COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 4, 2010
Tuesday, 16 November 2010

FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

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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>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18</td>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>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>

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST 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—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mrs Yvette Maree D’Ath MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vanvakinou 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. Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon 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. Warren George Entsch MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP
Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
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<td>Frydenberg, Joshua Anthony</td>
<td>Kooyong, VIC</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gambaro, Hon. Teresa</td>
<td>Brisbane, QLD</td>
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<td>Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM</td>
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<td>Gilmore, NSW</td>
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<td>Brand, WA</td>
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<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawke, Alexander George</td>
<td>Mitchell, NSW</td>
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<td>Hayes, Christopher Patrick</td>
<td>Fowler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict</td>
<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
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<td>Flinders, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Husic, Edham Nurreddin</td>
<td>Chifley, NSW</td>
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<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenkins, Harry Alfred</td>
<td>Scullin, VIC</td>
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<td>Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey</td>
<td>Tangney, WA</td>
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<td>Throsby, NSW</td>
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<td>Jones, Ewen Thomas</td>
<td>Herbert, QLD</td>
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<td>Katter, Hon. Robert Carl</td>
<td>Kennedy, QLD</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Stirling, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Eden-Monaro, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
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<td>King, Hon. Catherine Fiona</td>
<td>Ballarat, VIC</td>
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<td>Bowman, QLD</td>
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<td>Fraser, ACT</td>
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<td>Farrer, NSW</td>
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<td>Barton, NSW</td>
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<td>Forrest, WA</td>
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<td>LP</td>
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<td>Banks, NSW</td>
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## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<td>Grey, SA</td>
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Members of the House of Representatives

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilkie, Andrew Damien</td>
<td>Denison, TAS</td>
<td>Ind</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<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; LNP—Liberal National Party; CLP—Country Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals; NWA—The Nationals WA; Ind—Independent; AG—Australian Greens

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
GILLARD MINISTRY

Prime Minister                                           Hon. Julia Gillard MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer                      Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and Leader of the Government in the Senate Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Minister for Foreign Affairs                               Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Minister for Trade                                    Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House     Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship                 Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Leader of the House
Minister for Health and Ageing                                Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Finance and Deregulation                      Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency           Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP

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

Minister for the Arts
Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Social Inclusion
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Minister for Sport
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Assistant Minister to the Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation
Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare
Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Defence Materiel
Hon. Jason Clare MP
Minister for Indigenous Health
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Mental Health and Ageing
Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for the Status of Women
Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Special Minister of State
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Minister for Small Business
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Minister for Human Services
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Cabinet Secretary
Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer
Hon. David Bradbury MP
Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations
Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity
Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Parliamentary Secretary for Trade
Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs
Hon. Richard Marles MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
Senator Hon. David Feeney
Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship
Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and
Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing
Hon. Catherine King MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers
Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services
Hon. Julie Collins MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water
Senator Hon. Don Farrell
Minister Assisting on Deregulation
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency
Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
### SHADOW MINISTRY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Member</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for</td>
<td>Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<td>Foreign Affairs and Shadow Minister for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Truss MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
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<td>Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for</td>
<td>Senator Hon. George Brandis SC</td>
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<td>Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager</td>
<td>Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<td>of Opposition Business in the House</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of the</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
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<td>Nationals</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water</td>
<td>Senator Barnaby Joyce</td>
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<td>and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction and</td>
<td>Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP</td>
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<td>Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources</td>
<td>Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Senator Hon. David Johnston</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband</td>
<td>Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services</td>
<td>Hon. Kevin Andrews MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population and Shadow</td>
<td>Mr Scott Morrison MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science</td>
<td>Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security</td>
<td>Hon. John Cobb MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer</td>
<td>Hon. Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<td>Affairs</td>
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</tbody>
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[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation  Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection  Mr Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation  Senator Mathias Cormann
Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning  Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Universities and Research  Senator Hon. Brett Mason
Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House  Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment  Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Regional Development  Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Special Minister of State  Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for COAG  Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Tourism  Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel  Mr Stuart Robert MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs  Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Regional Communications  Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health  Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Shadow Minister for Seniors  Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate  Senator Mitch Fifield
Shadow Minister for Housing  Senator Marise Payne
Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee  Mr Jamie Briggs MP
Shadow Cabinet Secretary  Hon. Philip Ruddock MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition  Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance  Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport  Mr Darren Chester MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General  Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee  Hon. Tony Smith MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education  Senator Fiona Nash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia  Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government  Mr Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin  Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel  Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support  Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare  Dr Andrew Southcott MP
**SHADOW MINISTRY—continued**

| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health | Mr Andrew Laming MP |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families | Senator Cory Bernardi |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women | Senator Michaelia Cash |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment | Senator Simon Birmingham |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement | Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration | Senator Michaelia Cash |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science | Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry | Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Fair Competition | Senator Scott Ryan |
## CONTENTS

**TUESDAY, 16 NOVEMBER**

**Chamber**

Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No. 4) Legislation .......................... 2453

Main Committee—

  Address-in-Reply ........................................................................................................... 2453
  Afghanistan—Reference .......................................................................................... 2453

Afghanistan—

  Report from Main Committee ........................................................................ 2453

Forgotten Australians ................................................................................................. 2491

Questions Without Notice—

  Gillard Government ................................................................................................... 2492
  Climate Change ........................................................................................................... 2495
  Interest Rates ............................................................................................................. 2496

Distinguished Visitors ................................................................................................. 2498

Questions Without Notice—

  Electricity Sector ........................................................................................................ 2498
  Electricity Prices ......................................................................................................... 2499
  Climate Change ........................................................................................................... 2500
  Broadband .................................................................................................................. 2501
  Climate Change ........................................................................................................... 2503
  Broadband .................................................................................................................. 2504
  Energy Sector ............................................................................................................. 2505

Distinguished Visitors ................................................................................................. 2506

Questions Without Notice—

  Broadband .................................................................................................................. 2506

Distinguished Visitors ................................................................................................. 2507

Questions Without Notice—

  Climate Change ........................................................................................................... 2507
  Petrol Sniffing ............................................................................................................. 2508
  Climate Change ........................................................................................................... 2509
  Asylum Seekers ........................................................................................................... 2511
  Climate Change ........................................................................................................... 2512

Documents ..................................................................................................................... 2513

Committees—

  Cyber-Safety Committee—Membership................................................................. 2513
  Parliamentary Library Committee—Membership .................................................. 2513

Personal Explanations ................................................................................................. 2514

Matters of Public Importance—

  Economy ..................................................................................................................... 2514

International Financial Institutions Legislation Amendment Bill 2010—

  Referred to Main Committee .................................................................................. 2530

Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010,

National Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2010,

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement Bill 2010,

Higher Education Support Amendment (2010 Budget Measures) Bill 2010 and

Social Security Legislation Amendment (Connecting People with Jobs) Bill 2010—

  Returned from the Senate ......................................................................................... 2531

Higher Education Support Amendment (Fee-Help Loan Fee) Bill 2010—

  Report from Main Committee .................................................................................. 2531
  Second Reading ........................................................................................................... 2531
Third Reading ................................................................................................................ 2531
Committees—
Regional Australia Committee—Membership............................................................... 2531
Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards)
Bill 2010—
  Consideration in Detail .................................................................................................. 2531
Territories Law Reform Bill 2010—
  Second Reading .............................................................................................................. 2560
  Consideration in Detail .................................................................................................. 2564
  Third Reading ................................................................................................................ 2566
Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures)
Bill 2010—
  Second Reading .............................................................................................................. 2566
Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards)
Bill 2010—
  Consideration in Detail .................................................................................................. 2574
  Third Reading ................................................................................................................ 2576
Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures)
Bill 2010—
  Second Reading .............................................................................................................. 2576
Adjournment—
  Stirling Electorate: Osborne Park Returned and Services League ................................. 2592
  Dr Nouria Salehi ............................................................................................................ 2593
  Ms Kath Byer ................................................................................................................. 2593
  Paterson Electorate: Commonwealth Marine Protected Area ....................................... 2594
  McEwen Electorate: Upper Goulburn Community Radio ............................................. 2596
  Mr Rod Irwin ................................................................................................................. 2597
  Mrs Beverley Bernadette Cresswell ............................................................................... 2598
  Cowper Electorate: Community Services ...................................................................... 2599
  Braddon Electorate: Active After-School Communities ................................................ 2601
  Telecommunication Scams ............................................................................................. 2602
  Ms Alicia Martin ............................................................................................................ 2603
  Ryan Electorate: Remembrance Day ............................................................................ 2605
  Agriculture: Foreign Acquisitions .................................................................................. 2606
  Stradbroke Island Sandmining ....................................................................................... 2607
Notices .............................................................................................................................. 2608
Main Committee
Constituency Statements—
  Aston Electorate: Remembrance Day ............................................................................ 2610
  Fowler Electorate: Rotary Club of Liverpool Greenway ............................................... 2610
  Farrer Electorate: Murray-Darling Basin ........................................................................ 2611
  Iraq ................................................................................................................................. 2612
  Senior Sergeant Corey Allen ......................................................................................... 2613
  Throsby Electorate: Employment .................................................................................. 2614
  Green Loans ................................................................................................................... 2614
  Education ....................................................................................................................... 2615
  Wright Electorate: Food Security ................................................................................... 2616
  Robertson Electorate: Brisbane Water Oyster Festival ................................................ 2617
Ministerial Statements—
  Afghanistan ..................................................................................................................... 2618
Governor-General’s Speech—
   Address-in-Reply ........................................................................................................... 2630
Business ................................................................................................................................. 2685
Questions In Writing
   Roads: Bruce Highway—(Question No. 33) ..................................................................... 2686
Tuesday, 16 November 2010

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 11 am, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2010 MEASURES No. 4) LEGISLATION

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (11.01 am)—Mr Speaker, on indulgence. Yesterday in the House I said the following:

Even today I was given information that suggests that, on average, if you took all bank fees paid in Australia and averaged them out across households, each household pays more than $5,000 in bank fees.

I repeated that again today on MTR. As I said, I was advised of that, and that information has proven to be incorrect. The number of households in 2009 was 8,236,000, the bank fee income from the households was five billion and 31 million dollars and the average per household was $611.

AFGHANISTAN

Report from Main Committee

Order of the day returned from Main Committee for further consideration; certified copy presented.

Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The SPEAKER—The question is that the motion be agreed to.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (11.03 am)—Mr Speaker, thank you for the call and thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution to this debate. I start by acknowledging the great, heartfelt sadness that 10 families must have felt on Remembrance Day. There were 10 new names added to the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial. All those 10 outstanding Australians gave their lives in the service of our country doing what our nation asked of them in Operation Slipper in Afghanistan. Sapper Jacob Moerland, Sapper Darren Smith, Private Scott Palmer, Private Timothy Aplin, Private Benjamin Chuck, Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Grant Kirby, Private Thomas Dale and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney all made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan over the preceding 12 months. Their contribution, their courage and their selfless service of our nation is captured on the honour roll at the War Memorial. That brings the number of Australian lives lost in Operation Slipper to 21, and there are more than 150 people who have been wounded, some very significantly, under Operation Slipper.

I raise that because it is something I spoke with some children about on Remembrance Day at a service in Mount Eliza. It is a very real example that the good fortune we enjoy in Australia needs to be protected, and our duty is to preserve and carry forward those great gifts of freedom and liberty of opportunity that we enjoy. Where we see an opportunity to make a contribution as part of the
international community we should consider our good fortune and recognise our responsibility to help others. I raise that in the context of our history as a nation. We have done that in the past, it has served our nation well and it has served humanity well. We also need to do that now. It is just one of a number of reasons why Australia’s engagement in Afghanistan is, in my mind, entirely justified. It is just and it is one that we should persevere with.

In addition to that there is the unavoidable truth that tragedy has been inflicted on Australian citizens through the most heinous acts of terrorism and violence by people whose talents were developed in Afghanistan. It is also worth recognising that a failed state in that region of the world where nuclear capability is present presents enormous problems for all of us. A functioning, regional architecture and opportunities for citizens of that region are our best antidote to not see potentially enormous and unthinkable things happen from the crumbling of civilisation, civilised discourse and governance in that part of the world.

The other thing we should also bear in mind is that, when we reflect on our own good fortune, we pay the respects that are very hard earned and well deserved on commemorative occasions like Remembrance Day. It is important to wonder to ourselves what might occur if we did not participate and recognise the enormous cost borne disproportionately by the family members of those whose loved ones have already suffered so much and by those who continue to suffer from injury, illness or impairment as a result of their service. If that sacrifice was not made what might happen?

I am happy to account for my contribution as a minister in the defence portfolio and as Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, where my duty from sun-up to sundown and through most of the night was to care for those doing extraordinary work on behalf of our nation. But had they not been doing that work, had other likeminded countries not recognised not only the threat that was present in Afghanistan but also the consequences of that threat—consequences that had already played out most horrendously—what would have happened? Would we have left that role to someone else? Were we suggesting that because we were not a combatant in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda would spare Australian citizens the heinous acts of terrorism that they perpetuate around the globe? Would we be content for others to step up and see that the cost of their actions was somehow appropriate yet our willingness not to contribute was reasonable given the international concern that inspired the engagement in Afghanistan? I think for all of those questions the answer is that if we did not turn up we would be regretting that inaction and we would be paying the cost of it—and that cost would be paid for a long time.

Al-Qaeda is nothing like the outfit that was in Afghanistan previously. Al-Qaeda is a global terrorist organisation; it seeks to end Western influence and attack Western values and it seeks to ensure that that influence and those values do not take hold in the Middle East. Al-Qaeda pursues its mission with extraordinary acts of inhumanity and heinous crimes against people to drive home its objectives. They are now not able at will to come into and leave Afghanistan to develop that lethal terrorist capacity. They have been pushed out of Afghanistan. It is already an extraordinary achievement that that training ground, that incubator of terror, is now no longer present in Afghanistan, where entry and exit was so porous. It was frightening to see the number of people who went and learned their evil craft in Afghanistan.

The Taliban, though, is a coalition of political, military and tribal organisations that
basically wants to run Afghanistan. It has more of a domestic focus. Those in the Taliban are keen to impose their will on the people of Afghanistan. They are trying to exercise the weight of oppression to control the population, not the weight of their argument. They use the calibre of firearms to persuade people to follow their direction, not the calibre of the leadership or the quality of the ideas they put to the people there. They continue to represent a threat, and they continue to symbolise the reason for our engagement—they are a threat to the physical security of people in Afghanistan and beyond.

Afghanistan is referred to as a military engagement. That is but one phase of where we are at in Afghanistan. I think the Prime Minister, when talking about a decade-long engagement, could have articulated more precisely that this engagement will change over time—it will adapt to new circumstances and threats of the kind that al-Qaeda represented and that the Taliban, to a lesser extent but still at great cost of life, now represents. As that threat is removed, pushed back like a tide of evil and danger whose goal is to maim and kill others to gain a foothold of influence and power, we need to maintain our efforts. We need to make sure that our perseverance in a security and military sense does not wane and allow that tide to come in again. If that tide comes back into Afghanistan, anything else we seek to achieve in Afghanistan will not be achievable.

Children do not go to school when they are terrified about walking down the street or terrified that they will be the subject of a random bombing attack designed to cause fear and intimidation and to terrorise a population into following an alternative strategy on the direction of the government not because it is in the citizens’ best interests but because the fear is so great. People do not go to health clinics when the resources in that clinic are not safe and secure and when medical practitioners risk their own lives simply by venturing out into those community spaces. Literacy does not improve when there is not the opportunity to engage in education. Livelihoods do not improve when the place is so dysfunctional that there are no prospects of any kind of economy taking hold.

Women in Afghanistan need the opportunity to make a full contribution to lift the country’s opportunities and prosperity and to shape a better future. Women need to be involved and they need that opportunity to participate. I have often said that if women are not being fully engaged in developing fragile countries and economies they are tackling the challenge with one arm tied behind their back. Yet in the Taliban’s view of the world women do not have that contribution to make. At the Telstra Business Women’s Awards presentation the other night I heard story after story about the remarkable contributions of women, and that reinforced my view of how much poorer countries like Afghanistan will be if organisations like the Taliban have their way.

We need to pursue a position of strength to try and secure a negotiated peace settlement. You cannot negotiate from a position of weakness where it has already been proven that threats and intimidation, force and violence may be used as part of the artillery. We need to be in a position of strength to negotiate a political settlement. It is encouraging news that more conflicts now end in negotiated settlements than in military victories. It also turns out that wars that end in negotiated settlements last three times longer than those that end in military victories but are nearly twice as likely to restart within five years. So if we are to negotiate a peace settlement and put Afghanistan on a positive footing with their future being shaped by Afghans, we need to recognise...
the risks of the threat re-emerging—that is why I use the analogy of keeping the tide out.

As a state emerges—it is past being a fragile or a failed state; it is now in a state building mode—safety and security are basic preconditions, otherwise nothing else will be achieved. That is why a military presence is justified but it needs to adapt and recalibrate as the domestic forces begin to provide that basic security, and that makes everything else possible. As that state is secured, we then get on with state building. The elections in Afghanistan might not pass the test of being free and fair by our standards but they were an expression of the people’s will and that Afghans can shape their own future. Their systems of democracy will improve. There is no question that corruption is a cancer on the work going on in Afghanistan but, sadly, it is not alone. We have seen it in other countries, and we have to work persistently to overcome that.

It is also worth recognising what the international literature says about fragile states, failed states and state creation: it is a long-haul business. As the military’s presence declines and a security-policing presence emerges and as objectives of livelihoods develop, services are put in place, schools are built, education and health services become available and there is the full participation of citizens, the tool kit needs to change and adapt. But that is going to take a long time. Even the recreation of fragile states—we are not talking about building from the ground up—is extraordinarily expensive to support.

Under the previous coalition government, I was involved in the development of a white paper which provided some information about the cost of fragile states and how, on average, they remain fragile for half a century. You do not need to look too far to see this. The work with countries in our own neighbourhood has seen Australia continue to be involved with fragile states. Opportunities need to be supported through aid and development, and good governance is needed to support the continuation of that work—and we have been at it for decades. I also invite people to look closer to home. Australia have a recognised competency in dealing with the fragile and failed state recovery mode. We have some experience. We did it in East Timor, we did it in Bougainville and we are still at it in the Solomon Islands. We have developed some competencies around that space. The need to get local governance working and to see people want what that offers is a key precondition.

The Afghans will welcome our support but, as a friend of mine who has done a number of deployments said, they need to know you are for real. You need to do what you say you are going to do to be valued by the Afghans, and you need to stay the course. We have that reputation. But to get the Afghan people working collaboratively and in a synchronised way with our international efforts, we need to keep face with the Afghan community. That is a cultural precondition. We need to do what we say we are going to do. We need to see this through. We need to make sure that the support is there and that the Afghan people can turn their efforts towards a partnership with the international community and know that those partners will hang around. This builds respect and credibility; it builds preconditions for a recovering state in Afghanistan. But this is going to take decades, and we need to be prepared to make that commitment.

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (11.18 am)—I join with many members on both sides of the House and on the crossbenches to speak about Australia’s involvement in Afghanistan and, in particular, the deployment of the Australian Defence Force throughout Afghanistan. I welcome the school students who are
in the galleries today and also the members of our community. It says a lot about our democratic parliamentary system when we can have such a significant debate in this House, with our community watching on.

I thank all those who have spoken before me and who are still to speak both in the House and in the Senate for their contributions on this important motion. Their contributions have been thoughtful and delivered in a way that is within the spirit of the debate. Many speakers before me, including the Prime Minister, have spoken of the heavy burden that the federal government must carry in making a decision to send our young men and women to war. The war of today is in many ways very different from the wars that our forefathers had to fight in the past. However, as we know, the war of today carries the same risks to the lives of those who choose to defend our country. If we, as a democratic society, accept that we must defend our nation, its people and their way of life then we must accept that we cannot defend our nation only from our shores. The risks to our nation can come from far away.

Terrorist acts have taken the lives of so many Australians, and we have seen those lives lost in acts of terror on foreign soil. New York is 15,989 kilometres from Sydney, Australia. Despite this distance, I am sure many Australians who were watching their televisions or listening to their radios when the devastating attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York occurred on 11 September 2001 will still recall exactly how they felt. I remember dropping my daughter off to day care, just thinking about the tragic loss of life. Later that day, I heard from my South Australian colleagues in the AWU that one of our past AWU officers had been in the World Trade Centre at the time. Andrew Knox, aged 29, was on the 103rd floor of the north tower when the plane hit. The last we heard of him on that day was that he and other work colleagues were heading to the roof, waiting to be rescued. Andrew was one of 10 Australians lost that day. Since that time we have witnessed other terrorist attacks that have taken Australian lives.

The lives of 88 Australians were taken in Bali in 2002 and four Australians were killed in the second Bali bombing in 2005. Our embassy has been bombed in Jakarta. We saw the loss of one Australian and others injured in the London bombings on 7 July 2005. In each of these cases, the terrorist groups involved had links to Afghanistan. Australia’s involvement in Afghanistan is not about any one individual; it is about all individuals. It is about defending our right to live without fear and defending that freedom.

The Prime Minister outlined the two vital national interests in Australia’s involvement in Afghanistan: firstly, to make sure that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists, a place where attacks on us and our allies begin; and secondly, to stand firmly by our alliance commitment to the United States, formally invoked following the attacks on New York and Washington in 2001.

This House has heard from many that al-Qaeda, prior to 2001, was able to establish itself as an extensive global financial network that enabled it to exercise effective control over the Taliban. Al-Qaeda were able not only to train under the safety of the Taliban government but to finance and plan the attacks on foreign soils on innocent people.

There are people in my communities and in communities around Australia who question our involvement in Afghanistan, who question what has been achieved. Since 2001 we have seen the removal of the Taliban government and the fracturing of al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda cannot hide under the safety of a Taliban government and they cannot openly...
conduct their operations nor establish training facilities.

We have heard from others, in reply to the Prime Minister’s statement, talking about the actions of the Taliban regime—the brutality that it forced onto its people and the power that it wielded with such ferocity and terror. Women were subjected to acts that we in Australia could not even fathom, let alone let our minds wander to the thoughts of our daughters being subjected to such treatment—abduction, forced marriage, rape or being sold into sexual slavery. Women were prohibited from working or gaining an education.

Importantly, we do not go in to this war alone. This action was taken as part of a broader strategy across nations. The International Security Assistance Force was created in December 2001 after the terrorist attacks of September 11. The International Security Assistance Force works under a United Nations Security Council mandate. ISAF’s mandate has continued to transform to match the shifting needs of Afghanistan and its people.

In London in January 2010, the international community—including over 70 nations and international organisations—reaffirmed its resolve to work with the Afghan government to defeat international terrorism. Importantly, the conference emphasised the need to transfer ‘ownership’ for security, development and governance to the Afghan government, and the need for sustained international commitment in these areas.

In June 2010, US General David Petraeus assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force. As recently as 13 October this year, the United Nations Security Council unanimously renewed ISAF’s mandate for a further year. In July 2010, around 70 nations and international organisations met in Kabul, where participants welcomed the Afghan government’s determination to work with the other nations to achieve governance, strengthen their own military operations and to renounce violence and links with international terrorist organisations.

I welcome this debate because a government, having made a decision to send our defence personnel into combat, must regularly assess the situation to ensure that the objectives are achievable and the decision is justifiable. I believe that the member for Eden-Monaro said it best, in speaking in his reply to this statement. Dr Mike Kelly said:

This parliament is situated on an axis that ensures we are always in sight of the Australian War Memorial. There is no mistake in this, as it was intended that it be a reminder of the consequences of political decisions and that they should not be taken lightly. It is also a reminder that this nation has made great sacrifices throughout its history in the cause of peace and freedom.

The executives of governments who have made these most challenging decisions do not do so lightly, and we have heard that from many in the executive of the current government in their addresses to this parliament and also from those who held executive positions in the previous Howard government. Nor do we, as elected representatives, take decisions about the service of our men and women lightly, whether it be in Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world.

In the midst of a war, it can be difficult to recognise the real and tangible positives that are occurring in Afghanistan through the work of ISAF together with the Afghani people. There are, however, tangible positives that have already been achieved. These include positive steps in the areas of health and education—areas which, as Australians, we take for granted as being a basic birthright. Primary school enrolments are at six million today, up from one million only nine years ago. Importantly, two million of those
enrolments are girls—something not just unthinkable but illegal under the Taliban rule. The transformative power of education is today sowing the seeds in these young Afghan boys and girls who will blossom in the years to come. The power and dignity an education can give to an individual should never be underestimated and the value to Afghanistan as a nation is incalculable. In the area of health, we have seen a 22 per cent decrease in infant mortality in six years and an immunisation rate that is between 70 and 90 per cent. These are achievements that our nation should be proud of.

We must continue to support those who serve this country—those who do so voluntarily, with great risk and great sacrifice. Remembrance Day was marked across our nation last Thursday. There were a number of services across my electorate of Petrie. At one service, two serving soldiers spoke incredibly movingly of their recent service in Afghanistan. They spoke of the toll of the loss of their fellow soldiers, and the pride they feel at the job they are doing in Afghanistan and the positive changes they can see their work doing.

I would like to finish by acknowledging the tremendous efforts of our serving defence force. To the Australian Defence Force personnel, the Australian Federal Police personnel and the civilian personnel who serve in the combined team in Oruzgan we say, ‘Thank you.’ To the 21 Australian soldiers who have lost their lives in Afghanistan since 2001 and to the families left behind, we say: ‘Thank you. Your husbands, sons, and fathers will not be forgotten.’ To the 129 soldiers wounded: we acknowledge your service and your sacrifice.

And even to the explosives detection dogs that have died protecting our troops we say, ‘Thank you.’ One of those dogs was Herbie. Herbie died with Sapper Darren Smith and Sapper Jacob Moerland, both from the Brisbane based 2nd Combat Regiment. These men and Herbie died from a roadside bomb in Afghanistan in June 2010. On 29 October this year, the Peninsula Animal Aid shelter in my electorate was presented with a plaque by Bonnie’s Dog Obedience and Care Centre. Herbie had been adopted by the Defence Force from the shelter two years earlier.

I end as I started: the decision to send our men and women to fight on foreign soil is taken with a heavy heart. It is, however, a decision that a democratic government, elected by the people, must make in the best interests of our nation. Having made that decision, the government must ensure that our nation, its people, are always grateful for the service that is given and never forget those who have served.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (11.30 am)—More than 200 years ago it was Edmund Burke who said to the electors of Bristol, ‘Your representative owes you not his industry only but his judgment, and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.’ On matters of judgment, nowhere is this more important than on issues of national security. I therefore feel privileged to have this opportunity to share with the House my judgment in support of Australia’s current military mission in Afghanistan. In doing so, I am conscious that within both my electorate and the broader community there are dissenting voices. This is understandable—war is a blunt instrument. It can be deeply unpopular and brings with it great pain and suffering. But there are times when neither a heavy human cost nor fragile public consensus should deter us in our task. There are times when we must take hard decisions, stare down the detractors and steel our resolve. But, most importantly, there are times when we, the public’s representatives, must elevate the debate, articulate our goals and explain to the community at large what
really is at stake. Today’s war in Afghanistan is such a time. We must remember why we went there.

On September 11, 2001 the world changed forever. I call it our ‘JFK moment’. My parents’ generation could always tell us where they were when they heard JFK had been shot. My generation can always tell you where they were when they first learnt of 9-11. It was a brazen, sophisticated and terrifying attack on the US mainland that has redefined how we think of our security needs. No longer do we fear Red Army tanks rolling over western European borders and ending life as we know it; rather today it is the plain clothes al-Qaeda terrorist walking undetected into one of our major cities carrying a dirty bomb in their briefcase that strikes the deepest and most fearsome chord. This permanent, fundamental recasting of the nature of the security threat is the real lasting impact of 9-11. We must never forget that the brutal slaying of nearly 3,000 innocent civilians in 9-11 was planned by al-Qaeda from their safe haven in Afghanistan. We must never forget that 10 Australians were among the nationals of 77 countries that died that day and we must never forget that since 2001 more than 100 Australians have been killed in terrorist attacks overseas and in each case the perpetrators had links to Afghanistan.

At the time of 9-11, Afghanistan was positioned at the axis of the global terrorist movement. The United States and its allies could no longer put at risk their citizens by tolerating the status quo, and they did not. With the backing of United Nations Security Council resolution 1386, adopted on 20 December 2001, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force was established. With the support of a unanimous resolution of the Australian parliament, articles 4 and 5 of the ANZUS treaty were also formally invoked. This was the first time an Australian government had invoked the treaty in the 50-year history of our alliance with the United States. Soon after, nearly 1,300 of Australia’s finest men and women in uniform were deployed. Our troops were withdrawn by the end of 2002 as the Taliban were defeated in Kabul and the pointy end of the conflict was at a close. International attention would soon turn to Iraq and only in the latter part of 2005 would Australian special forces make their way back to Afghanistan.

In 2006 Australia sent a reconstruction task force to the southern Afghan province of Oruzgan as the mission morphed into assisting the country in its rebuilding phase. Australia continues its critical role in Oruzgan, helping to train the 4th brigade of the Afghan National Army and strengthen the capabilities of the Afghan National Police. With 1,550 troops in the field, Australia is now the leader of the provincial reconstruction team in Oruzgan, and in the past year we have lifted our civilian contribution to the country by 50 per cent. Australia has committed nearly three-quarters-of-a-billion dollars in development assistance to Afghanistan since 2001.

We should be proud of the significant contribution but at the same time we should recognise that the mission in Afghanistan is truly a global effort. Today’s coalition force of more than 120,000 troops comes from 47 different nations, including 19 non-NATO members. Significantly, there is buy-in from the Islamic world with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Pakistan all having attended the Kabul conference in July. The global jihadist movement is as much a threat to their regimes as it is to ours, and their involvement in helping to resolve the conflict is a timely reminder that our battle is not with Islam but with an extremist ideology that has sought to hijack Islam for its own totalitarian ends.
Given the length and depth of Australia’s commitment over so many years to this distant conflict, it is legitimate to ask: why should we stay the course? Indeed, you could not find two any more different countries than Australia and Afghanistan. With its landlocked mountainous landscape, its drug trade dependent economy and literacy levels around 30 per cent, Afghanistan has seen more than its fair share of suffering over recent decades. But now the people of Afghanistan have begun to get their first glimpse through the window of hope.

The military and civilian contribution of ISAF has made, and is making, a difference. Australia is critical to this effort. A free press and an elected parliament are in place. Trade-training schools are churning out local graduates who in turn contribute to the rebuilding effort. Australia has been involved in 78 school reconstruction projects and the allocation of 950 micro-finance loans. New hospitals and health centres have been built and new transport infrastructure—roads and bridges—are fostering commerce. And tens of thousands of Afghani police and military have been trained to enable an eventual transition to local forces to guarantee domestic security.

When it comes to the size and structure of Australia’s military commitment, the government should be guided by the expert judgment of our leaders in the field, and in this respect I support Tony Abbott’s words in this debate that our 1,550 personnel in Oruzgan should be seen as an average maintained over time rather than a limit never to be exceeded irrespective of the requirements on the ground.

We must be under no illusions for in Afghanistan there is no overnight cure. Progress is gradual and hard fought and there are continuous setbacks. Disturbing allegations of corruption in the Karzai government are the most recent manifestation. But we cannot be deterred, as the commanders tell us we are making ground and we know the cause is too important to fail. The US commander in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, said recently that ‘winning in a counterinsurgency campaign means making progress, and in that regard we are winning.’

Were Australia to prematurely withdraw from Afghanistan, we would be sending the worst possible message to the people of Afghanistan, to our steadfast ally the United States and to all those with the intention and wherewithal to harm our citizens and our interests. We would be betraying our basic instinct as Australians to see out a tough fight even if it means taking blows along the way. And what would we leave in our stead? An even more fragile country in the invidious position of being overrun by the Taliban and used once again as a safe haven for the global terrorist network. The instability this would bring to neighbouring nuclear armed Pakistan should alarm every free-thinking leader across the world.

But most tellingly of all, were Australia to exit before the job is done, what would one say to the families of the 21 Australian soldiers killed in action and the 152 wounded in action since 2001? These 21 brave men have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country and we owe it to them to stay the course. I have been very fortunate to get to know Felix and Yvonne Sher, the wonderful parents of Private Gregory Michael Sher. The Shers and I belong to the same Jewish congregation in Melbourne and we all live close by. Greg was tragically killed in a rocket attack in Oruzgan on Sunday, 4 January 2009. A member of 2nd Company, 1st Commando Regiment, he had been in Afghanistan for only six weeks and celebrated his 30th birthday only four weeks before his untimely death. Like his fellow fallen com-
rades, Greg left behind a loving partner and an adoring family.

Greg’s commitment to his country knew no bounds. He was an Army reservist who had also served as a medic in East Timor. He is the only Australian reservist to have been killed in Afghanistan. Greg’s father has told me how proud his son was to be a member of the Australian Defence Force—a legacy upheld by Greg’s brother Steven, a member of the RAAF Reserve, who hopes to graduate as a lieutenant in a few weeks time. The military was like an ‘extended family’ for Greg, and Felix talks proudly of how the acts of mateship continue to this day, including one fellow soldier naming his son after Greg just a few days ago. On the day Greg was killed in Afghanistan, his mates built an aluminium Star of David to locate above his coffin, respectful as they were not to see him have a cross above his head as he was transported home. Despite all the pain the Sher family has gone through, Felix wants it to be known that Afghanistan remains a cause worth fighting for. These are his words to me just last night:

We cannot withdraw until the momentum for peace, prosperity and the protection of women has reached the point where Afghanistan’s future can be secure. To do otherwise would make the contribution of our soldiers to have been in vain. It would also provide the Taliban with an opportunity to fill the vacuum and provide a fresh harvest of new recruits.

The decision to take a country to war is the hardest decision its leaders can take. Having made that decision for all the right reasons in 2001, we now have a duty and a purpose in seeing it through. I conclude where I began. It is my judgment that our military and civilian commitment to Afghanistan is in pursuit of a just cause, is in Australia’s long-term national security interest and honours the bravest sacrifice of our fallen soldiers.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (11.45 am)—I welcome this debate on Afghanistan. It is certainly not before time that we are discussing in the national parliament our part in a war that has been running for nine years; that has cost Australia $6 billion; that has involved the loss of 21 Australian defence personnel and injury to more than 150, some very serious injuries; and that we discuss the paths that lead from our current mission into the future—the future of Australia’s involvement, the future of the international effort as a whole and the future of Afghanistan. Before proceeding further, I want to pay tribute to the Australian troops who are and who have been in Afghanistan, and to express my condolences to the families of those who have died as well as to those who have suffered injury as a result of their service to this nation.

The gravity of our involvement requires that the purpose and costs of Australia’s commitment are well understood and scrutinised and, yet, as General John Cantwell, the Australian officer in charge of our mission in Afghanistan, said recently:

I do fear that Australians in general don’t understand what we’re doing here …

This government and this parliament are responding to that view and I commend the Prime Minister for her clear, detailed and heartfelt statement that commenced this debate, and also for the new commitment to instigate a parliamentary consideration of our role in Afghanistan at least once a year for every year that our role continues. It is a meaningful improvement to Australia’s national parliamentary conduct and governance.

In my first speech I called for the introduction of a War Powers Act that would require parliamentary consent before Australian troops are sent overseas to war. I note that a number of contributors to this debate
have also endorsed this approach. I believe it is very odd that a decision by an Australian government to change policy, even minutely in some cases, requires the passage of legislation through the parliament, yet the decision to commit the nation to war—to send our armed forces to put their lives on the line and to be prepared to take lives—remains within the sole discretion of the Prime Minister and the cabinet, without any requisite involvement of the parliament. This is done through the exercise of prerogative powers—by convention rather than pursuant to the Australian Constitution, which is silent on the matter.

Blackshield and Williams have quoted the view of noted English legal scholar Sir Frederick Pollock where he said:

Prerogative is nothing more mysterious than the residue of the King’s undefined powers after striking out those which have been taken away by legislation or fallen into desuetude—that is, disuse. I note further the UK House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution’s report entitled Waging war: parliament’s role and responsibility of 27 July 2006 which concluded:

… the exercise of the Royal prerogative by the Government to deploy armed force overseas is outdated and should not be allowed to continue as the basis for legitimate war-making in our 21st century democracy. Parliament’s ability to challenge the executive must be protected and strengthened. There is a need to set out more precisely the extent of the Government’s deployment powers, and the role Parliament can—and should—play in their exercise.

In my view that statement applies equally to Australia and there is every good reason to properly consider the introduction of a War Powers Act to ensure that the decision to commit troops overseas to war, and indeed to continue in war, are decisions given the full weight and scrutiny of the Australian parliament.

I would like at this point to acknowledge the tireless advocacy on this issue of Ian Maguire, a semiretired solicitor from Blackheath in New South Wales, who writes regularly to me and to other parliamentary colleagues on this subject. As almost every contributor to this important debate has pointed out, Australia is in Afghanistan as a consequence of the September 11 terrorist attack on the United States and our involvement was properly effectuated through bilateral and multilateral processes. Australia joined the United States in Afghanistan according to our obligations under the ANZUS treaty, which was invoked for the first time as the formal means of securing our participation in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

I commend the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in this debate and the minister’s longstanding commitment to the probity and integrity that is delivered through Australia’s re-engagement with and observance of multilateral processes. As the minister noted, Australia’s alliance with the United States is without question our most important relationship and our role as an instigator, shaper and member of the United Nations is in my view the most important contribution we have made to international relations.

For me, as a former United Nations staff member, the fact that the International Security Assistance Force was properly sanctioned through an appropriate United Nations process is of great importance. It is what distinguishes our presence and our purpose in Afghanistan from the poorly justified, planned and executed excursion to Iraq. The UN Security Council renewed the ISAF mandate as recently as 13 October. It is clear that the illegal and harmful war in Iraq distracted from the effort in Afghanistan—indeed, it set it back substantially. I do not believe this is a reason to leave Afghanistan,
but I do think we need to be honest about the environment in which we are now operating.

The new Taliban is resurgent and well-funded by drug crops, and supported from Pakistan. The security situation both inside and especially outside of Kabul is highly unstable and dangerous, and the government led by Hamid Karzai is generally acknowledged to be corrupt and dysfunctional, operating a system of patronage networks. I am grateful to Professor Amin Saikal, Director of the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Australian National University, for his insights into Afghan society, which he describes as a mosaic of different ethnic, tribal, cultural and linguistic groups with close ties to neighbouring countries. Despite these differences, Afghans are strong and proud people who have suffered over many years from foreign interference and from weakness of the state.

Professor Saikal notes that the establishment of a presidential style system of government now entrenched in the Afghan constitution has only exacerbated these factors. It has resulted in a system of patronage and personalisation rather than institutionalisation of politics. In some ways, it has also helped the elevation of one tribal group within Afghan society (the Durrani Pashtun) to the detriment of other groups, including the Ghilzai Pashtuns—from where most of the Taliban originate—and the non-Pashtun ethnic groups inhabiting northern, central and western Afghanistan such as the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and Hazaras.

I note further the comments in this regard of Professor William Maley, Director of the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at ANU, that ‘while corruption is a very serious problem, it should more be seen as a product of a dysfunctional set of incentives created by aid flows in an environment of weak institutions than the moral weakness of individual Afghans’. It is recognition of this institutional fragility and fragmentation that leads to the acknowledgement that military means alone will not resolve this conflict. The Soviet experience in Afghanistan as described by Professor Paul Dibb, former deputy secretary of Defence, is testament to the futility of pursuing such a course.

It is clear, however, that the ISAF military intervention is a significant component in establishing the leverage needed to achieve a political solution, which must include an emphasis by donor countries and international entities on helping to rebuild the institutions that are part of better governance and greater political stability. Fulfilment of these core, or survival, functions of the state would improve the authority and legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its population.

Negotiations are now underway for a political settlement. Such a settlement will not only need to be inclusive of the wide spectrum of Afghan society but also require a regional consensus including Iran, Pakistan, India and Saudi Arabia. In particular, as has been noted by Professor William Maley, Pakistan, as the incubator of the Islamic extremist Taliban forces, will need to discharge its duty as a sovereign state to prevent its territory from being used for mounting attacks on a neighbouring country.

I would also argue that much more attention must be devoted internationally to combating the root causes of terrorism. As I noted in my first speech:

… you cannot fight a war on terror without also fighting a war on disadvantage, discrimination and despair. Security, development and human rights are inextricably linked. Tackling poverty in our region through the Millennium Development Goals is part of a wider strategy to deal with terrorism, climate change, pandemics and refugees.

A key rationale of the international mission in Afghanistan is the need to repel the attack upon our democratic values and beliefs that
is represented by terrorism. We must therefore be careful to ensure that our own actions and words are consistent with these democratic values. One of the most powerful organising tenets for al-Qaeda and other outlets for Muslim extremism is the belief—widely held in the Muslim world—that we do not consistently apply our values and beliefs, particularly in relation to the rights of the Palestinians. Settlement of the long-running Israel-Palestine conflict would go a long way towards removing a central recruiting tool of Muslim extremism.

While much of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan is unquestionably motivated by the extremist cause, I note the view put forward in an interview on *Lateline* by former Marine Captain Matthew Hoh, who resigned from his post in Afghanistan with the US state department, that for as long as we are involved in combat operations the insurgency will have life. It is true that to a certain extent the relationship between an occupying force and an insurgency is mutually reinforcing. Meanwhile, the civilian population remains caught in between, often cruelly exploited by the insurgents and sometimes shown insufficient care by the occupying forces.

In a recent article the *Guardian* described a survey carried out in Afghanistan which found that although few Afghans spoke warmly about the Taliban they felt the international forces were equally brutal towards civilians, and often indiscriminate. As the *Guardian* article notes, these issues have been recognised by Western policy makers and reforms have been made to address them, such as tactical restrictions on air strikes that risk civilian deaths. On the other hand, for example, night-time house searches, which result in fewer deaths but cause offence and terror, have increased; international forces often hire or subcontract unaccountable Afghan guards for security support; and many incidents involving civilian harm are dealt with in a non-transparent way, especially where special forces are involved.

The article concludes that for any resolution of the conflict to be sustainable it needs to be built on trust. The good news is that, despite the negative views expressed, most Afghans surveyed still wanted foreign troops and international engagement in the country. This is a key factor for the ISAF mission in going forward, and I am heartened by the efforts being made to avoid harm to civilians and moreover to work with local communities on the provision of vital infrastructure like roads, hospitals, schools and irrigation systems.

I believe that any Australian who looks closely at our operations in Afghanistan will take pride and pleasure in the reconstruction efforts, whatever else they may feel about our role in the war. According to the Lowy Institute, the percentage of the population with access to basic health care has increased from nine per cent in 2002 to 85 per cent in 2008. Of the six million Afghan children enrolled in primary education, two million are girls, when there were none in 2001. The Prime Minister is absolutely right to say that nothing represents progress more than those two million Afghan girls learning to read.

I also take heart from the perspective of an Australian friend and former UN colleague with whom I worked in the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, Tony Preston-Stanley, who has recently worked on the ground in Afghanistan. He too highlighted the importance of education:

I can tell you from personal observation that there are people there who see this as the way out of feudalism, and the only real hope of some future for their grandchildren. There are many examples out in the middle of nowhere of families desperately trying to educate their children against all sorts of odds. I have seen them under trees, in
ratty tents and on the floor of a two-room village mosque. On my bad days it is those little faces and the efforts of their communities and teachers that give me reason for saying we need to help this country for a while yet.

I am in agreement with the Prime Minister that whatever the nature of the Australian military involvement in Afghanistan in the future, Australian civilian aid for humanitarian and development assistance will be needed for at least a decade and its nature and composition may change. The institutional and governance areas noted earlier would be a natural fit for expanded Australian contributions.

I note the research that has been carried out by the Afghanistan Working Group of the Australian Council for International Development, ACFID, into the obstacles and opportunities that exist in the area of development assistance in Afghanistan. ACFID has called for increased public transparency of Australia’s development assistance to Afghanistan as well as for Australia to play a key role in ensuring that strong Afghan participation, including by women, is a condition of funding in order to ensure Afghanistan develops its own capacities.

I note further the comment of Oxfam’s Executive Director, Andrew Hewett, in a recent article in the Age that ‘military-led projects quickly become a target for anti-government elements’ as well as concerns expressed by the outgoing head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA, Sir John Holmes, earlier this year about a blurring of the distinction between the work of soldiers and aid workers when the military engages in humanitarian aid delivery, which may be putting the humanitarian workers in danger. In 2008 alone, 260 humanitarian aid workers in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan were killed, kidnapped or seriously injured in violent attacks. In order to address these concerns, every effort should be made to separate the roles of military and aid work, and local and civilian constructed development should be preferred wherever possible.

There are no easy answers in Afghanistan, but it is essential that the international community, in collaboration with the Afghan government and its people, continue to work together for a solution. I have already spoken about the ways in which the delivery of aid might be approached differently, as well as the need for a political settlement that is inclusive of the many sections of Afghan society and involves regional consensus and cooperation.

However, I am concerned that whatever political conclusion is ultimately reached does not worsen the already unacceptable position of many groups within Afghan society. There is one very large group—namely women—who have a great deal to fear in a political solution that trades away the observance of fundamental human rights as the price of Taliban participation in an outcome. If the Taliban return to power not only will women suffer enormously but also the non-Pashtun national minorities, including the Hazaras, will be subjected to brutal discrimination, as they were when the Taliban were in power from 1996-2001.

I would like to end with a quote from WilliamMaley’s book The Afghanistan Wars:

Here, the peoples of the wider world, who have witnessed agonizing waves of war sweep over the people of Afghanistan, bear a special responsibility. An old Kabul proverb—*Kuh har qadar boland bashad, baz ham sar-e khud rah darad*—states that there is a path to the top of even the highest mountain. With characteristic determination, the Afghans are now striving to reach that summit. They should not be left to climb alone.

In the end, I too believe that we should not leave the Afghans to climb alone.
Mr McCormack (Riverina) (12.00 pm)—Right now, somewhere in the world, an Australian soldier stands defiant against an enemy he most likely cannot hear or see. Right now, somewhere in the world, a proponent courageously rallies against government oppression knowing full well the brutal consequence of their actions. Right now, somewhere in the world, a baby is being born into poverty and whose parents will love, nurture and teach that child because they believe that there is still hope in harsh times. They are brave people. They are prepared to fight for what is right, to stand up and be counted. We ought to live by their example.

Our world is not perfect. It never will be. Those lucky enough to be brought up in countries in which democratic freedoms are almost taken for granted do not have to worry about military regimes which rule with unjust and unquestioned force. Military regimes which ensure free elections are but a forlorn hope. Our world, sadly, is not the same place it once was. But if military dictatorships were all with which we had to contend, at least we would know what we were up against.

Terrorists do not play by any rules of engagement. They strike at any time, anywhere and with fearful and deadly outcomes. Often they are suicide bombers who have no regard for their own lives let alone the life of anyone else. These same people who perpetrate such destruction against innocent lives are given direction from someone—someone who heads an organisation which deals in death.

It is important to remember why we are presently at war. In 1996 Osama bin Laden moved his terrorist operations from Sudan to Afghanistan on the invitation of the Taliban. When the Taliban took control in that country later that year, bin Laden’s own power was consolidated and an alliance formed between the Taliban and al-Qaeda. This association led to the atrocities by al-Qaeda on 9-11, the deadly attacks against the United States of America—indeed, against the free world—on 11 September, 2001. The terrible images of the aeroplanes hitting the World Trade Centre and then the collapse of those twin towers are burned on the consciences of all.

Within a month, the US and its allies retaliated and a war began. Despite its terrible nature, casualties and cost, conflict and war can be justified under certain circumstances. Self-defence has always been the foremost reason. Assistance to an ally acting in self-defence is also a convincing reason. Protection of a third country or group experiencing a threat from an aggressor is also a credible reason. Our commitment in and to Afghanistan meets all three criteria.

Australia has always answered the call in the preservation of civilised society, be it against imperialism, fascism, communism or, today, extremist Islamic terrorism. One hundred and eleven of our fellow Australians, along with thousands of others, have become the victims of the callous, random and senseless terrorist attacks orchestrated by extremist Islamic terrorists.

Remembering that each was an innocent human life cut all too short, on top of those murders are the many more injured or maimed. Australians have been killed and wounded in Bali, in the World Trade Centre and elsewhere at the hands of terrorism—awful, mindless, barbaric terrorism.

The Taliban is financed by drug crops and from bad and mad elements within Pakistan. If 9-11 stripped the world of the relative peace which existed prior to those plane hijackings, then the Bali bombings one year and one day later robbed Australia of its innocence in the general unease in which we
all now find ourselves. Of the 88 Australians killed, the Riverina lost three wonderful young men in the unprecedented attack eight years ago. These three men were locals and were on well-deserved holidays, like so many others caught up in this senseless tragedy. Shane Walsh-Till from Coolamon was a cricket club-mate of mine and a fantastic fellow. David Mavroudis was a neighbour and Clint Thompson from Leeton was also highly regarded in his community.

Sadly, there are many of us in this place who can stand and talk about those from their regions whose lives were taken in an instant on that fateful day. It is all the more reason why we should stay the course in Afghanistan now. I feel a personal connection and a sense of responsibility for the families in my electorate that justice is done for the loss of their sons.

Wagga Wagga is a tri-service city for defence training bases with the Australian Army at Kapooka, the Royal Australian Air Force at Forest Hill and also a Royal Australian Navy base. Blamey Barracks at Kapooka is the recognised home of the soldier with the many thousands of Australian Army recruits each year doing their initial training there. The Riverina’s commitment, therefore, to the defence of this nation and upholding the rights of people across the world to live with freedom and respect is as great, if not greater than, any Australian region.

Some in politics and the general public have argued that they do not wish Afghanistan to end up a drawn out stalemate. Within the Riverina, there are dissenting views about our involvement in Afghanistan. This is understandable. No-one wants another Vietnam. But for us to openly declare an exit strategy would be like telling our enemies to sit tight and simply wait until we eventually go away. There is an old Afghan saying: ‘If you have the watches, we have the time.’ You should never tell your enemy when you are going to quit. Time lines should not be deadlines because warfare is dynamic—it constantly changes. We have to run this race the necessary distance and keep the faith—faith to get the job done, faith in the US and Australian and allied forces to win this fight, faith in the Anzac spirit to again deliver.

Today, in the face of the evil of terrorism, which could strike again at any time, good men and women from all over the world have put up their hands to ensure this evil will not triumph. For them, doing nothing is not an option and we salute them. We remember them. Their sacrifice, their service and their valour is our security.

The threat of radical Islam is real. There are, on average, 1,800 separate terrorist attacks each year perpetrated by Islamic extremists. A lot of them are directed at their own, but many, too, are directed at Westerners—tourists, business travellers, innocents. Afghanistan remains one of the hotbeds from which this evil is delivered succour. Ours is a worthy cause—it is just, although it is heart-rending.

Afghanistan remains the cradle of terrorism, where terrorists continue to be recruited. This is where they are trained and this is where they should be, must be and will be stopped. To date, we have lost 21 of our own and endured more than 150 soldiers with injuries. Each and every Australian feels a personal connection with the wives, husbands, partners, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters of the fallen. Our condolences are expressed to them, our prayers remain for them and our gratitude will be eternal. We rally together and support one another. To walk away now would be an insult to the families and soldiers whose deaths may well be seen to have been in vain.
I end with an old proverb, yet a timeless truth: 'For evil to triumph, all that is required is for good men to do nothing.'

Mr Griffin (Bruce—Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel) (12.08 pm)—I welcome this opportunity to debate the issue of Australia’s involvement in Afghanistan. I see it as an opportunity to publicly highlight and discuss the many complex issues surrounding our commitment, the situation we find ourselves in as a nation and the situation in which the world finds itself in dealing with issues like Afghanistan. However, while it is an opportunity to highlight and discuss, we also have to understand that we are not going to reach too many conclusions.

It is also a subject that is very hard to cover in the time that is available to an individual speaker—15 minutes, particularly if it is me speaking, can sound like forever, but the bottom line is that it is a short period of time to cover what are some manifestly complex issues. I am going to try to avoid some of the detail covered by many of the previous speakers and just focus on a few points. In doing so, I can hopefully add something relevant to the debate.

There are some points which need to be made at the outset. I do not want to descend into cliches, but they are points which I think all sides of the House agree on and which, I believe, the Australian community also agrees with. One of these points is simply the general question of support for our troops in the missions that we have given them and the undertakings that they fulfill on our behalf. The bottom line is that the Australian Defence Force is a professional and very skilled force; they are amongst the very best in the world. They go with our best wishes, with our prayers and with our hopes for their safe return. However, we know that, for some, safe return is not what has occurred and so we again express our sympathy for the families of those who have lost loved ones, for the individuals who have come back grievously wounded and for the families of those individuals. They will have to deal with that situation for the rest of their lives.

When I was a minister in the defence portfolio area, I had the duty of attending several funerals for soldiers killed in action in Afghanistan. Those occasions were very challenging for me as a minister, as a member of parliament and as a representative of the Australian community. I found it challenging to see the very open and raw grief of those who had lost a loved one in trying circumstances. I have to be honest with the House and say that one thing I will not miss, no longer being a minister in the defence portfolio area, is attending funerals of that nature. I am a typical bloke—I do not handle that sort of stuff very well. To be at those funerals and see the very open, heartfelt grief of the families is something that I found very difficult.

But in speaking to members of some of the families and in speaking to some of the men and women who have come back from Afghanistan, including at those funerals, the overwhelming view that has come through has been that the work being done in Afghanistan is working, that objectives are being met and that achievement of those objectives is making a real difference to the communities that we are seeking to assist in Afghanistan. The view that has come through very clearly from those sources is that activity needs to be maintained and that we can be confident that we are moving in the right direction.

One of the difficult things about being a politician is having to sit in judgment and it is not something I feel particularly confident about with respect to some of these issues. Despite having some knowledge from a short tenure as a minister in the defence portfolio,
I do not pretend to be an expert or to have all the answers. Nor do I believe I have a clear and detailed understanding of all that is being done. However, I do feel able to raise a series of questions that I would urge the government to take on board and to consider as part of what we do as a nation in future—not only with regard to Afghanistan now but also with regard to other locations where we may end up having to put our people in harm’s way. We know from post World War II experience that we can expect there to be other locations and times we are called on to honour an alliance and other times when the international community of which we are part needs to play a role. I think we need to look at what has happened in Afghanistan to see whether that points us in some directions for dealing with those issues in the future.

As a starting point: should we be there or should we have gone in the first place? I think the answer there is: yes, it was a just cause—the circumstances after September 11 meant that action needed to be taken. There were certainly numerous attempts made to try to get the Taliban to see sense with respect to what was occurring in Afghanistan, but they fell on deaf ears. So I think the initial involvement was certainly clearly in Australia’s interests and in the world’s interests because of the nature of that regime.

Should we stay there? That goes to questions like whether we can win, what that actually means and, if we can win, how we can do it. Part of the debate that has been going on, both in the chamber and in the community, is around those sorts of questions. People are asking what is required, what victory is, how that victory can be achieved, whether it can be achieved at all and, if so, at what cost.

I think that goes to the key question: what are we seeking to do there? Others have spoken in more detail about the nature of what we are trying to achieve in those environments, the circumstances for ensuring a safe Afghanistan for the local community and the development of security mechanisms which will allow the Afghan defence forces and police to be able to secure the environment, avoiding a situation where it regresses to a base for terrorism and, hopefully, in time dealing with issues such as the enormous international problem of drug running that has many of its origins in Afghanistan.

My view is that we cannot judge Afghanistan by our own standards. What we would see as being a safe and secure environment is not going to be what we end up with in Afghanistan. What we see as being a modern society is not what we are going to see coming out of Afghanistan. The sorts of values which relate to Afghan society are very different to those of our own. However, can we see movement in the right direction? Can we see achievements that will lead to a safer location? Yes, we can—but how long will it take and what do we as a nation need to do as part of ISAF to achieve those outcomes?

I think we need to recognise that there have been mistakes made in the past. Frankly, with the benefit of hindsight, we can point out a litany of mistakes made in the original involvement in Afghanistan, in what occurred there in the aftermath of September 11 and in what has occurred since then. For a start, the fact is that we got out. We say it is a conflict which dates back to 2001. It does, but post the initial invasion there was a period of some three years where Australia’s involvement was minimal and the overall involvement of international forces was well and truly toned down from what it had been initially.

In 2004 I visited Afghanistan with the now Minister for Foreign Affairs, the member for Griffith, who was then the shadow foreign minister. At that time we had one
member of the ADF in the country. We spoke to a number of senior figures in the Afghan government—President Karzai and also the foreign minister at that time, Abdullah Abdullah, who was the opposition leader in the recent election—so there were certainly different views from within Afghan society. The view that came through to us at the time was that the international forces had vacated the field before there had been a proper opportunity to build on the initial success of the invasion, and that of course was because the focus turned to Iraq. That in itself caused issues for the situation in Afghanistan. The nature of the deployment when it was ramped up around 2006 also produced problems. I now think that there is scope and reason for some optimism around what is occurring under the current leadership of General Petraeus, but again we have got to see if it works and we have got to test that.

When we look to the future and to what we are doing in this situation, often these questions come up: should we leave, when should we leave and should we set a date? I would like to make one or two points. Firstly, open-ended commitments are dangerous, but so are time lines. The problem with time lines has been mentioned by earlier speakers: they flag your intentions and set a date. But the problem with open-ended commitments is that they do not necessarily allow you to properly evaluate your progress and, if you are not, frankly, making progress, adjust what you do or re-evaluate your commitment. Our objectives need to be concrete, achievable and measurable and they need to be articulated and assessed on a regular basis. We need to make sure that we are bringing the Australian community and the international community with us when we are part of a coalition like this and we need to be in a situation where, wherever possible, we articulate very clearly how we are going and where we are going.

We also need to understand it is not just about military assets; it is also about a civilian aspect—providing support. The issue of hearts and minds is very important. We can protect hearts and minds through force of arms and we will need to do that. But the bottom line is that if we overprotect or if we are not sensitive in the context of that protection there is a danger that we will lose those hearts and minds over time—and there is evidence of that to some extent in Afghanistan.

The issue of support beyond the military needs to be considered very seriously. I know the government is doing more work in that area. I know an AFP component has been increased slightly. There is also an issue around the environment in Afghanistan and what civilian assets you can deploy in a safe manner. I would urge the government and the international community to look seriously and to a greater extent at what can be done with a more holistic approach, which will ensure that we provide the military support to protect and also the civilian support to provide better outcomes within the Afghan community. More work can be done there, and it is important that it is done. We need to recognise that mistakes have been made and also that they will be made, and we need to work to adapt from and learn from those mistakes in the future.

There has been quite a bit said about the context of the Australian community and ensuring that people understand what is going on and that there is support. Lieutenant General Peter Leahy had a proposal for parliament to approve troop deployments. I do not necessarily think that is what is needed. I do think there is a need to regularly assess what is occurring and a need for the transparency that comes with a parliamentary debate to ensure that there is that debate within the broader community.
I bring to the attention of the House a document that relates to Canada, which I was provided with by the Australian Council for International Development. Canadians produce a quarterly report to parliament which goes into the details of their engagement in Afghanistan. I would urge members to have a look at it. It provides a context for where they are up to in Afghanistan and it also lists their priorities and reports progress against those priorities. I think an approach such as that would be a good step forward, although I also welcome the commitment by the Prime Minister to a regular statement to parliament. There are also issues beyond that. There are the questions about how and when we deploy, about the nature of our force structure and whether it will meet our needs into the future.

I think there are some key questions that need to be considered within the defence area. This is a difficult and tense environment for our troops. We have to not only make sure that they very clearly understand that we have their interests at heart and will provide them with the support that they need but also as a nation look to the question of where we take this involvement into the future. We have to set objectives. We have to understand what are realistic outcomes and be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances. In an uncertain world post-Cold War we cannot afford to just stay the course because the course has been set. We need to be clear about what we seek to achieve and work to achieve it. We also need to be prepared to recognise when our objectives cannot be met or when the cost of meeting them is just too great.

I do not believe we are at that point yet. However, we need to be aware that if that point does come then we must recognise it and act accordingly. I commend the work of our troops. I commend the work of the defence forces in what is an incredibly difficult and challenging environment. The complexities of these issues will be with us for years to come, but we must at this stage continue.

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth) (12.23 pm)—Last year, together with my colleagues the member for Curtin and Senator Johnston, I had the great privilege of visiting our troops in Kandahar and in Oruzgan province at Tarin Kowt. Brief official visits are only ever going to be at best a superficial introduction to the challenges facing our troops, but the visit did leave several indelible impressions. We were struck by the enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism of all our troops. There was no mistaking that they believed they were engaged in an important, just and historic mission and that it was manifestly in both the interests of the Afghan people and of Australia that they were there.

The challenges they faced were very apparent. The terrain we saw in southern Afghanistan was a vast mountainous desert: steep, rocky ranges with thin slivers of irrigated cultivation and settlement running along the rivers on the valley floors. This topography makes travel from one settlement to another extremely difficult—unlike in Iraq, which is mostly flat and has many good highways. It also means that there is often only one route in and out of a settlement, typically the road up and down the valley. That brings me to the other sinister challenge of the improvised explosive device or IED, which has claimed the lives of so many of our diggers and their allies. This is the weapon of choice of the Taliban and its sophistication is improving all the time. We saw many examples of IEDs, with some fashioned out of unexploded munitions from this and previous wars; others made with readily obtained chemicals, including fertilisers. The ingenuity of the bomb maker is very evident in Afghanistan and the technology of the IED has improved as rapidly as
our techniques for identifying and disarming them.

Our special forces who conduct carefully targeted operations against Taliban leaders and strong points endeavour to avoid the IEDs by travelling across country or using helicopters and avoiding the roads and settlements until they reach their target. They are not always successful in that endeavour. However, in a counterinsurgency war such as this the most important role for our forces is to train and mentor the Afghan security forces so they can win the confidence of their own people. At the same time, our forces must themselves win the confidence of the people of Oruzgan province and to do that they must work with them. This is the role of the training and mentoring task force. Working with and in the community they are especially vulnerable to IEDs, especially when they are on foot outside one of our Australian designed mine resistant vehicles, the Bushmaster.

Together with all members I record my admiration, once again, and my thanks to our forces in Afghanistan for their courageous service. In particular, we give thanks to those 21 Australian soldiers who lost their lives in that country; wearing our uniform and under our flag. Others have been gravely wounded. Their families know that this nation, this parliament, will never forget that service and that sacrifice.

The question we are debating is whether we should continue to remain a part of the United States-led coalition in Afghanistan. Should we bring the troops home? It is right that the parliament is debating this issue. The bipartisan support for our commitment in Afghanistan has had the consequence that the case for remaining has not been made often enough nor has it been tested in debate. Democracies from the time of Pericles have been debating the conduct of wars, for thousands of years, and this war and this parliament should be no exception.

The debate began with two fine speeches from the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. The Prime Minister made a profound point when she said that our troops offer their lives for us. They embrace wartime sacrifice as their highest duty. In return we owe them our wisdom. Our highest duty is to make wise decisions about war. I agree. Our troops need to know that they are fighting there not because we believed it was the right thing in 2001 or 2004 but that it is the right strategy today and tomorrow. The Leader of the Opposition made an equally profound point when he said that those who advocated our withdrawing from Afghanistan could not do so without at the same time advocating that the United States and its other allies do the same.

We should not be naive about the war in Afghanistan. We did not invade because we wanted to liberate the Afghan people from the tyranny of the Taliban; we invaded because the United States had been attacked by al-Qaeda, whose leadership had planned that deadly assault from bases in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime was urged to surrender the al-Qaeda leadership. It refused to do so and consequently the United States and its allies invaded. The initial assault was successful in the sense that the Taliban regime was overthrown and the al-Qaeda strongholds destroyed. However, Osama bin Laden evaded capture and al-Qaeda quickly regrouped in Pakistan.

Colin Powell had cautioned President Bush about the consequences of invading Iraq by referring to the warning that the Pottery Barn offers its butter-fingered customers: you break it, you own it. And so it is that if a great power invades a country and overthrows its government then it inherits the responsibility of establishing a new and bet-
ter government for its people. The truth is
that, after the invasion, the war in Afghan-
istan was neglected as the United States fo-
cused more and more resources on the con-
figlict in Iraq. As Michael O’Hanlon noted
recently in *Foreign Policy*, by the end of last
year it was clear that the Taliban had nearly
as many fighters in the field as they had be-
fore 9-11 and considerably more than they
had in 2005. The Taliban was winning the
war.

President Obama was left with little
choice but to embark on, as his predecessor
had done in Iraq, a thorough counterinsur-
gency strategy involving a near trebling of
US forces, which was designed not simply to
kill and capture Taliban fighters but to pro-
vide a secure environment for the Afghan
people, for long enough to enable the Afghan
government to develop the capacity to pro-
vide both ongoing security and adequately
efficient and honest government. The most
difficult task we and our allies have in Af-
ghanistan, therefore, is that of nation build-
ing. Every tactical success, every victory on
the battlefield, every Taliban leader killed or
captured will be of little enduring value if
there is not a strong Afghan government to
take responsibility for their own country and
the safety of its citizens.

With lessons hard learned in Iraq, the
United States government has developed a
thorough counterinsurgency doctrine. Au-
thored by General Petraeus, the manual
notes:

At its heart—
counterinsurgency—
is a struggle for the population’s support. The
protection, welfare and support of the people are
vital to success.

David Galula said:

Essential though it is, the military action is sec-
ondary to the political one, its primary purpose
being to afford the political power enough free-
dom to work safely with the population.

As a consequence, the manual notes:

Military efforts are necessary and important to
counterinsurgency efforts, but they are only effec-
tive when integrated into a comprehensive strat-
ey employing all instruments of national power.

A successful—
counterinsurgency—
operation meets the contested population’s needs
to the extent needed to win popular support while
protecting the population from the insurgents.

Once the insurgents lose the support of the
people, they cannot survive. In this context it
is important to bear in mind the fluid identity
of the insurgents. As David Kilcullen re-
minds us, they are not a standing army. Their
ranks are swelled by resentment towards the
Afghan government and indeed towards for-
eign armies, especially if their activities
cause loss and damage to the local popula-
tion. These are Kilcullen’s accidental guerril-
las. Equally, as an effective counterinsur-
gency strategy restores order and a compe-
tent national government resumes control,
many of those insurgents stop fighting. Over
the course of this year there have been many
tactical successes. Taliban leaders are being
killed or captured, their administration has
been challenged in provinces where they
have been in barely challenged control for
many years.

However, at the strategic level, there are
two very significant problems. First and most
importantly, the Afghan government has
simply failed to develop the capacity to de-
deliver adequate security and efficient govern-
ment in many, if not most, areas of the coun-
try. In a counterinsurgency strategy, the host
government should be the solution not the
cause of the problems exploited by the insur-
gents. The notorious, systemic corruption of
the Karzai government, however, is more
often than not perceived as the problem. The
Taliban has sought to respond by offering an
alternative government—harsh and violent to be sure; often perceived as the lesser of two evils. Improving the calibre, competence and honesty of the Karzai government or its successor is probably our most important and difficult task in Afghanistan.

Second, our allies’ long-term commitment is somewhat questionable. The Netherlands forces have been withdrawn from Oruzgan, and other nations, including the Canadians, Poles and Italians, have set dates to withdraw, although on Friday I note Prime Minister Harper announced a more prolonged timetable for withdrawal. President Obama’s surge, announced in late 2009, was accompanied by a commitment to start withdrawing forces by mid 2011.

The Taliban believe they will win the war not because they think they can defeat us on the battlefield but because they believe that public opinion in America and its allies will not permit their forces to remain in such large numbers for long enough to enable the Karzai government to acquire the capacity to administer their nation themselves. Withdrawing from Afghanistan now would, quite simply, deliver the country back into the hands of the Taliban. It would constitute a humiliating defeat for the West and a glorious triumph for the Islamist jihad. Those that advocate withdrawal cannot credibly dispute that this would be the consequence, but they argue that we are better off cutting our losses rather than postponing an inevitable defeat.

The truth, however, is that the new population-centred, counterinsurgency strategy has only just begun. We are fighting a new war which began in earnest late last year. Already we are seeing real progress in building up the Afghan security forces. Michael O’Hanlon noted:

The quality of training is up too largely—in the Afghan security forces—because teacher to student ratios have more than doubled. … In the Afghan army, the better of the main security institutions, 20,000 recruits are in training at all times, and the force is on pace to reach its interim goal of 134,000 soldiers by this fall. … The rate at which new recruits are joining the force is now twice the rate at which soldiers are leaving.

In terms of civil society, I might note that the Afghan parliament has a higher percentage of women MPs than our own. So there are some positive signs.

While the Afghan engagement has been a long one, in reality, we are fighting, as I said, a new war which commenced from the end of last year when President Obama took the advice of General Petraeus and General McChrystal to undertake a surge along the lines of the one that had been successful in Iraq. A successful end to the war is not going to look like victory in a conventional war. Truth be told, conventional wars have been few and far between. Wars of counterinsurgency are the norm nowadays. Just as the military effort is secondary to the political effort in counterinsurgency strategy, so is the end game in this exercise, essentially, a political one.

Already there are negotiations with some elements of the Taliban which are being facilitated by the United States. As Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, observed in response to criticism of this approach:

You don’t make peace with your friends.

A satisfactory outcome to the war would be one in which a stable government was able to provide security and reasonably honest administration across the country in which democratic institutions, however inadequate by our standards, nonetheless, allowed Afghani men and women to live in peace and security. Most importantly from our point of view such an outcome would see a government which would not ever again permit al-
Qaeda to base itself in Afghanistan and wage war against us from there.

This goal will certainly be very difficult to achieve but, if we and our allies were to pull out now, it would have absolutely no prospect of achievement. Our mission is not to stay in Afghanistan forever; our mission is not to leave Afghanistan; our mission is to leave Afghanistan in peace and security. And before we can leave on those terms we must give the new strategy the chance to succeed.

**Mr Murphy** (Reid) (12.38 pm)—I begin by congratulating the member for Wentworth on a very thoughtful and measured analysis of the war in Afghanistan, and I would like to associate myself with his very significant contribution to this debate.

On 11 September 2001 we all learned that the world had changed forever. Since that time we have been engaged in an international fight against terrorism. Who could have imagined the horrific cold-blooded murder that took place on 11 September 2001 in the United States of America? Who could have thought that such a cold-blooded, callous and cowardly assault by al-Qaeda on America could occur? We cannot allow the perpetrators of that murderous attack and those who have continued to terrorise the world to escape justice. Those attacks on America were an attack on us, so we must support the USA. We must drive the terrorists out of Afghanistan and we must bring peace, freedom and democracy to the people of Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan have suffered enough. We have a duty to protect their rights and we have a duty to defend their dignity.

It is timely to quote from the report card of the Council for International Development in relation to Afghanistan. What a sorry report it is. It states:

- Afghanistan ranks second last—181 of 182 countries on the UN’s human development index.
- An estimated 42% of the population are living below the poverty line, up from 33% in 2005.
- An additional 20% of the population are hovering just above the poverty line, highly vulnerable to shocks and fluctuations in household income and consumption.
- There is a high prevalence of chronic and rapid-onset natural disasters in Afghanistan (including seasonal floods, droughts, earthquakes, avalanches and landslides). When combined with ongoing conflict this makes Afghans extremely vulnerable to shocks and stresses.
- Poverty in rural areas is higher than in urban settings, with 47% and 27% of people living below the poverty line respectively in 2007...
- Less than 30% of people have access to safe drinking water and over 90% do not have access to proper sanitation.
- Afghanistan is the most food insecure country on the planet according to the Food Security Risk Index 2010. Climate change further exacerbates the precarious, agriculture-based livelihoods of Afghans.
- In every development indicator women are disadvantaged compared with men.

As I said, that is a very sorry report on Afghanistan from the Council for International Development. We must stay the course in Afghanistan, and we must bring peace to the people of Afghanistan. All of us in this place strive for peace and security for all people in the world. That is absolute. We all support the troops fighting in Afghanistan and we pay tribute to their courage and bravery. We honour the 21 young men who have paid the ultimate price in the pursuit of freedom and democracy for the people of Afghanistan, and we pray that they have not sacrificed their lives in vain.
Terrorism came to our doorstep a little over 12 months after September 11 when 88 Australians perished in the first Bali bombing. Four more Australians were killed in the second Bali bombing three years later, and our Australian Embassy was attacked. Terrorism in our region is real and we must fight against it here and with our allies in Afghanistan. Who better in this place to say why we must remain in Afghanistan and finish the job for the people of Afghanistan than the member for Eden-Monaro? Here is what Dr Mike Kelly said in this place on 21 October 2010 when he concluded his magnificent speech:

I understand what we are asking of our men and women in Afghanistan and their families. I have seen the devastation of war in Somalia, Bosnia, Timor-Leste and Iraq, watched men die, lost friends and washed their blood from my uniform. I have shed tears over broken bodies and, together with coalition colleagues in recent times, tried to console families. I do not support the continuation of our commitment in Afghanistan lightly. If you were to ask the troops themselves, they would tell you that they think they are making progress, they want us to keep faith with them, as do the families that I have spoken to. We should not leave Afghanistan because it is hard. We are in Afghanistan because our national interests are engaged and because it is the right thing to do. What the government has outlined is not a prescription for a blank cheque but, as things stand at this moment, we believe it is worth our perseverance, and persevere we must.

I have not served in our defence forces, so I can only imagine the great challenges, the sacrifices and the hardships our defence men and women are facing today, particularly in Afghanistan. I was very moved by Dr Kelly’s words, and I believe that those words encapsulate the debate on Australia’s involvement in Afghanistan that we are having in the House at this time. I believe that our presence in Afghanistan will make the lives of Afghan men and women and their children better in the long term. I believe that our presence in Afghanistan will ultimately make the world a safer place. I conclude by thanking our dedicated and able defence personnel and their families for their sacrifices for us and for the people of Afghanistan, and I pray for their safe return.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (12.46 pm)—On 12 October 2007 I stood in the courtyard of the Australian compound in Bali, with the task of representing the Australian government at the 5th anniversary commemoration of the 88 Australians who lost their lives in the Bali bombing of 12 October 2002. On that day I met the brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters of those who had been lost in the Bali on October 12. Their loss was profound. It was put to me that five years had been both the longest of times and the shortest of times. The additional three years that have bridged the gap since then would also feel like both the longest of times and the shortest of times. These losses were the human face of the Australians who had been ripped from loved ones. They represent the cost, the tragedy and the task we face in an ongoing moment of great global challenge.

When we step back a year to 11 September 2001, it is to the genesis of what we face today. It is the defining moment in the last two centuries of global history. It was the moment when the notion of security switched most tangibly from the classic power confrontations during the First World War, the Second World War and, in particular, the Cold War to asymmetric threats from terrorist groups and particularly from an extremist sect within the Islamic world. That moment changed our task, our role and our lives. By now, I would have expected that we had faced worse challenges and worse outcomes. We have had Bali, London and Madrid. But the horrors of September 11 have not been followed by the level of violence against our societies that we might have expected. The reason is that there has been a
profound, concerted and widespread international effort to confront the causes, the leaders and the carriage of those acts which would destabilise not just our society but the Islamic world itself at its core.

