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SITTING DAYS—2010

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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
## Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Denison, TAS</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; 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
Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer
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
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
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Trade
Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Leader of the House
Minister for Health and Ageing
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
Minister for Finance and Deregulation
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

Hon. Julia Gillard MP
Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Hon. Simon Crean MP
Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Hon. Tony Burke MP
Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
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<td>Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information</td>
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<td>Minister for Sport</td>
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<td>Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity</td>
<td>Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</td>
<td>Hon. Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare</td>
<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel</td>
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<td>Minister for Defence Materiel</td>
<td>Hon. Jason Clare MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Indigenous Health</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Mental Health and Ageing</td>
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<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
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<td>Hon. David Bradbury MP</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins</td>
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<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy</td>
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<td>Hon. Catherine King MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Julie Collins MP</td>
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<td>Minister Assisting on Deregulation</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
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<td>Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP</td>
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<td>Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP</td>
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SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Tony Abbott MP

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

Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Warren Truss MP

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

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for the Arts
Senator Hon. George Brandis SC

Shadow Treasurer
Hon. Joe Hockey MP

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

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

Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate
Senator Barnaby Joyce

Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction and Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee
Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP

Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP

Shadow Minister for Defence
Senator Hon. David Johnston

Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband
Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP

Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Hon. Peter Dutton MP

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

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

Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population and Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Mr Scott Morrison MP

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

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

Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs
Hon. Bruce Billson MP

[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
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<td>Mr Andrew Laming MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families</td>
<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment</td>
<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
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Wednesday, 17 November 2010

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 9 am, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

COMMITTEES

Intelligence and Security Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER—I have received a message from the Senate informing the House that Senators Faulkner, Forshaw, McGauran and Trood have been appointed members of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security.

SCREEN AUSTRALIA (TRANSFER OF ASSETS) BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Crean.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (9.01 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The government places great value on a creative and viable Australian film and television industry, which produces high quality cultural content appealing not only to Australian audiences but to international ones as well. The government acknowledges the enormous contribution that the film and television industry has made to the cultural life of the nation. Beyond the initial reach and impact of screen productions, they also provide an important record of Australian cultural life for future generations. We are convinced that the importance of this industry will also be considerably enhanced with the rollout of the National Broadband Network.

This bill facilitates the transfer of part of Screen Australia’s film library and associated sales and digital learning functions to the National Film and Sound Archive. It deals with consequential and transitional matters related to the transfer of staff, assets, liabilities and other matters. The bill also provides for a change in the name of the NFSA to the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia.

Screen Australia and the NFSA were established on 1 July 2008, delivering on a major element of the government’s 2007 election policy, New Directions for the Arts. Screen Australia is the Australian government’s key agency for providing support to the film and television sector. The National Film and Sound Archive is the Australian government’s collecting institution for the nation’s audiovisual heritage and has a national collection of over 1.6 million items.

The agencies have now successfully completed over two years of operations as separate statutory authorities. However, in that time it has become clear that the functions associated with the portion of Screen Australia’s film library produced by the former Film Australia Ltd and its predecessor agencies, and related sales and digital learning functions, are now best placed with the NFSA. This film library is a substantial archival resource and the government considers that the NFSA, as Australia’s premier collecting institution for audiovisual material, should be responsible for preserving and supporting the development of this resource. The transfer of this film library and digital learning functions will also enhance and complement the NFSA’s new direction of providing greater online content and improving access to its collection of audiovisual materials.

Screen Australia’s film library amongst other things consists of a collection of ap-
approximately 5,000 films (and associated materials) produced by the former Film Australia Ltd and its predecessor agencies. This part of the film library is one of the largest and most historically significant sources of archival, documentary and stock footage in Australia, reflecting a century of our history. The sales function relates to the commercial use of the film library's holdings. The digital learning function is a collection of primarily online educational resources which uses audiovisual material and stills within this film library and associated teaching materials which are suitable for primary, secondary, tertiary and lifelong learning.

In relation to the change in name for the NFSA, the addition of ‘of Australia’ to the end of its name will bring the agency’s name into line with the majority of the Australian government collecting institutions such as the National Gallery of Australia, the National Museum of Australia and the National Library of Australia. The change will enable the agency to be identified internationally as Australia’s premier audiovisual collecting institution. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Andrews) adjourned.

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (COMPLIANCE) BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Roxon.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (9.07 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill will amend the Health Insurance Act 1973 to give effect to two components of the Increased Medicare Compliance Audits initiative, which was announced in the 2008-09 budget.

The bill is a reintroduction of a largely identical bill introduced in the 42nd Parliament. This version incorporates parliamentary amendments which were agreed to, or moved, by the government during parliamentary debate on the bill. Minor changes were made to the text of three of the amendments to ensure that they are effective. None of those minor changes is intended to change the effect of the amendments as agreed to.

Compliance audits are conducted to ensure that taxpayers’ money is spent appropriately. Expenditure on the Medicare Benefits scheme was over $15 billion in 2009-10 and has grown by more than $1 billion per annum over the last three years. On average, 20 per cent of practitioners contacted by Medicare Australia do not respond to, or refuse to cooperate with, a request to substantiate a Medicare benefit paid for a service. When this occurs, Medicare Australia does not have any authority to require a practitioner to comply with the request. This means that there is no way to confirm that the Medicare benefit is correct. This legislation is intended to address that deficiency.

In developing this bill, it was necessary to balance the public interest in ensuring the integrity of public revenue expended on Medicare services with the privacy concerns. An extensive consultation was undertaken, including release of an exposure draft and privacy impact assessment. Issues raised by key stakeholders including the Australian Medical Association, other practitioner organisations and the Consumer’s Health Forum are addressed in the bill.

The Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into Medicare compliance audits recommended that patient clinical records are only accessed where necessary. The bill now provides that documents containing clinical details do not have to be produced unless necessary. In addition, prac-
tioners may choose to provide these docu-
ments to a medical practitioner employed by
Medicare Australia rather than an administra-
tive auditor.

This bill will enable the Chief Executive
Officer (CEO) of Medicare Australia to give
a notice requiring the production of docu-
ments to a practitioner, or another person
who has the custody, control or possession
of the documents, to substantiate a Medicare
benefit paid for a service. Before a notice to
produce documents can be issued the CEO
must fulfil several conditions:

- Firstly, the CEO must have a reasonable
concern that the Medicare benefit paid
for a service may exceed the amount that
should have been paid. This means that
Medicare Australia cannot conduct ran-
dom compliance audits under the provi-
sions in this bill. A reasonable concern
may relate to a particular practitioner or
group of practitioners, or a particular
service or group of services.

The CEO cannot develop a reasonable
concern in relation to the clinical relevance
of a service. The compliance audits con-
ducted by Medicare Australia under the pro-
visions in this bill will seek to confirm that
the factual elements of a service were per-
formed. For example, if a Medicare benefit is
only payable for a service when a specific
test is undertaken, Medicare Australia will
ask the practitioner to produce documents
that demonstrate that the test was performed.
The elements of each service are outlined in
the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

- Secondly, the CEO must take advice
from a medical practitioner employed by
Medicare Australia on the kinds of
documents a practitioner may need to
provide to substantiate the Medicare
benefit.

- Thirdly, the CEO must take reasonable
steps to consult with a relevant profes-
sional body about the types of docu-
ments required to substantiate a Medi-
care benefit before commencing a com-
pliance audit. The minister will, by legis-
lative instrument, declare bodies to be
relevant professional bodies for this pur-
pose.

- Finally, the CEO must give the person a
reasonable opportunity to respond to a
written request to voluntarily provide
documents. This means that a notice can
only be issued if a person has refused or
ignored a written request to voluntarily
provide documents to substantiate a
Medicare benefit.

These conditions must be met before the
CEO can issue a notice requiring a person to
produce documents.

The bill does not introduce any record
keeping requirements. It will be up to the
person who receives the notice to decide
what documents they have available to sub-
stantiate the service. The notice to produce
documents must explain the reason for the
concern, identify the service that needs to be
substantiated, and indicate the kind of infor-
mation that the person may provide to sub-
stantiate the service.

Medicare Australia is also working with
the Australian Medical Association and other
stakeholders to develop guidelines outlining
the kinds of information that practitioners
may use to substantiate particular services or
groups of services. These guidelines will
emphasise that clinical information should
only be provided if it is absolutely necessary
to substantiate the service.

The bill provides protection for practitio-
ners by placing limits on how the informa-
tion and documents that are produced in re-
sponse to a notice can be used. This informa-
tion can only be used for the compliance au-
dit and for proceedings relating to false and
misleading statements under the Health In-

CHAMBER
The bill requires the CEO to notify practitioners of the outcome of an audit. Practitioners must be given 28 days in which to seek internal review of the decision before a debt notice is issued. At the time the person seeks the review, they may provide the CEO with additional information to substantiate the amount paid for the service.

At present, if an amount paid for the service cannot be substantiated, the practitioner is required to repay the amount. This will continue to occur. However, this bill introduces a financial penalty for certain practitioners who cannot substantiate the amount paid for a service. This penalty is intended to encourage greater compliance with the requirements of the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

The financial penalty will only apply to debts that exceed $2,500. This threshold reflects the point at which Medicare Australia data indicates that mistaken claims may become routine or reflective of poor administration or decision making. If this threshold had been applied to audits conducted in 2009-10, 60 per cent of practitioners who made incorrect claims would not have received a financial penalty.

The bill provides for a regulation making power to enable the threshold amount to be increased. This will enable adjustments to occur to ensure that practitioners are not disadvantaged by incremental increases in the value of the Medicare benefit amount paid for services. The regulations cannot be used to decrease the threshold amount.

A base penalty amount of 20 per cent will be applied to all debts over $2,500. The base penalty amount can be reduced or increased according to circumstances described in the legislation. The reductions are intended to encourage greater voluntary compliance.

If a practitioner tells Medicare Australia that an incorrect amount has been paid for a service:

- prior to being contacted by the CEO, the penalty is reduced by 100 per cent;
- before a notice to produce documents is issued, the penalty is reduced by 50 per cent;
- after a notice to produce documents has been issued but before completion of the audit, the penalty is reduced by 25 per cent.

On the other hand, if a practitioner:

- does not respond to a notice, the full amount of the services identified in the notice become repayable and the penalty is increased by 25 per cent; or
- has been unable to substantiate an amount paid for other services in the previous 24 months, and the total they repaid was more than $30,000, the penalty for the current amount is increased by 50 per cent.

These increases in the base penalty rate are intended to promote greater compliance with the legislation and to discourage recidivism.

The provisions in this bill do not commence until the day after the bill receives royal assent. The bill is not retrospective and will only apply to Medicare services that are provided after the commencement of this bill.

I commend this important bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Andrews) adjourned.
Wednesday, 17 November 2010

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2691

TOBACCO ADVERTISING PROHIBITION AMENDMENT
BILL 2000

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Roxon.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (9.16 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 seeks to make it an offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet and in other electronic media.

This brings electronic means of advertising—whether it be on the internet or by mobile phone—in line with restrictions that are already in place in the other media.

Australia’s comprehensive approach to tobacco control with sustained and coordinated actions from the Commonwealth and state governments including excise measures, advertising bans, bans on smoking in workplaces and public spaces, and anti-smoking advertising campaigns over several decades have seen smoking rates cut from 30.5 per cent in 1988 to 16.6 per cent in 2007.

Despite these good results there is still more to do.

Tobacco smoking remains one of the leading causes of preventable death and disease amongst Australians.

Smoking kills over 15,000 Australians every year and costs over $30 billion each year.

In 2007, some 16.6 per cent of Australians aged 14 years and over smoked daily.

That is why in April 2010 the government announced a comprehensive antismoking action package aimed at delivering on its commitments to reduce the smoking rate to 10 per cent by 2018—a target agreed to by COAG and all state governments—and to halve the rate of smoking amongst Indigenous Australians.

The bill is part of this package which included:

- the 25 per cent tobacco excise increase introduced on 29 April 2010,
- record investments in antismoking social marketing campaigns, and
- legislation to mandate plain packaging of tobacco products by 2012.

We all acknowledge that messages and images promoting the use of tobacco products can ‘normalise’ tobacco use, increase uptake of smoking by young people and act as disincentives to quit.

A national ban on tobacco advertising—that is, direct cigarette advertising on radio or television—first came into effect in 1973.

At that time, Australia also introduced mandatory health warnings on cigarette packs.

Over a decade later, the Smoking and Tobacco Products Advertisements (Prohibition) Act 1989 nationally banned tobacco advertising in newspapers and magazines.

In 1992, the Commonwealth introduced a more rigid ban with the passage of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 (the act).

The act serves as the primary vehicle governing advertising of tobacco products in Australia.

It makes it an offence to give publicity to, or promote, tobacco products. While much of the emphasis is on cigarettes, the act applies to all tobacco products including cigars, pipes and pipe tobacco, loose tobacco, cigarette papers et cetera.
Since the passage of the act in 1992, the use of the internet as an advertising medium has become increasingly widespread.

The media platforms that are accessed by young people today are continually evolving. The internet is clearly becoming a major vehicle by which young people can be exposed to tobacco advertising.

Unregulated internet advertising and the promotion of tobacco products undermines the effectiveness of the act and fosters the false perception that smoking is the norm.

Unregulated retail activity on the internet can also undermine tax pricing policies aimed at deterring smoking, facilitate the purchase of tobacco products without appropriate graphic health warnings and contribute to the promotion of smoking more generally.

At the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) in 2007, the states and territories expressed their support for the Commonwealth to seek to regulate tobacco advertising on the internet.

National and international efforts signal the level of concern surrounding tobacco advertising on the internet.

Australia is a signatory to the World Health Organisation’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

Guidelines developed under Article 13 of the WHO FCTC require that, where internet sales of tobacco products are not yet banned, restrictions should be imposed, allowing only textual listings of products with prices, with no pictures or promotion features.

I note that a complete ban on internet retail sales has not been included in this bill.

This is consistent with the policy of consecutive governments that the internet should be maintained on the same footing as, and not be disadvantaged, compared to other retail points of sale.

This helps ensure, for example, that people living in rural and regional areas are not disadvantaged when purchasing grocery items including tobacco products over the internet.

Currently, ambiguity exists as to how the provisions of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 may be applied to the advertising of tobacco products on the internet and whether or not advertising of tobacco products over the internet is permitted.

The intended effect of the amendments is to make it a specific offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet and all other electronic media and future technologies, unless such advertising complies with state or territory legislation or with Commonwealth regulations.

Section 34 of the act allows the Governor-General to make regulations prescribing matters required or permitted by this act to be prescribed, or necessary or convenient to be prescribed, for carrying out or giving effect to this act.

It is proposed that regulations will be made under the act to prescribe specific requirements as to:

- the size, content, format and location of tobacco advertisements;
- the inclusion of health warnings, warnings about age restrictions on the sale of tobacco products, information about any fees, taxes and charges payable in relation to tobacco products; and
- age restricted access systems for access to tobacco advertisements.

The maximum penalty for each offence under these amendments is 120 penalty units, which is $13,200.

This is consistent with the penalty units for other offences under the act and for legislation of a similar nature, such as the Interactive Gambling Act 2001.
The Gillard government remains fundamentally concerned about the harms and subsequent health costs related to the consumption of tobacco.

As a consequence the government is committed to reducing the effects of tobacco on Australia’s population.

This bill will bring restrictions on tobacco advertising and promotion on the internet into line with restrictions in other media and at physical points of sale.

It creates a level playing field—the restrictions placed on over-the-counter sales and online sales will no longer be different.

This legislation and the proposed regulations are part of our government’s comprehensive approach to tobacco control which is helping to give Australia one of the lowest smoking rates in the world.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Andrews) adjourned.

**AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2010**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Garrett.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (9.24 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Australian Research Council, the ARC, is a statutory authority within the Australian government’s Innovation, Industry, Science and Research portfolio. Its mission is to deliver policy and programs that advance Australian research and innovation globally and benefit the community.

In seeking to achieve its mission, the ARC provides advice to the government on research matters and manages the National Competitive Grants Program, a significant component of Australia’s investment in research and development.

Through the National Competitive Grants Program, the ARC supports the highest quality fundamental and applied research and research training through competitive selection processes across all disciplines, with the exception of clinical medicine and dentistry.

This is an appropriation bill to support the ongoing operations of the ARC. It will fund the high-quality research we need to address the great challenges of our time, to improve the quality of people’s lives, to support the development of new industries, and to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy.

Bills to amend the Australian Research Council Act 2001 to receive administered funding occur each year; this is to apply indexation to existing appropriation amounts, create a additional forward estimate and may also contain new funding for new initiatives.

The current bill updates the special appropriation funding cap amounts administered by the Australian Research Council to include indexation adjustments to three existing financial year appropriation amounts, and adds a forward estimate year in the Australian Research Council Act 2001. The bill adjusts the Australian Research Council’s funding cap for the financial years beginning on 1 July 2010, 2011 and 2012 in line with indexation, and sets the funding cap for the financial year beginning on 1 July 2013. Indexation adjustments and adding an additional forward estimate year are part of the standard budget process and are administrative in nature.

The proposed amendments change only the administered special appropriation; they
do not alter the substance of the act or increase departmental funds.

The ARC is the major source of funding for the innovative, investigator-driven research that has underpinned inventions ranging from the bionic ear to the Jameson flotation cell, which saves the coal industry hundreds of millions of dollars each year. ARC centres of excellence provide key science and policy advice on the management of coral reefs, are developing automated control systems for the mining industry and agricultural sector and are taking some big challenges in medicine such as applying nanobiomarkers to regenerate spinal cord injuries. ARC funding has enabled regional centres such as the Cairns campus of James Cook University to attract Australian and international leaders in tropical rainforest ecology to build world class teams of researchers and postgraduate students.

Ongoing funding for the Australian Research Council is essential to the vitality of the Australian higher education system. Excellent researchers across all areas of the university system must be able to compete for funding if we are to keep world class academics in Australia working in our universities and teaching our next generation.

Since 2007 the Australian Research Council has delivered on the 2007 election commitment for 1,000 Future Fellowships. The Australian government will provide over five years up to $844 million and will award up to 1,000 of these midcareer research fellowships. The inaugural 200 Future Fellows were announced in September 2009 and the next 200 will be announced this week.

In January 2008 we announced the establishment of the ARC Advisory Council and a range of other measures to enhance the independence of the ARC.

In February 2008 we announced the ARC will deliver the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA). This is a world leading research evaluation framework reflecting the Australian government’s commitment to a transparent, streamlined evaluation of the quality of research undertaken in Australia’s universities. The Australian government has provided $35.8 million over four years.

In March 2008 the government announced the opening of all ARC grant schemes to international competition, and in July 2008 the government announced the opening of the ARC schemes to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (ALATSIS). The ARC continues to work closely with Indigenous researchers on a range of new initiatives for Indigenous researchers.

In September 2008 the ARC introduced the Australian Laureate Fellowships Scheme. This was a new fellowship scheme to build strong teams around our very best research leaders. The Australian government will provide over five years up to $239 million and will award up to 75 fellowships. The inaugural 15 Laureate Fellows were announced in June 2009.

In June 2009 the National Centre of Excellence in Groundwater Research and Training was established as a joint initiative of the ARC and the National Water Commission with Australian government support of $29.5 million for five years from 2009.

