as a conse-
quence of that, I do also accept as sensible the change to restrict, at every election or by-election, each of the registered parties to standing one candidate and one candidate only. I think that is a fair and sensible change.

I understand there is very minimal impact financially. The cost estimate I have is for just over a million dollars, with savings over forward estimates of over $5 million. Most of those savings arise from more efficient pre-polling at the next couple of elections. I do not have a problem with this bill and I await the associated legislation with a great deal of interest. Whilst it is still in negotiation, I would encourage all members to reflect, and to reflect deeply, on whether this is a process about short-termism or long-termism. Is this process a scramble for power—a couple of major parties fighting over the title of 'executive'—or are we, through these processes of electoral reform, building a better and more sustainable long-term parliamentary democracy in this country? I would ask for those negotiating on the next piece to keep a particular focus on that.

Whilst being fair through this legislation is uncomfortable and difficult, and I do not think anyone in this debate speaks with clean hands on any of this, I would hope quite sincerely that the focus is on those broader principles that I started with. Quite often they might sound boring and philosophical, but they are critical if we are building a better structure of detailed processes for provisional voting or pre-polling. Those broad principles do matter. In this case, without losing integrity, I accept that it is an inclusive process. When we get into the financials, I will have plenty more to say about some broad principles as well. I hope they are considered through the process of drafting that bill.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (8.00 pm)—I will start by responding to some of the comments that the honourable member for Lyne just made. He posed the question: is it a scramble for power or is it long-term parliamentary democracy building? I have to say to him that it is not a scramble for power for people in this chamber, but it is about empowering the community, empowering the voters, empowering the people who have the right to vote and empowering the people who have the right to vote according to our Constitution. That is why I am speaking in strong support of these changes to the law. The honourable member for Lyne also says that nobody comes to this debate with clean hands. I certainly come to the debate with clean hands, as one does when one goes to equity. I am absolutely happy to say that.

Mr Oakeshott—We will discuss that later!

Ms SAFFIN—We certainly shall discuss that later, as the honourable member for Lyne says. It is an inclusive process, and it is about making sure that voters have every opportunity to exercise their constitutional right. The Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010 gives them that right. I rise to speak in strong support of the bill for the compelling reason that it enhances individuals’ ability to cast a vote. That is a basic but essential exercise, and also a responsibility in a democracy. A democracy is both product and process, and this is about the process of our democratic system. As lawmakers, as parliamentarians, we have an obligation to do anything that we can do to enhance it, to strengthen it—and that is what we are doing with this legislation.

When I studied law some years back I was surprised to find that our right to vote was in the Constitution. The Constitution is not something that we know very well in Austra-
lia, or indeed talk about. When you study law you at least get to study it for a year. It might not make you an expert, but you learn a little bit more than what is generally known in the community. We have a constitution that serves us relatively well, but it is not a constitution that is flush with individual liberties in a direct sense, in an expressive sense. We have this right to vote and this responsibility, something that we cherish in our community, and to find that it could be adulterated by law was a surprise to me. I thought it was something that was this right, this responsibility, and yet we have law and lawmakers who then adulterate it. That was how I saw it. I still see it within that framework. My personal view was, and remains, that if an individual Australian citizen turns up at the polling booth on election day to exercise that right, that civic responsibility, that person should be able to do that full stop and the law should not prevent them and put obstacles in their way; the law should facilitate their doing that. The changes in legislation I am speaking to tonight actually remove some barriers that were put in place in 2006, and they will assist people to exercise that right.

I know there are functional reasons—to prevent fraud and provide ease of administration, among others—as to why we have electoral laws. But functionality should not put barriers up to preclude a person from voting. We have to be mindful of that. I was surprised in 2006 when Mr Howard introduced the amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act. I looked at it and I thought about it but I could not see any rationale for why we would have the issuing of the writs and then the roll would be closed off immediately and people would not have the seven days that they had prior to that change to get themselves on the roll. A lot of people do not go around thinking about the election and thinking about being on the roll. We do, because we are in the business of it. That is our job and that is what we do. A lot of people do not, and when the writs are issued that turns people’s minds to it. They realise they are not on the roll, and the AEC can do some work. The seven days lets people think about it and it gives them that bit of time to get on the roll. Yes, it is a responsibility, and it would be nice if everyone was on it beforehand, but they are not. That is not how we operate in human societies. To actually have the writs issued and then it was sudden death—there was no opportunity after, I think, eight o’clock that night—meant that people lost that opportunity. That did surprise me. I looked at it and I cannot say conclusively but I did not see any reason advanced that made sense.

The Report on the conduct of the 2007 federal election and matters related thereto of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters provided some good information and recommendations. Many of the reports that have come from that committee have done their work well. They have provided good insights into the electoral process. The reports have provided good information and good recommendations, and this clearly shows the power of the parliamentary committee to work in the way it is intended to work. The report that I am referring to from the 2007 election came up with 53 recommendations. If I remember correctly, 45 were unanimous, and among those 53 were some good recommendations about the way we should approach the electoral law.

I turn to some specifics of the bill. A major and seminally important change is to section 155 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act. It is a change that will cause the rolls to be closed for the purpose of an election seven days after the date of the writs. That means that we get to hear the announcement—and it is always the announcement we hear from the Prime Minister of the day—and then we hear that the writs have been
issued and then people have seven days to get themselves registered. So there is a preparedness process. In a democratic system, that is an obligation that we have to make sure that people can do that. It gives effect also to recommendation 1 of the joint standing committee that I referred to.

There are a few other amendments. This legislation also gives effect to the Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act. It brings the act into conformity with what I have just outlined in the Commonwealth Electoral Act. The way I read the bill—and I stand to be corrected—where we are amending the Electoral Act to allow better processes for voters et cetera in about six key areas, there is also a provision to amend the referendum act so that it is in conformity with the Electoral Act. I think it stands to reason that one has to do that. If we are exercising the referendum act, we have to have the same provisions in place, because we exercise a referendum act to cast our vote. The legislation picks up recommendation 45 of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters giving consistency to the solid provisions.