I also note that, in addition to the 88 Australians whose lives were lost in Bali and the other 100 or more Australians whose lives were lost as a consequence of the terrorism which followed from 11 September 2001, 21 beautiful young Australians have given up their lives in the pursuit of achieving a lasting solution of peace and security for the people of Afghanistan and the people of the broader world. There are no free passes for anyone. The price that has been paid has been profound, real and tragic and the echoes of those losses will pass through generations of Australians. In my own family, a great-uncle, Colin Alexander Grant, lost his life on the Western Front during the First World War. Over the next 50 years, his parents, my grandfather and my mother never lost feeling the impact of that tragedy. For the families today, their losses will last throughout their lives. We offer our profound sympathy and most profound ‘thank you’ for the courage and the commitment of your sons, your brothers, your fathers or your husbands.

What then is the global threat which we face? I want to put this challenge into its grandest context. The goal of the Wahhabist movement, which developed most profoundly in Egypt in the postwar period, is nothing less than an Islamic caliphate. It is a 100-year goal. It is a fantasist’s objective but it is nevertheless a real and abiding motivation for those at the heart of the Wahhabist movement who seek to distort and pervert an otherwise beautiful faith. They seek a global world under Islamic rule of its most extreme and barbaric form, as was evident under the Taliban. And they are patient. The 30-year objective, the generational objective, is to establish a beachhead in one of the great Islamic states of the world. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Indonesia are all part of the push towards a long-term caliphate, and the goal is to destabilise and fragment these countries and ultimately to secure control.

I do not believe that the movement will be successful in any of these countries. But it was successful in one place—Afghanistan—and we should never lose sight of that fact. The Wahhabist movement, driven through the agency of al-Qaeda and manifested in the form of the Taliban, assumed control of one of the poorest countries of the world and, from that country alone, was able to carry out and lead the attacks of September 11. They trained the architects, such as Hambali of the Bali bombings, and contributed, through the network of al-Qaeda and its affiliates, to London, Madrid and the numerous attacks throughout the Islamic world.

Their immediate task, the immediate objective, is to fragment and destabilise an Egypt, a Saudi Arabia, an Indonesia or, in particular, a Pakistan, and thereby assume control of a more powerful state and have a stronger base as part of a longer global objective. However wild that idea may seem to us, it is real and it has profound consequences for security in a world where asymmetric capabilities are able to lead to catastrophic consequences.

That also brings me to the issue of a great security threat which is abiding and with us today—the dirty bomb. The dirty bomb is the risk that we all face and it will be with us throughout our lives. So long as there are nuclear weapons in the hands of states which are at risk of fragmentation, the nightmare possibility remains of a perversion of some of those materials, the conversion to a dirty bomb and the detonation in one of our cities. This is not fantasist material. In 2002 and 2003 there were warnings of future attacks on UK cities and on Spanish cities, and sadly
these attacks came to pass in almost identical form to those warnings. I believe today that that same threat remains tangible, real and germane. That is why we face a profound and abiding security task.

Our task in Afghanistan has been and remains twofold: firstly, it is to guarantee that Afghanistan is not a safe haven—and I agree with the words of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on this, and indeed have proposed such terms for a long time now. It cannot be a safe haven now and it cannot be a safe haven in the future for al-Qaeda or its governmental manifestation, the Taliban. Secondly, we must ensure that Afghanistan is not allowed to become a wedge into regional security and thus lead to the fragmentation of Pakistan or the destruction of democratic rule there. That can occur either through the complete breakdown of order and security in Afghanistan or through the mass flow of population across the border. Both of those risks are profound. So that remains our task. That remains our purpose.

Coupled with that is the high human objective of doing all that we can to secure and advance human rights within Afghanistan itself. This is a noble, real and profound task and one which the West has taken upon itself on many occasions over the course of the last 60 years, with great cost to itself but with a genuine and elevated sense of common humanity and purpose. It is never easy; there are always costs of action and costs of inaction. In this case, we believe that the costs of inaction are greater.

This brings me to the issue of progress. Progress is about both success and an honest accounting of failure. The progress we have seen in Afghanistan is real. We have 1,550 Australian troops in Oruzgan. We are helping to train the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army. We are part of 120,000 international troops—on the way to 140,000—and of 20,000 local recruits in training at any one time, rising to about 134,000 local soldiers and 109,000 police. So real security progress is underway.

I would note that we have also seen educational and health progress. In particular we have gone from one million students in school in 2001 to six million today, and two million girls in school compared with none in 2001. This was a society based not just on some form of gender inequality but on a brutal repression of females and a brutal repres- sion of educational opportunities for women in Afghanistan. There is much to be done there but that development is real, profound and significant.

The honest side of the accounting, though, must call us to say that there have been significant failures. The democratisation process has advanced in fits and starts and there are real questions over much of the conduct of the recent election. Secondly, there is clearly endemic corruption in much of the government and in much of the society. That corruption must be rooted out, and the Karzai government has failed to take the steps necessary to ensure that the corruption disappears. We must never be apologists for what is occurring now—real progress but deep failures to date.

This then brings me to the question of where we should go from here. I am deeply cognisant of those 21 families who have lost sons, fathers, brothers and husbands in Afghanistan. We have three options. We can withdraw, straight up. But that will create a vacuum in Afghanistan with a profound and tragic set of human consequences. There will be bloodshed, there will be the eradication of opportunities for young women and girls, and there will also be a great security vacuum which will see destabilisation in Pakistan. That is a consequence of nightmarish proportions and one which should send
shudders down the spine of anyone who looks at the great global challenge of security. If Afghanistan falls then there will be profound issues for security in Pakistan; there can be no question of that.

The second option is the endless blank cheque, which is simply unacceptable. Along with many in this House I believe there must be a third way, which is conditionality—a progressive draw-down once security has been obtained in return for greater development of democratic participation. We must seek to hive off and to shatter those elements of the insurgency who will never be accommodated from those who can be part of a democratic future, much as has occurred in Northern Ireland and Bougainville. I am realistic about the future but optimistic about the potential and resolved in our commitment. We have a great challenge; it is one which the world must meet. I support Australia’s engagement in Afghanistan and I commend the motion to the House.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (1.02 pm)—There is no such thing as a good war, but there is such a thing as a just war. That is how the war in Afghanistan began. We are in Afghanistan because our ally the United States was attacked. Under the terms of the ANZUS treaty that meant we were attacked. Each signatory to that treaty recognises that an armed attack on any of the parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety.

Self-defence has been accepted through the ages as a legitimate reason for waging war. It is recognised in article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, which says:

Nothing ... shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations.

And it is worth remembering that the ANZUS treaty is not a blueprint for war; it is a document designed to try to ensure peace. In its opening, the signatories reaffirm:

... their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all Governments.

But that desire was shattered on September 11, 2001 in the terror attacks on New York and Washington. The next day the Security Council unequivocally condemned in the strongest terms the horrifying terrorist attacks and said it ‘regards such acts, like any act of international terrorism, as a threat to international peace and security’. The solidarity many in the rest of the world felt for the United States was expressed in the pages of the French newspaper Le Monde on 12 September under the headline ‘We are all Americans’. The article asked:

How can we not feel profound solidarity with those people, that country, the United States, to whom we are so close and to whom we owe our freedom, and therefore our solidarity?

It was also prescient in dismissing the false justifications that would be made for the attack, saying:

None of those who had a hand in this operation can claim they intend the good of humanity. Actually, they have no interest in a better world. They simply want to wipe ours off the face of the Earth.

Like Australia, NATO would invoke its treaty, with each of its members agreeing that the attack on America was an attack on them all. It is easy to forget, in the wake of all that has come since, that in 2001 much of the world saw America’s cause as just when it sought to strike out at the forces that attacked it.

Al-Qaeda claimed credit for that attack and it was protected by Afghanistan’s Taliban regime. We are in Afghanistan because our ally, the United States, rightly sought to defend itself by ensuring Afghanistan would never again be a base for the export of terror-
ism. We are in Afghanistan because we need a stable future for that country if we are to ensure a stable, peaceful future for ourselves.

But mistakes have been made and this war has dragged on longer than it needed to. For too long the United States and Australia were distracted by the war in Iraq, a war which could not be justified no matter how repugnant the regime of Saddam Hussein. But the reason for going to Afghanistan was just. And the reason for staying is just. Having waged war in Afghanistan, there is a moral imperative on the United States and its allies to try to stabilise the country and make it secure enough to plot its own future.

There is no argument that we should leave. The argument is over when we should leave. I believe that to withdraw now would leave Afghanistan with little hope of a peaceful future. There is no perfect vision of the future but the best advice is that it will take another two to four years to get the Afghan troops and police to a level where they can ensure the peace. I believe Afghanistan deserves that time. I believe in our continued commitment to Afghanistan and its people. I believe that our commitment is the right thing for the continued security of our allies and Australians at home and abroad. And I believe our commitment is the right thing for the Afghan people and their future. But the military commitment cannot be open ended and both President Obama and the Prime Minister have signalled that it will not be.

I am advised that our commanders believe that it has only been in recent years we have got the mix of strategy and troops right. The current surge has to be given a chance of success. Some here have argued that the military should be withdrawn and aid should be increased. But how can aid be delivered without security? Hopefully, soon the Afghan army and police will be in a position to secure their country, and then the nature of our commitment should change. As the Prime Minister has signalled, we must have some commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan for at least the next decade, but the nature of that work will differ over that time.

Some here also say that al-Qaeda has vanished from Afghanistan and with it the reason for continuing to fight. But an unstable Afghanistan threatens the region and the world. Al-Qaeda could return or one of its offshoots rise in its place. It has also been noted that it is not good enough to say that the Taliban presided over a brutal and appalling regime and that if removing governments that abuse their people were our goal then we would be at war all over the world. That is true. But that was not the reason for going to Afghanistan. As I said, we went to defend ourselves. But that does not mean that the good things that have happened in Afghanistan should be allowed to unravel. And for all the horror of this war, some good has come of it.

If this war is to have any long-term benefits for the people of Afghanistan then we need to give them a chance of a decent future. I am all too aware of the tragic history of Afghanistan, from the Soviet invasion in 1987 to the mujaheddin insurgency and the 1994 takeover by the Taliban, whose brutality towards the Afghan people was unspeakable.

I do not for a moment believe that this is a simple issue easily broken down into sound bites. Afghanistan is a complicated place with very little black and white. We cannot forget it is a nation that has been continually at war for decades and routinely at war for centuries. We cannot forget that, prior to the commitment of Australian and allied forces, every aspect of civil society had been eroded and Afghanistan was being used as a place to train people in acts of terror.

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CHAMBER
It is well known that Afghanistan under the Taliban provided a safe haven and training ground for terrorist groups. But this is not the only crime perpetrated by the Taliban. When the Taliban came to power in 1994, they adopted a self-serving and narrow interpretation of Islam that stripped Afghans of rights and forced them to live in fear. In 1998, the Physicians for Human Rights reported that every Friday night:

... the Taliban terrorizes the city of Kabul by publicly punishing alleged wrongdoers in the Kabul sports stadium and requiring public attendance at the floggings, shootings, ... beheadings, and amputations.

But this was just the tip of the iceberg. Many in the House are well aware of the Taliban's treatment of women. In 2001, Human Rights Watch found:

Taliban decrees have greatly restricted women's movement, behaviour and dress and in fact virtually all aspects of their lives ...

Violation of dress code, in particular, can result in public beatings ...

These decrees have had a significant negative impact on women's lives. The rate of illiteracy among girls in Afghanistan is now over 90 per cent.

The restriction on women's mobility has meant that women do not enjoy satisfactory access to health care.

This report is filled with many individual examples of brutality against women and the oppression of their rights such as the story of Majida Akbar, a 17-year-old girl who could not get medical help for her sister-in-law who was in labour, or that of Durani Husain, who speaks about her desire to get an education so she can read the letters from her brother.

Unfortunately, these relics of the past are still witnessed today in those areas still terrorised by the Taliban. In March of this year, CNN reported on the experiences of 19-year-old Bibi Aisha, who had her nose and ears cut off at the behest of a Taliban court for dishonouring her husband. In 2008, according to CBS News, Shamsia Husseini had acid thrown on her face for trying to go to school. Yet despite this Shamsia told CBS:

I will fight these people by continuing to go to school. Last time they threw acid to stop me, but even if they hit me with bullets, I will not stop going to school ...

Shamsia's suffering is as real as her courage and determination. I acknowledge the significant difficulties being faced from a resurgent Taliban and an Afghan government that at times is slow and weak. Elements of it are clearly corrupt.

But while progress is slow, there has been some progress. That progress has to be given a chance to take root. That is why I am encouraged by Zolaykha Sherzad, Hassina Sherja and Nilofar Zia Massud—three Afghan women who now operate a thriving textile and clothing business that employs hundreds of Afghans. I am encouraged by the six million children who are now enrolled in school—two million of them girls. I am encouraged by the fact that 85 per cent of the population now has access to basic health care compared to just 10 per cent under the previous regime. And I am encouraged that in 2010-11 Australia will provide $106 million in development aid to grow the capacity of the Afghan government. That adds to the education programs we have given to schoolchildren on health and hygiene education. That adds to the education programs we have given to Afghans on landmines.

We have heard the names of the Australian soldiers who have been killed while serving their country, and my thoughts and sympathies go to their family and friends. Words cannot adequately express the loss those families must be experiencing. I pay tribute to their professionalism, dedication and sac-
rifice, and offer my sincere condolences to their families.

I also wish to honour those Australians who are currently serving or have served in Afghanistan. Without the sacrifices offered by Australia’s soldiers and civilians overseas, none of the achievements in Afghanistan would have been possible. Afghanistan would still be a place where people live in fear, where brutality is the norm and where terrorism is core business.

We must continue to support the commitment to Afghanistan. To do otherwise will place our own security and that of our allies at risk. It will also condemn the Afghan people to a future that relives their brutal past. This is not an easy mission, nor should it be an open-ended one. We must have clear goals and plans, but I believe our continued involvement is the right and just thing to do and I urge all members of this House and all Australians to support it.

I do not view this through rose-coloured glasses and I do not pretend for one moment that this will be an easy journey or a short one. We have already heard from the Prime Minister about the long-term commitment of Australia to the region. I commend her candour and openness.

Rebuilding a nation that has spent so many years, so many decades, in conflict—when generations of Afghans have only known violence—is not an easy thing, but it is the right thing. It is the just thing. It is not just the right and the just thing for the Afghan people. It is the right and the just thing for our allies and it is also the right and just thing for our country.

Ms O’DWYER (Higgins) (1.15 pm)—It is fitting that this continued debate should occur in the month of November, when we honour our soldiers who have fought in all conflicts throughout Australia’s history. While Australia is a young nation compared to the rest of the world, we have been steadfast in our determination to protect freedom, tolerance and democracy—sacrificing our nation’s sons and daughters so that we might live in a world of peace and prosperity.

On 11 November, I attended a remembrance service of the Camberwell City RSL. We paused to reflect upon the Australian lives lost in war and to honour the sacrifice of those who have given their lives in recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These Australians are continuing the legacy of the Anzacs and the Australian soldiers who have fought since. As I laid my wreath at the Surrey shrine in Surrey Gardens, I thought particularly of the 21 young soldiers who lost their lives in Afghanistan to protect us. I thought of their families who now have to go on life’s journey without them and the terrible human tragedy for their families and our country. There is a memorial in Ferndale Park in my electorate of Higgins to one of those 21 brave soldiers: Private Greg Sher. As President Calvin Coolidge once said:

The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten.

And that is one of the reasons this debate is important. We should not forget what our soldiers have done to defend Australia and humanity abroad. We must bear in mind their great sacrifices and ensure that what they fought to achieve is protected and fostered.

In many parts of the world, a woman leaving home can be a death-defying activity. We should understand that as Australians we are privileged to live in a country of peace and security, and that our children do not have to witness regular acts of violence. Unfortunately, this cannot be said of some parts of the world where people have been forced to accept violence, subjugation and terrorism as an inescapable and inevitable part of their lives.
Our mission in Afghanistan can be categorised by three things: to stop Afghanistan from again becoming a safe haven for terrorists; to train Afghan security forces so that they can provide for their own security; and to honour and protect the US alliance, which is in our national interest. Our national security is in our national interest.

After the horrific attack on civilians that was September 11, it became clear that the Taliban in Afghanistan had allied themselves with terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda and therefore posed an international threat to the security of all nations. The Taliban enforce one of the strictest interpretations of sharia law in the world. Their perverted interpretation of Muslim teachings is diametrically opposed to the mainstream Muslim world. They are an isolated and culturally regressive group of people who pass down a congenital extremism that holds no place in a civil world. In many ways, they represent the antithesis of civilisation. Their barbarism, especially against women, is well-known.

In terms of Australia’s commitment to Afghanistan, our troop numbers are relatively modest compared with some of our allies. We have 1,550 Australian Defence Force personnel in Afghanistan, compared to 9,500 from the United Kingdom and 78,000 from the United States that form the core of the coalition. Nevertheless, Australia’s contribution is absolutely vital and has taken on some of the most critical security tasks in that region. Importantly, Australia has been directly involved with the training of the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade in Oruzgan province, which will assume responsibility for security in Afghanistan.

Australia not only are providing security to the region but are helping to build the future of Afghanistan since the defeat of the Taliban regime. We are providing important aid and services to the people in the region, and helping them to rebuild during tumultuous times. Australia have increased our civilian contribution and increased the AusAID commitment by nearly 50 per cent to $106 million in 2010-11. We are also providing important funding for mine clearance, agriculture and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. This builds on the first Reconstruction Task Force that was deployed by the coalition government in 2006. Importantly, we have assisted in the establishment of democratic institutions in Afghanistan. Although governance issues continue to pose a problem, we can be proud of the fact that, with our allies, we have put in place the machinery for free and fair elections. The coalition must continue to work to improve Afghanistan’s democracy. It may never be perfect by our standards, but it is an important start.

Australia have a stake in the success of Afghanistan. We need to be there to see it through, so that one day the people of Afghanistan can take their place amongst the free. And there have been some successes. For a start, al-Qaeda no longer has safe havens or training camps in Afghanistan. According to the Australian Defence Force, the Afghan National Army reached its October target of 134,000 personnel almost two months ahead of schedule. Likewise, the Afghan National Police reached its target of 109,000 personnel three months ahead of schedule. The Afghan military and police are gradually assuming greater responsibilities. These signs are promising as we work towards a self-sustaining government in Afghanistan.

I have listened carefully to the speeches made both here and in the other place in this debate. In this context, the Greens, supported by some Independents, have put forward a bill in the Senate requiring the parliament to vote on any decision to deploy Australian troops overseas. They go so far as to suggest
that there be a conscience vote by members of parliament before troops are deployed overseas. I believe that this is a dangerous and flawed proposal that overturns the established process, which has always been in the hands of the executive government. It is right that the executive government of this country be responsible for the deployment of troops, be it for the defence of Australia’s borders, for the safety and security of other nations or for humanitarian missions overseas. These decisions must be made by the executive, who are vested by the Constitution with the powers to make decisions relating to our defence forces both here and abroad.

In the case of Afghanistan the decision was made by the previous coalition government in 2001 to contribute soldiers to fight extremist forces who had established a network of cells for the purpose of carrying out terrorist attacks on Western nations. The Australian government’s response in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States was planned in conjunction with our allies, in particular the United States. It is wholly appropriate that such plans be carried out by our executive government and that the government of the day be allowed to carry out important work in the nation’s interest, particularly when that work involves a rapid and timely response to international developments.

Australia’s response to extremist forces in Afghanistan was appropriately planned and coordinated by the government. It was a response that involved bipartisan support from both the government and the opposition—bipartisan support that continues today. This does not preclude public debate on the issue of our involvement in Afghanistan, either inside or outside the nation’s parliament. As this current debate shows, public discourse continues to be strong on this issue and the people of Australia take an active interest in our military activities abroad. Nor is the parliament prevented in any way from holding the government to account on this or any other issue. But ultimately the decision must be made by the government that has been elected by the people to act in the interests of the nation. If this cannot be the proper role of our government then there is little else that it can be responsible for.

The people of Australia rightly expect that the government will make these important decisions. This is what governments are elected to do and what our Constitution provides they ought to do. The Greens’ bill is nothing more than an attempt to erode the power of executive government and to prevent it from making the important decisions that it can and should make in relation to our military. It is a contrived bill that attempts to draw into question the democratic mandate given to the government of the day to respond to international developments that affect Australia’s national interests. It is an attempt to draw into question the ability of the parliament to discuss and debate Australia’s overseas commitments. For these reasons I believe it should not be supported by the parliament.

I conclude by quoting a great thinker. As Aristotle said, ‘We make war that we may live in peace.’ This is the object of our troops and commanders in Afghanistan: to fight a war that we do not want for the purpose of securing peace for the region and our world. We must always bear this in mind.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (1.25 pm)—This is a very difficult issue to speak on for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that we are talking about war, and with war comes destruction, carnage and death. It comes at great cost in both human beings and resources. Australia has now been at war in Afghanistan for nine years, and I think the debate we are having in the parliament now is something we should have had
from 2001 onwards in relation both to Afghanistan and to Iraq.

I remember the terrible days of 9-11, when the world stood with the citizens of the US and saw in horror terrorism played out in its most brutal form. The world, including Australia of course, supported action to combat that terrorism and those who had perpetrated the crime. Our involvement, along with many other countries and the UN, with the US in Afghanistan was supported not only by the population of Australia but by the international community. Indeed, it was regarded by most as a legitimate, legal and just war.

The intention most immediately was to attack the cause of the terror that had been perpetrated on September 11—to find and subjugate al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The ruling Taliban’s refusal, in the main, to participate in rooting out al-Qaeda and other terrorist elements in Afghanistan at the time proved to be the reason international forces went into Afghanistan, and most people in Australia supported that action. Unfortunately after 2003, when the so-called fight against international terrorism was diverted to Iraq, the original purpose in Afghanistan appeared to be lost. Indeed, it entered into a strategic vacuum. That original intention was basically neglected until 2006 and indeed even further, to 2008.

The international community experienced different conditions in Afghanistan after 2003. In essence, we saw the resurgence of the Taliban and increased military activity, both tribally and nationally. Australia has played its part in seeking to tackle terrorism wherever and however that is possible. One of those means is to provide our contribution to the international forces currently in Afghanistan. Some 1,500 Australian personnel engaged in those activities in Oruzgan Province in particular are facing hostile activities from the Taliban specifically and from other hostile elements. We have lost too many of our young people in this fight against terrorism, in supporting a fledgling democracy in Afghanistan and in helping to reconstruct this battle-torn country.

Indeed, 21 of our soldiers have been killed and 152 have been wounded in these operations. The Australian public has legitimately asked: what are the reasons for our presence in Afghanistan today? Have we accounted for al-Qaeda? Research would indicate that that depends on how you define al-Qaeda. The general conclusion is that al-Qaeda has morphed to other countries and established itself more substantially in Pakistan than in Afghanistan, and that it uses Pakistan as a staging post for a number of its activities.

What else has emerged is the resurgence of the Taliban while we were participating in the strategic vacuum of Iraq. Now we have a group of people who are ideologically motivated and bring to bear on many of their fellow Afghans little more than suffering, particularly for minority groups and females. They are part and parcel of what is Afghanistan today. There is more and more reason strategically and tactically to accept the fact that, if there is to be such a thing as a ‘victory’ in Afghanistan, for both common sense and humanity, we have to deal with the Taliban in more than just a military way. We need to work with elements of the Taliban, to bring them to the negotiating table, to be part and parcel of what has, in the end, to be a political solution to the troubles of Afghanistan. I believe that trend will continue to emerge.

In the meantime, what is our role? The Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and many others in this place eloquently and adequately set out both our rationale and the strategy and tactics that we seek to employ in Afghanistan. The first was to try never again to make it a safe haven for terrorists. It could
be argued that this fight against terrorism merely redirects terrorist groups to other areas. Indeed, there is strong evidence that many terrorists reside in Pakistan and that unless we deal with the realities that face us and the Realpolitik of what is going on in Pakistan, no effort is going to have any substantial effect. We need to tackle that issue as a community of all nations, auspiced I believe through the UN and supported by the US. We have to deal with the Afghanistan issue as a region.

What a lot of people forget is that something like 50 nations are involved in Afghanistan in some form or another, providing support militarily, culturally, economically and socially. Until we deal with Afghanistan as part of a region being fed by terrorist activities from the outside, I do not believe we can ‘win’ in Afghanistan. That is in no way meaning to denigrate the work of Australia and its allies in Afghanistan to date. We have to be very honest about what has been happening there. The Australian involvement in Afghanistan is considerable. We are in a very serious and hostile area militarily as well as socially. Australia’s troop deployment and our support for social, culture and economic development in the region are considerable.

There has to be some end point to this conflict and to our involvement. Nobody denies the reality that we are supporting the United States, our ally, in its objectives in Afghanistan. We will continue to do that. As an ally, we will provide material and non-material support for that cause, but at some stage there has to be an end and we need to work towards providing the substance to reach that end.

The decision has been made that in order to have a political solution you need to up the military involvement to try to drive the Taliban and other players to the negotiating table. That is the policy, the strategy, being adopted at the moment. But it is absolutely crucial that, whilst we do that, we also meet our humanitarian obligations to the people of Afghanistan and, in Australia’s case, the province of Oruzgan in particular.

One of the most difficult conundrums in all of this is that many scholars of this region, particularly scholars of its culture, its history and the various tribal and ethnic groups in Afghanistan, claim that it is the presence of foreign troops and foreigners in Afghanistan that causes most of the dissent and stops people from coming together to try to negotiate a way out of this—that it in fact brings them together with the most disparate and militant elements. So what we think is homogeneous dissent against foreign involvement is, in fact, people coming from different parts of a spectrum of dislike of the foreign presence.

So there is the conundrum: the longer we stay, some would argue, the worse it is going to get. However, how do you leave without leaving a complete and utter mess? That is the conundrum we are working on. Nobody denies that it is a problem—it is—but we have to deal with it by working genuinely and constructively to make the lives of those who are going to be left behind better.

I think the only solution is going to be a political solution and I think that political solution will be driven not by the gun but by the region. There are players intent on pursing their own political purposes in Afghanistan. Until we expose those players and bring them to the table to work out how to arrive at a consensus for Afghanistan, I do not know how we are going to extricate ourselves from there in an honourable way. What I can say, however, is that we need to stay the course, as long as in doing so we pursue our original objectives and as long as we do so in a humanitarian way. We are at war, with all its
very serious consequences, and I wish our forces and our personnel well in very dangerous times.

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (1.40 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate about our nation’s involvement in Afghanistan. I think it is a timely debate and right that we justify our Afghanistan commitment to this parliament given that last month marked the ninth anniversary of Australia’s involvement in Afghanistan and we have seen a number of changes over that period. Last week, on 11 November, Australians commemorated Remembrance Day in honour of those who have died or suffered for Australia’s cause in all wars and armed conflicts. As I participated in commemorative services in my electorate of Bonner, the observation of two minutes silence—one minute for those who returned and one minute for those who did not—touched a chord for many gathered there. I believe that a third minute of silence could also be observed to acknowledge those currently serving and defending our nation in various theatres around the world.

In line with those commemorations, I would like to start by outlining my support and admiration for Australia’s Defence Force personnel. I pay tribute to those thousands of men and women who serve and have served in Australia’s Defence Force, at times in very dangerous and hostile environments. In particular, I acknowledge the 21 Australian soldiers who have lost their lives in Afghanistan’s service in Afghanistan. I salute the ultimate sacrifice those soldiers made in defence of Australia’s national security. I also acknowledge the 152 soldiers who have been injured during Australia’s mission in Afghanistan. I honour your service to date and I know that many of you have continued or will continue to serve our great nation upon your recovery. I also support and admire the families and loved ones of our Defence Force personnel. I understand the concerns that many families of serving personnel have when their loved ones are serving overseas and I empathise with the enduring anguish of the loved ones of those soldiers who have lost their lives.

In assessing Australia’s commitment in Afghanistan over the last nine years and indeed our future commitment, it is important to remember that our mission, and the sacrifices that have been made, is in defence of Australia’s national security. Australia’s national security is articulated through the achievement of a number of objectives, the first of which is freedom from attack or the threat of attack—that is, our capacity to protect our citizens and interests at home and abroad. Our national security was put at risk when terrorists attacked the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. In that attack, 10 Australians lost their lives. Our national security was again significantly put at risk when 88 Australians were killed in the first Bali bombings. Similarly, the death of eight other Australians in subsequent terrorist attacks in London, Kuta Bali, Jimbaran Beach and Jakarta continued this sad trend.

Our troops are committed to Afghanistan because all these attacks have been proven to be linked in some way back to the freedom of action that terrorist forces enjoyed in Afghanistan. We must remove these safe havens for terrorist groups capable of extending their influence into Australia’s region and thereby further impacting on our national interests.

However, our mission is twofold. While we must remove safe havens for terrorist groups, we must also engage with the society that has proved to be, often unwillingly, a breeding ground for terrorist groups and assist the building of a stable Afghan state through a combination of military, policy and civilian effort. This is one of the most fundamental aspects of Australia’s mission and
one that I support wholeheartedly. I appreciate that progress in this strategy will be very gradual and that advances will be achieved day by day, village by village. It is a slow process, but one that we must follow through so that it will lead to the successful restoration of normality in a country where normality has been a foreign concept for the past 30 years.

I know that there are some voices advocating immediate or near-future withdrawal, but I believe that this is not in any way a viable option. It is not viable for Australia’s national interest and it is not viable for Afghanistan’s security and stability. The irony of this alternate strategy is that an incomplete mission in Afghanistan will see the resurgence of the Taliban, a repressive regime that has operated off the back of the heroin trade. It is highly corruptible and is known as one of the worst human rights violators of recent times. An incomplete mission in Afghanistan also has the potential to send the message to other terrorist organisations which cooperate with and look up to the Taliban and al-Qaeda, particularly in our South-East Asian region, that we are not serious about defeating terrorism and protecting our national security.

The coalition has never taken this commitment lightly. I support Australia’s commitment in Afghanistan and I support the work we are doing, through our alliance with the United States of America and under the auspices of the United Nations, to defeat terrorism at its source, deny terrorist organisations a training ground and support a democratically elected government to ensure that Afghanistan can never again become a haven for terrorism.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (1.47 pm)—I was not going to speak on this motion, because I thought there were many others who would have much better knowledge, but I realise the significance of the motion and its importance to our nation. The decision to go to war and to commit troops is probably the greatest decision that any country can make, and to represent one’s constituents is something that one needs to give good consideration to. I have discussed our commitment in Afghanistan with many people in my constituency. Some have family who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan in recent times. Of course some of them are very proud that their family members are doing their job in the name of Australia, but some of them have certainly shown some concern in asking what is being achieved, how long we will be there and when our troops could be coming home. So it is necessary for us to give consideration to those questions for the broader Australian community.

We are at the end now in Iraq, except for work that we do through the United Nations. But in Afghanistan we still have things to do and matters to conclude, and some of those issues need to be given much consideration. You cannot understand Afghanistan unless you understand its history. It is an amazing history that goes back for centuries and centuries. Physically, it is a landlocked country with borders shared with many equally old and interesting nations. Its terrain is very dry, dusty and mountainous. It is very hot in summer and very cold in winter. I imagine it is not a very easy country to live in. It is certainly not an easy country in which to carry on a conflict against any of the people, who of course know the terrain better than Western trained soldiers.

Afghanistan is right in the middle of a trading route that was of strategic importance. It links oil and other commodities which Western countries want. Afghanistan’s history, its internal political development, its foreign relations and its very existence as an independent state have largely been determined by its location at the crossroads of
central west and South-East Asia. Waves of migrating peoples poured through this region in ancient times, leaving a human residue to form a melting pot of linguistic groups. In modern times as well as in antiquity, great armies passed through the region, establishing at least temporary local control and often dominating Iran and northern India as well. Although there were many flows of different people through the country and a flourishing trade route existed, Afghanistan did not really become an independent nation until the 20th century.

Previously, because of its location, great rival powers have tended to view the control of Afghanistan by a major opponent as unacceptable. Sometimes the Afghans have been able to use these circumstances to their benefit, but more often they have been caught in the middle of power struggles and have suffered grievously for it.

Such an example can be seen when just after the Second World War the Afghani government was attempting to raise funds for its infrastructure program. The US refused to lend general support to a five-year program in 1957 and said it would only provide funds for projects, so the Afghans improved their relations with the USSR and played off the two powers. People who travelled through the area in the late sixties were able to travel on a beautiful new highway running from west to east, half built by the US and half by the USSR. The markets in Kabul at the time were full of both US and USSR military surplus stores as both sides plied the country with goods.

Great powers have considered Afghanistan’s internal politics only in terms of how they can achieve their own strategic interests, rather than considering it as an autonomous country with sovereignty. It has also been the case that whichever central government has been in power in Afghanistan it has been unable to establish effective and permanent control over the numerous peoples of that society. It is only in response to a foreign invasion or as part of an army inside or outside the country that many diverse groups have found a common cause. So without delving deeper into the whys and wherefores of the present struggle, it is quite plain to me that there is no easy answer to ensure that the Afghani people will find an acceptable solution while there are many interests at stake. We have to understand history to know that we should learn by it and not take on the reasons of why things were done in the past.

Wars also displace people. I was in Iran three months before the US declared war on Iraq for the second time. I visited the United Nations’ refugee camps in Iran and saw how many of the Afghani displaced people were being processed in those camps. They were encouraging many to return home by providing families with a jerry can of water, a few clothes and other possessions and then busing them 200 kilometres inside the Afghani border. This was before the bombs were raining down in Afghanistan. It did not take much imagination to see how many of them might risk a leaky-boat trip or other dangerous trips to try to make a life in a less risky environment.

We were talking to the Iranian government at that time about nine Iranians that we wanted to repatriate. They said that they had 2.4 million Afghani to try to cope with and therefore they were not very interested in our problems. I did not agree with Australia’s involvement in Iraq because it was likely to have unwanted consequences at home, especially as war displaces people and it was not in Australia’s strategic interest. The reason for going to Iraq was based on erroneous information and we were sucked in with many other nations. When we think that there are 43.3 million displaced people in the world, many on the move because they can-
not survive in their own countries, it makes you realise how lucky we are in Australia and that we are not the only country trying to control its borders, trying to come to grips with people trying to come here by various means.

I do not think we should be so naive to think that by continuing an aggressive military presence we will bring peace to Afghanistan. Afghans will need to build their country themselves, with help from other nations and of course from Australia. I think we can help and should help, but through more peaceful means. I think Australia should continue to help train, help resettle villages, help bring water and infrastructure and help bring better health and education to both men and women there. One is moved by reports of the many thousands of children being involved in education, especially girls. These are the things that will build the future of Afghanistan. But I do not feel we should try to sort out the issue of who is running Afghanistan. Maybe we can learn a thing or two from the brave women there who have to try to continue their lives, bring up their children and influence those in power to allow them equal rights and justice, as they deserve.

How long should we remain in Afghanistan? I really do not know. If we can help in the social development of that country then I think we should keep a presence there. But I do not think that we can be there without having that proper motive and of being able to look towards Afghanistan building its own future. What is the time scale? That has to be developed. We have to try to work with the other nations that are there endeavouring to build Afghanistan.

I salute our young people in the forces over there, doing what they can to make this remarkable country a better place, and I grieve for the families of those that have lost loved ones there doing their job. I believe it is now time to look hard at the future of this nation and at what we are doing to bring the factions of this nation together for a peaceful nation. I wish all those involved the best in those endeavours.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted and the resumption of the debate is made an order of the day for a later hour this day. In accordance with the resolution agreed to earlier, the matter stands referred to the Main Committee.

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (2.00 pm)—Mr Speaker, on indulgence: on this day a year ago, almost a thousand people from across the country gathered here at Parliament House to witness the official apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants—the more than 500,000 people who grew up in institutions and out-of-home care in the last century. This was a day that finally acknowledged the abuse and neglect that many forgotten Australians and former child migrants experienced as young children in institutional care and foster homes. For many of these people, childhood was a time of fear and loneliness.

Last year, the Australian government said sorry on behalf of the nation for all of these injustices. I would like to acknowledge and thank the former Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, and the former Leader of the Opposition, the member for Wentworth, who both spoke so eloquently on the day. I would also like to thank the members for Corio and Blaxland, and to mention especially the member for Swan. They all made a very significant contribution to last year’s apology.

We are all sorry for the absolute tragedy of childhoods lost. Last year’s apology on behalf of the nation was the chance for many
to begin the healing process. Many people helped get us to this day and I particularly acknowledge Leonie Sheedy from the Care Leavers Australia Network, Caroline Carroll from the Alliance for Forgotten Australians and Harold Haig from the International Association of Former Child Migrants. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions over many years of a number of senators from across the political spectrum who really shone the light on this dark period of Australia's history. In particular, I acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of former Democrats' senator Andrew Murray for his tireless commitment to this important issue. Thank you all.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (2.02 pm)—Mr Speaker, on indulgence: I would like to associate the coalition with the comments made by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and congratulate her and, particularly, her staff for the work they did in organising the apology last year. I also acknowledge the member for Griffith, the former Prime Minister, and the member for Wentworth, the former Leader of the Opposition. I note particularly the comments that I received from members of the forgotten Australians and their families who attended on that day about the comment made by the member for Wentworth, 'We believe you.' This was an emotionally charged time in the Great Hall, and for a thousand people who were forgotten Australians and their families it was a time for them to start their lives over and to be acknowledged for the situations they had experienced in institutions around Australia. I also acknowledge the members for Blaxland and Corio, with whom I worked closely in the committee process in helping to organise the apology. I acknowledge the people from CLAN, the Alliance of Forgotten Australians and also the Maltese and UK migrants.

In June 2009, the Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited report was tabled. The report contained 16 recommendations, some of which have been met, in particular the Find and Connect Service which was instigated by the government today. I congratulate them on doing that. From the minister’s speech this morning, I understand that it will be implemented from April 2011.

This time last year, I did not attend question time but went down to the front of Parliament House and enjoyed the mood and festivity of the forgotten Australians celebrating the apology that they received from the Australian government. For them, it was party time. They believed that they had been recognised and they were in a euphoric state. A woman from Victoria, who had actually got out of her hospital bed to come up to the apology, said that she came up expecting little because it was politicians who were delivering it but that she was now going to go home, back to her state, and move on with her life because she had got far more than she had expected. I congratulate again the former Prime Minister and the former Leader of the Opposition for the amount of emotion they put into the apology, which made those people’s visit to Canberra worth while. Again, on behalf of the opposition, I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence on this issue, and acknowledge the work of the minister and that of Andrew Murray, the former senator from Western Australia, who is here today. His work on this issue has been second to none.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Gillard Government

Mr ABBOTT (2.06 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister of her statement last June that the government had lost its way. Given that over the past fortnight her East Timor solution has been rebuffed, her refugee-processing system
has been ruled invalid, the midyear budget update avoided hard decisions and the banks have yet again ignored her with excessive interest rate rises, isn’t this government finding its way a bit like Burke and Wills finding theirs?

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and I think anybody hearing the Leader of the Opposition’s question can no doubt sympathise with him that he is obviously looking forward to a Christmas break. Can I say to the Leader of the Opposition, who appears to have brought question 11 from yesterday’s question time pack, that the government is of course getting on with the job of methodically delivering reforms in this country because we want this nation to build for the opportunities of the future. I know that the Leader of the Opposition finds this quite hard to intellectualise. He finds it quite hard to accept.

Famously there was a supermodel who said that she did not get out of bed for less than $10,000 a day. Well, the Leader of the Opposition does not get out of bed without a focus group report for the day. He puts the alarm clock off, gets out of bed, grabs for the focus group report, sees what three-line slogan he has for that day and then, like a ventriloquist’s doll, he goes and repeats it mechanically time after time. And is it only me who wonders why every one of the Leader of the Opposition’s three-word slogans always starts with stopping something or ending something? This is a man who is always keen to tell you what he is opposed to but can never tell you what he would do or support. He is completely unable to define a vision for the future for this country. Well, the government has a vision for the future for this country. We understand that it requires a strong economy. We understand that it requires being ready for the challenges of the future. We understand that it requires governing for all Australians. We understand that that means investments in things like education and health to make a difference for the opportunities of Australians right around the country and irrespective of the circumstances of their birth. We understand that it requires keeping Australia safe and secure in the world. So we will leave the Leader of the Opposition with his bitterness and negativity and we will get on with the job.

**Mr ABBOTT**—I ask a supplementary question to the Prime Minister. Given the reforms that the Prime Minister mentioned, in the light of the fact that in just the past week the government’s national curriculum has been deferred by New South Wales, cash for clunkers has been deferred, the Murray-Darling water plan has been delayed, the diabetes plan has been delayed and the population review has also been delayed, I ask: is this what the government means by finding its way?

**Ms GILLARD**—Once again, here we have the Leader of the Opposition—

**Opposition members interjecting**—

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Prime Minister will resume her seat. The question having been asked, the Prime Minister is now responding. The Prime Minister should be heard in silence.

**Ms GILLARD**—Once again we have the Leader of the Opposition in this place puffed up with his negativity, always there ready to tell you what he is opposed to. It is completely impossible for him to say what he supports. Let us go through the Leader of the Opposition’s list. Education reforms: I am proud of what this government has achieved given the 12 long years of neglect we inherited from a government that the Leader of the Opposition was a part of and that did not care that kids in this country were disadvantaged—

**Mr Randall**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. How can an at-
tack on the opposition leader be relevant to the question asked?

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Canning will resume his seat. The generosity that I have shown with both the original question and the supplementary question may have a downside, and the downside is that there is greater scope given for direct relevance in an answer. The member for Canning stretches any friendship with anybody when he makes comments like that. He made his point of order. He has used the point of order now for this question and he will sit there in silence. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—I am proud of this government’s education reforms given that we inherited, after 12 long years, a circumstance where the federal government, of which the Leader of the Opposition was a part, had not stopped to think once about educational disadvantage in this country. It had not even bothered to locate the most disadvantaged schools, and I will—

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume her seat. The member for Sturt’s inability to understand standing order 65(b) is breathtaking. He is warned and he knows that a warning is a precursor to naming. He cannot expect to interrupt continually without being in danger of being put outside the services of this House for longer than one hour.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is a very important issue. I put to you that the propositions advanced by this side in the questions that have been asked to date are all statements of fact. Facts may provoke the other side, but the responses have been highly provocative—

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

Government members—Not a good one.

The SPEAKER—It may not have been a good one. I can hear comments like that. The member for Goldstein should realise that there is no point of order. The questions were ruled in order. I was making observations. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—As I was saying, I am proud of the education reforms of this government, including having the courage—

Mrs Mirabella interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Indi is warned.

Ms GILLARD—to deliver the national curriculum. It is not easy, but it is a reform that fell to us in the interests of children because, after 12 long years, the government in which the Leader of the Opposition served—

Mr Simpkins interjecting—
The SPEAKER—The member for Cowan is warned.

Ms GILLARD—did absolutely nothing about this profound reform. Of course, the education policy he took to the last election was basically, ‘Rip off apprentices.’ There are three words for you.

When it comes to health, I am also proud of the health reforms of this government. I am proud that we are dealing with the challenges of sustaining quality health care in an ageing society. We are addressing the fact that under the Leader of the Opposition funding from the Commonwealth government as a percentage of healthcare funding was going down. We are addressing those challenges. Once again, it is not easy. But I stand by this government’s proud track record of reform in stumping up to those difficult problems, compared to the Leader of the Opposition’s—

Mr Schultz interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Hume is warned.

Ms GILLARD—policy when it comes to health, which is always, ‘Cut health funding.’ There are another three words for you.

When it comes to climate change we are a government that is dealing with this issue through pushing energy efficiency, through dealing with renewable energy and through setting targets. Despite all of the twists and turns, shenanigans and lack of unity in the opposition about this question, we are getting on with the job of the difficult question of pricing carbon. Meanwhile, what does the Leader of the Opposition do? I will give you another three words: denies the problem. He does not think that the globe is warming. He stands in the face of every major scientific opinion on this fact and he would rather look for political advantage than do anything in the national interest on this question.

Day after day, despite the Leader of the Opposition’s cheap performances and insults, we will get on with the hard job of the reforms that this country needs in order to have a strong economy in the future, in order to have an economy that is ready for the challenges of the future and in order to govern for all Australians so that they can get the fairness and decency that they deserve. Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition sits there in denial about the past and his poor track record as a minister and without any vision for the future.

Climate Change

Ms BIRD (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Why is it important to take action on climate change, and what is the government doing to move to a low-carbon economy?

Ms GILLARD—I very much thank the member for her question. She is a woman who lives in and represents in this place a region where people understand that climate change is real, that our society needs to take steps to address it and that we need to work through these difficult steps in consultation with the community.

When I was in Adelaide last week, I talked about my vision and this government’s vision for the future of this country. I want to make sure that we have a strong economy, ready for the challenges of the future, which gives Australians the best opportunities for the future, for their own personal prosperity and for their own ability to succeed. But to get there, to have a strong economy that meets the challenges of the future, we need to engage in continuing rounds of reform.

There is no more important reform than making sure that our economy is ready for the challenge flowing from climate change. That is, we need to make sure that we are a prosperous nation but that, as we generate
that prosperity, we generate fewer carbon emissions. I am an optimist. I know the Leader of the Opposition always looks on the negative side for what you can wreck and who you can criticise. I am an optimist and I believe that our nation is up to meeting this challenge. We can get this job done and we can get it done together.

In order to get this job done together, we do need to work through pricing carbon. We need to do that to drive a fuel switch into investment in cleaner energy. That is a key to the future and we need to make sure that we are the custodians of that key—that we price carbon and drive investment in cleaner energy. The experts in the energy industry tell us that we need to do just that. For example, Richard McIndoe, managing director of energy supplier TRUenergy, has said:

We want to see this—
that is, pricing carbon—
on the agenda before 2013 and we really need to start to have a dialogue with the government about the best way to attract investment in low emissions technology now. There is no time to waste.

He goes on to say that:
... if this uncertainty continues, not for two to three years but four to five years, and nobody is building, then you will have power shortages and insufficient capacity.

That is the vision of the future the Leader of the Opposition would embrace—power shortages and insufficient capacity.

Then of course there is the incoming Treasury brief that made it absolutely clear that, if we are to hit our carbon emissions targets, we need to price carbon. To go down any other route is, to use their words, ‘to impose a significant economic and budget impact’. That is the vision of the Leader of the Opposition—increased taxes or savage cuts into health, pensions, defence and education in order to pay for trying to deal with climate change another way. We stand for the efficiency of pricing carbon, and we will get on with that job.

Interest Rates

Mr HOCKEY (2.22 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the fact that a family with a $300,000 mortgage is now paying over $21,000 a year in interest, including the fact that their interest bill went up by over $1,000 a year in the last fortnight alone. When will a government that had lost its way in June find its way and start taking upward pressure off interest rates for Australian families and small businesses?

Ms GILLARD—I can only imagine what the shadow Treasurer must have thought of his performance in government given what interest rates were then.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will get to the question.

Mr Randall interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Canning is warned!

Ms GILLARD—I can only imagine how he must have hung his head in shame every morning for being such an incompetent minister in such an incompetent government. If he wants to go down this track, well let us do comparisons of track records—I am very happy to.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume her seat.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker—

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Sit down. The Prime Minister has the call. She will be directly relevant to the question.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Those on my left could learn a lesson by not interrupting as much as they do because, quite frankly, I
could not listen to the answer because of the hubbub that was going on, and given the reaction of members on my left I am assuming that the member for North Sydney was going to raise a point of order on relevance. He is lucky not to have been named or given one hour because of the way that he approached the dispatch box. We might rule a line in the sand about this question time now, but I am telling you, the behaviour has got to pick up. The Prime Minister has the call. She will be directly relevant to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I was asked about interest rate pressure. What I can say to the shadow Treasurer about interest rate pressure is I understand that families are under pressure from interest rates and paying the mortgage. I understand that in the past, under the former government, they struggled with higher interest rates than now. But interest rate movements do cause pressure on working families—absolutely right—which is why of course we want to make sure that there is competition in banking so that people have the ability to shop around and get a better deal. That is why the government has already acted to introduce competition reforms, and we will act to introduce further competition reforms. Even today, if you check the products and prices that are on offer, my attention has been drawn to the fact that a good bank, Adelaide Bank, from my old home town, is offering a mortgage rate of 6.59 per cent compared with, for example, today’s Westpac mortgage rate of 7.86 per cent. It does make a big difference to families if they go and get a better priced product. The difference in cost between Westpac and the Adelaide Bank is $245 a month. I give that as an example because it shows that if you can facilitate competition in banking, if you can enable people to move from one product to another, then they can look around, look for better deals and use their purchasing power effectively as consumers to drive different conduct in our banking sector. That is why the government has delivered competition reforms in the past and that is why we will deliver further competition reforms.

In terms of the macroeconomy and supply-side constraints, we as a government understand and we have understood for a long period of time that we need to lift the productive capacity of our economy by investing in human capital. That is why we have a transformational education agenda after 12 long years of neglect, why we are nation building with the infrastructure projects, overseen by the government generally and particularly by the minister for infrastructure. That is why we are so committed to the delivery of the National Broadband Network, because of its ability to drive new ways of doing business, new productivity enhancements, new ways of expanding economic capacity.

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business on a point of order.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on the issue of direct relevance, the Prime Minister was asked about how the government was taking pressure off interest rates. She was not asked about infrastructure spending on the National Broadband Network or any other kind of infrastructure spending.

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—Perhaps at some point someone could explain to the opposition about the question of supply-side constraints, explain to the opposition about economic capacity, explain to them about the role of infrastructure and explain why I am being directly relevant to the question that is asked. Really, nothing could tell you more about the economic incompetency and illiteracy of the
Liberal Party in the modern age than that point of order.

We will deliver the further competition reforms. We have already delivered competition reforms. I will say again, as I have said previously, people should use their power as consumers to put pressure on banks. The banks have behaved badly. They deserve to feel the pressure of competitive powers. Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, I am critical of the banks’ conduct. He wanders around saying: ‘I don’t blame the banks. I believe they bear their fair share of responsibility.’

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will conclude.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.29 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a delegation from Indonesia. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to the members.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Electricity Sector

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (2.29 pm)—My question is also to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister outline how a carbon price can transform Australia’s electricity sector?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Wills for his question and I know he is very concerned about this country’s future, about environmental questions and about the question of pricing carbon. He is also a man who is in touch with his constituents and would understand the pressures that families feel when utility prices rise and that they are asking for explanations as to how this works and what will happen next. I believe that it is important to be honest with the Australian people and thoughtful in your responses. Not for me the three-word slogans of others.

When we look at our electricity generation sector, and when we look at the question of investment in electricity, we find that we have had a track record of underinvestment and we need to transform electricity generation for the future so that we are able to meet demand and not face power shortages and power outages and that we are generating our electricity in a cleaner way.

To give some statistics in this regard: in terms of electricity used, around 82 per cent of power in the national electricity market is generated by coal with 10 per cent from natural gas and eight per cent from renewables, but in terms of capacity coal only makes up around 58 per cent of capacity with gas around 20 per cent. That is telling you that despite rising energy demand we still have natural gas fired generation capacity which is underutilised and we need to change that picture. To put it at its most simple, we need to generate power from coal in a cleaner way, we need to reduce the emissions of generating power from coal and we need to increase the competitiveness of energy that is generated from gas and from renewable energy sources like solar to make them a greater part of our energy mix. In order to drive that innovation and that competitiveness, we need to price carbon.

I can see the member for Wentworth concentrating on this. The member for Wentworth is a man who has always understood this and has, over time, advocated pricing carbon because he understands its effects on electricity generation and in the marketplace. Of course, it does mean, as we work through these issues, that we need to make sure we are telling Australians the truth. Often in this debate there is a position painted, particularly by the opposition, that if you price carbon then electricity prices go up but if you do nothing then somehow that does not happen. Can I say to the opposition that at least there is one truth teller on their front bench.
and that is the member for Groom, who admitted the day before the election when you looked at power prices: ‘Power prices are set to double over the next five to seven years irrespective of who is in government. Lack of planning has led to an investment drought.’ He is a truthful man. As we work our way through investing in energy and increasing supply, we also need to work our way through pricing carbon so that that new investment is directed to the cleanest possible power generation for our nation’s future.

Electricity Prices

Mr HAWKE (2.34 pm)—My question is also to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her claim that a new carbon tax would not force up electricity prices. I remind her that the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales found that a carbon tax would push electricity prices up by an additional 26 per cent. I further refer her to the fact that the Minister for Foreign Affairs said in February that an emissions trading scheme would push up prices by 19 per cent over two years. Prime Minister, when will a government that lost its way in June find its way and drop this tax that will hurt small businesses and households through much higher electricity prices?

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: as you previously indicated to the House, these questions are out of order under standing order 100(d).

The SPEAKER—Parts of the question give difficulty under the standing orders, but I have been generous in the interpretation and I have also indicated what comes with that generosity, although I hope that the Prime Minister in her response will not take up that generosity. The Prime Minister will respond directly to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I am very happy to respond directly. What I would say to the member is that perhaps, instead of trying to summarise what I have said, he should actually read what I have said. I refer him to recent speeches I have given on the subject of electricity. I refer him to the last answer I gave where I said very clearly that we need to have a truthful and full debate about what is happening in electricity generation. If he is under any doubt about what is happening in electricity generation, then I suggest that he has a discussion with the member for Groom because, as I have indicated, the member for Groom, from his statements the day before the election, is actually onto it—he actually understands it. He understands that, in trying to create an image in people’s minds that there are somehow policy settings of no price rises versus pricing carbon, that is a figment of people’s imagination and that we are dealing with rising energy prices. We have had underinvestment. In the words of the member for Groom—and I quote them again: ‘Power prices are set to double over the next five to seven years irrespective of who is in government.’ These are his words, not mine, dealing with the reality of electricity generation and the need to expand capacity to make up for underinvestment.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I refer you to page 553 of Practice. I note that Practice indicates that you have the power, without invoking standing order 75, to deal with tedious repetition. We have heard it all before. I would ask you to rule it out of order, for the member to return to the substance of the question and answer it.

The SPEAKER—Order! There is no point of order. The standing order that was quoted by the member does not apply to questions. I appreciate her assistance from time to time. Sometimes I do not need those sorts of directions and I hope that in future she will remember that.
Ms GILLARD—So the policy question that genuinely confronts us is that, as we need to see investment in electricity, we know that investment is now being held up because of current uncertainty. Long-term investment is not going to be made until we answer the question about pricing carbon. As we release that new investment, do we want to release it in a way which helps us tackle the problem of climate change and carbon emissions or do we just want to go on as we are now? Well, I am for reform. I am for dealing with the question of pricing carbon. I am for telling people the truth. The Leader of the Opposition, with his three-word slogans and his denial of climate change, wants to hide the truth from people. But, of course, his ability to hide that truth ran out of rope when we had the Treasury books for the incoming government released under freedom of information, because they made it absolutely clear that this nation needs to price carbon in order to meet its targets for reducing carbon emissions and that the only other way to do it is to put huge costs on the budget. The member who asked me the question asks about costs. I say to him if he wants to talk about costs let us have an honest debate. How much would you hack out of education to deal with it your way? How much would you hack out of health? How much would you hack out of defence? How much would you put taxes up by?

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will come to her conclusion.

Ms GILLARD—We know the Leader of the Opposition loves a good tax: he took one to the last election. He loves increased taxes: he ran for the last election on the basis of them. So when the opposition actually wants to front up and put a full position about those questions we will have the debate. In the meantime I would say to the opposition and to the member who has asked the question that the Australian community deserves better than this endeavour to hide the truth from the Australian community and just drive fear. We will work our way through this debate. The Australian nation is up to it, the government is going to do it and the only people being left behind are sitting over there on the opposition side.

Climate Change

Ms SMYTH (2.40 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Why is it important for Australia to introduce the most economically efficient way to tackle climate change and how is the government planning to achieve this? How has this approach been received and what is the government’s response?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for La Trobe for this very important question, because the central challenge for Australia on the road of reform is to provide business with the certainty to invest in the low-pollution economy of the future. Other economies are doing it but we are not doing nearly enough. What we have to do is to give business the certainty that they can make the necessary investments in power generation, for example, so we can not only be certain of supply but we can also be certain that we may just be getting value for money.

The road of reform is sometimes hard and what we have to find is the most economically efficient way of doing this. Of course, the most economically efficient way of doing this is a market based mechanism that those opposite will not contemplate because when it comes to essential reforms which will benefit this country all we see from them is the politics of the stop sign. They will not go down the road of reform which is going to deliver the prosperity this country needs. And what this country needs is a price on carbon. Why do we need it? We need it to stay competitive. We need it to drive the investment in the alternative technologies. We need it to be contemporary. We need it for
our future prosperity but they will not con-
template it because they are more interested
in playing the politics of the issue. They are
not interested in the national interest.

What they say is they want to do it by
regulation. But, of course, regulation is not
the most cost effective. There has been a lot
of debate in this House in the past day or two
about the OECD. The OECD has had this to
say about the importance of a price on car-
bon and doing it in the most efficient way
and not going down the road of regulation
that the member for Flinders wants to go
down. That is not the cost-effective way.
That is the way that will impose very big
costs on our budget and very big costs on our
industries—and when you do that you make
them uncompetitive. This is what the OECD
had to say about the solution that has been
put forward by those opposite:

… attempting to reduce emissions through regula-
tory and subsidy arrangements would also be
costly for the economy. The cost of regulatory
approaches to reduce emissions can be more than
twice as high as the cost of market based ap-
proaches.

That is what the OECD had to say in their
recent report, and they are backed up by the
Treasury. The Treasury has made this point:
A carbon pricing regime would achieve the nec-
essary abatement at a cost per tonne of emissions
significantly lower than other announced alterna-
tive policies …

That is where the economics stand and that is
where the national interest stands but the
member for Flinders over there wants to sit
back and decide where the subsidies are go-
ing to go and how much Australians are go-
ing to pay to pick winners. I would not trust
him to wash my car and I most certainly
would not trust him to pick the winners. I
most certainly would not trust him to do that.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer
will be directly relevant.

Mr SWAN—On this side of the House we
are going down the reform road. In the na-
tional interest we are going down the reform
road, but what do we get over there? The
politics of the stop sign from those that are
only interested in their immediate political
interest and not interested in the national
interest.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point
of order.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Manager of
Opposition Business will resume his seat.

Broadband

Mr TURNBULL (2.44 pm)—My ques-
tion is to the Prime Minister. If the Prime
Minister thinks that the cost-effectiveness of
carbon prices, carbon taxes and emissions
trading schemes is important enough to war-
nant proper investigation by the Productivity
Commission, why is she refusing to allow
the commission to investigate the cost-
effectiveness of the $43 billion National
Broadband Network?

Ms GILLARD—I very much thank the
member for Wentworth for this question.
What we know about the member for Wen-
tworth’s suggestion is that it is yet another
delay from a political party that is now on its
20th version of a policy, each one as ineffec-
tive as the one before. The fact that this is all
about delay is best indicated by the inability
of the opposition to say that it would agree
with broadband under any circumstances.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point
of order. The member for Wentworth asked a
very straightforward question without any
embroidery, and the Prime Minister is talking
about the opposition side of the House. Will
you bring her to order?

The SPEAKER—the Manager of Oppo-
sition Business has raised as a point of order
direct relevance. The Prime Minister is re-
sponding to the question.
Ms GILLARD—The fact that this is all about delay—not about rigour, not about looking at things, not about study, not about analysis—has been admitted by the opposition. They have said—the Leader of the Opposition has been very clear—that, no matter what happens, their mission is another three-word slogan: demolish the NBN. That is what they stand for: demolish the NBN. The actual facts, the figures and the case for reform do not matter to them at all. They are not interested in that.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will resume her seat. I have two options with the member for Sturt. I can name him—

Mr Gibbons—Do it!

The SPEAKER—If that was the member for Wakefield, he—

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Oh, it was the member for Bendigo. There are a few dobbers in the House. Regrettably now the member for Bendigo—it has been a big day for Bendigo today—is warned.

I suggest to the member for Sturt that if he stepped back and tried to disengage himself from his positions on some of these answers, he would understand that, in this case, it may not be the answer that his side of politics is seeking but it is an answer that could be considered directly relevant to the question. I am not in a position, as Speaker, to dictate how a minister or the Prime Minister answers the questions. I think that the member for Sturt should learn to sit there quietly. If he really wants to make changes that will get the result that he wants, he should engage with the Procedure Committee as they review the success or not of the newly implemented standing orders. The Prime Minister has the call. The Prime Minister knows that she must be directly relevant in responding to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I am asked about the opposition’s proposition that the NBN go to the Productivity Commission. I am answering that question, and I am answering that question on the basis that it is very clear from the opposition’s statements that it is not serious about absorbing any work that comes out of the Productivity Commission. I will use the member for Wentworth’s own words. On 24 September this year he was asked by a journalist: ‘If the cost-benefit analysis did come back with an unequivocal “Yes, go ahead and do it,” would the coalition at that point support it?’ Surely that was a question that begged yes as an answer but, no, the member for Wentworth said: ‘Well, that would depend. A good cost-benefit analysis will be very transparent, set out all its assumptions, will enable people to play with those assumptions, to change them. But no-one’s going to give it a tick in advance.’ So the opposition is not at all serious about this, not at all serious about the work coming from the Productivity Commission. The only reason it is advocating a Productivity Commission approach is as another delaying tactic, because the opposition’s actual strategy is the one set by the Leader of the Opposition, another three words: demolish the NBN.

I understand that, when it comes to the Productivity Commission, the member for Wentworth does sometimes value their opinion. He was asked on radio this morning about the Productivity Commission and carbon pricing, and he said:

… the Government believes that the Productivity Commission will say that a market-based approach to reducing emissions is the most cost effective …

Now there’ve been plenty of other studies that have come to that conclusion, they can be highly
confident I would think of getting that outcome from the Productivity Commission. If the member for Wentworth is that serious about carbon pricing, he had better have a chat to this bloke sitting in the chair.

Climate Change

Ms GRIERSON (2.51 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Will the minister outline recent analysis of the drivers of increased electricity prices? Will the minister report on how this was received and outline the government’s view of this analysis, particularly in relation to the impact of a carbon price?

Mr COMBET—I thank my colleague the member for Newcastle for that question. We both come from the Hunter region, where electricity generation is a very important issue and electricity prices are just as important for consumers there as those elsewhere in the country. Mr Rod Sims, who is an independent expert adviser to the government’s multiparty climate change committee and also a person of extensive experience in energy markets in this country and currently the chairperson of the New South Wales Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, recently gave a presentation to the government’s multiparty committee about what is driving increases in electricity prices. The committee has made that presentation public. Mr Sims’ main point in his presentation was this: a carbon price is the most efficient method of tackling climate change. He clearly states: ‘The introduction of a carbon price will allow the currently lowest cost measures to be chosen while technological change drives the best longer-term solutions.’ That is the fact of the matter: a market mechanism to establish a carbon price is the most economically efficient way of driving reductions in carbon pollution in our economy.

Mr Sims in his presentation also clearly outlined that electricity prices are currently increasing in the absence of a carbon price mainly because of increases in network costs—the 850,000 kilometres of poles and wires in the transmission and distribution network around the country which delivers electricity to consumers. The fact of the matter is that there have been steep rises in electricity prices over the last three years—by as much as 40 per cent—and they have been driven, as Mr Sims indicated in his presentation, by infrastructure investments that were long overdue and that are now starting to be made. We can be clear about one thing: these price rises are not being driven by a carbon price; there isn’t one. They are driven by the long overdue infrastructure spending that is occurring.

Mr Sims went on to make a further point that is extremely important. The point he made was that it is the absence of a carbon price that is a further risk to increases in electricity prices. That is due, as the Prime Minister has indicated in earlier answers, to the fact that the lack of a carbon price is creating investment uncertainty in the energy market, having the effect of seeing the postponement of important investment decisions about the future generation capacity of this country. Investment decisions into combined cycle gas turbine generation, for example, are being forestalled by the lack of a carbon price. There will be more emissions intensive generation infrastructure because of this.

The OECD in a report released yesterday supports the government’s view about carbon pricing being necessary to provide certainty to investors in the energy sector. That will help mitigate the impact of price increases on consumers in the future. These are facts that the Leader of the Opposition will not respect. The opposition with its scare campaign tactics and through its fear mongering about
electricity prices is acting against the national interest.

The SPEAKER—The minister will bring his answer to a conclusion.

Mr COMBET—The simple fact of the matter is that the biggest risk to electricity prices in this country sits there in the chair of the Leader of the Opposition.

Broadband

Mrs ANDREWS (2.56 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, at a time when struggling Australian families are scrutinising every dollar that they spend on bills, food, mortgages and rent, why is the government spending $43 billion of taxpayers’ money on the National Broadband Network without subjecting it to a proper cost-benefit analysis? If spending every dollar carefully is good enough for families, why isn’t it good enough for the government?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question. I believe that spending every dollar carefully is important—absolutely.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson is warned!

Ms GILLARD—that is one of the reasons that I opposed the tax increase that the Leader of the Opposition wanted to put on everything that families buy at the last election. I thought that that was wrong. I do not know if the member thought it was right or wrong for the Leader of the Opposition to take a big tax on everything to the last election—a tax that would have flowed through to prices in Coles and Woolworths. I thought that that was the wrong thing to do, but she might want to express her own view about that, given her concern about the cost of living and families.

On the National Broadband Network, what I would say to the member who asked the question is that you do not want to fall for the spin coming from your frontbench about the National Broadband Network. I refer the member to the studies that have already been released—the McKinsey Implementation Study, for example—about the National Broadband Network. I refer her to the many business and academic studies that show the productivity, service delivery and innovation advantages of the NBN and the projected growth in our GDP and the increased prosperity for Australians as a result of this new technology.

I say to the member who asked the question that if she is really concerned about prices and families, she would be vitally concerned about the question of whether or not mum or dad has a job. The issue with the National Broadband Network is this: if we allow the technology of this country to continue to fall behind, then what will effectively happen is that we will export jobs to countries with better technology, such as Singapore and Korea. We would export jobs that would have supported working families and enabled them to pay their bills.

Mrs Andrews—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. My question was quite specific. It dealt with why the government is not conducting a proper cost-benefit analysis on this project.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I was directly responding to the issue the member raised about cost of living and families, and I was directly responding on the productivity and competition advantages we need from this technology. I am not content to see this country export jobs to other countries. On the question of cost of living and the NBN, the member may be interested to know that, if we look at the costs of broadband among OECD countries, Australia is the fifth most expensive. That is happening now: real money coming
out of families’ pockets, out of their pay packets, to pay for the fifth most expensive broadband. I want to see Australia get the advantages of cheaper broadband. I want to see Australians get the productivity advantages of that, the GDP advantages of that, the health service delivery advantages of that and the education delivery advantages of that. That is why the government is determined to build the National Broadband Network and not settle for the 20th plan coming from the opposition—every one of those plans a weeping failure.

**Energy Sector**

Mr MURPHY (3.00 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy and the Minister for Tourism. Will the minister inform the House about the importance of policy certainty to deliver investment in the energy sector?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I thank the member for Reid for the question. In answering it, I remind the House that one of the cornerstones of the strength of the Australian economy has been the reliability of our electricity system. It is regarded as one of the most efficient national energy markets in the OECD world. For those reasons, we as a community are going through a series of significant increases in the cost of electricity, largely born out of decisions at a state and territory level. These decisions, as recognised by the Premier of Western Australia, are absolutely required to maintain reliability for the strength of the Australian economy. Currently in the pipeline are investments of about $100 billion over the next 10 years, of which $40 billion has currently been committed. Those investments are about maintaining the reliability of the system, going to fundamental issues such as network assets—the poles and the wires—and our generation assets.

That is not just the view of the government. I remind the House that this issue was actually recognised by the member for Groom. I refer to his statement of 20 August this year when he said:

If you look at where the investment has to go, there is massive investment to be made out there. You can’t dally around.

No, you cannot dally around on the investments in the current pipeline, and you cannot dally around on the question of our absolute need for new investment in generation capacity. We have a strong economy. Hence, the demand for energy is increasing. Our problem in recent years has been an inadequate amount of investment in new generation capacity in Australia. That is because there is no-one interested at this point in time in investing in new coal fired generation capacity in Australia.

The House supported a renewable energy target. That will see an immediate growth in wind energy in Australia. We would all appreciate that that gives the energy system some challenges as to reliability. What is now required is some fundamental investment in baseload capacity, and the transitional fuel is going to be gas. To bring on these immediate investments in relation to the transition, we require a price on carbon so that the industry has the certainty it needs for the purposes of investing in Australia.

For those reasons, this government is absolutely committed to building consensus on these issues, just as we built consensus in the 1980s and 1990s on fundamental restructuring of the Australian economy. This is equal to the changes we made on issues of globalisation, a reduction in tariffs and changes in the nature of workplace relations in Australia, which well positioned Australia for the 21st century. We now confront the same challenges on the issue of electricity and the reliability of our system, which is the key to
our economic future from both an industry and a household point of view.

In conclusion, I simply say that the sooner we resolve the issue of a price on carbon the sooner we can make these baseload decisions which guarantee our economic future, guarantee that when we go to work there are no brownouts and there is no shedding so we can actually put in a hard day’s work for a fair day’s pay and guarantee that when we go home we can turn on the lights and cook a meal without questioning the reliability of the electricity system in Australia. A price on carbon is fundamental to our economic future.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (3.04 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Hon. Gail Gago MLC, the South Australian Minister for State/Local Government Relations, Minister for the Status of Women, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Government Enterprises, Minister for the City of Adelaide and member of the Executive Council. I am pleased that she found time to come and visit us. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Broadband

Mr SIMPKINS (3.05 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. The OECD criticised the government’s National Broadband Network because it locks Australia into a single fixed line broadband technology provider instead of enabling competing technologies, including the HFC cable network. Yesterday the member for La Trobe exposed the real problem with picking technology when she said, ‘We really need to get moving on the NBN in case the technology that might be considered becomes obsolete.’ Hasn’t the member for La Trobe shown how a government that has lost its way can now find its way by initiating a cost-benefit analysis on this $43 billion spending commitment?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. On the reference to the Productivity Commission delay tactic of the member for Wentworth: no, we will not be doing that. Clearly, when you have an opposition that is on its 20th plan—all of them failures—what it knows about is delay. It absolutely knows about delay—12 long years in government, delay, delay, delay; in opposition, the generation of plan after plan, each of them a failure. And then of course it has already presignalled that, as an opposition, it is not at all interested in what the Productivity Commission has to say. All of this is just fitting in with its approach to politics—three words: demolish the NBN—in line with what the Leader of the Opposition stands for: three words on everything, and all of them about stopping this, ending that and demolishing something else, because his entire approach to politics is negative.

Can I refer the member to the OECD report, because I think it makes some interesting reading. I would refer him to its contents. The OECD said:

NBN is a far-reaching reform project to fill the gaps in the broadband internet sector.

They said:
NBN will improve internet services for the entire population and promote a fairer competition between private firms on retail services.

They went on to say:
Due to Australia’s size and relatively low population density it will be difficult for more than one competing fixed telecommunications network to exist.

And further:
The NBN will avoid the risk of a geographic digital divide as it will cover the entire population,
whereas if it were done by the private sector it would be done more gradually and only to the most densely populated areas.

Of course, this was a factor recognised by the country Independents in this House because they did not want their communities left behind. They understood that the NBN would be a transformative difference for their communities and they did not want their communities to be left behind metropolitan Australia. Well, neither does the government. We want to govern for all Australia and the NBN is part of that. Then the OECD went on to find:

The use of the new network can bring large savings, 0.5 per cent and 1.5 per cent of GDP—

they are large savings—

to the cost of public services over a 10-year period in four areas: health care, education, transport and electricity, which on their own would warrant construction.

So I ask the member for Cowan: why is it that he wants Australians to settle for health services, education services, transport services and electricity services which are not at the standard that we could have with the NBN? Why does he not want this nation to realise the savings identified by the OECD? We understand that the opposition will, at every step of the way, resist this nation-building project and this transformative technology, because that is what the opposition is: a bunch of wreckers. We will get on with building the nation and realising the new economic capacity and the new service delivery modes for all Australians that the NBN will give.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

**The SPEAKER** (3.09 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery Andrew Murray, a former senator of the other place, who is here for an important anniversary, as was mentioned earlier in question time, and I give to him a very warm welcome on behalf of the House.

**Honourable members**—Hear, hear!

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Climate Change**

**Mr LYONS** (3.10 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. How is the government helping to build consensus on the need to take action on climate change and introduce a carbon price?

**Mr COMBET**—I thank the member for Bass for his question. At the last election the Prime Minister made it clear that the government was determined to build consensus to support an important economic reform—that is, to introduce a carbon price into our economy. To achieve that aim, the government has taken a number of steps. The first one has been to establish the multiparty climate change committee. That comprises representatives of the government, the Greens, and the members for Lyne and New England. That committee is advised by four independent experts, and I have referred in my earlier answer in question time to the role of Mr Rod Sims. At the last meeting the committee released a number of papers covering areas such as the science of climate change, the action being taken in a number of other countries around carbon pricing and information on energy markets and electricity prices.

I am sure the House will be interested to know that in Professor Will Steffen’s presentation to the committee, advising the committee on climate science, Professor Steffen reported that there is now 100 per cent certainty that the earth is warming and 95 per cent certainty that human-induced emissions are the main cause of the warming observed over the last century.

*Dr Jensen interjecting—*
Mr COMBET—I thought that statement may cause some mirth for the member for Tangney, who is currently auditioning to replace—

The SPEAKER—The member for Tangney will stop interjecting. The minister should ignore him.

Mr COMBET—The second initiative relates to the work that will be carried out by Professor Ross Garnaut, to update his 2008 climate change review. Professor Garnaut’s update will be extremely important. It is due to be completed by the end of May next year and will, of course, be released publicly in progressive stages. Eight papers will be produced. The third initiative is what was announced yesterday—that is, a study by the Productivity Commission into the effective carbon prices that exist in the economies of our major trading partners. That will be another important contribution that is due to be finalised by May next year.

The fourth initiative is the setting up of two roundtables by the government to engage with members of the business community and members of various non-government organisations, including environmental groups and unions, about the issue of carbon pricing.

Finally, the other principal initiative that the government is currently working on and is well advanced in its preparations is the implementation of a new Climate Change Commission—another commitment that was made by the Prime Minister in the election campaign. The commission will play an extremely important role in engaging the public about the climate science, about the economics and about the importance and role of carbon pricing in driving reductions in carbon pollution.

All of these initiatives and the debate that they will inform, and the papers that are being produced, will help build consensus in the community and deepen the level of understanding about the important public policy challenge that climate change represents in this country. All that we hear in this context from the opposition, in this crucial public policy issue for our national long-term interest and for economic reform in this country, is negativity. They say: ‘Stop this, stop that. End this. Don’t do that.’ They wreck this, oppose this, run scare and fear-mongering campaigns. They do not have one iota of an idea about a constructive contribution to one of the most important challenges we face in this country. (Time expired)

Petrol Sniffing

Mr CROOK (3.14 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Indigenous Health. In March this year, the federal government announced a $2.3 million program to roll out Opal fuel into the Northern Goldfields of Western Australia, the Central Desert and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands to curb the alarming occurrence of petrol sniffing. While the announcement advised that Opal would be available from mid-2010, the rollout of Opal fuel to the Northern Goldfields is yet to occur. Petrol sniffing, along with other substance abuse, is a major problem in this region and it is destroying lives and communities. Can the minister please inform the House as to when Opal fuel will be available in these communities and, secondly, what measures are being put in place to ensure that regular unleaded fuel is prevented from reaching these communities?