Other joint initiatives include $92 million through the ARC to the National ICT Centre and $21 million in support of stem cell science research through the ARC’s Special Research Initiative announced in May 2010.

In September 2009, 100 Super Science Fellowships (worth $27.8 million) were announced as part of the Australian government’s $1.1 billion Super Science initiative. The successful recipients were announced in April 2010.
In December 2009—bionic vision research—the Australian government provided $50 million for research into bionic vision science and technology which came about as a priority from the 2020 summit.

In July 2010, 13 new centres of excellence were announced with total Australian government support of $255.9 million over seven years. This was in addition to the Australian government’s announcement in February 2009 of an additional $82.25 million to extend the funding of 11 existing centres of excellence.

Through this important legislation, the ARC will continue to advance our efforts to build a fairer and more prosperous Australia through innovation and education.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Andrews) adjourned.

FAMILY LAW AMENDMENT (VALIDATION OF CERTAIN PARENTING ORDERS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010
First Reading
Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr McClelland.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading
Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (9.32 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The bill responds to the High Court of Australia’s decision in the case known as MRR v GR [2010] HCA 4 which casts doubt on certain parenting orders made under the Family Law Act 1975.

The High Court, in MRR v GR, held that a court has no power under the Family Law Act, where parents are to have equal shared parental responsibility for their child, to make an order that the child spend equal time with each parent, unless it has first found, under section 65DAA of the Act, that it is reasonably practicable for the child to spend equal time with each parent.

The bill has two purposes.

First, it ensures that parenting arrangements under orders affected by the High Court decision continue to have effect. Second, it streamlines procedures for orders that are made in the future that provide for parents to equal shared parental responsibility for their child.

Creation of statutory rights and liabilities in relation to parenting orders

The first purpose is achieved by the bill creating new statutory rights and liabilities for parents who have, on or after 1 July 2006, obtained orders, on an interim or final basis, that were made without meeting certain of the requirements under section 65DAA of the Family Law Act.

The approach taken under the bill differs depending on whether or not the order was made with the consent of all the parties to the proceedings.

For an order made without that consent, the bill creates rights and liabilities, where the child’s parents are to have equal shared parental responsibility, if the court or Family Court Judicial Registrar making the order did not give consideration as to the reasonable practicability of the child spending equal time, or substantial and significant time, with each parent. These requirements arise under paragraph (b) of subsection 65DAA(1), and paragraph (d) of subsection 65DAA(2), of the act respectively.

To avoid cost and complexity for parents who have agreed on parenting arrangements for their children, orders made with the consent of all the parties to the proceedings are treated differently.
For orders made with that consent, the bill creates rights and liabilities, where the child’s parents are to have equal shared parental responsibility, where the court or the Family Court Judicial Registrar or the Family Court or Federal Magistrates Court Registrar making the order did not consider the matters set out in subsections 65DAA(1) and (2) of the Family Law Act.

These matters are, first, whether it is in the child’s best interests to spend equal time, or substantial and significant time, with each parent, secondly, whether those arrangements would be reasonably practicable and, finally, whether an order for the child to spend equal time, or substantial and significant time, with each parent should be made.

The requirement, when deciding to make a particular parenting order under the Family Law Act, to regard the best interests of the child as the paramount consideration, remains.

The rights and liabilities created by the bill are declared to be the same, and always to have been the same, as if the court had considered the relevant matters under section 65DAA of the Family Law Act before making the order.

Further, any act or thing done, or omitted to be done, in relation to the rights and liabilities created by the bill will have the same effect and consequences, and are taken to have always have had the same effect and consequences, as if done, or omitted to be done, in relation to a parenting order made under the Family Law Act. Past acts validated will include any civil enforcement action taken to secure compliance with the order, including the imposition of sanctions under division 13A of part VII of the act.

The approach taken by the bill is based on a similar approach upheld by the High Court of Australia in a case known as R v Humby; ex parte Rooney (1973) 129 CLR 231.

To ensure that people’s rights are protected, the bill does a number of things.

The new rights and liabilities are exercisable and enforceable, and are to be regarded as always having been exercisable and enforceable in the same way as if they were rights or liabilities arising under a parenting order made under the act.

Courts are given powers to deal with the new statutory rights and liabilities including the power to vary, revoke, set aside, revive or suspend them.

Appeal rights—including rights of review—as well as rights in relation to orders made without power are preserved by the bill. These rights apply as though the original orders had been parenting orders under the Family Law Act.

Parents will be able to apply to a court for fresh parenting orders where arrangements under orders made in contested proceedings are not reasonably practicable.

Finally, the bill will not validate or confirm any purported conviction of a person for an offence by a court on the basis that a parenting order was a valid order.

These measures will provide certainty for families by removing doubt about the status of the rights and liabilities attaching to parenting orders that may be affected by the High Court’s decision.

The second purpose of the bill is to amend the Family Law Act to provide that courts in future proceedings may, but are not required to, consider the matters set out in subsections 65DAA(1) and 65DAA(2) of that act before making an order—that is, an order with the consent of all the parties in the proceedings, providing for parents to have equal shared parental responsibility for their child.

This amendment will ensure that appropriate weight is to be given to parenting arrangements agreed by parents.
It reflects the position taken under the Family Law Act, since 1996, in relation to whether or not the court, when deciding whether to make a parenting order with consent, needs to consider each of the matters currently set out in subsections 60CC(2) and 60CC(3) of the act, in determining what is in the child’s best interests. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Andrews) adjourned.

COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL AMENDMENT (POLITICAL DONATIONS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 16 November, on motion by Mr Gray:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (9.40 am)—I have great pleasure in speaking in support of the reforms being put forward in the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010. There is some contemporary context to these initiatives. We have just been through the mid-term elections in the United States and it was very interesting to see coverage last week of the launch of the film Gerrymandering in the United States. Despite the fact that the media coverage had it wrong that the original Governor Gerry came from Connecticut, this debate in the United States drives home a few realities in the context of this debate. It was mentioned in the film that, of the 50 states of the United States, in 46 states the party controlling the state assembly can decide on the boundaries within that state in the US congress. Whether it is Republican or Democrat, basically you align those constituencies as you would be politically advantaged.

In Australia, in contrast, despite the fact that I, for instance, might question the redistribution in New South Wales in the last term which saw rather bizarre strange boundaries between the seats of Blaxland and Parramatta, in general we have a very legitimate recognised honest system, controlled by an independent Australian Electoral Commission. That is a very important part of the broader debate on electoral matters in this country. The opposition has been systematically denigrating our system, alleging corruption, finding any contrived arguments that there should be greater restrictions on people’s voting rights, that there should be more checking of people, that it should be difficult for people to vote and that there should be restrictions in the way in which people exercise their franchise. The most controversial of those areas has been those restrictions which in the past would have made it very difficult for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory to vote because of identity requirements.

After every election attempts are made to find a list of people who voted twice and to find some corruption in the system and after every election the AEC concludes that most of the people who voted twice are people who are intellectually challenged or were errors. We in Australia can be proud of a system that is, by any international standards, renowned and respected. It is no wonder that the AEC is often asked to assist other political systems.

The main measures in this bill are about having public exposure of donations. I strongly support these measures. In the Joint Committee on Electoral Matters report on the 1996 election, the Liberal Party and National Party members stated:
The disclosure thresholds should more accurately reflect current financial values. The scenario painted by the AEC—donors going to extraordinary lengths to avoid disclosure of gifts totalling $90,000—is in most cases unlikely. Even accepting such a possibility, a sum of just $90,000 spread over the State and national branches of a party is hardly likely to engender corruption.

I am afraid I agree with the AEC and not with the opposition. I think $90,000 is a substantial amount of money. I think that there would be more than one person in this country who would be persuaded in a variety of political matters by donations of $90,000. The AEC predicted at that time that there would be an increase in the amount of donations that would go unreported. I would far more respect their integrity and their disinterest from a political partisan point of view than those who ensured that more and more donations in this country would go unreported.

The measures in this bill are that the threshold for reporting donations would go from $1,150 down to $1,000 and that all donations over $1,000 would have to be disclosed. I think the Australian people would regard that as more than reasonable. There are arguments that there are small businesspeople out there who are intimidated, who are too scared to give donations if they are known. I do not think anyone with any credibility would listen to that kind of stuff.

This is quite clearly an attempt to maximise donations for the Liberal Party through backdoor operations.

Amongst the other changes is one to extend the probation of anonymous donations to all donations over $50. Once again, why should there be anonymity with regard to these matters? Why should the Australian public not know that particular developers, particular people with very clear interests, are giving money? Why should we not be able to determine whether we think there are questionable decisions being made because of donations in this country?

The bill also bans foreign donations, and that is the matter I mainly want to talk about. I do not want to cover areas that have been covered by other members. It also talks about donation splitting, in other words, making donations to a political party in a variety of state and federal jurisdictions so that they are not put together in one item, thus avoiding public scrutiny. Once again, this is overdue, it is correct and it should be supported.

There is also the closer tying of the amount of money that people get with regard to taxpayer funded electoral assistance to the actual campaign expenses. We have seen a few cases in the past where people are basically running in elections to make a few bucks out of it.

I want to turn to foreign donations. This is a very overdue reform. There are clearly areas where foreign powers and other countries try to affect the political system in another country through donations. In recent decades we have seen some very disturbing instances where this was a possibility. In the 1996 United States elections, after sources close to the Chinese government donated to the Clinton legal defence fund, there was a significant investigation in the United States into the activities of John Huang, Johnny Chung et cetera, which led in the end to 21 convictions. A number of these people had connections to a particular corporation, Lippo, and ties with the Chinese administration. It was alleged that in total $7.4 million was devoted to this. Bob Woodward and Brian Duffy in the Washington Post spoke of the Chinese Embassy in Connecticut Avenue being tied to these efforts. They had favoured George Bush in 1992 but in the 1996 elections there was a degree of uncertainty as to Clinton’s reliability because of his attacks with regard
to human rights in Tibet. That is a good instance of the way in which, allegedly, money from other sources was being used to affect the politics of another nation.

We know the Liberal Party has a close friend, Michael—Baron—Ashcroft, a person who managed to make $1 million for the Liberal Party in this country between 2004 and 2005. He is another example of questionable practices. Recently he resigned as deputy chairman of the Conservative Party in the UK, having on the way out criticised the electoral performance of David Cameron. He has been essentially a citizen of Belize for decades and failed to reveal, over quite a period of time whilst an officer of the Conservative Party, the fact that he had not managed to pay taxation in the United Kingdom on his earnings. He was also alleged to have paid $3.6 million in a loan to the Conservative Party in the UK in the ‘cash for peerages’ scandal. He admitted in March 2010 that, after arguing for some time his taxation privacy, he had not paid on his overseas earnings. Lord Oakeshott of the Liberal Democrats said, ‘Democracy is in danger if Lord Ashcroft has been pouring millions into Conservative campaigns through an offshore pipeline from a Caribbean tax haven.’ As I say, this is a matter of concern.

You can get a variety of issues. We know in recent years that the United States blocked the entry of funds from Dubai and China in regard to port control in the United States because of security concerns. We know that it is a reality around the world that diasporas tend to be far more hard line and more intransigent with regard to issues in their homeland than perhaps the citizens of those homelands. You can look at a variety of foreign policy issues in our own country. Take the breakup of the Soviet Union and the concern of the Baltic, Ukraine and other communities here. Their intensity around those issues is perhaps stronger than the citizens in the homeland. Obviously it is a lot safer to be very radical around these issues in Australia, where you will not get a bullet in your head. You can also have the situation where a diaspora in another country is not really representative of the population back in the homeland. Those people who have left that country in many cases are perhaps an elite of better off professional people, or maybe they are political refugees with objections. In a political system it is natural that these people can influence the politicians of an area in regard to the foreign policy attitudes of their new homeland. To allow donations from overseas sources to be players in the field is, as I say, quite inappropriate. It is long overdue that we are taking measures here to defeat the possibility of influence on the political system from overseas sources.

Once again, another controversial instance was in Canada where former Prime Minister Mulroney was involved in a major scandal involving West German finance, some of it possibly coming from the Bavarian CSU, in a number of commercial transactions in Canada—national decision making that is still being questioned. In 2008 he refused to go before the ethics committee of the Canadian parliament after the main person who was alleged to have paid him this money was extradited. That is another example of why there must be concerns and serious oversight of foreign donations.

Returning to the question of the way in which there should be some limits, and to give an example of some of the money that kicks around in these systems, it has been estimated that the US Chamber of Commerce donated $75 million to ‘pro-business candidates’ in the last midterm US congressional elections. One of our favoured sons, Mr Rupert Murdoch, is estimated, from sources, to have given $4.4 million. He said
in an interview with Politico’s Keach Hagey, about $1 million of them, that he ‘didn’t ex-
pect’ that his donations would become pub-
lic. This is typical of the amount of money
that kicks around these systems.

It is more than overdue that there be re-
strictions on the amount of money that can
be kept secret from the Australian public.
These measures are about transparency. They
are about making sure there is oversight so
people can gauge for themselves whether
money is having a significant influence on
politics. We know that overnight in New
South Wales there have been moves to actu-
ally do something about the huge influence
of alcohol, gambling and tobacco in the poli-
tics of that state. Another area is the very
disturbing influence of developers. The op-
position harks back with constant references
to the union movement and how much
money the unions give. I have no quibble
with massive oversight of them. But that is
not the issue here. The issue is that people
should be able to see what is really happen-
ing. It should not be by backdoor processes.
It should not be by hiding donations, by
making them through a variety of state
branches so they cannot be collected on the
one site and so people do not have knowl-
dge. I commend the minister and I com-
memd the committee for working on these
matters. When we accomplish these kinds of
changes we will be strengthening a political
system whose legitimacy and whose integrity
is renowned around this world. To do other-
wise, whatever the contrived arguments, is
simply to have a mechanism to try to ensure
that the public does not get proper oversight.

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (9.54 am)—I rise
to speak on and strongly oppose the Com-
monwealth Electoral Amendment (Political
Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010.
Let there be no mistake: this bill is, first and
foremost, an attempt by the Labor Party to
aid its own political and financial position
under the guise of transparency and reform.
The reintroduction of this bill by the Labor
Party is to fulfil their obligations under the
Labor-Greens-Independents alliance—the
tail wagging the dog. We are seeing it end-
lessly and it is already causing enormous
confusion across so many policy fronts for
those on the other side of the chamber.

This is essentially the third iteration of the
same bill. Ironically, it follows coalition calls
for a comprehensive inquiry into Australia’s
campaign finance laws following the Wol-
longong sex-and-bribery scandal, a call that
was made in good faith and, as we under-
stood at the time, that good faith was to be
reciprocated. But what we found is that was
opposed by the government. They did give
an indication that they were willing to act in
good faith for an objective assessment across
the board of Australia’s campaign finances.
The government subsequently announced the
development of a green paper, which we ap-
plauded, for electoral reform. Yet ahead of
dealing with that green paper, we see a series
of cherry-picked amendments, as represented
in this bill today, which would essentially
advantage the Labor Party: ‘Forget the holis-
tic approach. Forget acting in good faith with
each other. Let’s just bring in some grubby
amendments to try to disadvantage the coali-
tion parties.’ There was a mad rush to bring
these amendments in before the last election.
There was no coincidence about that! They
tried to get it all passed before we rose last
time. The cynicism was exposed, the self-
interest was exposed and the crass political
nature of these provisions were exposed.

Once again the bill reinforces that elec-
toral reform should not be done in an ad hoc
fashion nor cherry-picked for political advan-
tage but needs to be undertaken in a holistic
sense as part of a large suite of electoral re-
forms. This bill contains provisions that pri-
marily discourage business donations. In
fact, that is its objective, primarily to dis-
courage donations to one side of politics. We have measures such as that of reducing the disclosure threshold from $11½ thousand, indexed to the consumer price index annually, to $1,000, non-indexed, a measure directed at the heart of small business donations to the coalition parties. We see that the bill requires people who make gifts above the threshold, to candidates or members of groups during the election disclosure period, to furnish a return within eight weeks of the calling of an election. This is a blatant attempt to put the frighteners on small businesses and other businesses who are quite happy to reveal a donation. But to do so and making it public in the context of an election campaign makes it possible for political actions to be taken and makes it possible for intimidation to occur and makes it possible to discourage others who might have the ‘affront’ to make a donation of more than $1,000 to the coalition parties.

It also makes unlawful the receipt of a gift of foreign property by political parties, candidates and members of a Senate group—and we have been quite open-minded about exploring those sorts of issues in a more holistic bill. It prohibits all anonymous gifts above $50 except in two specified situations—again, Labor’s penchant for bureaucracy. This will be unmanageable for so many thousands of volunteers around the country, but in the interests of discouraging donations to my side of politics that does not worry the Labor Party. It also provides that public funding of election campaigning is limited to declared expenditure incurred by the eligible political party, candidate or Senate group or the sum payable calculated on the number of first preference votes received where they have satisfied the four per cent threshold, whichever is the lesser—again a provision that we would be prepared to discuss; we would be prepared to discuss versions of it in the context of a holistic approach.

The new arrangements are set to commence on 1 July 2011. Of course, there is no mention of the privileged and irregular position of the unions in any part of this bill. It is all directed at those people who primarily form part of our support base and who would be keen to see our side of politics sufficiently armed with resources to announce an effective campaign and to put our case for government. But there is no mention of the privileged and irregular position of the unions in regard to political donations and there is no mention of third parties—all the issues that must be addressed if there is to be a balanced approach. These are issues that are fundamental to seeing a balanced approach and for the community to have confidence in the laws that regulate political donations.

What lies at the heart of this bill is Labor’s real agenda to shore up its own fortunes while at the same time severely hampering those of its political opponents. Of course, the significant direct and indirect support provided by the union movement, amounting to over $65 million in the years prior to the 2007 election, is not addressed in this bill. The bill is also silent on the intervention of third parties, such as GetUp!, Greenpeace, the Wilderness Society and the like, in the political process. The historical trend has been that unions continue to provide massive support to the Labor Party while businesses have either split donations on a 50-50 basis or have withdrawn their support for the funding of political parties altogether.

Much of that 50-50 split and/or the withdrawal of funding altogether has resulted after a concerted campaign over the last 15 years by the Labor Party to intimidate so many businesses around this country. There has been a concerted campaign to intimidate those donors from the electoral rolls and, by other anecdotal advice, to identify smaller donors and for Labor Party heavies to physically meet with the heads of those companies
over a period of time, which has had the effect of either forcing a 50-50 split of donations or, in many cases, discouraging any donations at all.

In terms of delegates to the ALP conference, affiliated unions make up 427 voting members and party members make up only 426. Unions also retain their 50 per cent share of selection committees. There is a great funding source. It is a group that largely dictates to the Labor Party, and yet there is no mention of the propriety or the arrangements of many of the donations that are passed through from the union movement. New South Wales ALP members who are members of affiliated unions number fewer than 2,500 people. That is about 0.6 per cent of the total affiliated union membership in New South Wales of 384,000. Thus, the 99.4 per cent of members of affiliated unions in New South Wales who have actively chosen not to join the ALP are still financing the political ambitions of the 0.6 per cent who have.