Another key provision is the issue regarding the need to give proof of identity when casting provisional voting.

Mr Laming—Hear, hear!

Ms SAFFIN—I hear ‘Hear, hear!’ from the other side. I think there is a lot of agreement on this particular issue, which is good to see, and I understand a lot of the recommendations from the joint standing committee do have bipartisan or multipartisan support. The provision is around the issue of ID and it is good to see that it will be picked up. I turn to that specifically. The Howard government’s Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006 ensured that provisional voters were required to produce evidence of identity—a drivers licence et cetera—before their vote was counted. There were two issues arising from that. Some people do not have such ID, and if they did not have that evidence of identity on polling day then the elector had until usually the Friday after or five business days after the election to produce evidence of identity to the AEC. In the 2007 election, approximately 25 per cent of provisional voters were unable to produce evidence of identity on polling day, with approximately 20 per cent of electors then producing evidence after the election, meaning 27,000 votes were rejected at the preliminary scrutiny. That is 27,000 votes too many because if we are talking about—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—They could have been fraudulent.

Ms SAFFIN—The honourable member for Mackellar says they could be fraudulent. There are ways of determining whether they are fraudulent. That was an absolute cut-off. If people turn up to exercise a provisional vote, they are entitled to cast it and then we have a process in place where they can have that checked. This bill implements a 2007 election commitment by the Australian Labor Party to repeal the provisional voting identity requirements. It also implements recommendation 2 of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters report on the conduct of the 2007 federal election. The committee, as I said before, is multipartisan. It picks up the committee’s recommendation. Yes, it was a commitment of the Australian Labor Party. That was absolutely clear and it was the right commitment and the right issue. A multipartisan committee of this parliament also recommended it. It picks it up as a safeguard, and we are talking here about issues of fraud. If the Divisional Returning Officer responsible for accepting the vote has reason to doubt that the signature that purports to be the elector’s signature is the signature of the elector, the DRO must check the signature against the most recent record of the elector’s signa-
ture that is available. There are safeguards, and we have to be mindful that our job is to allow people to vote and not preclude them, not put barriers up. It is always easy to put the barriers up, put the shutters up, make it difficult and make it hard, but we actually have to let people through and not push them out.

There are a few other amendments that are quite specific and relevant in this bill. I have dealt with the first two: restoring the close-of-the-rolls period to seven days after the issue of the writ for an election and repealing the requirement for provisional voters to provide evidence of identity before their votes are admitted for scrutiny. There are a few others. The bill is modernising the enrolment processes to enable electors to update their enrolment details electronically. I would like to make a few comments about that. If somebody moves to a different address, they have a responsibility to notify the AEC that they have done that and to keep all their details up to date. My experience is that a lot of people, including me, then get a notice from the AEC that says, ‘Please return this within 14 days.’ What happens after 14 days? If you do not return it within 14 days, does it become invalid? That is how it reads. A lot of people might get their mail after 14 days have already passed. Frequently I do. Somebody from my household got one a little while ago and, by the time they read it, 25 days had passed. What do they do? It says that they have to return it within 14 days.

I have always said how simple it would be if you could do that online. We live in a world that is electronic. Why can’t we update our details online? Why do we have to do this process—get a form, fill it in and send it off within 14 days? It frequently trips people up and further acts to disenfranchise them. That is what we are talking about. It is about franchisement, not disenfranchisement. So I was pleased to see that addressed in the bill.

I am not 100 per cent clear how it will work in practice. I think it will be a work in progress, as something new that is being introduced, but it is a welcome provision and it is good to see that it is in there.

Another provision in the bill allows the AEC to manage its workload more efficiently by enabling the enrolment transactions to be processed outside the division for which the person is enrolling. That one speaks for itself. It just makes sense. It is probably one of those ones that are long overdue. I think that provision will be welcomed by the AEC.

Another provision in the bill is to do with prepolling. I am aware that most of us here in this place have had quite a deal of practical experience with scrutineering and prepolling. I forget what the figures are, but the number of people who cast their votes with prepoll is getting up around—

Mr Zappia—Fifteen per cent.
Ms SAFFIN—Fifteen per cent.
Mr Laming—Five per cent.
Ms SAFFIN—Five per cent? I read 15 per cent. That is large. It is a significant amount of the community that are casting their votes in that way. If you have been scrutineering in a polling booth on an election night, you will know that prepoll votes normally do not get counted with the votes on that night—they go off and are counted elsewhere. That can slow down the count in seats. It is important—essential—in a democracy that we have the count done as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

The way I read this change is that the prepoll votes cast in an elector’s home division—and a lot of them are cast in home divisions—will be able to be counted as ordinary votes, wherever practicable. I imagine that most of them could be, just from my observation of it and my involvement. Those
votes will be counted on the night or they will be counted very quickly, so there will not be that time lag. That means that the result can be known a lot quicker in a particular area. Some we know quickly and some we do not, for certain reasons. This is a very welcome change as well.

Another change in the bill restricts the number of candidates that can be endorsed by a political party in each division. Previous speakers have put it on the record that this came up with the recent by-election in Bradfield. I am sure it has been an issue before, but it was highlighted in Bradfield by the large number of candidates from a particular party. It is just good sense to make this change.

This bill is most welcome. It is a bill about inclusivity. It is bill about shoring up and strengthening our franchisement and removing what I see as some areas of disenfranchisement that came in with the 2006 amendments. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (8.20 pm)—This debate is effectively one between the two sides of the chamber arguing the issue of inclusiveness against the issue of integrity. I will go into the detail, but what this argument will turn upon is whether one or both or neither of these sides can make a case for either the integrity of the system or, in the government’s case, its inclusiveness—they often use the word ‘franchisement’. The government can only make the case for the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010 if they can demonstrate that, if the increased inclusiveness comes at the loss of integrity, that is a price worth paying. The opposition’s argument, particularly around schedules 1 and 2, is simply about integrity. In the end, if there is no integrity, there is no effective election. There have to be rules somewhere. We have to set a bar somewhere. In the Australian political system, it is well known that there already is the requirement upon Australians to maintain their enrolment details in their permanent place of residence, to cast a vote when an election is called and to fully extend their preferences to the candidates. That is written in the act.