Mr SNOWDON—I thank the member for his question and his interest in this very important subject. I first became acquainted with the horrors of petrol sniffing when I was working in and out of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands of Central Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Over the period, many things have been tried to address what is really a dreadful problem
for many individuals and communities—something which has split families—and, obviously, young people, who are dying very much earlier than they should.

Many strategies have been tried. One which was introduced by the now Leader of the Opposition as Minister for Health and Ageing was the rolling out of Opal fuel, which is a BP product, starting in 2005. In 2008, the government did an evaluation of the program of rolling out Opal fuel and discovered that we were able to reduce petrol sniffing in the communities which were surveyed by 90 per cent over the period. As a result of that, the government further took a decision to roll out Opal elsewhere.

You are right: in March of this year we took a decision, and Minister Roxon, Minister Macklin and I announced the rollout of Opal fuel into the Kalgoorlie region, a $2.3 million project to roll this out, working with BP, who would supply the fuel. We would pay for the storage and they would then distribute it. Unfortunately, as you have noted, it has not come to pass, mainly through technical difficulties confronted by BP in getting the facilities in place in Kalgoorlie. However, I am assured by BP that they are looking at providing alternative strategies to supply Opal into the communities by the end of the year, subsequent to the completion of the fuel storage facility, which will be in the middle of next year, we believe. So we are hopeful that we can get Opal into the communities in a far more sustainable and reliable way by the end of this year or early next year, thus providing the opportunity for people in those communities who retail fuel to substitute Opal for their regular unleaded fuels.

You asked me about what we can do to prevent regular unleaded fuels being introduced into these communities. Frankly, not a lot. What we have done is look at the possibility of mandating the supply of Opal fuel, but we have taken the decision that it is better in the first instance to provide voluntary compliance. However, we do have in our back pocket the possibility at some future point, if we are not successful in rolling out Opal in those communities that need it, to look at a legislative option.

I should say that in the last budget we announced $38.5 million of new expenditure to roll out Opal into 39 additional communities across the Top End of Australia, starting in the western Arnhem Land region around Jabiru and Gunbalanya. That is happening as of December. As with the rollout of the fuel in Ngaanyatjarra communities, we will obviously have a public communications exercise to assure consumers that Opal will not affect their motors either in their vehicles or, in the case of Gunbalanya, in the small boat motors of fisherfolk.

It is very important that we adhere to this strategy of rolling out Opal fuel into these communities. It is an extraordinarily successful project which, as I said earlier, was initiated in the first instance by the current Leader of the Opposition. But I am hopeful that we will be able to satisfy the needs of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in the not too distant future.

Climate Change

Mr HUSIC (3.19 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister advise the House what the government is doing to assist developing countries to tackle climate change and what key emerging economies are doing to reduce their emissions?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. For many of the most vulnerable countries around the world, climate change represents an existential threat—

Opposition members interjecting—

CHAMBER
Mr RUDD—countries like Kiribati, countries like Tuvalu and countries like the Maldives. I find it remarkable that members would find this a matter of humour in this place. If you were to speak with the presidents of Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Maldives, they would have a different reaction. Furthermore, for many of the poorest countries in the world, climate change represents a fundamental challenge to economic development in terms of coastal inundation, water scarcity and the forced migration of populations. Again, those opposite, including the honourable member who interjects most volubly with his laughter: the President of Bangladesh has said to us in recent meetings that 40 million of her country’s population lie potentially vulnerable to the inundation of the southern part of Bangladesh should climate change continue unabated. Those opposite may find this to be amusing. We on this side of the House find it not to be amusing but instead to be the basis of intelligent international public policy.

When the countries of the world gathered at Copenhagen, they decided through a Copenhagen accord on four courses of action. One was an agreement for the first time that temperature increases across the world should be kept within two degrees Centigrade. Secondly, they agreed that, when it comes to the burden to be shouldered to keep temperature increases within that range, it should be undertaken by both developed and developing countries, for the first time. Thirdly, there should be a global system of measurement, reporting and verification so that states which commit to courses of action are held accountable for their commitments. And, fourthly, for the most vulnerable states, the countries of the world agreed on a $30 billion allocation by the year 2012 to assist them with the immediate tasks of adaptation.

Since then, for the information of the House, 140 states around the world have now acceded to the Copenhagen accord. Australia is playing its part in this respect. We have allocated some $599 million out to the year 2012 to assist in a number of specific areas. Twenty-five per cent of that funding is to go to those countries which are small island states and most vulnerable states, and I have listed some of them already, and 25 per cent will go to those who are dealing with the problems of avoided rainforest degradation. These are practical courses of action which assist with adaptation and mitigation for climate change purposes. For example, in the island republic of Tuvalu we have used this allocation of funds to assist with the provision of some 576 additional water tanks to provide for water storage on that highly exposed island in the Pacific. We are allocating $70 million to work with Indonesia on avoided degradation of rainforest across an area of some 120,000 hectares of the Indonesian republic.

We see actions undertaken by developed and developing countries around the world. In China we see actions to reduce energy intensity. In India we see actions to reduce energy intensity. In New Zealand a decision has agreed on a reduction in carbon by introducing a price on carbon through an emissions trading scheme. These are the actions of responsible governments around the world, developed and developing, and Australia is also rising to the global challenge. (Time expired)

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (3.24 pm)—Mr Speaker, the opposition feels that the foreign minister has more to say and I therefore move:

That Mr Rudd be granted an extension of time.

Question agreed to.

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (3.25 pm)—Mr Speaker, I am most grateful to the Manager of Opposition Business and I make one single point.
Around the world this is taken seriously. By those opposite it is regarded as a joke.

Asylum Seekers

Mr CHRISTENSEN (3.25 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to a Pakistani immigration official’s assessment of Australian migration policy, and I quote:

It [people-smuggling] is increasing and the reason is very simple: you’re not doing anything positive to stop it. You’re sending all the wrong signals. …If you’re going to be so friendly then of course you’re going to get more people.

Isn’t he right, Prime Minister?

Mr Albanese—I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. Under standing order 100, that clearly does not contain any detail of who the quote is from, what the context is, where it is from or any evidence.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on the point of order, standing order 100 specifically says that names should not be used unless strictly necessary. The point of the question is the actual quote and that the government is not doing anything other than attracting people, and the Prime Minister is being asked to comment on the government’s policy.

The SPEAKER—This is a dilemma for the chair because I am in the position that I am being asked to decide whether the naming of the official is required to make the question intelligible to the extent that it can be properly answered. I really do think that in cases like this when somebody overseas is being quoted there should be identification. I will leave it in the hands of the Prime Minister whether she chooses to reflect upon the quote that has been given, but I would say to the member for Dawson that there should be much more precision in identifying a person who is making the quote that he is asking for a response to.

Ms GILLARD—If I could give a new member of the House a tip: don’t take cast-offs from the shadow ministers of questions they are too embarrassed to ask. It normally gets you into trouble. I am not surprised that they would be too embarrassed to ask this one, because obviously it is a completely unnamed, unidentified source, and whoever it is and wherever the words are from they are completely wrong. As a government we have more assets patrolling our borders than ever before. We have a stringent mandatory detention policy. We have made some moves in relation to the circumstances of children. If the member is opposed to them, if the Leader of the Opposition is opposed to those changes in the interests of children, then stand up and say so. We are still waiting for a policy response from the opposition because of their internal divisions on this question.

Whilst the opposition continues to play cheap politics—three-word slogans, stop this, end that, wreck, demolish—we will get on with the job of delivering in the national interest while the opposition stew in its own juices of bitterness, looking to impose that bitterness on the Australian people, putting their political interest in front of the national interest each and every time. The Australian people deserve better than this.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order. I seek leave to table the article in the Australian of 1 November which refers to the quotation, so that it can be put beyond any doubt.

Leave not granted.

The SPEAKER—I simply say that some of the devices that have been used today make me think that some of the people should reflect upon them. The Manager of Opposition Business was involved in the point of order about identifying who the officer was. The Leader of the Opposition and the Manager of Opposition Business are incredulous but, if we are to see stunts like this, where the information was available and could have been given to the member for
Dawson, the generosity that I displayed to the member for Dawson as a new member will not be as forthcoming. The alternative was that I could have ruled the question out of order.

**Climate Change**

*Mrs D’ATH (3.31 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Will the minister outline the threat to the Great Barrier Reef from climate change and provide an update on government action to manage this threat?*

*Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Petrie for the question. As a Queenslander, the member for Petrie has a strong understanding of the economic benefits of the Great Barrier Reef, but today I want to talk about both the environmental importance of the Great Barrier Reef and also the environmental threats from climate change.*

When we can easily lose the context of just how unusual the system that we have in the Great Barrier Reef is by international standards, we could look at a place like the Caribbean, where the reefs have 60 different species of coral compared to our own Great Barrier Reef, with 560 different species of coral. The reef is under threat very directly through climate change in a few ways: first of all, through significant increases in ocean temperatures; secondly, through increased acidification of the ocean; and, thirdly, through the impact of more major weather events. The impact of those major weather events is clear: as cyclones go through, the health of the reef is compromised immediately, both through the destruction of coral and also through the increased run-off of floodwaters, as they often bring nutrients and agricultural chemicals down to the Great Barrier Reef. Added to that you have the impact of bleaching, which occurs through the increased ocean temperatures which are being seen in the area.

There is also increased acidification of the ocean. We often talk about the role that trees and forests have as carbon sinks. We forget the extent to which the ocean also plays that role. As it does, though, carbonic acid is formed and the pH of the ocean has fallen by 0.1—towards a higher level of acidification. That has an impact. It does not kill the coral, but it means the coral grows more slowly. When you add the impacts together—the impact of major weather events and bleaching events—there is a need for the reef to recover, and with increased acidification that recovery happens more slowly. It means there are some really significant challenges to the reef by virtue of climate change.

In dealing with that, as well as the government dealing with the causes of climate change, it is also important that we do what we can to improve the health of the reef so that recovery, even as these events occur, can at least happen in a more resilient ecosystem. That is why the government, ever since 2007, has been involved in the Reef Rescue program, working with $200 million under Caring for our Country and working directly with the graziers and the cane growers up and down the Queensland coast to change their systems. We have situations now where cane growers have managed to plot each square metre of their cane fields and connect that to a GPS, and they are able to locate very precisely where chemical and fertiliser is added so that no more than is required is used. When the rains then come, the run-off is reduced. Similar work is being done with beef producers to try to improve the ground cover so that run-off is diminished. This provides a greater opportunity for the reef to be a healthier system.

*Mr Christensen interjecting—*
Mr BURKE—The member for Dawson, of all people, should understand this, because so much of the economy of his seat is reliant on there being a healthy reef system, a healthy Great Barrier Reef, to preserve the ecology of what is—at least members on this side of the House understand, Member for Dawson—one of the most precious systems in the world.

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

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.35 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and Hansard. I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Australian Fisheries Management Authority—Report for 2009-10.
Executive Director of Township Leasing—Report for 2009-10.
Migration Act 1958—Section 91Y—Protection visa processing taking more than 90 days—Report for the period 1 March to 30 June 2010.
Section 440A—Conduct of Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) reviews not completed within 90 days—Report for the period 1 March to 30 June 2010.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Cyber-Safety Committee

Membership

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.36 pm)—by leave—I move:

That:

(1) paragraph (2) of the resolution of appointment of the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety be amended to read:

That the committee consist of 11 members, 4 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 2 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 Senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators; and

(2) a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting its concurrence.

Question agreed to.

Parliamentary Library Committee

Membership

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.36 pm)—by leave—I move:

That:

(1) paragraph (6) of the resolution of appointment of the Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Library be amended to read:

That the committee shall elect 2 of its members to be joint chairs, 1 being a Senator or Member who is a member of the government party or parties, and 1 being a Senator or Member who is a member of the non-government parties, provided that the joint chairs may not be members of the same House. The joint chair nominated by the government party or parties shall chair meetings of the committee, and the joint chair nominated by the non-government parties
shall take the chair whenever the other joint chair is not present; and

(2) a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting its concurrence.

Question agreed to.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (3.37 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—Does the minister claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr BOWEN—I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr BOWEN—Yesterday, the member for Cook claimed that I had misrepresented him by pointing out that his claim that offshore refugee and skilled migration visas are not subject to judicial review is wrong. In fact, the member for Cook has misrepresented me and misrepresented the law. The Migration Act requires that any valid visa application must be considered against the visa criteria and if the application meets the criteria it must be granted and if it does not it must be refused, regardless of whether the application is made offshore or in Australia. Furthermore, any decision to refuse a visa application is subject to review by the High Court. The member for Cook appears patently unaware of this.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Economy

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

The failure of the Government to deliver a plan for managing the Australian economy.

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

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

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.38 pm)—This government has told many fibs, including in question time today. There was the pre-election emphatic ruling out of a carbon tax, which has been most definitely ruled in since the election. There was the statement before the election that there was no way they would be building new immigration detention centres on shore, which has been completely overthrown since the election. There was the claim before the election that the mining tax issue was all solved, which has totally unravelled after the election, and then, of course, today from the Prime Minister—repeatedly—there was this claim that interest rates were higher under the former government than under the current government. She is absolutely wrong. The standard variable mortgage rate paid by homebuyers under the Rudd-Gillard government has averaged 7.41 per cent. Under the Howard government the rate average was only 7.24 per cent. So she is wrong, wrong, wrong. Sure, the cash rate, thanks to the global financial crisis, has been much lower under this government, but the spread has almost doubled. The rates actually experienced by homebuyers and small business borrowers have been higher under this government than under the former government, notwithstanding the global financial crisis.

The biggest fib of all is that this is a government which knows how to manage the economy. The great lie is that this government has somehow saved Australia from the global financial crisis. Well, let me make it absolutely crystal clear yet again that it is the
reforms of previous governments which saved this country from the global financial crisis, not the spending spree of the current government. But haven’t they spent. They found a $20 billion surplus and within a year they had turned it into a $50-plus billion deficit. There is the $50-plus billion deficit for the financial year just gone and there is the $40-plus billion deficit that they expect for the current financial year. There is the borrowing of $100 million a day which is going on under this government which means that, even on the best case scenario, borrowing will peak at $5,000 for every Australian man, woman and child, after the former government had given this country a $60 billion net asset position. This government, within the space of just a few years, will deliver a $100 billion net debt position.

What have they spent the money on? Pink batts—a program which has caused house fire after house fire, a program which tragically has been linked with four deaths. This is the quality of the government’s economic management. They spend money in ways that have actually done all sorts of terrible, even fatal, damage to the Australian people. Then, of course, there is the school halls program and this idea that somehow Australia was saved from the global financial crisis—which, according to the Governor of the Reserve Bank, lasted just six weeks, other than as a North Atlantic phenomenon—with a spending spree lasting four years, which is longer than the First World War. And what about the quality of that spending? Study after study has shown that in New South Wales public schools the Building the Education Revolution structures have cost on average $4,000 per square metre, which is almost three times the industry average of just $1,500 per square metre. These are gold medal wasters of money and they have absolutely no plan to deal with the Australian economy.

I tell you how to characterise their economic planning and, yes, let us sum it up in a very useful three-word encapsulation: it is borrow, waste and tax. That is their plan for the Australian economy. And, on the subject of tax, there is the emissions trading scheme, a great big tax that was billed to raise something like $100 billion over the first 10 years of its operation, and the mining tax, billed to raise almost $10 billion in the first two years of its operation, both of them taxes that would seriously damage the long-term health of the Australian economy.

But it has been going from bad to worse since the election. The waste just gets worse. Let us look at that which they are so proud of: the $43 billion National Broadband Network that was cooked up on the back of an envelope in a flight because the only way the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy could get to see the Prime Minister was to catch a plane with him. So, on the back of a coaster in the VIP jet, they cooked up this $43 billion white elephant.

There are so many things wrong with the National Broadband Network. To start with, it replaces a competitive market with a government monopoly. Then it uses a single technology instead of a range of alternatives. Finally, and most pathetically for a government that claims to be economically conservative, there was not a single cost-benefit analysis done. It is no wonder that the one minister in the government who had any economic literacy at all, the only economically shrewd minister in this government, the former member for Melbourne and former Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Lindsay Tanner—who once said that there would be no major spending from this government without a published cost-benefit analysis first—quit in embarrassment at the government’s policy and in disgust at the kind of
internal political shenanigans which resulted in the election of the current Prime Minister.

Let’s make it absolutely crystal clear: this government does not have a plan for faster broadband; this government just has a plan for more fixed lines. It is not faster broadband; it is just more fixed lines when everyone in this country who actually uses telecommunications knows that wireless and mobility is the way of the future. This National Broadband Network is based at the very beginning on an $11 billion waste. That is the $11 billion that they are going to hand over to Telstra to buy a perfectly functioning copper wire network and close it down. They are going to spend $11 billion on Telstra’s existing network to close it down. In the whole history of this country, has anyone spent $11 billion on something just to wreck it? That is exactly what this government is doing.

The $43 billion that they are going to spend for starters on the National Broadband Network amounts to some $4,000 for every Australian household. That is just for starters, because then there is the cost of actually using this network. There is one cost that they are very embarrassed about. Because the copper system is going to be closed down, the monthly rental for all those struggling families and pensioners who just want a standard fixed line phone is going to go up from $30 to $60 a month. That is a $30 a month hit on the cost of living and the standard of living of the pensioners and struggling families of this country.

Not only is the National Broadband Network a shocking waste, not only is it going to be more expensive for struggling families, but it is not even going to be all that fast. They are putting in this great big new network to increase speed and then they are going to put in this great big new filter to decrease speed. What kind of madness are we getting from this government, which claims to be economically conservative? The fact of the matter is that, as is increasingly obvious, the Prime Minister and her economic team are out of their depth and they are obviously clueless when it comes to dealing with the Australian economy and with so many other important aspects of government.

Do not just believe me. Already seeping out from behind closed doors are the true feelings of senior members of the Labor Party. There was the comment of former Minister Faulkner that this is a political party which is ‘very long on cunning but very short on courage’. There was the comment of senior Senator Cameron that to get into the caucus these days you just about have to have a lobotomy first. ‘We are zombies,’ he said.

Mr Mitchell interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT—A programmed zombie—he recognises himself in this description! Then of course we had the former leader of the Labor Party, Mark Latham—the man who members opposite asked the Australian people to make Prime Minister of this country, who the current Prime Minister thought was absolutely the best placed person in the whole of the Labor Party to become Prime Minister. What did he say of the current Prime Minister? He said, ‘She is already in the transit lounge out of her current job.’

The coalition, by contrast, has a clear plan. It is a clear plan that gets under the skin of members opposite. Because it gets under their skin, let’s repeat it. The coalition will end the waste, repay the debt, stop the big new taxes and, above all else, stop the boats. We will end the waste by paying school money to school communities, not to out-of-touch bureaucrats. We will end the waste by not proceeding with the $43 billion white elephant and instead investing some $6 billion in improving broadband services in the
areas where the market will not do it. There would have been $11 billion less spending over the forward estimates period under us. There would have been $30 billion less debt under us. There would have been no mining tax. And still, if we have our way, there will be no mining tax, because it is a dagger aimed at the heart of the Australian economy. No responsible economic manager would ever put the most important sector of our economy at risk the way this government is doing. And there will be no carbon tax. There will be no carbon price under this side of the parliament. There will certainly be no carbon price for consumers, because the Australian people are suffering enough cost-of-living pressure as it is under the mismanagement of this government without the additional hit of a carbon price.

What the Australian people will get from this side of parliament when we get our chance in office is real tax reform—lower, simper, fairer taxes; real welfare reform, which will try to ensure that people have a real chance to show what they can do, not just what they cannot do; and real people power, with local communities involved in the running of school hospitals. That is what people will get from this side of the parliament, and unlike members opposite we were upfront and honest about these things before the election. What we say after the election is exactly the same as what we said before the election, unlike members opposite.

We know what is happening on the other side of parliament. This is a government which is paralysed. It is beholden on the one hand to rural Independents and on the other hand to urban Greens. It is torn between the pragmatic operators on the one hand and people who would really rather be in the Greens on the other hand. And the shadow behind every policy change of this government since the election is in fact the Greens. Lurking behind the Prime Minister’s circumlocution are the convictions of Senator Brown, the most powerful man in the Australian parliament now. Let me say in conclusion: Labor might be in government but, as the Australian people are increasingly becoming aware, the Greens are in power.

Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Trade) (3.53 pm)—Australians will recall that after the election the Leader of the Opposition gathered his shadow cabinet together in September and declared in front of the waiting media, ‘We are a government in waiting.’ He expected government then to fall into his lap. He believed that, consistent with the born to rule mentality of the coalition parties, all he had to do was insist that the Independents come on board, because that is what coalition political parties do—they believe they have a natural right to rule. The problem is that the Independents did not accept the edict delivered by the Leader of the Opposition that they had an obligation to join him and to form a government. From that point, the opposition leader spat the dummy out—in a beautiful arc. He spat the dummy out and they have been looking for it ever since. He has been conducting these tantrums day by day, week in, week out because he just cannot believe it happened, that the born to rule mentality of the Liberal Party did not get him up, that the Independents and other members of this parliament did not join him and give him his natural birthright—that is, the position of Prime Minister of Australia. From that moment, when the dummy went out in this beautiful, gorgeous arc, he resolved to seek to wreck, to stop and to destroy any good initiatives in this parliament.

Fortunately, despite all the threats, all the bravado—he was going to stop all of our legislation—he has been unable to stop any of our legislation because our legislation is being assessed by the Independent members of this parliament and they are passing the
legislation, but over the dead bodies of the Leader of the Opposition and those who sit opposite. The opposition leader and the member for Canning say, ‘We are but a heartbeat away from government; it is going to come to us.’ You would think if that were the natural order of things, as they believe it is, then of course they would have some policies. But we had confirmed again today that they have no policies. In place of policies they have three-word slogans. In fact I think they have choir practice. They get together to recite their three-word slogans and if anyone gets it wrong they will be called up to the office and told to stand in the corner and ‘recite our three-word slogans till you get them right’. They had another slogan today. It was so useless, so pathetic, I have forgotten it. But there it was, and we will hear it again and again—and you are going to get the cane from headmaster Abbott if you do not get it right. That is the coalition’s pathetic excuse for policies.

The truth is that this is supposed to be a debate about the economy and about an economic reform program. Let us look at the difficulties that were left for the Australian economy by 12 years of wanton neglect by the coalition. A key indicator of the future prosperity of any country must be the productivity performance of that country, because today’s productivity growth is tomorrow’s prosperity. Eighty per cent of the prosperity increases in income per Australian over the last 40 years is directly attributable to productivity growth. What happened to productivity growth during these 12 desolate years? After the productivity boom of the 1990s, created out of the economic reform program of the Hawke and Keating governments, labour productivity growth averaged 2.1 per cent per annum. During the period of the coalition, average labour productivity growth fell from 2.1 per cent per annum to 1.4 per cent.

Another important measure of productivity is called ‘multifactor productivity growth’. Of course, the opposition leader had no idea what that would mean. It is basically a measure of the ingenuity, innovation and increase in expertise and knowledge of an economy. What happened the last four years of the coalition government? Was it small? Was it zero? That would be bad. No, it was negative. At the end of the period of the previous government, Australia was less productive than it was four years beforehand. The cause of that is the complete absence of a productivity-raising agenda and the consequence was this. This is a diagram which indicates Australia’s productivity growth performance as a percentage of that of the United States, which is regarded as being at the productivity frontier. Members on this side of the parliament will see this boom created by the Labor government—and now, to quote the author of this graph, ‘Relative to the US, Australian labour productivity is back to where it was in 1990.’ It is a desert. We are back to where we started because of the lack of a productivity-raising agenda, and that is what the Australian Labor Party, the Gillard government, is seeking to deal with.

We should not be surprised because, as the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Leader of the Opposition actually said this about health reform: ‘No-one should fret about an unreformed health system.’ He was the health minister for years and he concluded at the end of it that no-one should fret about an unreformed health system. He had no interest in reforming the health system.

Here we were, three booms under the coalition: the first boom was the tech boom, followed by a housing boom, followed by a mining boom. You reckon they would have invested some of the proceeds of three booms into the capacity constraints that were confronting the Australian economy, namely, skill shortages and infrastructure. No, there
was an infrastructure drought in this country and the coalition invested virtually nothing in skills development in this country. The Leader of the Opposition then said, ‘Hold on, we have got a reform program’—by the way, it is three words; you should not be surprised—‘and our reform program is real tax reform.’ When he delivered the Deakin lecture—you might recall when the Prime Minister was talking about economic Hansonism the Leader of the Opposition said, like the Monkees, ‘I am a reformer too; yea look at me I am a reformer’—he said, ‘The most attractive of the Henry recommendations was to increase the tax-free threshold to $25,000 and to have a flat rate from that point to an income of $180,000 a year.’

So here is the opposition leader saying, ‘That’s it, that’s real tax reform, that’s our program.’ The problem was it did not even last two feeds by the shadow Treasurer before he said, ‘Oh, we’ve had a look at it and it’s got hairs on it.’ This did not last two meals from the shadow Treasurer before they dumped their version of real tax reform. It did not last a day. Then, of course, we have heard from the opposition leader today saying, ‘We’ve got a health reform policy—local hospital boards.’ That is it—local hospital boards. That is the health policy. Local hospital boards—how many words is that? It is always three words—have you noticed that?

The truth is that this government is investing in productivity-raising reform issues and agenda items. It is investing in Australia’s education and health systems. We are providing up to 711,000 training places to deal with the acute skills shortage created by the neglect of the coalition when in government. We will be investing in university education, we have the My School website and we have, for the first time, some transparency in the school education system by paying the best teachers to go to the toughest schools. These are very important reforms. By the way, a number of them again are opposed by the coalition. We are investing in innovation—

Mr Fletcher interjecting—

Dr EMERSON—and the member interjecting back there should know something about innovation, but instead he completely opposes the National Broadband Network. We are investing in innovation by converting the 150 per cent R&D tax concession into a direct payment, which is directly useful to small businesses to start up companies.

We are investing in infrastructure, after that infrastructure drought of the previous government. The government’s $22.5 billion nation-building plan for the future, which was announced in the 2009-10 budget, includes an investment of $8½ billion in expanding Australia’s transport networks—our roads and rail infrastructure. And, of course, we are opening the economy wider to competition and cutting back on the wasteful and duplicative regulation that has created in Australia not one single market but up to eight markets, and that is by reforming business regulation in this country. That is something that the previous coalition never did, and it got to the point where the Business Council of Australia described, in relation to the previous coalition government, the ‘creeping reregulation of business’. Then they said, ‘We will do something about this business regulation.’ So they went to COAG. Katie Lahey from the Business Council of Australia was talking about the 10 regulatory hotspots they were supposed to be working on and she said, ‘They must have been so hot they burned a hole through the paper and it fell to the floor and we have never seen them since.’ That is the neglect of the previous government. What we are doing is reforming in 27 different areas of business regulation, with 12 of those already completed. These
are the sorts of reforms that we are investing in. We are ensuring, with a two-speed economy, that we ease the capacity constraints in our ports by investing in infrastructure. Some of that investment will come out of the mining tax, which again is opposed by the coalition.

Coalition members in the last few days have been saying, 'This terrible economic report out from the OECD completely damns the National Broadband Network.' Let us have a look at what it actually says about the National Broadband Network:

Management of the new network by a public enterprise not involved in commercial activities ensures that private operators accessing the NBN will each get fair treatment on the basis of uniform nationwide pricing. Lastly, the government’s programme will avoid the risk of a geographic digital divide insofar as it will cover the entire population. Public involvement could be important where private firms are not prepared to invest if they were compelled to make the networks available to their competitors. What is more, if private capital were deployed it would probably be done gradually and limited, at least at first, to the most densely populated areas.

That is a description of the 20 plans that the coalition have hatched. They never implemented one in 12 years of government and have never been able to stick to one in three and a bit years of opposition—20 different plans, all designed to deprive regional Australia of high-quality, high-speed broadband.

While we are on the OECD report, it goes on to say that under this government the rise in unemployment was relatively modest, partly because many firms reduced hours of work rather than jobs to forestall potential skills shortages which had occurred in the past. What it is describing here is a flexible labour market—that is, under the legislation where we tore up Work Choices and introduced instead a fair but flexible industrial relations system. On the stimulus, which is criticised again by the opposition leader today and has been previously, he said that we should not have gone into deficit at all. It would have devastated jobs in Australia if there had been no deficit, because up to $200 billion was wiped off the revenue. Presumably, the Leader of the Opposition’s policy prescription, when you lose $200 billion, is to find $200 billion in cuts. That would have devastated the Australian economy.

But he is never true to his word, because when he goes to the election what does he do? He brings to the election, on polling day, an $11 billion black hole. Here is an opposition leader who says, ‘We, the coalition, are for lower taxes.’ If you look at taxation as a share of GDP, they were, between 2002 and 2007, the highest-taxing government in Australia’s history. And what is the centrepiece of his election policy? It is paid parental leave funded by a great big new tax on everything you buy.

This is the truth: the coalition always talks about cutting taxes but never does it. They are the champions of higher taxation, they are complete frauds and they are sloganeers. In a few short words: go back to your choirs and go back to your recitation, because we will get on with the economic reform program that this country deserves.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (4.08 pm)—This matter of public importance has been raised by the coalition to highlight the vacuum in leadership at the head of the government and the vacuum of ideas and policies at the heart of the government, culminating in the government’s failure to deliver an economic plan for Australia. This government is in the grip of a policy drift—aimless and directionless. It is drifting and—forgive the pun—it is rudderless in more ways than one. It is staggering, stumbling along with no plan for the economy and no plan for the future.
As I said, this matter of public importance was raised by the coalition, but it could so easily have been brought on by Labor itself. Over the past few weeks, we have been the beneficiaries of an insider’s guide to how Labor is faring in government. An array of ministers and former ministers and powerbrokers and former powerbrokers and would-be powerbrokers, Labor insiders all, have given their sober assessments of the Prime Minister and her government. Here is just a small example of the comments and, boy, do I want to read these into Hansard for posterity’s sake! These are the words of Labor’s soothsayers. First, here is Senator Doug Cameron, on what it is like to be a member of the Labor caucus:

It seems to be like having a political lobotomy. You know you are actually your brain is just ripped apart. You can’t think about things. You are not allowed to talk about things and really, you know, we don’t want zombie politicians.

That is a rather uncharitable description of the Labor members of parliament but, hey, who are we to argue with Senator Cameron? Senator Cameron knows and calls it as he sees it. This is a government of hollow people.

Senator John Faulkner, a well-respected figure within Labor circles, opined:

Modern Labor is struggling with the perception we are very long on cunning, and very short on courage. All the political cunning in the world can’t substitute for courage, for leadership.

Hear, hear, Senator Faulkner!

Minister Combet, busily presenting his leadership credentials to all who will listen, said:

… good policy based upon sound values should not be subordinated to research about community opinion …

He is slagging off at their obsession with focus groups. He went on:

… we have a responsibility to lead, not follow.

That was his plaintive cry to the Prime Minister.

Paul Howes, the union boss, also presenting his leadership credentials—he is not even in parliament, but watch this space; it is only a matter of time—gave his considered view:

I think Labor is going through a hard time at the moment. I think federally we are still yet to determine what that new direction is, what that new ideal and aim is for our movement …

He went on to say:

Swings to the Greens and the disillusionment of the ALP base were caused by Labor’s ‘unwillingness to provide real leadership’.

What a damning assessment of the current and former prime ministers.

Then we had former cabinet minister Graham Richardson, clearly a godfather figure to many in the Labor Party. These were his words on their decision to go to an election early:

I told them ‘don’t do this’ because there was no Julia Gillard agenda. There was just a Rudd agenda which she would continue on in an election campaign which I thought was a pretty bad idea. We had to get away from the Rudd agenda. People are tired of that; people didn’t believe it any more.

But then he muses on what would have happened had Labor run its full term. He said:

Where I may have been wrong, however, is we would have been having an election now, and, if there is a weakness in the Gillard government, it’s there still isn’t an agenda. I think, four or five months on there’s still no agenda. There needs to be one; there needs to be one pretty quickly.

So say all Australians. The government has no agenda.

But the award for prescience goes to former Labor leader Mark Latham, the man the current Prime Minister fervently believed would be the best person to lead this nation as Prime Minister. He said on 24 June, the day after former Prime Minister Rudd was
toppled by the current Prime Minister, that the ALP:

... is a poll-driven party and there will be nothing—

no new policies, he means—

in the coming months ... The modern Labor Party is so focused on polling, so focused on marketing ... it has given up on getting these reforms through.

And referring to the current Prime Minister, he warned her to be careful and to watch her back because, he said, when the polls fall ‘she will be the next one for the knife’.

It is four months on and his words are hauntingly prescient. Political history shows that new leaders and new governments invariably receive a honeymoon period, basking in positive media and positive opinion polls. The Australian people give them a go. Not this government—the honeymoon period for this Prime Minister, this government, is well and truly over. Its brevity must be a record. Newspoll shows the polling for Labor and the Prime Minister to be about the same, in some instances worse, than the polls that led to the downfall of Prime Minister Rudd. So the sharks are circling and the Labor Party frontbench is lining up to knife the Prime Minister in the back.

But let us hear the words of the Prime Minister herself, which reveal the totality of her thoughts on key economic issues such as population and managing the budget. I ask members in the House, members of the press gallery and members of the viewing public to ponder these gems from the lips of the current Prime Minister. On population planning, she said:

... moving forward means moving forward with plans to build a sustainable Australia ...

On the budget—these are her words—she said:

Moving forward means moving forward with budget surpluses ...

Seriously, this is the leader of our nation, with all the rhetorical flourish of a dead cat. No wonder the sharks are circling. It is clear the Prime Minister lives in a parallel universe where brain-numbing repetition substitutes for plain speaking. It is little wonder Senator Cameron feels he has been subjected to a political lobotomy. It is no wonder he says Labor is full of zombies. The cliches, the slogans and the repetition from the leader are clearly inhibiting thought and debate within Labor. I am sure many viewers would feel that their minds are being ‘ripped apart’, to quote Senator Cameron, when they listen to the non-answers from the Prime Minister to questions in question time.

In the context of this MPI and the failure of the government to deliver a plan for managing Australia’s economy, let us have a look at the Prime Minister’s track record. It is not a track record of achievement; it is a track record of failure—no redemption in sight; even if there is a policy idea, it is going nowhere. The Prime Minister’s three-word slogan of a ‘regional processing centre’—her answer to the growing number of boat people—has been ridiculed by her own side and rebuffed by the parliament of East Timor, the very nation that she insists must host her thought bubble. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan has been delayed. The national curriculum has been rejected by New South Wales and will be delayed. The cash-for-clunkers policy has been ridiculed and delayed. The citizens assembly, thankfully, has disappeared. And 2½ years ago the Treasurer announced a root-and-branch tax reform policy review. Nearly 12 months ago, the government received the report from Dr Henry, and apart from the mining tax in its original form not one other reform has been put in place. The Henry report has been virtually ignored by this government—so much for its credentials on tax reform.
We must remember that this was the Prime Minister who said: 'The government has lost its way. We must dump the mining tax.' She dumped the mining tax, fixed it with three out of the 3,000 miners and it is now unravelling. This is the Prime Minister who said that we had to walk away from an emissions trading scheme and convinced Prime Minister Rudd of that fateful decision. She promised before the election that there would be no carbon tax. Now a carbon tax is on the table. This is the Prime Minister who said—her own words—that she would ‘stop the boats’. She introduced her East Timor regional processing centre—a three-word slogan. It will not happen. Everyone in the region knows it. She has wasted valuable time on her overseas trips flogging the dead horse of her regional processing centre.

It is quite clear to whom Senator Faulkner was referring when he said:
All the political cunning in the world can’t substitute for courage, for leadership.

He was referring to the current Prime Minister. He was referring to this government, a government that in four short months has lost any credibility, any respectability and any legitimacy for the Labor Party. It is a disgrace.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (4.18 pm)—I rise with pleasure to talk on this matter of public importance, the issue of economic reform in the Australian economy. The previous speaker, the shadow minister, quoted various people’s words. I will cite some words back to her that I think summarise the approach from those opposite on this issue, and that is the statement by the current Leader of the Opposition that he actually had no interest in the economy, no interest in economic reform. There are very few topics that can be debated in the national parliament of this country that are of more significance to the long-term welfare of the people of this country than economic reform. It is the foundation of prosperity for the next generation. As members of parliament, it is a responsibility that we carry in this place to lay the foundations for the next generation to live at least with the lifestyles to which we have been accustomed and hopefully to improve those. The standard of the debate that we have had from those opposite on this MPI is pretty disappointing within that context and pretty disappointing all around. The Leader of the Opposition spent a great deal of his speech attacking, on a political basis, aspects of our party and aspects of internal discussions within our party. But at the end of the day that does not address the issue of what he stands for, his vision for where this nation should go. It might be a bit of fun for him, it might be some cheap political points, but it actually reflects the reason that his address on this MPI was so sadly lacking and, even more seriously, let down the people of this nation. He did not once, in the whole 15 minutes, outline his own vision of where this nation should go and what the economic reforms are that are required to take us into the future.

I remind members opposite of the situation that we were facing in 2007 as we went into the election. We had had 10 interest rate rises in a row. People were paying higher interest rates than they are paying today. Why was that? There had been significant ongoing warnings about the inflationary pressures in our economy that were putting pressures on interest rates. The Reserve Bank itself had been warning about the blockages in our economy that were creating inflationary pressures. Significantly, the two of those that were most important were infrastructure bottlenecks and skills shortages. We were being lobbied consistently by people like the Australian Industry Group and the Business Council about the problems that were occurring and the growing pressures in the econ-
omy arising from those two significant reform areas that were not being addressed. As a result of that, we went into the 2007 election with an economic plan to take some serious action on infrastructure investment and skills development. That is what we have been working on over the time since the 2007 election—significant new investment in the traditional forms of infrastructure: access to rail, development of our ports, improvements to the national road network. All of that is significant for my region and those of many of my colleagues in the House. These things are important drivers of regional development and growth and, because of that, economic development and growth for the nation.

Beyond that, we understand that there is now a need for the next generation of infrastructure: the fibre-to-the-home network that will be the foundation of the National Broadband Network. The Leader of the Opposition said that wireless is the way to go and that mobile is the way to go. I suggest to him that if he does not understand that the two technologies sit side by side and in many ways fill very different purposes then he needs to go back and do a bit more research on the issue of communications infrastructure. Mobile broadband will of course play a significant role in people’s futures. But the foundation to create a more productive economy—the support, for example, of the thousands of home based businesses that exist in all of our electorates—requires fibre-to-the-home fast broadband access. That is what will transform many of our regional economies.

In my own area, 20,000 people commute to work a day who do not do a seven- or eight-hour work day but who do a 12-hour work day because of the amount of travel that has to be added to their day. Then you can add on the social costs that that has to our community. They cannot train the kids football team in the evening because they are not home early enough; they cannot participate in volunteer activities in the community. Then there is the lost expenditure in their communities, which is a direct economic cost to us as a region. They are more likely to shop in Sydney if they are working there.

A lot of those jobs are what you would call back office jobs. They are jobs in finance and HR. They are jobs that, with safe, reliable and secure broadband to their homes, could be done from home for significant periods of the week—it might not be all week; they might go to Sydney on Monday and Friday and work from home in the middle of the week. That capacity to transform our regional economies will be driven on the back of the provision of fibre-to-the-home technology. So it will benefit not just the small businesses that operate from home in my electorate; it will benefit the commuters. They will have a significant change to the way in which they can live and work.

I look at my grandfather’s generation, who were generally living in an area in which they could almost walk to work because that is how you had to live your life. Then I look at where we are now, where, through the transformation of transport infrastructure, people take jobs much further from home. Is it that hard to envisage a next stage of growth for our economy that can release people from those ties and allow them to work and develop businesses from their homes? It is already happening in our communities. The National Broadband Network will be the foundation for transforming the way that we live in the modern world.

It is pretty sad if the Leader of the Opposition cannot begin to comprehend that. However, I hope that is what it is. I hope that it is not just that he is opposing it because he feels that the way to move his leadership to this side of the House is to simply tear down
everything that this side of the House puts up. This should be something that we all are committed to in order to transform our economy. We have a plan for it.

I also want to take up the point that the Leader of the Opposition raised about the fact that if he were on this side that there would be no mining tax and no carbon tax. As I indicated in question time today when I asked the Prime Minister a question about the climate change issue, I come from a regional economy that was built on the back of coal mining and steel. They are still significant and important components within our economy. But one of the great strengths of the Illawarra region is the capacity that we have to diversify and to take our traditional industries and to value add to them. For example, BlueScope Steel now makes a lot of water tanks and the infrastructure for renewable energies. They are diversifying to be part of the new economy. Particularly under the Hawke and Keating governments, we also expanded the growth of the University of Wollongong. That has driven the economy of our region into becoming much more diversified.

If you want to diversify and increase the productivity of your economy to create new employment opportunities for the next generation then you have to make sure that the boom that you experience on the back of your minerals is transformed into investments in long-term projects that can be part of the transformation of our economy. That is what the mining tax is about. We need to take the boom period of minerals and ensure that we use that to diversify our economic base. I would suggest that particularly the reforms to superannuation are an important part of that. When I was on the economics committee in the parliament before the previous one, chaired by the previous member for Cook, there was a great understanding on both sides that the boom in the mining economy needed to be developed and utilised for the good of all Australians in diversifying the base of our economy. That is reform; that is a plan for reform in our economy.

The same applies to the carbon tax. Tackling the challenge of the world moving to a carbon constrained future means realising that there is not just a cost in not taking action but a cost in losing the initiative in creating the new opportunities in the world economy by being a leader in these technologies and being a leader in transformation. We need to be able to export to the world the expertise and the innovation that Australians are so famous for when it comes to new manufacturing and mining technology. Wherever our traditional base is, we are good at finding answers and solutions. I have faith that this country can do that and that will in fact be the foundation for new growth and new opportunities. That is a plan for the future of our economy. (Time expired)

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (4.28 pm)—On the day that the Prime Minister completed her leadership coup, she said that the Labor government had lost its way. Six months later, they are still lost. They are absolutely lost. There was once a TV series called Lost. It went on for years, seemingly an endless saga. As the only Australian member of parliament to have been mentioned in that program, I think that I have a right to speak with some authority on this subject today. We have seen the TV show; now we have the government: lost. Nothing better describes this government than the word ‘lost’. It lost its way and it has no idea how to find a solution.

The Prime Minister made the blunt and very factual admission that the Labor administration lost its way sometime between 2007 and 2010. In fact, I am not sure that it
ever found its way at the beginning, but cer-
tainly it had lost its way by the time the Prime Minister made the great confession. Now, after another four or five months of searching since she became the leader and made that statement, Labor still has not found what it is looking for. It still has no idea where it is going. I am not even sure that Labor knows what it is looking for. It is a poll driven party that knows how to stay in office, even if it has to hand away all the power to its masters in the Greens. It stays in office, and that is all that Labor is about—never about delivering any kind of vision or making any of the good policy decisions that need to be made. There is never anything in the national interest, there is no direction, there is no vision, there is no commitment, there are no core values and there is no plan. The government is completely lost. There is no mojo. There is no soul. This is a party that is lost and that knows not where to go. This is not governing. This is, in fact, struggling around to find a path out—except the government wants to maintain the trappings of office.

This is also a government that, sadly, is not honest. It was not honest with the Australian people before the last election. The Rudd government was infamous for its long list of broken promises, but Labor has not learnt. This government is also about broken promises, with no regard for the commitments it made to the Australian people before the election. If there was one statement that the Prime Minister handed out—repeatedly said, in plain, simple language—it was that there would be no carbon tax while she was Prime Minister. She also said that there would be no emissions tax while she was Prime Minister, under her government. There would be no carbon tax. But since the election they can talk about practically nothing else. The previous speaker, the member for Cunningham, spoke almost entirely about an emissions trading scheme and about a carbon tax. Does she not believe what her leader said just before the election—that there was not going to be a carbon tax? Why is anyone on the opposite side even talking about it? The Prime Minister said that there will not be a carbon tax.

All questions from the government today, in their dorothy dixers, were about the carbon tax that Labor promised they were not going to have—that they promised they were not going to deliver. Does this government have any honesty, any credibility or any decency at all? The reality is that they made empty promises to try to beguile the Australian people, when in reality there was always this agenda. There was no concern for real people, no concern about the impacts of what Labor was actually going to deliver through its carbon tax. They said there would be no carbon tax, but now it is their priority issue and they can talk about little else. It has taken only days for the government to break their core election promise. They told the pensioners, they told the small business people and they told the employers of Australia, ‘We will not impose a carbon tax on you while Julia Gillard is Prime Minister.’ Yet now the government can talk and think about nothing else.

There was going to be a 150-member committee to devise a new climate change policy, with one member chosen from every electorate—from the phone book or some other way. Then there was going to be a committee of parliamentarians, but only those people who were for a carbon tax could actually be on it—a carbon tax that they were not even going to have. So why, indeed, have the committee? Now we are going to have PC inquiry committee reports and all sorts of other things. This is a government that cannot be trusted, because it cannot be taken at its word.
The Prime Minister said in question time today that she wants a truthful debate about a carbon tax. How can she ask for a truthful debate on a carbon tax when she has not been truthful? She promised that there would be no carbon tax, and now we hear little more from the government than about how they are going to implement it, in what way and how expensive it is going to be for Australian people. This is a government that surely has failed. In fact, the Prime Minister herself said, on 18 September, that she could not honour all her election promises because of a changed environment. She was publicly walking away from the promises she had made only a few days earlier.

This government has particularly failed in managing the economy, and that matters for the Australian people because we have to pick up the costs. It is hard work. It is something that the previous government did well and received a lot of credit for. We inherited, when we came to government last time, what seemed to be an incredible and almost insurmountable debt of $93 billion and record budget deficits, with no plan in sight to enable us to repay that debt. But we worked on it, and we delivered. We delivered budget surpluses, we delivered good economic times and we delivered interest rates which were, on average, lower than those that this Labor government has delivered since it has been in office. Indeed, Labor has only one policy proposal. As the Leader of the Opposition said, their economic strategy is to borrow, waste and tax. That is the way Labor behaved in government the previous time they were in office, and they are going down the same path again: borrow, waste and tax.

The Australian people are looking for something better than that. They want a sense of direction. I welcome the fact that a few courageous figures within the Labor movement are beginning to speak out. Senator Doug Cameron, a stalwart of the Left, branded his fellow MPs as zombies—people who would not speak out. There were a number of regional MPs who would not speak out on behalf of their electorates during the last election, and they are not here today. We have the member for Dawson and the member for Flynn in the parliament because the previous members for those electorates would not speak out against the evils of Labor’s emissions trading scheme, and their electorates passed judgment upon them. The reality is that we do not want people who will just sit like zombies, not prepared to make any contribution to the policy debate. Frankly, the people on the back bench could not possibly be any worse than those on the front when it comes to actually delivering policies and actually delivering results.

Paul Howes was another to speak his mind, when he said Labor’s election losses resulted from an ‘unwillingness to provide real leadership’. There is no willingness, there is no ability, because this government is simply lost; it is paralysed. The only thing it is good at is spending money. The month of September saw our deficit grow to $13.8 billion, the highest monthly blow-out on record. During the election campaign we used to talk of Labor borrowing $100 million a day. In September our government had to borrow $400 million every day, to pay for the excess of its expenditure over what it was raising. So if you were in small business and you wanted to borrow some money from the banks during September to keep your business afloat you were competing with a government that wanted $400 million on that same day so that it could keep afloat. And the government wanted another $400 million the next day. So if you were a homeowner and went into the bank the next day, you also had to compete against a government that needed $400 million just to stay afloat. Is it any wonder that interest rates are going up? Is it any wonder that the banks complain
about their cost of borrowing going up? The government is out of control—its waste, borrowing and taxing policy is what is driving up interest rates and placing an enormous burden on ordinary Australians.

We need some people who will stand up, who will make decisions, and we need people who understand what is going on in our country. We need some people who care about the livelihoods of families, and you will not find those in Labor. This government has sunk to a new level. It is truly lost. (Time expired)

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (4.38 pm)—In rising to speak on this matter of public importance I want to make three points to the House today. Firstly, the strength of the Australian economy is testament to Labor’s good economic management. Secondly, Labor is committed to economic reform in the future. Thirdly, that those opposite have no commitment to economic reform.

Let us turn first to the strength of the Australian economy and Labor’s track record. When it came to dealing with the global downturn, Labor delivered household payments to low-income households and much-needed infrastructure to everyone. It is unclear whether the coalition would have done anything at all in response to the greatest global downturn since the Great Depression. But if they had, it probably would have been tax cuts for the rich. In contrast, Labor’s strategy was exactly what international groups such as the G20, the OECD and the IMF recommended: ‘timely, targeted and temporary’ fiscal stimulus. We should always be trying to get the level of unemployment below what it is today, but we can be proud of our successes. There would be another 200,000 unemployed Australians today were it not for the fiscal stimulus that the Labor government put in place. We did that with remarkably little debt. Australia’s net debt will peak at six per cent of GDP in 2011-12. By contrast, the average net debt of the G7 countries is expected to peak at nearly 100 per cent of GDP.

Moreover, our debt load has at least as much to do with revenue falls as it has to do with spending increases. The global financial crisis stripped $110 billion out of the budget. Anyone who argues that we should not have taken on a small amount of debt to accommodate this is effectively saying that when the global financial crisis came we should have cut spending or raised tax rates. If that is the position they are taking, it is up to them to tell us which programs they would have cut and which taxes they would have raised.

But when it comes to talking about the current state of the Australian economy, don’t just take my word for it. Let us look at the Reserve Bank minutes of 2 November, just released, which note:

The labour market remained strong.

They go on to say:
Consumer sentiment remained at a high level …

And further:
Business conditions remained generally favourable …

Or we can look at the latest OECD report on Australia, which begins with the opening paragraph:

The Australian economy has been one of the most resilient in the OECD during the global economic and financial crisis.

It then says:
The strong policy response and encouraging outlook restored confidence rapidly, and exit from the stimulus is underway.

Historically, Labor can claim credit for many of Australia’s major economic reforms. The Curtin government put in place uniform personal income taxation and laid the foundations for a post-war full employment pol-
icy. The Whitlam government implemented universal health insurance and began the process of lowering Australia’s tariff walls. Hawke floated the dollar and negotiated the accord. Keating introduced the superannuation guarantee and enterprise bargaining. It is timely to note that many of these reforms were opposed at the time by the coalition. Labor has always been committed to economic reform. This Labor government stands committed to a new wave of economic reform in the future. In her speech in Brisbane, on 12 October 2010, the Prime Minister said:

In Government, we must walk the reform road every day, and minority Government is no excuse.

The Prime Minister then went on to set out the new agenda for economic reform. She went through five important aspects of the modern economic reform agenda: the most significant fiscal consolidation in at least 50 years, with a budget back in surplus by 2013. They included:

… cutting the company tax rate to make our businesses more competitive; better sharing the benefits of our commodity boom; superannuation reform to lift national savings and support domestic investment …

… investing in roads, rail and ports, and the National Broadband Network to build productivity and economic capacity …

And then in relation to the critical reforms in education, she said, ‘Taking the market based tools that have made our financial and industrial capital so much more productive and applying them to schools, providing choice, information and incentive structures.’ She went on, ‘Our structural reforms will drive efficiency across the hospital system. Instead of states receiving block grants, hospitals will receive activity funding.’ That is fundamental economic reform in the modern age and sets the Gillard Labor government squarely in the great Labor tradition of economic reform.

Finally, it is important to refer to the position that those opposite take when it comes to economic reform. The Leader of the Opposition has been reported as saying that economics is a bore. It is as though he thinks that saving Australian jobs, improving our tax system and dealing with climate change are all sideshows to the main game: coming up with a snappy, three-word slogan for the evening news.

And, worse, the Leader of the Opposition does not even seem to have bothered to understand Economics 101. In February, he told ABC Radio National:

… in New Zealand they have tried to reform their way through the global financial crisis under the new government’s leadership and they seem to be doing pretty well.

Actually, New Zealand’s unemployment rate at the time was seven per cent compared to Australia’s five per cent. If we had had New Zealand’s unemployment rate, we would have had another 200,000 jobless. As respected economic commentator Peter Hartcher put it:

The opposition leader has shown that he can’t tell a kiwi from a kangaroo, a plus from a minus, wreckage from recovery.

There were a series of Superman comics, and one of the characters in those Superman comics was Bizarro. Bizarro was an ‘imperfect duplicate’ of the Man of Steel. His face resembled white faceted stone, and he said things like, ‘Me am going away now.’ Eventually, Bizarro settled on his own planet and peopled it with thousands of imperfect duplicates of himself, Lois Lane, and the rest of the Superman family. The Bizarro code was:

Us do the opposite of all Earthly things! Us hate beauty! Us love ugliness! Is a big crime to make anything perfect on Bizarro World!

Today, the coalition is taking us into Bizarro world economics. In Bizarro world, the party of the right does not believe in free markets.
Its shadow finance minister does not like floating exchange rates, its shadow Treasurer wants to reregulate interest rates, and the opposition leader does not believe in a market mechanism to tackle climate change. It is Bizarro world all right: ‘Us hate markets. Us love regulation.’ Of course, the Leader of the Opposition has form on this. In the Adelaide Review in November 1994, he said:

The floating dollar remains an article of faith with the leadership of both main parties notwithstanding its exceedingly dubious outcome for Australia and the damming verdict of the Economist magazine … that the experiment with floating exchange rates had failed and it was time to return to pegged rates.

I have taken a keen interest in a certain aspect of the first speeches in this parliament. As an economist, I am interested in what new members of parliament have to say about economics. I could not help noticing an interesting fact, which is that the first speeches from this side of the parliament have been much more pro-market than those from the other side of the parliament. The member for Chifley referred with pride to the trade liberalisation that took place under Labor. The member for Canberra talked about the over-regulation of the Indian economy and her pride as a small-business worker. The member for Greenway referred to her background as a corporate lawyer working on telecommunications, competition and broadcasting laws.

On the other side of the House, we had a clear demonstration of what those opposite think about markets. The member for Rivervina said in his first speech that Australian agriculture ‘needs protection—fair trade rather than free trade’. The member for Flynn said that the fishing industry required assistance and should not be swamped with imports. The member for Aston said that he did not believe the taxes on binge drinking, pollution or congestion had any impact on behaviour. And the member for Dawson said: I believe income tax should go.

This is despite the fact that the income tax is generally regarded as one of our most efficient taxes. In the interests of time, I will skip over on this occasion some rather unorthodox views about economies of scale from the member for Hughes and some particularly unusual views about how capital markets work from the member for Forde.

Like the US Republicans, the coalition are increasingly becoming a party of conservatism, not a party of liberalism. The result is that there is only one party in this House any longer committed to economic reform, and that is the Australian Labor Party.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganias)—Order! The discussion is now concluded.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Referred to Main Committee

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (4.48 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the International Financial Institutions Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

Question agreed to.
Tuesday, 16 November 2010

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2531

VETERANS’ AFFAIRS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WEEKLY PAYMENTS) BILL 2010
NATIONAL SECURITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010
PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT BILL 2010
HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (2010 BUDGET MEASURES) BILL 2010
SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH JOBS) BILL 2010

Returned from the Senate

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

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (FEE-HELP LOAN FEE) BILL 2010

Report from Main Committee

Bill returned from Main Committee for further consideration; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 15 November, on motion by Mr Garrett:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Trade) (4.50 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

COMMITTEES

Regional Australia Committee

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georgas)—Mr Speaker has received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip nominating changes in the membership of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia.

Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Trade) (4.50 pm)—by leave—I move:

That Mr Haase be discharged from the Standing Committee on Regional Australia and that, in his place, Dr Stone be appointed a member of the committee; and Ms Ley and Mr Secker be appointed supplementary members of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia for the purpose of the committee’s inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in regional Australia.

Question agreed to.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (COMPETITION AND CONSUMER SAFEGUARDS) BILL 2010

Consideration resumed from 15 November.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (4.52 pm)—by leave—We have a series of amendments here of which notice has been given. I will be seeking leave in a moment to move the amendments in groups. For the ease of honourable members, in the amendment they are referred to under the headings spectrum and pay TV, disallowance of instruments, competition, procedural fairness and merits review. Those are the sections that we are referring to. We can deal with all of those as a group. I seek leave to move the following amendments together. They are amendments (1) to (17), (24), (33) to (40), (43), (45) to (57), (64) and (65), as have been circulated in my name.

Leave granted.
Mr Turnbull—I move:

(1) Schedule 1, before item 1, page 4 (line 5),
omit the heading (Act name).

(2) Schedule 1, item 1 to 5, page 4 (lines 6 to
24), omit the items.

(3) Schedule 1, item 6, page 5 (lines 2 to 5),
omit the item.

(4) Schedule 1, items 11 to 15, page 5 (line 22)
to page 6 (line 19), omit the items.

(5) Schedule 1, item 17, page 6 (lines 27 and
28), omit "", 577CD or 577ED".

(6) Schedule 1, item 17, page 6 (lines 29 and
30), omit the note, substitute:

Note: Section 577AD deals with an
undertaking given by Telstra.

(7) Schedule 1, item 18, page 7 (lines 1 to 6),
omit the item.

(8) Schedule 1, item 19, page 7 (lines 10 and
11), omit "", 577CD or 577ED".

(9) Schedule 1, item 19, page 7 (lines 12 and
13), omit the note, substitute:

Note: Section 577AD deals with an
undertaking given by Telstra.

(10) Schedule 1, item 21, page 7 (lines 18 to 23),
omit the item.

(11) Schedule 1, item 22, page 7 (lines 27 and
28), omit "", 577CD or 577ED".

(12) Schedule 1, item 23, page 7 (lines 31 and
32), omit the note, substitute:

Note 1A: Section 577AD deals with an
undertaking given by Telstra.

(13) Schedule 1, items 24 and 25, page 8 (lines 1
to 8), omit the items.

(14) Schedule 1, item 26, page 8 (lines 12 and
13), omit "", 577CD or 577ED".

(15) Schedule 1, item 27, page 8 (lines 16 and
17), omit the note, substitute:

Note 1A: Section 577AD deals with an
undertaking given by Telstra.

(16) Schedule 1, items 28 and 29, page 8 (lines
18 to 25), omit the items.

(17) Schedule 1, item 30, page 9 (lines 5 to 24),
omit the outline box, substitute:

* Telstra may give an undertaking about
structural separation.
* The undertaking comes into force when
it is accepted by the ACCC.

(18) Schedule 1, item 30, page 14 (lines 32 and
33), omit subparagraphs (vii) and (viii).

(19) Schedule 1, item 30, page 35 (line 26) to
page 44 (line 24), omit Division 3 and 4.

(20) Schedule 1, item 30, page 44 (lines 29), omit
"", 577C or 577E".

(21) Schedule 1, item 30, page 46 (line 4) to page
52 (line 2), omit Division 6.

(22) Schedule 1, item 30, page 52 (line 7), omit
paragraph (a).

(23) Schedule 1, item 30, page 52 (line 8), omit
“another”, substitute “a”.

(24) Schedule 1, item 30, page 53 (line 20), after
“control of” insert “a telecommunications
network if”.

(25) Schedule 1, item 30, page 53 (lines 21 to
22), omit paragraphs (a) and (b).

(26) Schedule 1, item 30, page 53 (line 23), omit
“if”.

(27) Schedule 1, item 31, page 70 (line 18) to
page 75 (line 26), omit Part 10.

(28) Schedule 1, item 36, page 76 (line 16), omit
"", 577C or 577E".

(29) Schedule 1, item 36, page 76 (line 18), omit
“Note 1”, substitute “Note”.

(30) Schedule 1, item 36, page 76 (lines 20 to
23), omit Notes 2 and 3.

(31) Schedule 1, item 38, page 77 (line 7), omit
"", 577C or 577E".

(32) Schedule 1, item 39, page 77 (line 17), omit
"", 577C or 577E".

(33) Schedule 1, item 39, page 77 (line 19), omit
“Note 1”, substitute “Note”.

(34) Schedule 1, item 39, page 77 (lines 21 to
24), omit Notes 2 and 3.

(35) Schedule 1, item 74, page 87 (line 26), omit
"", 577C or 577E".
(53) Schedule 1, item 93, page 94 (line 7), omit “, 577C or 577E”.
(54) Schedule 1, item 96, page 95 (line 12), omit “, 577C or 577E”.
(55) Schedule 1, item 102, page 96 (line 13), omit “, 577C or 577E”.
(56) Schedule 1, item 107, page 97 (line 28), omit “, 577C or 577E”.
(57) Schedule 1, item 113, page 100 (line 18), omit “, 577C or 577E”.
(64) Schedule 1, item 249, page 194 (line 28), omit “, 577CD or 577ED”.
(65) Schedule 1, item 249, page 195 (lines 1 and 2), omit subparagraph (iv).

These amendments serve to remove the ‘gun at the head’ provisions of the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2010 which provide ministerial discretion to bar Telstra from bidding for next-generation 4G wireless spectrum, via a disallowable instrument. These provisions are profoundly offensive. They are designed to force a private company which was sold to the public as an integrated telecommunications company by the Commonwealth to take, under extreme pressure, certain actions to restructure its own business.

As honourable members are aware, we support the structural separation of the network business of Telstra from the retail business. That separation can obviously be achieved ideally structurally or alternatively voluntarily, but it should be done in a way where it is plainly in the interests of Telstra shareholders to do so. It should not be done at the point of a gun. These provisions threaten Telstra with being forced to divest its HFC pay-TV cable assets and/or its 50 per cent interest in Foxtel if it does not voluntarily structurally separate in a way acceptable to the government. There is nothing voluntary about it. As I said earlier, we are moving these amendments as a single group for drafting reasons largely so that the consequential changes to the bill are consistent.

The government have claimed that they would not be able to get a deal with Telstra without holding a gun to its head. The fact that they justify this extraordinary means by reference to the end of achieving a transaction that creates a massive government monopoly just shows the extent to which this is truly an abuse of the government’s power. These amendments would serve to remove those provisions that hold the gun to the head. The most significant among them are those that are at items 30, 33 and 35, which remove a number of divisions and sections from the bill. I commend them to the House.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (4.56 pm)—The government opposes these amendments to the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2010 and we do so for very good and practical reasons. These amendments moved by the coalition relate to spectrum and undertakings about hybrid fibre coaxial networks and subscription television broadcasting licences. The shadow minister referred to these provisions as the so-called “guns to Telstra’s head”. The coalition’s amendments are not necessary as the so-called “guns to Telstra’s head” have been removed in the bill. There is no longer an automatic prohibition on the acquisition of spectrum if Telstra does not structurally separate and divest its interest in its HFC network and Foxtel. The bill has been amended to give Telstra sufficient regulatory certainty to take a firm proposal to its shareholders to do so. It should not be done at the point of a gun. These provisions threaten Telstra with being forced to divest its HFC pay-TV cable assets and/or its 50 per cent interest in Foxtel if it does not voluntarily structurally separate in a way acceptable to the government. There is nothing voluntary about it. As I said earlier, we are moving these amendments as a single group for drafting reasons largely so that the consequential changes to the bill are consistent.

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Foxtel and its hybrid fibre coaxial cable network. In the event that Telstra does not proceed with structural separation, the minister could take into account Telstra’s ownership of Foxtel and HFC networks in determining whether to use the powers in the bill to prevent Telstra from acquiring certain spectrum to address Telstra’s power in telecommunications markets.

I find it somewhat extraordinary that here we have a situation where Telstra itself, the company, is no longer out there campaigning saying, ‘This is a big priority, we’ve got to remove these provisions from the bill,’ and yet the opposition seem determined to continue to persist with trying to remove these provisions, the excluded spectrum regime, from this legislation. Frankly, it defies logic when the company involved, whilst of course it would like to operate in a way which was free of constraints on regulation, as most corporate entities would in an ideal world for them, has accepted that the government have acted responsibly in forwarding this amended piece of legislation before the House. I therefore urge the parliament to reject these coalition amendments to this important piece of legislation that is before the House.

Mr Windsor (New England) (4.59 pm)—I will not be supporting the amendments. I believe that today will be a fairly significant day in our history, with the structural separation arrangements being put in place and the movement towards the National Broadband Network. I think it is high time that we move forward, into the future, rather than perpetuate the problem that we have had for over a decade now: the interminable argument about where our telecommunications system is going in a nation of this size and magnitude. I am very pleased to see what is happening. Obviously, in relation to the structural separation issues, we are repairing something that should have been repaired a long time ago.

I would also pay a compliment to the member for Wentworth, not only in relation to this part of the bill but in terms of his shadow ministry. Even though I am not likely to agree with him about the broadband arrangements that he is proposing, he has displayed enormous tenacity in putting forward his arguments. I have been known to say to him that he has become a stalker on this particular issue, but I compliment him for his tenacity in engaging in what he obviously believes is a position that he needs to uphold. Unfortunately, on the broader issue of the broadband arrangements, the Leader of the Opposition has taken a position of denial, in a sense. He believes that the National Broadband Network is a dog and should not be supported. I do not agree with that view at all. I would like to place on the record, because I was unable to speak earlier in the debate, that I believe that the fibre technology we are talking about is quite possibly the greatest piece of infrastructure for country Australians that I will have seen as a member of parliament.

We should not be finding objections via the Productivity Commission and other arrangements. We would really have difficulty valuing future uses of this technology and making a realistic economic assessment, anyway. Rather than going down that track and maintaining opposition to change, I think it is time we actually embraced the future. The future is fibre, will be fibre and should be fibre, and country Australians should, in the main, be allowed to share in that technology. I support the government in relation to structural separation. I understand the reasons it is being done. I understand the relationship between Telstra, the National Broadband Network and the government, and I will be supporting the government’s
view on this and hence will not be supporting the opposition’s amendments.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (5.03 pm)—My position on both structural separation and the future of ICT generally, and broadband in particular, for regional Australia has not changed. The concept of getting away from dial-up and towards more reliable and affordable services in regional areas, such as the mid-North Coast of New South Wales, is a welcome one. I get the concept of a broadband rollout, as presented by the government. I have consistently said that there is fertile territory for all of us on issues around cost and delivery. They are both areas where members of parliament of all persuasions need to keep executive government honest and accountable, as all members of the Australian community need to keep members of the executive as accountable as possible.

My position on structural separation has not changed since previous attempts at legislative reform. I think that we are making an unfortunate incursion into shareholder rights and that we are doing it in an ugly way. However, I do get why we are doing it and the greater national interest and public interest of doing it. In an ideal world this would have been done at the start: separation would have been resolved early and shareholders would have made decisions accordingly. Unfortunately, it was not and we therefore have to do this to some degree at the expense of shareholders who may have made decisions in good faith without this decision on their radar. But I still get the point of doing it and will endorse the government getting on with it. I note that this is also now the position of David Thodey, and of Telstra generally. He is now endorsing this legislation in general terms.

I also want to put on the record some comments in relation to the proposed amendments. I endorse the comments of the member for New England that the member for Wentworth has done a significant job in the last eight weeks of very subtly but strategically moving the coalition position to a point where we now have a policy contest on cost and delivery. I endorse the comments that were made previously in that regard.

If the shadow minister is going to deal with merits review and procedural fairness together in the same amendment—and I do not see procedural fairness identified in any of the amendments in the list—I will be interested in supporting that one. However, in regard to 4G and spectrum issues, I do not buy the gun-to-the-head argument and I do not think that it is in the national interest that we try and defend Telstra shareholder rights over and above some national interest outcomes that we are trying to achieve through this legislation.

As this suite of legislation goes through over the next four to six months, we are all in a difficult position. Anyone who does give a damn about better ICT and broadband services for regional Australia will want to see action in this area sometime soon, and preferably in the next three years. At the same time, we do not want to slow down the delivery of that in the quest for efficient government. That is the bind that I think we all find ourselves in if we are genuine about trying to achieve the right policy outcome.

In the coming vote on the amendments you will see my support in one instance for the shadow minister. That is because I see such support as delivering a potential efficiency gain on the questions of cost and delivery. However, in other regards you will see me, on what I think are going to be three other divisions, support the government, because in my view the national interest of the concept is the priority in those instances.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (5.08 pm)—If I can respond to the remarks made
by members that have just spoken, let me first thank the members for New England and Lyne for their kind words. I would rather have had their kind votes; however, their kind words are appreciated.

The member for Lyne said that this is an ugly way to go about achieving structural separation. He is absolutely right. It is also unprecedented, unjust and unnecessary, and it comes with an enormous cost to the taxpayer that will not deliver what we seek to achieve with telecoms reform, which is universal and affordable broadband. There is no question that the NBN can achieve broadband services across Australia. Universality is, perhaps, the easy part. Affordability, however, is really looming as one of the biggest issues. Honourable members are keenly aware of the digital divide and the fact that internet services are more readily available at higher speeds in the cities than they are in the regions. It is one of the reasons we had a scheme to address that in 2007. If we had been re-elected, it would all be in place. It is a pity the Labor government did not pick that up. But the biggest digital divide—overwhelmingly the biggest digital divide—is based on income. The difference between home internet usage in the metro cities compared with the rest of Australia is 76 per cent in the cities to 63 per cent or thereabouts everywhere else. Internet usage in households with an income of $40,000 a year or less is 43 per cent, whereas for households with incomes over $120,000 it is 95 per cent, and in fact once you move into middle incomes it rapidly gets up very close to the high 80s and 90s.

The real digital divide is based on income and affordability, and this scheme is massively expensive. It is creating a monopoly, and the amendment that we will come to under the heading of competition is absolutely critical. The government knows that it is creating a monopoly that is obnoxious to the provisions, purpose and intent of the Trade Practices Act and our consumer and competition act, and that is why it wants to exempt it from that act, to deem it to be authorised without any proper inquiry. The OECD was scathing in its criticism—and the OECD was mediating the views of the Treasury, I might say—of the way in which the NBN/Telstra deal prevents the use of the HFC cable network, which is a potentially competitive cable network passing 30 per cent of Australian households, being used to compete with the NBN. Were that allowed to compete, as I have no doubt it would were this transaction to go before the ACCC under section 51 of the Trade Practices Act, you would have real competition and, inevitably, downward pressure on internet access prices.

As the OECD keenly observed, the only justification for eliminating competition is to support the economics of the NBN. But we have to ask ourselves the question: what are we trying to do? Are we trying to create a massive government owned monopoly and then use all of the power of government and parliament to prevent anyone competing with it so it can charge higher prices? That is what state governments used to do years ago and were roundly criticised for. This is what we have had 25 years of microeconomic reform to turn back, and now we are turning back the clock. This is like a state government in the old days having a state government owned railway and passing laws to prevent people carrying goods on trucks, on the road, so it did not compete with the railway. That is what this is about and the simple bottom line here is that yes, we agree on separation and yes, we agree on universal and affordable broadband, but it has never been established that this is either the fastest or the most cost-efficient and effective way of delivering it. And that is why, both through these amendments and indeed through our proposed reference to the Productivity.
Commission, we are trying to impose some rigour and accountability on this whole sorry saga of the NBN.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (5.13 pm)—I think from the start we need to be very clear about what the legislative rationale is in these parts of the bill that the opposition is seeking to amend. What we are talking about here is the digital dividend—the liberalisation of the sweet spot of the radio communications spectrum, which has untold, unknown value. Importantly, we only have one chance to get it right. We have one chance to ensure that this spectrum is allocated in a way that will take us beyond the 21st century. If we get this wrong now, it means that we will simply perpetuate all the regulatory failures of the past and thereby simply ensure that they continue into the future to the detriment of consumers.

Rules in auction processes on who can bid for spectrum and in what amounts are not novel. The ACCC has long had a statutory involvement in that. Other countries who are doing their digital dividends right now have had rules on their spectrum management. Yes, the legislation does incentivise Telstra to take action on separation before precluding its ability to bid for long-term evolution spectrum. But, as the minister has said, this bill no longer has an automatic prohibition on the acquisition of spectrum if Telstra does not structurally separate and divest its interests in the Foxtel network. So the opposition’s amendment here is completely misguided. The strong incentive regulation element is still there. I query whether, if the opposition had their way on this point, they would permit Telstra to take its already significant market power in the customer access network and impose that on the 21st century networks that will be built, simply entrenching the already broken market structure rather than transforming it. The member for Wentworth talked about turning back the clock. What he is talking about here is perpetuating an existing regulatory failure and bringing it into the 21st century.

Even the chief technology officer of Telstra knows that spectrum cannot do what fibre can do. Spectrum will always be complementary, never a substitute. Until someone, as I said yesterday, finds something that is faster than the speed of light, you will get nothing better delivered than under fibre. It is simply something that spectrum will not be able to deliver, because it is a shared resource. The physics will tell you that it is a shared resource that will never be able to deliver what fibre can deliver. Once the backbone network is built, what then will need to be done is changing the electronics at each end. Once it is built, you will have the conduit for doing anything in the future—applications and services that have not even been invented yet.

On the issue of picking winners, I note that it is the opposition that is choosing to pick winners here by trying to give wireless and HFC a leg up. That is the great paradox of this debate. I will also say, as someone who has been talking to people in the industry for some time about this, that the industry welcomes the way that this bill has been structured so that broadband has been dealt with in a holistic way, not a hotchpotch of different parts of wi-fi and copper such as the coalition took to the last election and still has as its policy today. Rather, the government is choosing to address all technologies and issues to do with broadband. By dealing with these in a holistic way, we can structure a regulatory system that delivers a holistic solution to the issue of the lack of broadband accessibility in Australia.

The member for Wentworth talked about the digital divide, and we had this conversation yesterday. It is about affordability. The affordability problem arises because of the
failures in the existing regulatory structure. Firstly, there has been a lack of infrastructure based competition. There is no denying that there has been no infrastructure, let alone infrastructure competition, in many parts of Australia—not only in rural and regional Australia but in metro parts of Australia too. In my own electorate, I receive calls, emails—well, not so much emails, because they would become very slowly—and representations from people in new greenfields estates who simply do not have broadband. They cannot access it. The only choice they have is probably some wireless mechanism which would cost them a great deal of money. They cannot understand why they cannot get the same treatment as everyone else.

The member for Wentworth talked about the NBN taking away the investment in greenfields. The NBN is the greenfields investment. It is the only investment that is going into greenfields. For those reasons, these parts of the amendments that have been put up should not be supported. (Time expired)

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth) (5.19 pm)—I will just respond briefly to a couple of the points the member for Greenway made. She said that there had been in Australia a lack of infrastructure competition. In terms of fixed line, that is undoubtedly true. There has been some, but there is the opportunity now to have real and substantial infrastructure competition at the fixed line level. But that opportunity is being cancelled out by this legislation and the agreement which it supports whereby Telstra and in due course Optus and others, like Actew here in Canberra, will be prevented from using their cable networks to compete with the optical fibre network of the NBN.

With great respect to the honourable member, her proposition that HFC cable cannot compete with optical fibre is simply wrong. The reality is that technologies compete right across the board. In the United States there is competition in many markets between ADSL and twisted copper pairs, DOCSIS 3.0 standards and HFC cable—just as we have here—and GPON services and optical fibre networks, not to speak of competition from satellite and wireless. The picking of technological winners is a big mistake pretty much wherever you are, whether you are in the public or the private sector. From a government, political and policy point of view, we should be stipulating an objective and then being technologically agnostic about it.