Also, this connection with the unions and what it means is revealed today in the Herald Sun in a piece by Phillip Hudson. He revealed that earlier this month we saw Labor’s links with the trade unions writ large with the appointment of the failed Labor candidate in the seat of Melbourne, a former ACTU official, to the lucrative position of chief executive of the Australian Government Employees Superannuation Trust. AGEST has over $3.8 billion in assets and over 140,000 members. That is 140,000 people whose retirement funds, their future, is locked up in AGEST. They are predominantly from the Commonwealth, Northern Territory and ACT governments. Many members in this chamber, including me, have funds in AGEST. The board is appointed by the finance minister and the ACTU. Labor needs to demonstrate today that the appointment of Ms Bowtell, the failed candidate for Labor in the seat of Melbourne, was not a consolation prize for her standing in and losing the seat of Melbourne. The minister responsible, Senator Wong, the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, made the too-clever-by-half comment when approached by journalists that she played no part in the appointment, that it was nominated by the board members. She made no other comment. She refused to pursue any other investigation of the appointment. But, of course, AGEST Super was created by the Labor government and the ACTU in 1990. They appoint three directors each and jointly select the chair. The federal minister in charge is the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Penny Wong, who took over from Lindsay Tanner, who stood down as the ALP member for Melbourne, and Ms Bowtell was selected to replace him. Ms Bowtell failed to hold the seat for Labor. She is also a former senior ACTU official who missed out on the role of union president.

The 140,000 people with their life savings for their retirement being managed by AGEST need to be given the comfort that Ms Bowtell has the experience to manage such a responsible job. When selling herself recently to the voters in the seat of Melbourne, Ms Bowtell made no reference to any experience in the investment of funds. In fact, she said, ‘My early career was spent representing workers in the education sector.’ She also said, ‘For the past 15 years I worked at the ACTU advocating for ordinary, working Australian people.’ When you go to the website of AGEST, you find one paragraph outlining her professional credentials to oversee a $3.8 billion super fund—a huge sum of money. It says:

Cath has a law degree and has been a superannuation trustee for over ten years, with five years on the board of AGEST …. She has been an active member of investment and audit committees and
for six years was responsible for superannuation policy at the ACTU.

There is no mention whatsoever of investment experience. I was an independent member of the board of Sinclair Knight Merz, Australia’s biggest consulting engineering group with 6,000 consulting engineers. After five years, I brought a perspective to that board, but I am not an engineer. I was in no way equipped—and it would be laughable to suggest I was in that position—to take over as CEO of that consulting engineering company. In the same way, there is no evidence of investment experience.

This person will be competing against a great deal of experience and expertise in this marketplace. Usually, those running a multi-billion dollar investment fund would have at least 20 years of senior investment experience. What hands-on investment experience and what managerial experience has Ms Botwell had? None of this is canvassed on the AGEST website and none of it has been put in the public arena. We have every right to seriously question the appointment, given Labor’s track record of looking after Labor mates. This is a very serious issue and it goes to the heart of this bill. It shows that Labor is not serious about transparency and that Labor is looking to use any piece of legislation to advantage itself or its mates. It is captured again and again in this bill. We see the issue with GetUp, a third-party group which pretends to be non-aligned, yet in the 2007 election where was all of its focus in the last four weeks? In the marginal seats that we were seeking to defend. And what did you see at the last election? The CFMEU giving a significant $1.2 million to GetUp to run ads against the coalition. They are an arms-length party to the Labor Party. They are a wholly owned subsidiary, in my view, of the Labor Party. They are doing their job.

Mr Martin Ferguson interjecting—

Mr ROBB—You are the only one advocating some Liberal Party policies. This bill reeks of partisanship, opportunism and grubby politics. It must be opposed. We will oppose it very strongly. We need to get back to a holistic approach to political donations.

(Time expired)

Ms HALL (Shortland) (10.09 am)—The contribution of the member for Goldstein to this debate on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010 reeked of political opportunism and was totally directed towards promoting his side of politics. If I was to describe his contribution to this debate, I would describe it as: ‘I hate the unions, I hate the ALP, I particularly hate the ALP’s candidate for Melbourne, Ms Bowtell, and I believe that any legislation that changes electoral law reform should be designed to advantage my side of politics.’ It is not about putting forward an argument for fairness, transparency, openness and accountability. The member for Goldstein does not want that. He does not want transparency, he does not want openness and he does not want accountability. He just wants an advantage for his side of politics. If in any way he can see any fairness, transparency, accountability or openness being brought into law, then he is going to oppose it. He is going to strongly oppose it and he is going to make sure that his side of politics strongly opposes it.

I will just run through some of the things that the member for Goldstein said. When I came into the chamber he was saying that the amendments would disadvantage the Liberal Party. Would a bill that lowers the threshold for disclosure of political donations given by political parties disadvantage the Liberal Party? I do not quite understand that. The way I look at it, both sides of parliament will have to make disclosures. Every member of this parliament will have to make disclosures. What the legislation does is put on
record those people who are donating to political parties or candidates. I believe that the Australian people have the right to know who is making donations to the people they are voting for. I do not think it should be a secret. I do not think a person should be able to go along and donate, as they can now, a bit over $10,000 to a party or a candidate without the people that are voting for that candidate, the people of Australia, knowing where that political party is getting its money from.

The member for Goldstein says that the disclosure disadvantages one side of politics. I go back to what I have just said. How can it disadvantage one side of politics? It disadvantages both sides of politics if they seek to hide things. It discourages donations to one side of politics. It would have the same impact on both sides of politics. He talks about our side of politics, but I always thought that when we put laws in place in this parliament it was not about us but about making sure the people of Australia knew what this parliament stood for, what the members of this parliament stand for and making sure they know who and what they are voting for.

The member for Goldstein was very upset about the fact that business splits its donations. He did not like the simple fact that returns would have to be submitted earlier. Anything that brought about change that led to openness, transparency and accountability, the member for Goldstein disliked. He argued against it. In arguing that, he was saying what his party stood for, what his party advocated and how his party would be voting. That is not the way we on this side of the parliament look at it. On this side of the parliament we believe that people have a right to know who is donating to political parties. We believe that people cannot just give anonymous donations without some form of accountability.

This bill bans gifts from overseas, with penalties for breaches. It extends the ban on anonymous gifts to encompass all anonymous gifts, except where the gift is $50 or less. Such gifts can be received in two very limited circumstances. The first is where the gift is received at a general public activity—for example, you are at a school fete and someone gives you a donation—and that has to be done in a proper, accountable way. The second is where a gift is received at a private event, and the definition of ‘private event’ is set out in the legislation.

The bill contains measures that tie election funding to reported and verified electoral expenditure directly incurred by a candidate or a party in an election period, with penalties for fraud. That is very important and it is something that I am sure the Australian people would expect. There are measures dealing with gifts to separate divisions of a party to prohibit donation splitting. I suspect that that is something that the member for Goldstein and his colleagues would strongly oppose, because it is all about accountability, openness, transparency and letting the Australian people know how elections are funded and how candidates are funded, and we know that those on the other side of this parliament seem to really fight against that.

Under this legislation, people who make gifts above the threshold to candidates and members of groups during an election disclosure period are required to furnish a return within eight weeks after polling day. Once again, the member for Goldstein is vehemently opposed to this. It puts too much pressure on people who donate to his side of politics, and I suspect that this is a common theme that members opposite have run through this debate. I think it is right that those returns be submitted as soon as possible. They should be timely. This is a very good change to the legislation. The legislation also introduces a requirement for six-
monthly disclosure returns of gifts, where previously there was a 12-month time frame.

This legislation comes to the parliament today with, I would have to say, a history of opposition from the opposition. It was previously debated in the last parliament, in 2008-09. The opposition voted against it in the House. In the Senate the Greens and Senator Xenophon supported the legislation we have before us today and unfortunately the coalition and Senator Fielding, from Family First, voted against it—voted against transparency, voted against letting the people know where we get our political donations from and voted against us submitting our returns in a timely manner. They voted against all the good points this legislation contains.

At the commencement of this parliament the government entered into an agreement with the Greens and the Independents that this legislation would be reintroduced as soon as possible. The Greens and the Independents were concerned about the people of Australia knowing where they got their financial donations from and how their election campaigns were funded. We must remember that this legislation very much arises from a government initiative, with the green paper and much work having been put into getting us to this point. The Greens and the Independents know that this is a very important piece of legislation and they know that it is something that the Australian people want and something the Australian people expect. When it does come into law I think it will do a lot to improve the way in which people in Australia look at politicians. Australians like to know what their politicians stand for, what the people that represent them in this parliament stand for. They want to know where they receive their donations from and they want accountability.

It is proposed that this bill will commence on 1 July 2010. I suggest to the opposition that they rethink their position and maybe have a talk to some of their constituents about it. I encourage Senator Fielding to rethink his position and join with Senator Xenophon and the Greens to pass this law so that it will come into effect on 1 July. It does need his support to get through the Senate. It is such important legislation. Delaying the bill has left us in a situation where at the last election the Australian people were unable to ascertain where a number of gifts that had been given to political parties had come from. I am not ashamed to say where donations to my campaigns come from—I am not ashamed in the least. I do not think that members on the other side should be ashamed either.

The member for Goldstein talked about the fact that small business donates to his side of politics. Small business donates to both sides of politics, and both sides of politics understand—well, one side of politics understands. I should say—that a person chooses to donate to a political party for various reasons and it is not about disadvantaging them if they do give a donation to the member for Goldstein’s side of parliament. Rather, it is about openness and transparency. It is not about doing the types of things that the opposition did when it was in government—trying to totally demolish the union movement. On this side of parliament we stand for accountability. On this side of parliament we stand for openness. On this side of parliament we stand for transparency. On this side of parliament we do not stand for advantaging ourselves. I commend this piece of legislation to the House. (Time expired)

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (10.24 am)—I am pleased to rise to speak on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010. The biggest concern that those on this side of the House have with the bill that is before the parliament is that, in typical Labor Party
fashion, we have a bill that Labor are looking at implementing that is cloaked with the cloth of transparency and openness. We know that basically the entire frontbench—and, for all intents and purposes, nearly all other members of the Labor side of the chamber—were born and bred from one common heritage: the union movement. The Australian Labor Party unabashedly travel around and say, ‘We are representatives of the union movement.’ It is instrumental that the two members in the chamber, the members for Batman and Melbourne Ports, are perhaps extreme examples of the Australian Labor Party’s pedigree. Both are born and bred 100 per cent union men and nothing other than that. These people come into the chamber, they put their hands together, they wring their hands and they say, ‘We are concerned about the corrupting influence of big money in Australian politics.’ ‘We need to have transparency in the parliament,’ they say. The Labor Party say that they want to see electoral reform that will ensure that the Australian people enjoy a more transparent, open and accountable democracy, one in which our political parties are free from the corrupting influence of big money. That is the central thrust. That is the sales message that the Australian Labor Party provides us.

But when you look at the bill that is currently before the House—a bill that has been defeated twice by this parliament already—it has been defeated because there is a fundamental flaw with the bill, and that is that this bill, when you scratch the surface, actually is not about transparency. It is about entrenching an already unlevel playing field to further benefit the Australian Labor Party. Although I heard the member for Shortland wringing her hands and waxing lyrical about transparency, there are a number of realistic aspects that need to be taken into account with respect to this bill. What I am talking about is this. Let’s take, for example, the first issue that was raised—that of the disclosure threshold. Under the coalition we had a disclosure threshold of $10,000 originally, and it went up to $11,500, indexed for inflation. This bill seeks to reduce that threshold to $1,000, not indexed. We heard members opposite say they were not afraid of transparency and they were happy to say where their donations came from. Well, so is everybody on this side. We are very happy to say where our donations come from.

But the fundamental difference is this. I know that in Queensland when a small to medium sized enterprise or a private individual makes a donation which is disclosed, and if they only donate to the coalition side of politics and not to the Labor Party, then on the Monday morning after the Electoral Commission releases the information on who has made donations trade union officials or the state secretary of the ALP will be on the telephone to that enterprise or individual saying, ‘Listen, mate, let’s send a bit of lolly our way, to the Australian Labor Party.’ And if the person says, ‘No, thank you—I’m a supporter of the coalition,’ then, lo and behold, all of a sudden that business, which might employ a number of staff, starts having trouble from the union movement. Across the country we hear reports of small to medium enterprises that have made donations to the coalition suddenly finding that, if they have not donated to the Australian Labor Party, the bovver boys of the union movement start exerting a little bit of muscle and a little bit of pressure on those people, suggesting that they make donations to the Labor Party as well. That is the reason why the threshold was raised to the level it was. It was a level that provided a safeguard to those that would be intimidated by the union bovver boys so that they could make donations without threat of undue influence.

More importantly, a donation of up to, say, $10,000 is hardly a corrupting influence of a
donation. That is the reason why we had that threshold. Now Labor talk about putting it down to $1,000, not because they are concerned about transparency but because Labor know that they will pick up all of those other donations that sit below the disclosure threshold, enabling them to flex a bit more muscle and attempt to intimidate people who make donations. That is Labor’s approach to these disclosure bills. That is the reason why Labor are concerned about transparency. If it is purely about transparency, then why wouldn’t the threshold be $1? Labor has already shaved off the edges by saying it should be $1,000. Why not make it $1? If it is only about the principle of transparency, then make it $1. But, no, they will not. It is $1,000 because they recognise that it is impractical for it to be $1. That is the reason why. Whether it is $10,000 or $1,000, a compromise has already been made about the principle of transparency. So why not allow those who want to participate in the process to make donations?

More importantly, and of more concern, are big money donations to federal politics. Let us look at the 10 biggest donors to the Australian Labor Party. I will run through the list: No. 1 on the list is the shoppies—that is, the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association—who donated $1.5 million to the Australian Labor Party; the CFMEU—the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union—donated $1.3 million; the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union donated $1 million; the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union donated $765,000; the Electrical Trades Union, $674,000; the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, $650,000; the Maritime Union of Australia, $581,000; the Australian Workers Union, $568,000; the Health Services Union, $366,000; and The Transport Workers Union, $304,000. They are the top 10 union donors to the Australian Labor Party. That is serious money, money that does not even come close to being matched by donations to the coalition from private enterprise or private individuals.

That is money coming from trade unions into the coffers of the Australian Labor Party, and it is coupled with actual political organisational influence and the ability for these unions to hold executive positions and positions on preselection councils of the Australian Labor Party. And the Australian Labor Party has the hide to lecture the coalition about big money influence. Half of the members—actually, that is an underestimate—90 per cent of the members on the other side of the House would not even be in this place were it not for the trade union movement or, indeed, trade union lawyers. There are many examples of members opposite who owe their position in this chamber to the trade union movement. So it is little surprise that the Labor Party comes into this chamber and says: ‘We’re concerned about transparency, so we are going to lower the threshold and we are going to ensure that gives us maximum opportunity’—when I say ‘us’, I mean the Labor Party and their union bovver boys—to intimidate and influence those that donate only to the coalition.’

Let us look—because we are concerned about genuine electoral reform—at third-party organisations. One of the most glaring omissions from this bill—which is apparently ‘holier than thou’ to listen to the speeches of Labor members—relates to third-party organisations and political expenditure caps. Take, for example, an organisation like GetUp!. Across Australia, we have seen advertisements on TV of organisations like GetUp!, which holds itself out as being some kind of community activist organisation which simply tries to get Australians mobilised for the best interests of Australia. They say that they are separate to the political process. In my view, perhaps one of the
most hypocritical advertisements of all time was GetUp!’s advertisement showing a big resource company pretending that a person had made donations to a minister or to a conservative government in order to secure outcomes that they needed for their mining project. This is GetUp!’s most hypocritical advertisement, because GetUp! is a long, long way from being the pure white organisation it pretends to be. The GetUp! organisation received $1 million of funding from the union movement to promote its activities. It is nothing more than a front for the Australian Labor Party.

Mr Danby interjecting—

Mr CIOBO—The member for Melbourne Ports disagrees! That is $1 million from the Australian trade union movement to the GetUp! organisation to run—surprise, surprise—anti-Tony Abbott advertisements.

Mr Danby—It’s a conspiracy!

Mr CIOBO—No, it is not a conspiracy—you have only to join about three dots, member for Melbourne Ports. I know that you can do it; it is very straightforward. The GetUp! organisation gets $1 million from the trade union movement and runs anti-Tony Abbott advertisements. It is quite straightforward. It is a front for the Australian Labor Party, propped up by the union movement—the same union movement that owns and controls the Australian Labor Party. It is the reason cabinet ministers sitting at the table have the pedigree that they do with the Australian trade union movement.

In addition to that, let us look at what is actually happening with trade unions. Why not put expenditure caps in place?

Mr Danby—How is any of this relevant to the bill?

Mr CIOBO—The member for Melbourne Ports should understand that it is relevant because there are no expenditure cap limits in the bill. If the Labor Party was serious about making sure that we had electoral reform, it would put expenditure cap limits in the bill. But the Labor Party is not doing it, because the union movement, between 1 July 2006 and 30 June 2009, contributed direct and indirect funding of $76.6 million to the ALP. That is $76.6 million directly and indirectly from the trade union movement over three years to help the ALP. Of that, there were direct payments to the ALP from the unions amounting to just under $20 million during that period of time. So $76.6 million came straight out of the pockets of workers in the union movement, straight out of mysterious funds that employers are intimidated into supporting—registered training funds and these kinds of things. We on this side know how it works. We have seen the leaked documents and we know about the compromises that party officials have to make because that is how they go about collecting $76.6 million over three years to fund the Australian Labor Party. And, lo and behold, the bill is silent on expenditure caps. There is no reference to expenditure caps and yet those opposite say they are concerned about the corrupting influence of big money.

As a coalition MP, let me say that we could only dream of access to resources like this. We do not even come close. No wonder Australian Labor Party members sit over there with big grins on their faces, laughing about the fact that they are looking at implementing a bill that is cloaked in the cloth of transparency but which does nothing other than entrench the massive machine of the union movement behind the Labor Party. The Labor Party makes zero attempts to introduce expenditure caps.

I suggest that those members on the crossbenches—who include now for example the Greens member for Melbourne; a man who got direct funding from the union movement as well, lo and behold—ought to
be making sure that we put in place expenditure cuts; ought to be making sure that organisations like GetUp!, a front for the Australian Labor Party and funded to the tune of a million dollars by the trade union movement, are not contributing to the political debate. Put expenditure caps on them too. Let us be serious about genuine political reform and not simply cloak it by saying we are about transparency and do nothing except entrench the massive windfall advantage that the trade union movement provides to the Australian Labor Party over the coalition.

That is really what is at the core of this bill, and that is why the coalition makes no apologies for saying we will not support this sham of a bill; we will not support a bill that is pretending to be one thing but in reality is the exact opposite. When the Labor Party is serious about third party expenditure, when the Labor Party is serious about tackling big-money-corrupting donations by the trade union movement to the Labor Party, that is when we will support the bill. Introduce expenditure cuts; introduce limits on third parties taking part in political donations; stop organisations like GetUp! from ripping millions of dollars from offshore and then spending it on political campaigns in Australia. That is what you should do if you are genuine about making sure that we have political reform in this country; that is what this bill is missing. The coalition will not support something that does nothing except entrench the union movement’s power over those Labor members who sit in this chamber and pretend to govern for all of us. Those in the Labor Party do not govern for all of us; they govern for those who fund their campaigns to the tune of $76 million over three years.