So there is already in place a legislative floor, and part of that floor is, of course, the requirement to prove who you are. If you cannot do that, effectively you are balancing up the right to vote with the right to know who the voter is or whether the voter can say who they are and prove who they are. Can they present something as simple as a piece of identification? What is being argued here today is simply that, in the guise of enfranchisement—straight out of the ALP text-book—we are prepared to erode or, even worse, dilute the requirements around integrity of the voting process.

Let us go straight to the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. I would like to focus on the dissenting report. I think it is important that we go through that clearly. Unlike the government, I am not going to focus on every schedule and give each schedule two minutes. I am going to focus on what we disagree on. It is always a bit suspicious when government speakers come in here and devote two minutes to each schedule. I am going to focus on what we disagree on. It is always a bit suspicious when government speakers come in here and devote two minutes to each schedule, because you truly wonder whether they get what we are debating today. There is disagreement on two schedules in particular—the Australian people are concerned about two schedules in particular—and we agree on the rest. There is no need to devote half of your speech to things upon which we all agree. People want to know why this government is allowing voters to turn up to vote and not be able to present some ID. In the pubs and clubs and around the parking areas around shopping centres, people will say that, if you are going to get out of bed, put on
your clothes and drive down and vote, it is reasonable that, if you are asked who you are, you can prove who you are with some ID. Most people find that a thoroughly reasonable request by the DRO.

What we have here is a fairly fluffy obfuscation around this debate, saying that it is all about inclusivity. It is almost this electoral relativism, which is that it is more important that every person who wants to vote is handed a ballot paper because in some way, if we were not to do that, it might affect the result of an election. We are simply putting to the government that, on this side of the House, we have made a very clear argument that integrity of the roll is essential and the AEC needs time to prepare that roll so that the vote can be done properly. In the end, as I think all Australians would agree, the great threat—even though it may well be minor—of fraudulent voting is eliminated.

Australians are right to be fearful that someone can go to one ballot place and say, ‘I’m Jack Smith,’ and get a vote and be ticked off and go to another ballot place and say, ‘I’m Jack Smith,’ and be ticked off and do it two, three or multiple times and, in the end, when the AEC comes back and says, ‘Did you vote a number of times?’ and that person says no, all of those votes are in the hopper. How do we pick out those votes and remove them? They are not provisional votes. These people have fraudulently voted. There has to be some way of preventing that, and I think the average Australian would agree. We are down to the last speakers, and I challenge the members sitting on the other side to answer the question: how will one deal with fraudulent voting? I ask government members to answer that question.

Australia’s voting system is something of which we are all proud, and we are defending 99 per cent of it. The building blocks of our democratic system—compulsory voting, preferential voting—are things that we truly support. But what the majority of members of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters are basically saying is that they do not want to impose an unwarranted inconvenience, and that inconvenience is to show some photo identification. I do not think any reasonable person taking a glance at that proposition would say that that is an unwarranted inconvenience that will dissuade people from coming and voting or will change a result. What will change it is a lack of integrity in the system—not only fraudulent voting but also a perception amongst people that it is not worth getting out and voting because there is so much fraud. We are obliged to fight to eliminate fraud in voting wherever we can. Whether we think it is a big or a small problem, it is important that we have rules.

In its recommendation, the committee is basically saying that we should repeal section 155 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act and replace it with a new provision that allows people to enrol for up to seven days after closure of the writs. A very important point that has not been clearly made is that the closure of the writs occurs a number of days after an election is called. I am just not sure how disenfranchising it is for someone to hear that an election of some form or another has been called and to have the desire to vote but not be able to get to an AEC office within three or four working days to update the roll, as it currently is under the 2007 changes made by the coalition when in government. No case has yet been made by any speaker here that there is a significant threat to the integrity of the system from allowing only four days and not extending it out to seven days.

This government, on the other side of the chamber, has only one job to do in this debate, and that is to find within the AEC the resources to guarantee the integrity of the
roll between its proposed seven-day cut-off and election day. We can ask the AEC. In their first submission to the committee the AEC made the statement at 2.3.1 that:

The reduction in the close of rolls period meant that during 2007 the AEC—

had the time and—

placed a strong emphasis on ensuring that eligible electors were correctly enrolled prior to the issue of the writs and that the focus was on having—

for the first time—

an “election ready roll” at the appropriate time.

I say to those on the other side that, until there is a statement from the AEC saying anything other than that, it is clear that, by closing the rolls at the issuance of the writs, the AEC were able to do their job completely—read into that, guaranteed integrity of the system. There is nothing in the committee’s report that speaks against that proposition. There has been no case put by government members on the other side of the chamber to disprove that moving to the seven-day period will need either more resourcing—more hands on deck—or some other system whereby the rolls can be guaranteed. I challenge the final speakers to come forward with a statement from the AEC to that effect. I doubt that they will.

We on this side of the chamber say that the existing arrangements, set up in 2007, actually work. Furthermore, we know what the AEC said in 2.4.5 of their submission. They noted that, under the new rules in 2007, the number of people who missed the closure-of-the-rolls deadline in 2007 was 100,000, compared to the 2004 election, where 168,394 people missed out. There simply is no case from the government that there is a problem. In fact, the system was improved with the rules that this government is now seeking to repeal. The number of people who missed out on the cut-off was reduced by 40 per cent. All that is going to occur with the proposed changes is that an unknown number of additional people may be able to enrol but there will be a definitively reduced amount of time for the AEC to guarantee that these rolls are in good order.

In contrast to the argument that has been asserted by the government, a truly effective AEC campaign to encourage enrolment needs to be combined with a fact that is often missed by the government—the fact that failure to enrol prior to the election must have a consequence. The Speaker, who has taken his seat, knows that we all realise that there have to be consequences to every action. If you remove those consequences, you cannot expect people to follow the law. That is precisely what is being done here. We saw in 2007 a very good outcome. There was increased enfranchisement. I know how much the government want that. They want to see more enfranchisement. That was demonstrated with our laws that were implemented, and they have not been supported in these changes.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

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

That the House do now adjourn.