The honourable member talked about, as a number of her colleagues have done today, the lack of access in urban electorates. They are generally outer urban electorates where, because of network decisions made in the past, there is architecture that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to deliver high-speed broadband over twisted copper pairs. These are pair gain systems and RIM systems. These are all generically black spots in internet access in the cities. Some of the Labor members have said today, ‘There are fast speeds in the honourable member for Wentworth’s electorate, but there are not so many fast speeds in my electorate.’ If that is so then surely the objective should be, in a cost-effective way, rectifying the black spots in the cities so that everybody has the same speed as the best speed in the cities and making an investment in rural electorates with the benefit of a substantial government subsidy, as both sides agree is required and appropriate.

The paradox is that nobody contends that nowhere in Australia is there adequate broadband. Not even the honourable member for Greenway is saying, ‘Nowhere in Australia is there adequate broadband.’ Yet this NBN is based on the premise that nobody
has adequate broadband—not even the fastest areas in our cities—and we need a complete overbuild, a completely new network.

The issue of competition at the facilities level is absolutely critical. The OECD has made that point as strongly as it could, citing numerous references in the literature. There is no better way to keep prices down than to have competition between fixed line providers. That has been the universal experience. It is one of the things people have criticised Australia for not having. So here, when we are at the point of being able to achieve that, the government uses legislative power to prevent it from occurring, and it does so simply because it wants to create this massive government monopoly. You cannot stand in the way of the laws of physics; you cannot stand in the way of the laws of economics. If you have a massively overcapitalised, heavily capitalised, government monopoly or any monopoly, it will inevitably be drawn, compelled, to charge higher prices to recover an investment. The only thing that can keep it honest is competition. That competition is being precluded, prohibited, under this legislation and it will have the inevitable consequence that the digital divide—the divide in internet access between rich and poor—will get wider and we will have spent $43 billion of taxpayers’ money to make it deeper and more enduring.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (5.24 pm)—I rise to respond to the comments of the member for Wentworth, even though he did not actually address in that contribution the reasons why he has moved these particular unnecessary amendments. But he has raised some comments that do need a response from the government. He speaks about competition and competition being excluded from the National Broadband Network. Of course, what he ignores is the fact that the NBN is about the wholesale market and the competition will be in the retail sector. We are already seeing that competition in Tasmania as the NBN is being rolled out. It is a bit like the situation in my portfolio, under which the ARTC owns the tracks on which the trains travel. The trains are owned by different corporate sectors. That is where the competition comes in; that is where the market operates. Unless you have the track—in this case, the fibre-optic network to the home—the foundations, the backbone, you simply will not be able to move forward in a way which will take Australia into the 21st century.

The opposition had 18 plans when they were in government. They have had two plans since. So we have 20 plans, and when it all boils down it comes down to ‘leave it to the market and it will sort itself out’. The market did not sort it out and we have continued to go backwards when comparing our competitive advantage with that of our neighbours, whether it be Korea or Japan or Hong Kong—or New Zealand, for that matter. We have continued to go backwards when it comes to broadband speeds on what is the most important single piece of infrastructure for the 21st century.

The member for Wentworth speaks about turning back the clock. We are actually taking the courageous decision to move forward into the 21st century. That is why we are so committed to the National Broadband Network. That is why structural separation needs to occur through this legislation. The member for Wentworth says that the opposition support structural separation. Why didn’t they do it when they privatised Telstra? That is when it should have happened. That would have been the appropriate mechanism, and the member for Wentworth knows that that is the case, knows that that was the right thing to do. I appreciate that he agrees with the fact that that is an appropriate policy mecha-
nism. We have not talked about it. This legislation is actually doing it.

I agree with the member for New England: this is absolutely vital, historic legislation before this parliament. It is vital because it forms the foundation stone of our commitment to deliver fast, high-speed broadband to Australians wherever they live—whether it be in cities in electorates such as Wentworth or Grayndler, or whether it be in Armidale or Kalgoorlie. People in those places should have the same access as people in Rose Bay and Marrickville. That is what the National Broadband Network is about—an important reform.

The member for Wentworth says it is not about regions and cities. He has discovered class and the fact that incomes make a difference. Of course incomes make a difference in terms of access to computers, access to new technology and access to services. Of course that is the case. But the member’s point could apply to any purchase of services or infrastructure in the home. The fact is that the wealthier you are the more access you have. As members of parliament we are able to deliver it for ourselves and our families much more so than many people who live in our electorates. This is historic legislation that is about putting in place our commitment. It is about time the opposition got on board with the program, because they know that this is vital infrastructure for the 21st century.

Question put:
That the amendments (Mr Turnbull’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [5.33 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

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AYES

NOES
Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (5.39 pm)—by leave—I move opposition amendments (18) to (23), (25) to (32), (41), (42) and (44):

(18) Schedule 1, item 30, page 11 (line 27), omit “writing”, substitute “legislative instrument”.

(19) Schedule 1, item 30, page 12 (line 4), omit “written”, substitute “legislative”.

(20) Schedule 1, item 30, page 13 (lines 17 and 18), omit “the associated provisions”, substitute “subsection 577BC(2)”.

These are the amendments referred to on the amendment sheet under the headings ‘disallowance of instruments’ and ‘competition’.

I will deal briefly with the matter of the disallowance of instruments. In section 577A of the bill, there is a new provision relating to the manner in which an undertaking from Telstra to effect a structural separation may be accepted. Such an undertaking would,
under this provision, have to be considered by the ACCC, although not under the purview of section 51—so it would not be considered by the ACCC for the purpose of determining whether or not it was anticompetitive. This, of course, begs the question as to why the ACCC would be involved. But, putting that aside, the ACCC is asked, under this provision, to take into account certain matters which may be specified to it by the minister in writing. The purpose of the amendments referred to on the amendment sheet as ‘disallowance of instruments’ is to replace ‘in writing’ with the words ‘in a legislative instrument’ and this happens at a number of places through the bill.

This is simply a question of accountability. The amendments would ensure that any ministerial direction to the ACCC regarding the criteria for acceptance of a functional separation—or indeed a structural separation, because the provisions also apply to the section in the bill dealing with that—would be a disallowable instrument and therefore subject to the scrutiny of parliament.

The second set of amendments that we are considering in this group are those referred to on the amendment sheet as relating to competition. This is probably the most important part of this group of amendments. These amendments are designed to ensure that the normal operation of the Competition and Consumer Act, formerly the Trade Practices Act—the key legislation in this country protecting the interests of consumers and promoting competition—would apply to the deal involving Telstra and NBN Co. The amendments would, among other changes, excise new section 577BA. New section 577BA is at page 18 of the bill and basically provides that a contract between the NBN Co. and Telstra would, by virtue of this statute, be authorised for the purposes of section 51 of the Competition and Consumer Act. In other words, without our amendments, that contract between NBN and Telstra would not be considered by the ACCC. Why is the government seeking to do that? It seems extraordinary that a government that has talked so much about the importance of competition in telecommunications would actually legislate to take its own new monopoly out of the purview of the ACCC.

Why are they doing that? They are doing that because a key part of this deal is an obligation on Telstra, as I said earlier in this debate, not to use its HFC cable to compete with the NBN. It is a key part of the deal because the government knows, and NBN Co. knows, that if they allow facilities based competition it will result in lower prices and better deals for internet users. That, of course, would undermine the already tragic economics of the NBN.

The minister compared this earlier to a rail track and said, ‘If you have competition for use of the rail track, you don’t need to have two rail tracks.’ The fact of the matter is that if you have a monopoly provider of any service, be it wholesale or retail, that monopolist will seek to attract a monopoly rent. That is why we are opposed to monopolies; that is why we have legislation to regulate monopolies; that is why we have the elaborate provisions of the Competition and Consumer Act. But, without our amendments, those provisions would now be irrelevant to this anti-competitive transaction, the consequence of which can only be—you cannot suspend the laws of economics—higher prices, less affordability and less accessibility to the internet for Australians. (Time expired)

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (5.44 pm)—The government will be opposing these amendments. We oppose them for good reason. Firstly, with regard to the issue of the Competition and Consumer Act, the proposed amendment is simply unnecessary.
The bill already provides the ACCC with powers to scrutinise the Telstra and NBN Co. agreement when it considers Telstra’s structural separation undertaking. So it is already there. This is entirely appropriate, as it removes any need for a separate authorisation inquiry, while still ensuring that there is appropriate scrutiny by the ACCC of the arrangements between Telstra and NBN Co. The conduct that could require authorisation includes the decommissioning of the copper network, the progressive migration of customers to the National Broadband Network and the restriction on the use of Telstra’s hybrid fibre-coaxial cable network. The bill is designed to provide proper competitive scrutiny but also to provide the confidence that is necessary for Telstra to get on with the job. The fact is that those opposite say that they do not have any disagreement with this—or some of them do; the member for Wentworth says that he kind of gets it that broadband is pretty important but it is good enough if you live in his electorate. But he does not then take that to its logical conclusion, because he moves amendments that would simply destroy the ability of the National Broadband Network to move forward.

The second issue which has been raised is whether the ministerial direction to the ACCC should be disallowable by parliament. The government’s strong view is that the risk of disallowance and of this opposition playing politics with this issue would cause uncertainty for Telstra to structurally separate. What the opposition are putting up is actually a barrier to reform. Structural separation is in the national interest. The opposition’s proposal undermines the full structural separation of Telstra. Under the Legislative Instruments Act 2003, there are three key requirements that apply to legislative instruments: they are subject to parliamentary disallowance; they are published on the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments to ensure their availability to the public and industry; and they are subject to sunsetting after 10 years. Sunsetting is not of relevance here, as each of the instruments in question will cease to have effect before the 10-year period provided for. For most of the instruments in question, there is a requirement for publication on the department’s website, meaning publication on the register is not necessary. In each case, there are sound reasons for not making these instruments subject to parliamentary disallowance. That is why we are opposed to these amendments.

It is very clear that the opposition, in moving these amendments, are once again doing everything they can to stop the National Broadband Network being able to move forward, to stop structural separation actually occurring, even though they acknowledge how important it is. I ask the House to reject the amendments moved by the member for Wentworth.

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth) (5.48 pm)—The Minister for Infrastructure and Transport has just told the House that the undertaking about structural separation will be considered by the ACCC. That is true. I mentioned that earlier. But the ACCC will not be considering that undertaking in the context of competition. The only reference to competition is the requirement, in proposed section 577A(3)(a), that the undertaking provides for equivalence in relation to the supply of Telstra to its customers. What that means is that the ACCC simply has to be satisfied that the NBN will charge like customers like amounts. It does not raise or consider the problem that the NBN is a monopoly, part of a deal which excludes competition from other facilities, such as the HFC network and, no doubt, other telcos that will be asked to do a similar deal with the NBN.

It does not consider the monopolistic consequences of that; namely that, while the NBN may be charging equivalent prices to its cus-
tomers, those prices will be excessively high. If they are overcharging everybody, that will pass the test. So this really misses the point. This authorisation is no substitute for the competition provisions of the Trade Practices Act.

Next is the issue about accountability. I wonder how the Independent members feel about the new paradigm. The minister sounded like he was back in the old days, when he had a big, solid working majority here. He said that the risk of disallowance—that is, the risk that either house could disagree with the government—would create uncertainty and involve ‘playing politics’, to which the honourable minister is a complete stranger! The government have entered into a massive, unprecedented commitment to build an uncosted, unanalysed National Broadband Network. They have then entered into an anticompetitive contract with Telstra. Having done both of those things, they then say that those agreements and those investments that they are proposing to make are the sole object of policy, and any scrutiny, any check, any balance—anything which prevents the government getting its way—creates uncertainty. I thought that in the new paradigm we were all in favour of accountability.

The fundamental point—and this is a matter that this House has to reflect on very seriously—is that what we have is the creation of a massive government owned telecoms monopoly. We have a government that is seeking to use the power of the parliament to ensure that that monopoly has nobody competing with it. Therefore, it will be able to charge higher prices—indeed, the McKinsey implementation study proposed that price increases in real terms be imposed on customers every year for the next decade. That is a complete reversal of the experience that we have had.

When did we decide that the competition laws of this country, which we all regard as being so important to microeconomic reform to an efficient modern economy, should not apply to the biggest monopoly in one of our most important sectors? This is unprecedented. It is extraordinary. It is reprehensible that the government is creating this massive monopoly and excluding competition with a combination of threats, guns at heads, legislative power and $11 billion, and then, just in case this might offend the competition laws of the country, providing by statute that those laws do not apply.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (5.53 pm)—It is important that the government respond to the assertions of the member for Wentworth regarding what criteria the ACCC will apply under section 577A. It is important that this nonsense put up by the member for Wentworth be put to bed. The fact is that, in accordance with standard administrative law requirements, the ACCC must have regard to the objects of the act. That is the first point to make. The second point to make is that subsection 3(i) of the Telecommunications Act makes it the main object of the act to provide a regulatory framework that promotes the long-term interests of end users and the efficiency and international competitiveness of the Australian telecommunications industry. These are entirely appropriate criteria for the ACCC to apply when considering a structural separation undertaking that will result in fundamental structural reform of the telecommunications industry. It is naturally the case that, being the competition regulator, the ACCC will also consider the competitive impacts of Telstra’s structural separation undertaking.

Let there be no doubt that what the opposition are about here is putting up straw arguments that simply do not apply to the legislation that is before this House. If these
amendments are successful there will be very real implications for whether structural separation can occur. That is a fact. They know that this is the case. The member for Wentworth was given the task by the Leader of the Opposition of wrecking the National Broadband Network. In the amendments that are before the House today we can see that the member for Wentworth on this occasion is being loyal to the Leader of the Opposition, because that would be the consequence of the carriage of these amendments.

It is important that we take a step back in considering this legislation to look at what we are aiming to achieve here, which is high-speed and affordable broadband for all Australians. That will improve living standards, make us competitive and give us an edge in our region. Those opposite failed with all their approaches. They failed on the issue of structural separation. This legislation is progressing that. It is worthy of support. The sort of nonsense being put up by those opposite is simply aimed at undermining this legislation. That is why these amendments should be rejected out of hand.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (5.57 pm)—I want to put on record some views on these amendments. I accept the government’s position on them. I do that as a lover of competition and a lover of the role that the ACCC plays in regulating the market mechanisms in place in many Australian marketplaces. I also make the point that this does not reflect poorly at all, in my view, on that much over-used and almost cliched statement, ‘the new paradigm’. We can in this place legislate and/or regulate anywhere on anything at any time, to steal a line from the Goodies. Our moving for structural separation long after the initial restructure and privatisation of Telstra is an example of how, if there is a need in the future to address issues to do with increasing competition and producing better national interest outcome, we as parliamentarians can do so. We are not losing that right by either supporting or rejecting changes to parliamentary disallowance periods. The issue here is one that was addressed to my satisfaction by the response just given by the minister. On this particular suite of amendments I will again stick with the government. But I will make two points under the theme of competition, because that is at the heart of what the shadow minister is trying to achieve.

I would love to have at my disposal, right here right now, a business case from NBN Co. It is unfortunate that we are having this debate as legislators who are trying to make decisions about issues such as competition while deep in the bowels of government, despite nearly two months of public rhetoric saying that a business case would be available, it remains unavailable to us as legislators. I think it is disappointing, when this first piece of legislation is coming up that is relevant to decisions for all of us about the detail of the concept of national broadband, that we do not have that business case available so that we can make decisions based on merit. I understand what a big document it is, and I understand that it would take time to read and consider it. I understand the processes of government, I understand the processes of cabinet, but if we are going to invest in the new working parliament then that needs to be considered as a valued part of the processes of government. If we are going to make decisions, particularly on the cross-benches in a tight parliament, then we need to be given the opportunity to make those decisions on merit. On this particular issue of competition, it was very difficult to make that decision without that business case available so that we can make decisions based on merit. I understand what a big document it is, and I understand that it would take time to read and consider it. I understand the processes of government, I understand the processes of cabinet, but if we are going to invest in the new working parliament then that needs to be considered as a valued part of the processes of government. If we are going to make decisions, particularly on the cross-benches in a tight parliament, then we need to be given the opportunity to make those decisions on merit. On this particular issue of competition, it was very difficult to make that decision without that business case from NBN Co. at our disposal. So, taking the opportunity to put on the record my thoughts on this amendment, I also ask the government to expedite the business plan. It is necessary for the public debate to be a real de-
bate and for truth to be separated from fiction.

The other point I make about accountability to drive competition is that we are all struggling with the issue of a Telstra deal being done at the front end that will be presented to shareholders at the back end, with a legislative reform package in the middle. That is a challenge. It would be valuable to receive as much help from government as possible by making as much information available as possible on what the deal was at the front end and what will be presented to shareholders at the back end to achieve the right outcome. (Time expired)

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (6.02 pm)—The shadow minister, the member for Wentworth, is quite misguided in his understanding of what the ACCC will and will not be able to do. The ACCC will be able to undertake a competition analysis, and it will do that understanding that telco infrastructure, even at its most basic level, exhibits what economists call natural monopoly characteristics—things like high sunk costs, network effects and vertical integration. The role of the regulator is to ensure that that is regulated effectively. I note that Graeme Samuel of the ACCC backs up what the minister has said on the role of the ACCC. I quote from iTnews of 25 October this year:

ACCC chairman Graeme Samuel has outlined the competition regulator’s desire to have final say on undertakings submitted by Telstra and NBN Co, without facing the prospect of court appeals.

Samuel goes on to say:

Turnbull—

the member for Wentworth—

had suggested that proposed legislation put forward by the Government ‘exempted [the NBN] from the provisions of the Trade Practices Act.’ Samuel said the ACCC—which enforces this act—would not be exempt from studying these undertakings.

‘If you examine the legislation carefully. I don’t think that the NBN is subject to exemption from ACCC examination’, Samuel said.

And:

Samuel said the undertakings would be subjected to ‘very rigorous examination’ to ensure competition over several decades.

I will read one last quote on the issue of merits review for the benefit of the member for Lyne, which I will talk to when we get to those amendments. Graeme Samuel went on to say:

It should not be subject to any form of gaming, if you like, by seeking to have it taken on review to various tribunals and courts up the line.

The opposition has been peddling the notion of the elimination of competition and the creation of a new monopoly in NBN Co. I have heard the member for Wentworth come into this place and say that the government has to eliminate all competition for the NBN to be successful and will exempt the ACCC from determining whether this monopoly is in the public interest. The fact is that the ACCC, as I have said, will actually be tasked with approving Telstra’s structural separation undertaking under the government’s changes. Instead of exempting the ACCC from playing a role, the government has given the ACCC a central role in this whole process to ensure the restructure of the industry through the oversight of the structural separation of Telstra and the migration of connections to the NBN.

I will also say one thing about parts XIB and XIC of the Trade Practices Act. Like the member for Lyne, I love competition. I have spent most of my professional life working in the area of telco competition. NBN Co. will be subject to regulation by the ACCC under parts XIB and XIC of the Trade Practices Act, but it will not be the weak powers
given to the ACCC in 1997 when the opposition was in power. The changes that are proposed here by this government will actually strengthen the role that the ACCC plays in the way it regulates Telstra and the NBN going forward by giving the ACCC what I have referred to as the up-front role in the process.

I continue to be fascinated by the fixation of the member for Wentworth with this notion of a new monopoly being created, when in fact what we are doing is getting a vertical disintegration of the sector. You cannot get anything more competitive than disintegration of the sector. There is widespread acknowledgment of those natural monopoly characteristics needing to be regulated. It is paramount, within the network architecture where you have the top layers, the content and applications, and the bottom layer, the network layer, that competition happens in those higher layers. You do that by disinfecting those higher layers by regulating at the wholesale level. Every liberalised country does it, and does it effectively, and is moving in that direction to ensure the most effective regulation at the wholesale level so that competition at the retail level can flourish.

This is certainly not some flight of fancy. The notion that you need to regulate as deep as possible into the network is something that I know the ACCC is very keen to pursue. Not only that but it results in what consumers want. It results in competition at the retail level that will ensure lower prices and that will lead to better price and non-price quality of services and a greater range of services and availability. This is what consumers want. If we regulate at the wholesale level, which is what the ACCC will do, we will see the benefits in the upper layers of the network architecture. So, far from the monopolisation that has been fixated upon, the fact is that disintegration will produce the results that consumers want.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (6.07 pm)—I want to add some comments in this debate as someone who in a previous life closely watched from within the industry the impacts of regulation upon the industry and the ability of people to secure work in the industry. I have a deep and abiding interest in the future of the industry—the very debate we are engaged in right now. One of the issues that I have is that we have referred a number of times to the multitude of plans that were embarked upon by the other side when in government. In that array of plans was a recognition that leaving it to Telstra on its own would never satisfy the demands of consumers. We would never see the industry evolve if it was left on its own, which was why the former coalition government attempted on a number of occasions, through its 18 or 20 versions of a plan, to see us change the industry.

One of the things that I learnt watching from within the industry was that a litigator was a telco’s best friend. If left to their own devices, the telcos would use any avenue they possibly could to fight the decisions of regulators or competitors to advance the interests of competition in the industry. While zealously guarding themselves and saying that they needed to protect their own interests, we had armies of lawyers willing to engage at any point to frustrate the ambitions of regulators and government to inject more competition. We had 18 plans from the other side because the coalition was unable to progress this further.

Telstra decided that it did not want to invest further in its copper network. Telstra made the decision that if it did invest in broadband it wanted to see a greater return on that investment, about which the ACCC would then have reservations. Where did we get? Nowhere. I pick up on some of the contributions made by the member for Greenway when I support a stronger role for the
ACCC into the future in the oversight of Telstra and NBN Co. We cannot remain stuck in the regulatory logjam that prevented the industry from moving forward.

If I can add another perspective, there are employees within Telstra—line workers and technicians—who for all their lives have been working basically on copper. We have an opportunity now to train those employees to move into the world of optic fibre and to be part of this rollout. Another thing I have said on the record is that it does not take much to convince Telstra to sack employees. I used to dread every analyst day because frankly that was the day they would announce further job cuts—not necessary cuts, as no-one could argue that Telstra did not have work; no-one could argue that those workers were not required on the front line, in call centres answering customer inquiries, or out in the network. Telstra would basically cut numbers to satisfy the share market.

Any further delay that we have in being able to move forward on this bill, or getting the rollout done, is a further delay in retraining those workers who otherwise will be lost from the industry. The union that I previously worked for demonstrated that 85 per cent of people who had been made redundant by Telstra were lost from the industry. We face a worsening skill shortage within the sector if we are unable to advance the training and re-training that will also be offered as part of this process and to bed that down.

My final remark refers to the member for Wentworth. I have enormous regard for his understanding of this area and I would never seek to parallel or match that in the sense that I know he has watched this area for some time. But I cannot believe that a person in his position could argue against or seek to frustrate this process further. His words of 26 October in the matter of public importance in this place are still ringing in my ears. He said he had ‘…very serious cause to reflect whether there is any prospect of there being a net benefit to our economy from this project.’ I find that astounding and cannot believe that in the course of debate something like that could be expressed. (Time expired)

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth) (6.12 pm)—Responding to the minister and the members for Greenway and Chifley, there is no dispute about the need for a separation of the customer access network from the retail business. Honourable members have been critical of decisions that were not taken in the past, and it goes back a very long time. Kim Beazley, I think, has pled guilty to an omission in that regard too. We are not dealing with history now; we are dealing with the present.

If the objective is to have a separation of the customer access network from the retail business, and if the objective is to provide affordable universal broadband across Australia, it is reasonable to ask: what is the most cost-effective way of doing that? We had a lecture today in question time from the Treasurer about the importance of ensuring that reducing Australia’s carbon emissions was done in the most cost-effective way. He was getting the assistance of the Productivity Commission and various other wise people to achieve that end. That is exactly what we are talking about today.

There is no point trying to pretend that I or the coalition are opposed to broadband or opposed to universally affordable broadband. There is also no point pretending that everybody is in favour of this. You have some of the leading competitive telcos in Australia—the Alliance for Affordable Broadband—expressing very grave reservations about this project and calling for there to be a cost-benefit analysis done by the Productivity Commission. These are not spokespeople for the coalition. These are competitive telcos—
the sort of people that the member for Greenway may very well have had as clients in her legal career.

As far as the issue of competition is concerned, this cannot be brushed aside. Let me return to the OECD’s economic survey of Australia, published on the weekend. This is what they said at page 109. Talking about what government policy should achieve, they said:

… it should not trigger a weakening of competition in wholesale broadband services to protect the viability of the government project. An alternative to this picking-the-winner strategy would be to let the market guide choices between the various Internet service options on the basis of prices that reflect costs, factoring in externalities that ought first to be evaluated. To that end, it would be desirable to maintain competition between technologies and, within each technology, between Internet service providers. This would be consistent with the planned vertical separation of Telstra and with other aspects of the reform that seek to promote competition. To develop fibre optic networks more gradually than under the government programme would also allow a better assessment of the new network’s costs and potential benefits and the potential positive externalities.

And, as honourable members know, the OECD went on to recommend that there be a rigorous, independent, public, cost-benefit analysis for a major project of this kind. That is advice that the government is completely ignoring.

There is no point in honourable members sneering and snarling at the OECD as though they are a bunch of idiots. Not only is the OECD a leading economic and political institution in the world but this report has been written with considerable input—enormous input, as every member knows—from the Australian Treasury itself, so there are very real concerns about the way the government is proceeding with this. In terms of the red book, the advice to the incoming government, what were the two concerns that the Treasury flagged? One was the financial risk to the public balance sheet from such a massive, uncosted investment, because nobody has asked or sought to answer the question: can we achieve this policy objective in a more cost-effective way? And the second was the impact on competition, which is what the OECD has written about and what we are debating in the context of these amendments. So these are serious issues.

The proposition that the authorisation or the undertaking acceptance provisions in the bill are a substitute for section 51 is simply not correct as a matter of law or as a matter of policy. If the government thought that section 51’s provisions should be applicable to this, it would not be seeking to remove this transaction from the provisions of the Trade Practices Act. (Time expired)

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (6.17 pm)—The member for Wentworth says that the competition issues ‘cannot be brushed aside’. This is extraordinary from a political organisation, the coalition, which privatised Telstra without protecting competition, choice or service delivery, including in the bush. This is what Allan Fels said about competition and this legislation when he was asked about whether this legislation is a victory for the ACCC. He said this:

Yes and for consumer. This had to happen. The access law was very weak and it was introduced at a time when the government wanted to privatise Telstra, so it made it weak and kept it weak. And so the true objectives of policy weren’t achieved.

That is what Allan Fels had to say. He knows something about competition across the board. This is a coalition that took a public monopoly, turned it into a private monopoly and called it reform, at the expense of Australian consumers. So let us have none of this
nonsense from those opposite about competition.

But you do not have to go to Allan Fels. This is what the now member for Bradfield had to say about competition in his book *Wired Brown Land*? I quote Paul Fletcher in that book:

In fixed-line telecommunications today we have the equivalent of Qantas owning all the airports. The result: competition is weak.

That is what the bloke who sits up the back—who gets questions on the NBN because the tactics committee do not want to give the member for Wentworth too many questions during question time—their expert, had to say about competition and their performance in government. So let us have none of this nonsense.

There were a range of issues raised that simply are not correct. The member for Wentworth has argued that prices on NBN will increase, but NBN Co. prices will be subject to ACCC regulation. Let us make that very clear: they will be subject to ACCC regulation. He quotes the OECD report. This is what the OECD report had to say about competition:

Calling the dominant operator’s vertical integration into question is also welcome, as it will stimulate competition in the DSL Internet sector, and it can be expected to yield substantial benefits …

The report went on specifically to talk about the fact that the market alone simply would not deliver the best outcome. It said that the NBN ‘will avoid the risk of a geographic digital divide as it will cover the entire population, whereas if it were done by the private sector it would be done more gradually and only to the most densely populated areas,’ My electorate would benefit. Wentworth would benefit. Lyne and New England would get done over.

That is the reality. It is that simple. And we know that that is the case. That is the way the market operates, not because Telstra’s board are good or bad people but because that is their fiduciary obligation: to maximise their return for shareholders. But the interests of the Australian public are different. There is a national interest here, a national interest test, and that is what the legislation before us here does.

The member for Lyne also raised the issue of NBN Co.’s corporate plan. As he knows, the company submitted the plan to the government just last week. The government is currently considering the document and will make a range of information from it publicly available in due course. NBN Co.’s business study confirms the findings of the implementation study—despite using different assumptions—that the NBN can be built on a financially viable basis with affordable prices for consumers.

The real issue here was perhaps best summed up by the member for Wentworth when he said:

The NBN is the answer to a problem that has not even been identified …

Well, if you do not know what the problem is, it is not surprising that you have no idea about what the solution is. The solution, moving forward, is this legislation. It should be supported and the amendments should be rejected.

**Mr Turnbull** (Wentworth) (6.22 pm)—I was very interested to hear the honourable minister quoting Allan Fels in endorsing the arrangements with the NBN, so he suggested. Because I had my trusty wireless iPad here, I was quickly able to discover that he was in fact giving an entirely misleading account of an interview Allan Fels gave to *Inside Business* on 4 October 2009. He quoted a little bit, as he often does, which was out of context. Allan Fels welcomed the
changes to access legislation but then Allan Fels went on in this interview to say:

There are a lot of tricky questions: are we going to restructure Telstra now once and then soon after maybe restructure it again for the NBN?

ALAN KOHLER: What because the NBN will be a monopoly?

ALLAN FELS: Well, that’s a further concern. Obviously I would be quite concerned if all the main players now like Telstra and Optus and everyone got into the NBN and it had monopoly power. That is a real dilemma.

So, far from giving this a tick, Allan Fels was expressing exactly the same reservations that we have had about the monopoly power, and the minister and Independent members may want to reflect that the minister chose to quote selectively from that interview in a way to create a misleading impression of what Allan Fels’s views were.

Finally, we get back to this fundamental issue of competition and how important it is. The reality is that this will be a monopoly provider of fixed line services to the home. We have expressed concern about it, the OECD has expressed concern about it, telcos have expressed concern about it—there is real concern right across the board. Even Paul Budde, who is a real enthusiast for the NBN and a man that I do not think has ever agreed with me in his life, I saw was complaining that the plan for the points of interconnect was offensive because it reeked of the exercise of monopoly power. There are real competition issues here. We cannot kid ourselves. We cannot turn a blind eye to this, and that is why this deal, this transaction, should be subject to the jurisdiction of the ACCC and the provisions of section 51 of the Trade Practices Act.

Question put:

That the amendments (Mr Turnbull’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [6.29 pm]
(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

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AYES


NOES

Adams, D.G.H. Bandt, A. Bowen, C. Brodtmann, G. Burke, A.S. Albanese, A.N. Bird, S. Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.E. Byrne, A.M.
Mr TURBULL (Wentworth) (6.35 pm)—by leave—I move amendments (58) to (63) together:

(58) Schedule 1, item 152, page 108 (lines 10 and 11), omit the item, substitute:

152 Subsection 152AV(1)
Omit “152AT or”.

152A Subsection 152AW(1)
Omit “152AT or”.

152B Paragraph 152AW(1)(b)
Omit “paragraph 152AT(3)(a) or”.

152C Paragraph 152AW(1)(c)
Repeal the paragraph

152D Paragraph 152AW(1)(e)
Omit “152AT or”.

152E Paragraph 152AW(1)(f)
Omit “152AT or”.

152F Paragraph 152AW(1)(g)
Omit “152AT or”.

152G Paragraph 152AW(1)(h)
Omit “152AT or”.

152H Paragraph 152AW(5)(a)
Omit “152AT or”.

152I Paragraph 152AW(5)(c)
Omit “paragraph 152AT(3)(a) or”.

152J Paragraph 152AW(5)(d)
Omit “paragraph 152AT(3)(a) or”.

152L Paragraph 152AW(5)(e)
Repeal the paragraph

152M Paragraph 152AW(5)(g)
Omit “152AT or”.

152N Paragraph 152AW(5)(h)
Omit “152AT or”.

152P Paragraph 152AW(5)(i)
Omit “152AT or”.

152Q Paragraph 152AW(5)(j)
Omit “152AT or”.

152R Paragraph 152AW(5)(k)
Omit “152AT or”.

152S Section 152AX
Omit “152AT or”.

(59) Schedule 1, item 160, page 131 (after line 2), insert:

Subdivision G—Review of access determination by Tribunal

152BCX Application for review

A person whose interests are affected by an access determination may apply in writing to the Tribunal for review of the determination.
(2) The application must be made within 21 days after the Commission makes the determination.

(3) The Tribunal must review the determination in accordance with section 152BCY.

152BCY Review of access determination

Orders

(1) On a review of an access determination, the Tribunal may order that the determination be affirmed, varied or revoked.

(2) If the Tribunal makes an order that the determination be varied or revoked, the Commission is taken to have varied or revoked the determination accordingly (other than for section 152BCX or this section).

(3) For the purposes of the review, the Tribunal may perform all the functions and exercise all the powers of the Commission.

Conduct of review

(4) For the purposes of the review, the presiding member of the Tribunal may require the Commission to give such information, make such reports and provide such other assistance to the Tribunal as the member specifies.

(5) For the purposes of the review, the Tribunal may have regard only to:

(a) any information given, documents produced or evidence given to the Commission in connection with the making of the access determination; and

(b) any other information that was referred to in the Commission's report mentioned in subsection 152BCH(1) or in any reasons for making the access determination that the Commission published.

Time period for review

(6) The Tribunal must use its best endeavours to make an order under subsection (1) on or before the action date for the review.

(7) If the Tribunal is unable to make an order by the current action date, the Tribunal must, by notice in writing, set a later date as the action date.

(8) The Tribunal must:

(a) give a copy of the notice to each party to the review; and

(b) publish the notice on its website and in a newspaper circulating generally throughout Australia.

(9) In this section:

action date, in relation to a review,

means:

(a) the day 90 days after the Tribunal receives the application for review; or

(b) a later date set under this section.

60) Schedule 1, item 160, page 131 (lines 30 to 32), omit subsection (6).

61) Schedule 1, item 160, page 140 (after line 4), insert:

Subdivision E—Review of binding rules of conduct by Tribunal

152BDM Application for review

(1) A person whose interests are affected by a set of binding rules of conduct may apply in writing to the Tribunal for review of the rules.

(2) The application must be made within 21 days after the Commission made the rules.

(3) The Tribunal must review the decision in accordance with section 152BDN.

152BDN Review of binding rules of conduct

Orders

(1) On a review of a set of binding rules of conduct, the Tribunal may order that the rules be affirmed, varied or revoked.

(2) If the Tribunal makes an order that the rules be varied or revoked, the Commission is taken to have varied or re-
voked the rules accordingly (other than for section 152BD or this section).

(3) For the purposes of the review, the Tribunal may perform all the functions and exercise all the powers of the Commission.

Conduct of review

(4) For the purposes of the review, the presiding member of the Tribunal may require the Commission to give such information, make such reports and provide such other assistance to the Tribunal as the member specifies.

(5) For the purposes of the review, the Tribunal may have regard only to:
   
   (a) any information given, documents produced or evidence given to the Commission in connection with the making of the rules; and
   
   (b) any other information that was referred to in the Commission’s report mentioned in subsection 152BCH(1) or in any reasons for making the access determination that the Commission published.

Time period for review

(6) The Tribunal must use its best endeavours to make an order under subsection (1) on or before the action date for the review.

(7) If the Tribunal is unable to make an order by the current action date, the Tribunal must, by notice in writing, set a later date as the action date.

(8) The Tribunal must:
   
   (a) give a copy of the notice to each party to the review; and
   
   (b) publish the notice on its website and in a newspaper circulating generally throughout Australia.

(9) In this section:

   action date, in relation to a review is:
   
   (a) the day 90 days after the Tribunal receives the application for review; or
   
   (b) a later date set under this section.

(62) Schedule 1, item 177, page 152 (lines 25 and 26), omit the item, substitute:

   177 Subsection 152CE(1)
   Omit “152BU(2), 152BY(3),”.

   177A Subsection 152CF(1)
   Omit “152BU(2), 152BY(3),”.

   177B Paragraph 152CF(1)(b)
   Omit “152BU(2) or”.

   177C Paragraph 152CF(1)(c)
   Omit “152BU(2) or”.

   177D Paragraph 152CF(1)(d)
   Omit “152BY(3) or”.

   177E Paragraph 152CF(1)(e)
   Omit “152BY(3) or”.

   177F Paragraph 152CF(5)(a)
   Omit “152BU(2), 152BY(3),”.

   177G Section 152CG
   Omit “152BU(2), 152BY(3),”.

These are the amendments which are referred to as merit review and procedural fairness. There has been a great deal of criticism over the years of Telstra using lawyers, talented law firms like the one the member for Greenway used to be a partner of, to challenge—

Ms Rowland interjecting—

Mr TURNBULL—You wished you had the Telstra account—okay. As I was saying, there has been a great deal of criticism over the years of Telstra using lawyers to challenge access decisions made by the ACCC. The mechanism that was used has been summarised as being ‘negotiate, arbitrate’. That has been replaced now with a more prescriptive approach known as ‘set and forget’. We support those changes. However, it is important not to completely lose sight of issues of justice and fairness and to remember that it is one thing to say that a corporation is using lawyers to gain decisions, that is
fine to use that description; but, if to remedy that, you take away that corporation’s rights—in other words, if you literally throw the fairness, natural justice baby out with the bathwater—you end up with an extraordinary situation where the ACCC becomes literally beyond review.

So this is a question of getting the balance right, and we believe the government has gone too far in eliminating procedural fairness and in not allowing a merits review of access determinations by the tribunal. It is important that there be a merits review of these access determinations because they will be conducted in a prescriptive way as opposed to the much criticised approach taken in the legislation hitherto.

One of the criticisms that have been made is that a review could delay things. Often people dislike litigants using appeal rights. It is a bit like the minister talking about debate in this chamber getting in the way of the orderly business of government. That is part of what we pay for in democracy and the rule of law. But I would draw honourable members’ attention to the provisions of the new sections that we are proposing on pages 6 and 7 of the amendment. You can see that there are very strict time frames put in place. The application must be made within 21 days after the commission makes the determination. The tribunal has to make a decision promptly and the action date in relation to a review means 90 days after the tribunal receives the application for review. So it can set a later date naturally, but there is a clear statutory direction there for this to be dealt with promptly. So the argument that this is going to hold things up or frustrate the objects of the act is simply not correct. This will get the balance right. We do not want to have lengthy proceedings that delay access determinations; but on the other hand we cannot throw procedural fairness and natural justice out. And, of course, this recognises that just occasionally the ACCC might make a mistake, and it is important for there to be an ability to review it.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (6.40 pm)—The government will be opposing these amendments, the latest series of amendments in the wrecking strategy of the opposition to the National Broadband Network. There are two lots of amendments here. The first is a proposition from the coalition to require the ACCC to comply with the requirements of procedural fairness when making binding rules of conduct. Requiring the ACCC to comply with procedural fairness as part of the process would severely compromise the effectiveness of those binding rules of conduct. Binding rules of conduct are intended to enable the ACCC to quickly address problems which are affecting the supply of a declared service. The ACCC will only be able to make binding rules of conduct if it considers there is an urgent need to do so. If the issue is not urgent, the ACCC will have to deal with it by varying the relevant access determination. Since binding rules of conduct can only be made in cases of urgency, it does not make sense to require the ACCC to comply with procedural fairness as that will have the effect of delaying the making of the rules. Binding rules of conduct will have a maximum duration of 12 months. Within 30 days after making binding rules of conduct, the ACCC will have to commence a public inquiry to vary the access determination or make a new access determination. Parties will be accorded procedural fairness in the public inquiry process.

The previous amendments moved by the member for Wentworth were all about giving the ACCC more power and influence; now this lot of amendments is about undermining the ability of the ACCC. It is an extraordinary position taken by those opposite. It is inconsistent. It is only, in fact, consistent
with their approach to wreck the National Broadband Network.

The second lot of amendments is about merits review of ACCC decisions under part 11C of the act. The coalition is proposing to restore merits review for anticipatory individual exemptions and special access undertakings. When this bill was first introduced to parliament, the removal of merits review from anticipatory individual exemptions and special access undertakings was widely supported in the industry. The removal of merits review was supported by industry because experience has demonstrated that any accountability benefits provided by merits review are strongly outweighed by the delays, the regulatory uncertainty and the outright gaming that has occurred. The coalition is also proposing to make new provisions for merits review for access determination and binding rules of conduct. Before making an access determination the ACCC will have to hold a public inquiry; in the course of this public inquiry the ACCC is likely to receive dozens of submissions from access providers, other industry participants and consumers. Submissions will canvass complex pricing and technical issues. The Administrative Review Council, which is the body established to provide advice to the Attorney-General about administrative law, has published guidelines about what kinds of administrative decisions are suitable for merits review. Paragraph 4.53 of the guidelines states that decisions which involve extensive public inquiries or consultations are not suitable for merits review.

Access determinations clearly fall into this category. In 2002 the then government abolished merits review for ACCC arbitration determinations because merits review was hindering the development of competition. So you have in 2002 the Howard government abolishing merits review, on the sound basis that it was hindering the development of competition, and yet the opposition now wants to reintroduce merits review, a move which would again cause uncertainty and unnecessary delays for the industry.

In relation to binding rules of conduct, the bill provides that they will have a maximum duration of 12 months. Furthermore, the ACCC will have to commence a public inquiry to vary an access determination or make a new access determination within 30 days of making binding rules of conduct. (Extension of time granted) In other words, before any merits review of binding rules of conduct could be considered, let alone take effect, the ACCC would have already started the public inquiry process to make changes to the relevant access determination.

The effect of the coalition’s amendments would be to waste the resources of the Australian Competition Tribunal, the ACCC and the telecommunications industry on a meaningless exercise in red tape. The fact is that these amendments should be rejected and the legislation should be carried by this House unamended, which would be a major reform to deliver the National Broadband Network. Structural separation has been spoken about for a long time. We are actually delivering it through this legislation. The amendments put forward by the opposition do not merit the support of this House, which is why they should be rejected.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (6.47 pm)—Briefly and firstly, on the matter of procedural fairness and binding rules of conduct the minister says these rules would only be binding for a year. That is an age in the commercial world, particularly in the telecommunications sector. The section that we are seeking to remove from 152BD(6) is that which provides that the commission is not required to observe any requirements of procedural fairness. All that the requirements of procedural fairness meant was that they had
to give the party against whom the order was being made—almost certainly Telstra—advance notice. What the minister wants to be able to do is to put in place rules with a lifetime of 12 months on an entirely ex-parte basis. That is a remarkable measure.

As far as the merits reviews are concerned, I explained earlier why we believe they are appropriate given the change to the more prescriptive way in which access determinations are being made. But just in terms of delay, I again point the House to the time limits in the amendments and also to proposed subsection (5) of our proposed 152BCY, which states:

… the Tribunal may have regard only—

for the purposes of review—

to:

(a) any information given, documents produced or evidence given to the Commission in connection with the making of the access determination; ... 

It is like a review on the papers from the commission. So there is not the opportunity to introduce a raft of new evidence or new issues. It is very circumscribed. It is going to be done in a timely fashion. It is fine for the minister to say that people exercising their right to review a statutory body’s decision or to have the benefit of procedural fairness is just clogging things up with bureaucratic red tape—and, of course, he described accountability to parliament as just playing politics. This is the classic voice, the unfiltered voice, of the all-powerful executive—hardly a new paradigm. We are a democracy. Governments should be accountable to parliaments. Statutory bodies, particularly agencies like the ACCC, are enormously powerful and it is important to have the ability to review their decisions. These proposals that we have made strike a fair balance between an elaborate system of lengthy reviews, without time limits and with a scope to introduce new material, and something that is circumscribed, tailored, trimmed both in terms of scope and time that will enable the decisions of the ACCC in this regard to be accountable, just as we seek to have the decisions of the government accountable in this House.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (6.50 pm)—I will be brief too in offering my support to the amendments. It is on the grounds of a long-term view of where telecommunications is heading and of a view that industry sectors are morphing to an increasing degree and therefore the rules of engagement from regulatory bodies should reflect as much as possible that morphing as soon as possible. Procedural fairness and merits review apply in other sectors in regard to the role that the ACCC plays and I certainly can see where the government is coming from in the short term in regard to a special set of regulatory rules for a monopoly provider and concerns around the monopoly provider. However, in the long term I think we will see the morphing of sectors and increased competition in the marketplace, which would suggest that regulatory bodies should apply an equal set of standards to all.

It was only two weeks ago that I took the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government to the offices of Country Energy in Port Macquarie where there was a lively, healthy and positive discussion about the role of the broadband rollout in the mid-North Coast of New South Wales. They also discussed how an electricity retailer is having almost daily conversations with NBN Co. about how those two industry sectors will provide the rollout in a region such as my electorate. Likewise the role that smart-gridding is going to play in the sector in the future is another example of where we cannot assume any longer that poles and wires may indicate an electricity provider, separate from the poles and wires of a traditional telco and
separate again, potentially, of an internet provider. We are seeing a morphing of sectors and public policy and regulatory bodies need to reflect that. A fair and equitable standard on some of those regulatory rules around procedural fairness and merits review should also be reflected in policy moving forward. I will be supporting these amendments and I congratulate the member for Wentworth for winning that support.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (6.53 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, through you to the member for Lyne: it is not too late to change your mind. With the deepest sincerity I take on board everything that the member for Lyne has said—I love competition too. I know that the words ‘merits review’ and ‘procedural fairness’ in telco sound great, they sound just and they sound like the right thing to do but, as a practitioner in this area and having seen what happens, I can assure you, paradoxically, it is the exact opposite.

The member for Wentworth talked about merits review only being able to be decided on the documents that are put before the ACCC. That amendment came in in 2002. I will tell you what happened then because I was part of it. You had truckloads of documents. You had discovery that went into whole floors of office blocks because everyone knew they had to get every single document down, otherwise they would not be able to introduce it. The only people who made any money from this were the people paying my rent. The only people who made any money from this were the lawyers.

The member for Wentworth talks about time limits. I promise you that they are always extended. It is the cumulative effect of these delays; it is not just a simple delay. It is not saying that it is going to be delayed for a week. PSTN pricing was clogged-up in the Australian Competition Tribunal for years, which meant that consumers in the member for Lyne’s electorate and in my electorate did not have lower prices.

There was a review in 2000 by the Productivity Commission culminating in the 2002 competition amendments. The biggest thing that review examined and got the most support from—from everyone but Telstra—was the need to remove merits review. The amount of time that was being taken up by cases going into the Competition Tribunal meant that consumers were not getting the benefits of lower prices. Merits review and telco regulation has been widely discredited—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

Ms ROWLAND—And the member for Mackellar voted to remove merits review in the telco sector, but this evening she is going to vote to put it back. Here we go! Go ahead, you vote for that. We are going into the 21st century—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! The member for Mackellar has had a good go.

Ms ROWLAND—Come in spinner! It is a 21st century network, but let us go back to a 20th century problem that was taken away in 2002. The member for Wentworth talked about timing and timing is everything. In dynamic industries like telcos where the amount of money on interconnect charges and on declared services is measured in minutes means that every single day of delay amounts to millions of dollars. I will also let the member for Mackellar know that some of the companies I acted for went broke waiting for their cases to be heard in the Australian Competition Tribunal. It was an absolute disgrace that that happened.

In 2002 the issue to be addressed was that of gaming and no-one could compete against
Telstra’s market power in this area. That is why merits review was specifically removed. This is an area of this debate which I feel strongly about. It does not matter if you have all the competition levers right and it does not matter if you have all the ex ante and ex post rules right because, when you have operators with significant market power and the ability to game the regulatory system, you simply undo it all for consumers. These amendments will actually undo all the gains that will be made.

I say to the people here and to the member for Lyne that this is important. This is not something that is about justice. These are not amendments that seek to uphold justice. These are amendments which are ill conceived and will actually result in residents in the member for Lyne’s electorate and in my electorate being adversely affected by these changes. I urge members here to reject these amendments. (Time expired)

Mr Husic (Chifley) (6.59 pm)—As I have reflected on previously, when we look back on this debate we will see whether we had someone with skills and expertise in this area and who was helping us to advance the cause of technology by bringing a new network that had been denied to the Australian public for many years or someone who went down as a vandal. The more we watch what is taking place here tonight and over the course of the last few weeks, we realise that the contribution from the member for Wentworth will be best summed up as vandalism against this network.

He is effectively demonstrating that he does not believe that we should proceed with this. He said in an MPI that he could not determine whether there is any prospect of a net benefit to our economy. On 26 October, he said that he doubted that there was a ‘net benefit to our economy from this project’. Everyone in this country knows that getting a broadband network in place in this country will have benefits across a range of areas. But the opposition spokesperson charged with being responsible for the opposition on this policy cannot even see a net economic benefit. He then comes forward and says, ‘We think a merits review will be a great idea’. If you cannot trust him on whether there will be an economic benefit, how can you trust him on whether or not he is sincere in his ambition to put in procedural fairness by installing a merits review that his own government got rid of?

He is advocating today that a merits review is the way to go when we finally come to a landing on pricing, but it will shackle us to a litigator’s merry-go-round where they will put the money in and spend up big. The member for Lyne has seen in regional New South Wales how Telstra has just gotten rid of job after job and has not cared about the impact. I have seen it myself. Telstra has not cared about the impact on regional Australia, but at the same time they can find the money, as they have in the past, to challenge regulators’ decisions on pricing. You do not think that in this industry they would not use the merits review to shackle us all to a litigator’s merry-go-round?

This is simply a recipe to stall the NBN. This is a tactic that is not designed in the interests of fairness, in the interests of advancing this further or in ensuring that we have got some oversight and review—this is yet another mechanism being put in place by an opposition whose chief spokesperson on this cannot even see the economic benefits of the NBN, which is startling given his background and expertise. We are being consigned to having delay built into this process. It is being dressed up as being for the benefit of the public when it will actually slow the process down instead of getting a landing on pricing and moving forward on it.
Can we just inject a bit of reality into this? As a wholesaler, NBN Co. will not be the body entrusted to go to individual homes to connect the NBN, it will be the retailers. What will drive it are the retailers and the competition that comes out of doing that. Again, the member for Wentworth does not believe that this presents an economic benefit to the country. He cannot even describe the arrangements between wholesaler and retailer in this, yet he now advocates that we should embrace a merits review as a way of bringing fairness into this when his own government realised what a drag on competition it is.

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth) (7.03 pm)—I will be brief because the passionate remarks of the member for Chifley cannot go unanswered. The member for Chifley says that I am deficient in not being able to see a net economic benefit for a $43 billion project, which has not been the subject of any cost-benefit analysis. I do not really know what school of economics the honourable member is from, but the whole point of a cost-benefit analysis is to work out whether there is a net economic benefit. Government spending that does not pass an appropriately defined cost-benefit test necessarily detracts from Australia’s wellbeing. That is, when taxpayer funds are not put to their best use, Australia’s wellbeing is not as high as it otherwise could be. It is important, therefore, that policy-advisers are able to access quality evidence and use robust frameworks to assist governments to judge the relative merits of alternative policies.

That really is the point. I remind the honourable member for Chifley that if you want to look at the net economic benefit, ‘net’ means that you take into account the benefits and the costs. That is why they call it a cost-benefit analysis, because there is no such thing as a ‘free good’ here. The government is going to spend $43 billion and we have to identify what the benefits will be and see whether they are greater or lesser than $43 billion. So, no, I am not able to determine the net economic benefit of a project without doing any analysis and neither is the government. It does not want to do that analysis because it knows it will not stack up.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms AE Burke)—The question is that the amendments be agreed to. There being more than one voice calling for a division, in accordance with standing order 133(b) the division is deferred until 8pm.

Debate adjourned.

Territories Law Reform Bill 2010
Second Reading

Debate resumed from 15 November, on motion by Mr Crean:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr Crean (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (7.07 pm)—in reply—I thank the House for the opportunity to sum up the debate on the Territories Law Reform Bill 2010 and I would like to thank all members for their contributions to the debate. I had the opportunity to visit Norfolk Island 12 months ago whilst returning from a trade meeting. I met the local people, including some of the Norfolk Island administration. With its unique blend of cultural heritage and its beautiful environment, it really is a special place but it does face significant challenges with its small population—just like many regions in
Australia—and that is what this bill is about helping to address.

The reforms proposed in this bill are required for the long-term financial sustainability of Norfolk Island, but they are also important to resolve some of the short-term issues that currently beset the island. Successful governments have considered these issues for some time. Since taking on the portfolio, I have had discussions recently with the Norfolk Island Chief Minister, the Hon. David Buffett, and his Minister for Finance, the Hon. Craig Anderson. I discussed the legislation by telephone with them on 1 November and we have been working cooperatively since to address the short-term issues that they face as well as setting the scene for assessing and approaching the long-term issues. Also, in Canberra next week I am meeting with the Chief Minister, where we will discuss face to face the short-term and the long-term issues.

It is positive that the Norfolk Island government have recognised that reform will be needed to ensure their viability over the short and the long term. The Chief Minister made a statement to the Legislative Assembly of Norfolk Island earlier this month in which he supported the reform measures proposed in this legislation. This statement affirms Norfolk Island’s commitment to reform and cements the fact that the bill should be passed in a timely manner without amendment. The majority of Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly members also supported the motion, including all four of its ministers.

Apart from the direct dealings with the government of Norfolk Island, the reforms contained in this bill also represent our commitment to improving the lives of Australian citizens living in regional and remote locations, and obviously those living on Norfolk Island. Accepting the Territories Law Reform Bill 2010 is an essential step forward in improving accountability and public confidence in the Norfolk Island government, and introducing a financial framework which will increase community confidence in the Norfolk Island government’s management of public money and the long-term sustainability of their economy. The bill does not seek to remove responsibility from the Norfolk Island government, which the shadow minister for territories has indicated is one of his concerns because it was raised previously by the Norfolk Island government. Rather it will increase their responsibility in the areas of governance reform and introduce a contemporary financial framework and administrative law requirements.

These provisions will extend those entitlements that apply here on the mainland to residents living on Norfolk Island. Australian citizens resident on Norfolk Island are entitled to the same level of accountability and transparency from their government that other citizens receive from their state and territory government. The shadow minister’s amendments, however, offer Australian citizens on Norfolk Island less transparency and less accountability, and will not increase public confidence in their administration. Further to this, the Norfolk Island administration has previously said it would legislate for these administrative law reforms but has continuously failed to do so. These reforms will not only give Norfolk Islanders a better understanding of the operation of their government but also improve the ability of Norfolk Islanders to participate in decision making concerning their future.

The need for Norfolk Island governance reform has been stated in numerous parliamentary reports and recommendations. The Australian parliament and the Norfolk Island government have long been aware of the need for the reforms contained in this bill. The reforms were announced by the Australian government in May 2009 and implement
a number of recommendations from the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories 2003 report entitled *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?: inquiry into governance on Norfolk Island.*

**Mr Hartsuyker**—Your Latin is great, Simon.

**Mr CREAN**—Thank you. I did study law. The report recommended a wide range of reforms, many of which have been adapted and incorporated into the reforms package implemented by this bill, including reforms to the Norfolk Island electoral system; incorporation of the designations of Chief Minister and ministers and additional powers of dismissal; adoption of a comprehensive financial framework, including auditing and reporting requirements; and the extension to Norfolk Island of the benefits of a comprehensive system of administrative law commensurate to that available to other Australians.

I would also like to address some of the issues raised by members opposite. The member for Stirling and the member for Cowan have argued that the approach taken in the administrative law reforms to extend Commonwealth administrative laws to Norfolk Island is too complex and that the Norfolk Island government lacks the capacity to implement such reforms. These concerns, however, are not shared by the Norfolk Island government. As mentioned earlier, the Norfolk Island government recognises the importance of these reforms and supports the passage of the bill through the parliament without amendments. I do not intend to address the previous issues raised by the Norfolk Island government, as outlined by the member for Stirling, as I have discussed this bill with the Norfolk Island Chief Minister and all outstanding concerns have been resolved. I understand the Norfolk Island government has explained this, in fact, to the member for Stirling and I do not see any point on reviving the old issues nor, quite frankly, do I understand why he is persisting with the amendment.

Much has been made of the different approach which has been taken in relation to the reforms associated with the Ombudsman. I agree that these reforms are a positive example of what can be achieved through cooperation between the Commonwealth and Norfolk Island. However, the approach taken to those reforms associated with the Ombudsman should be distinguished from the remaining administrative reforms for a number of key reasons. Firstly, there was existing precedent for this approach, as the Commonwealth Ombudsman already undertakes the role of the ACT ombudsman under the ACT legislation; and, secondly, the Norfolk Island government introduced ombudsman legislation into the Legislative Assembly in 2009.

The need for administrative law reform on Norfolk Island has been the subject of numerous reports, as I have mentioned, going back to 1991. However, to date the Norfolk Island government has failed to initiate any Norfolk Island legislation in the area of FOI or privacy. The approach taken in relation to administrative law mechanisms, including privacy and freedom of information, was in fact endorsed by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, who completed an inquiry into the bill earlier this year. The suggestion has been made during this debate that the committee recommended freedom of information and privacy legislation be in Norfolk Island law. This is not the case. The committee agreed that the extension of Commonwealth legislation was an effective and appropriate way of implementing high standards of administrative law.
The approach taken in this bill is specifically designed to take into account the ongoing concerns raised by the Norfolk Island government about resourcing and capacity constraints on the island. The existing Commonwealth legislation is adaptable to Norfolk Island and is currently applied across Commonwealth agencies of varying sizes, including those equivalent in size to the Norfolk Island administration. The extension of Commonwealth administrative law mechanisms will enable the Norfolk Island government and community to access the Commonwealth’s expert knowledge, experience and resources. Funding has already been allocated to Commonwealth agencies to assist with the implementation of these reforms on Norfolk Island. The assistance of these Commonwealth agencies will relieve the perceived additional burden on the Norfolk Island administration. The bill will ensure that the standards of administrative law enjoyed by Australians on the mainland are extended to Norfolk Islanders.

As mentioned earlier, the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories has completed an inquiry. It tabled its report on 11 May. The committee supports the general provisions of the bill and recommends that it be passed by the Senate. The committee made four other recommendations. Firstly, it recommends the continuation of consultation with Norfolk Island in the development of regulations to support the bill. This process is already being undertaken through working groups established for that purpose. Secondly, it recommended that the Commonwealth minimise delays in the scrutiny of Norfolk Island legislation as part of the assent process and that a review be undertaken of items in schedules 2 and 3 of the Norfolk Island Act. The government accepts these recommendations.

The final recommendation of the committee is that the amendments relating to elections be removed from the bill and reintroduced in 2011 following consultation with the Norfolk Island government and community. Changes to Norfolk Island’s electoral system have been recommended in a number of previous reports on Norfolk Island, including by the joint standing committee, and whilst Norfolk Island has a degree of self-government it is also part of Australia and the Australian parliament retains ultimate responsibility for territory electoral matters. The proposed amendments simply recognise Commonwealth responsibility.

Under the commencement provisions of the Territories Law Reform Bill 2010, any electoral regulations will only take effect from the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly following the first general election after the bill receives royal assent, which is anticipated to be sometime in 2013. In other words, the first election to be conducted under any new electoral voting system is expected not to occur until 2016.

The other legislative amendments relating to elections, in part 2 of the bill, provide for a minimum term of three years and a maximum term of four years for the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly and enable the Norfolk Island government to make arrangements with the Australian Electoral Commission to conduct general elections or to fill casual vacancies. Consultations undertaken by the Attorney-General’s Department in addition to submissions received by the committee inquiry indicate a level of support from both the Norfolk Island government and the community to these legislative changes. The Australian government acknowledges the concerns raised by the committee in formulating this recommendation. I believe that these concerns can be addressed through retaining the provisions in the bill.

To address the committee’s concerns I agree with the approach taken by the Minis-
ter for Home Affairs, the Hon. Brendan O’Connor, as the minister who was previously responsible for territories. I will undertake not to introduce electoral regulations until after July 2011. This timing will enable consultation with the Norfolk Island government and community and consideration of appropriate voting systems for Norfolk Island. I intend to present to the committee the draft electoral regulations for their review and comment. This will introduce an additional measure of scrutiny to the regulations.

The Norfolk Island reforms included in this bill are an important step in ensuring high levels of transparency and accountability in Norfolk Island governance and financial frameworks and in administrative decision making. The bill allows the Australian government to assist the Norfolk Island government and community to create an equitable and sustainable future. These reforms represent the government’s ongoing commitment and I commend the bill to the House. (Time expired)

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (7.23 pm)—by leave—I move amendments (1) to (18) together:

(1) Schedule 1, item 155, page 55 (line 4) to item 156, page 55 (line 9), omit the items.
(2) Schedule 1, item 158, page 55 (line 14) to item 190, page 62 (line 9), omit the items.
(3) Schedule 1, item 191, page 62 (line 15), omit the note.
(4) Schedule 1, item 192, page 62 (line 16) to item 198, page 65 (line 26), omit the items.
(5) Schedule 1, item 199, page 65 (line 27) to page 66 (line 15), omit the item, substitute:

199 Section 47B

Before “A document is”, insert “(1)”.

199A At the end of section 47B (before the note)

Add

(2) In this section:

State includes Norfolk Island.

(6) Schedule 1, item 200, page 66 (line 16) to item 203, page 66 (line 29), omit the items.
(7) Schedule 1, item 209, page 67 (line 10) to item 211, page 67 (line 15), omit the items.
(8) Schedule 1, item 214, page 68 (lines 2 to 3), omit the item.
(9) Schedule 1, item 216, page 68 (line 8) to item 236, page 70 (line 21), omit the items.
(10) Schedule 1, item 238, page 70 (line 26) to page 71 (line 2), omit the item.
(11) Schedule 1, before item 243, page 73 (lines 2 to 3), omit the heading (Act name)
(12) Schedule 1, item 243, page 73 (lines 4 to 9), omit the item.
(13) Schedule 1, item 244, page 73 (lines 11 to 14), omit the item.
(14) Schedule 1, item 246, page 73 (line 20) to item 273, page 77 (line 25), omit the items.
(15) Schedule 1, item 275, page 78 (line 4) to item 290, page 80 (line 21), omit the items.
(16) Schedule 1, item 292, page 80 (line 29) to page 81 (line 2), omit the item.
(17) Schedule 1, item 293, page 81 (lines 3 to 32), omit the item, substitute:

293 At the end of section 70

Add:

(4) In this section:

State includes Norfolk Island.

(18) Schedule 1, item 294, page 81 (line 33) to item 297, page 82 (line 16), omit the items.

I want to address some of the things the minister said in his contribution. A lot of what he said we do not disagree with. In fact, what he was saying were statements of the obvious. We all understand that there is a need for law reform on Norfolk Island, as the Norfolk Island government reiterated in their dealings with the government and the opposition. It is
untrue to say that this bill does not reduce their independence because clearly it does and clearly that is what the government has believed in the past when they have made submissions to the Commonwealth and to the opposition about these matters.

What has changed is that the government of Norfolk Island have found themselves in difficult financial territory. They have therefore come to the Commonwealth and asked for assistance. The Commonwealth have said to them, ‘Sure we’re happy to assist but only on the condition that you endorse wholesale this particular bill.’ Clearly, Norfolk Island is in an extraordinarily difficult situation. As I said in the debate yesterday, they are well and truly over a barrel and the Labor government have taken full advantage of that and insisted that they endorse this bill wholesale.

Mr Crean—Which they have.

Mr KEENAN—The minister is correct—which they have done, but, as I said, under duress. The truth is that these amendments are incredibly simple amendments. They reflect what you would hope in this parliament would just be common sense—that is, for a small administrative territory like Norfolk Island, with a limited population and limited administrative capacity, they are going to find it extraordinarily expensive and bureaucratically unnecessary to implement wholesale the provisions of the freedom of information and privacy acts which apply to Australia. They have said so consistently in their submissions to inquiries about this bill. I take the opportunity to remind the House about what was said. In their submission dated April 2010, the Norfolk Island government reiterated that the format for the FOI proposed within this bill would be unsustainable for Norfolk Island from both a financial and a resource perspective. They further went on to talk about how this bill was going to affect them in relation to the implementation of privacy provisions. Again, they said that they would find the time and resource costs arising from the complexity of such a system, as suggested in this bill, unsustainable. They believe the Commonwealth have underestimated that time and that complexity. They believe that it is unnecessarily bureaucratic and the opposition shares that view. We believe that was a sensible response. They have not said that they are not interested in administrative law reform within Norfolk Island. In fact, they have explicitly said that they are interested in implementing law reform in both of these areas but they would like to develop FOI and privacy regimes that are more suitable for a territory of their size and of that nature.

For me, that is just a statement of the absolute obvious and the government does not have any particular arguments as to why they cannot sit down with the government of Norfolk Island and come up with an arrangement that is more suitable for them. Instead, they are insisting on the wholesale passing of this bill because they can, because they know they have the Norfolk Island government in a position of weakness and therefore they are just going to override what are the sensible objections of that government as expressed to both the government and the committee inquiring into this particular bill. We think that that is just bureaucracy gone mad. Why is it that the 1,500 inhabitants of Norfolk Island need to have privacy and FOI acts wholesale as they apply to the 22 million people of the Commonwealth of Australia? It does not mean that their rights are going to be somehow less than for anyone else in Australia. It means that they could come up with something sensible and more suitable for their own territory.

This approach has been tried in the past. Indeed, this is the approach the Labor government chose to follow with the govern-
ment of Norfolk Island on some other administra-
tive reforms as related to the role of the
Commonwealth Ombudsman on Norfolk
Island. They were happy to work with the
Commonwealth on that particular reform so
that it would apply to Norfolk Island in a
way that was more suitable for Norfolk Is-
land. Surely it is the citizens and the gov-
ernment of Norfolk Island who are best
placed to judge that. I therefore commend
these amendments to the House. (Time ex-
pired)

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Re-
gional Australia, Regional Development and
Local Government and Minister for the Arts)
(7.28 pm)—We oppose the amendments. The
bill does not remove responsibility from
Norfolk Island. It does increase their ac-
countability. It has the support of the Norfolk
Island government and it is our view that the
sooner this legislation is passed it will enable
a more effective engagement with the Nor-
folk Island government to address its short-
term problems and its long-term viability,
which is the obligation we are going to dis-
charge as the government of Australia. It
follows discussions we have already entered
into in good faith with the Chief Minister
and his government. We need to be able to
proceed on that but with the backing of this
legislation.

Question negatived.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Re-
gional Australia, Regional Development and
Local Government and Minister for the Arts)
(7.30 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL
AMENDMENT (POLITICAL
DONATIONS AND OTHER
MEASURES) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 20 October, on mo-
tion by Mr Gray:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar)
(7.30 pm)—I rise to speak on the Common-
wealth Electoral Amendment (Political Do-
nations and Other Measures) Bill 2010,
which once again we find before us. This is
now the third time that Labor has tried to
ram this flawed, unfair bill through the par-
liament. Labor tried it in 2008 and they
failed. They tried it in 2009 and they failed.
And now they are trying to push it through
again. This bill is a bad bill because it seeks
to entrench a financial advantage for the ALP
and the Greens, who are now also the benefi-
ciaries of some of the unions’ rivers of
gold. This is not genuine reform. Mr Rudd
promised the Australian people genuine re-
form, Senators Faulkner and Ludwig prom-
ised genuine reform, and yet we are once
again presented with this severely flawed
bill.

This bill is another example of the suite of
opportunistic and ad hoc electoral changes
put forward by Labor, this time in cahoots
with the Greens. The coalition has always
believed that any proposals for electoral re-
form should be part of a comprehensive
package, not released in dribs and drabs. We
said that a comprehensive bill should be
brought in after the green paper process was
completed and the government had issued its
response. Yet we have seen seven bills on
electoral matters before the House: the taxa-
tion laws amendment bill, two earlier iter-
ations of the same bill before us today and
four other electoral bills dealt with in June.
At the core of the current bill is a cynical
attempt to seek partisan gain under the guise of reform. The bill is a deliberate attempt to advantage the Labor Party and the Greens and to entrench that financial advantage. It will disadvantage permanently the coalition, the Independents and the smaller parties like Family First. So once again I say: we opposed the previous bills and we will continue to oppose this bill.

We are not opposed to electoral reform, nor do we disagree with a number of the points contained in this bill, but Labor promised comprehensive electoral funding reform following a response to the two electoral green papers. We have had no response. We have had nothing from Labor. Instead, Labor, having done a deal with the Greens, are again serving up this crusty old bill in the hope that we may now find it appetising. They have done so only because it was part of the cynical deal with the Greens to deliver power to the Gillard government. There is nothing new in this bill, and it is no more appealing than it was previously. At its heart, this bill is fundamentally flawed, even though there are some positive suggestions such as the foreign donation ban, which is a legitimate thing to do. We note that it is far more likely to hurt the ALP and the Greens than it is the coalition, but no doubt they will find ways around it. The ban on anonymous donations is welcome, but we feel that setting the limit at $50 is unworkable, when the very decentralised nature of our major political parties will result in an inordinate increase in administrative costs for our parties. We believe that $250 would be a more reasonable figure.

We support prompt disclosure of donations, but we also note the horrendous administrative costs that have afflicted the political parties in New South Wales following the changes in that state. It is notable that both sides of state politics now acknowledge that twice-yearly, eight-week reporting time frames are problematic and that the Keneally government, with the agreement of the Greens, have moved to return to an annual disclosure regime. We do not object to the principle that election funding should not exceed election expenses, but we do question whether it is worth imposing the additional financial and administrative burden on Independents and small parties just to fix a problem that was once seen to have been created by Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party. It is well to reflect that Pauline Hanson became our first political prisoner in that she was imprisoned for a strictly party political issue, where she was held not to have registered her party. That was eventually overturned.

Finally, we support stronger penalties for infringements of the Commonwealth Electoral Act, but in so doing we note the most egregious electoral abuses have been those committed by the Labor Party: the multiple cases of electoral fraud in Queensland which resulted in the Shepherdson inquiry, the Gino Mandarino fraudulent enrolment, the Christian Zahra fraudulent enrolment and the Wollongong City Council sex and bribery scandals. Why is there no strengthening of the penalty for falsely enrolling? Why is there no strengthening of the penalties for fraudulently voting? Why have we skimmed over these crimes, if you are serious about electoral reform?

So let us look at what real reform should look like. I am sure there will be a lot of talk by members opposite about the corrupting influence of big donations. Of course, there is not one instance at the federal level of politics, I believe, that you can point to that supports any such assertions. Let me make it very clear. I do not believe that there is a single member of the federal parliament who acts corruptly due to the influence of donations. I do not extend that to the New South Wales Labor government; that is a very different story which is indeed mired in corrup-
tion. But legislation for ethical behaviour will not make a corrupt person act ethically.

So what is this bill really about? It is about coercing coalition donors to stop donating to the coalition or to donate to the Labor Party as well. And we all know how it works. We know that companies which donated exclusively to the coalition are subject to pressure from Labor officials to provide balanced funding to the Labor Party or to face repercussions. And we know getting the balance right is one of those expressions that this Labor Party likes the most.

Mr Hartsuyker—It’s almost a slogan!

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It is indeed a slogan and in this context getting it right means coercing coalition donors into balancing up those donations to the Labor Party.

Disclosure returns are used by Labor officials to use intimidation to extract money from businesses. Donate just to the coalition and you are bound to get a call from the state secretary of the ALP suggesting that it would be appropriate for your business to donate equally to both parties. If a company failed to pay up, it could find itself blackballed for government contracts in Labor controlled states or the business would suddenly attract a great deal more attention from union officials. By lowering the disclosure threshold to $1,000 from the existing $11,500 those companies and individuals who had previously had some security through anonymity would now find themselves open to a return of such Labor intimidation.

The historical trend has been that the unions continue to provide massive support to the Labor Party, and now the Greens are starting to see their share of that money—money they hope will increase as they become more disillusioned with the Labor Party itself. Conversely, businesses have either split donations on a 50-50 basis or, after tiring of pressure from Labor officials, have simply withdrawn their support for funding of political parties entirely. Were this bill to pass in its current form, the flight of donors would not only be likely to continue but would also be likely to increase apace. Of course, that does not matter to Labor and the Greens, who have the rivers of gold from the trade unions.

Whilst I have said that donations do not influence politicians at the federal level, let us for the sake of argument suppose that there might be some influence peddling by big money, and if big money and the influence that it buys is the problem then consider this: the trade union movement are the biggest money influence peddlers in Australia. Nobody actually knows the total amount of money given by the unions to the ALP and, more recently, to the Greens. Certainly, the unions and the ALP alike like to keep quiet about the level of union affiliation fees—I guess we are a bit grateful to Rodney Cawdler for at least publishing some of them in New South Wales; he had access that the rest of us would never get. But what we do know from the limited information on the public record is this: between 1 July 2006 and 30 June 2009 unions helped the ALP campaign by $76.6 million through direct and indirect funding.

Mr Brendan O’Connor interjecting—

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Let me repeat that figure: $76.6 million from the unions through direct and indirect funding. Let me say—

Mr Gray interjecting—

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—If we are going to talk about television advertising, that is a pretty sorry tale, again, from the Labor Party’s point of view. Having first impugned the good reputation of the Auditor-General and then gone on to have someone inquire into him, and to then appoint the person who criticised him to the job that the
Auditor-General formerly had, Mr Ludwig then, of course, exempted them from that decision and they simply spent the money anyway—and all ‘in the national interest’. My goodness gracious me! So I repeat: $76.6 million over three years. Direct payment to the ALP from unions amounted to just under $20 million during this period of time. But independent political campaigning by unions added a further $56.7 million to the left of politics through their overt support of either the ALP or the Greens.

So let us put it in perspective. I have been made aware of a leaked financial statement of the New South Wales branch of the AMWU from 2008. On page 3 of that document, under the heading ‘National Council Political Fund’, I note the following items: affiliation fees, $401,846—and I would hazard a guess it was not affiliated with the Liberal Party, the Greens, Family First or Independents; donations, $209,591—and I would also guess that this was not a donation to the Liberal Party, the Greens, Family First or Independents; election advertising, $8,120. This brings the total for one year of overt political expenditure to over $620,000. But the best is the last. There is a specific line item in these accounts which says, ‘Marginal Seat Campaign: $150,352.’ And that is just one branch of one union and the influence that comes their way.

Before the members on the other side and the crossbench get too high and mighty about the evils of corporate donations, let them first reflect on what the AMWU and every other union spends and what influence they get for that money. A list of the top 12 union donations to the ALP in 2007-08 is instructive: Simon Crean’s old union, Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association, $1.5 million; Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, $1.3 million; Communications Electrical Plumbing Union, $1 million; Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, $765,000; Electrical Trades Union, $674,000; Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, $650,000; Maritime Union of Australia, $581,000; Australian Workers Union, $568,000; Health Services Union, $366,000—we are into petty cash now!—the Transport Workers Union, $304,000; Australian Services Union, $244,000; and the National Union of Workers, $236,000. If you want to talk about big money in politics, there is no more powerful influence than trade unions.

What do the unions get for this simple largesse? Union leaders preside over ALP preselections. Union leaders sit on various administrative committees of the Labor Party. The overwhelming majority of Labor MPs are former union officials. I am aware that certain left-wing academics have tried to make the argument that, given the relationship between the unions and the ALP, unions should be granted some sort of special exemption in relation to funding and disclosure laws. I find this argument totally unconvincing. The old myth of the unions as somehow being representative bodies is disproved in both the general—only 17 per cent of workers are now union members—and the specific: official ALP figures show that few union members want anything to do with the Labor Party.