This bill is a long way from being the pure white cloth that those opposite claim it to be. It is not about transparency; it is about providing an opportunity for them to have more ability to see who it is that is donating to the coalition parties so that their union men can go around and say to them, ‘Give us a little bit of money as well, or don’t donate.’ That is their track record; that is their form. There are many examples of that having occurred, and it is a great shame that a true opportunity for material reform is now being missed.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (10.39 am)—It is with some pride that I speak on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010. I do take the opportunity to celebrate the contribution that the trade union movement makes to working Australians. Certainly I am a trade union member and I am very proud to be so. The trade union movement has played a very significant role for many decades in raising the living standards of Australians right across the board, in both Labor and coalition seats.

This legislation is about providing transparency in the Australian electoral system. In Australia we celebrate our democracy and it is appropriate that we do have proper safeguards to ensure that Australians right throughout this nation can have faith in their electoral system. Transparency and accountability in political donations is a cornerstone to a healthy democracy, and that is why the Labor Party is so passionate about ensuring that we do have transparency and accountability around political donations. This bill does provide the mechanisms for that.

The coalition’s track record is absolutely woeful. Time and time again they find ways of hiding the source of their political donations and support. We on this side want to see transparency and accountability in our electoral system. The government is not only keeping to its commitments struck with the Australian Greens and the Independents on forming government, it is also continuing to deliver the necessary reform that we in the Labor Party have supported for many years.
This bill continues the government’s reform agenda.

The government proposed these transparency and accountability reforms back in 2008, only months after we were first elected. In May 2008, the government introduced its first bill dealing with political donation reform. This same bill was later amended, on advice from the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. Unfortunately, those amendments were defeated in the Senate. That was a crying shame. Those involved in the joint standing committee put a lot of time and effort into ensuring that there would be proper regulatory oversight.

The bill proposes reform in six areas. In particular, we are increasing the transparency of political donation disclosure, introducing more frequent and timely reporting of political donations and expenditure, and reforming the public funding of elections. Those reforms do go to the heart of a modern electoral system that is clear, that is transparent and that the Australian community can be satisfied has appropriate safeguards.

I will be discussing only a few of the measures within this bill. Let me start by bringing the House’s attention to one of the proposed reforms in the bill, the threshold for political donations, which is currently $10,000. This bill will decrease the threshold from $10,000 to $1,000 for registered political parties. That makes enormous sense. That will assist our electoral system. Candidates and others who incur political expenditure will need to declare those. This bill also provides more transparency and accountability with regard to political donations and gifts. This bill will also reduce the time frames for the making of returns to the Australian Electoral Commission. The time frame for submitting returns from donors is presently 15 weeks, the time frame for registered political parties is 16 weeks and the time frame for third parties is 20 weeks. Under this bill they will all be required to make those declarations within eight weeks.

Political parties will now have to lodge their AEC returns twice a year. This will provide transparency to the Australian community, which is something that those on this side of the House certainly strongly support. These reforms will also provide the AEC with more information, and that information will be made available to the Australian community. Again that is something that is necessary in a modern democracy. The information will be collected earlier than before. That is something that is critical in this area. This will also help with transparency for the community. All this data will be made available on the public record, and the changes will enable voters to view this information in a much more timely way. This is great news for our democratic fabric.

This bill will also remove the loophole regarding anonymous donations. The current situation is that an anonymous donor can make numerous donations just under the threshold to different branches or divisions of the same political party. For example, a company could donate $9,000 to each branch of a political party and avoid scrutiny under the existing procedures. This bill will remove that loophole. This will be done by using an existing definition of related political parties that has been found elsewhere in the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. This will make it clear that each branch of a political party is regarded as part of one political party. The situation that exists at the moment means that each branch or division of a political party is considered to be a different political party. The Australian community do not accept that definition. We on this side do not accept that definition. But those on the other side do. They do that because they wish to hide who is making donations to them, whether it be big tobacco, the big min-
ing lobby or many others. That is inappropriate. The Australian community do not like it.

Mr Danby—Like the member for Indi.

Mr CHEESEMAN—That is exactly right. The member for Indi likes to hide these things. We have seen that in the past. These matters are critical for informing the Australian community. This is about the transparency of our democratic institutions. We need these matters to be resolved in a timely way. It is for these reasons that the government has decided to reintroduce this bill. We sought to change these arrangements in the last parliament. We still stand by the need for these reforms. We will continue to pursue them, as we said we would. We entered into arrangements with the Greens and the Independents and in doing so indicated that we would continue to pursue these matters. And we will.

The federal government also does not want to see foreign companies having political sway on Australian democratic institutions. For that reason we believe that outside influences should not be allowed to inform our democratic processes. We will be moving to ensure that that cannot happen. This bill will also make it unlawful for a third party to receive any gifts from foreign governments. That is important, because we do not want to see a situation in which foreign governments make contributions to business that then in turn pass on those gifts or donations to political parties. That would be inappropriate. We are very proud to be putting in place measures to ensure that that does not happen. I am proud to be a member voting for this legislation. I encourage the Liberal Party to support it.

Previously, anonymous gifts of up to $11,500 could be made. This is far too much. This bill will reduce this amount to $50, a sum of money that will see far more transparency. This amount will certainly help create transparency when it comes to gifts to political parties. It is something that I support. The $50 threshold will enable practical measures to be taken to ensure that local branch members are clear and transparent with the Australian community and the Australian Electoral Commission without overly frustrating them by forcing them to fill in excessive paperwork when, for example, conducting a local branch raffle, which is something that Labor Party branches conduct on a regular basis. For that reason, I support the $50 threshold. It is a practical sum. It is not anywhere near the outrageous current sum of $11,500. I believe that these reforms will make sure that our democracy stays open to ideas and that donations made to political parties are transparent so that people can follow who has made what donations to what parties. These reforms will not overcomplicate the donation process. They will ensure that we protect our democratic institutions.

Electoral funding is important and it is important that it be tied to electoral expenditure. This proposed reform will aim to address the possibility that political parties or candidates may receive a windfall from payments of election funding. Again, I think we do need to be mindful of that. The proposed reforms will mean that a candidate will receive the lesser amount of either the electoral expenditure that was incurred in an election campaign or the amount awarded per vote. The amount for each vote will not be changed.

This bill will also introduce a range of new offences under the reporting and disclosure regime that we currently have in place. It will also put in place across the board increases in penalties for breaches of the Electoral Act. Again, this will ensure that our electoral system maintains its integrity and that appropriate penalties are put in place.
This is critical to maintaining our democratic institutions.

This bill has been around for some time, both in the last parliament and this parliament. I encourage all political parties to support this legislation. These are necessary fixes to ensure that we do have transparency and accountability. I would hope that the Liberal Party sees sense and works with this government to ensure that we do have a transparent accountability framework with respect to electoral matters.

The time I have left is now limited, but I urge all parties, all members of this House and those in the other place to support this legislation, because it is important that we do have accountability and transparency in our Electoral Act.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (10.54 am)—The Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010 should have been passed years ago. Early last year the government introduced a similar bill into the Senate to make political donations more transparent, but the bill was defeated by an unholy coalition of Senator Fielding and the Liberals, both of whom do not want to clean up our election campaign finance system. I hope things will be different this time, with that unholy alliance of Senator Fielding and the Liberals, both of whom do not want to clean up our election campaign finance system. I hope things will be different this time, with that unholy coalition of Senator Fielding and the Liberal Party still there until June. They will certainly change after June, because the government is determined to see that transparent, open and fair electoral funding is put in place.

We have always had a very strong and clean electoral system in Australia. We rarely hear complaints about fraud or rigged elections. However, it is well known that our election funding system—our political donations system—is in need of reform. In 1984 the Hawke government brought in laws that required all donations to political parties, whether from individuals, companies or organisations such as trade unions, to be declared public. In 2004, however, the previous government gained control of the Senate. One of the first things they did was to change the law on political donations. They lifted the disclosure threshold from $1,500 to more than $10,000 and increased tax deductibility. This allowed large amounts of money to flow to political parties, particularly the Liberal Party, without being disclosed. As the member for Corangamite quite rightly pointed out, it meant that the Liberal Party, by disaggregating the donations—for example, they could go to state branches of political parties as though they were separate entities—could get donations of $80,000 secretly, without the public knowing that it was getting such donations.

As I said, it is possible to make separate donations to each of these political parties under the existing legislation. How abhorrent is that? To hide who has donated to which party during an election campaign avoids the forms of transparency and accountability which the public expects of elected officials. What an abuse of power. With this legislation, Labor has sought to undo this deceitfulness.

Previously, the member for Moncrieff was going on about how we need to apply this measure to third parties. He was whingeing and complaining about GetUp!, which he said was a pro-Labor organisation. Goodness me! He must not have been in receipt of the same emails I have been receiving. If anything, it is a pro-Green organisation. The sum of $1 million donated to Getup! pales into insignificance beside the Minerals Council’s advertising costs during the last election, which went directly to the heart of the government’s capability of handling the global financial crisis. Who was the person behind the mining advertising? Mr Textor. He is perfectly entitled to earn a living; he is
a very capable person—full honour to him. He helped get the British Conservatives, with their Liberal Democrat mates, into government. But to say that the mining council advertising, which cost $17 million, was insignificant in the last election is obscuring things and makes GetUp! a very poor comparison. This is particularly so when it is much more focused on criticising both the government and the opposition rather than, as the member for Moncrieff claimed, being a Labor Party front.

The Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010 seeks to lower the donation threshold, from $10,000 to $1,000. It means that donations received or given by key participants in the political process will be transparent and accountable, as well as reducing the scope of undisclosed gifts. Of course, it also means that if this legislation is passed then individuals or organisations that give $1,000 cannot do it in different states and be in the same situation they would have been in previously. As the member for Corangamite and others have pointed out, this legislation reduces the time frame for the making of returns. It reduces the current time frames for the making of returns and the disclosure of gifts and expenditure relating to an election by individual candidates and members of Senate groups and donors who make donations within the election period. The time frame is reduced from 15 weeks to eight weeks. The idea behind that is quite sensible—that is, the public should know in a timely way what donations are being given by whom so they can make assessments about whether those donations are tied to people’s political views or judgments, particularly those of political parties. Previously, political parties, associated entities, third parties and donors were required to provide returns to the Australian Electoral Commis-

sion once every 12 months. They will now be required to be lodged every six months.

This bill also seeks to ban large overseas companies from exerting political influence on parties by making unreported gifts or donations to political parties. The Australian public will, as a result of the change, be able to scrutinise any possible impact that foreign donations have on political decision making. How could the Liberal Party be opposed to this? I do not suggest that they take foreign donations. Of course they should be opposed to overseas countries making foreign donations, and therefore they should, quite logically, support the bill.

All of this legislation is being contemplated, I would suggest, to reduce the risk of corruption and undue influence. The former shadow special minister of state, Senator Michael Ronaldson, attacked union support of Labor last year when we first introduced this legislation. I imagine the new shadow special minister of state, Bronwyn Bishop, will do the same. If the shadow minister and the coalition were serious, they would wean themselves off contributions from outside players and make it clear to the public who they take money from. For example, the Liberals take money from tobacco companies.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

Mr DANBY—They do—British American Tobacco—and the public have a right to know that. I have said before that previous laws that existed allowed political donations to be concealed from the public, and this gave the bad odour of potential corruption. I commend my friend the Special Minister of State for reintroducing this legislation to ensure that our system is more transparent and accountable.

However, the aspect of this bill that I really think is worth noting is the reporting of election funds and verification of election...
expenditure directly incurred by a candidate or party for an election, with penalties for fraudulent claims. This House may remember that I spoke in 2007 of the need to reform the electoral expenditure and reporting funds in order to avoid another Pauline Hanson situation. In 2004, the former member for Oxley ran for the Senate in Queensland, spending only $35,000 and trousering $200,000 that she got from the public purse because, as we know, a fixed amount is given by the Electoral Commission according to the number of votes. What Pauline Hanson used to do was run a campaign in the Women's Weekly and on A Current Affair, get all the free publicity and spend none of the money that was given to her by the public for a legitimate election campaign, score over four per cent, which was the minimum you needed, and trouser the difference—spend $35,000 and take $200,000 from the taxpayers. What a scheme that was! It reminds me of Zero Mostel's famous film The Producers, where they deliberately tried to have a play that closed on the first night in order for all the contributions that they got oversubscribed from elderly widows to make the play worth while financially. This was an extraordinary scheme by the former member for Oxley, Senate candidate Pauline Hanson, and this legislation will close that sort of thing down. Again, I would think that the Liberal Party would be in favour of this. They are not in favour of Pauline Hanson. They opposed Pauline Hanson. Therefore why would they not support this legislation?

The context of this legislation is also very important. The period from 2004 to 2007 when the Liberals had control of the Senate is widely regarded by many people as a period of hubris for the now opposition, the Liberal Party, when they introduced legislation on workplace reform that ultimately brought them down. But, when they controlled the Senate, apart from introducing their bodgie donations scheme, they introduced legislation such that, when people cast a provisional vote, they had to produce unreasonable amounts of photo ID in order to exercise their provisional vote.

What that meant at the last election I want to make clear to this House. Two hundred thousand Australians sought a provisional vote at the last election; 130,000 of them received letters in the last few weeks saying that they were not granted. They did not get their vote, because of this Liberal Party scam that required them to produce photo ID, not just proof of signature or proof of change of address, which they could easily produce, as they did in the past.

At every previous election since 1996 the Liberal Party were elected on the basis of people with provisional votes having matching signatures. On all those occasions, it was perfectly legitimate for them to be elected on the basis of those people's votes, even in close elections. Now they try to rule out all of those Australians' rights to vote. In a compulsory voting system, our ethic should be to try and include every person who is a legitimate voter in the voting system, not exclude them. In those elections in which the Liberal Party were elected between 1996 and 2004, 50 per cent of people who applied for a provisional vote got it. Because of the scam that they introduced in 2007, only 20 per cent of people got a provisional vote. One hundred and thirty thousand Australians lost their right to vote because of the photo ID scam that the Liberals introduced at the 2007 elections. Of course, this is their idea, their motivation for the 2006-07 legislation: salami tactics to shave off different groups of people that might vote for the Labor Party.

Another group of people that they have excluded very cleverly over the last 15 years via masterly inaction is people who shift addresses. As you change address—and every
member of parliament knows this—the Electoral Commission know where you have shifted to because of their access to databases like the White Pages. The AEC are bound by legislation to write to the ordinary voter and say, ‘Can you please confirm in writing that you have shifted address?’ Unfortunately, only 20 per cent of Australians respond in hard mail. What that has meant over time, over the period of the Liberal Party’s government—and we did not manage to change it in the last three years of the previous Labor government—is that 1.8 million Australians have been taken off the electoral roll by this process.

What we ought to do—and I am confident that my friend the Special Minister of State will eventually do this after June when there is a sensible majority in the Senate—is that, when we know people have changed addresses, when the Liberal Party does not dispute that they have changed addresses, when it is confirmed by different databases such as that of the Transport Accident Commission or the various electricity boards, people should write back to the Electoral Commission only if they are not at that address. Hopefully therefore in excess of 1½ million Australians would be able to be put back on the electoral roll.

This is our responsibility. In a democratic system, in a compulsory voting system, it is absolutely terrible that 130,000 Australians cast a provisional vote and were not actually allowed to vote at the last election. It is terrible that 1½ million Australian citizens were not given their right to vote because they were not enrolled, and I think it will be the responsibility of this government and of the Electoral Commission to clean up this Liberal rort just as we are cleaning up political donations.

I might say that one very bad idea on political donations that came during the last three years was initiated by Senator Ronaldson, the previous spokesman on these matters, together with his mates in the Greens political party. That was for pure public funding of political parties. What a crazy idea that is. I have the figures for the Their plan period of the real cost of political parties. Can you imagine the Australian taxpayer taking up the entire cost of funding the Liberal Party or the Labor Party? In the 2004-07 period the real cost of the Labor Party operations was $217 million. The real cost of the Liberal and National parties was $180 million. In order to have pure public funding of the Australian electoral system it would cost the Australian taxpayer $450 million. Do we really want to do that, to pay for political parties, or do we want to build hospitals, pay for our defence forces and pay for the public education system? The current mixed system of some matching public funding at election time together with private donations, open and transparent, is an ideal way for an open democratic society like Australia to pursue. But having pure public funding would cost the Australian taxpayer $450 million. When we make decisions on these kinds of issues, we have to have the real costs of what these idealistic Green ideas would cost rather than just proceed with them. (Time expired)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (11.09 am)—It is a pleasure to follow the member for Melbourne Ports, who has been a passionate advocate of political reform in this place. I know he was pleased that those people so unjustly unable to be on the electoral rolls have now got that opportunity, and I thank him for his fine work on behalf of the Australian community. I rise to speak again in support of the bill. While some may discount its importance, the integrity of the funding of our electoral system is something that cannot be understated. Indeed, it is a fundamental part of restoring the trust of the
people of Australia in our electoral system, something I believe was undermined when the former government increased the levels of donations and failed to tighten the loopholes that exist. This lack of action allows more questions over where the money was actually coming from. The bill is about taking the Australian system of electoral funding to best-practice levels and making sure people, lobby groups and corporations cannot dance around the regulations to achieve their own aims and seek to influence the system just from the sheer depth of their pockets. I am pleased therefore to support the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010 seeking to reform foundation, disclosure and funding laws for political parties and election campaigns.

Simply, the bill aims to improve our system of political donations disclosure and election funding to help ensure that campaigning is fair and transparent. How does it seek to do this? Essentially the bill introduces six measures in three key areas. The first is increasing the transparency of political donations disclosure; the second is more frequent and timely reporting of political donations and expenditure; and the third is reforming the public funding of elections. The measures contained in the bill are not new. They are in fact in response to the Labor government’s 2007 commitment to act on these matters.

A first bill on these issues was introduced in May 2008. The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters delivered an advisory report on that bill in October 2008. In December of that year, the government tabled amendments to the bill in response to this report. Unfortunately, that bill was rejected by the Senate. In March 2009, the government introduced another bill encompassing the government’s amendments. That second bill lapsed with the end of the 42nd Parliament. The bill before us is substantially in the same form as that introduced in March 2009 and on which I spoke in this place on 16 March. The measures contained in this bill increase transparency and add to administrative processes for political parties and candidates. As Special Minister of State Gray pointed out in his second reading speech on this bill, it is not the intention of the government to burden parties and candidates, but to increase the transparency and integrity of the electoral system.

The six measures in this bill involve the following characteristics. The first is to set the donation disclosure threshold level to a flat rate of $1,000, lowering it from the current threshold of $11,500. This rate applies equally to all participants in the electoral process, including donors, registered political parties and candidates. The second measure deals with anonymous donations. For the record, under the Commonwealth Electoral Act registered political parties, branches of parties, candidates, Senate groups and people acting on behalf of these categories can receive anonymous donations below an indexed threshold, which is currently $11,500. Anonymous donations above this amount are prohibited. Fundamentally, the bill extends this ban on anonymous donations to all anonymous donations except where the donation is $50 or less and has been received at a ‘general public activity’ such as a fete, where people may place money in a bucket, or at a ‘private event’ such as a dinner, dance or quiz night, where people might donate small sums of money. These activities and events are defined in the bill and specified records must be kept in order for the anonymous donations to be retained.