**University of Western Sydney: Women of the West Award 2010**

**Mr HAYES** (Werriwa) (8.30 pm)—We are very fortunate to have exceptional people in our communities, people who genuinely make a difference, and it is only right that we acknowledge their contribution. On Monday afternoon I had the pleasure of attending the University of Western Sydney’s 2010 Women of the West Award ceremony, held at the Parramatta campus, where Sister Kerry MacDermott of Minto was proudly named the joint winner, along with Aunty Mae Robinson of Mount Pritchard. Michelle Fenech
of Camden was awarded the UWS Young Women of the West Award. This prestigious award, now in its sixth year, continues to grow and succeeds in showcasing the diversity and strength of women in Western Sydney. I would like to take a bit of time now to inform the House briefly about each of these worthy winners.

It was a great honour for me to nominate Sister Kerry, a Minto resident for 26 years. Her award was a fitting tribute to the hard work and dedication she has shown to the local community for nearly three decades. Sister Kerry is a member of the religious community Our Lady’s Nurses for the Poor, better known as the ‘Brown Sisters’, and currently oversees the Catholic Diocese of Wollongong’s Aboriginal ministry. Monday was also Sister Kerry’s 46th anniversary in the convent. What strikes me most about Sister Kerry is her ceaseless devotion to the principles of social justice and equality, particularly in relation to the local Aboriginal community in south-west Sydney. Over the years, Sister Kerry has become a well-respected and much-loved figure within the Campbelltown community. Her compassion, empathy and capacity to advocate for those who feel they have no voice know no bounds. Sister Kerry has truly lived a life of service, and yet she does not expect credit for her tireless work within this community, nor does she accept credit willingly.

Aunty Mae Robinson is a longtime Mount Pritchard resident and Aboriginal elder who was recognised for her contribution to the education and wellbeing of Indigenous people. Aunty Mae has an impressive list of achievements and involvement with various programs and initiatives that all help to improve the lives and education of Aboriginal youth in south-west Sydney. In 2007, Aunty Mae was recognised by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council with an Indigenous Elders and Leaders Award. In 2009, Aunty Mae was awarded the Director-General’s Award for Excellent Service to Public Education and Training. Even though Aunty Mae is now officially retired, she continues to support schools in the region to develop a greater understanding of Aboriginal Australia and to support Aboriginal student achievement. She remains a member of the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and is their representative on the UWS Indigenous Advisory Council.

Michelle Fenech was awarded the UWS Young Women of the West Award for her commitment to community and charity work. Michelle began working as the sole journalist at the Wollondilly Advertiser in 2006 and she quickly became more than just a reporter: she became an advocate and strong lobbyist for her local community. Unfortunately, one of Michelle’s close friends suffers from cystic fibrosis, a debilitating and life-threatening illness that affects about 3,000 Australians. Michelle took her compassion, generosity and sheer determination and organised some of Cystic Fibrosis NSW’s most successful fundraisers, including the 65-kilometre Swim for Cystic Fibrosis. This event has been held for the past two years and Michelle has raised, in Picton alone, nearly $100,000. Michelle also regularly uses her weekly column to campaign for those in our community who are in need, and particularly for those who often do not have a voice, calling for compassion and generosity—two qualities Michelle has in spades.

I would also like to acknowledge the Highly Commended awards that were presented to Prue Gregory of Campbelltown and Tarsha Gavin of Bonnyrigg Heights. Prue is the Principal Solicitor for Macarthur Legal Centre. She regularly undertakes pro bono work in the local area, particularly in Macquarie Fields and Claymore, and works tirelessly on improving access to justice for so-
cially and economically disadvantaged people. Tarsha is a student at Sydney university. She commits herself to advocating for young people’s rights and interests and has been involved in a number of voluntary positions in government organisations, non-government organisations and charity groups at local, state and federal levels. Our community is indebted to people like those I have just mentioned. Their spirit and commitment have touched the lives of so many people and make our community what it is today. 

(Time expired)

Centre for Cerebral Palsy

Mr IRONS (Swan) (8.35 pm)—Last Sunday I had the privilege to be involved in a fundraising event for the Centre for Cerebral Palsy called the Wheelie Big Day Out. The Wheelie Big Day Out is a community event that not only raises money for those who live with cerebral palsy but also gives people an opportunity to appreciate the difficulties of operating an electric wheelchair. Believe me: it is a lot harder than it looks. The challenge—and it certainly is a challenge—is to complete an obstacle course relay in an electric wheelchair. The event provided plenty of memorable moments, and local TV celebrities from channels 7, 9 and 10 all supported the day, along with West Coast Eagles players Dean Cox and Andrew Embley. Ex-West Coast Eagle and now TV identity Adrian Barich also participated and brought his family along.

It was great to see so many community partners involved in the day, including retired fireys from FESA displaying the restored fire trucks. Also, there was ‘Beat the Heat’, a community based anti-street-racing program, started in 2005 by the former members of the now defunct WA Police Tango 1 Police Drag Racing Team. The main aim of the program is to reduce the incidence of illegal street racing on WA roads by encouraging participation in drag racing in a safe and controlled environment.

‘Reptiles by Request’ was another interesting community exhibit. It was situated next to my stand, which was ably serviced by many Young Liberals. Reptiles by Request provided my team with some memorable moments, particularly when the snakes were draped over the shoulders of one of my staff, Emma. I also had a snake draped over my shoulders. I admit it was an experience I am glad I have had, but I may not rush out to try it again.

Amongst the excitement of the day was a strong message that organisations like the Centre for Cerebral Palsy need our support on a number of levels. The centre receives funding from both state and federal governments; however, this funding does not cover all the costs associated with supporting the individuals and families the centre works with. To help meet these costs, the centre relies on events like the Wheelie Big Challenge and the support of the wider community to help fund specialised equipment from the-never ending wish list.