Yet the disproportionate position of the trade unions in the power structure of the Labor Party is worth noting. In New South Wales, for example—and these are ALP sourced figures; as I said, we are greatly indebted to Rodney Cavalier—there were 15,385 financial members of that branch of the ALP as at September 2009. Of these, 4,090 were employed or in receipt of an income but not a member of an affiliated union, 2,444 were members of affiliated unions, 8,400 were students, retired, on home duties, pensioners or unemployed, and 451 were life members. Yet, in delegateships to
the ALP annual conference, affiliated unions made up 427 voting members and the party members made up 426. Unions also retain their 50 per cent share of the vote on selection committees. But the key statistic is that New South Wales ALP members who were members of affiliated unions totalled fewer than 2,500 people. That is 0.6 per cent of the total 384,000 affiliated union members in New South Wales. Thus, 99.4 per cent of members of affiliated unions in New South Wales who have actively chosen not to join the Labor Party are still financing political ambitions for the 0.6 per cent who have.

We are opposing this bill, but we are still advocating reform. There are a whole range of other matters which have been left on the backburner and need to be part of a comprehensive approach. In this legislation, is there any mention of donation caps? No. Any mention of expenditure caps? No. Any mention of donation and expenditure caps on third parties? No. Rather, the bill is deathly silent on the intervention of so-called third parties such as GetUp!, Greenpeace, the Wilderness Society, the WWF and the like. We all know who they support, and it is not this side of politics. This bill will return power to faceless men who give secret donations to seemingly innocuous front organisations.

Over the last weekend we saw confirmation that GetUp! received a secret donation of more than $1 million from the CFMEU construction division.

Mr Hartsuyker—They said they needed the money, so it was okay!

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—That is right. This is the same GetUp! which previously lectured us about the so-called corrupting influences of big money. The hypocrisy of GetUp! is breathtaking. They rail against union donations yet they are happy to take them. It reminds me of the old Augustine plea: ‘Oh, Lord, make me pure, but not just yet.’ In the final stages of the 2010 election campaign they happily took a secret donation to run an overtly partisan ad which personally attacked Tony Abbott. Surely this evidence puts the final nail in the coffin for GetUp!’s claims of nonpartisanship. GetUp! is simply a pro-Labor front.

GetUp! claims to have over 370,000 members, but what do these figures represent? You just have to click on a button on their webpage in support of any one of their many campaigns and—whammo!—you are claimed as a member of GetUp! Yet, if you take a serious look at the documentation which shows the constitution of GetUp! Ltd, it shows that to get to be a member with any voting rights is extraordinarily difficult. It sets out the requirements that you have to meet to be a director. They include ‘individual with significant credibility and experience in the union movement or industrial field’. You have to be ‘significantly credible and experienced in the Australian environmental movement’. And they like you to be ‘credible with the Australian media or business’. In other words, the connection between the union movement, Labor and GetUp! is very strong. If we go back in the history of it we will see that one of the previous directors of the company was none other than William Shorten, who then lived at Laura St, Moonee Ponds. He has moved. These recent revelations tell you all you need to know—that it is a front organisation for big leftist money.

GetUp! originated with seed funding from the socialist millionaire and pro-Labor supporter Evan Thornley. According to its own figures, the top 22 donors in GetUp! accounted for almost $2 million or a quarter of GetUp’s total funding in the year to September 2010, including another $50,000 of trade union money from the CPSU. If this bill passes you can expect to see a proliferation
of third-party organisations funded and controlled by faceless men. Just imagine a future where the political debate in this country is controlled not by your elected members and senators but by the faceless men such as the self-outed Paul Howes.

There is another loophole in this bill which will work in favour of third parties: overseas donations. Under this bill third parties like GetUp! will still be able to get foreign donations provided that the main purpose of the gift is not for political expenditure. This is a farce—the money is completely fungible. An unscrupulous foreign donor simply has to pretend that their donation is for administrative purposes, freeing up money collected locally for political expenditure. Contrast this with the provisions which apply to political parties: a blanket ban on foreign receipts for any purpose. This is a massive loophole. It is another reason why this bill needs to be rejected and the government must return to the drawing board. We need to be presented with a bill which addresses all issues raised in the green papers, not just those which favour Labor and the Greens.

There is nothing in this bill which could be considered reform in any sense of the word. Labor’s decision to pick and choose the electoral reform it wants conjured deep suspicion in 2008 and 2009 and even more in 2010, with the colluding of the Greens in relation to this bill. In my home state of New South Wales we have seen the Greens enter into a devilish pact with state Labor to pass Labor’s deeply flawed electoral bill. Yet when Mr O’Farrell promised even more stringent laws, the sorts of laws which the Greens have supposedly been pushing for some time, we found the Greens have colluded with the ALP, to their joint advantage and to the disadvantage of the opposition. Some may be loath to impute bad motives, but what explanation other than rank self-interest makes any sense? We all know that Mr Bandt received substantial union funding to help him win the seat of Melbourne.

In response to the New South Wales bill, the New South Wales Greens said, ‘The laws before parliament are far from perfect and the limits are too small, but taken as a whole it is a step forward.’ The unions of course will be able to donate over a million dollars each, and there are 22 of them affiliated in New South Wales. That is a $22 million war chest for starters. The Greens say that they will have to work with the next government to improve the electoral laws and close loopholes. Isn’t it interesting, however, to see how pragmatic the Greens can become when it is a matter for which they gain a direct pecuniary interest? There is no taking the moral high ground or standing true to one’s principles on this issue by the Greens. Surely the Greens are not hiding behind insincere rhetoric to obscure their new-found funding windfall from certain disaffected sections of the trade union movement. Indeed, a cynical person might be tempted to believe that the legislative rush for this current bill was simply an attempt by Labor and the Greens to entrench a financial advantage for themselves before the next election and to set the coalition, Independents and minor parties at respective disadvantage.

Two and a half years ago we were willing to take Labor at their word on a promise that a comprehensive reform bill based on the outcome of the green paper process would be dealt with by the parliament before an election was called, but it never came; it simply never came. Instead this bill—this zombie bill, twice killed by the parliament already—is disinterred by Labor and the Greens and seeks to walk among us like the living dead. We will not support the bill, and I am surprised that the Special Minister of State, who is sitting opposite me at the table, wrote on 8 April 2009 to some of his donors saying:
Many of my friends and supporters were very generous in their campaign donations in 2007 and took advantage of the fact that donations of up to $10,500 did not have to be declared. Currently contributions under $10,900 are below the donation disclosure threshold and do not need to be declared to the Australian Electoral Commission. Nice one!

But we will work with government. We will not be railroaded. The bill is a cynical attempt to hit the conservative side of politics and legislate a permanent financial advantage for Labor and the Greens. If this bill passes, we will condemn our country to a future where real political debate will be hijacked by third parties. If this bill passes, elected representatives will become the puppets of faceless men who control the union purse strings and can dish out patronage at their whim. This bill deserves to be defeated. The opposition will indeed be opposing it.

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (7.58 pm)—I am very pleased to speak today in favour of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010, which will give effect to the government’s very important commitments to immediately reform the legislative regime that applies to donations, disclosure obligations and the regulation of funding for political parties and election campaigns in Australia. The bill seeks to ensure that election campaigns in this country remain fair and transparent and in order to do so seeks to improve our existing arrangements relating to the disclosure of political donation and election funding.

I would like to begin with a few remarks from the member for Mackellar. It was quite a fantastical dissertation, I must admit, but in between maligning various union members and unions in general, she raised the point that she was concerned that the Labor Party would be coercing coalition supporters to donate to both parties. Evidently the member for Mackellar is somewhat concerned with the competition that this might create. It is one of the more ludicrous assertions that this chamber is likely to hear, and what a terribly thin argument. Really it says less about the opposition’s concerns about election funding reform and more about its capacity to meaningfully mount a convincing argument about the merits of the coalition’s policies and their leadership.

Having attempted to malign a variety of unions in her remarks—unions which have unashamedly, unabashedly, campaigned against Tony Abbott’s and Bronwyn Bishop’s Work Choices—she anticipates that others in this debate will seek to similarly malign corporations.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Deputy Speaker, a point of order: I would ask that the member opposite utilise the proper forms of address of the parliament.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—I thank the member for Mackellar. I would remind the member for La Trobe to please use the correct parliamentary terminology and refer to members by their seats.

Ms SMYTH—I will accommodate the member for Mackellar in repeating that what unions were unabashedly campaigning about—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Deputy Speaker, a point of order: it is not an accommodation—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have not recognised the member for Mackellar. The member for La Trobe will resume her seat. The member for Mackellar on a point of order.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. On a point of order: it is not accommodating me; it is simply observing the standing orders.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—There is no point of order. The member for La Trobe.

Ms SMYTH—It was unions who were much maligned in the member for Mackellar’s remarks previously about those who had campaigned somewhat steadfastly against the opposition leader and the member for Mackellar’s Work Choices regime. She anticipates, I believe, that others in this debate will seek to malign corporate donors. Here is a revelation: I do not propose to do so because I think that we are more than capable of articulating a positive position on the bill which is put before us—the bill which so effectively provides for significant reforms to electoral campaign requirements.

The changes proposed to be made by this bill are considerable and they are detailed. In the main, however, the bill deals with three central objectives. It increases the transparency of disclosure obligations relating to political donations and provides for more frequent and prompt reporting of political expenditure and donations. The reforms do not set out to create additional or unnecessary administrative obligations for parties or individuals but seek to increase the transparency and the integrity of the election system. It is quite extraordinary then that the members opposite would be seeking to oppose such a straightforward and fairly innocuous piece of legislation.

Public perceptions of the sources of funding available to political parties and individuals are naturally linked to the regard in which our political system is held. Thorough disclosure of sources of election campaign funding ensures that the electorate can satisfy itself of the independence of policy decisions from undue influence or interference. The history of this legislation has been quite protracted—so much for the legislative rush described in the remarks of the member for Mackellar. The reforms are, as might be expected, detailed and comprehensive. They have involved deliberations over a considerable period of time and it is now timely indeed that they proceed. The government has sought to reform election funding and political donations for some time. The first bill to address these issues was introduced in—

Mr Pyne—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: the standing orders require the vote that was delayed in the dinner break to be called on at eight o’clock. I am just wondering why that would not have been done.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have taken the view that the deferred division should not proceed until the member speaking at 8 pm has completed his or her speech, so I did not interrupt the member.

Ms SMYTH—I was remarking on the legislative history of this bill. Members who were present during the last term might recall that the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters had initially delivered its advisory report on that bill in October 2008. In December 2008, the government tabled amendments to the bill in response to that report. Disappointingly, that bill was rejected by the Senate. The government tried to introduce another bill in early 2009, but again, unfortunately, the second bill lapsed with the end of the last parliament. Given the protracted nature of deliberations around the reforms proposed in this bill and the recalcitrance of members of the opposition to date on the topic, it is important that the bill be enacted as law as soon as possible and that the commencement date of 1 July 2011, contemplated in the bill, should have effect.

This government has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to electoral reform in this area by pursuing reform at the earliest opportunity available to it. I hope that other members ultimately in this place will be as committed to genuine reform of campaign finance in Australia. The member for Mackel-
lar remarked earlier this evening that the opposition would like to advocate for further reform. Unfortunately, we have heard little of it and their obstruction on this matter paints a fairly unpalatable picture of their commitment to election reform generally. The practical reforms which are proposed in this bill will have a significant impact upon the functioning of our electoral processes and, ultimately, the representative nature of our democracy. It is critical that they be handled sincerely and implemented as swiftly as possible.

Although the bill includes a substantial number of provisions, I propose to refer only to those key changes which go to the heart of the electoral reform package. Central to the reforms proposed in the bill is a new lower threshold for the disclosure of donations. The current threshold of $11,500 will be substantially reduced to a threshold of $1,000. This disclosure level would apply equally to donors, registered parties and candidates. It will provide transparency and accountability in the donations received or given by key participants in the political process and it reduces the scope for undisclosed gifts. It is curious then that such a relatively innocuous proposal should be so vehemently opposed by members opposite. Central to the reforms also proposed by the bill is the capacity to make anonymous donations—

Mr Pyne—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I do not like to disagree with your ruling but I do point out that the standing orders indicate that all business will be suspended at eight o’clock to deal with any votes or quorums that might have been called during the dinner break. The precedent that you have established means that if a speaker starts speaking at 7.59 pm, for example, they could speak for 20 minutes, and if they were the first speaker from the opposition or government side on a bill they could speak for 30 minutes. That would mean that a division or quorum would not be dealt with until either 20 past eight or half past eight. That is a very important precedent to have established, and the opposition believes that, as members are being called back to be here at eight o’clock and as the standing orders indicate that the votes and proceedings should be concluded at eight, you should interrupt the member for La Trobe and call on the vote.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank the Manager of Opposition Business. I am happy to take advice from House of Representatives Practice and from the Speaker. I have already given my ruling and I call on the member for La Trobe to continue.

Ms Smyth—Mr Deputy Speaker, in the interests of assisting the House, I am willing to defer the rest of my remarks on this matter until later.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I thank the member for La Trobe for her goodwill. The debate is interrupted. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (COMPETITION AND CONSUMER SAFEGUARDS) BILL 2010

Consideration in Detail

Consideration resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 133(b), I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion moved earlier today by the honourable member for Wentworth on which a division was called but deferred.

Question put:

That the amendments (Mr Turnbull’s) be agreed to.
The House divided. [8.12 pm]
(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ayes</th>
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**AYES**

- Abbott, A.J.
- Andrews, K.
- Baldwin, R.C.
- Bishop, B.K.
- Briggs, J.E.
- Buchholz, S.
- Christensen, G.
- Cobb, J.K.
- Crook, T.
- Entsch, W.
- Forrest, J.A.
- Gambbaro, T.
- Griggs, N.
- Hartsuyker, L.
- Hunt, G.A.
- Jensen, D.
- Keenan, M.
- Laming, A.
- Macfarlane, I.E.
- Markus, I.E.
- McCormack, M.
- Morrison, S.J.
- Neville, P.C.
- O’Dwyer, K.
- Prentice, J.
- Ramsey, R.
- Robb, A.
- Roy, Wyatt
- Schultz, A.
- Simpkins, L.
- Smith, A.D.H.
- Southcott, A.J.
- Tehan, D.
- Tudge, A.
- Van Manen, B.
- Washer, M.J.

**NOES**

- Adams, D.G.H.
- Bandt, A.
- Bowen, C.
- Brodman, G.
- Burke, A.S.
- Byrne, A.M.
- Cheeseman, D.L.
- Collins, J.M.
- Crean, S.F.
- Danby, M.
- Elliot, J.
- Emerson, C.A.
- Ferguson, M.J.
- Garrett, P.
- Gibbons, S.W.
- Grierson, S.J.
- Hall, J.G. *
- Husic, E.
- Katter, R.C.
- King, C.F.
- Livermore, K.F.
- Macklin, J.L.
- McClelland, R.B.
- Mitchell, R.
- Neumann, S.K.
- O’Neill, D.
- Parke, M.
- Ripoll, B.F.
- Rowland, M.
- Rudd, K.M.
- Shorten, W.R.
- Smith, S.F.
- Snowdon, W.E.
- Symon, M.
- Thomson, K.J.
- Wilkie, A.
- Zappia, A.

**AYES**

- Alexander, J.
- Andrews, K.J.
- Billson, B.F.
- Bishop, J.I.
- Broadbent, R.
- Chester, D.
- Ciobo, S.M.
- Coulton, M. *
- Dutton, P.C.
- Fletcher, P.
- Frydenberg, J.
- Gash, J.
- Haase, B.W.
- Hawke, A.
- Irons, S.J.
- Jones, E.
- Kelly, C.
- Ley, S.P.
- Marino, N.B.
- Matheson, R.
- Mirabella, S.
- Moylan, J.E.
- O’Dowd, K.
- Oakeshott, R.J.M.
- Pyne, C.
- Randall, D.J.
- Robert, S.R.
- Ruddock, P.M.
- Seeker, P.D. *
- Slipper, P.N.
- Somlyay, A.M.
- Stone, S.N.
- Truss, W.E.
- Turnbull, M.
- Vasta, R.
- Wyatt, K.

**PAIRS**

- Hockey, J.B.
- Gillard, J.E.
- Scott, B.C.
- Plibersek, T.

* denotes teller

**Question negatived.**

**In division—**

The SPEAKER—I understand a point of order was raised about the timing of the division. It is clear that the practice of the House has been, where a member has been on his or her feet making a speech, that the member has completed their speech and then the division has been called. I would hope that that is the practice that we will continue—

Mr Pyne—Nobody knew!
The SPEAKER—Yet again the member for Sturt—I am not sure whether he is talking to his neighbours—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—But he does it in a way that I can hear—and, because of the special relationship that he was seeking from me, I listen to him. When he said that nobody knew, I assumed that he meant that nobody had read *Practice*. But that is okay; I accept that he was talking about something else.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I am supporting the member of the Speaker’s panel, who appears to be lacking in confidence and requiring that support.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I am supporting the member of the Speaker’s panel was only doing what he thought was correct. I understand that the House resolved it in a way that was accommodating to all. That should be acknowledged.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (8.19 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL AMENDMENT (POLITICAL DONATIONS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (8.20 pm)—At my last opportunity to make remarks on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010, I was referring to the various reforms which are being considered in the bill. I had remarked on the new lower threshold for disclosure of donations, which I had observed was a fairly innocuous reform but a significant reform from the point of view of the electoral system and the transparency of the system in the public’s eyes. I found it remarkable that those opposite were taking issue with such a relatively innocuous reform.

Simultaneously, a key reform to the capacity to make anonymous donations will be made under the bill. The current Commonwealth Electoral Act provides that registered political parties and their branches, candidates, Senate groups and those who act on behalf of persons within each of these categories may receive anonymous donations below a specified indexed threshold. The indexed threshold is currently set at $11,500, and anonymous donations which exceed that threshold are not permitted. But at present a donor who wishes to make anonymous donations could do so by making multiple donations slightly below the threshold to various divisions of the same political party. The bill before us would remove that donation-splitting loophole by using an existing definition of ‘related political parties’ found elsewhere in the Commonwealth Electoral Act to ensure that donations to different divisions of a political party are treated as aggregated, as they should be. This again is what one might regard as a fairly innocuous reform, and yet again we are seeing considerable resistance to it from those opposite.

The reforms proposed under this bill will have the effect of banning all anonymous donations except those which are less than or equal to $50 and which are received at a general public activity or at a private event. These activities and events are defined in the bill and specified records must be kept in
order for the anonymous donations to be retained.

All of these reforms will apply equally to all political parties and all candidates. Once again, it is most surprising that those opposite seek to resist these changes so strenuously. Unfortunately, while I have articulated the merits and factual circumstances of this bill, those opposite have maligned union officials and union generally. I have not, as the member for Mackellar flagged in her remarks, sought to malign any individual donor or categories of donor and I do not propose to do so in the remaining time available to me.

Anonymous donations by third parties for political expenditure will now also be prohibited. This will apply to third parties that are required to lodge annual returns of their political expenditure above the current threshold, which will hopefully—assuming that this bill is passed—be lowered to a threshold of $1,000. The bill also provides for the recovery by the Commonwealth of any unlawful anonymous donations. Both of these reforms will improve substantially the transparency of political donations and the confidence that the public can have in our political processes. It is pleasing to note in particular that these reforms are supported by the Greens and the Independents.

Both of these reforms, along with the balance of reforms in the proposed bill, will have a very significant role to play in terms of the public scrutiny of political donations and expenditure by making information more swiftly available to the public. The bill before us will require more regular disclosure of political donations and expenditure. It will also reduce the current time periods for the lodgement of returns from the existing periods of between 15 and 20 weeks down to eight weeks. The requirement to lodge returns will now apply once every six months rather than once every 12 months as is currently the case.

My time has been somewhat interrupted this evening, unfortunately. I will leave it to my colleagues remaining to speak in this debate to remark on the other merits of the bill. In closing, the changes that I have discussed and a substantial number of additional measures proposed in the bill that I have not had an opportunity to discuss this evening will have a very significant and positive impact on public perceptions of campaign finances and electoral transparency.

One of the remarks of the member for Mackellar this evening was, ‘What motivation other than rank self interest makes any sense?’ I put it back to the opposition, because I simply cannot understand what motivation other than rank self interest makes any sense. (Time expired)

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (8.26 pm)—The issue of political donations is a vexed one in politics and it is fundamental to the integrity of our political system. An important aspect of political speech and political freedom is the ability for people to make a financial contribution to a political party, candidate or cause. But we all know that very real concerns arise about the independence and the integrity of political parties and candidates where the sums involved are so large that something must be given in return—or something must be assumed to be given in return.

The Labor Party has a very different history to the Liberal Party. The Labor Party is the political wing of the labour movement. The trade unions are the industrial wing of the labour movement. The Labor Party was established as a means of getting the representatives of the trade unions into parliament. The operations, the preselections and the policies of the Labor Party are to a very
large extent controlled by the trade union movement.

We have reached a point in Australia in the campaign finance area where the Labor Party enjoys an enormous advantage in terms of fundraising and campaign finance. They receive 100 per cent of the tens of millions of dollars that the trade unions give to political campaigns—the unions do not give any to the Liberal Party. Those in the business sector—particularly the large public companies—increasingly do not make political donations at all, where they do, they split them between both parties. But increasingly they do not make political donations at all. If you go back 20 years, you could say that the big end of town gave to the conservatives and the unions gave to Labor, and there was a rough equivalence. That is not the case any longer.

Increasingly, you have Labor dominated financially by the trade union movement. They have an organisational leverage over the Labor Party because of the history and structure of the Labor Party. But they also have a financial stranglehold over the Labor Party—it cannot function without the massive support from the trade union movement. At the same time as the large public companies that used to make political donations have increasingly not made them, more and more we have seen political donations from business that used to come to either party go overwhelmingly to the Labor Party because of their domination at the state level for some time. Further, political donations that come from business tend to come from businesses that have a particular interest in government policy—for example, the liquor industry, the gaming industry and property developers.

There have been many efforts—false starts—at trying to do something about this. The issue of disclosure is being sought to be addressed in this bill, but this bill is not calculated to restore integrity to campaign finance. It is designed to tilt a campaign finance playing field that is already tilted in favour of Labor even more in favour of Labor. Because of the large sums that the trade union movement gives to the Labor Party, it is immaterial whether the disclosure level is $11½ thousand or $1,000. The donations are going to exceed the higher disclosure level. There are many small and medium sized businesses that know that if they make a donation to our side of politics and that is disclosed they will come under pressure to make an equivalent donation to the Labor Party. There is no point being naive about this. Those honourable members who have been involved in campaign finance—in particular, those on the Labor side—know that that is exactly how it works. The pressure, the standover, is brought to bear and a business is pressured to make an equivalent donation to Labor or, alternatively, decides that it is all too hard and stops making donations at all.

The Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010 is designed not to effect campaign finance reform. We have sought over the years to engage the Labor Party in constructive discussions about real campaign finance reform. What that would look like is campaign finance reform that puts a cap on donations and eliminates donations. This is my own view. It is based on submissions I have made over the years and my own experience as honorary Federal Treasurer of the Liberal Party in a previous life. I was the principal fundraiser for the Liberal Party in that capacity. My view is that we should have a system whereby there is a cap on donations and donations can be made only by natural persons—that is to say, human beings—who are on the electoral roll. Donations could not be made by trade unions or
by companies or associations. That would restore a degree of equivalence, an equity, and would address many of the issues of perceived influence that we see at the moment.

I make the point that these issues of influence are very, very substantial. All of us on our side have complained over the years about the influence the trade union movement has over the Labor Party. The Labor Party would say in response to that, ‘Well, the trade union movement created our party; it is only reasonable that they should have influence.’ However, consider this: the Labor government in New South Wales—which I hope is entering into its last months in office—in its time under Premier Bob Carr, permitted an extraordinary expansion of gaming facilities in hotels throughout New South Wales. Every hotel in New South Wales, with very few exceptions, was turned into a small casino. That was done to protect the economics of the hotel industry. You would have to be one of the most naive people—and I hope I do not fall into that category—to imagine that that extraordinary change in policy, which I believe has done great social harm in New South Wales, was not connected with the massive donations from the hotel industry and from the gaming industry to the Australian Labor Party’s New South Wales branch.

These issues of influence, perceived or real—people have different views about them—have to be dealt with. This bill does not deal with them. This bill is designed to do one thing and one thing only. It is designed to make it harder for small businesses to support the coalition, because they are the ones that will be sensitive to disclosure due to the pressure that they come under. The unions do not mind, because their donations are very big—they are well over the $11½ thousand threshold. Large companies are not fussed, because their donations are also going to be well over $11,500. If you think about the sorts of people and the sorts of people and businesses that are making $5,000, $6,000 and $7,000 donations to political parties, they are small and medium business and their owners. They are overwhelmingly supporters of the coalition, and they will be vulnerable, once their donations are disclosed, to being hit up by the Labor Party.

That is what this so-called reform is all about. If Labor were fair dinkum about campaign finance reform, it would look at caps being placed right across the board and donations being limited to natural persons. So take unions out of it, take companies out of it, limit it to people on the electoral roll and then focus on what measures can be taken to ensure that those rules are not subverted by third-party activity. We have come close in discussions with different people in the Labor Party over the years to achieving we thought some kind of consensus in this area. But Labor, with this legislation, is quite clearly not interested in real reform; it is interested in changes that benefit it as opposed to the coalition.

So I cannot support this legislation. I have a longstanding commitment, publicly documented over nearly a decade, to campaign finance reform, but it has to be fair dinkum. That means it has to be root-and-branch reform, not just fiddling at the edges—not just twirling the knobs to make the system that much more favourable to the Labor Party. The playing field is already tilted in favour of the ALP. This legislation is designed to tilt it even further in that direction. It does not address the real problems of perceived influence, real influence, integrity and equity that we face in campaign finance. We need to face those issues, and we can do so. There is a common will to do it. At least I thought there was a common will when Senator Faulkner was in a leading role in the government ranks, but that seems to have dissi-
Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (8.37 pm)—I speak in support of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010. This bill has nothing whatsoever to do with trade unions or the trade union movement. There is no mention of the same in this legislation. I heard the member for Wentworth—and, indeed, the member for Mackellar, when she was in the chamber before—prattling on about the trade union movement. They just cannot get over it. This legislation is about transparency, accountability and integrity in the political process. On 20 October 2010, the Special Minister of State, the honourable member for Brand, said in his speech on the second reading:

The bill aims to improve our system of political donations disclosure and election funding to help ensure that campaigning is fair and transparent.

The forces of conservatism, the bastions of privilege in this country, were against the franchise. They have been against the universal suffrage that Labor campaigned for. They were in favour of malapportionment of boundaries. I saw that in my home state of Queensland under the dark, long years of the Bjelke-Petersen regime. They made difficult provision voting for those people who were itinerant. They have restricted enrolment; they have cut back the time in which people can enrol to vote when the roll closes. They have done everything they possibly can to cut back the franchise and to ensure that, as the population increases, the franchise goes backwards. Their true colours have been clearly shown—clearly against transparency, integrity and accountability in the political process—by the speech we heard from the member for Wentworth. This legislation is about those three factors.

By world standards we are a very young country. On a national scale, however, we are a very old democracy. Our national anthem talks about being young and free. We are right to be proud of our democratic history. Not many countries in the world have had a longstanding history of democracy and changes of government like we have. We are right to be proud of how healthy our political system is: the integrity, the efficiency and the effectiveness of the Australian Electoral Commission. Its impartiality is to be cherished and honoured. We ought to really laud the Electoral Commission for the way in which it has carried out its duties. The personnel there do a fine job—not for us the terrible events of Florida, in the US, in the presidential election some years ago! We do face challenges in our system, including changing technology, how people can participate in the political process and how influence can be brought to bear through new media and new technologies. With respect to political campaigning we do face the so-called arms race. The major parties spend millions of dollars at each election, at state and federal level, campaigning, trying to win the marginal seats, ensuring that their message is out across the country and ensuring that they get adequate and proper representation also in the Senate. There is a perception by many people that money does buy influence. Every person in this House would have raised funds to run their campaign. The political parties they represent and indeed the Independents, if they were a member of a political party before becoming an Independent, would have also been engaged in party campaign fundraising.

We have many elections in this country: local, state and federal. Many countries in the world, such as the UK, have local elections, but they have a unitary system of government: a House of Commons and a House of Lords. We are a federation, so Australians
face the ballot box many times more than those in other countries. Indeed, in my home state the state election is held every three years. Elsewhere it is four but, at a federal level, it is usually significantly less than three years for the House of Representatives and the half-Senate.

As I say, there is a perception that large sums of money not disclosed can have an influence, unnecessarily and unduly, on the political process. Labor is trying to restore some integrity, transparency and some accountability in a system that was, in my view, abused by the 2006 changes by the Howard government where the disclosure threshold for political donations was lifted from $1,500 to more than $10,000, CPI indexed. The Howard government raised the limit for anonymous donations from $1,000 to donations exceeding $10,000, also indexed.

As a delegate to the national conference I, of course, supported Labor’s position of ensuring greater transparency and accountability. As a candidate in the 2007 federal election I was pleased to support Labor’s position. It is a position I hold firmly to my breast and I really believe that what we are doing here today is in the best interests of the political process and builds on the democratic values we hold dear in this country.

In March 2008, the Special Minister of State, Senator John Faulkner, announced the introduction of legislation that would comprehensively reform Australia’s electoral laws. The agenda included three elements: the first was the lowering of the donation threshold from $10,000 to a lower figure and preventing donation splitting to avoid the donation disclosure threshold by treating donations to different branches of a political party—for example, the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party to the Queensland branch of the Labor Party—as donations to the same political party, namely, the Australian Labor Party.

The second element is banning overseas donations and banning anonymous donations unless they are donations of $50 or less received through fundraisers—that is, taking a bucket around at a branch barbecue and raising some funds that way. The third is increasing the reporting obligations on political parties, candidates and other participants in the political process and making sure that we tie public funding to verified electoral expenditure to make sure that political parties and candidates, even if they are Independents, cannot make a profit from public funding. Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper, in our home state—yours and mine—we have seen a former member for Oxley engage herself in significant profit making by virtue of being a serial campaigner at various stages. This is to the discredit of the political system, in my view, and I think we should make sure that there is greater integrity in the political process. Candidates, if they are going to be reimbursed, should be reimbursed for verified political expenditure.

The coalition showed their true colours, just as the member for Wentworth showed them today, by opposing these reforms at every available opportunity, initially by referring the bill to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Electoral Matters for more than a whole year. When the joint standing committee reported on that bill in October 2008, there was dissent by the opposition. The coalition members dissented from the majority and simply argued for further delay, greater procrastination, greater inertia, greater inaction. That was their motto and their mantra. By their voting against the measures in the Senate in March 2009, together with Senator Fielding’s vote, the reform legislation which Senator Faulkner introduced into the Senate was defeated. By voting against a reintroduced bill in the
House of Representatives, they again showed their true colours in their opposition to this integrity measure. By voting against allowing the Senate to consider the bill, yet again, during the March 2009 sittings, again they delayed the legislation and showed that procrastination was what they were all about.

Despite this persistent opposition, the federal Labor government remains committed to making sure that this legislation gets put into our electoral laws. We believe it is important. We believe it is also important for further reforms, and it is not true to think that this is being done in isolation. The member for Wentworth would have you think that all we are on about is an isolated change with respect to this legislation, but our agenda is far wider. Indeed, that was shown by Senator Faulkner bringing forward as part of the government's comprehensive reform measures an electoral reform green paper on donations, funding and expenditure, released in December 2008. That was open for public discussion and submission. The government considers that electoral reform in its widest measure is important to make sure that the system works to the benefit of all Australians and is open and transparent to all.

This bill puts into action the commitment that we made to the Independent members and to the Greens to reform political donations—the funding laws for political parties and for election campaigns. It aims to make sure that the system is fair. I do not agree with the analysis of the member for Wentworth. The bill does improve our system of political donation disclosure. This bill introduces six new measures in the key three areas: increasing transparency of political donations disclosure; more frequent and timely reporting of political donations and expenditure; and—the third phase which I think is important as part of those measures—reforming the public funding of elections.

The bill today is largely in the same form as one introduced—as I referred to—in March 2009. That bill encompassed the government’s amendments to the earlier bill introduced in May 2008, which was rejected by the Senate. The March 2009 bill lapsed with the cessation of the 42nd Parliament. The introduction of this bill and the debate today demonstrate our commitment to restoring the integrity of our political processes and systems.

The six measures in the bill can be easily summarised. First, the donation disclosure threshold level is set at a flat rate of $1,000, lowering it from the current threshold of $11,500. Second, the bill expands on the previous rules on anonymous donations which, under the Commonwealth Electoral Act, could only be given to registered political parties, branches of parties, candidates, Senate groups and people acting on behalf of these categories below an indexation threshold of $11,500. Anonymous donations above this amount are prohibited.

The bill today extends this ban to anonymous donations except where the donation is $50 or less and has been received at a public event such as I described: a barbecue or fete where a bucket is provided for donations—a private event really, like a dance or trivia night, where people might donate smaller amounts. We in this chamber have all been involved in those. Today’s bill defines these activities and events, and specified records must be kept. Currently, if a third party wants to anonymously donate funds for political expenditure, there is no restriction under the Commonwealth Electoral Act. This bill prohibits this by requiring the third party to lodge annual returns of their political expenditure and also altering the threshold of donations in this instance from $11,500 to $1,000.
Currently, section 314AEB of the Commonwealth Electoral Act defines political expenditure on the public expression of views of a political party, a candidate or a member of the House of Representatives or the Senate, including an issue during an election, and the publication of material that requires authorisation. With this bill, only those anonymous donations of $50 or less received by third parties at a general public event or private event will be able to be used for political expenditure by entities required to lodge returns under that section of the Commonwealth Electoral Act. Unlawful anonymous donations, under this bill, can be recovered by the Commonwealth government.

The third measure is that all foreign donations will be banned under this bill. This brings us into line with other nations such as the United States of America, where overseas donations are not allowed. The fourth is that, currently, if a large donation is given, it can be split across states and territories to avoid potential disclosure, and this bill prevents this from happening.

The fifth element is that public scrutiny of political donations and expenditure can be enhanced by reducing time frames for disclosure. The final, sixth, element is that this bill will ensure that election funding is tied directly to genuine election expenditure so that no political party or candidate will financially gain from electoral public funding systems. These are a priority, and the reforms should operate from 1 July 2011.

We are a democratic country but we can make it better. We have a blessed system but we should allow our voters to express their views and wishes without fear of retribution. We are the envy of numerous nations throughout the world but we must always strive to make sure our system is even better and more accountable with more integrity and more transparency. These reforms do just that.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (8.52 pm)—As I rise to speak on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010 I will take a moment to reflect on the question which the member for Blair raised when he talked about trivia nights. He said we have all been to lots of trivia nights. Well, here is a Trivial Pursuit question for you: how many members of the executive of the Labor Party are also senior officials or members of the executive of a union? The answer would be an enormous number. It probably would not be a very good Trivial Pursuit question because it would take too long to answer the question.

The member for Blair said that there was no mention of unions in this bill. That is the precise problem, because what we have here tonight in the bill that we are considering in this parliament is once again an episode in which the Labor Party is putting forward a set of amendments, a set of changes to the laws governing the electoral matters in this country, which are purportedly motivated by a high-minded desire to improve the arrangements under which political funding and other matters are dealt with in this country. And it is uncontroversial, as speaker after speaker from the coalition has said on this bill and on similar bills in the past, that there is always scope for the arrangements in relation to the regulation of political donations to be improved. But when we see, time after time, election after election in which the Labor Party spends very substantial amounts of money on campaigning and then its campaign is reinforced by equally substantial amounts of money spent by the union movement, when we see this time after time and then we see purported reforms which are completely silent on the question of the role of unions, which are completely silent on the
question of funds going to the union movement, which are completely silent on the question of expenditures made by unions in the course of political campaigns, then is it any wonder that on this side of the House we look with a certain degree of scepticism on the motives of the Labor Party in putting forward the measures that are in this bill?

Many others before me have observed that there are very convenient arrangements by which union officials proceed in a smooth and uninterrupted fashion into parliament, moving from being a union official at one stage of their career to being a Labor parliamentarian at another stage of their career. It appears to be amply reflected in the very large number of members of this place and the other place on the other side of the chamber who come from backgrounds as union officials or industrial relations lawyers. Indeed, the recent book by former New South Wales Labor minister Rodney Cavalier, *Power Crisis*, is a very interesting read on the subject of the wholly unrepresentative nature of the modern Labor Party. This bill, which purports to constructively reform the regulatory framework dealing with political donations, fails to address the fundamental policy issues. It is an assemblage of measures purportedly for high-minded motives which is in fact calculated to deliver political advantage to the Labor Party.

I want to make three fundamental points this evening. First of all, the measures in this bill, by virtue of completely failing to address the presence and role of unions in the political process, in effect grant special treatment to the unions and to other third-party organisations which are overwhelmingly aligned with the Labor Party and which have a track record of supporting that party in the election process.

The second point I want to make is that, as on our side of politics we have repeatedly acknowledged, there is a clear need for a more rational framework in relation to the governance of political donations and the coalition has a stated appetite to participate in a rational reform framework. But, as we have repeatedly made the point, no sustainable outcome will be achieved in this area without a bipartisan consensus.

The third point I make is that this bill regretfully falls into a long tradition in which the Labor Party puts forward measures in this area which are purportedly about reform but are in fact designed to grant partisan advantage to one particular side of politics.

Let me turn firstly to the way in which the measures in this bill operate with effect to grant special treatment to the union movement. There is a provision in this bill which requires that donations to all units of a political party be treated as a single entity. But where is the mention in this bill of funding going to the Labor Party on the one hand and funding going to any union on the other also being aggregated when it comes to determining the total amount of the political donations which have been made? There is no mention in this bill of that important issue. This bill is completely silent on that important issue, even though it is very clear to even the most casual observer of the Australian political scene that the union movement and the Labor Party are intimately tied together, as is very clear in the recent book that I cited earlier, *Power Crisis*. People holding key organisational roles within the Labor Party such as presidents, members of the executive, are very frequently holders of senior offices in the union movement. For example, for Mr Michael Williamson, the current vice-president and immediate past president of the Australian Labor Party, his professional background is that he has been a member of the Health Services Union for over 30 years and general secretary for the past 10 years.
What is the significance of this point? There is nothing wrong with being a member of a union—I have no hesitation in making that point. I myself was a union member in the very distant past. But the important point is this: when it comes to the question of expenditure on political campaigns, it is naive in the extreme to look only at the amounts that are expended by registered political parties and to wilfully close one’s eyes to the very substantial expenditure which is made by the union movement in pursuit of political advantage for the Labor Party. Any attempt to reform political donations and the regime which applies to political donations in this country which is blind to that point—which wilfully ignores that point—is rightly and correctly open to the suspicion that the real motive of the changes is to grant partisan political advantage to the Labor Party. You need merely look at the extensive political campaign run against the coalition in the 2007 election by the ACTU on the topic of Work Choices or at the extensive campaign run against Tony Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, in the 2010 election to see that the union movement works hand in glove with the Labor Party when it comes to political campaigns and campaign expenditure. Therefore, to propose a set of reforms which purportedly address important issues in the area of regulation of campaigns and campaign donations but which fail to address this most pressing issue is a wanton failure of the overall reform imperative, and leads inevitably to the suspicion that the primary motivation behind these purported reforms is in fact the securing of partisan political advantage for the Labor Party.

Why is it unfortunate that this package of reforms has come forward without addressing that most central and pressing issue? It is unfortunate because no sustainable outcome in this area will be achieved without a bipartisan consensus. Thoughtful people, people of goodwill, can acknowledge that there is scope for the reform of campaign financing. Thoughtful people, people of goodwill, can acknowledge that there are different approaches which could be taken to those which are presently taken in the Australian system. But anybody who looks at this issue objectively, who looks at the various participants in the political process and who looks at the expenditure which is put into campaigning could not but see the obvious fact that a very substantial player in political campaigning in Australia is the union movement. And the contribution made by the union movement—I am sure you would share my horror at this—is inevitably in support of the Labor Party, with some exceptions such as in Tasmania in 2004, as you might very well remember, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams.

The third point I want to make is that we have seen a regrettable tradition from Labor of putting forward measures which are purportedly designed to reform political campaign donations but which instead are designed to secure partisan political advantage. Any of us who live in New South Wales will have seen only too many examples of this, such as the cynical approach of the New South Wales Labor Party, which spent 15 years remorselessly hoovering up donations from property developers. It had a sudden rush of purity in 2009 and argued that it was no longer appropriate to accept donations from property developers and in turn passed legislation to that effect. When we see a political party which claims to be introducing reforms to the political donations system supposedly in the public interest and supposedly for high-minded motives, but which has a track record of introducing legislation in this area on a calculated basis to secure partisan political advantage, there can be very little surprise that those on this side of the
House look at what is proposed in a jaun-diced fashion.

Let me conclude by reiterating, as others from the coalition have done, that we remain open to genuine and sensible bipartisan reform in this area. Sadly, what has been put before the House tonight does not meet that test. It has been admitted by previous speakers that a primary motivation of the Labor Party in bringing forward this legislation, which is substantially similar to legislation which has been put forward and rejected by this parliament previously, is to give effect to the deal that was done between the Labor Party and the Greens. If we are to make reform in this area, there needs to be a better justification for it than honouring a deal that was made between the Labor Party and the Greens to keep the Labor Party in power. There needs to be a well thought through, solid policy foundation for these changes, a policy foundation which addresses the genuine issues in the area of political donations. Sadly, what has been put before the House in this bill does not meet that test, and it is for that reason that the coalition is not prepared to support this bill.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (9.06 pm)—I rise to support the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010. In the last parliament I supported a similar bill that was brought forward by the government and indeed, as chairman of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, which I am in this parliament and was in the last parliament, we did an advisory report on that previous bill and, in the main, recommended the passage of that bill with some modifications. I know that the member for Cook is in the chamber and he was on the committee at that time, and there was a minority report by the coalition members of the committee, who wanted further debate on the bill and said that it should be deferred, but the only substantive recommendation they made, which was the second recommendation, was to allow anonymous donations below a threshold of $250, whereas I think back then—and it is what is in this bill—it was a recommendation of $50 only.

I want to address something that the member for Wentworth said. He talked about big business being able to live with being outed in terms of their donations and the unions being able to live with being outed in terms of their donations but said that small business cannot. I have to say this: my view is that everyone should live with being outed for their donations on a reasonable threshold test. We should have transparency and openness. We should not be designing our systems so that there can be hidden donations that can be wound up like the Millennium Foundation does and never see the light of day. Or, if it is the union movement, the same thing applies to the Labor Party. These are basic principles, in terms of a threshold, as to what people should be allowed to donate before there is a disclosure period.

It is interesting that for a very long time, from 1984 to 1991, the threshold level was $1,000. It was raised in 1991 to $1,500 and it was only when the coalition had a majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate in that period of 2004 to 2007 that these new threshold levels came in. When you do the mathematics of them, those new threshold levels allow for substantial donations to be made to political parties and they will not see the light of day. Or, if it is the union movement, the same thing applies to the Labor Party. These are basic principles, in terms of a threshold, as to what people should be allowed to donate before there is a disclosure period.
So I have always been a low threshold person. I do not discriminate against business at whatever level and, in the 20 years I have been here, I have always argued for a low threshold test. I can remember in the old Hawke and Hawke-Keating governments, and when I was on this committee I was always arguing for a low threshold. Why? Because I want to know who is paying the money.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Because it doesn’t hurt you!

Mr MELHAM—The honourable member for Mackellar can bellow as much as she wants. She has been a fundraiser for the Liberal Party, and a quite successful fundraiser, as has the member for Wentworth. I think he was the federal treasurer of the Liberal Party and was quite a fundraiser. And they like raising money but not disclosing who has given that money. That is why they like high thresholds—because they do not mind being bought; they just want people not to know who bought them.

Mr Baldwin—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask the member to withdraw. He has just cast serious aspersions against members of the coalition about hiding funding disclosures.

Mr Bowen—Mr Deputy Speaker, on the point of order; this has been a wide-ranging debate. Members on this side have been very tolerant of a lot of allegations made by the other side in this debate about the motives of Labor members both federal and state. This has been a debate which has been willing, and the member for Banks has been completely in keeping with the debate which has gone before him.

Mr Baldwin—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a further point of order, which is that, whilst it may be a wide-ranging debate, the member for Banks has laid a direct assertion alluding to corrupt activities by the coalition seeking to hide funding declarations.

Mr MELHAM—On the point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think it would help for me to say that I did not make that allegation. At no stage have I suggested illegal behaviour. I have suggested that the members opposite are operating within the system. It is the threshold levels I am attacking. I will not have it said that I made any allegations of illegality against any member opposite. I have not and I would not.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—I will rule on the point of order. This is a very wide-ranging debate. I heard the previous speaker from the coalition make some pretty broad comments about New South Wales Labor. I do not believe that there were any personal allegations against any members and I ask the honourable member for Banks to resume his comments.

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

Mr MELHAM—I want to continue further, Mr Deputy Speaker. For the member for Paterson’s benefit, in over 20 years in this place I have never made allegations against members opposite of illegality, and I have never had reason to. We have a difference of philosophical opinion. This is a philosophical debate as to what a proper threshold is in relation to disclosure and I understand members opposite are operating within the law. I am arguing that the law was only recently changed. It is not working. You can actually have $100,000 distributed to political parties if you do it in a particular way, and it is not disclosed—and you have only got to read our report, which shows that. It has never been challenged. Now, at the end of the day there is this obsession—

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! I ask members to refrain from interjecting across the chamber, especially from the table.
Mr MELHAM—The interesting thing is that the members opposite rail against unions. What the members opposite allow is for unions to use the system under the opposition’s preferred system, which would not lead to disclosure. What I am arguing is: if unions want to disclose under the system I am proposing, there would be more disclosure. The unions could run campaigns similar to that of the Millennium Foundation and, in relation to raising large amounts of money under the current law, if the law were changed as we propose, it would mean more disclosure. What this is about is trying to stop disclosure. It is an argument about transparency.

It is also an argument about anonymous donations and foreign donations. I notice that those opposite who were members of our committee—and the member for Cook was one of them—did not rail against specific sections of this bill. I took it from their minority report that there was a general argument about electoral reform and political donations that they thought should be wrapped up into a whole range of things. But in relation to some of the specifics—and I do not say this in relation to the threshold, but in relation to other specifics—I felt that there were no objections to the way in which the committee conducted itself and the evidence on a number of proposals within this bill. There were only a couple. In particular on anonymous donations they went from $50 to $250. That is my recollection of the way the matter was conducted.

I understand there is a philosophical objection. I am saying quite clearly that I believe that there would be more public confidence in the system if there were lower thresholds, if we went back to $1,000 instead of the current system. Let’s have a look at what is proposed. If one goes to the explanatory memorandum for this bill, it says:

The Bill contains provisions that will:

- reduce the disclosure threshold from ‘more than $10,000’ (indexed to the Consumer Price Index annually) to $1,000 (non-indexed)—that is something I think the coalition are feral about—
- require people who make gifts at or above the threshold to candidates and members of groups during the election disclosure period to furnish a return within 8 weeks after polling day …

I would argue that is reasonable. The explanatory memorandum continues:

- Agents of candidates and groups have a similar timeframe to furnish a return in relation to gifts received during the disclosure period—in other words, much earlier disclosure. The bill will also:
- require people who make gifts, agents of registered political parties, the financial controller of an associated entity, or people if they fall within the relevant provision, who have incurred political expenditure to furnish a return within 8 weeks after 31 December and 30 June each year;
- prevent ‘donation splitting’ by ensuring that for the purposes of the $1,000 disclosure threshold, related political parties are treated as the one entity—

I think donation splitting is something that needs to be addressed, because it is one way of hiding donations. The bill will:

- make unlawful the receipt of a gift of foreign property by political parties, candidates and members of a Senate group. It will also be unlawful in some situations for associated entities and people incurring political expenditure to receive a gift of foreign property;
- extend the ban on anonymous gifts to encompass all anonymous gifts except where the gift is $50 or less and received at a ‘general public activity’ or a ‘private event’ as defined—
I know that in their minority report the opposition members of the committee said $250. Further, the bill will:

- tie public election funding to reported and verified electoral expenditure. In other words, unendorsed candidates, registered political parties and unendorsed Senate groups, who receive at least four percent of formal first preference votes in an election, will receive the lesser amount of either:
  i. the ‘electoral expenditure’ that was actually incurred in an election period; or
  ii. the amount of $2.31191 (indexed to CPI every 6 months) per formal first preference vote received …

What is the opposition’s view on that? My understanding is that the opposition was not opposed to that particular proposal because it was not about enriching candidates at an election. The explanatory memorandum continues, stating the bill will:

- provide for the recovery of gifts of foreign property that are not returned, anonymous gifts that are not returned and undisclosed gifts; and

- introduce new offences and penalties related to the new measures and increase the penalties for existing offence provisions.

I have heard a lot about bipartisan support. In all my time on the electoral committee, the evidence shows that I have attempted to embrace bipartisanship wherever possible. In a number of areas it is not possible, because we have different philosophical views. That is the reality of life. The opposition might agree to some things; we will not. However, my approach is not to shout down the other side. My approach to conducting the joint standing committee is to allow both sides to obtain evidence, bring evidence before the committee, inform themselves and allow matters to be argued on their merits. Sometimes an argument might have merit but will still be voted down.

In the 20 years that I have been here, there has always been opposition on these particular areas from those opposite. They have never wanted to participate in change to these provisions, because they have always had a view. At one stage Senator Minchin was on the committee while a parliamentary secretary, which is generally unheard of. He was a formidable member of the committee with his vast experience from South Australia. He did not give an inch when it came to disclosure provisions, the Millennium Foundation or a whole range of other things.

I know the honourable member for Mackellar is currently on the committee and I look forward to working with her during this term of parliament to see if there are things we can agree on. If history is any guide, there are things we will agree on and there will be much we will disagree on. And we will not need generators because I am sure the electricity will fly! That is the way it should be. But let’s admit the prejudices we have. It seems to me that those opposite have a real anti-trade-union sentiment running through their veins. They are dirty on the trade union movement because the trade union movement’s involvement has historically been to support this side of politics. That is a legitimate use of trade union resources because, after all, our history is that we came out of the union movement and—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Mackellar will remain silent.

Mr MELHAM—in terms of conditions for their members, it is honourable. Historically, that is the same as how capital has always supported the other side, in the main. There are some notable exceptions. That is politics. But what we are talking about here is confidence in the disclosure and transparency of our system.
I know, for instance, the honourable member for Cook has longstanding knowledge because of his former position as the state director of the New South Wales Liberal Party. He understands more than most the areas where we might be able to achieve agreement on these matters and lend more credibility to this situation. He also understands how to put the boot in to other areas.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (9.21 pm)—What we have before us in the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010 feels a bit like déjà vu. We have been here before. The member for Banks and I have been here before, debating this same legislation, and what it betrays is the lack of an agenda from this government. What we have got is a recycling of the former Prime Minister’s agenda. We have got the leftovers of the former Prime Minister’s agenda and whatever the Greens serve up on their agenda, and that is the policy drift we find with this government. What we have got is a recycling of the former Prime Minister’s agenda. We have got the leftovers of the former Prime Minister’s agenda and whatever the Greens serve up on their agenda, and that is the policy drift we find with this government. The member for Banks talked about an inquiry conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, of which I was deputy chair and he was chair. He made reference to the report and the dissenting report provided by the minority members of that committee. What he did not point out was the fundamental point which I think the government misses—that is, this bill is not even a half measure, not even a quarter measure, not even a tenth measure.

If the government are serious about campaign finance reform, about reform in this area, then they should engage with the opposition and come up with a fair dinkum bill. This is not a fair dinkum bill. This is not a fair dinkum attempt. This is a bill designed to prosecute the advantage of the Labor Party. That is incredibly disappointing, because with all the shrill noises about bipartisanship it does require an element of good faith to come to the table to address the things that we all know in this place are producing the very dangerous cocktail of the politics of money. In the last parliament I said on numerous occasions that we had a fairly unique opportunity in this place to avoid the politics of money spilling over from the cesspit of the New South Wales Labor government and other state jurisdictions around the country and creeping into this place.

There is a real opportunity to do something significant in this parliament. I know the shadow minister at the table, the member for Mackellar, is very keen and very committed to reform in this area. There is an open invitation to the government to come and seriously discuss the issues that need to be discussed. But it is a demonstration of the serious lack of agenda that this government has. ‘Citizen Richardson’, as I suppose we could now call him—none other than the most prodigious power broker the New South Wales Labor Party has ever known—made the observation that this is a government without an agenda, and any assessment of what we see coming before this place on a daily basis I think is an absolute demonstration of that fact. But that is for the government to address. It is not for the opposition to write the government’s agenda. You would think that if they wanted to form government they would actually have an agenda for a government. In this area I think they are as bereft as in any other area that we have responsibilities for in this place.

We want a bill that will deal with the serious issues involved in working against the politics of money dominating our political environment in this country. I would suggest there are three areas we need to look carefully at, the first being political expenditure. While there will be many who will want to prosecute the case that the great ill in the system is who you take money from, if you deal with why the political parties need so
much money then I think you are going a long way to addressing the ills that exist within the system. If the question is, ‘How much money do you need?’ and the answer is, ‘How long is a piece of string?’ then we all in this place leave ourselves incredibly exposed and I think this is a very dangerous situation we place ourselves in. The moves made particularly in the Canadian, New Zealand and UK jurisdictions to set limits on campaign expenditure are worthy of consideration and serious assessment. If you can control and regulate the amount of money that is needed then clearly you are not opening yourselves up to abuses in the way that money is then solicited. This is something that I would commend to the House for consideration.

Secondly, if you are going to deal in this area you must deal with third parties. That is the great abuse that we have seen in the New South Wales parliament recently with the haphazard reforms that have been trumped up more recently in that state. What we want is fair dinkum regulation and control of third-party participation in this area. If you want to be a third party like GetUp! or any other group of that nature out of the union movement, you want to participate in the electoral process and you want to run paid advertising in election campaigns then you should be subjected to the same level of scrutiny and conditions and controls as the political actors in those campaigns. By that I mean simply this: they should be completely subject to expenditure controls, and very strict and limited expenditure controls. They should also be subjected to political disclosure of the donations they receive. They should be able to say where they got their money from and not just take it out of the honey pot of union membership fees and make a donation. If you want to spend money as a union in a political campaign then get it off your members honestly by asking them for a donation and disclosing those donations. If that is what you want to do, do it. But that is what you need to do and that is what the process and the system should encompass.

Thirdly, we need to ensure that we recognise practically in this place that, on whichever side of politics you sit in this House, in relation to the compliance regulations that we put into these bills, the people who assist us in our work as members of our political parties are by and large volunteers. We need to ensure that we have compliance regulations and activity that enables them to comply and does not seek to hunt them out as being some sort of criminal participants, when all they are seeking to do is support the political view of their choice. That is a noble thing. People who want to make donations to political parties should be seen as people doing noble things, subject to reasonable regulation. To suggest their participation in the political process is somehow inappropriate when appropriate regulation is in place I think demeanes our democracy. If people want to get involved and support candidates, good on them. We need more people who are keen to participate in the political process in this country.

So I plead, in the very short time remaining to me, that we deal with the issue of expenditure caps, that we deal with the issue of third parties most importantly, that we understand that there are people who support us in our political parties who are simply trying to express their support for views and that we do not seek to make the process too burdensome for them to comply. At the end of the day, we need to work together to end the politics of money. This is a half-measure bill and the government need to come up with something serious or they cannot expect the opposition’s support.

Debate interrupted.
ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Stirling Electorate: Osborne Park Returned and Services League

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (9.30 pm)—I rise to talk about a very important community organisation in my electorate and that is the Osborne Park Returned and Services League. The sub-branch has been located in my electorate for many years and is now enjoying its 91st anniversary. The Osborne Park RSL, like many of the clubs in Stirling, provides important services to my community. Ex-servicemen and women, veterans, members of the Australian Defence Force and club members in Stirling use the services, but they also love the camaraderie that comes with being associated with the club or a sub-branch of this kind.

The club provides many services and it is one of the smaller RSLs in my electorate, but it is one of the most effective in terms of what it does for its membership. My involvement with the sub-branch has been varied and we are very pleased to be able to help the club with photocopying and we are also very pleased to be part of their Anzac Day ceremonies every year. I have been honoured by their sub-branch on a couple of occasions by being able to make the speech at their dawn service.

They celebrated their 91st birthday with lunch on 10 November, the day before Remembrance Day. It is fitting that this close to Remembrance Day we could acknowledge the service of our servicemen and women. This is something the RSL does wonderfully well on every Anzac Day and other important national occasions. Unfortunately, I was unable to be at the club for that particular celebration, but Mr Steve Ibbitson, with whom I have discussed the function, said that he was delighted by the turnout. Steve, local executives and members of the club are outstanding ambassadors for the RSL organisation as a whole. This has been recognised by support from the City of Stirling by way of a donation of $200 to help out with the running of the cost of the birthday and anniversary celebrations.

Osborne Park is a small sub-branch in comparison with many others in Western Australia, but it is a mighty hardworking club. Like all RSLs, their membership is declining, and like a lot of RSLs, the leadership of the club has been transferred down from World War II veterans to veterans of later wars, in particular Korea and Vietnam. They rely on their community network for fundraising. This does not deter members of the Osborne Park RSL and this has been evident over the last few weeks as they have just finished one of the most important periods of the year for them—Remembrance Day. Like a lot of clubs, they sell poppies to raise funds for their celebrations. This is how they fundraise to support the club and they support those people who have done so much to protect us and to protect Australian democracy.

I am very pleased to advise that poppy sales for 2010 were a huge success and they were significantly higher than the sales for previous years. This is a huge credit to clubs like the Osborne Park RSL whose members are actively pounding the pavement for the greater good of the club. Much of this success can be attributed to the various programs run by the Osborne Park RSL. One program in particular I would like to mention today, as I believe it goes to the heart of an organisation like the RSL, is their involvement in local schools in my electorate of Stirling. Osborne Park runs a great program where they invite students down to the club. They have a tour of the extensive memorabilia and they talk to members about their
experiences as they served their country in the various branches of the armed services. This is a very important lesson for our children to learn and for future generations to appreciate. As a result, it is often the case that at the Anzac Day ceremonies that the sub-branch runs, they always have a good representation of local schoolchildren who come down to celebrate that very important national day.

I make brief reference to the fact that many members of this sub-branch, and indeed other sub-branches of the RSL within my electorate, are very concerned about the government’s plan to remove the history of Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam war from our school curriculum. Indeed, they have made very extensive representations to me about that. They believe that this is a kick in the guts to every soldier who served in that war, where Australia had a very significant number of people involved and in which we sustained a very serious number of casualties. The Osborne Park sub-branch of the RSL is a very important part of my electorate and on their 91st anniversary I would like to salute them in the parliament today.

**Dr Nouria Salehi**

**Ms Kath Byer**

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (9.35 pm)—During the discussion of Afghanistan in the parliament I ran out of time to mention a phenomenal woman in my electorate, Dr Nouria Salehi. Nouria has been a resident of Australia since 1981 and has been contributing not only to Australia but also to her homeland in Afghanistan. I emailed Nouria today and said I was going to add to my contribution and she wrote:

> I am excited that you are talking about Afghani people and their problems. One is their status as being illiterate and unskilled. To be breadwinner for their family they easily join Taliban. If we can make more opportunities to train them and offer a job, then there is no need for to them to join the Taliban. Let us introduce peace through education, training and giving a skill.

Nouria has not only been talking the talk, she has been walking it. She established the Australian Afghanistan Development Organisation in 2001, on top of many other numerous charity organisations she has been involved with. This is an NGO registered with the Australian Council for International Development and is engaged in initiating and supporting projects in Afghanistan. Most of these projects have been achieved through individual donations and funding from various philanthropic organisations. Nouria and her family run the Afghan Gallery in Fitzroy and most of the proceeds from that establishment actually go to funding their charitable works back in their homeland. They also donated their family home and land in Afghanistan to be used as a training facility for the various works they are doing. She writes again:

As you know, Afghanistan has been suffering 30 years of war and the destroyed infrastructure still remains unchanged with minimal construction. There is a lack of hospitals, schools, roads, bridges and housing. The opportunity to rebuild is hindered by a tenuous economy, a lack of educated adults, unsure men and vulnerable women and children. In this situation you can imagine that this country, especially the capital Kabul, finds it difficult to support the local citizenry, let alone cope with the basic needs of approximately 5 million returned refugees from camps to Kabul. Nouria has been visiting Kabul twice a year since 2002 and in that time she has established many programs, basic programs to ensure people have skills. One of the programs I particularly like is From Guns to Pens—Ongoing Youth Vocational Training Project. This project seeks to work with Afghani youth who have grown up in an environment largely defined by guns. It provides them with vocational training and skills development.
Nouria has established centres to train women in sewing skills, but more importantly she has also been going back and re-educating teachers who have not been able to obtain the necessary skills. So she has been improving the outcomes for students by ensuring that their teachers have the relevant skills and qualifications. On numerous occasions, she has shipped—and she continues to ship—books that we would throw out. She does this because they have nothing in their libraries. Even English texts are valuable to them and she sends these home frequently.

She is a phenomenal individual from a phenomenal family. What she has done shows what can be done and what is being done. We are not talking enough about the grassroots things that are being done. She also talks about disappointment, saying:

Speaking closely with people, they were concerned and disappointed with the 2004 Constitution which offered equal status and respect for all citizens, males and females, ethnic grouping or social class. So far none of the promises have been successfully applied. This has been very discouraging for all people in Afghanistan and for those who return to their country from refugee camps.

Afghani people, especially the younger generation, need skills to undertake jobs and take part in the reconstruction of their country. Unemployment is too high, they cannot feed their families, and their children cannot attend schools because of lack of stationery and clothing.

She goes on to say:

On behalf of the Afghan-Australian community in Victoria, I would like you to consider the following points:

- Re-building of the irrigation infrastructure so that this very arable land can once again provide food for its people with potential for development of export businesses
- Re-building of basic housing as much of the housing has been destroyed
- Support for the basic literacy and numeracy education of citizens

Development of vocational skills: carpenters, builders, electricians, plumbers, agriculture, health workers, child-care, infant/maternal health, small business, tourism etc.

All of these skills have been lost. This used to be a country with a very high level of education and it is sad to see that destroyed.

In the very short time I have left, I regret that I must inform the House that I have just discovered that Kath Byer, an amazing woman from my electorate, passed away last night. Kath was the owner of the Notting Hill Hotel, so any Monash student would have known Kath. She was the first female owner of a licence in Victoria and had been a hotel owner in Victoria for longer than anyone—she had run the Notting Hill Hotel for longer than any of us can remember. Only a couple of months ago, I was at the Not for a traditional ALP fundraiser I hold there every year. She was still sprightly and going and I am very sad to hear that Kath has passed away—a truly great female that we will all miss.

Paterson Electorate: Commonwealth Marine Protected Areas

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (9.40 pm)—I rise to speak on the issue of the introduction of Commonwealth Marine Protected Areas in my electorate of Paterson. I will start by making it clear that I support better fishery management. I am a keen recreational fisherman and formerly operated a fishing charter and diving business. So I have seen our marine habitats firsthand and I want them protected.

I have spoken to thousands of fishermen, both recreational and commercial, and they all know that their livelihoods and their sport rest on a quality marine environment. Sustainable, healthy fish stocks are critical for the survival of commercial fishermen, tourist operators and others who make their living on or beside the ocean. They respect their catch. That is why bag limits are agreed to,
actively promoted and rigorously followed. Those in the business know this. However, they also know that it is simply not necessary to lock them out of huge areas of coastline.

Consultation must occur if we are to strike the right balance. This cannot happen if the Labor-Greens alliance continues to lock locals out of the debate. Marine parks legislation will impact almost everyone, from the commercial operator through to the pensioner who likes to cast a line with their grandkids. It is vital we get this right. That is why I have held three open meetings on the issue recently, attended by hundreds of angry people. My community is furious that the Gillard Labor government has not bothered to host its own meetings to hear from those who actually know the area.

That anger was perpetuated earlier this year when the former Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, wrote to the Newcastle Herald that he had:

… held seven meetings with a range of commercial and recreational groups in the Newcastle region (more than 60 individuals attended).

If Mr Garrett spoke to 60 people at seven meetings, that is an average of less than nine people per meeting. Considering hundreds showed up to my meetings, I must wonder about Labor’s exclusive guest list. Perhaps it is simply that those who do not agree with the proposals are not welcome in Labor talks.

The Gillard Labor government has left many of my community’s questions unanswered, questions such as: why does the park commence north of Sydney and not in Sydney, one of the most highly populated areas in the country? Another unanswered question is: if large areas of ocean are declared ‘no take’, won’t other areas be overfished? Prime Minister Gillard should have learnt her lesson about consultation when Labor rushed to ban the fishing of mako and porbeagle sharks, even though those species are prolific in Australian waters, only to have that ban overturned months later thanks to the coalition and the fishing community.

Before voters went to the election in August, the ALP promoted itself as an independent party despite knowing it would need Greens support to form government. Now that the Labor-Greens alliance has been formalised, the government must explain to voters what its intentions are. Labor has repeatedly said that its marine parks are not a done deal. On the other hand, the Greens website openly states that members want:

… a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) system of marine reserves in both Commonwealth and state and territory waters.

The website also states that the Greens will:

… ensure that the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas program has legislated targets of a minimum of 30% ‘no take’ areas per bioregion by 2012.

My concern is that, since Labor needs the Greens to hold government, marine parks could be introduced regardless of the detriment to businesses, recreational fishing and tourism successes. My constituents are also concerned that Labor will put its deal with the Greens ahead of their interests, and they spoke clearly on 21 August by failing to deliver in Paterson the same swing towards the Greens that occurred nationally.

As we have seen with state marine parks, there are still questions as to the effectiveness of ‘no take’ areas. As the Coffs Coast Advocate reported on 8 September, former head of New South Wales Fisheries Research, Professor Bob Kearney, said:

The greatest threats to marine life, coral reefs and fish species don’t come from fishers; they come from on-land activities.

Further, the Keneally government has recently conducted a review to draft the Ma-
rime parks strategic research framework 2010-15. The framework sets a new direction for research and monitoring within state marine parks. We will not know the results for five years.

If the Labor-Greens alliance is to introduce marine protected areas then it must make science and consultation its absolute priority. Proper research combined with real-life expertise is the only way to ensure our coastal environments are properly maintained. Huge marine parks based on romanticised ideas rather than proper science will never, ever work.

McEwen Electorate: Upper Goulburn Community Radio

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (9.45 pm)—There is no doubt in my mind that volunteers of community groups are the backbone of our communities. They contribute so greatly. It is hard to quantify their benefit to local areas. I strongly believe that they are an invaluable asset. McEwen truly is a great place, which embodies the term ‘community’ and brings it to life. We are indeed a better region for the work that our volunteers do. Therefore I believe that it is important to place on the public record in our national parliament my gratitude and thanks on behalf of my community for a community organisation that continues to keep giving.

I rise to congratulate Upper Goulburn Community Radio, a community radio station in my electorate which has done a great job over the past 16 years providing locals with news, music and public information. This last service was never more important than during the events of 7 February 2009, which saw Australia’s worst national bushfire disaster devastate my electorate and most of the area that UGFM broadcasts to. I was therefore delighted to have recently participated in UGFM’s 16th birthday celebrations at their new Marysville studio. These new permanent facilities will serve the community well and are another sign of support and strength for the Marysville community.

The local radio station has a long and proud history of communicating with the community, primarily about issues that directly affect our region. As I said, this was most evident during the February 2009 fires. UGFM and the staff were vital with their assistance for the community, giving very early and clear warnings of the Kilmore and Murrindindi fires as they spread, by using their local knowledge and links with fire authorities. This helped to save many lives as the fires spread into the Flowerdale and Marysville areas. The Marysville and Flowerdale transmitters were lost as the fires spread, but UGFM stayed on air with backup generators and coverage from the Alexandra and Yea transmitters. UGFM established a new studio at the Marysville temporary village in May 2009, to help with the bushfire recovery, and in August established a transmitter on FM94.5 megahertz, for the Kinglake Ranges, to assist with ongoing recovery information.

President of UGFM, Peter Weeks, gave evidence to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission on the systems and processes that the radio station had in place, how it managed to give early warnings to listeners and how he thought improvements could be made in the process of information dissemination.

UGFM received the Community Broadcast Association of Australia’s Tony Staley Award for Excellence in Community Broadcasting, for work during and following the 2009 fires. This is the sector’s highest award. Earlier this year UGFM became Australia’s first community station to become an official state emergency broadcaster, signing an MOU with the Brumby Labor government.
UGFM also received a highly commended award for media at the October 2010 Fire Awareness Awards.

Recently the relocation to a permanent home for the Marysville studio in the recovery and advisory centre at Marysville was completed. This was celebrated and officially opened along with the 16th birthday celebrations of UGFM.

UGFM continues today to provide additional regular recovery information for residents across the Murrindindi Shire as a part of normal daily programs provided by 50 dedicated volunteers. UGFM’s president, Peter Weeks, continues to give talks and presentations to conferences on the UGFM experience and the lessons learnt and encourages community broadcasters to become involved in emergency broadcasting and work with other broadcast sectors and government to help save lives and property in an emergency.

I want to congratulate all the dedicated volunteers at the radio station for their community spirit and work since UGFM’s inception and particularly following the fires. They continue to contribute greatly to the community’s way of life. I am pleased to say that on a fortnightly basis I get the opportunity go on air to discuss local initiatives with the announcers. UGFM should be proud of achieving its 16th birthday, as each year of UGFM’s service to the community has so richly contributed and benefited locals in many, many ways.

Mr Rod Irwin

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.50 pm)—In 2004, with the assistance and cooperation of like-minded members and senators, the Parkinson’s Parliamentary Support Group was formed. A key proponent of its establishment was one of my original constituents, who lived in Moss Vale, Mr Rod Irwin. Sadly, Rod passed away last month, on 30 October. I dedicate this statement to him and pay homage to his considerable contributions. Rod was afflicted by Parkinson’s disease but that did not slow him mentally. His was a sharp mind trapped in a withering shell. While it is terrible to see someone in that state, for the victim it is far worse. He served the public all his life—in the foreign service, with five postings; in AusAID; in Prime Minister and Cabinet; and in other areas. Although he was forced to retire due to Parkinson’s disease, he continued to work, at a more sedate pace, for Brain Injury Australia.

Amongst his considerable achievements for his cause, Rod became President of Parkinson’s NSW. He initiated priorities seminar as well as the Access Economics study now used by the European Union and Canada. He initiated lobbying for regional neurological nurses for the eastern states as well as an important community service statement raising awareness of Parkinson’s. As a result of those efforts, Gilmore has its first dedicated nurse as part of a pilot program. He suggested the Governor-General be patron. He became the Vice-President of Parkinson’s Australia, lobbying hard with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare on discrepancies in statistical data.

There is so much more he did and I cannot do his efforts justice in the limited time available to me. However, I would like to read out the sentiments of his former boss, the Hon. Gareth Evans, a former foreign minister in the Hawke and Keating govern-
ments and presently professorial fellow with the University of Melbourne. In a message to a family associate, this is part of what Professor Evans wrote:

Rod was a genuinely lovely bloke, and a very fine servant of his country, the South Pacific, and—simply—of humanity. I enjoyed enormously working with him: He knew everything about everything and everyone who mattered, from the most exalted to the most humble, and was an absolute fount of good advice, always conscious of the human implications of what we were doing—and always delightful company, not least in face of imminent air crashes.

I know that back home on my desk I have an unanswered letter regarding Parkinson’s and other things from Dymphna/Rod quite a few months ago. Afraid I just kept deferring it as the urgent crowded out the important, and now I’m riddled with guilt. Please convey my apologies for that to Dymphna, as well as my heartfelt regrets that I won’t be able to be there with you to celebrate a wonderful Australian life, wonderfully well lived.

Rod will be terribly missed not just by his family, but by many, many others.

There is not much more I can add to those sentiments except to say that Rod Irwin’s passing is also our collective loss.

I thank Rod for teaching me about Parkinson’s and pledge that I will continue to advocate the cause on his behalf and that I will continue to reinforce to the government the need for continued support as the incidence of this disease continues to grow wider and into younger age groups. And I will work with the medical profession to heighten awareness of the disease within the profession. I know that Rod’s wife, Dymphna, will never allow us to forget just how debilitating this disease can be. Stay strong, Dymphna. I know just how much Rod meant to you. His life was made more bearable because he had you by his side. He was a much-loved man and respected by all in the community of the Southern Highlands and beyond. I was honoured to have known him and to have been classed as his friend.

Mrs Beverley Bernadette Cresswell

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (9.54 pm)—On Wednesday, 27 October 2010 a funeral service was conducted at St Paul the Apostle South Church in Endeavour Hills. The church was overflowing with mourners, with many hundreds of people attending to commemorate and to honour the passing of a very special individual. Many people at the funeral noted the achievements of this person’s life, how she had selflessly helped many in her career and how she had changed the lives of so many people. They noted that she had devoted her life to assisting others. It was also noted that this person had wonderful energy and that her caring and loving nature would be missed by all.

This special person was Beverley Bernadette Cresswell, Secretary of the St Paul Apostle Parish Centre, who passed away on Wednesday 20 October 2010 after losing her battle with cancer. This cancer was relentless. Bev courageously survived an initial bout of this cancer 10 years ago. However, unfortunately it returned and though she courageously fought the cancer claimed her life.

Bev had a special role at the St Paul Apostle Parish Centre for the last 18 years. She was not only the head of the after-school religious education program but also a founding member and leader of the Can Care Cancer Support Group. Bev would volunteer three days a week at the parish. She was the quintessential quiet achiever who only wanted to help others and asked for nothing in return.

In particular, as I mentioned before, Bev, with the help of other cancer survivors, helped to create the Can Care Cancer Support Group that has been functioning for four years now. This support group provides all people touched by cancer with the opportu-
nity to come and socialise in a friendly atmosphere. Bev fully understood that living with cancer can be a lonely experience and that not everyone is comfortable sharing this experience. Accordingly, Bev helped to create a group that assisted people who had experienced or who had suffered from cancer. She was often phoned at the office by people wanting to speak with her to gain her gentle and sympathetic ear. Bev also helped run the St Paul Apostle Parish religious education program for children attending government schools. This again demonstrates how Bev’s devotion to helping others, especially children, came to the fore.

According to the local school community, Bev was a fantastic person, always giving of her own special gifts and always with a cheerful disposition. Nothing seemed to be an inconvenience to her. I have been to the parish twice recently and I have witnessed Bev’s selfless work first hand and how she made a real and significant difference to the St Paul Apostle Parish that was established in January 1980 with Father Frank Martin as the first parish priest.

I also wish to point out that since 1980 the parish has become a very important meeting point for many people in the Endeavour Hills community. The other parish groups include the seniors’ club, the men’s club, the women’s Woman and Wine Club, the young people club, the tennis club, the craft group, the garden group and the passionate family group. According to the parish team, ‘Bev has made a wonderful contribution to many aspects of our parish life but most of all she will be fondly remembered for the person she was, a women for others gracious, generous, and gifted.’

In addition to her work at the parish, Bev has also been one of the founding volunteers at the Wellsprings for Women organisation, an organisation that helps marginalised women in the local community. From very humble beginnings through the vision of Sister Anne Halpin, the Wellsprings for Women organisation has grown into a vital community service in Dandenong. It provides a very welcoming non-judgemental environment for women of all religious, ethnic and family backgrounds in need of support, encouragement and protection. Many of these women have experienced very challenging lives and need the healing environment that Wellsprings for Women provides. Additionally, this great facility offers programs that provide women with opportunities for personal growth, education and skills that will empower them to lead their lives to the full.