Historically, the use of anonymous donations by third parties for political expenditure has not been restricted under the Commonwealth Electoral Act. This bill seeks to change this to prohibit the use of certain
anonymous donations by third parties for political expenditure. The new prohibition applies to third parties which are required to lodge annual returns of their political expenditure above the current threshold of $11,500. The bill would also change this threshold to $1,000. Political expenditure, which is defined under section 314AEB of the Commonwealth Electoral Act, includes expenditure on the public expression of views on a political party, a candidate, a member of the House of Representatives or a senator; the public expression of views on an issue in an election; the publication of material that requires authorisation under the Electoral Act; the broadcast of political matter and opinion polls or other research on people’s voting intentions.

Only anonymous donations of $50 or less which have been received by third parties at a general public activity or at a private event would be able to be used for political expenditure by entities required to lodge returns under section 314AEB of the Commonwealth Electoral Act. The bill would also provide for the Commonwealth to recover unlawful anonymous donations and an amount equal to the amount of unlawful political expenditure as a debt due to the Commonwealth. Together, these two measures, which aim to reduce the disclosure threshold and limit anonymous donations, would enhance the transparency of political donations and the public’s confidence in the integrity of our political process. The government believes that the community has a right to know who is giving what to whom. We wish to end the secrecy around donations.

The third measure would ban foreign donations. This would help to remove a perception that foreign donors could exert influence over the Australian political process. The fourth measure would prevent donation splitting. Currently, large donations may be hidden across state or territory branches of the same party, potentially circumventing the disclosure threshold. Under this bill, separate divisions of a political party would no longer be treated as separate entities for the purposes of disclosing donations.

The fifth measure aims to increase public scrutiny of political donations and expenditure by making information available to the Australian public more frequently and more quickly. The bill would reduce time frames for lodging returns from the existing 15-, 16- and 20-week periods down to eight weeks. More frequent disclosure of political donations and expenditure would also occur. Whereas returns have been required every 12 months, they would need to be lodged once every six months.

The sixth measure seeks to reform public funding of elections by ensuring that election funding is tied to genuine election expenditure. This measure would prevent candidates, or any political party, from making financial gain from the electoral public funding system. Public funding would continue to be paid to registered political parties, unendorsed candidates and unendorsed Senate groups who receive at least four per cent of the formal first-preference votes at an election. Under the bill, they would receive the lesser amount of either the electoral expenditure that was actually incurred in an election period—between the issuing of the writs and the end of polling day—or the amount awarded per vote. In a technical update from the 2009 bill, which I mentioned earlier, the amount awarded per vote would be indexed for inflation. The commencement date for the bill would allow these features to operate from 1 July 2011.

The measures in this bill provide an important, immediate step that can be taken to maintain the integrity of our electoral system—something more widely commented upon by the member for Melbourne Ports,
the previous speaker. While some on the other side discount its importance, the integrity of the funding of our electoral system cannot be underestimated. This legislation is a fundamental part of restoring the trust of the Australian people in our electoral system, which was undermined when the former government increased the levels of donations and failed to tighten the loopholes that exist. As the Special Minister of State mentioned in his second reading speech, this bill is about taking the Australian system of electoral funding to best practice and making sure that people, lobby groups and corporations cannot dance around the regulations. I commend the bill to this House.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (11.20 am)—I too rise to speak in support of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010. Whilst this bill is specifically about changes to the Electoral Act, it highlights a much more significant issue relating to the integrity of parliament and the people’s confidence in government. Public opinion of and confidence in governments is not high, and there are understandable reasons for that. It is important that the credibility of our parliament and our politicians is restored. Our parliament is seen as a symbol of the democracy which underlies our culture, our values and our way of life. Regrettably, these values are being eroded. Politics is about power, and the centre of power lies in the parliament. The outcome of an election has significant consequences for many people in many places. The stakes are indeed high. So, for many, the end justifies the means. Self-interest, or political survival, is often pursued at any cost, including in some cases the loss of integrity and honesty. Regrettably, the quest for power has resulted in the erosion of the very principles that the institution of parliament represents.

Many of the means used today to secure political power are directly at odds with the very values that we expect parliament to uphold. Not surprisingly, public confidence both in the parliament and in our parliamentary members has deteriorated and continues to do so. That is very clearly reflected in voter participation in Western democracies where voting is not compulsory. Voting is not compulsory in the UK and USA, and in this year’s elections in those countries the voter turnout in the UK was 65 per cent and in the USA it was 42 per cent. One can only conclude that the people who chose not to vote in those elections did so because they have little faith in the system.

In my own state of South Australia we only recently held local government elections. They, too, are not compulsory. In South Australia the local government elections are conducted under a postal voting system, where the ballot papers are posted out to the homes of each and every elector. The voter response was less than 30 per cent.

Political donations are only one of the means used today to secure influence in the political system and to destroy confidence, as I just referred to. There are of course other things that contribute to the loss of confidence in public office. Whilst I will not talk in detail about those today, I refer to areas such as the political campaigning tactics being used, the media reporting of the political agenda and the media debates, and a broad range of other strategies—some of which have been referred to by other speakers in this debate—that are used to manipulate a political outcome.

I come back to the question of political donations. There is much that can be learnt about political donations by looking to what has happened in the USA. In this year’s mid-term elections in the USA, my understanding is that the total spend across the nation for
TV ads for that campaign was estimated at somewhere between $3 billion and $4.2 billion. The Republican candidate for governor in California spent $140 million on her campaign.

But there are other trends that we should take note of, because it is my view that the trends in the USA are quite often trends that we pick up here in Australia. In the USA there has been an increase in recent years in the amount of what is referred to as third-party political spending. In 2006, something like $223 million was spent by third-party advertisers or supporters. In 2008, the figure was $397 million. In 2010, the figure reached $564 million. What is interesting about this is that in a landmark 2010 US Supreme Court case the court handed down a ruling that third-party organisations can now pay for ads that talk directly about the candidates. No longer is it simply a matter where a third-party organisation can quite legitimately raise a political matter and talk about it in the context of an election campaign. They can now specifically and directly campaign in support of or against a political candidate. In fact, it was on campaigns against candidates that, I understand, most of that money was spent.

The ruling in the USA is and should be of concern to Australia as well, because if political donations continue to go unchecked in this country one can only draw the conclusion that we will end up with similar kinds of uses for those funds. That would further deteriorate the confidence in this very institution.

I have listened to a number of opposition speakers on this bill and I come to the conclusion that their arguments against it are simply unsustainable. The very fact that they are arguing against this bill, in my view, contributes to the concerns the broader public have about the political system. Whilst this bill does not resolve all of the issues that I have alluded to and whilst it may not resolve all of the issues relating to political donations, it is certainly a step in the right direction in terms of making political campaigning through donations more transparent. When the public see a political party oppose these measures, the first question they ask themselves is: why are they opposing the bill; what is really behind their opposition to it? If the bill is inadequate, by all means move additional amendments to it. By all means introduce additional matters that ought to be considered. But do not block the very matters that quite legitimately have been raised in this bill and that, I believe, would have the broad support of the community and that the community would also see as making the process of political donations much more transparent. That is exactly what we all should be endeavouring to do as members of this place.

If members opposite continue to oppose this bill, I suggest that they will be doing so at the expense of their own credibility, because they have put forward no credible arguments. To attack, as some members have done, third party organisations who have contributed to the political process, to attack the unions, is simply a diversionary tactic to cover their real motives for opposing this bill. Their real motive for opposing this bill is that they do not wish to have the people who donate to their campaigns disclosed. As I said a moment ago, if you do not want the people who are contributing to your campaign disclosed, it means that you have something to hide. If you did not you would be supporting this bill.

This bill covers six critical measures. Most speakers have spoken on each of those measures, so I will go through them very quickly. First is reducing the donation disclosure threshold from $11,500 to $1,000. It seems to me that the $1,000 limit is quite
reasonable in today’s society. To go any lower than that would make the whole system unworkable. But it would also be fair to say that anyone who contributes above that amount of money would do so because they have an interest in the outcome of the election, and that ought to be disclosed. In fact, even reducing it to $1,000 may not cover all of the loopholes. I am sure that there will be some smart strategists out there who will find ways of getting around this provision as well, but at least it is an attempt to try to ensure that we have the transparency that the public quite rightly deserves.

The second measure relates to the threshold for anonymous donations of $11,500. Again, why is a donation anonymous in the first place? It is in order to ensure that the donor is not identified. There is no sinister reason in why that person or organisation ought to be identified, but I suspect that there might be good political reason why the opposition would not want that to be the case. The second measure talks about how anything less than $50 may be anonymous. Again, for all practical purposes, you could not possibly have a law that could be administered properly if you did not have a minimal amount like the $50 that this bill contains.

The third measure relates to a ban on foreign donations. Whilst I believe that this particular measure is important, I am also conscious that there may be ways around this particular provision that will be used by those who are intent on influencing the political outcome here in Australia. But, again, we should make it as difficult as possible. Nor should we be in any way influenced by donations that come from overseas corporations or, for that matter, possibly even overseas governments, who all have an interest in the policy making of this government. This is a measure that I strongly support and, again, a measure that I am surprised is opposed by those opposite.

The fourth measure relates to the separation of donations where donations are split from one political branch of a political party to another in order to be below the $10,000 threshold. This is one of the tactics that is currently used. Whilst it will still be possible to do that in the future, this measure will make it so much harder. I believe that this measure will help restore some of the credibility that I was referring to.

The more timely reporting of donations is the fifth measure in this bill. It simply relates to the process of reporting the amounts of political donations that are received. I believe that more timely reporting would simply ensure that there is much more transparency and accountability when political donations are made. If they are made honestly and without any ulterior motive, there should be no reason why that particular provision should be opposed and there should be no reason for any of the donors to object to that particular provision.

The last provision is the reforming of the public funding of elections, which ensures that no-one can stand for office purely for the purpose of benefiting by standing for office because they may collect the $2.31 for every vote they get above the four per cent. They have to demonstrate that they expended the amount that they are going to receive before they receive that money. Given that we are talking about public funds, that seems to me to be an appropriate thing to do.

I am perplexed as to why the opposition oppose this bill. I am perplexed because none of their arguments address the real issues here. It seems to me that, once again, they are simply trying to support those who seek to influence the political outcome of our elections. (Time expired)
Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (11.35 am)—in reply—I thank all those who have contributed to the debate on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010. It seeks to improve our political donations disclosure and election funding arrangements. The measures contained in this bill are largely the same as those that were first introduced into the parliament in May 2008 and again in March 2009. The 2008 bill was considered by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in its October 2008 advisory report and the government accepted the suggested amendments to that first bill and they were then included in the 2009 version of the bill. Any further delays to the passage of the measures contained in the bill will result in any changes being delayed until July 2012 due to the lead times involved in establishing reporting systems and the need to commence these measures at the start of a financial year.

Let me once again summarise the key measures contained in this bill. The first group of measures in the bill concerns the disclosure threshold and reporting periods. This bill would reduce the disclosure threshold from the current CPI indexed amount of $11,500 to a non-indexed amount of $1,000. This would restore public scrutiny to donations of this size. Transparency in the funding and disclosure regime would be improved by requiring participants in the electoral process to report every six months, rather than every 12 months.

The Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2010 would also provide consistency by reducing the deadline when the participants in the political process have to lodge disclosure returns with the Australian Electoral Commission to a consistent period of eight weeks. This measure would replace the haphazard deadlines currently in the Commonwealth Electoral Act which include 15, 16 or 20 weeks depending on the person or the entity. To ensure that the new $1,000 disclosure threshold is not avoided by a person giving multiple amounts below the threshold to various branches or divisions of the same political party, the bill treats donations to different branches of a political party as if the donations were given to the same political party or entity.

The second group of measures in the bill relates to the source of certain donations. Specifically, the bill prohibits the receipt of a gift of foreign property. This would remove the perception of foreign donations being able to be used to purchase influence over political decisions. Also, registered political parties, candidates or members of groups will not be permitted to receive anonymous gifts so as to circumvent the reporting obligations. Only anonymous donations of $50 or less which have been received at a general public event, such as a fete, or at a private event will be permitted. Similar restrictions would also apply to third parties and their use of anonymous donations for political expenditure. Third parties that are required to lodge disclosure returns would only be able to use anonymous donations of $50 or less for political expenditure where those donations have been received at a general public activity or at a private event. These measures to restrict anonymous donations would help to end the secrecy around donations.

Finally, the bill seeks to prevent the possibility that some candidates and other groups may obtain a windfall payment of election funding by tying electoral funding to the actual electoral expenditure incurred. The government believes that this bill is an important step in delivering a more transparent and accountable electoral system for Australia. The government remains committed to improving the election funding and disclosure.
regime to maintain the integrity of the electoral process and to help ensure that the election campaign is transparent and fair. The measures contained in the bill are the first step in achieving such an outcome. I commend the bill to the House.

Question put:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided. [11.44 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes............ 74
Noes............  73
Majority........  1

AYES

Adams, D.G.H.   Albanese, A.N.
Bandt, A.       Bird, S.
Bowen, C.       Bradbury, D.J.
Brodie, G.      Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S.     Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M.     Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L. Clare, J.D.
Collins, J.M.   Combet, G.
Crean, S.F.     D'Ath, Y.M.
Danby, M.       Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J.      Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A.   Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J.  Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P.     Georganas, S.
Gibbons, S.W.   Gillard, J.E.
Gray, G.        Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P.   Hall, J.G. *
Hayes, C.P. *   Husic, E.
Jones, S.       Kelly, M.J.
King, C.F.      Leigh, A.
Livermore, K.F. Lyons, G.
Macklin, J.L.   Marles, R.D.
McClelland, R.B. Melham, D.
Mitchell, R.    Murphy, J.
Neumann, S.K.   O’Connor, B.P.
O’Neill, D.     Oakeshott, R.J.M.
Owens, J.       Parke, M.
Perrett, G.D.   Ripoll, B.F.
Rishworth, A.L. Rowland, M.
Roxon, N.L.     Rudd, K.M.
Saffin, J.A.    Shorten, W.R.
Sidebottom, S.  Smith, S.F.
Smyth, L.       Snowdon, W.E.

Swan, W.M.      Symon, M.
Thomson, C.     Thomson, K.J.
Vamvakindou, M.  Wilkie, A.
Windsor, A.H.C. Zappia, A.

NOES

Abbott, A.J.   Alexander, J.
Andrews, K.    Andrews, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C.  Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.   Bishop, J.I.
Briggs, J.E.   Broadbent, R.
Buchholz, S.   Chester, D.
Christensen, G. Ciobo, S.M.
Cobb, J.K.     Coulton, M. *
Crook, T.      Dutton, P.C.
Entsch, W.     Fletcher, P.
Forrest, J.A.  Frydenberg, J.
Gambaro, T.    Gash, J.
Griggs, N.     Haase, B.W.
Hartshuyler, L. Hawke, A.
Hockey, J.B.   Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J.    Jensen, D.
Jones, E.      Katter, R.C.
Keenan, M.     Kelly, C.
Laming, A.     Ley, S.P.
Maclaran, I.E. Markus, L.E.
McCormack, M.  Mirabella, S.
Morrison, S.J. Moylan, J.E.
Neville, P.C.  O'Dowd, K.
Pynne, C.      Prentice, J.
Robb, A.       Ramsey, R.
Roy, Wyatt     Ruddock, P.M.
Schultz, A.    Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D. * Simpkins, L.
Slipper, P.N.  Smith, A.D.H.
Somlyay, A.M.  Southcott, A.J.
Stone, S.N.    Tehan, D.
Truss, W.E.    Tudge, A.
Turnbull, M.   Van Manen, B.
Vasta, R.      Washer, M.J.
Wyatt, K.      

PAIRS

Plibersek, T.    Randall, D.J.
* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.
Third Reading

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (11.50 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Report from Main Committee

Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment, appropriation message having been reported; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (11.51 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (STUDENT SERVICES AND AMENITIES) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by Mr Garrett:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (11.51 am)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010. The coalition opposes this legislation. As explained in the report of the inquiry by the House Standing Committee on Education and Employment regarding this legislation, as tabled yesterday, the government have rushed this legislation into the parliament so that its provisions can be implemented by higher education providers in the new academic year.

The government introduced similar legislation twice in previous parliaments. This is despite Labor promising before the 2007 election that it would not be introducing a student fee to pay for services and amenities on university campuses. Labor’s spokesperson on education, the member for Perth, promised:

… I am not considering a HECS style arrangement, I’m not considering a compulsory HECS style arrangement and the whole basis of the approach is one of a voluntary approach. So I am not contemplating a compulsory amenities fee.

Both of the previous bills were opposed by the coalition and each bill failed to pass through the parliament. The legislation amends the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to allow higher education providers to charge a compulsory student services and amenities fee. The fee will be $250 per student per annum, indexed to $254 in 2011 and indexed annually thereafter. Given the legislation is not intended to apply until 2011, the fee will actually increase before it comes into effect.

The bill requires universities to spend fees collected on numerous specified services, including food and drinks, supporting sport or recreational activity, supporting the administration of clubs, and legal and health services. Whilst the bill prevents a service provider from spending the collected fee on supporting political parties or the election of a person to Commonwealth, state or local government, provisions will clearly allow funds to be spent on political campaigns in favour of policies or against governments.
The coalition agrees that certain student services are an important aspect of universities and university life. However, we do not believe that students should be forced to pay for services that they may not want or that may not be needed by the majority of students. Given these concerns, the coalition submitted this legislation to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment. We asked the committee to carefully consider the legislation and report during the next session of parliament. Despite the Selection of Bills Committee requiring a report by the autumn session of 2011, the Labor majority on the education committee rushed through the inquiry and tabled its report in a little over two weeks. Interested members of the public were given just six days to make a submission. The committee held no public hearings and did not request any further information from those making a submission. As the coalition members noted in their dissenting report:

... Coalition Members ... hold concerns about the broader nature of the Committee process in circumstances where there has been little time and limited mechanisms to discharge the obligations associated with membership of such a Committee. In our view, the use of an effective “guillotine” in standing committees would seem to be outside the much proclaimed new paradigm in the Federal Parliament.

The chair’s report explained that the government was trying to push this legislation through parliament this year so that it could be implemented by higher education providers in the 2011 academic year. However, by preventing the committee from completing the inquiry in a reasonable period of time, the government has prevented individual students from making submissions and detailing how the fee would impact on their study needs.

The coalition legislated in 2005 to prevent these students from paying a compulsory fee, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2005 the coalition amended the Higher Education Support Act to abolish compulsory student unionism and prevent student unions from imposing a compulsory levy on students. The coalition believes in the fundamental right of freedom of association. Before our amendments, students were forced to join the student union upon enrolling at university and were forced to pay an annual or biannual fee to the union. This fee paid for amenities, facilities and services that many students did not use and, in many cases, did not want. Students were prevented from continuing their courses or even from graduating if they failed to pay their union fees.