Over the past decade, modern technology has made a huge difference to the lives of people with CP; however, this technology is beyond the reach of most families. This year, 14 individuals and their families took the challenge and raised over $60,000. One of these champions was five-year-old Euan, who, together with his family and supporters, raised $22,000—nearly a third of the overall total. I would like to now give a bit of background about the courage and determination of this little five-year-old boy and how he achieved such an amazing fundraising total. Euan is an extremely sporty five-year-old who loves to do all the normal stuff other kids do, like run, jump and race around. Louise, his adoring mum, said, ‘Euan wears magic legs and has frequent botox treatments
and serial casting to help him keep up with the other kids and be as active as he can.' Through the centre, Euan works with a range of therapists to keep on top of the difficulties he faces on an everyday basis. Louise said, ‘Without the help of the centre’s early intervention program, Euan would not be blossoming into the happy child that he is.’ Euan is now fully integrated to his school environment and loving it. Euan and his family took part in the challenge to say thanks to the centre for all it has done for him.

Equipment bought with the funds raised at the event includes walk aids valued at $7,000 each. This amazing new technology has an electrical muscle stimulator which is worn around the lower leg to help children lift their feet as they walk.

The Centre for Cerebral Palsy was established in 1951 and has grown into one of the leading disability service providers in WA. It provides support, care and guidance to more than 1,000 children and adults with cerebral palsy. The centre has an operating budget in excess of $25 million. It employs 650 staff and relies on the support received from more than 200 volunteers. As we all know, the volunteers in our community play an enormous role and make a huge contribution. The overarching philosophy of the centre is for people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities to be included in every facet of society, and the centre aims to achieve this by providing a range of quality services. These services include physiotherapy, speech pathology, occupational therapy, social work, psychology, early education, respite, health promotion, employment, alternatives to employment, accommodation support and recreation. Specialised technology and equipment are often used to improve the capacity of a person living with cerebral palsy to carry out daily activities and participate in their local community.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to all the team at the Centre for Cerebral Palsy, and Samantha Thiele in particular, for organising such a great event.

**Paid Parental Leave**

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (8.40 pm)—As we debate the adjournment of the House, I would like to take the opportunity to consider some of the debate that occurred in the House today—in particular the discussions during question time around the opposition leader’s announcement of a proposed parental leave scheme. We heard today in question time several questions to the government about individual cases indicating that, under the opposition leader’s as yet fairly sketchy proposal on paid parental leave, people would receive the amount of their wage at the point at which they go on leave, but under ours they would receive only the minimum wage.

I want to raise this issue because I acknowledge, as the Leader of the Opposition and shadow ministers did not, that there is concern reported in the media amongst their own backbench about the fairness of such a proposal. I indicate that the idea that the government would have a—to use the opposition leader’s words in a new context—‘great big tax’ on businesses to redirect that into a paid parental leave scheme that gives people vastly different entitlements based on their earning capacity prior to taking leave is not necessarily a particularly equitable way to allocate a paid parental leave scheme sponsored by the government. Indeed, I acknowledge that there are media reports that members of the opposition backbench, in their own party room today, raised the concern that, for example, there is a bias towards city based people who have access to jobs that pay significantly more as opposed to country based people who, while doing the same sort of work, may well not be on the same sort of
pay levels, and that this sort of proposal would entrench a disadvantage between people based on their earning capacity before they took paid parental leave. It was interesting to note that none of that disquiet and those legitimate concerns and questions raised in the coalition party room were addressed in the way in which the questions were addressed to the government today.

I also want to acknowledge that during question time, when the Prime Minister and ministers outlined that our proposed paid parental leave system provided the minimum wage, the shadow minister consistently interjected that that was inadequate. I would assume from her interjections that, if she considers that to be inadequate, given that the current scheme provides nothing to people who do not have an individual arrangement for paid parental leave, they would be supporting, at the very least, our legislation when it comes up. But we are yet to hear that they are willing to make that commitment.

When I came through the doors in the previous sitting fortnight, I was asked about a report in the media about the opposition leader’s views on welfare reform. I said at the time, ‘Let’s just see how long this thing survives before I expend too much energy debating this.’ Not strangely, I would suggest, it has since disappeared, and my concern is that this is a particularly political intervention into the debate in terms of paid parental leave. I will just finish up by reflecting the local views in my area on this proposal. I refer members to the editorial in the Illawarra Mercury today. It is headed ‘Parental leave levy reeks of party politics’. It says:

Federal opposition leader Tony Abbott’s plan for a six-month paid parental leave scheme to be funded by big companies smacks of political opportunism.

He chose International Women’s Day yesterday to propose firms earning more than $5 million a year be charged a 1.7 per cent levy on their earnings to pay new parents the equivalent of their salary up to $150,000.

Can this be the same Tony Abbott who recently made comments that housework and ironing are the role of women?

Is this the same former workplace relations minister, who in 2002, publicly declared the introduction of paid maternity leave would be ‘over his government’s dead body’?

Unsurprisingly, the Business Council of Australia, which represents the chief executives of Australia’s top 100 companies, was less than enthusiastic, after all it burdens Australian businesses emerging from the global financial crisis with a new $2.7 billion a year tax.

Mr Abbott hasn’t a snowflake’s chance in hell of selling his proposition in its existing form to his Coalition colleagues.

Yet, if Mr Abbott is serious, he should accept the challenge from ACTU President Sharan Burrow for him to declare his support for the Government’s— (Time expired)

**Native Vegetation Legislation**

**Mr COULTON** (Parkes) (8.45 pm)—I rise tonight to speak about native vegetation and the related issue of property rights. In the 12 years since the New South Wales and Queensland governments introduced legislation to restrict land clearing and stop farmers managing their property in a sustainable way, we have seen a remarkable decline in the productivity not only of individual farms but of the country as a whole. While this may have been done with the best of intentions—it may have been done to garner green preferences, but it may have been done with the best of intentions—time has shown that it was an ill-conceived concept. You cannot improve the biodiversity and environmental situation of land by locking it up.