Bev also worked for four of the last ten years with the drug referral service of the Cyrene Centre to assist people with addiction and provide support for the families. This again goes to show how this quiet achiever did so much to help others in the local community of Endeavour Hills. Bev’s generous service as a faith filled person will be remembered and missed by many in the Endeavour Hills community and across the south eastern suburbs where the various organisations that she was involved in are based.

To her husband, Lindsay, her children, Kim, Lee, Ian and Zoe, and her granddaughter, Isla, I wish to express my sincere condolences for your loss. I hope that in some way, shape or form this statement tonight acknowledges her substantial contribution to the community and encourages others to follow her lead of selfless dedication to the cause.

Cowper Electorate: Community Services

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (9.59 pm)—I raise three issues in the House this evening. The first relates to the need for a seniors citizens’ centre in South West Rocks. The South West Rocks Seniors’ Association
is one of the most active on the North Coast. With more than 450 members, the club is renowned for its monthly lunches and regular activities. Around 58 per cent of the local community is over 55 years old. The association currently uses the South West Rocks School of Arts hall, but this is incompatible with their needs and precludes them from hosting activities, because of other demands on the hall. The association is negotiating with both the Kempsey Shire Council and the New South Wales government to secure public land on which a seniors’ centre could be constructed in South West Rocks.

During the recent federal election campaign, the coalition committed $500,000 towards the construction of a senior citizens’ centre in South West Rocks. The centre is much needed by the community and would complement the recent opening of the South West Rocks aged care facility. I acknowledge the great work and long service that John King has delivered for the seniors’ association in South West Rocks and call on the government to join the coalition in providing bipartisan support for this great local project.

The second matter I raise relates to the proposed Woolgoolga and Northern Beaches multipurpose community facility. The Northern Beaches area, north of Coffs Harbour, continues to grow, as does the demand for improved services and infrastructure. Currently the area is lacking sporting and cultural facilities in which young people can participate in a range of activities. A Northern Beaches multipurpose community facility committee has been formed and comprises strong representation from the community and sporting groups. These include the youth club, the residents’ association, the chamber of commerce, the Indian Temple Committee, the Lions and Rotary clubs, the Woolgoolga High School P and C, the Woolgoolga Netball Association, soccer clubs and the RSL Club. The committee proposes to construct an indoor community and sporting facility which would include basketball courts, a stage, a kitchen and multipurpose rooms. The centre would be a cultural venue for the arts and would provide a place to host community events.

The vision is to bring the community together in one location and address the fact that many young people cannot access such facilities unless they travel to Coffs Harbour. A re-elected federal coalition government would have committed $800,000 towards the construction of such a facility. These funds were set aside to assist with construction costs. However, it was important that all three levels of government supported a multipurpose facility in Woolgoolga. I acknowledge the professionalism of the committee and call on the federal government to join the coalition in supporting this project.

Another important issue I raise relates to the future of the village of Wooli in the Cowper electorate. Wooli is a small coastal community of a few hundred people, and it is confronting the challenges of sand erosion. After years of erosion, many houses are potentially under threat. The Clarence Valley Council has released a draft plan of management which proposes a progressive retreat from the site of the original village. The plan tables the option of allowing landowners in the foreshore area to swap properties for crown land near the Wooli sportsground. This proposal is causing grief in the Wooli community. I recently met with Bruce Bird from the Wooli Chamber of Commerce and Margy Hewetson to discuss their concerns. They highlighted to me how important it is that every effort be made to protect these threatened properties and retain the current village precinct.

If the draft plan is implemented, all land south of the Wooli Bowling Club could be sacrificed. That includes the Wooli Public
School. As the residents explained to me, there are other options available which could protect properties in the area, and I believe it is incumbent on the council to thoroughly investigate all options. The residents are concerned that the erosion problem will not receive adequate attention, given the small size of the Wooli village. I believe that Wooli residents deserve treatment equal to that of other ratepayers in the area, which is why I welcome the opportunity to place this matter on record in the federal parliament. Wooli is a beautiful village, and the land is very valuable. All reasonable efforts must be made to protect the village from erosion into the future.

Braddon Electorate: Active After-School Communities

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (10.03 pm)—I want to talk about the Active After-school Communities program, which, fortunately, has had its funding extended by the minister—and I thank the minister very much. Like my colleague the member for Bass, I have in my electorate one of the schools that has won an Active After-school Communities program Super Site award. It is Strahan Primary School, and what a beautiful school it is. I know that the principal, Trish King, was tickled pink by the award, along with the students and also Lisa Neilson, Melinda Hyland and David Munns, who is the Active After-school Communities program organiser. They were very pleased indeed.

But you do not need to take my word for it. Tom Rockliff, a student at the school, gave 10 reasons why Active After-school Communities sports is enjoyable, and I would like to share some of those with you. Tom said:

My first reason is that Active After-school sports keeps us fit and healthy.

My second reason is that we are given healthy snacks like fruit and crackers.

My third reason is that we are given an opportunity to use equipment that most children usually don’t have a chance to use, such as Speedminton, which I did not know even existed!

My fourth reason is that it is lots of fun to get outside and run around and play lots of different games that the school have in the P.E. Shed.

My fifth reason is the fact that it keeps children occupied after school, rather than going home and plonking themselves in front of PlayStations or TV.

It is lovely to see the term ‘plonking’ used by young people. Tom continued:

My sixth reason is for the education sport can give students. The students can learn about all different sports and games that are played in events such as the Olympics or the Commonwealth Games. They also have the opportunity to know if they want to go on playing that particular sport and become a professional.

My seventh reason is that it builds a good relationship between students and the teachers. We get to know our classmates and our teachers better. I know that I got to know a lot more people from other classes and have fun with those people.

My eighth reason is that we don’t get much of a chance to play sport in a roster as we only have football and hockey to play. Active After-schools gives us a chance to play other sports.

My ninth reason is that it gives the school equipment that we would not have enough money to buy otherwise.

His 10th reason—ah!—is:

Miss Neilson is the most fun, most exciting and funniest Active After-school teacher. If the activity is boring, Miss Neilson is willing to change it around. Miss Neilson loves to have a laugh and is lots of fun to be around.

Tom says, ‘Thanks Miss Neilson!’ as he signs off. Tom is only 10 years old, and he wrote this himself. His friend Corey Stephen, who is also aged 10, said:

If Strahan didn’t have Active After-school sports most students who attend would be out-
raged, because they would not understand the reasons why such a great program was cancelled. He went on to say:

Please keep Active After-school sports on, because it is free, it is good for the school community and the students really value the program. I think both Tom and Corey have encapsulated why the Active After-school Communities sports program is so important and why it is so important that the program continues.

Like my colleague the member for Bass, I have something like 19 schools and after-school care centres participating in the program, from Sheffield all along the coast down to Strahan. Something like 1,300 primary school aged children participated on the north-west coast’s 19 sites. Each child participating receives up to 80 free sports sessions, 80 free healthy afternoon snacks and free access to a qualified coach and sports equipment within a supervised environment. Indeed, in term 1 and term 2 of 2010, there were 149 community coaches involved in these programs. And, boy, look at what they did: multiskill, golf, athletics, tennis, softball, badminton, gymnastics, AFL, skills circuses—and circus skills!—aquatics, surf lifesaving, soccer, orienteering, basketball, ultimate frisbee and hockey. What more could you do with an Active After-school Communities program than what Strahan Primary School has done? Congratulations to Strahan Primary School for winning the Super Site award and now being eligible for the Tasmanian award.

Telecommunication Scams

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (10.08 pm)—It is my melancholy duty to again raise before this parliament the outrageous telco scam that is afflicting thousands of Australian small businesses in particular as well as community organisations. Just by way of background, this is the scam that saw aggressive and overly enthusiastic telecommunication sales representatives offer a discounted telecommunication service to small businesses primarily, as well as community organisations, including so-called free equipment. What has emerged in a number of cases is those telecommunication service providers have folded and what has remained is a claimed outstanding lease financing debt that apparently was related to the free equipment that was provided to the victims of this scam.

These matters have been before a number of courts as the finance companies seek to recover the debt they claim they are owed, a debt incurred as a consequence of what I can only describe, in the nicest possible way, as highly dubious circumstances. I am careful with the choice of my words because the legality of these transactions is yet to be tested, and this is at the heart of the concerns that were raised with me by a dozen telco scam victims today in this parliament in a committee room not far from here, where I was joined by my friends and colleagues the member for Gippsland, Darren Chester, and the member for Hughes, Craig Kelly. So concerned are these local members, and I know this concern operates right across the parliament because of the reaction on previous occasions when I have raised this matter, that we must continue to pursue the concerns that are at the heart of this telco finance scam.

There are court proceedings underway and there has been some coverage involving Macquarie Bank, and they are but one of a number of finance providers that have been caught up in this process. I would say that Macquarie has proceeded with some care and thoughtfulness in resolving the outstanding debts and has settled many of those debts at a significant discount of the face value of the debts that could have been pursued through legal recovery, but those settlements were arrived at with the dark cloud...
still hanging over the transactions about the extent to which they were lawful and enforceable. But Macquarie seems to have shown some degree of thoughtfulness in the way they have resolved those matters.

But there remain thousands of other Australian small businesses that are still the subject of debt recovery actions, and so widespread is this that we do not actually know how many are involved. Today, in discussions with the victims, there were a number of action steps that I think this parliament and the government need to take. First we need to stop this scam, and I hope again that in raising this issue, as the \textit{Four Corners} report from two weeks ago did, it will alert the Australian public to the risks of this scam and the fact that it is still being perpetrated because people see this as a very clever way of making lots of money at the expense of small business. Secondly, we need to do what we can to expedite a judgement about the lawfulness and enforceability of these transactions, and I have been encouraged by the Attorney-General's assurance that my call for the government to provide public interest litigation funding to support that action is being actively considered and I urge an expeditious consideration of those applications.

But it is not just the lawfulness. There are other factors. Section 73 of the Trade Practices Act is another avenue that I believe should attract public interest litigation funding to support that action is being actively considered and I urge an expeditious consideration of those applications.

Ms Alicia Martin

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (10.13 pm)—One of the great honours one experiences as a new MP is the opportunity to see firsthand the work of people within the community who selflessly serve others. The other honour as an MP is to be in a position to put a spotlight on their work, celebrate their efforts and extend to them whatever assistance can be provided to help advance their ambitions. I want to inform the House of the work of a truly special individual within the Chifley electorate, a person who has seen beyond her constrained present to deliver to herself, to her family and now to others a future lined with that most special quality, that of hope.

A few weeks ago, John Carrigan, the Special Projects Coordinator of the Community Resource Network, introduced me to Alicia Martin, who is a resident of Marayong. Alicia has established a small not-for-profit business supplying fresh food at affordable
prices to people on low incomes. That business is called Food Within Ltd. The reason Alicia has established this business is that she and her husband were paying their mortgage from their one wage while Alicia stayed at home to care for one of their children, who has special needs. Alicia tells the story of feeding the family tuna pasta night after night and thinking to herself that she needed to do something to make healthy, fresh food affordable for families like her own.

Alicia’s vision was to change fresh, healthy food back from the luxury item it had become to the necessity it should be. She approached local shopkeepers to ask if they would cut her deals to package fresh food at fixed prices that were within the reach of people on low incomes. She was knocked back but eventually found a butcher willing to help. She then started buying fruit and veggies at Flemington markets and sourced pantry items from a wholesaler. From these suppliers, Alicia was able to build a business, a social enterprise, supplying pre-packaged fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and low-fat, additive-free pantry items. Her food packs provide three meals a day plus snacks for seven days for a family of four—that is, two adults and two children.

These packs sell for $153 per week to beneficiaries and slightly more to people who are waged. The packs are planned around menus which Alicia designs based on what is fresh at the markets, and these menus are also provided and are available for other household sizes. The sale price of the packs just covers the cost of the food. Alicia cross-subsidises the food packages by delivering cooking, basic budgeting and other classes that target disadvantaged residents through the local community service agencies, and then the income she earns from the classes goes to building the business.

The underlying issue Food Within seeks to tackle is the loss of control over families’ own lives which many people on low incomes have experienced. They feel as if there is nothing they can do to change their circumstances. Food Within seeks to change that for the people who are motivated to change themselves. It offers what is effectively a scholarship program called Wings 2 Carry U. This program targets people whose financial management skills are so poor that they cannot afford the cost of the food packages. Wings 2 Carry U allows people in this situation to effectively barter their time and labour in return for a supply of the food packages.

This program starts with the packages being sold to participants at half the $153 cost. In return, participants have to barter four hours of their time. Each week during the course of the 10-week program the cost of the food packages increases by $10 and the amount of labour which participants are required to barter is reduced proportionately. This continues until participants are paying the full amount. At the same time, they are required to undertake basic budgeting and other life skills programs which Alicia provides as part of the program. The costs of Wings 2 Carry U are currently borne by fundraising activities and income from other sales and by the fact that Alicia herself contributes half the hours she gives to the business on a voluntary, unpaid basis.

Alicia’s work is increasingly recognised in Western Sydney. Last year she was a student in the School for Social Entrepreneurs in Parramatta and was named Sydney Social Entrepreneur of the Year from the inaugural year’s cohort of graduating students. Her work has been recognised by Rotary locally along with other service organisations, and she was nominated for Blacktown’s Woman of the Year for International Women’s Day.
I am proud to say that our government has supported social enterprise development through the Innovation Fund, the Jobs Fund and the Social Enterprise Development and Investment Fund. I hope to work with Alicia and Food Within to build on their special work. Besides extending to her this commitment, I—like others in the House, no doubt—want to salute her for her efforts and celebrate her for her tremendous work.

**Ryan Electorate: Remembrance Day**

*Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10.18 pm)—I rise tonight to recognise the significant date that passed last Thursday on Australia’s calendar. Remembrance Day is a day that should never be forgotten. The legacy of those who have served our nation should be forever preserved. This year we gathered to mark the 92nd anniversary of the Armistice. I speak with pride and knowledge that the Ryan community was united last week in honouring and saluting the brave service men and women who have served from the Great War through to World War Two, Korea and Vietnam and in East Timor, the Solomon Islands, Iraq and Afghanistan, war and conflicts where brave young Australians serve to this day. Across my electorate of Ryan there were many events to honour and preserve the legacy of Australia’s service men and women and recognise the significance of Remembrance Day. I wish to recognise the heartfelt efforts of the Ryan community members, who allowed all of us to pay our respects to Australians who died in service of their country—of our country.

In the north of the electorate, the Gaythorne RSL Sub-Branch held a community service at Sid Loder memorial park. Hundreds of people from the Ryan community gathered together to reflect and remember. I acknowledge in particular Suzie Campbell, a local university student, who played the bugle used by her grandfather at Anzac Cove.

I attended the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-Branch’s Remembrance Day service at the Fairview aged-care facility, where I spoke in honour of soldiers who had died doing their duty. I reflected in particular on those Australians who died at war during the past year, diggers who are no longer at home with their wives and children: Jacob Moerland, Darren Smith, Ben Chuck, Timothy Aplin, Scott Palmer, Nathan Bewes, Jason Brown, Grant Kirby, Tomas Dale and Jared MacKinney.

Remembrance Day is a day when families and communities recognise, as one, the sacrifices made by service personnel to protect
our country through all wars and armed conflicts. Remembrance Day is the day when we recognise and pay tribute to the soldiers and also to their families. In this vein, it is appropriate to consider the words of General Peter Cosgrove at the 91st anniversary at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, who said:

Every one of the names on the Roll of Honour and in the Remembrance Book represents a husband, father, son or brother taken; a wife, mother, daughter or sister gone. Their lives were precious: to their families, to Australia and above all, to those who gave them. They never had the chance to grow old, or to watch those dear to them grow old.

It was very special to join with members of the Ryan community last Thursday to reflect and to preserve the legacy of those who have served our nation in the past and those who serve today. To those brave men and women and their families left behind, we honour you and we salute you.

It is right also that we ensure that we afford all Australian families affected by the loss of diggers abroad access to essential services and support in their time of bereavement. It is for this reason that Legacy Australia must be supported in the community. By assisting families and offering vital assistance at a time of need, the work of Legacy touches many. While it will never replace the love and guidance of fallen diggers, Legacy offers hope where it may otherwise be wanting. I congratulate Lord Mayor Campbell Newman and the Brisbane City Council in ensuring that Legacy is offered the opportunity to continue its work with certainty and serve a new generation of Australian service families with the naming of the Legacy Tunnel in the electorate of Ryan. With this naming is the commitment to provide much-needed funds from collected road tolls to this great Australian institution.

As Australia remains committed to combative and peacekeeping operations around the world, Legacy’s role remains pivotal to helping families through the most difficult of times.

Agriculture: Foreign Acquisitions

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (10.23 pm)—I rise to give voice to many Hindmarsh constituents and of course South Australians more generally who have expressed their interest in reports of foreign acquisitions of agricultural land in Australia. I appreciate the many queries and perspectives that have been put through to me in my electorate office on this particular subject. I can inform the parliament that people are concerned, and as members of this place we have an absolute duty to bring their concerns to this House. I am very pleased to be able to do that tonight. Many people are concerned by the prospect of increasing foreign ownership of Australian agricultural land eventually leading to an excessive proportion of our food production capacity being owned by foreign interests and used for foreign purposes, that is, the export of food to feed people overseas, to the detriment—and this is key—of Australian consumers. This concern stems from the very legitimate concern for the Australian agricultural food producing sector being able to produce and bring to market enough food to feed our nation.

I am very pleased, though, that the Assistant Treasurer, the Hon. Bill Shorten, recently asked Treasury to examine options that would further strengthen the transparency of foreign ownership and interest in rural land and agricultural production. This request included Treasury assessing recent international regulatory reforms and arrangements and we are always keen to see the Foreign Investment Review Board guidelines move with the times and line up with our community concerns and those concerns I have been hearing and many other mem-
bers of this House have been hearing in their electorates.

Having more information available to us specific to this investment landscape would be very welcome and I especially welcome it. For example, the Senate Select Committee on Agriculture and Related Industries had a look at some of these issues earlier on in the year and recommended an information audit so that we can have better information on who is acquiring land, who is purchasing it and which companies they are or who they represent. I know that federal Labor on this side of the House has already made improvements to the foreign investment framework that are very much in the national interest. For example, we have released the national interest principles to improve the transparency around how the national interest test is applied, and that is very important. In June this year we released the easy-to-read version of the policy to further improve transparency of the regime. It is important to note that investment by state-owned enterprises and sovereign wealth funds already requires the Foreign Investment Review Board’s approval. When it comes to foreign investment in rural land, the government examines all significant private interest proposals and all foreign government and state-owned enterprises and they must notify the Foreign Investment Review Board before making a direct investment in Australia, whether it is for one dollar or a billion dollars. It is very important to note that specific point.

The key issue here is that we need to get the settings right between attracting foreign investment, which is very important to our economy, and making clear that Australia is open for business but also ensuring that we protect our national interests and resources. We know that the mere idea of there being insufficient food available to meet our needs does bring to mind the bread queues of the early 1990s in Russia and care packages distributed in parts of Africa through many years of disaster, and the food riots in Egypt more recently. This is a fundamental and legitimate concern, but I believe we need not fear for our food security for the foreseeable future. I would like to explain my reasoning. The Productivity Commission report *Trends in Australian agriculture* released in 2005 made the clear observation that Australia exported approximately two-thirds of our agricultural production in the early years of this last decade. We exported over $28 billion worth of agricultural production in 2003-04—$28 billion of some $40-plus billion worth of production. Beef, wheat, wine and wool were the largest contributors, with combined earnings of some $12 billion. So we only wanted one-third of the beef we produced and the rest was exported. (Time expired)

**Stradbroke Island Sandmining**

*Mr LAMING* (Bowman) (10.28 pm)—In a pre-election preference deal Premier Anna Bligh elected to wipe out sandmining on North Stradbroke Island by 2027 and with it liquid-papering away 250 mining jobs and another 350 indirect jobs. This threatens to bring to an end the North Stradbroke Island economy as we know it. It leaves families owning properties that they can potentially never sell, the risk of large and wholesale sale of real estate on that island and plummeting property values wiping out the small businesses that support that island at this current time. Of course the fakery of the Bligh government was to promise that there would be an ecotourism industry to replace mining. We know that it flagrantly wrong. The prospect of there being 50 high-paid Indigenous jobs created by an environmental and ecotourism sector is ridiculous. There is not a single national park in Australia that has that many jobs. This is the final act of a state government losing popularity. Yes, it is
a dying carcass of a state government. Yes, I can see the maggot meiosis, I can hear the blowflies, but before they go they will make some appalling decisions about the management of the North Stradbroke Island economy. It is a disgrace that they are wiping out sandmining and not looking to the future of that island and its families.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 10.30 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 10.30 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Crean to present a Bill for an Act to change the name of the National Film and Sound Archive and to transfer certain assets and liabilities of Screen Australia to the National Film and Sound Archive, and for related purposes.

Ms Roxon to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Health Insurance Act 1973, and for related purposes.

Ms Roxon to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992, and for related purposes.

Mr Garrett to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Australian Research Council Act 2001, and for related purposes.

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to validate certain parenting orders and amend the Family Law Act 1975, and for related purposes.

Mr Hunt to move:
That this House:

(1) notes that the Australian Government has not released figures for the full rate of defects discovered under both the Home Insulation Safety Plan and the Foil Insulation Safety Program;

(2) calls on the Australian Government to release the full rate of defects discovered under both the Home Insulation Safety Plan and the Foil Insulation Safety Program, including the:

(a) number and percentage of roofs:
   (i) found to be unsafe;
   (ii) found to be faulty or substandard;
   (iii) found to be flawed, unsafe or substandard in any way; and
   (iv) rectified;

(b) cost of repairing the faulty, substandard or unsafe insulation; and

(c) total amount of money paid by the Australian Government to insulation companies for faulty, substandard, flawed or unsafe insulation; and

(3) calls on the Australian Government to release information on the asbestos problem discovered under the Home Insulation Program, in particular:

(a) the number of roofs containing asbestos that received insulation;

(b) any specific warnings of asbestos risk given to installers prior to fitting the insulation;

(c) steps being taken to manage the asbestos risk for safety inspectors assessing roofs.

Mr Hayes to move:
That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) 10 December 2010 is Human Rights Day;

(b) Human Rights Day marks the anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly’s adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and is the most important commemorative day of the human rights calendar;

(c) the theme for Human Rights Day 2010 is 'human rights defenders who act to end discrimination'; and

(d) human rights defenders act against discrimination, exclusion, oppression and violence, often at great personal risk both to themselves and their families;

(2) acknowledges that:

(a) there are Governments and regimes in the world which do not afford their citi-
zens the fundamental human rights that we freely enjoy in Australia;

(b) one such Government operates in Vietnam, where there are more than 400 people imprisoned for exercising their fundamental human rights and who have been accused of crimes such as supporting political groups not recognised by the state, criticising government policies, calling for democracy, giving interviews to foreign journalists and providing legal advice to other dissidents on trial;

(c) as a nation we should be doing all that we can to urge the Vietnamese Government to adhere to the International Bill of Human Rights, which Vietnam ratified in 1982; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

(a) use the full weight of its diplomatic relations with Vietnam to strongly lobby for substantial reform when it comes to basic freedoms for its people; and

(b) continue its commitment to lobby and advocate for human rights in all countries.

Dr Stone to move:

That this House:

(1) mourns the tragic loss of young Chase and Tyler Robinson, who died at Mooroopna on 30 May 2010 in a recently rented home;

(2) notes that Chase and Tyler Robinson were the victims of a faulty gas wall heater emitting carbon monoxide; and

(3) calls upon the Australian Government to work with the State and Territory governments through the Council of Australian Governments to:

(a) urgently introduce legislation that requires:

(i) approved carbon monoxide detectors to be fitted in all homes that have gas appliances; and

(ii) landlords to arrange for suitably qualified contractors to biannually inspect all gas appliances and associated fittings in rental properties; and

(b) institute a national safety awareness campaign alerting all Australians to the dangers and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and the need to regularly maintain gas appliances to ensure that they operate efficiently and safely.

Mr Bandt to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) overwork is a significant problem for many Australian workers;

(b) research by the Australia Institute has shown that the typical full-time employee works 70 minutes of unpaid overtime a day, which equates to six and a half standard working weeks a year, effectively meaning that Australian workers are 'donating' more than their annual leave entitlement back to their employers in the form of unpaid overtime;

(c) excessive working hours can have negative consequences for physical and mental health, for relationships with loved ones, and for the broader community; and

(d) to focus attention on the ongoing problem of work/life balance, Wednesday 24 November is National Go Home on Time Day, an initiative of the Australia Institute that is supported by beyondblue, VicHealth, the Australian Health Promotion Association, the Public Health Association of Australia, and many other organisations; and

(2) acknowledges the positive and simple message behind Go Home on Time Day, and encourages employees and employers to take part on 24 November.
CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Aston Electorate: Remembrance Day

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (4.00 pm)—Last week I had the opportunity to attend several Remembrance Day services, where we paid our respects to those brave men and women who have died in the service of our country. The first such service was on the Sunday before Remembrance Day, when the Bayswater RSL Club held its official Remembrance Day service. Bayswater RSL is the only RSL club in my electorate. It is a wonderful community club with several hundred members, many of whom served in our forces or have close connections with those who have done so. It held its primary service on the Sunday prior to 11 November in order to allow people who work to attend. The RSL president, Mr Don Hamilton, and the secretary, Mr Noel McLean, officiated at the service. Many people from the local community attended, and I had the honour of being the primary speaker.

During the service we remembered those who had served Australia in all wars—from the Boer War right up to the present-day conflicts. We remembered their courage, we remembered their persistence and determination, we remembered their larrikin spirit and sense of humour and, most importantly, we remembered their sacrifice. The Bayswater RSL Club held a second service, at 11 o’clock on Remembrance Day itself, where it was joined by students from the Bayswater Primary School. This school has a close relationship with the RSL and recently did a beautiful mural representing Remembrance Day which now hangs in the courtyard of the RSL. It is absolutely terrific to see such a close connection between the RSL and the local primary school so that local children learn about the enormous sacrifices made by the people who came before them.

That evening, a citizenship ceremony was held at Knox in my electorate. I was very pleased to see that around half the new citizens wore poppies on their lapels. They obviously recognised that Australia’s attractiveness—the prosperity and the freedoms that we enjoy—is due to the sacrifices of the people who have come before us. At each occasion commemorating Remembrance Day—at those services and at the citizenship ceremony—we sang the national anthem, in which we rejoiced that we are ‘young and free’. I commented that the fact that we are young is an accident of history, while the fact that we are free is no accident but is due to those brave men and women who came before us.

Fowler Electorate: Rotary Club of Liverpool Greenway

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (4.03 pm)—I recently had the good fortune to attend the Rotary Club of Liverpool Greenway’s 20th annual charity ball, which was held at Roma Function Centre in Liverpool. Nearly 400 people turned up for the masquerade ball which helped raise more than $24,000 which will be used to purchase two colposcopes for imaging equipment for the Liverpool Cancer Therapy Centre. Incredibly, even more money was raised on the night and it will be donated to the Violet Foundation and to Crohn’s and Colitis Australia. The Violet Foundation’s aims are to help people affected by meningococcal disease and raise awareness of the illness. Crohn’s and Colitis Australia provides support and education programs for people living with these two diseases and raises money for research into a cure.
The Rotary Club of Liverpool Greenway certainly has an impressive history when it comes to supporting the local community. Over the past 20 years the club has raised much-needed funds for Liverpool Hospital’s maternity ward, the Wig Library, Mainsbridge Special School, Miracle Babies and Hoxton Industries.

During the ball I had the opportunity to catch up with the club president, Ms June Young, as well as Rotary’s 9690 district governor, Mrs Marilyn Mercer. I want to thank these two women for their hospitality and also for taking the time to enlighten me about the good work that the Rotary Club of Liverpool Greenway is doing throughout our community. The southwest of Sydney is indeed blessed to have so many groups like the Rotary Club of Liverpool Greenway who are genuinely committed to making a difference in people’s lives. I am certain that the average 350 patients who attend the Liverpool Cancer Therapy Unit each day appreciate the financial support that the Rotary Club of Liverpool Greenway gives to our community.

Our thanks should also go to the many businesses who contributed to the charity ball to make it such a success through their donations for raffle prizes and for the auction on the night. They all contributed to raise significant funds to help our community. The ball was a perfect example of the local community in the south-west of Sydney coming together to support their own. Once again I congratulate Ms Young for her organising ability and for bringing it all together on the night for an extremely successful evening. It shows what a local community can do when it is focused on delivering support for its own.

Farrer Electorate: Murray-Darling Basin

Ms LEY (Farrer) (4.06 pm)—On 28 October I advised parliament of the growing confusion surrounding the Murray-Darling Basin Authority’s consultation process into the draft guide for its Basin Plan. At the time I alerted the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities of widespread calls for him to direct the authority to withdraw the plan to allow time for full and proper consultation into the social and economic impacts, which the authority itself admitted was absent. The government then ignored those calls from rural organisations affected by the plan and ignored the coalition.

Today there is more evidence that this government is simply not listening. Today we read that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will not guarantee it will consider community feedback into its draft plan after the end of this month. This is the feedback that will give the authority and the government the message they do not want to hear: that they are both still orchestrating a plan which has the potential to decimate Australia’s food production industry and do lasting damage to small towns across the basin. So what is the message from the authority and Labor? We are not listening. Despite numerous calls from my office to the authority, pressing the need for them to stage community consultation in seemingly forgotten areas of my electorate—Broken Hill, which has a strong relationship with Menindee Lakes; and Hay, which has, as a vital part of its regional economy, irrigated agriculture on the Murrumbidgee—the answer was no. The message from the authority and Labor: we are not listening.

Today we also learn that the Gillard government has failed to meet its own deadline made during the federal election campaign into the future management of Menindee Lakes. Why the delay? The water minister tells us that it is an important scheme that cannot be rushed and that all due diligence must be followed. What does that sound like to you, Mr Deputy Speaker? Another false and hollow assurance from Labor. We now have two parliamentary
inquiries and an additional socioeconomic study, which the MDBA has been forced to undertake because of real and genuine concerns raised by the coalition and basin communities about how this process is being run.

I remind the government that this is a message they could have received directly if they had bothered to attend any of consultation sessions so far. The MDBA was happy to spruik that it had consulted with around 20,000 people over 28 sessions. Imagine that—20,000 people but not one senior member of the government. I wonder how many of those 20,000 actually had their voices heard during the authority’s last-minute dash around the basin. Instead, from the sanctuary of this House, the Labor leadership have assured us they want to get the balance right. Is there any chance that the Prime Minister might direct the MDBA to relax its time line to get all the facts and make the correct decisions for rural people? Not a chance, because they are not listening. This is more evidence that Labor has lost its way.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—We are honoured to have a senior minister in the Main Committee today. I now call the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and member for McMahon, the Hon. Chris Bowen.

Iraq

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (4.09 pm)—It is my honour, Mr Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much. I rise today to condemn in the strongest possible terms recent acts of violence in Iraq against Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs and Christian minorities. I have spoken many times in the House over the years about this issue, moved motions, tabled petitions and organised the Assyrian Parliamentary Friendship Group. I am glad my honourable friend the member for Fowler is here. He has also been very vocal and supportive on this issue.

It pains me to report to the House that there have been recent events causing great concern. For example, I am advised that on 31 October, at Our Lady of Salvation church, gunmen took close to 100 hostages. They were stormed by Iraqi antiterrorist forces; 30 hostages and seven security officers were killed.

Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs have inhabited Iraq for 2,000 years, and it is appropriate that they be able to continue to do so. This is a matter I have discussed with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the previous Minister for Foreign Affairs and I have taken delegations of Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs to see both men. In particular, the previous minister, the member for Perth, allocated a substantial fund of foreign aid to assist minority groups in Iraq. I am glad to have received reports from the Assyrian and Chaldean community that that aid is flowing and that they have received updates from AusAID on that work. The current Minister for Foreign Affairs is somebody who has taken a long interest in this matter. When he was shadow minister for foreign affairs, I took delegations of Assyrians and Chaldeans and His Grace Bishop Kassab, the bishop of the Chaldean community in Australia, to see him. As recently as today I discussed with him the recent events in Iraq and the suffering of Christians in Iraq.

The purpose of this speech today is simply to let Christians in Iraq know that they have friends in this House, on both sides of the chamber, who do not fail to acknowledge their suffering and who send their messages of support as they go through this suffering and, more
than that, send messages of material aid and comfort. We hope that they continue to live in Iraq peacefully and happily, as they have done for the last 2,000 years.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I am sure all honourable members would echo the sentiments of the minister.

Senior Sergeant Corey Allen

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (4.10 pm)—I wish to place on record my congratulations to Senior Sergeant Corey Allen, who has recently been nominated as a Queensland finalist for the Australian of the Year awards in the category Australia’s Local Hero. Corey is a truly remarkable local who has enriched not just the Ryan community through his hard work but that of the city of Brisbane. I first met Corey when he served the Queensland police as officer in charge at the Indooroopilly station in Ryan. He is now serving as the officer in charge of the Brisbane city station. Despite his elevated managerial position in the police force, Corey believes that the most effective policing occurs by being out and about and working in the community, and he continues to walk the beat.

However, his work above and beyond the call of duty is just as significant and worthy of recognition in this place. Indeed, it is the work of people like Corey that makes Brisbane a safe and truly wonderful place to live. It is the work of people like Corey, who has personally worked tirelessly to improve the lives of thousands of Brisbane residents, that embodies what it means to be Australian. Corey’s own unique style of policing is underpinned by a vision to create connections in the community and build tolerance and trust where none previously existed. With this vision, Corey has worked relentlessly with no expectation of community gratitude. Corey is focused on issues of youth, homelessness and public safety and has introduced several innovative programs to tackle these issues.

One key initiative is Project PATCH. Project PATCH was developed by Corey three years ago to target drug issues, violence and assault in Brisbane’s inner city suburb of Kelvin Grove. In recognition of the enormous success of this undertaking by Senior Sergeant Allen and the Brisbane city police, the project was awarded the prestigious National Meritorious Police award at this year’s Australian Policing and Crime Prevention ceremony in Canberra.

The National Australia Day Council has said of Corey that ‘he embodies old-fashioned policing values, where the officer in charge knows the people in their area and works with them on a first-name basis’. He is a member of the Commissioner’s Homeless Reference Group and volunteers with ‘50 Lives 50 Homes’, which engages with those sleeping rough between four and seven o’clock each morning. Corey and his wife, Tracey, also foster children on short-term and emergency placement. He is passionate about helping young people in difficult situations and his personal, hands-on approach is doing just that. He was also recently awarded the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust fellowship to study youth homelessness overseas to find better ways to help young people on the streets of Brisbane.

Senior Sergeant Corey Allen is a role model for all young police officers and, indeed, all people in our community. The Australian of the Year awards recognise individuals who inspire national pride and enrich the lives of their fellow Australians. It is therefore fitting that Corey is a finalist for these awards. It is a great honour. I congratulate Senior Sergeant Corey Allen on his well-deserved achievement. (Time expired)
Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (4.14 pm)—I rise to talk about the Gillard Labor government’s priorities in job creation, education and skills and their importance to my electorate of Throsby. Those priorities have seen over 600,000 jobs added to the economy through the deepest economic crisis that this world has seen in over 50 years—indeed, over 100,000 jobs have been added to the economy in the last three months in the area of education and skills. There has been significant investment, particularly in my electorate. Over the last few weeks we were pleased to announce an additional trades training centre. There is $5 million worth of investment in trades training centres which will benefit five schools in the electorate of Throsby and the adjoining electorate of Cunningham.

I want to focus today on just one part of the job creation and skills agenda of the Gillard Labor government, and that is with regard to the importance of apprenticeships and how that helps deal with the problem of youth unemployment. In my electorate of Throsby, part of the Illawarra region of New South Wales, general unemployment sits at several points above the national average. Alarmingly, the story with regard to youth unemployment is particularly dire, sitting at 14.8 per cent in the Illawarra part of my electorate as against the state-wide average of 11 per cent. In parts of my electorate the unemployment and social disadvantage that flows from this spans several generations. Addressing those issues will be a key focus of my work as the member for Throsby, just as it is a focus of the Gillard Labor government.

Some companies recognise that they have an important part to play in taking up the challenge of training the next generation of skilled tradespeople. In this regard, I wish to congratulate a local enterprise, Thomas and Coffey, for supporting apprenticeships for a diverse range of ages and backgrounds, including a mature-age apprentice fitter, an Indigenous apprentice boilermaker and 10 apprentices from non-English-speaking backgrounds. There is no doubt that these apprenticeships have made a real difference to the apprentices and the lives of their families. The recent recognition of Thomas and Coffey in the 2010 Minister’s Awards for Excellence was well deserved. Those awards showcase exceptional employers who support Australian apprenticeships. The Wollongong branch of Thomas and Coffey provides industrial maintenance services to companies such as BlueScope Steel, TRUenergy and other companies in the electorate of Throsby. I also congratulate their encouragement of the participation of those apprentices in the literacy program run by the WEA in Wollongong. (Time expired)

Green Loans

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (4.17 pm)—Sitting with me in my electorate office was a constituent at a loss financially. He was frustrated, exasperated and totally fed up. This is the human face reflecting the Labor Party’s failed Green Loans scheme. This scheme was aimed at making it more affordable for Australians to make their homes more energy efficient. However, it was dumped after three scathing independent reports exposed extensive mismanagement. The reports found widespread lack of compliance with government regulations on procurement, an absence of effective program supervision and poor financial controls of the program, among other things. The report found the department focused on speed rather than quality.

As the scheme was recognised as failing, it was moved from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. The government has replaced the scheme with a grants based program despite a Sen-
Committee recommendation that it not proceed, at least not without considerable qualifications. Program changes announced on 9 February 2010 effectively capped the number of assessors and the demand for assessments, but it left thousands of assessors, who had each invested their time and around $3,000 on training, insurance and registration, with unfulfilled work expectations. The backlog of assessment reports to be distributed continued to grow to over 100,000, which denied many householders the opportunity to apply for an interest-free green loan. These are no longer available. The Australian National Audit Office report found that the scheme had a number of design flaws and that aspects of the program had not been administered to the standard that the government and the community expected. It was noted that around 4,000 of the 7,500 assessors had been contracted under the program but, with the program capped at 5,000 assessors, some assessors would not receive contracts to work under the program.

There was a backlog of around 100,000 assessment reports yet to be sent to households. The delay in dispatching assessment reports was a contributing factor to the low uptake of green loans. Only 1,705 loans had been approved by participating financial institutions at that time. Green Rewards cards had not been distributed to households and delays in paying assessors were mostly due to incorrectly rendered invoices, with around 50 per cent of the invoices incorrect or incomplete when first submitted. In the wash-up of the failed scheme, it is the assessors who stand to lose the most. As one assessor commented:
The Auditor-General’s report is a must read for all those people thinking of working with Government. One can see from the report into the GLP, that a lack of management and what private businesses would see as common sense, is simply not present most of the time. Failings are common place around every corner.

After reading the report there has to be a serious doubt about staying involved in the new Green Start program. It is not a matter of thinking change but logic, common sense and financial survival.

In a 21 October email that one of my constituents sent to me, he sums up his communications with the department:

I have sent them documentation (at their request) for the fourth time requesting work as an assessor. Some of this I sent by registered post and I still haven’t received a confirmation that this has been received. How long does it take for a letter to get to the national capital? *(Time expired)*

**Education**

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (4.21 pm)—Higher education is integral to achieving the federal Labor government’s vision of a stronger and fairer Australia. It drives economic development, productivity and high-skilled jobs. In that context, two weeks ago I had the pleasure of representing Senator the Hon. Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, to celebrate and officially open the Better TAFE Facilities funding recognition ceremony at the Bremer TAFE facility at Bundamba, in my electorate of Blair. I was later given a tour of the facilities by the Acting Institute Director, Mr Michael Thomas, and the Facilities Manager, Mr Brad Fisher.

The ceremony was to officially recognise the funding received by the TAFE at the initiation of the federal Labor government under the Teaching and Learning Capital Fund for Vocational Education and Training element. My local state member of parliament, the member for Ipswich, the Hon. Rachel Nolan, made the remark in her speech that in her 10 years as a local state member this was the first time she had seen any federal money going toward TAFE. This
is a terrible indictment of the Howard government, which deprived all levels of the education sector of the funding they so desperately needed during the 11 years of that government’s reign. It sought to impose Work Choices on each sector and to link funding to the same. That is why the $2 million of federal Labor government funding provided to help address the immediate maintenance needs, small capital works and equipment and plant purchases was so warmly welcomed by the staff, the students and the Blair community at the Bremer TAFE. The TAFE has about 13,000 students.

Every person deserves the right to a first-class education. It is one of the greatest gifts that we can give our young people. It allows them to achieve personal success and contribute to the nation’s prosperity. World-class TAFEs are just as important as first-class sandstone universities. The refurbishment and upgrade of equipment at the Bundamba campus will enhance the quality of training already delivered there. It is great to see the expansion of its facilities and the warmth of the community’s approval for it.

The establishment of the Bundamba campus so many years ago was not without controversy, such was the sentiment and sympathy for the old technical college in the heart of the Ipswich CBD. The $2 million received by the Bremer TAFE is part of $200 million of funding being provided through Better TAFE Facilities to TAFEs across the country and, in particular, to community training providers to offer job-ready accreditation and vocational education and training. The Bundamba campus is a wonderful facility; it is a wonderful initiative for my electorate. Projects receiving funding include the upgrading of the Mary Street crossing; the refurbishment of D Block at the Bundamba campus; the relocation of the administration counter services at Inala; provision of data projectors to learning spaces; the provision of air-conditioning; the refurbishment of metal fabrication at the Bundamba campus; the upgrading of equipment, facilities and workstations; and the implementation of modern ICT delivery methods. Plant and equipment are additionally provided for at the facility to enhance and support the mining industry in the heart of Queensland, which we honour. (Time expired)

**Wright Electorate: Food Security**

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (4.24 pm)—According to the 2010 Intergenerational Report, Australia will have a population of 35 million by 2050, with over six million of these people living in South-East Queensland. In my electorate of Wright there are at least two new cities on the planning agenda, one at Yarrabilba and the other at Flagstone. Each of these new cities will have 30,000 residents all requiring housing, transport services, schools and hospitals, and food. By 2050 the world’s population will exceed nine billion. This raises the obvious question: how will these people be fed? This very question is now being asked by the agricultural industry in Queensland, especially Growcom, the Queensland fruit and vegetable growers association. The significance of this is obvious to me in my electorate, which contains some of the most productive small cropping farming lands in Australia. It is fast being overtaken by housing and urban sprawl. Many of our major food production companies are being purchased by foreign nationals. Our fresh food production and food security is under threat.

Australia does not have a cohesive and comprehensive national plan in place to guarantee that arable land with suitable water and climatic requirements and adequate infrastructure will be available into the future to guarantee our food supply. The loss of productive agricultural land has become an issue of concern in Queensland and throughout Australia. Increasing urban pressures on farmland in urban fringe areas is creating land use conflict and marginalising.
viable farming operations. Added to this are the pressures from mining and gas production. As a nation we have not grasped the importance of maintaining a critical mass of farmers and farmland. Farming enterprises are being pressured to embrace the environmental expectations of rural residential communities who want the lifestyle of acreages properties but are not always accepting of the normal farming practices that are being carried out on and around them. At the same time, higher land prices, land taxes and local rates introduced by development and lifestyle investors make it increasingly difficult for farms to maintain viability, or to further develop and expand or to maintain or improve productivity.

I urge the Queensland government to take their strategic cropping land discussion paper seriously and to use it to develop a new policy framework that will provide increased clarity for agriculture. What is at stake is the food security of our nation and this is something which we should not be prepared to gamble on.

Robertson Electorate: Brisbane Water Oyster Festival

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (4.26 pm)—I rise today to congratulate the organisers and participants of the Brisbane Water Oyster Festival, which I attended at Ettalong Beach last weekend. It was the 10th time the festival has been held. As oysters are want to do, the festival has developed into a pearl of an event over the last 10 years—25,000 people attended a weekend of festivities to celebrate the marvellous molluscs of Brisbane Water, Broken Bay and the Hawkesbury River. A total of about 6,000 dozen oysters actually went down the hatch.

The festivities began on the Friday night with the Oyster Festival ball at Ettalong Beach Memorial Club. It was a great chance to frock up for a good cause. The festival has an important fundraising element. In all, seven Central Coast women took part in a charity queen event. They raised a record total of $90,000 for the Cancer Council of New South Wales Breast Cancer Research and Support Services. That is the largest amount that this festival has ever raised in one year. Locally, that means supporting the activities of the Cancer Council New South Wales office at Erina, which runs support groups such as the young women’s soirée and another group for breast cancer survivors over the age of 50. That money also funds the production of the Understanding Cancer series of publications around breast cancer. These resources are often the first information received by someone who has received a breast cancer diagnosis.

Scarlett Napier of St Huberts Island raised an amazing $30,000. Scarlett was the Miss Charity Queen and was sponsored by the Ettalong Beach Memorial Club. Aimee Hanslow of Woy Woy was Queen of the Festival. Her sponsor was Kevin Crabtree of Euphoria Hair Salon in Point Clare. The other charity contestants were Chloé Brooks, sponsored by Star FM 104.5; Tyler Matterson, sponsored by Woy Woy Leagues Club; Nikki Sneade, sponsored by Woy Woy Bowling Club; Alicia Howard, sponsored by Avoca Beach Bowling Club; and Rachel Scoins, sponsored by Indulge Yourself Beauty. There was another charity category, the Mother of Pearl, which was won by Umina Beach resident Vikki White. The runner-up was Mandy Coolen from Star FM, who is just as charitable when she is playing rock stars as the host of the morning shift on Star 104.5.

I thank them all from the bottom of my heart for their wonderful generosity. The Peninsula Chamber of Commerce also raised almost $14,000 for Gosford Hospital for a colposcope, which is a diagnostic device to follow up on abnormal pap smears. Part of that funding came in the form of a $10,000 cheque from the New South Wales government which was presented

MAIN COMMITTEE
by my state counterpart Maree Andrews. Last and not least I would like to pay tribute to the
dedication and hard work of Deborah and Matthew Wales from the Peninsula Chamber of
Commerce. This community event has again brought out the best in the people of the Penin-
sula. I just put on record that Scarlett Napier indicated to me that she found out so much about
participating in her community and about breast cancer by her participation in this event.

(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! In accordance with standing order
193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Afghanistan

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Stephen Smith:

That the House take note of the document.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (4.30 pm)—I stand to lend my support today to our engage-
ment in the Afghanistan conflict. I make the point that war is a terrible thing, and that any loss
of life due to the hand of war is bad and should be avoided at every possible stage. But we do
not always have that luxury, and to date we have lost too many brave Australians already at
this war. But as a nation we cannot stand by and watch and tolerate innocent bystanders get-
ing caught up in the conflict which we cannot fathom: the injustices done to women, a law
and order system that would bedazzle the average punter in Australia. So while I open with
my comments that war is a terrible thing, it is a means to an end. Australia has always been
prepared to stand with its allies in the case of a just war. This war is a just war. It is a dirty and
dangerous war with many casualties, but it is just nonetheless.

It is easy to stand and criticise how long or how hard or how expensive a war may be, but
that may pale into insignificance when it comes to fighting that war. I would not want that
job, and I doubt whether I would even get through the training. So that is why I have nothing
but admiration for our serving personnel in Afghanistan. They put their bodies on the line to
serve Australia’s interest. They spend months away from their families and loved ones, they
miss out on weekends off, their children’s sporting events, birthdays of their loved ones and
other celebrations which we, at home, all take for granted.

The new seat of Wright, which I represent, has the Canungra Land Warfare Training Centre
which, since my election, I have had the opportunity to visit on several occasions. There I
have met the brave men and women who train to defend our nation from any threat posed to
our nation. And I have had the privilege to meet the brave soldiers and their families who
have served our nation in a number of conflicts around the world: the Middle East, Kuwait
and Iraq just to mention a few. It is their efforts that have allowed us the freedoms which we
enjoy today as an open society, and I take this opportunity to thank them personally for their
contribution to the Commonwealth of Australia. And just as importantly I thank their families,
for it is they who make the hidden sacrifices that I mentioned earlier—to miss out on the birth
of a child or the first day of school or to miss out on a funeral of a relative, a grandparent or
an old mate. It is a sacrifice I would not like to make, but our troops and families make these
sacrifices every day.

It was while on site at the Canungra warfare training centre that I experienced first-hand
the commitment that goes into preparing our young men and women. They transfer skills and
knowledge to recruits and experienced soldiers alike. When I inquired of a senior personnel manager up there about their role in preparing our troops, I felt an overwhelming sense of understanding when I was told by a high-ranking officer that it was his job to look each parent in the eye and give them a guarantee that their son or daughter had been given the best possible training to prepare them for any situation that they may encounter in different environments around the world.

It was also while I was on site that I asked about the spirit of our soldiers and whether or not there was any reluctance on the part of our troops to go to war or deployment. His response was convincing: our soldiers train with the knowledge that they know they want to protect their mates. He said to me: ‘You look like you’ve played football all your life. Well this is like football. There’s many grades: there’s your junior grades, there’s your Commonwealth cup, there’s the under 19 reserve grade and then there’s A-grade. Every one of my boys here wants to play A-grade.’ I add that the art of conflict and war is no football match. Bravery is sometimes matched by the ultimate sacrifice, and standing behind all of them are the families of the troops waiting at home: praying desperately, hoping for the day that they will welcome their sons, daughters, fathers or mates back home safe and well.

These are part of the war efforts which we could all overlook, but it is going to be something that I will be constantly reminded of. As I said before, I have many service families in my electorate as well as the Canungra Land Warfare Centre and, just to the north of my boundary, RAAF Base Amberley. A number of my constituents are former or current serving Air Force personnel. I handle a steady stream of inquiries about pensions and entitlements, and we need to recognise the lessons of past conflicts.

The Australian people and the Australian government send our personnel overseas to perform dangerous tasks, to risk the lives of many and in some cases to risk the chance of a long and peaceful retirement with their families. The scars of combat and conflict are sometimes more than skin-deep. The trauma of battle can scar the mind and invade the homes of our returned troops. We train our troops to survive the mayhem of battle and the challenge of long periods of boredom and estrangement from families. So I remind this parliament that we need to accept our duty to ensure that our returned troops are given all the support that they need to survive peace as well. That peace should also extend to the needs of the families. It is they who provide the cradle of care and who nourish and protect our returned warriors. They nurse their hidden wounds and give them hope for tomorrow.

Winning the peace within the families of returned service personnel is not an easy job. When I talk to my constituents who carry this burden I hear their stories and realise that this work is every bit as difficult as the military duties which others were trained and paid for. Many family members find themselves in the position of counsellor, mentor, conciliator and adviser, and most of them have had no training to perform these delicate tasks. The hidden damage is difficult to assess because these proud warriors are loath to ever admit their weakness.

I will declare my intention to this House. While I am in this place and while my job is to represent returned and serving constituents, I will be uncompromising in my representation. I will pursue every issue that these men and women bring to me. Some of this is everyday stuff of pensioners’ entitlements and battles fought and often lost with Centrelink, Veterans’ Affairs and some other government agencies. There are many instances where, on the face of it, is-
issues appear to be relatively minor. But, when I see the paperwork and the approach taken, I see all the training and discipline which the old digger, sailor or Air Force man has now put to good use in prosecuting his case and representing himself.

These are not easy tasks, because the needs of these people are not exorbitant when compared to the sacrifices they make. I will feel that I have not honoured their commitment to the nation. I cannot give them the answers to their inquiries or solutions to their problems. I want them to return to their families, their homes and their communities in my electorate to contribute where they can, as a civilian, as they served in their military life.

I would like to tell a personal story about my engagement with the US Marines. Before my time in this place I had a transport business and one of our divisions had a security detail associated with it. We were commissioned by the United States government to take a shipment of semi-automatic weapons from Shoalwater Bay to Gladstone and we were asked to pick up a platoon of US Marines. Our instructions were very brief. We were asked to wait at an isolated beach and the marines would appear. On time, at dusk, 30 marines came out of the ocean fully armoured in full camouflage gear. We had the opportunity of speaking with them while transporting them for up to two hours to their next location, and we asked them about their activities in the engagement that they were in and about the integrity of our Australian forces. They were very forthcoming in saying that, in any engagement that the US Marines engaged in anywhere in the world, they always felt an element of safety, support and professionalism when they were serving with the Australian forces. They said, ‘If we’re going to go into a contact situation, we’d prefer to have the Australian special forces with us.’

The war can only be won by the Afghan people themselves. Our duty is to assist them to assist themselves. We train our troops for and entrust them with this cause because it is a just cause. But we should never be prepared to write a blank cheque for their efforts; the cost is, above all else, the risk faced by our troops. If we cannot give them our full support then we should not send them there. If we are not prepared to support their families at home then we should not ask their families to send them in the first place.

I fully support our engagement. I have extracted a comment about our engagement in the war that I would like to include in my speech. It goes to the heart of the International Security Assistance Force, of which we are part. It reads:

At its heart, the International Security Assistance Force’s intent is to defeat Islamic terrorism at its source, deny Islamic terrorist organisations a training ground, support a democratically elected government to ensure that Afghanistan can never again become a haven for Islamic terrorism, and train and mentor the Afghan military, police and forces so that they can take command of their own security.

In summary, I would like to thank our Australian soldiers for their commitment and dedication, and their families—who go without and make sacrifices—for giving them the background support they need and nourishing them when they return to our shores. I would remind the nation to embrace our soldiers when they return and to learn from our mistakes in the past: when soldiers have returned from other conflicts, they may not have been received as warmly as they could have been. I would also add that our work in Afghanistan is sanctioned by the United Nations, and that we are proud to play our part and work with the allied forces. I do not have any stories of uncles or grandfathers who have been in conflicts or brothers who are now in conflicts. The story I have is of being a first-generation person living under the blanket.
of the freedom that previous troops have provided for this country. I am proud of that and proud of the work our troops do for us.

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (4.42 pm)—It is an honour to be here today to support the Prime Minister and speak on this most important issue, and to explain to the Australian people, including those in my electorate of Holt, why the Australian government must remain committed to our mission in Afghanistan. I just want to take us back to pre-September 11 times in discussing this matter now in the House.

On 26 February 1993, the first terror attack on the World Trade Centre took place. A truck bomb parked in a car park ripped through four levels of the South Tower building, killing six people and injuring hundreds more. New York’s serving governor, Mario Cuomo, said to journalists at the time: ‘We all have that feeling of being violated. No foreign people or force has ever done this to us. Until now, we thought we were invulnerable.’ Ramzi Yousef, one of the main planners of the attack, spent time at Bin Laden funded training camps in Afghanistan before travelling to the United States. Yousef’s plan was for the bomb to cause such significant damage to the South Tower that it would fall and subsequently bring down the North Tower. Whilst there has been some conjecture as to whether this attack was under the direct auspices of Bin Laden, it did signify the increasing threat from Islamic extremists, and their developing organisational capacity and willingness to strike at targets on Western soil.

There is no ambiguity, however, about subsequent attacks and the involvement of bin Laden and al-Qaeda in the coordinated bombings on 7 August 1998 at the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, that killed 291 people and the October 2000 attack on the USS Cole at the port of Aden in Yemen that killed 17 American soldiers. Operatives in the attacks on the US embassies in Africa and the USS Cole attended terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. Then we come to September 11. The attacks on September 11 in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania killed almost 3,000 people, including 10 Australians. On that day the world changed. On 11 September 2001, within the space of 20 minutes, two American airliners struck the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in Manhattan. The towers subsequently collapsed with the loss of almost 3,000 lives. At the same time, another hijacked jet crashed into the Pentagon, whilst a fourth—probably aimed at the White House—failed to reach its target due to the heroic actions of the jet’s passengers and smashed into a field in Pennsylvania.

Never before had mainland United States been the target of such a massive attack—though there was the surprise bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan, the only precedent in living memory. The carnage on September 11 was deliberately aimed at civilians and struck at the principal symbols of American commercial and military power and, missing its target in the third case, its political power. These horrific attacks were planned and resourced in Afghanistan. All 19 of the 9-11 hijackers attended terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. In order for the Australian government to justify our mission in Afghanistan, it is our duty to always provide an ongoing rationale and clear-cut explanation to the Australian people as to why we are there. We are in Afghanistan for clear reasons. Our mission in Afghanistan is in our national security interest. The threat posed by an unstable Afghanistan, which could once again become a safe haven for terrorism, could have ramifications that reach far beyond its borders and directly affect Australian national security interests.
A return of Taliban control to major urban centres, or an even further spread of Taliban control in regional areas, will provide a safe haven again for terrorists to plan, train and operate. Moreover, the instability that would ensue from the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan is also directly related to their fight and their desire to destabilise and control Pakistan, and has a direct impact on the strategic stability of that entire region. It is important to remind ourselves of the situation in Afghanistan prior to 2001. Let us reflect on this: the infamous ministry for the promotion of virtue and the suppression of vice; girls forbidden from going to school; significant discrimination against religious and ethnic minority groups such as the predominantly Shiite Hazaras; women unable to leave their homes, access medical care or even ride in a taxi unless escorted by a male relative; crowds of up to 30,000 people, including many children, watching near-weekly public executions, amputations and whippings at the Kabul sports stadium; and bans on television, films and music. These people basically wanted to export that model concept of society to the rest of the world.

When people say that this is a fight happening on the other side of the world, it is a fight that always directly affects us. Those who make the argument that it is not our fight because it is in a far-flung place forget that this is the place where some of the Bali bombers were trained. The Bali bombers killed 202 innocent civilians, including 88 Australians, and were trained in Afghanistan. Incidentally, according to a DFAT report on transnational terrorism, up to 1,000 South-East Asian Muslims are believed to have received military training in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Key Jamaat-i-Islami and Abu Sayyaf operatives, threats in our immediate region, fought with the Afghan mujaheddin, bringing back with them the training and the ideology to establish these organisations in South-East Asia. A number of the 2002 Bali bombers trained and fought in Afghanistan. Mukhlas fought in the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s and admitted to meeting Osama bin Laden. His brother, Ali Imron, received explosive training and Imam Samudra is reported to have received military training in the early 1990s. Eight-eight Australians died at the hands of these and other men in the attacks in Bali in September 2002 and another 66 Australians were critically injured.

Azhari Husein, who planned the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and was suspected of involvement in the 2005 Bali bombings in which four Australians died, also received explosives training in Afghanistan. We remember that in October 2003 some 530 survivors of the Bali bombings and the families of those who were killed filed into the Great Hall of Parliament House to light a candle and honour those who had died. It is vital that we do all we can to ensure that Australians travelling abroad—be it to London, Bali or the United States—can do so without an overarching fear of the threat posed by terrorists. We are in Afghanistan to reduce this fear and deal with this conflict so that Australians can travel freely and without fear.

In the days when the Taliban regime was completely in control, Afghanistan was a state-sponsored terrorism haven; a place that generated the horror of September 11 and the base for the attack on the US that day. This is why the war in Afghanistan falls within Australia’s ANZUS obligations. Afghanistan and the Pakistan border region is where the Taliban and al-Qaeda are based and where Osama bin Laden may still be hiding. It is in Afghanistan and the Pakistan border region that al-Qaeda continues to operate. It is in Afghanistan and that border region that the Taliban continues to represent a real security threat to the Pakistan government and people, to the people and the nascent government of Afghanistan and, frankly, to stability.
in the entire region. It is in Afghanistan that rampant opium and heroin production provides a continued source of funding for al-Qaeda’s global terrorism operations and it is in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions that the al-Qaeda command structure, albeit degraded, including Osama bin Laden, remains operational.

To meet these regional and global security challenges requires a global security effort which Australia is rightly and proudly part of. Under the mandate of the United Nations, 46 other countries are contributing, including two of our closest allies the United States and Great Britain. We know that the Department of Defence is doing an amazing job with our brave service men and women in this region. We know that we have, through Operation Slipper, up to 1,550 Australian Defence Force personnel currently deployed within Afghanistan. We know that 1,241 of them are deployed in the Oruzgan province and about 340 in Kabul, Kandahar and elsewhere in Afghanistan.

Australia’s substantial military, civilian and development assistance focuses on training and mentoring the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade in Oruzgan province to assume responsibility for the province’s security; building the capacity of the Afghan National Police to assist with civil policing functions in Oruzgan; helping improve the Afghan government’s capacity to deliver core services and generate income-earning opportunities for its people; and, importantly, operations to disrupt insurgent operations and supply routes using the Special Operations Task Group. That is some of the great work they have been doing. In particular, the Special Operations Task Group is working with our NATO allies and the growing Afghan National Army to prevent and deter a return of Taliban control and tyranny across the country. The role of this group is to disrupt Taliban command and control of supply routes. Our soldiers are on the front line fighting Taliban extremists on our behalf. It is a tough fight and, sadly, at times a deadly fight for our troops, some of whom have made the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf to keep us free of further terrorism incidents like the Bali bombings. Make no mistake, this is and continues to be a war against a determined and vicious enemy, but it is a necessary fight.

Let me talk about the overall progress in Afghanistan since 2001, when the overseas forces were put in there. There has been a dramatic increase in school enrolments in Afghanistan from around one million in 2001 to over six million today, of which one-third, or over two million, are girls. There has been a significant increase in the availability of basic health services, which were available to less than 10 per cent of the population under the former Taliban regime but are now extended to about 85 per cent of people. There has been the identification and management of over 39,000 community infrastructure projects such as wells, clinics and roads in over 22,000 communities throughout Afghanistan through the Afghan led National Solidarity Program. There has been the rehabilitation of almost 10,000 kilometres of rural roads, supporting the employment of hundreds of thousands of local workers through the National Rural Access Program. The telecommunications industry has created about 100,000 jobs since 2001. Today 10 million Afghans have access to telecommunications compared to only 20,000 in 2001. So I think there is pretty strong evidence that there has been constructive change.

The Taliban suppressed free speech. Afghan people also have access to over 400 print media publications, 150 FM radio stations and 26 television channels. These give Afghans an
outlet to discuss public issues that were previously off limits such as human rights abuses and women’s rights.

In concluding, I wish to pass on our deepest condolences and our prayers to the families of the soldiers killed in Afghanistan in the service of our nation. All Australians will be thinking of the thousands of Australian men and women who are serving their nation abroad in order to keep it free from the sort of terrorism that we saw almost visit our shores in Bali in 2002.

Australians know that our troops understand the dangers involved in deployments to hostile regions. They know that they face deadly and extremist enemies on a daily basis and they do it with pride and conviction. And our troops do a magnificent job. They are highly skilled, brave and dedicated. All Australians are proud of them and appreciate what they do in defence of our nation and its interests.

I want to read an extract from a letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in October this year. It was written by Vicki Hopkins, the wife of Corporal Mathew Hopkins, who was shot and killed on patrol in Oruzgan in March 2009. It says more eloquently anything I have said here today:

I knew that, with Mat, he was over there with a job to do and that was to make the world a safer place by getting rid of these evil people. And for that I am very, very proud of Mat. The army is not over there only to shoot and kill bad people; they are over there rebuilding the lives of the Afghan people.

People say this isn’t our war, but a lot of Australians have died as a result of the attacks on Bali and September 11. Afghanistan is the heart of where these people trained to do these horrible acts against the Western world. To pull the troops out now when the job isn’t done, then, really, all those guys did die in vain. They are powerful and moving words and why we have to be there to see out the mission to its full course.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (4.57 pm)—‘War is an ugly thing.’ So said the great British philosopher John Stuart Mill. ‘War is an ugly thing,’ he said, ‘but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing is worth war is much worse.’ I could not agree more.

The problem that I have had with this debate is not so much that it has allowed a few political fringe dwellers to express those decayed and degraded feelings but that in expressing those feelings they may have achieved nothing but to demoralise our troops in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, those with this minority view in the Committee and in the House seem to attract some larger following in the general community—but certainly not the majority of people. They attract that larger following because they can rally the uninformed with one word: peace. It is true that peace is an ideal that should be strived for, but the opposite of peace is not war; it is injustice. Injustice is the enemy of peace. Free men and women cannot live in peace while injustice prevails.

Let us remember the basis for this conflict in Afghanistan. Indeed, let us never forget that fateful day, September 11, 2001. Extremist Islamic terrorists, al-Qaeda operatives, hijacked four planes, flying two into the World Trade Centre and one into the Pentagon, while another was lost in a field in Pennsylvania. Thousands of lives were lost from that one act of terror, and the reality is that Afghanistan was the home base for the training and leadership of al-Qaeda and the terrorists who launched this attack. They were invited to operate from Afghani-
stand by the extremist Islamic Taliban regime that was in place at the time; it was basically state-sponsored terrorism. With that injustice, there was a grave duty to act.

I want to digress for a moment. There are those who would actually deny that that injustice occurred. I can quote the labour movement’s Kevin Bracken, the Victorian branch secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia and the President of the Victorian Trades Hall Council. Mr Bracken believes that the official story of 9/11 is a conspiracy theory that does not stand up to scientific scrutiny. He believes that 9/11 did not happen, or at least not as we saw it happen. He thinks that the United States government was behind it. While this was reported in the media only recently, it is a matter of record that Mr Bracken has been peddling his conspiracy theories throughout the Victorian union movement since 2006. What a disgrace.

His is not a lone voice from the Left on this. In fact, a Greens candidate, Bob Brown—he shares his party leader’s name—said earlier this year:

The 9/11 commission was not conclusive that al-Qa’ida was responsible … There are huge questions that need to be asked—one building came down without being hit, architects say the building looked like they were brought down by controlled explosions …

I am also aware that New South Wales Greens promoted a series of 9/11 conspiracy forums and fundraisers in their e-newsletter in late 2008. The Greens also have party members like John Bursill, who operates the 9110z website, which also peddles these 9/11 conspiracy theories. The Greens are linked to the United States party of the Greens through the Global Greens Coordination organisation, which connects to all these Green parties around the world. The US Greens are led by Cynthia McKinney, who is also a 9/11 conspiracy theorist. I raise all of this because, sadly, this is the result of a view that pervades the Left. It is a view of anti-Americanism, and quite frankly it clouds the Left’s judgment. I think anti-Americanism is at the heart of the opposition to our operations in Afghanistan. That is a great shame because, as I said earlier, the opposite of peace is injustice and one would think that those in the Left would rail against injustice.

I do not just speak of the injustice that was wrought upon the United States of America on 11 September 2001 or of the terrorist attacks in the rest of the Western world, the Middle East, the developing world and even on our doorstep, in Bali. I speak as well of the injustice that was taking place in Afghanistan itself, under the oppressive, extremist Islamic regime of the Taliban. Under the Taliban there was a complete ban on women’s work outside the home, and that ban included female teachers, engineers and most professionals. Only a few female doctors and nurses were allowed to work in some hospitals in Kabul. There was a ban on women studying at schools, universities or any other educational institutions. The Taliban had converted most girls schools into Islamic religious seminaries. Women were required to wear a long veil, or burkah, covering them from head to toe. Those not clothed in accordance with Taliban rules were subject to whipping, beating and verbal abuse. Women were whipped in public for even having their ankles uncovered. Women accused of having sex outside of marriage were publicly stoned.

The Taliban banned listening to music and watching movies and television, and they banned use of the internet. They forced Afghan youth to have haircuts and ordered Afghan men to wear Islamic clothes and a cap. They ordered that men not shave or trim their beards, which should grow long enough to protrude from a fist clasped at the point of the chin. They made non-Muslim minorities wear distinct badges or stitch a yellow cloth onto their dresses to
differentiate them from the majority Muslim population—echoes of Nazi Germany. I know these are sideline issues to our national security. The reason we wanted the Taliban gone was that they sponsored terrorism and harboured terrorists. But we should acknowledge that as a result of our actions this oppressive regime was removed along with most of those unjust rules which were offensive to the liberty of the individual.

I compare that regime to the situation in Afghanistan now, due in part to the work of our troops. According to the Department of Defence, in the past nine years there has been a dramatic increase in school enrolments: from one million in 2001—and no girls in schools—to more than six million today, two million of whom are girls. Today 85 per cent of the Afghani population has access to basic health services which were available to less than 10 per cent of the population under the Taliban. Some 10,000 kilometres of rural roads have been rehabilitated, employing hundreds of thousands of locals and more than 39,000 community based infrastructure projects, such as wells, clinics and roads, in more than 22,000 communities across Afghanistan have progressed. The injustices of the past are being undone.

The Dawson electorate stretches from Mackay to Townsville, so I want to particularly acknowledge the part Townsville’s 1RAR has played in this progress in Afghanistan. I also want to acknowledge Mackay base troops whom I are aware have served or are serving in Afghanistan, including returned veteran Kerin Connolly and, from the member for Capricornia’s electorate, Sarina brothers Jeremy and Brett Kipping.

With every combat effort there is a risk of combat and operational injuries and deaths, and it is certainly sobering to think that 160 have been injured and 21 of our men have sacrificed their lives for their country in Afghanistan. Any death is tragic, but the death of a service man or woman undertaking a duty for their nation is perhaps even more tragic. But those deaths are not in vain.

There is an old saying that I have heard from many a digger, particularly about World War II. It goes something like this: ‘We were fighting them over there so we didn’t have to fight them here.’ And let us not think for one moment that the threat of terrorism cannot reach our shores. It may not be in my home town of Mackay but it could be in Sydney, Brisbane, Lavarrack Barracks in Townsville or a strategic economic asset, such as Dalrymple Bay coal terminal or the Abbot Point coal terminal. A terrorist attack on our home soil could have occurred if we had neglected to pursue radical Islamic terrorism where it was fostered. These murderers reached Bali, where they killed 92 Australians in two separate bombings. So they can reach us and our shores unless we fight them on their shores and on the shores where they are harboured.

The 21 brave men who have sacrificed their lives have done so over there in Afghanistan so that Australians—be they Christians, Jews, Muslims or atheists—are not sacrificed here at the hands of the terrorists. It is for this reason that we cannot walk away from Afghanistan. We cannot allow it to return to a hotbed of radicalism. We cannot walk away from the war on terror and the war on extreme and radical Islam. We cannot walk away from a concerted attack on the West because of its values of freedom, liberty and democracy. We cannot walk away because we want some sort of false peace. I go back to John Stuart Mill and continue the quote which I began with:
The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

I salute the better men and women who serve this nation through our defence forces and dedicate this speech to their efforts.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (5.08 pm)—I am pleased to have this opportunity to join with my colleagues in this debate on Australia’s engagement in the war in Afghanistan. I know we all share the same sense of responsibility for explaining to the Australian people our role in Afghanistan, the reasons for being there and the future of our commitment in that country.

It is true that there have been regular reports given to the parliament during the last term of government by the Minister for Defence and others to inform members and senators as well as the public of the progress our troops and other personnel are making and the strategy we are pursuing. It is equally true to say, however, that nothing has engaged individual members and senators and pledged us each to undertake closer scrutiny and inquiry into the specifics of the war in quite the same way as this debate has. I think that the Australian community feels the same way. They will continue to seek answers about Afghanistan and hold us to the parameters and time lines we have set out for the Australian mission in the course of this debate. As parliamentarians and particularly as government MPs we will need to meet those expectations—and that is a good thing.

On that logic, I support the calls made by earlier speakers in this debate for the parliament to play a greater role in the decision to commit troops to go to war in the name of this country and with the support of this country. If the executive cannot convince the members of this parliament of the justification for military action, how can we expect the community to be convinced?

Openness and transparency about the reasons for going to war and putting our troops in harm’s way is what we are engaging in here and it is being universally welcomed as constructive and necessary. A requirement for a similar resolution by the parliament, authorising the commitment of our defence forces prior to their deployment, is a proper acknowledgement of the gravity of the decision and underscores the fact that it is a decision for which members of parliament ultimately have to take responsibility.

In the case of Afghanistan, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, a debate about Australia’s commitment to the war in 2001 would have been quite straightforward for most members and senators, while there is much less certainty now about the correct course of action in what has become a far more deadly and complicated conflict. One of the valuable things about this debate has been the opportunity it has presented to remind us of the history of the Afghanistan war and how Australia came to join the war in 2001.

In 2001 the obligation on Australia as an alliance partner of the United States and an active participant in the United Nations was unambiguous, at least it was for me. Following the terrorist attacks on America on September 11 Australia committed to military action against the Taliban-led regime in Afghanistan on the basis of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1386, which authorised an international security force in that country. The ANZUS Treaty was also invoked at that time. Nine years on, Australia’s defence forces remain in Afghanistan as part of a multinational force. There are 47 countries still engaged in Afghanistan as part of
the International Security Assistance Force, representing a coalition of over 120,000 troops. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out in his speech, the United Nations’ resolution authorising the coalition’s continued presence in Afghanistan has been renewed 10 times since 2001. That international consensus—also confirmed this year by the broad participation at the London and Kabul conferences—is built on the resolve of all nations to ensure that Afghanistan can never again become a safe haven for terrorists and a base for attacks like the ones in the United States or Bali.

On the question of Australia’s military presence in Afghanistan, I have always found reassurance in the fact that it is sanctioned by the international community through that UN resolution and also that Australia is at the table when it comes to determining the ongoing legitimacy of the engagement, the goals being pursued and the strategy to achieve those goals. The next opportunity will be in Lisbon later this week. Our support for that UN resolution has to be consistent with Australia’s national interests and does not absolve our government from constantly reviewing our mission in Afghanistan to ensure that those interests are being advanced and protected. The question for all of us is whether that initial justification that seemed so clear-cut in 2001 still holds now that, as we all well know, the Taliban was removed from office in Afghanistan shortly after the coalition entered the country and al-Qaeda has shifted its activities to other, friendly countries.

I am not an enthusiast for this or any other war but I am a rationalist. I have to be able to construct an argument one way or the other to come to a conclusion and as much as I want to stand here and say we should pull our troops out now, I cannot follow the argument through in my mind to make that case—not yet. The member for Parramatta explained it in her speech as a battle between her heart and her head and I know exactly how she feels. Although I am coming down on the side of continued support for Australia’s commitment, this debate has given me a much clearer understanding of the conditions that I now have on my continued support and of the questions that will need to be answered if I am to go the whole four years foreshadowed by the Prime Minister.

In coming to my conclusion in this debate I am influenced by some fundamental principles and some judgments made on a more practical level. I support Australia’s role as a positive partner in the international community and accept the responsibilities that come with that. In saying that, I am acutely aware that the true burden of those responsibilities is borne by the members of our defence forces who we send to defend our territory, our values and our desire to live in peace and security. It is really too much to ask of any Australian and yet they do it for all of us. They make us proud, and we are forever in their debt.

I also think that fighting in the country on and off for the past nine years does give us some responsibility for the Afghan people—not a responsibility that should hold us in Afghanistan indefinitely but a responsibility that should give us some pause before concluding that we should abandon our part in the whole exercise. On a practical level I am persuaded by the evidence that indicates that the Australian contingent in Afghanistan is making progress towards its objective of training and mentoring the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade in Oruzgan province.