In contrast, voluntary student unionism requires unions to be financially accountable for the services that they provide. The system allows students to pay a fee when they feel the union is providing value for money and that this fee represents an overall asset to university life. This bill reintroduces a compulsory fee because the government claims that campus services have been reduced since the introduction of voluntary student unionism. The minister argued in his second reading speech that student services fees are necessary because there is now a $170 million shortfall in funding for student services and amenities. Under the government’s legislation, a tax will be placed on students to recoup this apparent shortfall. However, Labor’s figures are based on revenue lost from the compulsory fee, not on total university funding. Since July 2005 funding for universities from all sources grew from $12.4 billion to $17.4 billion in July 2009—an increase of $5 billion. The coalition government’s reforms did not take money out of the education system; the reforms simply allowed students to spend their money on nec-
necessary items for their study, like textbooks, stationery and accommodation and living expenses.

I note that Labor’s committee inquiry report uses Griffith University as an example of the revenue shortfall. Griffith University estimates that it has lost $31.3 million in revenue since 2005. According to the inquiry report, the university projects that without student fees it will need to redirect $10 million a year to student support services and amenities and away from teaching and research. Yet according to Griffith University annual reports, the total revenue for the university has increased by $243 million since 2005. Again, the lost revenue claimed by universities is simply that which they could have taxed students under compulsory student unionism. The figures do not represent funding shortfalls, and the decision on whether to fund additional student services and amenities is one that is made by each university.

As detailed by the coalition’s dissenting report to the House of Representatives inquiry, the university sector supports this legislation simply because it reopens an alternative funding source with regard to student services. Each organisation that made a supportive submission to the inquiry stands to gain financially from the compulsory tax on students, and that is a very important point. The supporters of this legislation all stand to gain financially from its introduction.

Yesterday, the government called on the coalition to recognise the value of providing good services to students on our university campuses. The coalition supports good university services, but we are calling on the government to find alternative solutions for improving university funding that do not force students to pay a tax. The majority of student unions were guilty of mismanaging money when the fee was compulsory. Student unions were simply not providing good university services. The bill’s explanatory memorandum claims that compulsory fees will be spent on student services such as advocacy, health care, sport and recreation and child care. There can be no doubt that many students would require these services when attending university, but when we look at how student unions were actually spending the money before the introduction of VSU we get a very different picture of where the money goes.

Let us look, for instance, at the spending at universities in Melbourne in 2004, the year before voluntary student unionism was introduced. At Monash University in 2004 the student association collected $8.5 million in compulsory fees. The association spent five per cent on sport and recreation, 1.2 per cent on child care, no money on health care and over 50 per cent of their expenditure on—what do you think they spent it on?—administration and the costs of running the union. They were slugging university students with a compulsory fee—collecting $8.5 million—and then blowing half of it on administration. They spent none on health care. We hear the members opposite rabbiting on about the importance of health services at universities, yet at Monash $8.5 million was ripped off students—half of it was spent on administration but not one zack was spent on health care. Over $4.7 million of student taxes were spent on administering the union itself.

At Melbourne University in 2004 the union collected $7.6 million. What did they spend it on? They spent two per cent of that money on legal services, 1.6 per cent on health care—that is quite a bit better than Monash, up from the zero at Monash to 1.6 per cent of expenditure on health care—and 2.4 per cent on academic support. As for sport and recreation—how much would you expect sport and recreation to feature in the
$7.6 million collected from Melbourne University students? Sport and recreation got nothing, according to the financial statements. These percentages are comparable with nearly all Australian universities at that time, as I understand it. It is interesting that it is only Victorian universities that published their figures—it is only because they were compelled to by Victorian legislation. You would expect that if student unions were genuinely interested in providing value for money and good services they would be keen to disclose to their conscripted members where the funds were going to. Instead, what did they do? They put in place a veil of secrecy so that, outside of Victoria, conscripted members would not know where their money was going.

In its submission to the Senate Select Committee on Scrutiny of New Taxes, the University of Queensland Union detailed how it is managing the union under a voluntary system of fee collection. The union said in its submission:

As a student organisation, we have reshaped … ourselves to become more relevant to the concerns of our members and place particular emphasis on providing services and social events that will actually appeal to the wider student body and get them involved in the great services, support and representation that we offer.

What a refreshing idea: actually providing what students want. That is a very interesting concept. The end of compulsory student fees has forced the union to start taking student funding seriously and to provide the services that the student population actually needs and those services for which they are willing to pay. Whilst there was a shortfall in revenue for the University of Queensland Union after the introduction of VSU, the union placed a higher emphasis on its commercial operations and managing its finances in order to build an appropriate revenue base. Through cross-subsidisation of services, the UQ union is able to provide free academic and welfare advocacy, tenancy advice, employment support and advice on government assistance programs as well as free legal and emergency loans. That is an interesting concept—a student union organisation that is actually meeting the needs of its members rather than relying on the good old Labor Party to impose a compulsory tax that many students cannot afford to pay and for services they do not want to pay for. It is a refreshing change, I must say. And it goes on to say that the union will soon be in a position to operate on a basis of complete financial independence from the University of Queensland. Hear, hear to that, I say. This is exactly how a student organisation should operate: a union that is providing services that the student population demands and remains visible because it has chosen to accept responsibility for its finances and is operating commercially, not protected by a great big new tax.

Other university unions have failed to meet these challenges. For instance, reports have been made that student unions are currently involved in purposely running budget deficits in order to extract more funding from universities, and to continue pressuring the government to reinstate compulsory fees. We hear accusations from Labor that the opposition is taking an ideological approach towards this legislation. However, it is the government that are pushing their ideology on the university sector. As it proved in its first term, Labor simply does not believe in responsible budget management. When the budget goes into deficit or there are insufficient funds to fund its programs, Labor’s answer is to raise new taxes and force taxpayers to fund programs that they did not vote for. This approach encourages waste and mismanagement because taxpayers can always be called upon to bail out failed programs—let us think for a moment about bail-
ing out the pink batts program, $2.4 billion and bailing out the Building the Education Revolution program. That was way over budget. It is unbelievable.

During Labor’s first term we saw the budget go into record deficit, so the government invented a new mining tax to bail out its mismanagement. Australians are now being threatened with a carbon tax which will push up electricity prices around the country. Under compulsory fees, student unions will be allowed to use Labor’s approach to financial management. The student services legislation does nothing to encourage the financial management and responsibility that students should expect from their representatives. In contrast, under a voluntary system student unions are made to be directly financially accountable to the students that they represent. Students can also voluntarily choose to vote in the union elections and select their representatives on student unions and councils.

Through this bill, though, Labor is proposing to remove financial accountability from those student unions. Perhaps this is why Labor is trying to define the services and amenities that can be provided under the taxes collected by unions. Under compulsory unionism, student unions frequently spend funding on political activities. For instance, hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent on campaigns against the VSU changes. More recently the National Union of Students spent funds campaigning against the coalition in the 2010 federal election. The government argues that union funding cannot be spent for political purposes under this legislation. The explanatory memorandum to the bill states:

… none of the payment will be spent by the person or organisation to support a political party or the election of a person as member of the legislature of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory, or a local government body.

But this bill does not rule out money being spent on political campaigns in favour of or against legislation. It does not prevent funding being directed to political organisations such as trade unions and political groups such as GetUp!—that totally independent organisation, if you believe their rhetoric, although I do not think anyone does. And I do not think anyone believes that this compulsory tax on students will not end up in the hands of those running political campaigns. You would have to be living in a dream world to believe that. The union will still retain ultimate autonomy on spending and will have the flexibility to spend funding on a wide number of political issues. As I outlined earlier, the union will not be held accountable either financially or through union elections. The coalition cannot support mandatory funding of political campaigns not in the interests of students.

The inquiries into this legislation make it clear that individual students also do not support the changes. The vast majority of inquiry submissions from students expressed concern about the legislation and the compulsory nature of the funding. For example, Jonathon Roberts told the Senate committee:

We need to make sure that we provide incentives for students to want to further their studies. Students already pay a great deal for parking, travel, textbooks and course fees, and now potentially another few hundred dollars a year for facilities many do not have the capacity to use. This makes a difference for those students who are paying their own way through University. It will make a difference for me and many of my friends.

Mr Mathew Scott from Deakin University submitted:

Students like myself already have other things to pay for while studying—textbooks, travel, course fees, to name a few.

Student services have not suffered that much since VSU was introduced. In fact at Deakin, the
student union seems to have enough money to run their own book store, bistro and cafes on campus!

Before the election, Labor promised to increase university participation of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds by 20 per cent by the year 2020. The government’s policy to increase percentages is to provide universities with cash incentives that are designed to encourage enrolments of students from poorer backgrounds. If the government is actually serious about improving participation rates of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, they should be considering the financial barriers on individual students rather than increasing those barriers.

The financial costs of attending university can be considerable. For many students, working is not an option due to time constraints and study pressures. Every direct cost to students is another barrier to education. As a parliament, we should be debating ways to reduce these barriers, like fees of $250 indexed every year, rather than ways to increase them.

The National Union of Students, which is an organisation run by Labor-affiliated students, strongly supports this legislation and the idea of taxing students. This support by the NUS is despite its campaigns to increase the amount of welfare provided to students due to cost-of-living pressures. According to the NUS website:

1 in 8 students miss a meal regularly because of lack of money and 1 in 2 students report that their studies are adversely affected by financial stress. Students from regional Australia suffer huge relocation costs.

If this is the case, why would the student union movement support a tax that will take money away from students, take away their ability to buy textbooks, and put them under greater financial stress? The government knows that the tax will be a significant burden on students, which is why the legislation provides for a complicated loan scheme called SA-HELP. SA-HELP will provide loans to students who do not wish to pay the fee up front. Students will need to make a request for assistance and provide their tax file number in order to get a loan.

However, the practical implementation of the scheme is not made clear by the legislation. Professor Jane den Hollander, convenor of the Universities Australia Deputy Chancellors Committee, has described the proposed system as ‘complex, complicated and confusing for students and annoying and time consuming for everyone.’ The proposed loan system is not an answer to the burden being placed on students by this legislation. Those who are eligible to access loans will merely be forced into a liability to the Commonwealth, which has not detailed how and when the loan will be repaid.

Instead of reducing the study disincentives of an up-front fee, the complexities of the loan system actually add to the burden that this legislation places on students by enforcing a complicated and time-consuming process on those who are eligible to access SA-HELP. Again, if Labor’s purpose is to help students and provide incentives for study, adding financial disincentives and complex loan procedures to the university experience is not going to help.

I am particularly concerned with the impact this legislation will have on students studying externally and those from rural and regional Australia. The $250 fee will be applied to students who do not actually study on campus and who cannot even access the services provided by the union. The impact of such provisions was made clear in many inquiry submissions. Dr Michael Aylng, an external student at the University of New England, told the House committee inquiry:

I am in full-time practice as a specialist anaesthetist in South West NSW and a father of two
young children. It is not my intention to ever visit the UNE campus in Armidale.

I will have no role in student politics at UNE. I will never visit the university gym, join any clubs, make use of their childcare facilities, buy a subsidised cup of coffee at their refectory, nor seek the advocacy of their student union. Yet it is still envisaged that I should pay the new tax.

Mr Scott from Deakin University submitted this to the committee:

I live in regional Victoria in Bendigo, however I attend Deakin University in Melbourne. I am on campus one day a week, but also study several units from my course online.

Why should I be stuck paying for student services which I won’t be using? I already have to pay more to travel from my home in regional Victoria to my university campus in the city of Melbourne, as well as having to knock back shifts at work in Bendigo so that I can travel to University.

The Rudd-Gillard government has shown that it does not understand the pressure facing regional students.

As parliament is aware, the coalition is currently seeking to overturn Labor’s alterations to the eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance, which discriminate against regional students. Unfortunately, we have not been successful to date. Labor’s system currently classifies groups of students as ‘inner regional’ and forces those students to work additional hours in order to qualify for the independent rate of youth allowance. The plan to reintroduce compulsory union fees only further gives regional students a disincentive to study at universities, and studying at universities is so important for improving the economy and fortunes of those living in regional and rural Australia.

The coalition opposes this legislation for each of the reasons I have listed. We believe that Labor’s tax on students infringes the right to freedom of association. This legislation will force students to be financially associated with the union even if they decide not to join the union and vote for union representatives. By compulsorily acquiring fees, student unions and associations will not be held accountable for how they choose to spend student money.

There is evidence that voluntary student unionism has forced student unions to be more responsible and to provide services that students actually need. What a wonderful idea. This bill will allow student unions to descend back into their ugly old ways and spend money on political campaigns and frivolous activities not in the best interests of students. The amount of the fee and the complex process involved when a student applies for a loan to pay the fee provide further disincentives for young people to study at university.

As evidenced by the committee inquiries, the organisations supporting this legislation are those that will benefit financially from it. Individual students who do not want to pay this tax and believe that their study will suffer because of it have been ignored by this government. Finally, the legislation will particularly hurt regional and external students and discourage them from studying. External students will pay the fee despite never using the services provided. Is there equity in levying a tax on people who will never use the services that they are being taxed for? For those students facing the costs of relocating to the city, the legislation provides them with an additional financial burden. The coalition believes that we should not be increasing upfront burdens on students and giving disincentives for them to undertake tertiary study. I urge the parliament to oppose this bill in its entirety and to reject the inequity that it imposes on many struggling students who cannot afford $250 and who are keen to pursue their studies.
Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (12.18 pm)—I am very pleased to support the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010. In listening to the speech of the member for Cowper, I was reminded of the extent to which the Liberal Party and the National Party hate the word ‘union’. If only student organisations called themselves clubs, associations or societies rather than student unions they might appear less frequently in the conservatives’ villains gallery. It is a case of mistaken identity, to be perfectly honest, because there is a world of difference between a trade union and a student union, which is a body established for the welfare of students in a very different setting from a workplace setting.

The ideological nature of the coalition’s opposition to student unions can also be seen in their legislation and the way in which they use the term ‘voluntary student unions’ and ‘voluntary student unionism’. In fact, their proposals were for nothing of the kind. What they have done is to ban universities from charging fees, so that something that was supposed to be voluntary was in fact not voluntary at all; it was compulsorily banned. That shows the essential double standard at work here. While those opposite talk about the idea of student unionism being voluntary, in fact what they have done is to ban universities from levying student fees of this kind.

The member for Cowper talked about the extent of the administration costs in providing the student unions and cited figures from Monash University and the University of Melbourne. These figures are misleading. Administration costs are about the platform for providing services. It is like saying that, because the offices of members of parliament and senators accumulate administration costs, these are of no value in terms of things like health and education. But of course our offices are essential platforms for the policy work that we do, which leads to the provision of health services, education services and other useful community services and infrastructure.

In the case of the University of Melbourne, the member for Cowper suggested that there was nothing for sport and recreation. I confess that my University of Melbourne days are quite some time ago now but I can assure the member for Cowper that there was and I am sure continues to be very lively and extensive support for student sport and recreation services. I used to take advantage of the swimming pool, the athletics track and the other facilities that they provided. They were extremely useful for students and very well used. Indeed, in times gone by the University of Melbourne produced great athletes, including Olympians, AFL footballers and the like. So the member for Cowper’s understanding of how the University of Melbourne operates is deficient in this regard.

The member for Cowper said that unions should provide facilities which students want, and no-one disagrees with that. I think we all agree that the priority needs to be on the provision of services which students want. But student unions have elections for the purpose of electing leaders who are responsible for providing services that meet student needs and, if they fail to provide relevant services, they can of course be voted out. Universities themselves have a strong role in the provision of services in this area. I personally have a great deal of confidence in their capacity to deliver appropriate and relevant services. The member for Cowper also talked about things such as pink batts, the BER and the mining tax, which, to me, suggested that he had run out of things to say about this bill and that, essentially, it was a sign of weakness for the case of so-called voluntary student unionism.
This bill allows higher education providers to choose whether or not to charge a fee for student services and amenities of a non-academic nature. It commences on 1 January next year. It will be capped at a maximum of $250 per year. There will be indexation so that, in 2011, it will be $254. To ensure that the fee is not a financial barrier, universities that introduce the fee will be required to give eligible students the option of a HECS style loan under a new component of the Higher Education Loan Program. The government expects that providers will consider the views of students in determining whether to charge a fee and at what level it should be set. Universities will have the flexibility to charge a different fee for distance students or part-time students. Students have already experienced the indirect costs of the removal of student services and amenities fees, with many universities redirecting funding out of research and teaching budgets to make up for the shortfall in resources available for student services.

Post voluntary student unionism, most universities are subsidising services and amenities. They are doing this because they know the value to students not only of the positive culture of their campuses but also of the support services that assist students to successfully complete their degree. This reduces the university’s funds for other essential activities, including for teaching and research, and, despite cross-subsidisation from university budgets, there has been considerable cutting back on services which were previously provided to students.

The more financially viable services and facilities, such as sporting and recreational facilities and activities, and food services, tend to be contracted out on a commercial basis or are being run by a business structure owned by the university, as opposed to being managed by student associations. Childcare services are less likely to be subsidised following the introduction of voluntary student unionism. Students from regional areas who move away from their families to study tend to rely more on welfare and support services provided at universities. For this reason, this bill will particularly support students from rural and regional areas. The services and amenities offered by regional campuses benefit not just the students but the broader regional community, by creating jobs and providing essential community infrastructure. Regional universities have been particularly impacted on by the abolition of compulsory student services and amenities fees, with the loss of cultural and social services and amenities as identified by submissions to a discussion paper in 2008.

I will give a couple of examples. At the University of Newcastle, student services are now delivered by an amalgamated university controlled entity, which is responsible for providing food and social and recreational services, funded through an agreement with the university and subsidised by the university at a cost of $1.9 million. The university itself funds health and counselling services and subsidises childcare facilities. It has an agreement to fund the so-called NUSport and Campus Central and to provide sporting and recreational activities and welfare and student support services. VSU has resulted in fee increases for many services at the University of Newcastle and in reductions in subsidies for interuniversity sport, infrastructure and printing services. It has also resulted in the closure of the second-hand bookshop, the emergency loan scheme and a reduction in welfare services provided to students.

At the University of New England, student services are now managed by Services UNE Ltd, as a provider of commercial services, and are subsidised by the university at a cost of $300,000. Services UNE also provides some basic essential services such as off-campus accommodation, advocacy and
welfare services. VSU at this university has resulted in service cuts, staffing cuts—for example, student employment within Services UNE is almost non-existent—no student publications or newspapers, no transport for external students during residential schools and no social events or entertainment.

I concur with the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth in welcoming the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment into this bill. That report acknowledged that all higher education institutions, including those in regional Australia, welcomed the proposed legislation. The committee report also documented the devastating impact on student services following the previous coalition government’s decision to abolish student services and amenities fees. The introduction of VSU forced rationalisations of services in universities, impacting negatively on the provision of amenities and services to university students.

The Australian University Sport and Australasian Campus Union Managers Association commissioned a report at the time of the introduction of VSU that indicated there would be a progressive decline in the sector’s ability to deliver an appropriate range of sporting, recreational, social and cultural activities to students. That prediction has turned out to be accurate. Prices charged to students for use of services and facilities have in general increased materially since VSU, with the level of price increases outstripping the CPI. This has resulted in material reductions in the number of students accessing these services.

The report also outlined that, since the introduction of VSU, there has been a greater emphasis on user-pays systems and commercial orientation in the way universities operate their organisations and deliver services. The increased commercial focus and related increase in prices for campus services generally, combined with the concurrent HECS fees increases, have placed greater financial pressure on average students, who are already working extensive part-time hours to assist with the increasing costs of their higher education. This increased financial pressure is having a negative impact on levels of student participation in the non-academic parts of the university experience. There has also been a reduction in employment, of about 30 per cent, across the student services sector, with more than 1,000 jobs having been lost in the student services area.