It has been a little difficult to see the full ramifications of this decision during the period of drought that a lot of areas have had for the last 10 years or so. But in the last week I have spent some time touring the...
west of New South Wales in an area that will be in the Parkes electorate at the next election—that is, the areas around Cobar, Tottenham, Nyngan and Bourke—and what is very evident is that the areas that have been selectively cleared, with shade lines left, are vibrant, alive, productive and healthy. In contrast, areas that have been locked up, which have high infestations of woody weeds, cypress pine and other regrowth, are quite sterile. The land underneath this timber is bare—there is no grass cover—and with the heavy rain it has been subject to quite serious erosion. This reinforces that it is a fallacy that locking up land is actually good for it. With the focus now on property rights and native vegetation in the context of emissions trading with carbon credits, it would be a very good idea if, as a country and as a parliament, we looked at this policy and reassessed whether it is the best thing to do for our environment.

There is an area in my electorate called the Pilliga Scrub. It was in a scheme known as the Brigalow Belt South Bioregion lockdown. Six timber mills were closed down and large tracts of land were locked up, with human contact reduced. Eighteen months after that decision, 50,000 hectares of the Pilliga Scrub burned. The fire burned with such an intensity that it sterilised the ground up to 20 or 30 centimetres below the surface and killed any wildlife that was in there as well as a lot of the valuable vegetation.

The Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee are holding an inquiry that will look at four points. These are:

- any diminution of land asset value and productivity as a result of such laws;
- compensation arrangements to landholders resulting from the imposition of such laws;
- the appropriateness of the method of calculation of asset value in the determination of compensation arrangements; and
- any other related matter.

This is an opportunity for anyone who has been affected by these laws to put in a submission to the Senate inquiry. They have until 17 March to put that submission in, and I would encourage anyone who has anything to say on this to do so. Sometimes, with the best of intentions, laws that have a detrimental effect are put in place. It only becomes a tragedy if that is not realised. There is an opportunity to reverse this—to bring back the productivity of regional Australia and make these areas sustainable into the future.

Ride Launceston

Bass Electorate: National Bike Paths Projects

Ms CAMPBELL (Bass) (8.50 pm)—I rise in the House this evening to speak on a fantastic community event that happened over the weekend, which highlighted the success of a project funded by the Rudd Labor government. Over the weekend Ride Launceston took place in my electorate. It is a seven-kilometre bike ride that starts at the Inveresk car park. Cyclists travel along the Inveresk, Heritage Forest and University of Tasmania trails. In its sixth year, Ride Launceston was held on Sunday, 7 March, during State Bike Week, to promote the benefits of cycling as part of a healthy and active lifestyle. It is a fantastic event and almost 300 people attended. I might add that a large number of participants were local families making a day of the fabulous safe facilities our area has to offer cyclists.

This brings me to a project that my community and I have been campaigning on for some time within Bass, a project that is an example of the success of the Rudd Labor government’s economic stimulus package. I had the pleasure of announcing nearly
$577,000 in funding to construct bike paths in Launceston in my electorate. This is a result of people power. It is the result of the community working effectively together to achieve great things and common goals. In June last year, 150 cyclists rallied at the Launceston Civic Square to launch their campaign for better bike paths in Launceston. This was a joint campaign led by the Tamar Bicycle Users Group and the Launceston City Council Bike Committee.

During my time as Deputy Mayor of the Launceston City Council I was on the Launceston City Council Bike Committee, so I have taken a keen interest in this particular area since being elected to federal parliament. I was more than happy when approached to work with the Launceston City Council, the Launceston Bike Committee and the Tamar Bicycle Users Group—we call them T-BUG—and offer my support with a funding submission.

The Launceston bike paths project was part of the Rudd Labor government’s $40 million National Bike Path Projects fund and a key element of our economic stimulus plan. The project created on-road bike routes in the city of Launceston as part of a 50-kilometre arterial bike path route network. Nine hundred and fifty metres of the bike paths constructed connect commuters between Rocherlea, Mayfield, Mowbray, Newnham and the city as part of the Northern Suburbs Commuter Cycling Trail.

The project also delivers 21 jobs and traineeships, being supported during construction and into the longer term, delivering an outstanding economic boost to Launceston. In total, this project is worth more than $861,000. We are delivering it in partnership with the Launceston City Council. Practical infrastructure of this kind is exactly what the Rudd government’s economic stimulus plan is all about. By building better cycling infrastructure, the Rudd Labor government is also taking cars off roads in Launceston’s CBD, reducing carbon emissions over the longer term and delivering great events in the local area, like the successful Ride Launceston event.

I had the pleasure of announcing funding for this project on national Ride to Work Day and I would also like to note the successful event that was held by Active Launceston in the Brisbane Street mall, which I had the pleasure of attending. The breakfast educated and encouraged the Launceston community about the importance of a healthy lifestyle through displays, demonstrations of cycling and walking advice. This coincides as a major positive aspect of the funding obtained under the National Bike Path Projects fund: to build infrastructure that will encourage healthier lifestyles amongst residents in Bass and create a more sustainable community within my electorate.

Today I wish to congratulate and acknowledge some community members on their contribution to this project, and I do apologise if I miss anybody in particular: Harry Galea, director of infrastructure at the Launceston City Council; Nigel Coates, roads and traffic engineer at the council and also the coordinator of the wonderful submission that was put together; the Launceston City Council Bike Committee; T-BUG, particularly the T-BUG executive committee and its president, Malcolm Cowan, and secretary, Anna Povey; and Launceston City Councillor Jeremy Ball, who has worked extremely effectively with me and the community in seeing that this project comes to fruition.

I would like to convey my sincere thanks to Minister Anthony Albanese, who has ensured that this project, which has been a vision of the Launceston community for some time, has become a reality. This project de-
livers new and improved cycling facilities for Launceston residents and commuters, as well as the thousands of visitors and tourists that we welcome each year.

Fisher Electorate: Palmview Residential Development

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (8.55 pm)—It is incredibly disappointing that the state Labor government is trying to foist a half-baked project onto the people of the Sunshine Coast which would see more than 14,000 people put into an area where the state government is not prepared to provide the necessary infrastructure. The state government has identified Palmview on the Sunshine Coast in the electorate of Fisher as a greenfield site for a massive residential community development. The situation is creating great concern locally because the state government has not indicated that it is prepared to provide the infrastructure necessary to meet the needs of such a growing population.