I can understand that there is a perception out in the community that we have been in Afghanistan for nearly 10 years and if we have not managed to do the job by now we should give it away, but the fact is that our commitment to Afghanistan has taken a number of differ-
ent forms over that period and included a time when Australian troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan altogether. It was only in October 2008 that the Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force was deployed to undertake the training of Afghan forces. That is now taking place within the context of Barack Obama’s revised strategy for Afghanistan, announced in December 2009, which includes the surge of 30,000 additional US troops. That strategy acknowledges that the purpose of the International Security Assistance Force is to create the conditions that will allow for the transition of security responsibility to the Afghan government and the subsequent withdrawal of international forces from the country. A clearly defined strategy with measurable outcomes along the way, such as the numbers of Afghan soldiers trained and their capacity to assume security responsibility, is not the same as writing a blank cheque to the Americans and our other allies in Afghanistan.

It is up to us, however, as members of parliament to keep scrutinising our commitment and its progress against the task set for our forces in Oruzgan and the wider strategy. That wider strategy has to acknowledge that the goal of a secure and functional Afghanistan is not going to be achieved in the long term through military means. Achieving security and stability through force is not an end in itself; it can only provide the basis from which the Afghan people can build a viable future. Our job over the next few years of providing the Afghan government with a competent and independent security force has to be matched by efforts to find a political and diplomatic solution to the governance and economic and development issues that will otherwise perpetrate Afghanistan’s unrest and conflict beyond anything Australia’s 1,550 soldiers can ever hope to overcome.

I can be convinced that our soldiers should remain in Afghanistan assisting the international forces to prepare the Afghan government and its army to assume full responsibility for the security of that country, but only if the international community around the NATO-ISAF table shows that it is serious about ensuring that continued corruption, poor governance and lack of development in Afghanistan is not allowed to render that a pointless exercise. I can accept that we need to give the current strategy time to prove itself, but the parliament has to be assured in an ongoing way that what we are asking our troops to do is possible and can be shown to be bringing us closer in a tangible way to the time when handover to the Afghan government can take place.

I welcome the commitment by the Prime Minister given in her speech that opened this debate that she will make a statement on Australia’s commitment in Afghanistan each year that our forces remain on the ground there. This is in addition to the ongoing reports that the defence minister and others have already been making to the House in each session of parliament. Just as we have in this debate, members and senators have to take those opportunities to rigorously evaluate the status of our commitment to Afghanistan and judge the merits of our continued role.

In the meantime, like all members and senators, I fervently hope that the conflict in Afghanistan does not have to be brought before the parliament again in the way it already has on 21 sad occasions since 2001. Those have been the times when we have paused to pay our respects to the Australian soldiers who have lost their lives in Afghanistan while in the service of our nation. I think particularly of Lance Corporal Jason Marks, a young commando who grew up in Yeppoon in Central Queensland and who was killed fighting Taliban insurgents in 2008. This debate is carried out in honour of those men and their loved ones because we owe
it to them, and to their mates who continue to serve in Afghanistan, to recognise the job they are doing in our names and, tragically, the sacrifice some have been called upon to make.

I offer my condolences to the families and friends of our fallen soldiers, who have to live with their loss every day. It is our job to ensure that they live also with the knowledge that their sons and fathers and husbands and brothers were and are, on behalf of our country, doing a job that the Australian parliament regards as worthy and necessary and that the Australian people can support.

Debate adjourned.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 15 November, on the proposed address-in-reply to the speech of Her Excellency the Governor-General—
May it please Your Excellency:
We, the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia, in Parliament assembled, express our loyalty to the Sovereign, and thank Your Excellency for the speech which you have been pleased to address to the Parliament—

on motion by Ms O’Neill:

That the Address be agreed to.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Cabinet Secretary and Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (5.20 pm)—It gives me great pleasure to speak to the address-in-reply. I was going to speak about the re-election, about the results in Isaacs and, indeed, about the Labor results in Victoria. I am very pleased to be returning to this place for the second term of a Labor federal government. I congratulate my colleagues old and new. I look forward to working with our Prime Minister to deliver the progressive agenda we have for Australia.

There were mixed results around the country in the election just past, but Victoria saw a strong preference expressed by the people for the return of a Labor government. I am particularly pleased to welcome to this place my new Victorian colleagues—the member for La Trobe, Laura Smyth; and the member for McEwen, Rob Mitchell, whose long wait to join us in this place is finally over. We did think the new member for McEwen was going to join us a little earlier, at the end of the last election.

In Isaacs, there was a swing to Labor of 3.33 per cent. I sincerely thank our local community for again trusting me as their representative in the Australian parliament. It is a privilege to serve in this place and Isaacs is a unique and wonderful electorate to work in and to represent. I want to thank my family. One does not often get the opportunity to thank one’s family. In particular, I thank my wife, Deborah; my children, Joe, Tom and Laura; my father, George; and my mother, Phyllis. Without the love, the support and the inspiration that my family provide me on a daily basis, it would be impossible for me to do this job. I cannot thank them enough.

I want to thank also the dedicated staff who have worked tirelessly in my office in Melbourne and also in my office in Canberra over the last three years—Tim Lisle-Williams, Monica Bladier, Brett Collet, Julie Coventry, David Barda, Paul Haseloff, Youhorn Chea,
Claudette Macdonald, Laura John, Alex Fawke and Salazar Youhorn. In case anyone thinks I have had excessive churn in my office, I have the great good fortune to have a number of permanent part-time employees, and others have worked as volunteers but on a very long-term basis, which is the reason for the large number of people who work in my electorate office. I would also thank those who have worked in the Parliament House office here in Canberra, particularly Desmond Ko, James MacGibbon and Elouise Fowler.

I had hundreds of volunteers throughout the first term, but obviously more particularly in the campaign just past, despite the cold and rain of a winter campaign in Victoria—indeed, I would hope never again to fight a campaign in August. There have been very few August elections in the history of Australia and there is a very good reason for that, as we have just found out. In the cold and rain I had hundreds of volunteers handing out with me at train stations in the morning, assisting at street stalls, doorknocking with me and handing out on election day. It would be remiss not to mention at least some of these volunteers: Duncan Wallace, Tom Daley, Nola van Klaveren, Jackie McInroy, Nola Baker, Melanie Blewett, Roz Blades, Pinar Yesil, Jim Memeti, Kevin Gaynor, Trish McMullin, Russell Cole, Noel Pullen, Wendy Phillips, Cam Macdonald, Tony Falkingham, Alex Hicks, my sister Michelle Ball, and, in particular, Graham Malcolm, whose work in setting up my campaign office in Edithvale and running all over the electorate was invaluable.

I also thank my state parliamentary colleagues for the assistance they have given me over my first term in this place and also through the last election: Jenny Lindell, Janice Munt, Tim Holding, Jude Perera, John Pandazopoulos and, from the upper house, Adem Somyurek. I wish all of them the very best in the Victorian election coming up on 27 November.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone whom I have not directly named who assisted me either on the campaign or throughout my first term—whether it was handing out pamphlets, coming to mobile offices, handing out how-to-vote cards or simply informing me of some important local issue or giving me some wise words of advice, which I very much appreciate whenever they are offered.

One of the great joys of the job as a local member is to see how investment in the local community makes a meaningful difference for schools, for sporting clubs, for community centres, for business and for welfare organisations. In Isaacs a lot of the improvements to local community infrastructure came through the stimulus packages, which helped stave off the recession that threatened Australia during the global financial crisis, helped keep unemployment below six per cent and gave communities like mine in Isaacs a once-in-a-generation investment in infrastructure.

Our Labor federal government invested more than $100 million in local schools throughout my electorate thanks to the Building the Education Revolution program. It has been fantastic to see the finished results at schools throughout my electorate. Resurrection School in Keysborough has literally been transformed with innovative new buildings. The school serves a lower socioeconomic community in the very much newly-arrived immigrant suburb of Keysborough, and part of the community also comes from Springvale South. That community is now served by a school which has truly wonderful new buildings.

I could mention Carrum Downs Primary School or St Joachim’s Primary School, both of which have multipurpose centres that are going to be valuable assets to serve the whole of the Carrum Downs community. I could also mention an independent school in my electorate that
did what so many independent schools were able to do with the funds that were provided through the Building the Education Revolution program: they added the funds provided by the government to funds they had raised and built a building. Mentone Girls' Grammar School was able to bring forward by some five years the completion of an early learning centre, because it was in round 1 of the Building the Education Revolution program, and it is a truly excellent addition to that school. Of course, these are only the buildings that are finished; there are many more that are partially constructed and will be completed over the course of the rest of this year and into the first part of next year.

I would have to say that one of the most disappointing aspects of the election campaign was the opposition's misleading attacks on the Labor government’s spending in schools. My experience with school communities and principals, when it comes to the BER program, has been overwhelmingly positive. I can say that several times during the campaign, and before the campaign, I invited the opposition leader to my electorate to speak to local school communities like the Noble Park Primary School who were funded under the third round of the program.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 5.29 pm to 5.42 pm

Mr DREYFUS—Noble Park Primary School is an example of a school funded under the third round of the BER program. They were worried about losing their funding and much needed infrastructure if the coalition won the election. The opposition leader never showed up in response to the invitation that I gave him to visit my electorate and, indeed, he persisted with the promise to cut funding to schools whose projects were in the third round. Happily, the Labor government has been re-elected. Happily, the opposition leader remains in opposition. He is completely out of touch with local school communities and their needs. He is out of touch with the employment opportunities that were created by the BER program, and these are opportunities which have helped keep our unemployment rate at extraordinary lows, even through the global financial crisis. When I visited BER project sites, a theme that I heard over and over again from people working on the sites, from their managers and from tradespeople working on the projects was that they would not be in those jobs and working on those projects had it not been for the BER program. There is an old saying: crisis creates opportunity. The Labor government grasped the opportunity which was provided by the global financial crisis to improve local communities with new projects and upgrades to existing infrastructure.

There is a buzz around Noble Park in my electorate after one of its major landmarks, the Noble Park Swim Centre, with its iconic water slide, was given nearly $7.3 million under the government’s community infrastructure plan to completely redevelop the pool into a community hub. I have been working very closely with the City of Greater Dandenong on this project and cannot wait until it is complete. I am very pleased to hear that the Victorian state government has just agreed to also contribute to the project so that an indoor warm-water pool can be built for community use. It will make what was already a very good project a truly excellent project.

The $3.3 million Kingston Heath Soccer Complex is already up and running in Cheltenham. That is another community infrastructure plan project. That soccer facility will help local soccer clubs like the Bentleigh Greens enjoy superb new surfaces and modern facilities. It
was a great pleasure to open that facility with the member for Hotham a few months ago. There is no doubt that the venue will be a boon to the game in the south-east of Melbourne.

The construction of the Tatterson Park playground was also funded by our federal government and the City of Greater Dandenong. It will assist young families in the new estates in Keysborough in my electorate with a safer environment for their children to play in. Another major part of the stimulus program that manifested in my electorate was the unprecedented social housing funding, which will mean better access to quality public housing in Chelsea Heights, Noble Park and Dandenong. I was fortunate to have the then minister for housing, the member for Sydney, visit the area on two occasions to see directly the benefits for our local community from the significant investments that have been made in social housing.

In my first term as federal member, the Queen Elizabeth Centre in Noble Park has received two rounds of funding. I recently visited the Queen Elizabeth Centre to see how local migrant families are benefiting from programs designed to improve their English and social skills while giving their young children social interaction through play. The $19.4 million Frankston Trade Training Centre will serve 13 schools in Isaacs and Dunkley when it is completed on the site of the Chisholm Institute in Frankston. This will be a great boost to the local area, which, on a national scale, suffers well below average high school retention rates. Why the opposition would want to scrap this training centre is a complete mystery to me. It is vital that those of our high school students who are more suited to trades training or who wish to undergo trades training have that opportunity rather than being forced onto the dole queue.

Other federal government funding has supported manufacturing companies in my electorate, such as Cleanteq Ltd and Frontline Australasia in Dandenong South. Cleanteq produces new filtering processes, and Frontline does cutting-edge work in the development of cold spray titanium technology. Both of them, like many other manufacturing companies in south-east Melbourne, are demonstrating the strength of research and the depth of manufacturing industry that exists in Melbourne.

The first term of our government was defined by the global financial crisis and our necessary, immediate and decisive response to it. Australia has a fantastic economic story to tell. It is a story which is the envy of the world’s other advanced economies. Within a week of the global financial crisis, the Labor government responded with the first of two fiscal packages and a government guarantee for our banks that provided effective and early confidence in the banking and retail sectors. While it is the case that the global recovery is remaining patchy across the world, with some 30 million more workers unemployed than three years ago, Australia is leading the way with around 5.1 per cent unemployment, a budget that will be in surplus in 2012-13 and a peak government net debt of only six per cent of GDP in 2011-12. That is an unemployment rate of around half that of the US and Europe—and, just as a comparison, the collective net debt of major advanced economies is expected to hit around 90 per cent of their GDPs in 2015.

The miracle economy, if I can call it that, is no accident. Our government acted quickly, strongly and decisively to come out of the financial crisis in better shape than any other advanced economy. As a direct consequence of that, Australia has emerged from the worst global financial crisis since the Depression, with low unemployment and a buoyant economy. It is worth noting, yet again, the OECD Economic Survey report of Australia released this week. It was glowing in its assessment of not only the current state of the Australian economy
and the conduct of the Reserve Bank during the global financial crisis but also the policies that were put in place and that are continuing to be put in place by our government.

I am honoured to have been appointed to the roles of Cabinet Secretary and Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. I am very much looking forward in this term to assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, the member for Charlton, in putting a price on carbon, improving the nation’s energy efficiency and increasing our use of renewable energy. We will be working on establishing a price on carbon for Australia. It is one of my biggest disappointments in my first term in parliament that the parliament failed to pass the legislation that would have created the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, an emissions trading scheme. On three occasions this measure, which would have put a price on carbon for our country and reduced carbon emissions, was blocked in the Senate by the coalition and, I need to add, the Greens.

The state of this parliament—the make-up of this 43rd Parliament—is one which holds no fears for me, and nor should it for anyone who wishes to see stable or progressive government in this country. In the past 21 years, every state and territory has experienced a minority government, most of them serving a full term. Certainly the Victorian experience of the Bracks government from 1999 to 2002—which was the first term of the current Labor government that is still in office and is, I hope, going to be re-elected on 27 November—shows that minority government can, far from being unstable or an environment in which governments cannot get things done, be stable government. Indeed, it shows that there are exciting opportunities through the need to build consensus to produce real reforms. I am looking forward to building consensus in this parliament on issues like climate change, the economy and health reform. I have already enjoyed working with our parliamentary colleagues—the Independents in our House and the lone Green member of the House—on a range of matters, and I look forward to continuing to work with them to pass legislation that will improve our society and Australia’s place in the world.

Coming back after an election in which our side has lost several members is a powerful reminder that no seat can be taken for granted. Some excellent Labor members lost their seats at this election, and I would like to acknowledge Sharryn Jackson, Damian Hale, Jim Turnour, Brett Raguse, Arch Bevis, Jon Sullivan, Chris Trevor, Kerry Rea and Maxine McKew for their service in this place. I pay tribute in particular to the service of the former member for Brisbane, Arch Bevis, including his excellent chairing of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, which I had the privilege to serve on with him in the last parliament. I would also like to thank four members who retired at the end of the last term: Lindsay Tanner, Jennie George, Duncan Kerr and Bob Debus. I greatly appreciated their advice and comradeship during my first term, and this place will be worse off for their departure. I wish them all the best in their post-political lives.

I would like to conclude by welcoming all new members to this place, but in particular those I have mentioned, my new Labor colleagues the member for McEwen and the member for La Trobe. In addition I welcome my Labor colleagues the member for Canberra, the member for Fraser, the member for Throsby, the member for Chifley, the member for Robertson, the member for Greenway and the member for Bass. I trust that all of those new members will enjoy their first terms in this parliament and find it as rewarding as I found my first term in this parliament, which was the last term. I look forward to working with all of you, the
new members, in making the case for fairness, compassion and Labor’s progressive reform agenda.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (5.53 pm)—I am once again very grateful for the confidence the people of Cowan had in me in the recent election, which saw me re-elected with an increased margin. It is a great and humbling responsibility to be an elected representative, and representing the people of Cowan is the greatest honour I have ever had. I sincerely thank the people for their support.

There are, of course, many people who had a part in the successful Cowan campaign. I will start with my family, because without their support I would have been unable to devote the time needed to properly represent and work for my fellow residents of Cowan over the last three years. My wife, Kelly, is strongly supportive of me. She has for three years now asked only to be told when I would be home and does not make me feel guilty about being out all the time. Without her support I would be nothing. My daughters, Emily and Rebecca, also do not make me feel bad for working seven days a week, because they know I am on a mission. Also, I would thank my mother, Connaught, for working her third election for me in Cowan. Her support is always appreciated. Family is where we derive so much of our strength and our ability to go on in this challenging environment from. While I love doing this work, if it ever looked as if it would cost me my family then I would not do it. I therefore thank them for their unwavering support.

As members of parliament we work hard but the reality is that our effectiveness is maximised by our staff. We cannot assist all our constituents without great staff. I know that they always work hard and are never afraid of the extra hours required. My office manager is Helen Power, who has been with me from the start, just before the declaration of the poll in 2007. She is the wise counsel who has always served me and the Cowan community well.

Bill Coghlan has worked for me almost as long as Helen has and his people skills have proved an asset in our office’s relations with community groups and organisations within Cowan. Always positive, Bill, with his irrepressible optimism, has served me well. I thank him for his work and efforts over my first term and throughout the recent campaign.

Ryan Blake is a young staff member who has developed well and is most effective in dealing with constituents and policy matters. He has been a great asset to the team and works very hard. He is always present in all the campaign activities, and it is great to have Ryan as part of my team.

I also thank Lien Nguyen, who works for me on a part-time basis. She has been a great asset and has been instrumental in working for Cowan’s Vietnamese community and helping me to better assist my large number of Vietnamese constituents.

For two years I had Tim Brooks on my staff; however, for personal reasons he returned to his native United States about three weeks before the federal election. Tim was a very effective member of the team.

With just a few weeks to go in the election campaign, following the recommendation of the state director of the Liberal Party, my team was greatly reinforced by the arrival of the highly experienced Simon Morgan. An immediate asset, he was able to turn his extensive campaign ability to great achievement with the Cowan campaign.
Beyond my immediate team I was greatly supported by Senator Michaelia Cash and her staff, who volunteered so strongly before and after normal office hours and on the weekends. They were dedicated and highly effective contributors who provided both practical support and sage advice through the whole campaign. I thank them all, especially Lisa Scott and Marilyn Krawitz. They seemed always to be there for me and I acknowledge their efforts. I also acknowledge the efforts and support of Whitney Jago and Sarah Cunningham.

I was greatly pleased to have the support again during the campaign of Cheryl and Colin Edwardes, who gave the campaign team a great deal of local knowledge and political input when we needed it.

I also thank all my volunteers, who worked so well on the day of the election and came out in support in the weeks and months prior to the actual day. Your efforts helped to create a momentum that was critical when it counted.

The Hon. Chris Ellison was also on the team and was absolutely critical in coordinating the campaign. We were able to achieve a great deal due to his efforts and those of his friends and associates. Chris has been an outstanding mentor and his long-term support and belief in me has only served to strengthen my view that, despite the cynicism of some, politics is ultimately about loyalty, trust and integrity, and I hope that will never change.

When I think back over the months and weeks before and during the formal election campaign, I feel a great sense of warmth and regard for my supporters—those who worked for our cause, those who let us put up signs, those who made donations and those who spoke to me indicating their support, as well as the thousands who voted for me. On this day I thank and honour them for their faith in me.

It is also appropriate for me to acknowledge the sterling assistance of the state director, Ben Morton, and his deputy, Ben Allen, together with the whole WA campaign team. As the WA results show, they clearly got it right and I could not possibly have asked for better central support than we received during the campaign.

I would also thank the state President of the Liberal Party, Mr Barry Court, and the immediate past president, Danielle Blain, for their strong support and efforts for the entire Western Australian campaign—a perfect effort.

I also express gratitude to my federal and state colleagues for their support throughout the term of the last parliament and the campaign. I thank the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, for his strong support; Julie Bishop, our deputy, for everything she has done in promoting and supporting me; and our other frontbenchers including my good friend Bronwyn Bishop, who has made many visits to Cowan, all of them effective and greatly appreciated. Thanks also to Scott Morrison for his visits to Cowan. Kevin Andrews has always been willing to support me and I greatly appreciate his support. The Hon. Eric Abetz was there for me, as were Malcolm Turnbull, Ian Macfarlane, Senator Connie Fierravanti-Wells, Steve Ciobo, Andrew Southcott and of course Greg Hunt, who has made two highly effective visits to my electorate.

At the state level I have of course been well supported by my local state MLAs: Paul Miles, the great member for Wanneroo, and Andrea Mitchell, the star member for Kingsley. I thank them both for their very strong support. I also thank my local state MLCs Liz Behjat, Michael Mischin, Peter Collier, and Alyssa Hayden from the East Metropolitan region for
their great support. I was also very fortunate to have the support of Premier Colin Barnett, who visited Cowan and has supported me on many occasions.

I also take this opportunity to thank my close friends in the Macedonian, Vietnamese and African communities, who advise me so well on the issues that are of great concern to those communities. Their advice and support up to and including election day was most appreciated. It is when you see who is willing to work with you on election day that you see who is authentically there for you, so I thank them wholeheartedly. Ultimately the issues that are of concern to these communities are significant. In the case of the Macedonians, one of the big issues that they wish to have resolved is for their homeland to be called the Republic of Macedonia. I hope that comprehensive international recognition can be achieved; however, that will require the Hellenic Republic—the Greek government—to agree. I look forward to such a day.

In the case of the Vietnamese people, their issues and circumstances are deeper still. For those of us here in the federal parliament who have significant Vietnamese communities in our electorates, or a good knowledge of Vietnamese culture, we understand how hard they work and how important family bonds are to them. When you visit Vietnam you see the same strong work ethic and commitment to family that Vietnamese Australians display so clearly. The difference is that here in Australia when you work hard you receive the reward. In Vietnam, you work hard and you do not get the right return for the effort. Yet, as it stands, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam holds back its population. It holds back the relatives and friends of Vietnamese Australians with archaic political and economic instruments. While the ruling elite of the Vietnamese communist party does well, the Vietnamese people themselves cannot fully benefit from their efforts because the system does not allow them to do so. This is what I mean by issues being very deep with the Vietnamese community in Australia.

I take this opportunity to ask: why did the Rudd government fete and fawn to the general secretary of the communist party in a visit to the parliament here in Canberra last year? Of course we have an obligation to receive and accord due respect and regard to a visiting government leader, but why was there such a reception, such pomp and ceremony, accorded to a non-parliamentary political leader?

My view remains that single-party systems are not legitimate systems. My view is that the Socialist Republic of Vietnam holds back Vietnam and the Vietnamese people. This is the Vietnamese people’s tragic reality: they are held back economically, politically and religiously. As a single-party state, the government of Vietnam is not subject to the scrutiny that a democratic, multiparty system provides, and that is why there are so many questions relating to the legitimacy of the territory agreements with China and the concessions to Chinese companies regarding the bauxite mining operations in the highlands of Vietnam.

It is little wonder that the level of dissent—all peaceful, of course—is rising, when there is no opportunity for the communist party to be scrutinised and held accountable. I look forward to a time when the shackles are removed from the Vietnamese people in Vietnam and they can finally enjoy the fruits of their labour. I look forward to democracy and the freedoms that we enjoy also becoming part of the way of life in Vietnam.

I have in recent times had more involvement with the African community. In particular I speak of the African Christian community. I know how positive they are about their lives now in Australia. They are very happy to have been given the opportunity to live and work in Aus-
tralia and they are prospering. I see their community as being able to embrace the benefits and freedoms that Australia can provide. They believe in working hard to achieve success, and they do not believe in a welfare culture. While the colour of their skin may be different to most Australians, they have an Australian attitude of working hard but also looking after those who are in need of temporary assistance. They are good Australians and they add great value to our community. In the future I would like to see them have their own church building; that would give them the opportunity to add further value in the wider community. I look forward to seeing an even better future for their community.

I would like to take a moment to reflect upon an issue that was a significant one during the election campaign and one that is certainly of great concern to the people of Cowan, and that is border security. We often hear the words ‘dog whistle’ bandied about in this place by the Greens, Labor or the media—I suppose to try and suggest that those who support a return to strong border protection policies are in some way motivated by a less than honourable personal prejudice. I reject this view entirely. As I mentioned earlier, I was fortunate to have the shadow minister for immigration, Scott Morrison, visit Cowan during the campaign. On that occasion, we were able to meet with some people who have come to Australia as refugees. They expressed incredible frustration that, under the Rudd-Gillard government, those who are waiting in camps overseas to come here are effectively punished by doing the right thing, while those who arrive on illegal boats cause delays to the processing of legitimate, legal refugees.

During the campaign the coalition took a strong stance, designed to deal harshly with illegal immigration and people smugglers, and we do not shy away from that. Conversely, the Labor Party promised to establish a processing centre in East Timor but neglected to check with the East Timorese first. They also solemnly pledged that there would be no expansion at the Curtin detention centre, yet within days of cobbled together a government the Prime Minister broke that promise in one of the most brazen and deceitful moves it has yet been my misfortune to witness during my time in this place. It will do nothing to deter people-smuggling. Indeed, the recent announcements of holding facilities in Northam and Woodside in South Australia are encouragements, not deterrents, to illegal arrivals. These decisions are rejected by the local communities and are evidence of the government lurching from failure to failure.

I am proud that amongst my strongest supporters in Cowan, including a significant number who handed out how-to-vote cards on election day, are those who came to Australia as refugees and who have made our local area their home. It staggers me that the Greens, some in the Labor Party and some in the media, as well as so-called refugee advocates, cannot see what is obvious to the people who actually have firsthand experience—that there is a right way and a wrong way to come to this country. I call upon the government to think through the wider ramifications of its weak and hopelessly ineffective border protection policies. Those who suffer most because of its failures are those who wish to come to this country legally, work hard and become good citizens. We should not be making their task harder by making the task of people smugglers easier through ineffective policy responses to this urgent and challenging problem.

During the recent election campaign the coalition made a number of significant commitments to the people of Cowan. Whilst the Prime Minister may have been able to piece together a government on the floor of this House, at least for now, the Labor Party was soundly
rejected by the people of Cowan, who instead voted for the positive local action plan I put forward. I would like to touch briefly on some of its key elements, as these are things I am determined to keep fighting for.

One of the biggest concerns local residents in Cowan frequently mention to me relates to crime, particularly mindless vandalism. To that end, the coalition pledged to fund five mobile CCTV trailers that would be dedicated specifically to patrolling specific districts in Cowan. We already have a couple of such units operating in the City of Swan, and they have proved most effective in fighting crime. I will continue to push for more.

Likewise, local residents are extremely concerned about the speeding and hooning which takes place in residential areas. Those who engage in such activities are, to put it bluntly, idiots who show a flagrant disregard for the property, rights and safety of local families. To help combat this, the coalition pledged to fund a significant number of mobile speed humps, which would be used to combat hooning in local hot spots. These speed humps have previously been installed in some parts of Cowan to great effect, and I look forward to working with the Liberal state government to see what more can be done in appropriate locations.

I believe it is essential that we look after the interests of seniors in our local community. We must do all we can to ensure that seniors have access to facilities and services that allow them to enjoy social activities and retain a network of friends, which is so important in maintaining a healthy and independent lifestyle. That is why the coalition made a significant funding commitment to build a dedicated seniors centre in Ballajura, whose senior citizens group currently does not have its own building. I will continue to fight for this important community facility, which I believe is critically important to the health and welfare of our local seniors.

It is not my intention to go into the specifics of my campaign; however, I would say that the Cowan Liberal campaign for 2010 was, like my 2004 and 2007 campaigns, a fight defined by integrity and honourable behaviour. My campaign was done by the book in a spirit of fair play. I only wish the same could be said of my main opponent. We observed the rules and the by-laws and responded to legitimate concerns quickly, which stands in stark contrast to a number of breaches of those by-laws by the Labor campaign. They never acted on the many complaints made about their illegal signage and in fact only delayed removing their signs. The disappointing part was that the local government seemed less than enthusiastic in pursuing those Labor Party breaches and, in the case of illegal signage at a house in Wanneroo Road, took two months to have the signs removed. I note that it was one week after the election that the signs were finally taken down. I await the results of an external investigation into that and other matters regarding the inconsistent application of by-laws by one local government authority before deciding whether to take the matter any further.

As with all campaigns, I learned a lot about the way our opponents operate. In particular, I noted the partisan involvement of local government councillors. Their willingness to associate themselves with the Labor Party so clearly at the local government level is not really surprising, as I always knew who they were, but it is interesting that they chose to be so clearly partisan in a fight that was going so badly for the Labor Party. I suppose their perceived loyalty to the party in adverse circumstances gives them some status in Labor circles. To date, I have adopted the position that it would be wrong for me as a federal MP to become involved in local government elections. However, given the experience of the recent campaign coupled with the blatant partisanship shown by some councillors, I imagine that if a genuine, commit-
ted, community based candidate approached me for an endorsement on material they paid for using their own funds I would strongly consider it. Put simply, those residents living within certain wards deserve better than the sub-par service being provided by the clapped-out Labor hacks who currently dominate some of these councils. Some of them sadly appear to be more interested in the welfare of the ALP than they are in improving the lives of those whom they are elected to serve.

As the federal member for Cowan, I am deeply committed to supporting the local community and making it stronger. I see the positives and the potential in our children who will one day lead this country. I see that it is not through luck or a view that society owes them something that they will achieve their success but rather through hard work and a view that their destiny lies within the palm of their own hands. Sadly, there are too many people in Australia who do not see their own power to achieve success but rather hope to win Lotto or wait for their horse to win. There are too many who look for others to blame for their own problems. It is only once you look in a mirror and see the cause of your own problems that you can then also see in that same mirror the strength in yourself and the origins of your own success.

In this term of the parliament, I restate my commitment to the people of Cowan, not as some VIP or the lord of the manor but as the chief servant of the people of Cowan. I will continue to be approachable. I will continue to listen and I will always try to help the people of Cowan with their federal, state and local government issues. The people of Cowan can expect that I will be even more involved in the community. They will see me a lot. I regret that perhaps they will not always be able to walk in off the street and see me without an appointment because I will be out in the community. However, I guarantee that I will be out in the community more often, and they will certainly see me and have the opportunity to speak to me in those locations. I am 100 per cent committed to the electorate of Cowan and serving the people to the best of my ability. I thank the people of Cowan for their faith and confidence in me. It is a great honour to be elected as the member for Cowan and a great responsibility that I acknowledge again here today.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (6.12 pm)—I begin my address-in-reply to the Governor-General’s speech contribution, firstly, by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are gathered on and thanking them for their continuing stewardship. Secondly, in order to counterbalance any suggestion that I do so through some out-of-place tokenism, I also wish to acknowledge all others. In the Australia of 2010, just who are the others I refer to? That is what this speech will attempt to explore. On one level, when you strip away all the ceremony from the commencement of the 43rd Parliament, today I am replying to the words of the country girl from Ilfracombe who, on Tuesday, 28 September 2010, detailed the policy framework and legislative agenda for the Gillard government. I sat idle throughout the ceremony that took place in the main chamber, in the Senate and along the well-trdden route between the two chambers. It was different from the start of the 42nd Parliament, Deputy Speaker—your first as well, I seem to recall. Back then, that ceremony created a sense of awe, fear and wonder in me. This time around, as a mere ‘attendant lord’, I was able to soak in a lot more of the details. This time, there was a Governor-General from Queensland addressing the nation. Her Excellency, after her stylish genuflection to political correctness, wherein she deftly affirmed our Indigenous peoples as the first law-givers of our land, said:
I also acknowledge the remarkable circumstance of our nation having its first female Governor-General and first female Prime Minister.

This historic conjunction should be an inspiration not only to the women and girls of our nation but to all Australians.

It demonstrates this is a land of freedom and opportunity. It should reinforce to every girl and every boy, that in this wonderful country, they can aim high and see their hopes fulfilled.

I come from the great state of Queensland, which has a female Premier, Anna Bligh, and our third female Governor, Penelope Wensley. Governor, Premier, Governor-General and Prime Minister—all women. Only a few short years ago, all these leadership roles were held by males—the same as it ever was. Perhaps now one might smell a gentle change in our seasons. Does this mean that the modern Australia that has created the 43rd parliament has a feminine agenda? I do not think so. Perhaps it is more of an historical fluke that merely goes some way towards righting some past wrongs. If 51 per cent of the chamber were female, there might be some possibility of a new wave of change and equity. However, the agenda of this place is determined more by policy and party than by chromosome. Some things are different, but much stays the same.

For me, it was not just the great, vacant swathe of green leather on my side of the chamber that made the tide of pomp this time around a different affair. It was the same mace and crown imperial and even the same speaker—eventually—who led us from this chamber into the mysterious red haze of the Senate. The ceremony’s difference was due to the underlying tension that flows from the voters of Australia, who delivered almost evenly balanced numbers on the floor of this parliament. Consequently, there is a questioning of the presumptions that go with the, ‘We’ve always done it this way,’ starting point of forming government. Why? Because Australians have not done it this way for nearly 70 years.

Sometimes politicians make history with their words and sometimes historians utilise our words to reflect the history they want to write. Seventy years ago our 14th Prime Minister, John Curtin, famously said:

> Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.

That was a watershed moment. Where will we be as a nation in 70 years time—perhaps when the next hung, or balanced, parliament comes around? We have changed so much since Curtin commenced something truly indicative of Australian independence—one of the first things, you could argue. Unfortunately, it was declaring war independently on a foreign power.

Nevertheless, it is worth revisiting the Australia of the last minority government, nearly a decade before the Nationality and Citizenship Act, more than 25 years before we had a referendum that counted Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders more appropriately and nearly 50 years before the Australia Act ended our connections with the United Kingdom. Well, it almost completely ended them—not that I am suggesting anything disrespectful in a response to the Queen’s representative. We love our Queen—God save.

Domestically, we are also a different nation from that of 1941. We are still a nation of migrants, but now the people who get off the plane or the boat have roots reaching back to a much bigger variety of countries. Yet, slowly but surely, they become Australians—‘new Australians’ first, and then what? ‘Old Australians’? If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are
the ‘first Australians’, is everybody else a ‘second Australian’? Where is the cut-off between ‘new’ and ‘second’?

Those are rhetorical questions, but they relate to the ‘other’ I touched on in my opening remarks. Just what is this ‘other’? Just what is this Australia? For thousands of years, Indigenous Australians have understood Australia as a land of the Dreamtime. They maintain a strong spiritual connection to the land that most whitefellas cannot understand. The land is their food, culture, spirit and identity. There is a Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody song from the movie One Night the Moon in which the settler, the farmer, sings, ‘This land is mine,’ and the Aboriginal response is, ‘This land owns me’. ‘This land is mine’—‘This land is me’—two different voices, different perceptions.

If we step from the early Aboriginal times into the colonial period, we see in the literature and song of that time a hard life of settlers, drovers, jumbucks, convicts and explorers. It was in those times that emerged those common Australian ideals of hard work, mateship and the rebel underdog standing against the establishment. During last century it was phrases like ‘true blue’ and ‘the lucky country’ that seemed to capture something of the Australian identity. But when Donald Horne coined that famous phrase in his book by the same title, The Lucky Country, he was being ironic. He described an Australia of the 1960s that did not think for itself, that was bolted to its past with ‘colonial blinkers’. And he wrote this challenge:

If we are to remain a prosperous, liberal, humane society, we must be prepared to understand the distinctiveness of our own society. I say this challenge remains before us today.

Much of Australia’s search for identity has been defined, I would suggest, by what we are not. If my name were pronounced in French, I might declare that we are not French. Phillip only beat La Perouse by six days, so merely because Governor Arthur Phillip hauled the Union Jack into the air before the tricolour our identity has a strong British flavour. We know this to be true, although there are members of the House like Mr Combet and Mr Ripoll and ‘moi’ who may say it differently, but the three of us are almost accepted as Australians. I forgot to mention that D’Ath is another French name that might be appropriate.

In fact, the composition of this chamber shows that this modern nation is quite accepting of many backgrounds. We have Jewish Australians, Muslim Australians, Aboriginal Australians, Welsh Australians and even English Australians like the Leader of the Opposition. The adjectival part of these descriptions—the Jewish, the Muslim, the Aboriginal, the Welsh and the English—helps to describe the MP’s roots but does it really help us to understand what they are now, what we are now and what we are as a nation and who we are as a nation? Am I defined by my French, Italian or Irish heritage, or by my country childhood or the state high school that I attended or my religion? Whose bones do we feel underfoot? Can I, as a whitefella, only feel Burke and Wills, or must we as a modern nation learn to feel the memories of the Murris whom they wandered though, lost? Are we defined by sporting prowess? Are our successes or are our losses, like Gallipoli, more important? Or are we better assessed by how we treat our neighbours and those experiencing times of need?

The United States of America has the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. These help to make sure that all Americans, irrespective of their roots, have a set of ideals that transcend geography, race, religion, ethnicity and political persuasion. Sure, the gap between reach and grasp in the United States might be significantly larger than in Australia, but at least
the Yanks know what they are reaching for, more or less. In fact, more Australians seem to know the words from their Declaration of Independence better than our marvellous Constitution.

The British also know their identity. Sure, they are grappling with what exactly it is but they are cogitating from an unshakeable state of Britishness. Nevertheless, Australians have a political system that is sometimes called the ‘washminster’ system—bits from Westminster and bits from Washington. We owe much to both these countries, the United Kingdom and the United States, for our political ceremonies and structures. These countries have influenced our culture and our sensibilities, yet still today we characterise ourselves as a nation equally as much by these countries’ legacies as by the fact that we are not British and not American. Yesterday they definitely shaped who we were, yet equally today they help to define who we are not because now more than ever Australia needs to find out what it stands for.

In the face of challenges like climate change, ageing, a vibrant multicultural swirl, media connectivity combined with social isolation, internationalism and fluid capital this is definitely not the time for a meek parliament. Now more than ever our nation needs us to be bold; if not, then history will harshly and horribly judge this 43rd Parliament. I passionately hope that there is a time of bravery and vision and strategic national positioning before us. And there can be because I proudly assert something right now that might upset the member for Lyons and perhaps some of the members opposite. I am going to use a word that Mr Oakeshott suggested was almost forbidden in this chamber—that word is ‘mandate’.

I am not talking about a trip to the footy with another bloke; I mean mandate in the sense of parliamentary legitimacy. Every time our Prime Minister steps up to the dispatch box that was a gift to Australia from the British parliament she has a legitimacy that stretches back long before those 17 delicate minutes on 7 September 2010. As a Queenslander, home of the world’s first Labor government, I know it stretches back even further to before the formation of our political movement under the Tree of Knowledge in Barcaldine. It goes back to Cromwell and the Magna Carta and every assertion of rights beforehand.

It does not matter if a group selects a leader by a thin majority—what is important is that there is a leader with legitimacy. The challenges in front of the Gillard Labor government are many. We see the traditionally strong economies of the OECD under assault, some even under siege, and the GFC has arguably accelerated the power shift from North America and Europe towards East Asia and our neighbourhood. We are particularly vulnerable to shifts in Sino-American relations due to our roles as trader and ally. And, alongside emerging superpowers like China, we see nations like India and Indonesia changing the power dynamics of our neighbourhood.

I believe that our art and culture can help to define our national identity, shore up our role in the Asian community and also benefit the economic bottom line. Therefore, we should take more of our art and artists off shore to our neighbours. No longer should our Asian neighbours be the lights seen below the wings of the planes carrying Australian performers to Europe and North America. So contrary to the assertions of some of the fear merchants, now is not the time to be insular in trade or cultural exports. In the hope of drumming up fear some people bleat that Australia should not become another’s nation’s quarry.
Mr PERRETT—So in the hope of drumming up fear, some people bleat that Australia should not become another nation’s quarry. They say, ‘Put up the trade barriers and raise the tariffs.’ That is very short-sighted and completely unrealistic. In fact, there are two meanings in the dictionary for the word ‘quarry’. It reminds me of a saying that the rabbit believes it is mesmerising the anaconda, but not for long. Australia must be fully aware of its size and relative strengths, yet it must still be a brave leader wherever possible on the world stage, particularly when it comes to acting on climate change.

The Taiwanese in my electorate have taught me much about aspirations in the real world. We should not be guided by the meandering mutterings of misguided myopic bumpkins. If the misguided and ignorant do not properly understand our history, how can they help shape our destiny? So I call on this Gillard Labor government to invest significantly in Asian languages and more artistic exchanges with our neighbours, particularly our near neighbours. This should change in a modern Australia. I believe that additional interactions and cultural exchanges with our neighbours can help to shape and define our modern identity. There is no need for anybody to fear a dilution of our British culture and history. Australia will be a stronger nation if we recognise our past, yet step purposefully into tomorrow.

An Irish singer once said that we glorify the past when the future dries up. I see rain ahead, not dry bones. Australia has a brave new world of other possibilities before it and I welcome them, full of faith, hope and charity.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (6.40 pm)—I rise today as the federal member for Macquarie. The Macquarie electorate is vast, steeped in the history of this nation and bonded by location. The electorate encompasses all of the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains local government areas. Both regions are unique and hold a special place in the history of this nation. The Hawkesbury region became the food bowl of Sydney, as Governor Lachlan Macquarie established towns and farms to feed the growing colony. The Blue Mountains unlocked the barrier to lands beyond the mountains and by so doing played a key role in opening up the Western Plains as the colony expanded and grew. This year, 2010, we celebrate the bicentenary of Governor Lachlan Macquarie’s term of office and the legacy he left in the Macquarie towns he established, four of which are in the electorate of Macquarie: Windsor, Richmond, Pitt Town and Wilberforce.

In 2013 we celebrate the historic crossing of the Blue Mountains by Gregory Blaxland, William Lawson and Charles Wentworth, with re-enactments and events to mark history’s page in the narrative of our nation. Much has changed in the region over the last 200 years, yet the charm, beauty and productivity of our region have remained. Today, Macquarie is home to many new families and families descended from first European settlers, whilst still remaining home for many descendants of Australia’s original inhabitants—the Dharug people and the Gundungurra people, who lived across the region from the Hawkesbury River, across the Blue Mountains and out towards Lithgow and Bathurst.

The unique regional lifestyle is an inviting environment for small business. I recently attended the local Blue Mountains Biznet awards and was impressed by the professionalism, innovation, energy and determination to overcome the challenges that exist across the elector-
ate of distance, resources, access to services and a lack of infrastructure from a citycentric state Labor government. There is a strong sense of stewardship through the many diverse and thriving environmental networks. The families which have lived across the region for generations and those more recent residents are passionate that the lifestyle we enjoy is maintained.

Macquarie also boasts too of many iconic tourism attractions that draw visitors from across the world—the amazing Blue Mountains World Heritage National Park and the mighty Hawkesbury-Nepean River. I am indeed humbled, yet privileged, to be the member for Macquarie. The election campaign drew out a range of issues and challenges people across the region face on a day-to-day basis. As their federal member I will be a strong voice for the people of Macquarie, who question and challenge the change, the backflips and the broken promises of this Labor government. Together with my colleagues I will scrutinise the decisions of this government. The waste resulting from the Building the Education Revolution project is one example. Mistakes and mismanagement of the BER project undertaken at Cattai Public School, East Kurrajong Public School, Faulconbridge and Mount Victoria public schools and at other schools across the nation are completely unacceptable. The waste, damage and personal safety of people in their own homes as a result of the home insulation debacle must never be allowed to fade from the public record. This was a failure of monumental proportions. The money that was wasted could have been spent on other, worthy programs. Many community groups, volunteer organisations, such as the Rural Fire Service and charities, would have put that money to good use. And, of course, there is the mining tax and the impact that will have on the cost of living.

During the lead-up to the election, I announced a range of initiatives that, if a coalition government had been elected, would have made a difference to the people of Macquarie. Those initiatives I wish to highlight now, but can I assure the people of Macquarie that I will continue to fight on their behalf for what will make a real difference to their lifestyle, their futures and their opportunities. One was making the roads safer and supporting more freight to rail. The region needs a plan for the future for adequate road and rail infrastructure. The Leader of the Opposition and I met with local action groups and concerned residents whose message was loud and clear: an integrated rail and road system is essential for keeping our roads safe.

Another initiative was improving local hospitals and health services. As a start, I have a petition ready to be tabled to have the mobile breast screening service returned to Springwood and Richmond. Access to health care is a major challenge for the people of Macquarie and all residents across the region, and I had several initiatives that would have assisted with some of the challenges. I will continue to fight for these initiatives: $1 million to support the expansion of after-hours GP services to relieve some of the delays for treatment at local hospitals.

One example of how the people of Macquarie have been let down by the Labor government is this one. A teenage boy broke his leg in a motorbike accident. His mother took him to a major regional hospital in greater Western Sydney which services the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury. They were told it would be a 10-hour wait. His mother told me that no attempts were made to make the long wait even remotely comfortable. There were not enough chairs for all the patients to sit down in peace while they waited the many hours to be attended to. It was 2½ hours before the first consultation and six hours before there was any relief for
her son. Eventually the boy’s mother had to help the doctor plaster her son’s leg. Sadly, stories like this are not a one-off occurrence.

I also pledged $1.2 million for a CT scanner for the Katoomba hospital. People now have to travel long distances out of the region to access specialist services. Wherever possible and practical, we need to be bringing services back to the region. I also announced $200,000 for the Erik Hausoul Sarcoma Foundation. Every year hundreds of teenagers are diagnosed with sarcomas. The survival rate is low due to a lack of awareness about the importance of early detection and a lack of research to find suitable treatments and, more importantly, a cure. The funding would have helped the foundation develop education and awareness programs for parents, students and schools relating to teenage cancers and sarcomas.

If the coalition had been elected, its $1.5 billion plan for better mental health—a plan that is real action that will make a difference—would have gone a long way to improving Australia’s mental health situation. $1.5 billion would have funded 20 early psychosis intervention centres, 800 mental health beds and 60 additional youth headspace sites around the nation.

Another major initiative I announced on behalf of the coalition was funding to improve roads and $250,000 for Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon tourism, as part of the coalition’s $14 million domestic tourism development grants scheme. With the fluctuations in the Australian dollar, that domestic tourism scheme is needed now more than ever.

To address the pressing matter of local crime for communities in both the lower mountains and also in the Hawkesbury, the coalition if elected had committed $450,000 for CCTVs for Hazelbrook, Winmalee and Glenbrook.

During the campaign, I announced $15 million to establish a conservation corridor to protect the Cumberland Plain woodland in greater Western Sydney. This was described by the Vice President of the Western Sydney Conservation Alliance, Mr Wayne Olling, as ‘the greatest conservation commitment of any party’. If the coalition were leading our nation in government today and if we have the opportunity in the future—which I will fight for—we would have a project to link a continuous corridor of significant remnants of bushland and open space to protect greater Western Sydney’s endangered flora and fauna species.

And I made other commitments to further protect and preserve the environment in Macquarie, where bushfires and floods alike threaten precious wildlife as well as communities, businesses and our regional economy—$2 million for Blaxland and Glenbrook solar towns projects; $1 million for solar schools in Blaxland East Public School and Colo High; $500,000 for the University of Western Sydney’s biofuel study to convert algae from the Hawkesbury River to energy, something that would have made a real difference; and $250,000 for green army projects in Knapsack Reserve at Glenbrook and Yarramundi Reserve, two projects that not only would have helped our environment but would have provided training and employment pathways for our younger generation. I have also been active in making representations for funding for flood mitigation in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley and funding for improving water quality in the Hawkesbury Nepean river system.

The preservation of the Richmond RAAF base in its current capacity as a defence facility is another major priority for which I will continue to fight. The RAAF base employs around 3,000 people and is one of the most active bases in the Air Force. Approximately 14 per cent of total gross regional product and over nine per cent of total regional employment come from
the base. The RAAF facility’s runway is located on a flood plain. It is not capable of accommodating heavy airliners nor is it an appropriate site for a second Sydney airport. Labor needs to come clean with the Richmond community and tell us once and for all what its intentions are for our historic base.

I am also committed to making representations to local government to ensure the local community’s voice is heard on matters that are important to them, supporting improved public transport services and the relocation of jobs to the region and investing in a sustainable future to protect and preserve our local environment. These are matters that affect the daily lives of people living in the electorate of Macquarie.

I am dedicated to encouraging our young people to reach their fullest potential, to take on responsibility and to become leaders not just for their generation but for future generations. To that end I established a youth leadership program, the Macquarie Youth Leadership Forum, and we have completed the 2010 forum. The forum is dedicated to developing future leaders through practical exposure to core leadership values such as service to others, integrity and courage. It is critical to the future of our region and our nation that the community invests in the next generation of leaders. I particularly want to thank sponsors of the forum—Value Valley Meats, Woolworths Richmond, Bendigo Bank North Richmond, Rachael Goldsworthy Realty, Coles North Richmond, Audio Visual Warehouse, HR King and Sons Hardware and Bendigo Bank Katoomba. I thank them for their commitment to our young people.

If elected to government the coalition had a direct action plan that would have answered many of the concerns raised by the people in Macquarie and indeed across the nation. People are hurting as a result of Labor’s incompetence, financial mismanagement and broken promises. Already Labor has reversed an election promise, demonstrating an utter disregard for the cost-of-living pressures faced by everyday Australians such as the families, pensioners and small business people of the Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains.

Just prior to the election the current Prime Minister announced: ‘I rule out a carbon tax.’ Broken promises will become the norm for the Labor-Greens-Independents alliance. Look at the promised citizens assembly of 150 ordinary Australians to debate the carbon tax. Now that a carbon tax is back on the agenda, this assembly’s job will be to decide what the carbon cap should be, a far cry from deciding whether a carbon tax is in the nation’s best interests. A carbon tax is the first product of the secret deal between Labor and the Greens. A carbon tax would mean a short-term extra 25 per cent electricity price hike for pensioners and a likely medium-term doubling of the cost. Families and pensioners in the electorate of Macquarie are already being forced to decide between light and heat or food. A carbon tax will hurt each and every one of us as increased costs are passed on to the consumer. Labor simply cannot be trusted to do the right thing and keep downward pressure on daily living costs. How can the Labor government be trusted to keep its promises on taxes and on the environment? The coalition had a direct action plan that achieved sustainable environmental outcomes without the introduction of a carbon tax. I am determined to continue to work with the community on matters of concern and to work with individuals to achieve the best outcome for their circumstances.

In closing, I want to thank most sincerely all the people who supported me and the people of Macquarie throughout the campaign: my dedicated team—and they know who they are—if I listed everyone today, we would be here for a very long time. I want to thank every one of
the loyal and hardworking volunteers and my shadow ministerial colleagues, who visited and offered me support. In particular, I wish to acknowledge Senator Connie Fierravanti-Wells and Senator Marise Payne; their support for and commitment to the greater Western Sydney region is indeed unwavering. I especially want to thank the people of Macquarie for giving me the opportunity and for placing their trust in me to represent them, to give voice to their concerns and to raise in this national parliament what is important to them.

As the member for Macquarie, I will ensure that the people of Macquarie have a strong voice. The individuals, families, small business owners have dreams, aspirations and goals for their lives, for their communities, for the people they employ, for the people they work with for their children and for their grandchildren. They have a commitment to their lifestyle, to their local community and to their neighbours but also to their environment. What is important to them is that they have every opportunity to build a future for themselves, to make choices and to have an environment in which they are confident that the decisions they make will reap a reward. In this current environment, that confidence is not secure.

With Labor in charge, confidence is challenged on a daily basis. The economic environment is questionable. Their future is in doubt. I assure them that, on their behalf, I will fight for their best interests and I will work with them for what is important to them. I assure them that I will do the best I possibly can to represent them and to ensure that in this place what is important to them is heard and responded to.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (6.57 pm)—It is a great privilege to speak today on the address-in-reply on the occasion of the formation of the 43rd Parliament. As always when we speak on these occasions, I want to begin by thanking the people of Calwell for their generous support and endorsement of me as their federal member. This is the fourth time that the people of Calwell have endorsed me as their member. I think most members would agree that it is a humbling experience to have been given this very precious opportunity, which comes with privileges but also with responsibility. It is a responsibility that stretches to the representation of the people—in my case the people of Calwell. It is a responsibility that I take very seriously. As the achievements have been great and the challenges many, I want to place on record my full commitment to carrying out the task of representing my constituents, their needs and interests, with the same fervour and passion that I had when I was first elected to this House in 2001.

I want to especially acknowledge all those who worked on my campaign. In particular, I want to thank all my local branch members and party members, community groups, all those who volunteered throughout the election campaign and on election day and of course my staff. Being involved in a campaign is a very difficult and cumbersome business—I think we all know that—and we owe our successes to the people who volunteer their time to help us. So thank you to all those involved in the federal campaign for Calwell.

I also want to take this opportunity to welcome the new elected members to the House. This is a parliament of many firsts. We have our first female Governor-General, our first female Prime Minister, our first Indigenous member to the House of Representatives—the member for Hasluck, I would like to congratulate him on his appointment—and our first member of Muslim background, the member for Chifley. I want to single out the member for Chifley in particular, because my seat of Calwell has the largest Muslim constituency in Vic-
Victoria and the second largest in Australia. So his election to this parliament is of particular significance to the people of my electorate.

I think these many firsts are a reflection of our country as a land of opportunity. I do believe it makes this parliament more reflective of the diversity of the Australian community and I think we are in a very good position in the 43rd Parliament.

I also congratulate my parliamentary colleagues who have been re-elected in what is a new and very challenging work environment. I put on record my feeling of sadness that many of the members of the 42nd Parliament were not re-elected and my sadness for those who have left us willingly, who have retired. When we come up here we come up in classes. I came up in a class of 2001 and it was difficult for me to part with the former member for Throsby, whose presence in this place I enjoyed immensely. But this is the nature of our job. We come and go and we hope that at the very end we have made some small mark and some difference to this parliament and to our communities.

In the seat of Calwell, Labor achieved a swing towards it in the two-party preferred vote in the election of 2010. This comes on the back of a very large swing to Labor in the 2007 election, which was almost double the national average. It is a reflection of the fact that—and I note this not because I wish to pat myself on the back—for working Australia and for areas such as my electorate of Calwell the Labor Party still resonates as the party that is most responsive to the interests of that electorate. In that sense I am very pleased to be representing a wonderful constituency.

I also take the opportunity to congratulate the Speaker, the Hon. Harry Jenkins, my neighbour in the north of Melbourne but also a friend and colleague. I am very pleased that Speaker Jenkins is presiding over the House of Representatives in the 43rd Parliament. It is a very challenging time for him as well—and for others who are on the Speaker’s panel, yourself included, Mr Deputy Speaker. Harry has executed his role as Speaker magnificently. He has brought his own personal touch of good humour and admonishment. I am sure we all enjoy his speakership and I could not think of any other member who would be better placed to preside over this parliament than Harry Jenkins.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I will convey your sentiments to Mr Speaker.

Ms VAMVAKINOU—Thank you very much. There are many important issues that are going to be debated in this parliament. We have all certainly hit the ground running. For my part I intend to provide an input in these debates and welcome the opportunity to have issues that are important to the Australian people placed high on this parliament’s agenda. Of great importance during this parliamentary term will be proposals put forward to amend the Constitution to recognise our first Australians. It is about recognising the struggle and the enormous sacrifices that so many members of Australia’s Indigenous community have made and continue to make in their efforts towards seeking recognition and justice. It is about honouring the Indigenous people of this land. They are the oldest continuing culture in history. It is about ensuring we continue to move forward in our nation’s long journey towards reconciliation and ensuring that Australia’s founding charter embodies the spirit in which the path of reconciliation is being shaped.
Targets associated with the Closing the Gap report, investment in housing, health, early childhood, economic participation and remote service delivery will help ensure that Indigenous communities across Australia benefit from the government’s agenda. This agenda will see the advancement of the plight of Indigenous Australians strengthened by the establishment of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples. I welcome these initiatives, which are an important feature of the government’s agenda. I have a very large local Indigenous community—in the north and outer metro of Melbourne—and I know that they welcome the government’s agenda.

I also welcome the government’s continued investment in our health system. I always talk about the health needs of my electorate. The structural reforms that will serve to improve access to health and hospital services will be an important landmark in the improvement of the overall health and wellbeing of ordinary Australians. I strongly believe that the upgrade of primary care facilities into GP superclinics, as well as the construction of new dedicated GP superclinics, will deliver real improvement in front-line health services. The rollout will see the creation of a GP after-hours hotline for families not only in my constituency of Calwell but across Australia. Families will be able to receive support on weekends or very late at night. We know that for families with sick children the evenings are always difficult and the services they require are not always easily available. This kind of investment will ensure that Australians are able to link directly to those qualified to provide the best support but will also help ease the pressure on our emergency departments in hospitals across Australia.

Calwell is home to 162,000 people, with the overall population forecast to grow by 54 per cent from 2006 to 2030. Importantly, the aged population is forecast to grow by 179 per cent from 2006 to 2030. The Hume local government area has a growing community with a high number of young families. By 2013, Hume city is expected to reach a population of 177,299. That is an increase of 10,000 people from 2006, and the population will exceed 240,450 by 2030. With the way time flies nowadays, 2030 is not very far away. It is a phenomenal increase in population. The two groups that are increasing most in population are young families and the elderly, so you can imagine the pressure that that will bring to bear on a whole series of services, particularly health.

That is why the people of my electorate are very much looking forward to the GP superclinic announced for Calwell by the Gillard Labor government. The government has invested $7 million in our community through the national health and hospital reforms. I can assure the community that this will go towards the building of a GP superclinic, which will take pressure off existing health services. It will offer after-hours GP services and provide training for future health professionals. A GP superclinic will address some of the major areas of need and we very much welcome that investment. It is a credit to the government’s strong management of the economy that our community has secured a GP superclinic. Through the Gillard Labor government and the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Australian people can be certain that health will continue to remain a priority for this government in the years to come.

The government’s agenda is comprehensive. The agenda not only takes Australia into the future but is designed to support policies across ministries and departments to cater for a whole-of-government approach. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the government’s continued rollout of Australia’s largest ever infrastructure enterprise, the National Broadband Network. The NBN, in lifting productivity across the nation through high-speed,
affordable broadband, will not only expand and create new economic opportunities but improve the delivery of health and education programs that have been announced to date and will be announced in future. Where access to medical specialists is not as readily available, internet based consultations will prove vital to greater accessibility of services. This is particularly important for Australians living in regional and outer suburban areas, who, by the middle of next year, will be able to have access to a new Medicare rebate for these consultations. This will introduce all the benefits of technology to meet the needs of Australians and grapple with some of the problems that the delivery of health services encounters.

There is also the issue of social inclusion and, in particular, addressing the very important issue of homelessness. It is hard to talk about homelessness without talking about a denial of the opportunities afforded to most Australians—opportunities which exist on the premise that a person is living in the comfort and security of a stable home. On any given night up to 105,000 of our fellow Australians are homeless, totally separated from the connection to all that was once theirs and from it losing all opportunities that would otherwise be available to them. With a lack of a point of stability, it is difficult for homeless people not only to obtain and keep a job but also to participate in many other of life’s various aspects.

If we are going to change the landscape of opportunity for the homeless across Australia, we as a government need to create supported and sustainable living arrangements and social housing programs to accommodate our most vulnerable citizens. We need to ensure that, as Australia moves forward into a progressive future, it does so in the company of all its citizens. From key initiatives aimed at halving by the decade’s end the rate of homelessness and offering accommodation to all people who do it tough or sleep out, specialist housing services will be made available and new initiatives, programs and services to tackle issues of social inclusion and housing affordability will be created.

In the Australian context it is home which serves as a basis for all other opportunities afforded to us. Housing targets will only be effective if they are complemented with other support programs. It is primarily an issue of social inclusion. That is why I welcome the federal government’s social inclusion agenda and the creation of new initiatives, programs and services to tackle issues of social inclusion surrounding the efforts aimed at tackling homelessness. Such a multifaceted approach will help Australia tackle this complex social problem.

This is about building a more inclusive society and, despite our strong economic growth and the positive signs reflected through social and economic indicators, there are still entrenched disadvantages affecting the lives of many Australians and, indeed, many of my constituents. The government’s social inclusion agenda aims to increase the level of social and economic participation so that no Australian is left behind and so that, as our economy grows, every Australian is able to tap into the increased wealth and opportunities that come with it.

It is also about continuing to invest in our schools, continuing to invest in communities across Australia and continuing to support social inclusion measures. Of course, education is the great enabler. In recent days I have had much pleasure in being present at the recognition ceremonies for many of the schools in my electorate as their Building the Education Revolution programs have been officially opened. I attended four such openings in the last two weeks, and each and every student, teacher and parent I have encountered is absolutely rapt with the new facility in their school community. They are very grateful and they want me to
convey to the government their deep gratitude and their many thanks for the resources that were made available to their school community.

I do want to name some of those schools, because it is very important to recognise the good work that they do. I want to make reference to St Mary’s Coptic Orthodox College, which received $4.6 million. They built a magnificent new languages and science centre and a new library. They are absolutely delighted and so am I. Being a former language teacher, I have a particular interest in language centres and I am very pleased that the kids at St Mary’s Coptic Orthodox College are going to enjoy learning in a wonderful environment. St Anne’s Primary School in Sunbury received $3.2 million under the National School Pride Program and Primary Schools for the 21st Century, as part of the BER; Sunbury Heights Primary School received $3.2 million—again, under the National School Pride Program; Campbellfield Heights Primary school received $2.1 million; Greenvale Primary School received $3.2 million; and there was $3.2 million for a multipurpose centre at Roxburgh Homestead Primary School.

This is a significant amount of money and these are significant structures. They are not school halls. They have been characterised as school halls and a waste of taxpayers’ money. I want to say to the House that these are not school halls; these are highly sophisticated, high-tech facilities that equip children for learning in the 21st century. They are situated in an electorate that is known for its socioeconomic difficulties. I said that education is a great enabler. It is the means by which we transform the lives of children, and our young Australians need to be given every opportunity possible. It is our responsibility to give them every opportunity possible to develop to the best of their abilities. Children require a complexity of opportunities. Home and school are two of the most significant institutions in the lives of children. We know that when the home environment is out of kilter with the school environment or there are difficulties in the home environment, this impedes the progress of young.

As a former teacher, and having taught in portables, I have a great affection for portables but I also know that teaching in the 21st century must accommodate technology. I do not know what I would be like with the great whiteboards that I saw in my schools last week; I do not think I would be able to use them. But the kids take to them like ducks to water and it is incredible what they can do. Sometimes you have just got to stop and forget the cliches about halls and taxpayers’ money being wasted and acknowledge that a lot of taxpayers in my electorate and across this country believe and recognise that the money spent in the Building the Education Revolution is not only money well spent but money that should have been spent a long time ago.

I want to thank the government for taking my local schools into the 21st century. I make no apologies for the fact that my electorate has received a lot of money, and I know that it will be to the benefit of everyone in the electorate but in particular the young people in my electorate. I do not want to forget Bethal Primary School. Their building is so sophisticated that they do not quite know how to use it yet. Bethal is a school that has been disadvantaged and in many ways has been the subject of a lot of vandalism. The pride that they feel is enough to make one weep. (Time expired)

Mr Anthony Smith (Casey) (7.18 pm)—It is a pleasure to rise in this important debate, the first debate of the new parliament. In beginning my contribution, like many other members I want to point out what a privilege it is to be the member for Casey in Victoria and to have been elected as the member for Casey for the fourth time. As many members have
articulated during this debate, none of us would be in the House of Representatives without the support of our electorates and without many people working long hours to ensure our election.

I want to first of all thank the electors of Casey for the confidence they have shown in me again. As has been the case since my election in 2001, that confidence will be reciprocated as I work my hardest to represent them to the best of my ability in this House of Representatives. As members know, we all rely on the strong support of party volunteers who believe in us and want to see us elected and re-elected, as the case may be.

At the outset I want to thank a number of members of the Liberal Party in Casey who worked so hard, not just throughout the election campaign but in the lead-up to that campaign, as they have done in previous elections—Fran Henderson, the campaign manager; Annette Stone, the Chair of the Casey Federal Electorate Conference; Jill Hutchison; Byron Hodkinson; Jim Dixon; Peter Manders; Brian and Maria McCarthy; Rex McConachy; Neil Gryst; John Lord; Brent Crockford; Denise Jeffs; Nadia Carretta; Pamela Gemelli; Andrew Hallam; Nicole Blair and Estelle Wallingford are some of the people who worked very hard on a daily basis. I also want to pay tribute to the many other branch members who also contributed in the lead-up to the campaign and, naturally, on polling day itself. I want to pay tribute and say thanks to so many members of the community who were prepared to help on election day. They were not necessarily members of the Liberal Party but people who wanted to support me and our cause in this election and who volunteered their time.

Election day in a democracy is an incredible thing, as my friend here at the table discovered for the first time. And my colleague across the way has experienced a couple of times now the sheer event of nearly 90,000 people voting at however many polling booths you have in your electorate. In my case it is about 40. In both of your cases it is many more, I suspect. To see that happen and to see the volunteers and the man-hours that go into that is incredible. We are all here because of the dedication of so many others. That dedication of volunteers beyond politics is something that is very evident and key in the case of my electorate. It is a community that stretches from the outer eastern suburbs beginning in Croydon right out into the Dandenong Ranges and into the Yarra Valley. It is a diverse community but it is a very united community and it has a very strong volunteer spirit. We see it in the contributions of individuals. We all see this in our electorates and in the contributions of community groups.

In this address-in-reply contribution I want to pay tribute to some of the people I have had the pleasure of working with. As a member of parliament I work very closely with people who are dedicated to important charities and causes within the electorate and with people who are dedicated to their own particular community within the wider electorate. I want to take the time to single out a few who have put in extraordinary efforts on individual events. There are some who, for many years—decades, in fact—have contributed to not just one or two organisations but to many organisations.

Firstly, I pay tribute to Hendy O’Toole from the Croydon Lions Club. I first met Hendy a couple of years ago. She came to me because she wanted to raise money for and promote awareness of bionic ears for people with hearing loss. She was profoundly deaf as a younger lady and benefited from a lot of the research. She decided to give something back and to raise some money, and she did so by walking the Kokoda Track. She put those two events together. It was a pleasure to work with her and so many of her friends. It is a tribute that she com-
pleted the walk and raised $10,000 for the cause, but she also raised a lot of awareness in the local community and that will have a ripple effect going forward. I want to, in this House, pay tribute to her. The money that she has raised will go to a very great cause.

I want to also say thank you to a number of local business men and women in the electorate. As we all know, small businesses in particular are very much the backbone of our local economies. Their decision to employ someone can make the difference between a young kid having an opportunity, particularly in some of our traditional trades. Last year I began the Casey apprenticeship and traineeship awards. I called on a number of local business leaders to not just judge the awards but also conduct them, select the criteria and choose some of the winners. I wanted to recognise some of the outstanding apprentices who are embarking on careers not just in traditional trades but also in the new and emerging trades that we see in so many of the industries that are transforming the outer east and the Yarra Valley. I want to thank Phil Munday, of a Phil Munday’s Panel Works; Jeynelle Forrest, of Rustic Charm Restaurant; Clive Larkman, of Larkman Nurseries; and Nick Fraraccio of Stevens Glass. They all put in a lot of time—and it is very busy running a business. We often met at about seven in the morning. They received nominations from right across the electorate and judged them together as a group. As you can imagine, it was a very difficult task. I thank them for that.

I also pay tribute to those who received the awards. The two encouragement award winners were Steven Miller and Aung Luri, the two runners-up were Ashley White and Ashley Turnham and the ultimate winner was David Donchi of DBM Plumbing. David is an apprentice plumber but he made a mid-career change. He is a mature age apprentice who decided well into his working career that he wanted to take up a new trade. He was prepared to make that incredible sacrifice and he dropped a lot of income to do that. He is a first-class employee—he is a first-class employee—his business recognised that—and his award was very well deserved. Of course, those awards will be occurring again next year and that committee I mentioned will be there again putting in the volunteer hours to promote trades and apprenticeships and jobs and careers in small and medium sized businesses in the electorate of Casey.

We also have volunteer groups putting in hours on a week-by-week basis. There are a couple of groups I want to single out for mention, including those in the Montrose community who worked very hard over so many years to redevelop the recreation reserve there. They were able to do that with some money from the state government and a significant grant from the previous Howard government. That has been a long-term project and it would not have come about if it had not been for the hard work of the community and leadership from people like Julie McDonald, who led the way in raising community funds for a state-of-the-art playground that has now become a hub for young families within the electorate. So I pay tribute to that community. I also pay tribute to those in the township group, who have worked on so many town improvement projects, including the alleyway artwork project with the help of so many young artists from the local primary schools in the area.

Similarly, the Monbulk Living and Learning Centre is a major redevelopment in the centre of Monbulk. It will be a community hub with a library, childminding facilities, cafes and galleries. It will be the central hub. It opened just a few weeks ago—unfortunately, that was on a Thursday when I was here in Canberra. It had received a $2 million grant from the previous Howard government—and I must point out that that money was made available when we were running surplus budgets.
It would be remiss of me not to point out so many of the other groups, but time does not permit me to mention them all. The RSLs, which work so hard right throughout the year, were in fact running services in our community just last week. Eric Dossor from Lilydale, Neil Gryst, Sam Berry and Ron Batty from Croydon, Ted Beard from Monbulk, and Derek and Betty Crittenden from Mount Evelyn, thank you for everything you do. Over the last few years, we have seen a return of the Anzac Day service at the Cenotaph in Montrose. This has been possible due to the hard work and effort of Bob Hovenden and the Montrose Lions Club.

We in this parliament who are speaking on the debate that began with the new parliament must rightly reflect on national issues as well. Of course, as we begin this new parliament, we cannot help but reflect on what has occurred within the government over its period in office from November 2007. Before the election—in fact, 4½ months ago now—the new Prime Minister on her first day stated that the government had lost its way, and for 4½ months the government has demonstrated it has well and truly lost its way. The Prime Minister said that the government had lost its way on a number of policies. What we saw in the last parliament was the government failing the key tests of government. Those tests include the test of competence and the test of honesty.

On the test of competence, we all know only too well the policy failures from ceiling insulation through to school halls and solar panels. But we have also seen a failure of honesty when it comes to policy promises from this new government, and we have seen it in the period since the election. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister made it very clear that Labor would not introduce a carbon tax. In fact, not only was the Prime Minister insistent but the Treasurer, Mr Swan, said that claims that Labor would introduce a carbon tax were hysterical. Now we see them planning just that. There was a promise to open a detention centre in East Timor, even though it was news to the East Timorese, and now we are seeing more detention places here in Australia.

There are other examples but the important and disappointing point with this new government that has had two Prime Ministers in less than three years is that, when it comes to promises, the promises are always big but then one of a few things happens to those promises. If they are kept, they are implemented incompetently, and, if they are not implemented, it is because they have been dumped—or, in some cases, there is a combination of the two. Ultimately, we see that the poor decision making by the government here in Canberra, be it on economic management or on policy implementation, is paid for financially by all our communities. The policy failure here is borne in the towns and suburbs of our electorates. A government that announced it had lost its way on 24 June and is still lost today is not a government that is going to find its way. As the member for Casey, I will at every turn hold this government to account and at every turn stand up for my constituents who pay the taxes and bear the brunt of this incompetence and failure.

I have, from time to time, agreed with members of the Labor government on various issues. There have been a couple of instances where we have seen members of that side recognise the dire situation of incompetence and policy failure. One such person, of course, is Senator Doug Cameron, who recently—and you will have heard this, Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper, from many members—likened the Rudd government to ‘having a political lobotomy’, and referred to backbenchers becoming zombies. Nothing has changed. Senator Faulkner, an elder of the Labor Party, recently pointed out:
… Labor is struggling with the perception we are very long on cunning, and very short on courage. In one of the member for Griffith’s final speeches before he became Prime Minister, an address in 2007, he said:  
… Australia needs a government that will help the nation fulfil its promise, rather than a government that makes promises it can’t fulfil. 

Those words haunt this government. We have seen administrative failure. We have seen a government that demonstrates that it cannot govern competently, as I have said. But we have seen a government that is quite prepared during an election campaign, on a number of fronts, to make promises, with its fingers crossed behind its back, only to go back on them as soon as the parliament returns. 

It is our democratic duty to hold this government to account. I will do so with full vigour, in all the forums of the House, because it is my job to represent the best interests of the electors of Casey, because the decisions taken here very much affect the sorts of lives and opportunities that families, small businesses, pensioners and retirees have in Casey, in Melbourne’s outer east and in the Yarra Valley.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (7.37 pm)—By the age of 15, I might have understood, like most members of this House, that there are 18 players in an Aussie Rules team. But I am still to fathom why a few individuals in the Labor Party were indulged in regard to the allocation of seats at the last federal election in New South Wales after a very odd redistribution. It is for that reason that, tonight, I will concentrate more than normal on thanking a large number of people for their contribution to my campaign in Werriwa.

In the campaign, the way in which seats were allocated meant that I and the new member for Fowler were not able to avail ourselves of the very large amount of largesse the Australian taxpayer provides to incumbent members. That was the first difficulty in the campaign in Werriwa. Obviously, I had to also arrange for an office and could not conduct the campaign from my Reid electoral office. Similarly, the distance from the area where many of my former supporters reside to Werriwa is quite significant. Finally, there was the reality that the previous member for Werriwa had been very popular locally, and there was a very vicious campaign by one particular press outlet in the electorate. So to limit the swing to eight per cent was, in a sense, an accomplishment, given that this tended to be the city-wide swing.

I therefore want to put on record my appreciation of a large number of people who helped in this campaign. Many of them were at first reluctant to accept me because of the decision of the national executive to impose me, rather than, as should have occurred, having rank-and-file selection ballots throughout the New South Wales electorates.

I want to thank councillors Anoulack Chanthivong and Aaron Rule, the then mayor; Wendy Waller, a councillor of Liverpool; Councillor Anne Stanley, the president of the federal council; John McLaughlin, the president of the council; locals Owen Hooper, Brad Parker, Charishma Kaliyanda and Tim; Moinul and Masood Chowdhury; Brother Buryia; Farooq Iqbal; Vicki Meadows; all of my staff, but most particularly Steve Christou and Maurice Campbell; Dr Ali Sarfraz; Paul Drayton; Ian Pandilovski; David Voltz; Antonio Bifulco; Scott Mills; Mark Wine; Karl Appel; Kyle McGregor; Helen Samardzic; Mustafa Agar; Christopher Gosling; Sarah Frazier; James Kater; et cetera. Many of these, of course, came from...
my former electorate of Reid and are people with whom I have had a longstanding connection.

I also want to thank a significant number of ethnic communities, who, unsolicited, flocked to my campaign. Amongst those communities were the Sinhalese, Tamil, Arabic, Filipino and Bangladeshi communities, as well as those from the subcontinent of India and Pakistan, and Pacific islanders. I guess that over a long period of time I have been very active in multicultural and ethnic affairs in Sydney, and this was rewarded in large measure by a significant effort by these people on polling booths—people who were not party members but who welcomed me to the electorate because of my historic connections with these communities. So, in the end, I very much thank the people who contributed to the campaign for my ultimately having what I thought was a reasonable result.