VSU has failed to deliver what its proponents argued for—self-sustaining student organisations able to survive off voluntary memberships, investments and trading operations. Take, for example, La Trobe University: its Students Representative Council has advised me that in 2006, the last full year of the compulsory general service fee, the university collected just over $7 million from it. In 2007, the university provided a total of $3.3 million—so less than half that amount—for the provision of student services on campus.

As a consequence of this change, the La Trobe University student dental service, which was also used by students at RMIT Bundoora, was closed. The free legal service was taken over by the university and its operation changed. The SRC had also offered a free tax service for students—this was closed. The SRC had operated a second-hand bookstore for many years, which sold textbooks to students at well below the price of a new text—this was closed. Funding for clubs and societies was cut by 25 per cent, student magazine funding was cut by 70 per cent and representation funding was cut by 80 per cent. I have no doubt that the cut in student advocacy was exactly what the Howard government wanted to achieve.
It is typical of the Liberal and National parties to have an ideological opposition to student unionism. They basically hate it when education is accessible to everybody. They are still hung up on exclusivity. They never really got over Gough Whitlam opening up tertiary education to all young Australians on merit, and in office they made tertiary education more expensive and less accessible for young people in my electorate of Wills and right around Australia.

As student organisations represent a source of criticism from time to time, the previous government determined that they should be crippled and crushed. That was what voluntary student unionism was all about; it was not about some benign view of giving students a choice. By contrast, though the National Union of Students and other student bodies have been highly critical of federal Labor governments from time to time over HECS and other issues, we—and this is a conspicuous difference between us and those opposite—are big enough to take the criticism and big enough to tolerate dissent. We did not try to kill off student unions.

The Group of Eight, the coalition of leading Australian universities, has indicated that the federal government’s decision to allow universities to support essential student services through the collection of a modest fee is a sensible compromise that will enhance the quality of Australia’s higher education system. The Group of Eight supports the government’s decision to ensure that students will have the option of a HECS style loan to cover service fee costs. This means the student services fee will not pose an upfront barrier to any student. The Group of Eight believes the introduction of voluntary student unionism has had a serious impact on the delivery of childcare, sporting, health, counselling and other services, and on campus life and student representation more broadly. This bill seeks to rectify the failure of the coalition government and I commend it to the House.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (12.33 pm)—I wish to contribute to the debate on the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010. I speak on behalf of the students, parents and families of Ryan and I state from the outset that I will not be supporting Labor’s bill and broken promise.

Let me be clear—the bill is not a return to compulsory student unionism. So said the member for Kingsford-Smith in this House on 29 September during his second reading speech. Is that true, Mr Deputy Speaker? Is he correct? Is this bill not in fact a return to compulsory student unionism? This bill is a covert reintroduction of a compulsory fee and compulsory unionism. As my friend and colleague Senator Brett Mason said on this topic recently:

… if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck.

Ostensibly, if this bill is passed students will be compulsorily required to pay a $250 ‘fee’ each year to universities. According to the bill, this money is to be used to provide ‘services and amenities’. But how long will it take, in reality, for student unions to make a claim on this money by arguing that they are the de facto campus providers of services and amenities? Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is just a weak disguise for the reintroduction of compulsory student union fees. This is yet another broken promise, another deceitful trick, by a Labor government so entrenched in dishonesty it has, in the words of the Prime Minister herself before the public knifing of the now Minister for Foreign Affairs, ‘lost its way’.

So what is the reality for students if this compulsory fee—or, let’s call it what it really is, a union fee—goes ahead? When students
start their new academic year they are met with a raft of financial imposts, most significantly a CSP debt owed to the Commonwealth. For a three-year arts degree at the University of Queensland the financial burden placed on Commonwealth-supported students will be at least $5,550 per year. Over three years this burden will grow to over $16,600. Then there are costs for books, transport, accommodation, expensive computers—the list goes on. The extra impost of an ‘amenities fee’ is seen by many students as unnecessary and counterproductive to the improvements made to student unions since the compulsory fee was removed by the Howard government in 2005, a move welcomed by students around the nation.

The student campus today is a different place compared with the one many of the honourable members present attended. And the students who attend our learned institutions are likewise very different. Not all students are the same. The reality is that students today often have to work part time, or even full time, to support themselves. They do not always need the services that are offered by the unions or even have the time to use them, and they fail to see why they should subsidise those who do. They probably do not care that much about campus politics or student activism, and many of today’s students are of a mature age or are using new technologies to study remotely or to study in the evenings. Some are staggering their study and only doing one subject at a time. Some are juggling family commitments, jobs, a tight financial budget and study. So why should these people, all with different priorities and demands, be forced to join a union organisation or pay a compulsory fee for something that they have little need for or, if they do have need for it, that can be purchased on a user-pays basis as and when required?

The Labor way has always been to charge more and provide less. This bill goes to the heart of that notion. This bill is about charging students more and imposing on the modest lifestyle of students. It is once again clear that Labor believes students belong in a union and, no matter their personal views, the union way is the only way. I am very proud to say that it was under the leadership of the Howard government that the burden and shambles of compulsory student unionism were removed and students were finally allowed to make their own choices—a choice Labor does not believe should exist.

This bill, if passed, will be seen by students and the wider community as an act of forced unionism, as a removal of the choices bestowed upon student communities across Australia by the coalition in 2005. But let us face it: Labor have a history where compulsory unionism is concerned. They introduced a type of compulsory unionism in Australia as far back as 1932, when a Labor government amended the Queensland Industrial Arbitration and Conciliation Act to give preference to union members for jobs. This virtually forced all employees working under Queensland state awards to join a trade union or face dismissal. It seems a leopard does not change its spots. In May 2007, the then shadow education minister and now Minister for Defence, said:

… I am not contemplating a compulsory amenities fee.

Was that really so? And what did the Rudd-Gillard government then do? In 2009 they broke this promise when they introduced the Higher Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2009, a bill with a specific intention: to force more than one million Australian university students to pay $250 a year, regardless of whether they can afford it or whether they want it. This was defeated in 2009, but, as we can see, Labor has not given up on this incessant and obsessive fight for a covert
compulsory student unionism. Once again, it has been proven that the word of a Labor politician means absolutely nothing.

In my electorate of Ryan I have one of Australia’s most prestigious universities—the University of Queensland. When compulsory union fees were abolished by the Howard government in 2005, the union there immediately and practically addressed the new realities and went about establishing a financially self-sustainable model. The union was placed on a business footing, where the focus was on maintaining representational and advocacy services. These, in turn, were funded by the various business enterprises run by the union around the campus. Students immediately benefited. The financial burden on them was eased and the University of Queensland Union was afforded choice. The result is simple: the union is now listening to students. The union is now acting for the interests of students.

Mr Hartsuyker—What a great idea!

Mrs PRENTICE—Very novel. The student union was forced to become relevant to the wider student body. They seized the opportunity and are now thinking smarter and working harder to produce good outcomes for students. I do not see that the experience at the University of Queensland should be in any way unique. They are a shining example of what can be done with a bit of enterprise. The UQ student union is now accountable, transparent and much more efficient, whereas previously this body was plagued by allegations of waste and mismanagement. These benefits for students would have never been realised if the Howard government had not moved away from the previous 30-year-old ‘dinosaur’ concept of compulsory student unionism.

A common thread in Labor’s argument against VSU is the notion of a campus culture—the university experience. Labor needs to honour its pre-election pledge in 2007, a commitment made by the shadow minister for education, ‘to ensure that students, if they so choose, can voluntarily organise themselves into representative organisations and to allow students, if they so choose, to make voluntary contributions to those services’.

I will conclude where I began. The Labor Party is not in touch with the needs of students at universities across Australia in 2010. Labor’s attempt at compulsory unionism is a farce and this bill must not be supported, in any form. We on this side of the chamber have every faith and belief in the decisions students make. Students can drink legally, drive legally and vote. They should be able to choose how they spend their money and which organisations they join. The Labor Party instead believes students should be forced to pay and be made to join a union. This is an indictment on a party very out of touch with reality. Ultimately, this bill is about legitimising a form of extortion and it is representative of yet more broken promises from Labor. Just how many more promises are they prepared to break, I wonder?

The coalition will continue to stand up for students and defend their rights on campus, in particular their right to make the choice about what organisations they support and what services they want to use. I urge members not to support this bill. It is bad policy. It is morally wrong. Labor members opposite and Prime Minister Gillard stand condemned for yet another broken Labor promise and for pushing ahead with this attempt to burden students further. I urge honourable members to put the interests of students first. It is for these reasons that this bill should not be supported.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.43 pm)—I never cease to be amazed, when I listen to members on the other side of this parliament debate any legislation, by how they let their
ideological predisposition and hatred of unions permeate every contribution they make to debate in this House. We are not talking about student unionism here; we are talking about an administration fee so that students attending university can have the services they need, so that there is infrastructure in place to support students. Members on the other side of the House, like the member for Ryan, roll out the same, tired old arguments we have listened to in this parliament time and time again made by the ideologues on the other side. It is amazing. They absolutely never change and because they are so embedded in their philosophical hatred they are disadvantaging students and universities.

This legislation will amend the previous government’s voluntary student unionism legislation and deliver a balanced, measured and practical solution to rebuilding student services and amenities of a non-academic nature and restoring independent, democratic representation and advocacy in the higher education sector. Listening to speakers on this legislation from the other side of this chamber, one would think that it was only the government—the Labor Party—that was pushing this agenda. But, no, that is not correct; the universities are very supportive of the legislation that we are debating today. Universities throughout Australia have pledged their support for this legislation. I may have glimpsed the member for Cowper on his feet earlier in this debate and I know that universities and students in the area that he represents will be able to benefit from this administration fee that will be used to improve non-academic services and infrastructure within the university—I think it is Southern Cross University—in his area.

Earlier this year I had a visit from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Newcastle and he talked to me about an application that the university had made under the Structural Adjustment Fund. At the same time he took the opportunity to raise with me what he thought was one of the most important issues facing the university. Given my role as a representative for Shortland electorate, where one-third of the students attending that university actually come from, he felt that he had my ear and so he would raise this exceptionally important issue. What was that exceptionally important issue? It was student administration fees, and how the legislation introduced by the previous Howard government—driven by ideologues such as the previous speaker, the member for Ryan, and people who are out of touch with their communities—had impacted enormously on students and the university itself.

The fees collected at the University of Newcastle had decreased from $6 million to $1.5 million. That meant that the university faced the dilemma of whether it took money from some other source or took money out of another bucket of money, which was very important, to ensure that these vital services continued or let the services decline and do away with them. Along with that, the effect would be that the students attending the university would not have access to those services. So far, the university has been able to continue to support the students. What that university—the one attended by the majority of students from the area that I represent—would like to see happen is for this legislation to pass through the House.

As the representative of the people in the Shortland electorate, I argue very strongly for this legislation to pass through the House and for the members on the other side of the House to get over it—to leave behind your hatred of unions. This is not about unionism; this is about ensuring that students attending university actually get the services that they want and have exposure to a whole lot of different life experiences whilst they are at university, rather than the sterile picture that members on the other side of this parliament
have of the types of services that students
need and deserve.

The new provisions prohibit the new fee
being spent by a higher education provider
on supporting political parties or candidates
for election to the Commonwealth, state or
territory parliament, or local government.
The higher education provider must also im-
pose this prohibition on any person or or-
ganisation to which it pays any of the fee
revenue. Maybe that could be a problem for
members on the other side of this parliament
after listening to the debate on electoral re-
form. Maybe that is something that they
would like to see happen rather than not. The
legislation is not a return to compulsory stu-
dent unionism and the government is not
changing sections 19 to 37 of the Higher
Education Support Act.

The introduction of the voluntary student
unionism legislation by the previous gov-
ernment stripped close to $170 million out of
university funding. I just pointed out how
much money it stripped out of the University
of Newcastle, the university attended by the
majority of students from the Shortland elec-
torate.

Members on the other side of this House
have argued ‘choice’. Students do not have
choices about a lot of things in their lives. I
strongly encourage members to go and talk
to the students that they represent in this
House. The voluntary student unionism legisla-
tion has led to huge increases in the cost of
child care, parking, books, computer labs,
sport and food. When I was attending univer-
sity, one of my children attended a childcare
service. I would not have been able to com-
plete my university degree if the provision of
that service had not been subsidised through
the fees that were being paid then.

Students have also experienced numerous
rises in indirect costs. These are things that
they do not have a choice about. These are
things that are happening now. I think that
for members on the other side of the House
to sanctimoniously sit there and say that this
takes away choice shows just how out of
touch they are with what is happening in
their electorates and how out of touch they
are with what is happening at universities.
These are just more platitudes by an oppo-
sition that is only good at slogans and oppos-
ing everything, not at representing the people
of their electorates. It is the students who are
paying the price for the outdated ideas of the
ideologues on the other side of the House.

What I find a little bit confusing is the po-
sition of the National Party. They recognised
publicly that these fees should be supported.
The member for Cowper would have been at
the recent party conference that supported a
compulsory fee being levied on university
students to support services and amenities on
campuses. That is the belief, the argument,
that has been put forward by the National
Party outside the parliament. But inside this
parliament, subservient to their Liberal Party
masters, they vote against what their national
conference supported.

I can understand why many electorates
previously held by National Party members
are now held by Independents. People in
those electorates can see that it is Independ-
ents who stand up for them and Independents
who understand what their needs are—not
National Party members, who say one thing
at their national conference and come into
this parliament and vote against the interests
of the students and the people they represent.
I find it so disappointing that there is one
voice outside the parliament and another
voice inside. All of this shows a lack of un-
derstanding of the issue and the need for
members in the parliament, on both sides, to
get up and support their universities as I am
doing.
The vice-chancellor of the University of Newcastle pointed out that fee income had dropped from $6 million to $1.5 million as a result of the voluntary student union legislation. That is money that has been ripped out of the University of Newcastle. That money needs to be reinstated and this legislation is vitally important for achieving that. In the previous parliament, this legislation was supported in the House. This is really a reintroduction of previous legislation, legislation that the opposition voted against in the Senate, getting enough support to defeat it. I implore senators to get behind this legislation, because without urgent intervention the services at universities will continue to decline.

This legislation is vitally important for students. The non-academic services provided by universities go towards creating the whole-of-university experience for students and they go towards supporting child care, the cost of food and the many other costs that people have no choice but to pay. Those costs are increasing simply because members opposite cannot understand that these costs are being passed on to students. This is great legislation; this is legislation that will benefit students attending all universities. I urge the members on the other side of this parliament to put aside their ideological hatred of unions and support the legislation. (Time expired)

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (12.58 pm)—It is a great pleasure to rise today and again oppose the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010. This bill is, ultimately, a breach of a 2007 election promise by the Labor Party, an occurrence which is all too common in this parliament.

We have just had a lecture from the member for Shortland about national conventions and the issue of policy decisions made by political parties outside the parliament differing from the policy decisions made by members inside the parliament. We will be fascinated to see, tomorrow morning, where the member for Shortland, the member for McEwen and the Special Minister of State end up on the member for Melbourne's motion on gay marriage. On the one hand, the Labor Party said at their national convention that they are opposed to gay marriage. On the other hand, the vast majority of members of the Labor Party are telling Sky News on background that they support it. We know of a deal between the former Prime Minister and the left wing of the Labor Party to support the motion, so it will be fascinating tomorrow morning to see, after that lecture from the member for Shortland, exactly how many of these honourable and tough minded members support Mr Bandt's motion in the House.

As I said at the beginning, this bill is another attempt by the Labor Party to breach yet another election promise. In 2007 the then shadow education spokesman, the member for Perth, said:

I'm not considering a compulsory HECS-style arrangement and the whole basis of the approach is one of a voluntary approach. So I am not contemplating a compulsory amenities fee.

This bill will introduce exactly what the now Minister for Defence said they would not do: a compulsory amenities fee. This is not about the constant claim by the Labor Party that there is some great hatred of unions on this side of parliament. We do not hate unions; we just hate the compulsion that the Labor Party requires. Special Minister of State, I need to talk clearly so you understand how passionately opposed we are to this bill. This is a bad bill. I know that as a good man, you would be very uncomfortable with the fact that this is another broken promise by a Labor Party which does not seem to know how to make a promise before an election and stick to it after an election.
There seems to be two main claims by the Labor Party in this debate: firstly, that there is hatred on this side of parliament for the unions, which is wrong; secondly, that the long awaited reforms of former Prime Minister John Howard somehow ripped $170 million out of university services. The latter claim is based on a false premise. What that act of parliament actually did was put $170 million back into students' pockets so they could make decisions about which services at university they wanted to use and what services were appropriate for them to use. So it was never about ripping $170 million out of services; it was about giving the $170 million back to those students so they could make their own choices about whether they wanted to contribute or not.

What we have seen is that students have chosen to spend their money on the services that they want to spend it on, but that runs completely counter to the modern Australian Labor Party. They do not like people making decisions on their own; they want to tell people what to do. They want the students of Australia to be told which services they need. They want the students of Australia to fund services that they themselves have said, through their own choices, that they do not want or do not consider that they need.

We are opposed to this bill because it undoes important reforms. Again, this is another attempt to undo the very important and long awaited reforms introduced by the Howard government. This is a purely ideological approach from the Labor Party to again install compulsory student union membership. The member for Shortland claims somehow that this was not about student union membership but that it was a student amenity fee. But we all know that this is all about them delivering back to their training grounds, the student unions.

The claim by the Labor Party is that there is a protection in the bill against using this money for political activity. Of course, you can drive a truck through those provisions. I am thankful to Senator Scott Ryan for his work in the dissenting report before the election when the government tried to move this bill through the parliament. This bill opens the door again to use this money to support the political activities of student unions, which are the training grounds for the modern Australian Labor Party.

So many of those on the other side, including their new members, have come through this union training field and state parliaments littered across the country before entering this place. You do not have to go any further than the state of South Australia to see people, such as my good friend the member for Kingston, coming through the student union training school. The member for Adelaide was also a very longstanding contributor to student union politics in South Australia. It is part of what is known as the machine operation in South Australia. It is run by Senator Don Farrell and the shoppies use it as a training ground to build their next group of activists in the state and federal parliament. We see this now in the state parliament of South Australia, where many of these people were involved in the machinations to replace Premier Mike Rann and Treasurer Kevin Foley as they ran out of energy at the end of their careers. You only have to look at Jack Snelling—and even Tom Koutsantonis, I understand. They all come through this similar training school.

We say that claims that these provisions do not allow the money to be used for political activity are wrong. As Senator Scott Ryan’s dissenting report makes very clear, the provisions for freedom of association are absolutely put in jeopardy by this bill. This is money that will be collected and used in support of political activities. The report has
all sorts of examples of how this money will be used, such as funding campaigns of a political nature by third parties to assist particular parties or candidates. We saw that in the previous bill, which the Special Minister of State moved through, where they use organisations like GetUp! and so forth to run campaigns which support the political outcomes of the Australian Labor Party.