A wave of concern has engulfed the community as residents and the local community group, the Sippy Downs and District Community Association, fear the influx of new houses will not be accompanied by an acceptable standard of services. The development plan for the site was initially prepared by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council and included such positive and sensible features as a manageable and sustainable population level; a generous buffer between development and the nearby Bruce Highway; sensible plans for water and energy management, including plans for the community to become carbon neutral in 10 years time—that is, in 2020; environmental zones; plans for sustainable transport; and more. Unfortunately, these hard-fought good intentions and more have been scrapped by the state Labor government’s reworking of the plan.

A key concern is that, while the council said that there should be a maximum of 13,380 new residents, the state government has said that this is the minimum number of new residents and it has not capped the number of new residents. So there is a great concern that the state government might well be looking at many thousands more new residents. While the Sunshine Coast—as you would understand, Mr Speaker—is a wonderful place to live, we simply cannot manage a huge increase in our population without the infrastructure required to meet the needs of that increased population.

The Queensland state government has caused great concern in the community because it does not appear to be putting a maximum on the number of new residents in this massive greenfield development. A number of concerns worry people in the local community. For instance, the buffer zone with the Bruce Highway has been reduced by Labor from 200 metres to 80 metres. Plans impacting water and energy management and sustainable transport have been scrapped by Labor. The intention to become carbon neutral by 2020, which of course is a goal worth applauding, was also removed by Labor. In addition, the clear boundary that helped delineate between developmental areas and areas protected from development has been removed, and references to infrastructure agreements in the plan have been replaced with the wording ‘infrastructure arrangements’—which is an ambiguous statement that cannot help but raise concern and suspicion among the residents of nearby Sippy Downs.

I cannot help but reinforce what I said in a prior speech to the parliament about the Sunshine Coast University Hospital at Kawana, which has been deferred by the state Labor government until at least 2016-17: that the people on the Sunshine Coast are being penalised for having voted for the Liberal National Party at the state election and also at federal elections. I must also say that people
are incredibly concerned over the fact that the state Labor government does not appear to be remotely concerned about the impact on existing residents. I just think that it is an appalling situation that any government, state or federal—or, for that matter, local—could seek to impose on a local community a huge increase in the number of residents without being prepared to say, ‘It is government policy that we are going to bring these new people in and we’re going to give you the assistance that you need to make sure that the community is ready to receive these new people.’

It is an indication of how the state Labor government is completely out of touch. It managed to get into office at the last election through a system of duplicity, and opinion polls are now showing that, if there were a state election today—as happily there will be in Tasmania and South Australia shortly—the government would lose 25 seats.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 9.00 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 9.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to amend certain Acts as a consequence of the enactment of the Personal Property Securities Act 2009, to amend that Act, and for related purposes.

Mr Griffin to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to veterans’ entitlements, and for related purposes.

Mr Clare to present a Bill for an Act to amend the social security law, and for related purposes.

Mr Hartsuyker to present a Bill for an Act to provide for the consideration of matters of public health and safety in the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999, and for related purposes.

Ms Parke to move:

That the House:

(1) recognises that International Women’s Day was celebrated on 8 March 2010;

(2) notes that:

(a) the Australian Government is committed to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are the agreed targets set by the world’s nations to reduce poverty by 2015;

(b) Australia’s closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea (PNG), is currently off-track to meet any of the MDGs by 2015;

(c) the maternal mortality rate in PNG is extremely high, having doubled since 1996, with a woman in PNG being 242 times more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related complications than an Australian woman;

(d) there is a clear correlation between the high rate of maternal mortality and the high rate of child mortality in PNG;

(e) the high maternal and child mortality rates in PNG are a reflection of the failure of access to, and the delivery of, quality health services over the last 15 years;

(f) the challenges of reducing maternal and child mortality in PNG are many, including difficult terrain and weather conditions, fragile health systems, limited human resources, weak financial governance and management, and poor service delivery in many rural areas;

(3) recognises that, despite these challenges, progress is being made by organisations like UNICEF working closely with the PNG Government, AusAID and other key development partners;

(4) recognises that strengthening health systems and improving human resources for maternal and child health in PNG and the rest of the Asia Pacific are critical if the MDGs for maternal and child health are to be achieved;

(5) acknowledges the Australian Government’s concern about maternal mortality rates in
PNG and its increased commitments towards PNG achieving MDGs 4 and 5; and

(6) recommends that the Australian Government support the PNG Government to implement, as a matter of urgency, the recommendations outlined by the PNG National Department of Health’s Ministerial Taskforce on Maternal Health, including:

(a) securing investments to achieve the ambitious but necessary targets required to turn around the current status of maternal health in PNG;

(b) implementation of universal free primary education as a successful intervention to address maternal mortality in PNG;

(c) urgent and sustained efforts to address the well-defined system’s problems in the health sector in PNG;

(d) strengthening of access and coverage of quality voluntary family planning service provision for all Papua New Guineans as a primary intervention;

(e) access for every woman in PNG to supervised delivery by a trained health care provider by 2030; and

(f) access for all women in PNG to comprehensive obstetric care and quality emergency obstetric care if required.

Mr Oakeshott to present a Bill for an Act to protect consumers against the risk of bovine spongiform encephalopathy being present in imported meat.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

AHS Centaur
(Question No. 1174)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science, in writing, on 2 February 2010:
What records does the Royal Australian Navy have on the location of the wreck of the Australian Hospital Ship (AHS) Centaur.

Mr Combet—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Navy does not hold records concerning the location of the AHS Centaur. However, the AHS Centaur location information is available on the Australian National Shipwreck Database (ANSDB) available at: http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/shipwrecks/database.html (the shipwreck identification number is 2305).

Medicare
(Question No. 1191)

Mr Oakeshott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 4 February 2010:

(1) Why has Medicare item number 702, which allows home based health assessments to be performed on patients over 75 years of age by a practice nurse, been discontinued.