One of the issues that I want the government to press more strongly on is the question of carbon trading. We had comments about how there was no commitment et cetera at the last election. Quite frankly, I think this issue is bigger than those commitments. I think that one of the failures in the last parliament was the reversal on this matter after Copenhagen. The opposition are comforted by events in the US congress, by the fact that it seems that as a result of the mid-term elections things might be slowed down. They are comforted by comments such as that from Tea Party Wisconsin representative Ron Johnson, a plastics millionaire:

I think it’s far more likely that it’s just sunspot activity, or something just in the geologic eons of time where we have changes in the climate.

They are comforted by that kind of comment. They are also comforted by another Tea Party quote I saw last week that, because apparently there was some biblical reference where God had said that he would never punish the world again, we can be comforted that there is no problem.

Quite frankly, I think that in American politics we should have far more respect for the fact that, back as early as 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson said that fossil fuels were a significant problem in regard to climate change. That was in 1965. It was similar with President Carter, in the period 1975 to 1985—a million years ago as far as some people are concerned. It was reported by Garry Wills in a review of the book White House Diary recently that in that period fuel use in federal buildings was restricted, solar panels were inserted in the White House, there was a regulation of gas consumption in vehicles, and tax breaks were provided for wind technology. This significant crisis that the world faces was seen by some US presidents, as I say, as far back as 1965. And we have people apparently getting some comfort from the idea that Obama might have to back off for political reasons. I would hope that we have no vacillation, no weakness, by the Labor government in the period forward.

We of course face very significant crises on a national level. It has been projected that Australia could face by 2030 a further one degree of warming temperatures, up to 20 per cent more months of drought and up to a 25 per cent increase in days of very high and extreme fire danger. The results of these will be manifest in an increase in the frequency and severity of drought conditions resulting from climate change and reduced availability of water. The frequency of drought may increase by up to 20 per cent over most of Australia by 2030. The changing climate will threaten agricultural production. We have already had food riots throughout large parts of Africa and the Middle East because of the twin problems of the diversion of crops towards fuel alternatives and the drought, and also, of course, the continuing
concentration of agribusiness in the world. If the temperature rises by two degrees, our national livestock-carrying capacity is predicted to decrease by 40 per cent. Temperature rises, with population growth, are projected to see 3,000 to 5,000 more people die each year from heat related illnesses by 2050.

It is also interesting to note that not everyone has been sitting on their hands, despite the fact that some people would urge that. Across the 12 largest economies, over US$177 billion of economic stimulus packages have been earmarked for clean energy initiatives. The United States, with $67 billion, and China, with $47 billion, are the biggest investors. Some suggest that the US is already halfway to meeting the target it submitted under the Copenhagen accord.

Very conservatively, 90 Australian animal species have so far been identified as at risk from climate change. We note that the South Korean government recently introduced a bill that will enable emission trading and that the government aims to put green growth at the core of growth strategy along with commitments to investment two per cent of GDP in green technologies.

People who take some comfort from the apparent position of China at Copenhagen would perhaps be interested in recent articles in the Financial Review. In an article in the Financial Review of 9-10 October 2010, Diane Lin, fund manager of the Sydney based Pengana Asia Equities Fund, noted:

… China has about 1 per cent of the world’s oil reserves and consumes 10 per cent of oil exports; it has 14 per cent of the world’s known coal reserves and consumes about half the world’s coal exports. Because of China’s growth, it is a major user of these raw materials. The article noted:

This radical proposal shift to renewable energy is aimed at reducing the rate of increase in carbon emissions by about three-quarters over the next decade.

And the article further noted:

Much higher improvements in energy efficiency, technological breakthroughs in solar, wind and storage technologies could help achieve far higher reductions in energy consumption and CO2 emissions.

The Chinese government have walked down this road. They are beginning to actually do something, but such is the move that another article in the Financial Review, from 19 October 2010, talked about complaints by the United Steelworkers Union in the United States that China is now providing too much assistance for green energy. Interestingly, the same day that an investigation was launched by the United States in regard to these issues, China’s Communist Party Central Committee held its annual congress and, according to the article:

Top of the agenda for the congress was the next five-year plan for the country and its focus on renewable energy, genuine attempts to reduce carbon emissions and to promote green technology and energy conservation.

The article further noted:

Examples of how China helps it green technology companies include the massive credit lines recently approved for solar energy companies Suntech Power and JSA Solar.

It is worth noting that Suntech has its derivation in this country. Its owner was trained at the University of New South Wales. That is another example of how Australia lost significant technology and significant production in a growing industry because of a lack of support.
Australia has particular responsibilities. A recent report by the World Wide Fund for Nature ranked Australia in the top 10 most unsustainable countries on the planet. We were ranked eighth in that study and were joined in that list by the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the United States, Canada and others. Dermot O’Gorman of the WWF says, ‘Every Australian person requires about seven hectares to live their current lifestyle.’ The report also found that the earth has lost a third of its biodiversity since 1970.

Those urging action are many. The government’s climate change adviser, Professor Ross Garnaut, has been on the record again saying that there is a need to act swiftly, that delayed action is a recipe for failure and a recipe also for industries moving out of this country, and that there is more for countries that are a lot more active on these fronts to actually accomplish.

The first eight months of 2010 were as hot as the first eight of any year since 1998, despite the fact that there has been a drop in the El Nino. We are in a time when the opposition are attempting to talk about the costs and are trying to divert away the issues. We saw it from them again in question time—not all the opposition but some elements of the opposition. They ridicule the problem and have recourse to the opinions of a minority of scientists, who have been absolutely overwhelmed by the mass of scientific evidence from around world. The opposition continue to cite a minority of people who are usually identified with corporate interests, many of whom receive financial support from the petroleum industry and other industries with a direct interest.

I hope that in this term we have a government that acts swiftly, acts strongly, makes sure that Australia is in the forefront and understands that countries like Denmark and Spain have gained by being active and understanding that there are industries for the future, and understanding that for the world this is very necessary.

Another issue I want to talk about is the question of the government’s contribution with regard to schools. In the electorate of Reid $114-plus million was spent on 137 school projects over 55 schools. As I go around the electorate, I obviously come across a few issues where schools have not got the total satisfaction of what they would have liked. There has been clear evidence in New South Wales, compared to the rest of the country, that there have been issues of mismanagement with regard to these. But on balance, overwhelmingly, we have a situation where people are congratulating the government for what has been accomplished.

People have talked about what has occurred in education as being the best thing that has happened in three or four decades. I can see it at All Saints Senior Catholic College at Casula and the construction of a science centre. I was out at Dalmeny Primary School the other week and they were absolutely jumping as they showed me what has occurred out there. At Macarthur Adventist College, we had 125,000 go towards refurbishment of buildings, shade structures, sporting facilities et cetera. This is, as I said, a significant fillip to education at Unity Grammar college with 150,000 for the refurbishment of buildings, green upgrades, sports facilities et cetera.

Throughout the campaign I had people in education, I had parents, I had schoolchildren asking me why the government was not more positive about its contribution. I ran into the president of the Catholic principals association of New South Wales, whose main criticism in life was the fact that the Labor government had not more widely promoted letters that she had written on behalf of all Catholic principals about the gains made through this construction. A
failure of the government in the election campaign was to drive home over the previous year the realities that not only were these educational measures gains for education in this country, but they also avoided a critical recession that would have occurred in this country.

I come from an area that was built around the construction industry. It was an area that in the 19th century was characterised by the timber industry and later by a significant number of brick-making enterprises. In the old electorate of Reid there continues to be significant employment in that industry. I have an association with a large number of builders and developers, particularly in the small flat sector and in the housing construction sector. They might not all vote Labor, but a number of them have said to me that the action by this government in the last term for construction and keeping the industry going—making sure the building supply companies could sell their product, that the builders could pay their employees, that people could get jobs—was crucial. As I said, it is a bit of a failure that people came away with an impression over a year that because nothing occurred in this country—because we are not in the newspapers with Ireland today or a few months ago with Greece, because we are not there in joint headlines, because we do not have unemployment of 10-plus per cent which the United States has had for significant parts of this year—it was all never a possibility; there was never going to be a recession in this country. We have overcome the problem because in this case we have been so successful. And I do not for a moment ignore the contribution the previous government made with regard to the budget. But to say that we could have sat on our hands for that period and done nothing and therefore have hoped that all was well was not good enough.

I also note that for all the talk about the deficit in this country, when you look at the proportion of our GDP, the current budget measures, we are at the lower end of the spectrum internationally. Most European countries would be extremely pleased to have a GDF proportion of debt that we have. I do believe it was one of the more significant contributions made over that period for two reasons: to counter the recession the world endured over speculation and lack of regulation in the investment sector and also because these measures were worth while on the social front. This was a major accomplishment of that period and I would very much salute the efforts.

I also want to recognise tonight in this parliament that the Hindu Council of Australia is conducting a Diwali event with politicians from both sides of the parliament. India has been a significant migrant source over recent years due to skilled migration. Diwali is a very important event in the Hindu, Jain and Sikh cultures, and it is certainly testimony that for the eleventh year it is being held in this parliament in the dining room. Of course it is not only here; this is a major international event. From Suriname and Guyana in South America, to Mauritius near the African coast, these are countries where it is even a public holiday. So I salute the Hindu Council for doing that. It is also a council which is engendering in young Australian Indians a measure of protecting and preserving their culture, but also recognising they live in Australia with the culture and laws of our country.

Mr Coulton (Parkes) (7.55 pm)—Next week marks three years since I was elected to this place as the member for Parkes. It has been the most rewarding, challenging and interesting period of my life. The seat of Parkes that I contested at the last election is somewhat different to the seat of Parkes that I contested in 2007. In 2007 the seat of Parkes contained 107,000 square kilometres. At the moment it is 256,000 square kilometres, which is 34 per
cent of the landmass of New South Wales. It does present some challenges to represent an area that goes from the Riverina in the south to the Queensland border—to represent communities from Dubbo, which is a thriving city, to Mudgee, another large regional town with a growth spurt, to Narrabri, which is experiencing growth from mining, to agricultural communities like Moree, Coonamble, Walgett, Warralda, Bingara, and down into the south to places like Nyngan, Cobar, Lake Cargelligo and Condobolin. It was a great privilege that I got to know the people in these communities over the last three years and indeed, some of them over the last few months.

I would briefly like to reflect on what was achieved as a new member in opposition over the last three years. I would also like to acknowledge assistance I have had from government ministers over that period of time. The first crisis I confronted as a new member a few weeks into the term was the start of the collapse of ABC Learning. Although she is no longer a member of this place, I would like to acknowledge the help that Maxine McKew gave me in that period of time, and other ministers who have helped me out with issues. Such is the nature of this place that what is seen on the outside is only the conflict. I guess the conflict is an important part of what we do here but it is also important that we acknowledge that we can work in a collaborative arrangement and that we do get assistance across parties.

Without a doubt, I believe the greatest achievement that I was able to help achieve as a member of the opposition was the defeat of the emissions trading scheme. The previous speaker tonight spoke about the issue of climate change and the issues that the world is confronting with regard to climate change, but the issue of the emissions trading scheme was not whether you believed in climate change; it was whether you believed that what was being proposed under the emissions trading scheme was going to alter the environment. I believe that a lot of this was driven by a section of the community that has great concerns for the environment but somewhat affluent lifestyles. While it may be okay to trade in the station wagon and buy a Prius and tick the green square on your power bill and pay a bit more, and maybe pay a few offsets when you take your family to holidays in an aeroplane, if you are a pensioner in western New South Wales and the cost of electricity goes up then you have no other choice but to turn off the switch. If you are a cement worker in the town of Kandos and the cement plant closes because cement has become 30 per cent cheaper when imported from Asia, you are not suffering a minor inconvenience because of the emissions trading scheme; you are suffering the loss of your job. Indeed, for a town like Kandos, it is suffering the loss of the main reason for its existence. As an aside, unfortunately I lost the towns of Kandos, Rylstone and Gunnedah in the redistribution. I trust that the member for Hunter will keep their issues in mind when the issues of carbon trading and carbon tax come up in this parliament, because it is something that is very much at the forefront. It is not an abstract argument to the people of Kandos; it is very real. So I believe that we were able to build the case.

It is interesting to note that, at the end of 2008 and early 2009, only members of the Nationals publicly stated their opposition. Obviously, as time went on, there was a shift not only within the parliament but within Australian society. Members of the coalition were able to point out that there are other methods of abating carbon rather than imposing a tax. I spoke to a lot of people. I spoke to representatives of the Business Council of Australia and other people. They were trying to convince me of the need for a price on carbon, but ultimately they failed on the question that I always ask: will Australia putting a price on carbon alter the tem-
perature of the globe? Ultimately, the answer was no or maybe marginally. Professor Garnaut indicated in his report that the economic effect on regional Australia would be a downturn of 20 per cent, while metropolitan areas would have a downturn of eight per cent. How could I, as a member representing a regional part of Australia, support something that was going to disadvantage my community at the expense of others?

The other issue was the BER. The previous speaker spoke about that. No doubt, schools were in need of an upgrade, but the BER was a wasted opportunity. No greater was the waste of the BER more evident than in my electorate. The tuckshop at Tottenham achieved national notoriety. Spending $610,000 on a tuckshop that could not fit a fridge and a pie warmer was a scandal—a double-brick edifice. They have spent in excess of, I think, $100,000 in trying to alter it so that they can use it as a tuckshop, when there was a perfectly good tuckshop adjacent to it. It was worse when the same design was put up at Toomelah. Toomelah is an Aboriginal community of 400 people on the Queensland border in the northern part of my electorate. They have complete unemployment. For some reason, they got the same for $650,000. The people at Toomelah could have done a lot of things with $650,000. A double-brick tuckshop was not high on their priorities.

The issue that we have coming up in this parliament that will affect my area is the continuation of the emissions trading scheme. We are not troglodytes in my electorate; we are embracing alternative energy. Indeed, there is a 200-tower wind farm proposed in Coolah, in the middle of my electorate. There are obviously issues with transmission lines that we are working through. BP Solar have a proposal for one of the largest solar power stations in the world—certainly the largest in the Southern Hemisphere—to go in at Moree. They are working through the final stages of that. There is a gas-fired power station being constructed at Wellington in my electorate. So the people of my electorate are doing their bit in looking at alternative energy. Indeed, farmers in my electorate are also doing their bit in looking after the environment by using advanced methods of farming to sequester carbon.

The big issue that we are going to confront is the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan. What I would like to put on record is that those communities have already, through water-sharing plans, handed back large parts of the water that they were using. I represent probably a larger section of the Murray-Darling Basin than anyone else here. I have all the rivers in New South Wales, from the Macintyre in the north to the Lachlan in the south. In the Darling-Barwon section, in the Menindee to Mungindi section, they have already reduced their take of water by 67 per cent. The plan is looking at taking another 30 per cent. These people have made the adjustments in good faith. There was a recognition that adjustments needed to be made, and groundwater and river users have made those adjustments. There is a level of anger there because this is coming at them again. Those people are not unreasonable; they have made the adjustment. They have gone through 10 years of drought. I heard people with no firsthand knowledge speaking here about muddy waterholes, dying river gums and things like that. We have just had 10 years of drought.

If you go and look at the rivers in my electorate now you will see that they are magnificent. I was at Bourke last week. There is eight metres of water in the Darling River at Bourke. The wetlands in the Gwydir are full. The Macquarie Marshes are full. A farmer at Bourke last Friday summed it up succinctly when he said, ‘What people need to realise is that the environment is much more resilient than it’s given credit for.’ And indeed the environment seems to
be much more resilient than the economies of regional New South Wales. I think we need to take that into account when we are looking at the restructure.

This is being driven by people outside the area, and it is a great arrogance. If we are going to take the principles of the restructure of the Murray-Darling Basin into account, why don’t we look at the Tank Stream? Why don’t we restore the Tank Stream to the condition it was in when Captain Phillip came in 1788? Why don’t we restore the Yarra to the condition it was in when John Batman discovered Melbourne? If we have to relocate 40 per cent of the populations of Sydney and Melbourne, is that unreasonable? That is what is being asked of the people of the Murray-Darling Basin. I think we should keep this in context. The Murray-Darling communities not only have a right to survive; they also have an obligation to feed the population of Australia and another 50 million people around the world.

The other issue that is coming up is health. Indeed, a close watch on the restructure of health has been going on. In Dubbo there is a proposal—and hopefully there will be a submission for the next round of funding—for stage 2 of Dubbo Base Hospital. Dubbo Base Hospital services not only the City of Dubbo, with 41,000 or 42,000 people, but an area of nearly 200,000 people in western New South Wales, and it needs to be treated with the respect that a regional hospital deserves.

There is already great work going on. Lourdes Hospital is being rebuilt at the moment. Charles Sturt University, thanks to a grant from the previous coalition government, has now opened its school of dentistry. There is a private hospital there. The University of Sydney has a medical training facility there. Dubbo has the ability to be a health hub for New South Wales.

The other thing I want to mention is roads. Everything we buy in a supermarket starts on a local road. At the moment we have one of the largest grain crops in recent memory, admittedly suffering from wet weather at the moment. There are huge concerns as to whether we can actually pull this crop off. The frustration of my farmers is palpable. I worry about the mental health of some of these people who, after so many years of drought, are seeing a magnificent crop rotting in the field because of excessive rain. There was over 60 millimetres of rain in the wheat belt in my area yesterday. And they are trying to deliver this grain on roads that were built in the days of Cobb & Co.

I am supporting the Australian Rural Road Group, which has recently been formed from those councils around Australia with agricultural production in excess of $100 million to recognise the local road issue. We now have multimillion dollar businesses that cannot meet contractual requirements to deliver livestock or grain or even take in contracted fertiliser and such. In the year 2010, the fact that people are living on a dirt road and cannot get their children to school, cannot get to their job in town and cannot get to a hospital after 10 millimetres of rain is a disgrace.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 8.08 pm to 8.23 pm

Mr COULTON—Before the suspension I was speaking about what I believed would be issues in this term of parliament. I think one of the issues that is relevant to my electorate that we are going to have to confront is the issue of mining and gas exploration and the coexistence of that and agricultural production. That is particularly difficult. There is a lot of emo-
tion and misinformation on all sides, and it is going to take a lot to sort through. Obviously Australia’s strength has been based on the fact that we can produce clean food and we have reasonably cheap energy. To have those two strengths in conflict is a difficult situation and something that we need to be working through. We need to be careful that we do not damage a long-term asset like agricultural land for a short-term gain, which is mineral extraction.

Another issue is, I believe, the issue of this parliament. I believe that the parliament should represent the 150 electorates of the members of the House of Representatives and of the senators. Unfortunately, due to the way the numbers are, some members seem to be having somewhat more influence than others. A word of warning to the government: they will rue the day that they give too much credence to the Greens. The Greens’ policies are damaging to our economy and they are certainly damaging to the people of my electorate and they fly in the face of what is good for our traditional constituents not only in my electorate but also in Labor seats. The low-income and fixed income earners and the small business owners are the ones who bear the brunt of Greens’ policies. The Greens are driven by an affluent group of people with very little skin in the game. There are no Greens who are going to lose their jobs or their position because of a restructure of the Murray-Darling and there are no Greens working at the cement plant at Kandos. I think as a parliament we need to exercise great caution.

You do not get to be a member of parliament, particularly in an area the size of mine, without a great group of people helping you. I would like to acknowledge my electoral council, particularly the chairman, Warwick Knight, the treasurer, Max Lell, and secretary Sarah Johnstone. I would also like to particularly acknowledge Peter Bartley. Peter Bartley is a campaign director extraordinaire who has no peer, I do not believe, in organisation. To organise 115 booths across 256,000 square kilometres is no mean task. The other people I would like to acknowledge are my staff. I run two offices—one in Dubbo and one in Moree. I have five full-time staff and two casual staff. They are the real people who do the work for the people of the Parkes electorate. A lot of the support that I managed to gain—indeed, with a much improved margin—was due to the good work of my staff in an unbiased and professional manner. I would like to thank them for the hard work that they do, working in two offices. Trying to run them as one office is not without its difficulties, and I would like to acknowledge the good work that they do.

The other people I would like to acknowledge are my family, particularly my wife Robyn who is a political campaigner extraordinaire. She will not rest if there is a door to knock on. Indeed, her reputation across the Parkes electorate somewhat supersedes mine. I believe if I went under a bus Robyn would get the job as the member for Parkes with no problem at all. She has given up her career. She is a full-time volunteer for the people of the Parkes electorate. She works for no pay and she travels with me wherever we are, whether we are in Canberra or in the electorate. She makes sure that the issues that I say I am going to follow up get followed up. I could not do the job without her support.

In conclusion, it is a great privilege to be a member of parliament. It is a great privilege to be the member for Parkes. I would not swap my electorate for any other. I look forward to representing my constituents and not only dealing with the issues but also driving an agenda that is going to recognise the great contribution that the people of Parkes have made and can continue to make to the welfare of this country.
Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (8.28 pm)—I take the opportunity to speak to the House on this address-in-reply to the Governor-General’s speech, which of course was delivered to the parliament on 28 September 2010, subsequent to the 21 August election. I just want to make the observation that it was a particular pleasure and of quite historical significance that, at the time of the Governor-General’s address, that we had a woman as the Governor-General and a woman as Prime Minister in that process.

I make no assessment, some of my colleagues in the room will be pleased to know, about the relative pros and consequences of either gender—I think they both have so much to offer. But in a representative democracy it was particularly encouraging to see two of the most significant national leadership positions held by women. It was a significant moment in history that I want to recognise.

I also want to take the opportunity to acknowledge some of the women who have not returned to this parliament with me. First of all, I want to acknowledge my colleague Jennie George, the former member for Throsby. Jennie and I had neighbouring electorates within a fairly well defined geographic area that had many issues in common. In fact, we worked pretty much as a two-person team—we were sometimes referred to as the ‘terrible twins of the Illawarra’. The boundary was fairly artificial for us, really, because many of the issues existed in both electorates. A classic example is the University of Wollongong, which sits in my electorate but services both electorates and has a workforce from across both electorates. Many issues were common to us. It is encouraging in those circumstances to have someone who works alongside you and advocates completely as a joint voice for the region. Sadly, sometimes people get a bit possessive and protective of their boundaries. Given that, as we know, electoral boundaries can move quite dramatically, it was a real pleasure for me to have a colleague like Jennie to always work together with. I miss her already and I wish her and Dennis well in their retirement. I am absolutely certain that it will not be a quiet retirement for Jennie George!

Mr Danby—The member for Melbourne Ports joins you.

Ms BIRD—I would like to acknowledge that my colleague the member for Melbourne Ports, who is in the chamber tonight, endorses my comments. I think everybody, including the Deputy Speaker, the member for Calwell, would agree. I extend to Jennie and Dennis my very best wishes.

There are two other women whom I became friends with in the last parliament and also miss. Sharryn Jackson was the Chair of the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations, of which I was a member and where I got to know her very well. The committee produced a report on the inquiry into pay equity, a significant proportion of which addressed issues such as the need for paid parental leave in this country. It was a groundbreaking report in that it actually had some significant outcomes. That, I think, reflects the great commitment of the Labor government to progress that issue. Sharryn put endless hours and great commitment into the committee and that report. I of course am not biased by her name when saying that she was a wonderful person. I acknowledge sadly to the House that the ‘Sharon group’ on our side is now down to two when we were very happy to be up to three. I pass on my very best wishes to Sharryn Jackson. I miss her companionship.

The other person I came to know and be good friends with was Kerry Rea, the member for Bonner. Kerry had the dubious pleasure to be seated next to me in the House when the par-
liament commenced. As she was a Queenslander we had not run across each other at all, so it was a great honour to get to know Kerry. She had a long, distinguished and, I think, very rewarding career in local government before she came to this place and brought a lot of life experience to her position as member of parliament. I think she can take great pride in what she achieved in this place over her term. I will also miss her companionship in this new parliament.

As is traditional, I would like to thank my electorate for its confidence in returning me to the seat of Cunningham at the election. Having made comment on the Governor-General and the Prime Minister, I might mention that, when I first sought to represent my party through our preselection processes in the Illawarra in the early nineties, I quite regularly got questions like, ‘How would a woman represent a steelmaking, coalmining area?’ At that point the electorate had never being represented by a woman at the elected level.

Perhaps they did not know my generation, but that was a bit like a red rag to a bull; it just made me more determined to break through those attitudes. I am very pleased to say that I never encounter that now. Jennie George was elected prior to my election and we have had the state members, Noreen Hay and Lilea McMahon, elected to the state parliament. It is not an issue anymore. I think it is very encouraging, particularly to young women in the area, to see that these sorts of issues are not seen as questions—it is about your capacity to do the role. I must say that having grown up with four brothers, I never quite understood how you would not be able to hold your own anyway. So I thank the electorate for their support at the most recent election and I am committed to continuing to progress both the local interests of the electorate and the national interest, which is important to us locally as well.

I also had a redistribution and picked up some new areas. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to represent the suburbs of Waterfall and Heathcote from the old seat of Hughes, and also the areas of Maianbar and Bundeena from the old seat of Cook. People have been very warm. It is a bit confusing at first when there is a redistribution and people are a bit uncertain about why it has happened and who is going to represent them, but they have certainly been very open and warm to me in giving me an opportunity to get to know them. As I said to them, I am committed to ensuring that they get good and effective representation in this parliament.

The Governor-General outlined the program of this government for this term and it is an ambitious reform agenda. It covers a range of areas that I think already have well-laid foundations because of what was done in our previous term, and in the short period since the election I have already seen some progress on them, particularly in the area of parliamentary reform. We are all living the reality of that day to day as we come to terms with the new operation of the parliament, but I think they were good reforms.

There are reforms to the transparency and integrity of the parliamentary process, including areas such as political donations. They are important issues that we continue to progress. Importantly, there is the proposal to amend the Australian Constitution to recognise First Australians. I think many of us look forward to that succeeding. There will no doubt be a debate about the manner and form in which that will occur. I just hope that that debate, unlike so many in the early days of this government, is conducted in a constructive and positive way to see the goal realised.
We will also acknowledge the role of local government. Given how closely so many of us worked, particularly during the period of the global financial crisis, with our local government authorities and colleagues to have them play a role in keeping jobs sustained in local communities, we must make sure that we all understand how important and significant they are. I think that is important.

There is a raft of economic reforms, including returning the budget to surplus by 2012-13; the introduction of the minerals resource rent tax, which I spoke about in the matter of public importance before the House today; the convening of a tax summit in 2011; and the increase in the superannuation guarantee from nine to 12 per cent. Sometimes I think we forget to remind people that one reason for the great resilience of our financial system is the significant savings of over $1 trillion that exist through the superannuation scheme. That is an important backbone to the financial system in Australia, and to increase it from nine to 12 per cent is important not only for the individuals who will retire with a more meaningful retirement income but also for the nation’s savings.

Additional reforms include the development of national standards for occupational health and safety, and the simplification of tax returns, which are already underway. Most significantly, and I will only touch on this because I have spoken on it on many occasions already, there is the rollout of the National Broadband Network with its capacity to transform our communities and regional economies.

There is also a raft of measures addressing costs of living, including increasing the frequency of the payment of the childcare rebate in order to make it a more financially manageable situation for families. There is also the thing that we all celebrate with great joy, the implementation of the historic Paid Parental Leave scheme from 1 January 2011—it is well and truly time that Australia caught up on that. Other measures include extending the education tax rebate, including one that I cheered loudly when I heard it during the election campaign: increasing family support for teenagers who are enrolled in school and vocational education. It is constantly raised with me that sometimes the most expensive years are the post-16 years, when you are still supporting your young people through education, and that the need for financial support for families during these years is the least recognised. So I certainly welcome that.

We also continue our reform agenda in education and training. In particular, we are developing more national consistency across our education system so there will be more transparency in the reporting process. Of course, key to that is the development of the national curriculum, the My School website extension into increasing transparency measures and a range of measures to support young people to actually stay on and complete their schooling. Only recently, the new member for Throsby, Stephen Jones, and I announced more than $3 million for trades training centres across three of our high schools that are in a consortium together. They are thrilled and you can see how significant that was to them. I take the opportunity in talking about that announcement to acknowledge that, while Stephen does not address the same gender issue that Jennie George did as my colleague, he is a wonderful addition to the team and has worked in great partnership. I look forward to, jointly with him, achieving a lot for both of our electorates. That scheme has been very welcome and it is one area where I could not believe the Leader of the Opposition’s targeting of cuts in the education sector. As a former teacher I may be biased, but I think there is no greater investment that you can make,
particularly in the high-school years when young people can get disengaged. It is very difficult to re-engage them.

Health and disability was a major area of reform in our last term, and that continues. I am working with local GPs at the moment to look at things like the development of the GP infrastructure grants that are available to upgrade GP clinics to provide an expanded range of services. We are also looking at the GP after hours hotline and meeting with local groups to talk about the rollout of mental health services across our electorate as part of the national reform in that area.

We also have the National Health and Hospitals Network program continuing. In my state of New South Wales the call has gone out for the local networks and the chairs of those have just been announced by the state government. Of course, we also have the Productivity Commission looking at a national disability insurance scheme—another big area of reform in terms of both health and income support for vulnerable people. There is a great deal to be done there as well.

I am particularly pleased with our commitment on regional development and I want to recognise the new Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon. Simon Crean, who is a passionate advocate for the importance of regions and their role in setting their futures. Indeed, he came to Wollongong for the Regional Development Australia Illawarra Branch annual conference, where all the key players and stakeholders in our region come together and, in a democratic way, determine the priorities for our region and how we will work on them. I have had a great deal of feedback already about the minister’s speech at the conference. People were really encouraged and enthused by his genuine commitment to regional development, and that message is important to keeping up their commitment and energy for the task. So I thank the RDA and all the key stakeholders who participated and the minister.

And then, of course, there is climate change. I believe that climate change is an opportunity for Australia—and I come from a mining and steelmaking town. I believe that climate change gives us the capacity to develop the technologies, the knowledge and the skills that the rest of the world will be seeking in the not-too-distant future to transform their own economies to a lower reliance on carbon. For us to get in ahead of the game is an opportunity, not a problem. It means that our innovative and clever tradespeople, researchers, inventors and manufacturing industry, which have done so well in transforming into competitive industries that are at the cutting edge, will have the opportunity—because the carbon pricing system that has been put in place will give the investment incentive—to become world leaders. I think that in 20 years time, if not sooner, we will be looking back and saying that these industries were established from that reform and they created the solid ground for the future.

I want to finish up by acknowledging that the work in my electorate goes on, as it always does for all of us. No member ever retires from this place saying, and certainly my colleague Jennie George reflected on this, ‘I’ve done everything; we’ve solved all the problems; my electorate and region are now well established; the job is done,’ and then handing a comfy sinecure to their successor. The task always continues. There are always new challenges. Our area in the Illawarra is no different. The new member for Throsby, Stephen Jones, and I are enthused about that. We have great confidence in our community pulling together to find solutions, creating opportunities, taking advantage of times and events, having faith in our young
people and working together until the end of this term—which I am sure will be a full term
given the stability of this new government—and then we will be able to say these are our
achievements and we will continue on with the task ahead in partnership with the community,
as is the case with all members, to not only achieve outcomes for those we are currently most
concerned about but also lay good foundations for the next generation. I look forward to those
challenges during this parliament.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (8.46 pm)—I take the opportunity in this debate on the ad-
dress-in-reply to the Governor-General’s speech firstly to talk about the recent election. For
the second election running, my electorate of Calare was vastly changed. In two elections we
have almost changed 100 per cent, having changed almost 50 per cent this time. I have had
the pleasure within my electorate of gaining places like Lithgow, Oberon and the part of
Bathurst I did not previously have. When you add that to Blayney, Orange, Charbon, Parkes
and Forbes, you probably have certainly the oldest, if not the best, agricultural country in Aus-
tralia. This is where agriculture and mining first started in Australia outside of the Sydney
basin. It is fairly safe to say that this is where mining and agriculture first got really serious.
Without doubt it is also some of the best grazing and cropping country in Australia. And this
area has the oldest towns. I think Bathurst was the first official town settled west of the Great
Dividing Range; Wellington, which is just outside the electorate, was the second, and Carcoar,
which is in the electorate of Calare and within the local government area of Blayney, was the
third.

I must express my thanks to the electors of Calare for returning me as the member so I can
once again have the honour to represent in this place our 98,000 voters or our 135,000 citi-
zens—men, women and children. Every time you come back after an election you think you
get older and more cynical, but I have never yet not taken a deep breath when I have taken an
oath on the bible to look after the electorate. That never changes, and it reminds you that you
have a responsibility beyond anything you have ever done in your life before.

The electorate of Calare faces some big issues. It is the gateway to western New South
Wales, but that gateway has a gate across it called the Blue Mountains. It also has an enor-
mous need for a freeway. Whether you live in Lithgow on the eastern edge of Calare or in
Broken Hill, which used to be in my old electorate when I was the member for Parkes, on the
western edge heading towards the South Australian border, everybody knows the same thing:
until a good, multi-lane freeway is put across the mountains, not only is Sydney constrained
from being able to expand beyond itself and relieve the pressure it is under, but so is western
New South Wales, whether it is the tablelands, the central west or the far west. Its expansion,
its development, is constrained by the fact that every big company knows a lot of things can
happen west of the mountains, but mentally they see it as a physical barrier. The fact is it is a
very ordinary road, whether it is the Bells Line of Road or the Great Western Highway
through Katoomba or through Bell. One is incredibly dangerous and the other is incredibly
slow. It is probably the biggest need not only for an electorate but for the whole of the western
New South Wales—that is, the need for the New South Wales and federal governments to
combine to make that happen. It must happen.

Without doubt the other big issue for the electorate of Calare is water. Not water for irriga-
tion so much. By and large that is dealt with by farm dams for horticulture and in the Forbes
shire irrigation happens out of the Lachlan River. It is an issue, even with what has happened
Whereas most dams are three-quarters or full, Wyangala Dam is not. It is still only just over 40 per cent. The Lachlan is a river that provides a lot for a lot of people. Even though it is not a river that contributes to the Murray-Darling Basin as such—it dissipates down below Booligal—it provides a lot of production and employment as well as a lifestyle for the people who live on it.

The water issues I really refer to are urban: they are development, they are mining and they are the general thrust of life. Bathurst has a very good dam due to the foresight of its local government and previous state governments. But for the western half of the electorate, a new dam is sorely needed. Yes, they can do short-term measures and pull out of the Macquarie River or the Lachlan River, but a new dam is needed because there are 20-odd possible mining developments to happen in the region. I am not talking about coal; I am talking about minerals which certainly need water for their development and their processing as it happens. Cadia mine and Northparkes mine are going to need water assurance in the future, as will the city of Orange, as will the local government areas of Cabonne and Blayney. These developments seriously need water, and once again that requires both state and federal governments to come to the party to put in a new dam. Obviously local governments can contribute towards it, and I certainly believe the mining industry will, without any hesitation, contribute to it, but we are talking serious money. We are probably talking upward of $200 million, but it has to be found to ensure the future development. It will ensure that when we do get a freeway through the mountains we are able to cater for the enormous expansion that will go to what I believe is probably the idyllic part of New South Wales, which also has wonderful wineries. The members from places like the Gold Coast would not realise the quality of wine that is grown in the tablelands of New South Wales. I should invite the member for Moncrieff into the heartland of Australia—the oldest part of agricultural and mining Australia. The last time I went to his electorate was to watch St George beat the Gold Coast. However we will not go into that.

Mr Ciobo—That was the time before.

Mr JOHN COBB—No, it was the last time I was there. I have mentioned probably the two biggest issues—water and the need for a freeway across the Great Dividing Range, not just for the sake of western New South Wales but also for the sake of Sydney, and that should include rail. Speaking as somebody who has lived their whole life west of the Great Dividing Range, I believe it would be fair to say that, almost without exception, all the people who live in that 80 per cent or more of New South Wales—in whichever electorate it may be—are dependent on its mining, agriculture, forestry and transport. Those are the primary industries supporting it. Whether it is in the coal mines of Lithgow, in forestry at Oberon or in the agricultural industries at Bathurst, people tell me I must go to Canberra and ensure that the Greens do not put an end to what western New South Wales stands for. Without a doubt there is a fear of the Greens holding power in Canberra. Probably the biggest talking point from day one of the last election is the fact that the Greens might hold power. In order the Greens seem to hate mining, forestry, agriculture and then transport.

My phone ran hot the day the local Green said we had to take away any fuel rebates for the trucking industry, get B-doubles off the road and put everything on rail. Do they really think that, in Orange, Cobar, Lithgow or anywhere else for that matter, a train is going to run goods to Woollies or Coles? Of course, those goods have got to go out on trucks. That is the most
crazy thing I have ever heard. The Greens hate forestry, whether you grow it or whether it is native forest you cut down which you let regenerate or you replant. The Greens hate agriculture because we use the soil to grow food to feed people. The Greens hate mining because we dig up coal, copper or gold. Where I come from people are not stupid. They know they want to be warm and they know they want to be able to see at night. They are only going to be able to do that if we use coal. Anyone who thinks we are going to feed and clothe the world, keep people warm and give them something to see by at night from just using renewables is living in a dream world. I think most of us know that.

People in western New South Wales have heard some of the crazy Green suggestions of things we should do—including a carbon tax. It is easy for me to stand up for somebody who is not prepared to wear that, who is not prepared to see mining go, who is not prepared to see forestry go, who is not prepared to see agriculture go. You do wonder sometimes where people are coming from and you do wonder sometimes whether they think human beings should exist.

Calare is a unique and wonderful place to live. There are not many places better than my part of the world. I started in politics having one-third of New South Wales, almost 300,000 square kilometres. The electorate of Calare has come down to just over 30,000. I have gone from the South Australian border to the Great Dividing Range as a result of various redistributions. There are very few people, I suspect, who know western New South Wales and all its various aspects better than I do. I am incredibly proud to still be there and to still be a member of the National Party and the coalition.

I do believe that very few people who come into this place are bad people. We believe in what we believe in, and I believe in rural and regional Australia and I believe in my country. But I very much believe that in places like Calare, western New South Wales—any regional part of Australia—we are just part of Australia and sometimes we have to look at the good in everybody rather than just our own. By the same token, health services are not as good outside the major cities, be it Melbourne—where Deputy Speaker Vamvakinou’s electorate is—or Sydney or Perth. Without doubt, health is the biggest issue facing politics today, and Calare is no different. We are lucky to have Orange, which has the only serious medical centre west of the Blue Mountains. However, the small hospitals have to be maintained.

I believe that our policy of empowering locals to have a say, rather than simply having bureaucrats making decisions, is absolutely essential. I would guess that New South Wales and Queensland are the two parts of Australia that have suffered most from governments deciding that everything had to be done on a large scale to allow bureaucrats to move things as they saw fit—rather than allowing the people who suffer from a lack of hospitals and a lack of medical services to have a say.

I remember when I jackarooed in Queensland, quite a long time ago, I thought that Queensland had one of the best medical systems in Australia. That is no longer true, just as New South Wales certainly has the worst medical system in Australia. When I think that Orange, which is over the Blue Mountains, has a small helicopter which is not winch-equipped, is allowed to fly only in daylight, and is an hour’s flying time from the serious centres of Sydney, and Wollongong, which is 12 minutes flying time from Sydney, has a large helicopter and gets fewer calls than Orange gets, I realise the level to which New South Wales Health has sunk in a political sense. It is more important that Wollongong, with all of its safe state Labor seats,
gets something it does not need before Orange gets something it does need. Orange has to look after everywhere out to Cobar, 600 kilometres west.

I am still shocked and I still get very angry when I think about the cancer centres of excellence that were set up by the Rudd Labor government to look after rural, regional and remote Australia and the fact that Gosford was preferred to the whole of western New South Wales to have a cancer centre of excellence. I have no problem with Gosford having the best medical services they can have. But Gosford is only one hour from Newcastle and one hour from Sydney—probably less than that—and yet everywhere from Lithgow to Cobar, in fact from Broken Hill, went without. To me that is about as bad and as political as medicine can ever get. It is something that the Rudd government will be forever shamed on, and it was simply because they wanted to keep the marginal seat of Robertson. They did not give one cent of that money to an area 10 times the size and with a far greater population.

I will finish by saying that I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the issues that matter to my electorate—but not just my electorate. I consider myself a member for western New South Wales and for regional Australia generally. I also consider myself a good Australian when I need to be. But health is an enormous issue. Hospitals are an enormous issue. Forbes and Parkes have been promised new hospitals but have been sort of put on the back burner and they do not know when that is going to happen. We have lost private hospitals in Bathurst. Thank heaven we do have a new hospital being built in Orange, because Orange is the only serious medical centre west of the Great Divide, and it needs to be.

The rain since Christmas has breathed new life into western New South Wales. Until the last election, I had the most drought-affected electorate in the whole of Australia—without doubt since 2001 or 2002, when this drought really started. To see that country come alive, as it has, is enormous for the whole of western New South Wales. I should add that I hope nobody forgets that rain is not money; rain gives the opportunity to earn it. All of those farmers and their communities, whether people own a pharmacy or whether they work in the local supermarket, are totally affected by what happens to the agricultural situation around them. None of them have made money yet; they have only had the opportunity to make it. The rain that has come has already resulted in enormous losses with the best crops in a decade in Central Queensland, and that looks like it is happening in northern New South Wales. It is a cruel jest that Mother Nature has played for the last decade. There will be a lot of grain. I just hope that it is grain that can be sold to sustain the local community.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (9.06 pm)—It is a privilege and an honour to be back in this place after the last federal election. I take this opportunity to put on the public record my thanks to the good people of Franklin for putting their faith in me as their federal representative for a second term. I was humbled and overwhelmed by the confidence that the electors in Franklin showed in me on election day, with a swing towards Labor not just in the seat of Franklin but also in the state of Tasmania. My promise to the electors of Franklin is the same as it was in 2007 when I was elected: I will work hard and be a strong voice for them, both locally and here in Canberra. Over the past three years I have delivered a significant investment across Franklin that I believe has made a real difference to the lives of local people.

In 2007, in my first speech in this place, I talked about southern Tasmania feeling as though it had been left out in comparison to northern Tasmania. Certainly the investment in southern
Tasmania since that time has been redressed. Investments are now occurring on a needs basis for the strategic and economic benefit of all Tasmanians. I am particularly proud of the more than $200 million which has been invested in my electorate in health, education, transport and community infrastructure. I am proud to have delivered, over a three-year period, all of the election commitments I made to local people in the 2007 election. Most construction is well underway or commitments have been fully delivered. Construction of the Kingston bypass, which is a major project in the south of my electorate, is well underway and due for completion in 2012. It is a major bypass and work has been underway for some time. Significant progress has been made. There is also the beginning of the construction of the Clarence GP superclinic. We copped a bit of flak about a year or so ago from my Liberal Senate opponent in the electorate who said it was just a big, empty hole. We said construction was about to happen and, sure enough, construction is now well underway and due to be completed early next year.

I also lobbied really hard to deliver a trade training centre for the people of the Huon Valley. Construction of that will commence very soon as part of Labor’s election commitments from 2007. There is also the Huon Valley Water Scheme. I turned the first sod on 29 June this year. There was $12 million of federal government money towards a $30 million project to deliver secure water supplies for the residents of Huonville, Franklin, Cygnet and Geeveston. For some it was the first time they had a secure water supply.

There was also the Clarence water recycling scheme. We have construction of a major pipe underway and there is construction of a dam also underway. So there have been many significant improvements in the local electorate. Of course, that is without any of the stimulus money that was put into the electorate. Two of the projects under the Community Infrastructure Program that I know have been well received by local residents are the Bellerive oval lights project and the Kingborough twin ovals project, let alone all of the Building the Education Revolution projects.

Certainly in Tasmania, and in every school I have been to in my electorate, the Building the Education Revolution has been very well received by the school community, both students and teachers alike. In fact, during the last non-sitting week I opened four BER projects in my electorate and every single one of them was very well received. It was fantastic to see the children in these new facilities and some of the wonderful things that are occurring in them with some of the new equipment, such as the interactive whiteboards and the new computers, that people are using for the first time in some of those classrooms. It has certainly led to some innovation in some of the teaching.

Of course, there has also been some social housing in my electorate which was also very well received, and the NBN rollout was a big factor in the election in Tasmania. Tasmania is, of course, the first state to receive the NBN rollout. We have even got the state Liberal Party supporting the NBN rollout in Tasmania. Their leader, Will Hodgman, is supportive of the NBN rollout. Indeed, we have had an admission from Liberal Senator Eric Abetz that the NBN was a factor in the federal election in Tasmania. The reason that it was a factor in Tasmania is that it has actually been turned on in three suburbs or cities in Tasmania—in Smithton, Midway Point and Scottsdale, which are stage 1.

It was my pleasure to be there with the Prime Minister, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and the Premier when it was turned on on 12 August of
this year, during the election campaign. It was amazing to see firsthand how some of this technology will work. We spoke to a woman by the name of Peggy who was using the NBN to help her manage her health issues. One of things that Peggy said that really hit home to me was that it was like having a friend in her home, having this equipment that allowed her to manage her condition from her own home. She could contact the health professionals that she needed with the touch of a button. It was fabulous to see.

We also saw some of the students in the classrooms via the NBN and some of the advantages that will have for innovative education. The NBN is about more than just faster downloads. It will change the way we deliver health services in hospitals and in people's homes. It will change the way doctors and clinicians engage with patients, and there are many initiatives that will improve primary and preventative health care. It will also, of course, deliver particularly well for areas like Tasmania and rural and regional Australia. It is really important that people start to understand the concept that this is not just about broadband and faster speeds; it is actually about better government service delivery and it is about better services for rural and remote communities. It will drive innovation in many of the areas of health, education and e-commerce. So there are many advantages to the NBN rollout.

During the election campaign we also heard from many of my constituents about some of the concerns that they had. One of the concerns that I heard very clearly at the doors in the electorate was the concern about Tony Abbott becoming Prime Minister. It was a real fear in my electorate because they associated that with cuts to health, cuts to education, cuts to the trade training centre—that was a particularly big one in Huonville—and cuts to computers in schools. They were also really concerned about the wind-back of the NBN, as I said. People were fearful, and we saw in Tasmania a swing towards the Labor Party; the largest in the country. It was very clear that there was something a little bit different going on in Tasmania.

The other thing that was really important in Tasmania was the historic pension reform that Labor did in our first term. There is a larger majority of Tasmanians that are reliant on government support payments, and certainly an increase in the pension and that pension reform ongoing into the long term will benefit many Tasmanians. I am sure that the people in my electorate who have contacted me are very pleased with that reform.

The other things that I wanted to talk about are some of the election commitments that I made during the campaign. One of the things that we talked about during the campaign was the trade training centre, which was from the 2007 trade training centres commitment. One will be under construction in the Huon Valley later this year. The Liberal Party did actually commit to it in the last week or so of the campaign, which I know was very satisfying for the local community because they were then free to understand that, regardless of who won, that trade training centre would be built. It is very much needed in that local community.

One of the other things that I campaigned on was Centrelink services for the people of Kingston. Kingston is a very fast-growing municipality, and at the moment they do not have a Centrelink office. We had a petition for Centrelink services to be delivered in Kingston. We announced that Centrelink services would be delivered via a co-location with the Medicare office—one person being available there, and two kiosks. We hope to have that up and running by 1 July next year. We are in discussions with the minister about getting that delivered as quickly as we can.
We also have an election commitment for $2 million for the planning works to commence on the intersection between the East Derwent and Tasman highways to improve safety for local residents. This commitment has been very popular with local residents. There is a real safety issue in accessing the Tasman Highway from the East Derwent Highway on the eastern shore of Hobart. Those planning works will begin next year. There will be further money coming from the next round of the nation-building investment in infrastructure in Tasmania. We understand that the project in total will cost around $15 million. We look forward to working with the state government to be able to deliver on that one.

There is over $200,000 for ‘save the suburbs’ projects across the Kingborough and Clarence municipalities: $80,000 for lighting in the Clarence Aquatic Centre car park, Warrane Green Belt Park, Stanley Park and Astor Park for safety for children and families of an evening, which as we know is pretty important; $75,000 for lighting in the Kingborough Sports Centre car park; $50,000 for CCTV in the Kingborough CBD; and $20,000 for solar lighting for Kingborough War Memorial Park. These are local commitments that were very well received by local residents, and we look forward to making announcements in the future on when that money will be available so that these projects can go ahead.

I have talked about the result in Tasmania, but we all know that the result nationally delivered a minority government, the re-elected Gillard government. We want to deliver a stable, effective and secure government over the next three years and we have been working with the independents and the Greens in relation to securing a stable government. As we have seen in the last few weeks that has worked quite well so far. I am looking forward to working with the Prime Minister to ensure that that continues to go well and that the people of my electorate receive their fair share of the nation’s funds and the nation’s commitment in terms of access to ministers and access to resources.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank a few people from the campaign. Of course, that starts with my family. As all of us in this place know, you cannot do this job without a supportive family. As a parent of three children, I know that that has its particular challenges. I want to thank my children, Lochie, Xandy and Georgie, for their continued support. My daughter has moved from wanting mum to no longer be an MP to hoping that I might last long enough for her to vote for me in her first federal election. That is certainly progress. Of course I want to thank my husband and partner, Ian. We are celebrating our 10th wedding anniversary next year. Ian has been a great support to me in this job and I certainly could not do it without him.

I want to thank my loyal and dedicated staff, who have been working exceptionally hard for me over that period. I get a lot of feedback from the local community about the quality of my staff and about the services they provide to the local community when I am unavailable. Their commitment to the electorate and to me has been overwhelming, and I want to thank them all sincerely for their efforts in the campaign, for their continued efforts and for their efforts over the last three years. I want to say thank you to my campaign team, especially my campaign manager and long-time friend, Labor senator Carol Brown, who has been my friend now for 26 years. She is a great campaign manager. She is very difficult to say no to, which I think is totally the point of a campaign manager. She worked very hard during that campaign, as did the many volunteers, the doorknockers, the people who put up posters, the people who delivered letters, the people who worked on stalls and the people who worked on polling day.
handing out how to votes. I thank them all very sincerely—because, as we know, you cannot do this job without all that support.

Finally, I also want to acknowledge and pay tribute to Duncan Kerr, who held the seat of Denison for 23 years. Duncan was a senior government minister during the Hawke and Keating years and made a very valuable contribution to the people of Denison and in fact to the parliament and to the intellectual rigour in terms of policy on this side of the House during those 23 years. I have known Duncan for a very long time. In fact, his campaign in 1987 was the first federal election campaign that I ever worked on. I will certainly miss Duncan and I think this place is a better for having had Duncan here as the federal member for Denison.

It is certainly a privilege and a challenge to stand for office. As I said at the beginning, I promise my constituents that I will continue to be a strong voice for them. To all those electors who put their great faith in me, I will not let you down.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before I call the honourable member for Moncrieff, I will congratulate the parliamentary secretary on her forthcoming 10th wedding anniversary. I call the honourable member for Moncrieff.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (9.20 pm)—I am certainly pleased to have the opportunity to rise to speak on this address-in-reply to the Governor-General’s address. I have the very fantastic privilege of representing again, for what is now my fourth term, the people of Moncrieff, based on the Gold Coast.

The story of the Gold Coast is one I have told in this parliament on many occasions. It is a story about a city that has grown rapidly in the last 50 years. It has been Australia’s fastest-growing city for around three decades and it is forecast to continue to be one of Australia’s fastest-growing cities. It is a city that has been built off the back of the effort, sweat and contribution of people who have been willing to roll up their sleeves and to really attempt to realise their dreams with respect to both enterprise and the social infrastructure that they would like to see in a city like the Gold Coast.

It is a colourful city, comprised of a great mix of people, all of whom have got a story to tell and have come from diverse parts of this country and, indeed, diverse parts of the globe. From my perspective, to have such a unique opportunity to represent them in this, the pinnacle of our democracy, our nation’s federal parliament, is truly a wonderful, wonderful privilege. I am very, very grateful for the trust that the people of my electorate put in me.

The last federal election was certainly the most hotly contested election that I have been a part of. As someone who has been a student of politics for nearly 20 years, the last federal election was one where we knew that both the Labor government and the coalition thought that it was going to be a tight election. That is the reason that there was so much focus and emphasis placed upon the respective policy positions that were enunciated by the leaders of our two major political parties. That is the reason that people took particular interest in the vision, the goals and the direction that the two leaders, Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott, were attempting to take our nation.

For me, it was also a chance to maturely contribute to the development of policy on behalf of the coalition in the shadow portfolio role that I had at the time with respect to tourism, the arts, youth and sport. That too was a great opportunity and indeed a privilege. To have seen policy positions I had worked on over a number of years developed in collaboration with
stakeholders and interested parties from around Australia and to have the opportunity to feed
that into what I hoped was relevant policy that would be of benefit not only locally in my own
electorate but also more broadly across the country was something that excited me. It was a
privilege to have the opportunity to be on the front line when it came to campaigning not only
again in my seat of Moncrieff but also in a number of seats across the country and to have the
chance to be an advocate for change and reform that I believed was warranted, based on the
hundreds and hundreds of conversations that I had had with interested parties throughout the
time. This was for me a unique aspect, one I had not encountered previously in the 2010 fed-
eral election.

But we know now from history that the outcome was a minority government. We know
now that the Independents chose to go with the Australian Labor Party. I think at this point it
is opportune to reflect on what that means both in the government’s performance in its previ-
ous term and in the government’s performance in its current term. The address that was deliv-
ered by the Governor-General—instructed by the government of the day and in particular, of
course, the Prime Minster—outlined Labor’s plans for the future of this nation.

It has been remarked that when you change a government you change the fate of the nation.
That is certainly the case, because we saw in 2007 at the federal election the handover of
power after 12 years from the coalition to the Australian Labor Party. We saw a profound
change move across the country—a profound change that in many respects was not antici-
pated. The reason it was not anticipated was that at the 2007 election the then leader of the
Australian Labor Party, the federal member for Griffith, Kevin Rudd, said that he was basic-
ally a conservative when it came to economics and that he was essentially going to continue
many of the policies of the former Howard government—with some notable exceptions of
course, the Work Choices policy being one of them.

What transpired over the previous parliament was a Labor agenda that has been rolled out
across this nation the impact of which was compounded by the global financial crisis which
took place. We saw, under the cloak of the global financial crisis, a rhetoric emerge from the
leadership group of the Australian Labor Party that really fitted with what the Prime Minister
at that point described as almost a social democratic compact. We saw the evolution of gov-
ernment in this country to an even bigger behemoth. We saw government look at the introduc-
tion of new taxes. We saw government go on a spending spree that this country had not seen
since World War II.

As a direct consequence of this Labor government we saw a situation now where Australia
moved from being in a net asset position with having built up large surpluses and stockpiles
of taxpayers’ funds to ensure that we had money available to invest, for example, with our
Higher Education Endowment Fund, with money being made available for hospitals and for
Medicare and with the Commonwealth finally starting to meet some of its unmet liabilities
through the Future Fund. These were crucial funds that the previous coalition government
worked on but within the course of less than 24 months the Labor Party undid a decade of
good work. Within the course of 24 months the Labor Party had spent the entire surplus, had
spent the money that had been saved up for a whole raft of different initiatives such as higher
education and Medicare, and the Labor Party presided over a sharp increase in the unem-
ployment rate which saw the unemployment rate move from its record 33-year low of 3.9 per
cent upwards towards six per cent.
That was the legacy of this Australian Labor Party. That was what Labor’s achievement was, cloaked at the time with so many hollow promises that were delivered to the Australian people. We saw a government that went to the Australian people and said: ‘We will do something about grocery prices. We will do something about fuel prices. We will do something about the cost of living.’ What did they actually do? Apart from political posturing they did very little. What we saw was a failed Fuelwatch, a failed GroceryWatch and a raft of other announcements like that, all of which were quickly jettisoned.

So in 2010 it did not particularly surprise me that only weeks out from election day our Prime Minister said to the Australian people that she had no plans to introduce a carbon tax and indeed would not be doing it. What do we now see less than two months after the election? We see that firmly on the agenda is a committee focused on the introduction of a carbon tax.

We know that this centre-left Prime Minister with a centre-left cabinet, controlled in many respects by a Greens party that is now emerging as a very influential force when it takes the balance of power in the Senate as of 1 July next year, has a focus on a profound change to the structure of this country. We saw that this Labor government had a plan to tax the goose that had, for this nation, laid the golden egg. Our mining and resources industry is not something that we ought to take for granted. Australia’s mining and resources industry is an industry that has been achieved through the risk of capital and the effort of men and women to ensure that Australia is being competitive in some respects and able to supply our natural resources globally. That is very much under threat now by a government that has spent so much money in such a short period of time that it is now required to put up taxes to try to overcome the fact that it has such a huge deficit that needs to be turned around.

I must say that in the long term, when I as the father of a 23-month-old consider that Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard are responsible for him now having a share of public debt worth some $7,000 or $9,000, I really wonder what right the Australian Labor Party believes it has to put future generations of Australians into debt. It is nothing if not the height of selfishness that the Australian Labor Party believes it is justified in ramming this country into substantial debt and deficit to pursue its social outcomes. It is arrogance to leave the hard lifting to those that will follow. I think it is a great shame that the Australian Labor Party was successful when it came to saying to the Australian people that it could for all intents and purposes do what it wanted and we would worry about the ramifications and repercussions down the track. That, to me, is a form of government that I believe the Labor Party should be ashamed of.

I think it is simply unacceptable that in debates in the parliament, for example, we have Australian Labor Party members that would stand up and speak of projects in their electorates, crow about how they were supplying this school hall or undertaking this building activity or that rollout of pink batts or broadband, and say to the Australian people, ‘If you don’t want it, vote for the coalition.’ The reality is that there is an asterisk after every one of those offers, and the asterisk that was behind every single one of those statements that were made by the Australian Labor Party was that there was a debt associated with that as well.

More recently, I went to the opening of a new school hall that Labor paid for under its Building the Education Revolution program and that the Labor senator at the time stood up and spoke and crowed about, saying what vision it was to have invested in this particular school project. When I had the opportunity to speak to those children at that school hall and to
speak to the parents of those children, I made one point very clearly. I said to them that they should utilise that hall as much as possible, because the children that sat on the floor below the stage, in grades 6 and 7, are the children that are going to be repaying the debt on that hall for the next decade or more. They are the children who will have to spend a decade or more repaying the largesse of this government before they are even at the point where they are able to start to invest their taxpayers’ dollars in future infrastructure. When you consider that for 12 years we attempted to pay off $96 billion of Labor Party debt, and in two years the Australian Labor Party has ramped that debt back up to around $95 billion, that is the legacy that ought to be challenged head on.

I think that, in the fullness of time, the Australian people will judge the latest iterations of Labor’s so-called nation-building projects very harshly. As to the single largest project, the National Broadband Network that Labor is looking at rolling out—a $43 billion network that, for all intents and purposes, nationalises telecommunications in this country again, running contrary to the last 100 years of experience around the globe—they too will question the wisdom of that decision.

I do not dispute for one moment that there are political points to be gained in promising all things to all people. I do not dispute that the Labor Party love walking around their electorates and other electorates saying what visionaries they are for building the National Broadband Network. But I do dispute one thing. In the fullness of time, as this nation, mired in debt, is forced to make hard decisions about what we will do without so we can start to repay the debt, just so we can get back to zero, people will not be quite as grateful as the Labor Party would like them to be.

I come from a services based city. The Gold Coast is a city that does not have government departments. It is built on the free enterprise of its people. It is the small business capital of this nation. It is a city that is built on property development and, as I said, the tourism industry. For our city, the current spending of the Labor government is nothing but bad news. Our city is unlike other parts of this nation where there is a focus on resources, energy and agriculture—the industries and sectors of the economy that are performing relatively strongly. The people of cities like the Gold Coast, which have no agricultural, mining or resource benefits, are the ones who pay the price. In the economic framework as it is at present, we have the Reserve Bank consistently saying that it needs to do something about wage-price inflation and about the more rigid deregulation of the labour force—which in the longer term will also force up wages and cause wage-price inflation to spiral upwards. The consequence is that the Reserve Bank is rapidly putting up interest rates. We have seen six or seven interest-rate increases in the past 12 or so months.

To compound the problem, we have seen the banks move well and truly beyond the official cash rate increase that the Reserve Bank has imposed. Every time that happens, a city like the Gold Coast, with no benefits from agriculture, mining or resources, does it even tougher, because if the Australian dollar goes up, thanks to the interest-rate increases, we are less competitive when it comes to tourism. And, with every interest-rate increase, there is less aggregate demand for the property development industry and less demand for the services industry across the coast. This—and I will certainly reflect on these remarks years from now—I believe is the legacy that, unfortunately, the Gold Coast will need to overcome.

MAIN COMMITTEE
With respect to the actual campaign, I cannot thank enough the hundreds and hundreds of volunteers who came out to man my booths in Moncrieff on election day. To those who laboured for long, long hours, both on election day itself and prior to that at pre-polling, I say a very heartfelt and sincere thank you. I had a fantastic campaign team: Kylie Hart was my campaign director and Nick McAlpine was my campaign manager. These two staff members made all the difference to me. They were dedicated, well and truly beyond anything that I would ask of them—dedicated to the belief that we needed a change of government to get Australia back on the right track. For their hard work and their constant, seven-days-a-week work for the entire duration of the campaign—as well as, of course, all the weekends prior to that—I say thank you. I thank Alistair Mitchell, my adviser in the shadow tourism portfolio I had. Alistair was a source of invaluable advice for me on all matters related to policy and matters political. I simply cannot thank him enough for his dedication, not only to his role but also to me. I thank Mike Bruce, my local media adviser and also portfolio media adviser, for his great work, though he had only been with the team for a relatively short period of time. And of course I thank Helen Lewis, my office manager, for her contribution to the campaign.

In addition, I must thank my family—in particular my wife, Astra, and my little son, Asher. I do what I do because I sincerely believe that it makes a difference. I particularly hope it will make a difference in Asher’s life as he grows up. As all of us in this parliament know, our spouses truly are the ones who do the heavy lifting. I simply want to put on record my heartfelt and sincere thanks to Astra for all the nights when she is by herself, for the times when even when I am home it is only for a fleeting moment and for all the times when she, frankly, puts up with demands that I put on her which are well and truly beyond what would be considered reasonable. Finally, to my family more broadly—my mum and dad and everybody who came down to help on the campaign—I give a very heartfelt and serious thankyou to you as well.

Although the coalition was unsuccessful, falling just short of what was required for victory at this election, I fervently believe that we laid in place the framework and did the ground-work required to ensure that at the next federal election we will, I hope, emerge victorious.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before I call the next speaker, I remind all honourable members of the provisions of standing order 64, which provides that people ought not to refer to other members by their names and ought to refer to their titles or electorates.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing and Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport) (9.41 pm)—Like all members in this place in the debate on the address-in-reply, I particularly want to thank my constituency of Ballarat for again giving me the great privilege of representing them in this parliament. The 2010 election was a very memorable one. For me personally, it was the first time that I have faced an election while also running a household with a two-year-old. I have great sympathy for the member for Moncrieff and for his partner.

The election was also memorable in the sense that I think that, if any election showed just how stark the differences are in this fantastic country of ours, it was this one. Victorian representatives often felt during the course of the election campaign that to some extent we were in a very different place to Queensland as we watched some of the news that was unfolding. Certainly the results in my home state of Victoria, in Tasmania and in South Australia often point
to those differences. After the election campaign, it is important to remember our incredible responsibilities as members of parliament, whether in opposition or government, to ensure that this country remains united—where debate is welcomed but where we are all respectful of each other. As we go forward in this quite different parliament, it is important for us to continue to respect each other.

It is a very challenging time. Within this parliament, the Labor Party is very proud to have been able to form and deliver a strong and stable government. The agreements that we have reached with the crossbenches allow for that strong and stable government and I certainly look forward to working with members and senators to ensure that this nation is represented well and that we continue to respect each other in this place.

The election was very hard fought across Australia and on the ground locally. The people across the electorate of Ballarat have again given me the opportunity to represent them. They voted to support a member of the Australian Labor Party to represent them, their families and their communities. I can tell them absolutely that the result in the electorate of Ballarat is not taken for granted. It follows long hours of effort and a commitment to represent the people of my electorate with all the energy and intellect I can muster. I do not take this privilege for granted and I constantly reflect on the importance of the role of a member of parliament and what that represents in our community.

I would particularly like to thank my campaign team for their hard work. They are a tremendous group of volunteers who believe very strongly in the Labor cause but also believe in and have committed to working for me. I would also like to thank my staff, who have been tireless, obviously not just during the course of election campaigns but with all the many, many hours of work they have to do well and truly beforehand. Working for politicians is not just a job; it is absolutely a cause. I know that their families feel that very much as well.

I most of all thank the people who live across the diverse community of the Ballarat electorate. It is a very diverse community. It includes the springs and spa country of beautiful Hepburn and Daylesford, the historic goldmining towns of Clunes, Creswick and Ballarat itself and the thriving destination for young families that is Bacchus Marsh and Darley. The electorate also includes a number of other lively communities in Ballan, Trentham, Blackwood, Myrniong, Learmonth and Elaine to name just a few. It is a very diverse electorate and at times the calls that come to my electorate office reflect the diversity of views and opinions that come from across the country.

It is true that through the hard work of families in these communities and the responsible economic management of the Gillard government we have tackled the global financial crisis. Over recent years, families across the communities have faced significant challenges. People pulled together and they worked alongside the Gillard government in the rollout of the economic stimulus to support jobs and to grow infrastructure. That hard work is developing into long-term prosperity for regional and rural townships. Benefits are flowing to families and to businesses, but it is still slow.

As we head into the Christmas season and hear from retailers about what is happening within their sector, we should remember that despite the fact that we have managed to weather the global financial crisis we are not out of the woods yet. I heard the Leader of the Opposition try and dismiss the global financial crisis as a six-week nonevent when he said that it really did not matter too much to people. I can tell him well and truly of the thousand people...
who lost their jobs in my community and the 42 workers who lost their jobs just recently with the closure of Hilton Fabrics and of the absolute fear that many companies within my own constituencies have as private sector investment has not started to flow. I absolutely know and understand and get why the government put in place an economic stimulus package and why this package continues to be important. I find it quite extraordinary at times listening to the opposition, as they just do not seem to quite understand that and do not understand how important those economic stimulus packages have been, particularly for regional and rural communities.

One of the things that I am very proud of which led us into the election was that we promised and delivered on our commitment to abolish Work Choices. It was a draconian set of industrial relations legislation and the importance of that reform has not only put fairness back into workplaces but also shown an understanding of the need for productivity and the need for good, sound workplace relations to stimulate economic growth. This is something I am very proud of, and I am very proud to be part of a government that has done that and has also today announced and delivered on its election promise of extending and improving the GEERS arrangements for unemployed workers. I think that has been a long time coming. In fact, I remember almost nine years ago asking my first question in this place about it, so I am delighted to be part of a government that does understand the need to support industry and also the desperate need to support workers when things go wrong.

I am also very proud that we delivered on a major pension reform by increasing the base rate of the pension. We went even further in our support for pensioners by implementing higher indexation measures to better reflect pensioners’ actual expenses. These two measures have seen pensioners receive increases of around $115 per fortnight for singles and $97 per fortnight for couples combined. We understood the poverty being experienced by people on pensions and we did something about it. We did not just talk about it, we did not just despair about it and we did not just say it was too hard. We did something about it. We can argue that people continue to live in poverty and continue to have difficulties as expenses rise, but Labor stepped up and increased the base rate of the pension. That is on the budget for ever as a net cost to the budget, and that is incredibly important for those people.

I am also very proud of the reforms we have undertaken in education. I know it is easy for the opposition to try and dismiss the Building the Education Revolution; unfortunately they have got some traction in the Australian about that. It has been an extraordinary program. I have had the privilege of being able to open some of those BER projects certainly over the course of the last few weeks, and they have absolutely transformed many of the schools I have worked within. The program has not just transformed the buildings themselves; it has transformed the way in which education is being conducted in those schools. These are schools that have never had libraries before; that have never had electronic whiteboards. This is the case particularly with some of the small rural schools that might have only 15-17 students. They are now able to offer the same standard of educational experience that their larger school counterparts can provide in inner city and regional centre schools.

These sorts of improvements will make an enormous difference to the opportunities that are being provided to the young people in those primary schools, whether they be in the public education system or the Catholic system or are other independent schools. This will mean that we are leaving a lasting legacy for a generation of children and providing an opportunity...
for a generation of children which will hopefully see them do better than many of their counterparts have done in the past.

I have talked to all of the builders in my own community, and what the BER did was ensure that there was work for these kids’ parents so they stayed employed through the global financial crisis. It also left behind a lasting legacy for the children. In my own district we invested $116 million in local schools. That is a huge amount of money in a regional community when private sector spending had absolutely dried up. That has made an enormous difference and, again, it has left a lasting legacy of new primary school classrooms, school halls, libraries, computer infrastructure and a science and language centre at one of our secondary schools. It has been a great delight to see how that opportunity has been embraced in the school communities in my own district. A lot of the school communities, particularly in the Catholic education system, have been saying, ‘We had this on the wish list but we thought it would be 10 years down the track before we would ever be able to finish the project.’ I absolutely put on the record my thanks to the Prime Minister for this investment—it has made a real difference in my area.

In the area of infrastructure, we have made enormous investments in roads in my district. People who drive down the Western Highway will see that Anthonys Cutting is well under way and well ahead of schedule. The $160 million for that has been part of the Nation Building Program, and it will achieve a number of outcomes in terms of both road safety and relieving the infrastructure bottleneck that has meant that many freight companies have been finding it very difficult to commercially use that route as much as they would like. We have also provided some $404 million for the duplication of the Western Highway from Ballarat to Stawell, and that project has also started. This work will be of enormous benefit to those communities to the east of my electorate, on the Western Highway, who rely on that road for all of their employment and also for the economic trade that occurs along that route. It is a huge investment of over half a billion dollars in the Western Highway alone, which affects the entire community of my electorate. This is only a snapshot of the commitment to infrastructure that the Gillard government has put into my electorate.

It is important in this address-in-reply debate, as we start a new parliament, to look at what else we need to do in the future. It is clear in my constituency that the global financial crisis has not finished. Many private sector companies in the building industry are still very concerned about where their next pipeline of jobs is going to come from. We are slowly starting to see a rebuilding of that, but clearly there are lots of pressures, particularly in a town that is heavily reliant on manufacturing for employment and has to look at diversifying its economic base continuously in order to make sure that it is providing jobs.

One of the really important initiatives is the National Broadband Network. I have been lucky enough in my constituency to have one of the stage 2 rollout sites—the town of Bacchus Marsh, which is very close to Melbourne. Certainly there will be a significant change in the way in which that community does business. There will be an enormous opportunity not just for that township but for all of the townships along the Western Highway as we try and convince NBN Co. that the rollout should then occur not towards Melbourne but out into regional Australia to provide that connectivity to Melbourne. It really is going to transform the way in which people work, the way in which health services are provided and the way in
which people actually understand the connectivity not just between regions and capital cities but between regional cities and the rest of the world.

I know the benefits of NBN are well beyond what people think they are going to be now. I do not think that we can even imagine the sorts of things that people will be able to do when they have the high-speed capacity that is offered by the NBN. I am certainly looking forward to working with the business community and the community sector in those areas, and working with local government and also other broader industry sectors to make sure that that rollout actually occurs well, that it employs local people and that we also absolutely take advantage of every single megabyte of the speed of the National Broadband Network.

There has been an enormous amount of health reform, and I think one of the things that I am very proud of is the way in which we are transforming the health system. A lot of the focus, detail and work have been around how the funding mechanisms are working. But, as someone who has worked in that area, the reality of what that actually means in the health sector is enormous. At the preventative end we are trying to establish the National Prevention Agency. A huge amount of money has now gone into looking at issues around obesity, tobacco smoking and alcohol use, and about how you get better synergies with the states and at the local level through local hospital networks to really maximise how you reduce the burden of disease in a community. That is an important initiative that we have done through the health and hospitals reform.

We have also invested substantial amounts of money within the hospital networks themselves so that they can actually do their business better, providing more beds, providing incentives to get waiting lists down and driving quality within the hospital system. That will see more services available for people, but it will also see better and higher quality services available for people.

Obviously you need a workforce to enact some of that, so we have made investments in increasing the number of GPs and specialists, and we have worked to get those GPs and specialists out into regional and rural communities. Again, this is something that I am very proud of.

There are information systems that go with that. The My Hospital website will provide consumers, who are getting much more savvy about these sorts of things, with information about what is happening within their hospital system and enable them to make some choices around where they go and what services they have. This is also really important, as will be the e-health record. That is something that I hope to see driving better consumer outcomes and, certainly, better consumer information into the future.

I am also very proud of the work we have done about GP practices, really modernising the way in which GP practices operate whether that be through the GP superclinic we have in Ballan, or the initiative to improve the capital infrastructure of GP clinics themselves or the provision of better clinical training within those GP clinics. I know that that will make a significant difference.

Obviously, it would be remiss of me not to mention the regional priority round of the Health and Hospitals Fund. I am sure the member for Newcastle is pretty keen on a number of hospitals in her area. Within my own constituency I have already got $10 million to $15 million worth of projects that I know are going to come in for assessment, from Ballan District Health and Care, our district nursing service, which is desperately in need of $2 million to
Tuesday, 16 November 2010   HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  2685

improve its facilities through to the 100,000 meals that are provided out of an incredibly old hospital kitchen out at Creswick, and Djerrriwarrh Health Services in Bacchus Marsh, which is in a 1950s kit hospital that was brought across on a ship. It desperately needs its theatres done. I know that there will be a lot of competition in that round and I certainly want to assure people that I will advocate very strongly for those.

We have also made an investment in regional cancer centres of some $52 million in partnership with the state government, which is going to make a significant difference to cancer sufferers and also for diagnostics for cancer not just across my own electorate but throughout the entirety of western Victoria. Ballarat is becoming very much the hub for health, education and business services for the whole of the western district and we want to really support that development and growth.

The area of climate change is obviously one that has been dear to my heart and also one where there are some really good practical examples happening within my own city. The Central Victoria Solar City project, which is one of seven large-scale solar energy projects around Australia, really is going to provide some great examples for the rest of the country as to how you may be able to produce energy locally and the impact of that. I know the member for Newcastle has done very well in terms of some of the work that Newcastle is going to do in that too. I think that, because of the discrete nature of regional communities and the populations that live in them, there is some terrific work that you can do in terms of energy generation and also energy savings. I think Newcastle will provide a great example of that.

Again, I want to say thank you to the people of Ballarat for putting their faith in me again for my fourth term. Again, I particularly want to thank my staff and wonderful volunteers and campaign team. I acknowledge that it is absolutely a team effort. I also want to acknowledge my husband, Mark, and my beautiful son, Ryan. I hope that for many years to come, when he is an adult and reads back through these speeches, he gets why his mum was not always around, but I want to thank him and Mark for the sacrifices they have both made. (Time expired)

Debate (on motion by Ms Grierson) adjourned.

BUSINESS

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (10.01 pm)—I move:

That further proceedings on the orders of the day for the resumption of debate on the motions to take note of the document (presented on 19 October 2010), viz.: Australia’s commitment to Afghanistan—Ministerial statement; and relating to asbestos (Private Members’ business, order of the day No. 1) be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 10.02 pm
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Roads: Bruce Highway
(Question No. 33)

Mr Truss asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, in writing, on 18 October 2010:

Further to his answer to question in writing 1330 (House Hansard, Tuesday 15 June 2010, page 5466), when will the report on the social and financial considerations used in making the decision to build Section B of the Cooroy to Curra upgrade of the Bruce Highway be released.

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

The documentation cannot be released until all tendering has been completed, as the documentation contains information that could impact on the ability of the Australian and Queensland governments to achieve value for money.