(2) Has item 702 been combined with a range of other assessment items that can only be performed by a General Practitioner in a general practice; if so,
(a) why, and
(b) what are these items.

Ms Roxon—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) From 1 May 2010, Medicare item 702 and nine other health assessment items will be superseded by a series of four time-based health assessment items. This is part of the Government’s response to the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review of primary care items to simplify the Schedule, reduce red tape and encourage prevention.

(2) No. From 1 May 2010, the regulations governing where a health assessment can be performed and who can perform it, under Medicare arrangements, will not change.

The current arrangements for health assessments, which require General Practitioners (GPs) to provide the majority of the service, will continue. Under both current and future arrangements, the GP must also make a personal attendance on the patient. A practice nurse may assist a GP in performing a health assessment, in accordance with accepted medical practice and under the supervision of the GP. This may include activities associated with information collection and providing patients with information about recommended interventions at the direction of the medical practitioner.

Dichloroacetate
(Question No. 1192)

Mr Oakeshott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 4 February 2010:

(1) Have clinical trials of the drug dichloroacetate (DCA) for the treatment of cancer been performed in Australia; if so, have they been successful.
(2) Can she indicate if clinical trials of the drug DCA for the treatment of cancer have been performed overseas; if so, have they been successful.

(3) Is there a patent for DCA; if not, what implications will this have for research on and development of the drug.

Ms Roxon—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) It is a requirement of the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 that all clinical investigational use of a product in Australia be registered with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) where that use involves a product not entered on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods, including any new formulation of an existing product or any new route of administration; or a use of a registered or listed product outside the conditions of its marketing approval. The TGA has no ‘clinical trials exemption’ or ‘clinical trials notification’ registered on its database under these requirements in respect of dichloroacetate (DCA).

In addition, the Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry (ANZCTR) is an online register of clinical trials being undertaken in Australia and New Zealand. The ANZCTR includes trials from the full spectrum of Australian therapeutics. There are no clinical trials of DCA for the treatment of cancer presently registered in Australia under these arrangements.

(2) In 2007, researchers at the University of Alberta found that DCA shrank in vitro rat cancer cells. There are a number of clinical trials underway and planned in the USA and Canada further to this result in respect of DCA. These are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Trial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of California, USA</td>
<td>Recruiting</td>
<td>Use in treatment of metastatic breast cancer or non-small cell lung cancer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta Health Services, Canada</td>
<td>Recruiting</td>
<td>Use in treatment of recurrent and/or metastatic solid tumours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Alberta, Canada</td>
<td>Completed August 2009, but results not yet available</td>
<td>Use in treatment of malignant gliomas and glioblastoma multiformae.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta Health Services, Canada</td>
<td>Planned</td>
<td>Use in treatment of newly diagnosed glioblastoma multiformae in combination with radiotherapy and temozolomide.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) A patent has been issued by the World Intellectual Property Organisation, an agency of the United Nations, in respect of the University of Alberta, Canada for the use of sodium dichloroacetate for the treatment of cancer, including non-small cell lung cancer, glioblastoma and breast carcinoma.

Quarantine

(Question No. 1194)

Mr Oakeshott asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, in writing, on 4 February 2010:

(1) Is it a fact that domestic vegetable and fruit produce must pass 22 tests and imported vegetable and fruit produce must pass just seven tests to meet quarantine standards; if so, why.

(2) Has he considered bio-security insurance arrangements for local growers to protect various industries from the risks of importing produce; if so, what progress has been made on this; if not, why not.

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

(1) No. Imported vegetables undergo rigorous screening before they can be released from quarantine. Each consignment is sampled and visually inspected by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection
Service (AQIS) and some vegetables must comply with additional pre-export conditions and/or treatments. Under the AQIS inspection scheme that tests food for food safety, horticultural products are subject to testing at the rate of 5% of consignments for the presence of 49 agricultural chemicals and in some products, heavy metal contaminants. Controls on domestically produced horticultural products are the responsibility of states and territories.

(2) No. If, Australia imposed what were perceived to be barriers on imports, such as insurance bonds on overseas suppliers and/or Australian importers, it could expect equally unjustified conditions to be applied to our exports.

**Building the Education Revolution Program**

(Question No. 1215)

Mr Tuckey asked the Minister for Education, in writing, on 10 February 2010:

In respect of the Building the Education Revolution: (a) what quarantine conditions apply to contractors supplying turf products to builders for renewed or new school grounds; (b) what is her department doing to mitigate the potential infestation of grassed areas on school grounds, such as ovals, by the sting nematode now prevalent in WA and NSW; and (C) does she provide a list of approved turf suppliers to all potential building contractors; if not, why not.

Ms Gillard—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The BER program is an Australian Government initiative, underpinned by a strong partnership approach with state and territory governments and non-government education authorities to deliver the Building the Education Revolution (BER) in accordance with the National Partnership Agreement on the Nation Building and Jobs Plan: Building Prosperity for the Future and Supporting Jobs Now.

In the context of the National Partnership Agreement, states, territories and Block Grant Authorities are responsible for implementing the BER program, including meeting all obligations under Commonwealth and State legislation, ensuring the most appropriate facilities are funded according to each schools’ priorities, and managing tendering and procurement activities, such as the procurement and installation of turf products.

My Department has received advice from the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (WA DET) and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) about this issue.

WA DET requires that contractors ensure all turf is installed in the appropriate manner on school sites and a certificate is provided stating that turf installed on site is ‘sting nematode free.’

NSW DET’s Schools Facilities Standards include a standard specifically for landscaping, whether for new construction or refurbishments. This standard encourages the use of native plant species; provides advice on potentially toxic species and referencing sources for further information; and provides guidance on selection and location of turf and grass species. BER funded projects in NSW public schools must comply with the Schools Facilities Standards.

The BER program assurance framework includes monitoring of BER projects and the implementation by education authorities of the BER. Education authorities are required to report monthly to DEEWR on project progress, including commencement and completion dates.