So we say that there is a range of ways that this money can be used to do what it has always been used for—as a training ground for new Labor activists. I will quote from the Hansard of the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations hearing, where Senator Scott Ryan said:

I recall an incident quite a while ago where students held a protest. It reached a degree of violence, the police intervened and several students were arrested and charged. The student union legal services funded their defence or contributed to the funding of their defence. There is no restriction whatever on how these legal services can be used; it is just the provision of legal services, isn’t it?

The DEEWR representative at the Senate committee hearing answered very clearly:

There is no further specification than is proposed there.

In other words, there are a range of ways in which the money that is collected compulsorily from students can be used for activities which are part of the training structure of the Australian Labor Party and the trade union movement in this country. This is what the real intent of this bill is. In 2005, when the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Act first came in, there was a lot of noise coming from the other side of parliament because the compulsory element of the fee, which students will choose not to pay when they have a choice, had been used in part for their union training camp to produce the new group of activists.

This bill is about choice; it is about giving the $170 million that the Labor Party claim is being ripped out of services back to students so that they can put it in their pockets and spend it on what they want to spend it on, not on what the Australian Labor Party tell them they must spend it on. This is where there is a very large gulf between what we believe and what the Australian Labor Party believe. The Australian Labor Party believe that they know what is best for students. They believe they know what is best for Australians. They do not want Australians and Australian students making their own choices in life. They would prefer that they tell them what to do. They would prefer to tell them how they spend their money and, as a result, you get these claims trumped up as an argument by members in this place such as the member for Shortland, who says that this money is being ripped out of universities, when of course it is being put back into students pockets.

This is an extremely important bill and one that we hope does not pass this parliament. It would completely offend the freedom of association principles that we so rightly defend on this side of parliament. If those on the other side of parliament have their way—and it will be interesting after July next year when they do get more of an opportunity to do that with the Greens who will be in control of the Senate; we know that Labor may be in government but the Greens are in power—whether they go to other pieces of legislation to give their union friends the leg-up they so desperately need. When Australians get a choice, they choose not to pay—and that is a very important thing to understand. That is what we will defend. We will defend it on this bill. We will defend it when those opposite try to increase the reach of the workplace relations
act, which I am sure will come in, to push for more friendly provisions for compulsory membership of trade unions. This is the easy, soft way for the Australian Labor Party to attempt to stay in power at federal and state levels, and it is something that we should stand very much against.

This is a bill about choice. It is a bill about the fundamental right in this country of freedom of association. We will continue to fight tooth and nail, as we have for many years, for this right. There have been many fighters on this side of parliament for this cause. The member for Higgins, Senator Scott Ryan, whom I have mentioned, Senator Mitch Fifield, the member for Casey and the member for Indi are people who have fought against this injustice, this decision by the Australian Labor Party, to compulsorily take money from students to fund their activities, to fund their training camps in order to produce the next level of activists in this country. We oppose the bill, and we will continue to oppose it. It is a bad bill. It is nothing more than a political device used by the Australian Labor Party at the expense of Australian students.

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (1.11 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010. The previous Liberal government’s abolition of compulsory student services and amenities fees has had an extremely negative impact on universities Australia-wide that continues to this day. As a result of the Howard government’s Higher Education Support. Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union. Fees) Act 2005, $170 million of support has been stripped from student services. As we have heard today, the Liberals ideological hatred of unions continues in this place and gets applied to this bill, even though this bill is not about student unions; it is about amenities and services.

The removal of compulsory student fees has led most universities to draw funding away from other education services in order to supplement, often at a reduced level, the many student services formerly catered for by this revenue stream. As a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, which completed an inquiry into the bill just this week, I can say that the evidence presented was compelling in its support of the bill. For instance, a submission from the University of Sydney identified that, over the last three years, $38 million had been diverted from their teaching and research into areas such as non-academic student support services and amenities. The committee also had a submission from Griffith University, which estimated that, since 2005, it had lost $31.3 million in revenue due to the same impact.

The committee’s report recommended the release of the Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines. This important step has happened already. There is a particular point in there that needs to be made in this debate, because I think some of those on the other side are still missing it. Professor Alan Robson, from the Group of Eight universities, said:

The guidelines … make it very clear that universities will be required to use the funds for services and student representation and advocacy, not for “marginal and extreme political activities” as claimed by the Opposition in its Senate committee report on this issue.

The committee report also highlighted that all higher education institutions, including those located in regional Australia, are in favour of this bill going through parliament and becoming law. The Go8, as I said, support this bill, which they have done right the way through. They also supported the previous bill on the same matter when it was before the House, but it did not get through the
last parliament. I again go back to Professor Robson, who only yesterday said:

The Federal Government’s decision to allow Universities to support essential student support services through the collection of a modest fee is a sensible compromise that will enhance the quality of Australia’s higher education system.

He went on to say:

The Go8 strongly supports the Government’s decision to ensure students will have the option of a HECS style loan to cover service fee costs.

This means the student service fees will not pose an up-front barrier to any student.

I now turn to Universities Australia, which noted that universities have:

… continued to offer vital services from their own operating budgets, to the detriment of their teaching and research operations.

I gave examples of these before. Universities realised that these essential services had to continue. They have had to make cuts to their core business to have a package so that students can go and learn but also have support whilst they do it. Services such as child care, employment, health services and welfare support would have collapsed overnight if that funding had not been diverted. But some institutions have not been able to do that. Some institutions have not been able to cut or have not had reserves. Therefore, there are no student services in some of those areas, especially in smaller regional institutions.

For example, Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory does not fund many of these vital student services that assist students on campus, and the student union, which had previously done that job, was shut down after the legislation came into effect. Students need support especially when moving away from home. It may be a long way from home in the case of the university up in Darwin. They may need accommodation and employment services and may require child care or help with financial or other personal issues. Rural and regional institutions such as Charles Darwin need services on campus as much as, if not more than, the larger institutions in cities because of the large numbers of students living away from friends and family without necessarily direct means of support. Dedicated student services at universities have helped students remain and continue their studies. If these services did not exist, many may have dropped out or failed to complete their courses. The last thing that we as a country want to see happen is for someone to make it to university and not come out the other end with a qualification.

Under the proposed legislation, higher education institutions can charge students up to $250 per student per year for student services with an indexation factor of up to $254 in 2011. Eligible students will be able to pay the fee through SA-HELP, a HECS style loan also referring back to the Go8’s comments. In many instances, students paying the $250 student services and amenities fees will pay less than they did before the Howard government introduced VSU. For example, a full-time student attending the La Trobe University Bundoora campus in 2006 would have paid a $356 general service fee. A student attending the same campus of the same university in 2011 would pay a minimum of $106 less, should La Trobe University choose to implement a services fee. I highlight this to underline the fact that the government is not seeking to increase the financial burden on students.

The Gillard Labor government is seeking to support students and rejuvenate campus culture and support on campus and to do so in a way which impinges on students in the minimal way possible. Services provided by this fee will provide a safety net for students who may need to rely on them during their time at the institution. For students who, in
the first instance, may not use services such as employment advice, financial advice, child care or individual advocacy, there are still many other services that can make their time at university so much better. For instance, services such as clubs and societies may enable new students to join a debating club or a bushwalking club, to meet new friends or maybe develop a lifelong pursuit or maybe use university performance spaces and art galleries through clubs that focus on music or drama. University sporting clubs can provide students with a chance to continue their sporting interests or discover new ones, meet new friends and be part of a team.

The Liberal Party have presided over the removal and the reduction of student services in tertiary campuses right across the nation. These include advocacy, advice, legal counsel, support for mature age and international students, campus child care, support for new mums returning to education, medical services and, importantly, student peer support and orientation for new students. All these services were cut by the Liberals in government, many of whose members still sit in this place today. In particular, students from rural and regional communities have been disadvantaged by the removal of these services and the introduction of a user-pays model for the provision of services on campuses.

More often than not, rural and regional students face a greater financial burden in seeking a place at a tertiary institution, especially if they have had to relocate some distance to be there. Living away from home is not easy and, if it is your first time living away from home, it is even harder. Living away from families, friends and a familiar environment, these students—more than most other students—depend on campus student services to support them through their tertiary education. That is especially so in their first year. If a student comes down from the country, they may well be in a huge institution where they do not know many people, they do not know how to ask for things or where to go. That is where services such as these can be vital. Even a basic orientation of what happens is something that needs to be explained and needs to be shown—where the service is and how to access it.

This bill assists universities in turning around the years of neglect that we have seen from the Howard Liberal government when it comes to funding. This important funding stream will help universities rebuild campus facilities, including important student amenities like child care. These are the same child-care services this bill will help university staff to equip and encourage students to use. With the passage of this bill, as I hope to see, the Gillard Labor government will undo yet another rotten hangover of the Howard Liberal government. We will restore the sense of community to Australian universities.

Universities Australia have said that they believe the bill will greatly assist in reinvigorating campus life across Australia, and will help restore essential services. Universities Australia also note that these services will particularly assist students away from home networks, and that access to services will support more students from low-socioeconomic, Indigenous and/or disabled backgrounds. This bill enables a university to charge, as I have said, a fee of $250 per year for each full-time student so that these services can be provided on campus for all students. The bill limits what money can be spent on and precludes political donations. This legislation is about enhancing the university experience and is fairly balanced and designed to protect these resources for student services and programs. I support this bill and I encourage all members of the House to support the return of student services to Australian universities. I commend the bill to the House.
Dr STONE (Murray) (1.22 pm)—I too rise to talk about the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010. The bill is being introduced by Labor for a third time. The first bill was introduced in February 2009 and then again in September 2009. The point of course is that Labor promised during the 2007 election that it would not reintroduce a compulsory fee. This is another broken promise. I think we should remind the government of the day that Labor’s election promise was that in both principle and detail they would not reintroduce non-academic fees and as well they would not have any form of loans scheme to fund them. The then shadow education minister Stephen Smith was quite explicit about this. On 22 May 2007 he said:

I’m not considering a compulsory HECS style arrangement and the whole basis of the approach is one of a voluntary approach. So I am not contemplating a compulsory amenities fee.

So here we are today, November 2010, for the third time talking about a compulsory student services and amenities fee—some $250 per year and it is going to be indexed annually. If you have a three-year degree or a four-year course, those dollars accumulate.

I need to remind those opposite that, unfortunately, not all those pursuing a tertiary education come from comfortable families, or come from families in metropolitan areas where they can stay living at home and catch the tram to their college or university just up the road. A lot of tertiary students in Australia are rural students from rural Australia—although, sadly, increasingly fewer—who also aspire to a tertiary education, and $250 a year is a substantial financial burden, particularly for mature age students (for example, women) who are seeking to get some off-farm income through the development of a salaried position, or people who are looking for a mid-career change and who are looking to do their training close to their home in rural and regional Australia. Those families look at the fees and if on top they have a $250 compulsory student services and amenities fee, it all goes to make it more difficult for them to take this extra study.

I have been very closely associated with the tertiary education sector. I have been appalled to see in the past this compulsory student amenities fee buying all sorts of wonderful services in Parkfield, in Bundoora and on the Monash campus in Clayton where students enjoy dental services, childcare services, free parking and a range of drama, sporting and other cultural activities. Meanwhile, students on small campuses like Dookie College, for example, not far from Shepparton, who paid the same compulsory student amenities fee had no access to any of those sorts of amenities. That is quite unfair. I do not see why someone in a country campus should be contributing to the fabulous alternative activities of students based in metropolitan Australia.

I also think it is very unfair for students who, for various reasons, do not want to participate in those additional non-academic activities to have a compulsory fee put onto their entry requirements. Perhaps they do not have the time, the ability or the capacity to play one of these great sports or to attend drama or music activities, or even to access the child care or the car parking and so on. Why should those students have to pay the $250 per year indexed annually? I think that is a very serious issue. In relation to non-voluntary contributions, what we originally objected to as the coalition was based on the great liberal philosophy that no-one in Australia is required to belong to any organisation or association. And yet we were requiring university students in tertiary institutions to join, in effect, a union. We know that a substantial proportion of those funds were directed into party political activities on the
campus. Whether they were Labor or Young Liberal Movement activities is irrelevant. None of these funds should be delivered towards party partisan or other political activities when not all students choose to participate. Indeed, even if they did, those sorts of activities should be funded from the students' own means.

The establishment of a loan scheme, SAHELP, to provide Commonwealth funded loans to help students pay the fee is an acknowledgment that lots of students will find this fee a financial burden, but it by no means helps. As Mr Smith originally said, it is something that Labor promised it would not do. Here we have a loans scheme put in place to help students raise this $250 a year. I am quite concerned that it will be an even bigger erosion of the capacity of lots of students to even attempt to gain tertiary entrance. Of course, student union taxes were abolished by the Howard government in 2005. The Higher Education Support Act then said that students did not have to be a member of an association, union or guild. It said you could not have a compulsory fee for facilities, amenities or services that were not of an academic nature. We believe that if the user pay principle is appropriate for others seeking to play sport or participate in some other cultural activity then that should also extend to the campuses of universities.

I am appalled, I have to say, that we are again debating this issue when there are other extremely serious problems now facing Australia's university students in prospect—that is, the students who are just now completing their year 12 courses. Unfortunately, across rural and regional Australia, many students who have strived for 13 years of education, who have aspired, perhaps for years, to go to a university, are now not even applying because they are not going to be able to fulfil the criteria of the independent youth allowance. We have a new set of conditions and criteria which say that those students living in a so-called 'inner region'—that might sound like suburbia, but an inner region includes places like Shepparton, Echuca and up to Deniliquin—are not able to use the criteria that were in place when the coalition was in government and therefore, with only one gap year of work, go on to university with sufficient financial support for them to pay the up to $20,000 it costs to live away from home.

This government has turned its back on the needs of rural and regional Australians. I think it is absolutely appalling that Labor have acknowledged that their new regime is going to discriminate against rural students. They have acknowledged that by saying that those living in outer regional Australia or remote Australia may still be eligible to apply for independent youth allowance under the John Howard coalition government criteria, but those living in the so-called inner regions—remember, I have said that those are still very far from a capital city—are going to be ineligible, mostly, because of the new criteria imposed.

We already have the consequences of that in my area, where the numbers attending or even applying for university have dropped dramatically. I am so sad to think of the students whose family farms are now being rendered non-viable because they have been forced to sell their water during the drought—their lenders have been leaning on them—and now face further reductions of water under the Murray-Darling Basin Authority’s new guide proposals. For those farm families, their only hope for their children is for them to have an alternative non-farm career. That usually means tertiary education for those students as a key pathway to an alternative career. But no, in our rural and regional areas, so hard pressed—just having gone through nearly 10 years of drought in my area—they are now not able to contem-
plate a tertiary education for their sons and daughters because they simply cannot afford to pay. Their sons and daughters cannot undertake what is in effect a two-year gap and they cannot find the $20,000-plus per year to go and live away from home.

I would like to tell you some of the statistics that are now the fact in the Goulburn Murray Local Learning and Employment Network Area. The data is for 2007 and 2008 school leavers, but I am told anecdotally that it is now worse this year. Twenty-nine per cent of school leavers in the Goulburn Murray region went on to university. This compares with 44 per cent for the rest of the state, so less than half the number of graduating year 12 students from my biggest populated area, in the Goulburn Murray region, attended university compared to the state average. I think that that is an extraordinary indictment of this government. When we look at the number of school leavers looking for work, 6.8 per cent of school leavers in the Goulburn Murray area are looking for work after year 12. The average for school leavers looking for work after year 12 is 3.8 per cent for the rest of the state. So our students are out of year 12 and nearly seven per cent of them are looking for work. The school leavers from the Goulburn Murray area were not in training, they were not in an apprenticeship, they were not doing a VET course; they were simply looking for a job. I am afraid that when the parents and school leavers were asked why they were not in fact studying, why they were not putting up their hand to go to university, it is no surprise that 43.1 per cent said that financial pressures on the family were the reason that tertiary places offered were not taken up. That is nearly half. That is 43.1 per cent of those families in my electorate saying that they could not take up the offers, compared to only 26 per cent of families in the rest of Victoria saying that financial pressures had kept their sons and daughters out of university.

You might think that $250 is not a big amount of money. Well, it is to these families, who are working out every dollar and cent to see if they can afford to have their students go to Melbourne, Ballarat, Albury-Wodonga or Bendigo to study—in every case, away from home. I have to tell you that over half of the parents had to decline those places on behalf of their students because of the financial pressures. I think that is a shocking statistic in 21st century Australia. It means that we are going to lock into our region intergenerational skills shortages, because we know that if we do not have our sons and daughters go off and train as doctors, dentists, nurses, accountants, lawyers, teachers, surveyors—you name it—then we will be much less likely to see those numbers of students return in the future to be our skilled workforce. It is a reality in Australia that if you are not born and bred in the bush you are less likely to take up a job vacancy in the bush. So we are perpetuating the inequalities, the two-speed economy, of metropolitan Australia and rural Australia—and I am excluding the mining sector in Western Australia.

I am saying that it is a very serious problem when any further financial impost is compulsorily added to the cost of going to university in this country. This additional new fee that the Labor government is trying to introduce therefore does not stack up on a number of fronts. It does not stack up because it is another cost impost—over $1,000 during the course of a degree, for example. A lot of my families simply cannot afford that. It is not enough to say that there is a loans scheme, because you have to find that money upfront and families cannot do it.

I have to say too that it is not the Australian way to require people to compulsorily
pay for services and amenities that are not available to them on their campuses or that they do not choose to use. And, of course, we have always been concerned should any of these student union taxes, in effect, be used for other than academic purposes, particularly if they find their way into the pockets of student political movements. We think that is a very wrong way for taxpayer dollars or student raised fees to be directed.

I think universities have to look harder at how they fund their campuses. Most certainly we cannot agree with a bill that goes back to a bad old situation from many years before, and we want to remind the government that they promised in 2007 that they would not reintroduce a compulsory fee. This is another broken promise, with very heartbreaking consequences for rural and regional students, particularly in the electorate of Murray.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (1.37 pm)—I am pleased to support this bill, which will return high-quality essential services to university students around the country, and particularly in my electorate of Parramatta, and will return them on a sustainable long-term basis. The Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010 represents a balanced and practical approach to the funding of student services and replaces the heavily ideological approach adopted by the previous Howard government. The impetus behind the Howard government’s voluntary student unionism was, no doubt—and we have just had it confirmed by the member for Murray—the destruction of political activity on campuses but also, as she said, the creation of a user-pays system. The irony in this is that, where once with student unions we had services provided and paid for by the students of the university, once those student unions were abolished the taxpayer stepped in to fill the gap. So, rather than having a user-pays system, everybody paid for the services on the university campus whether they went there or not. It is kind of the opposite of user pays. It is quite ironical really that members on the other side see the abolishment of student unions as moving towards user pays and then ask the taxpayer to pay for it.

It also did not work in the removal of politics from campuses. You do not actually stop people from having political views and behaving in a political manner by taking away one particular source of funds. Politics still exists on campus. It is well and truly alive and well in Western Sydney. Where the VSU did have a profound effect is that it hurt regular students who were simply trying to get by. The member for Murray talks about the financial pressures on students. I can tell her that in my University of Western Sydney there are people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, single parents, who depended on the services that were provided by the student union, they depended on the free shuttle bus services, they depended on subsidised child care, they depended on the affordable cafeteria. So the financial pressures on many of the students in my area were actually increased by the abolition of voluntary student unionism.

The list of services terminated at UWS immediately following the introduction of VSU does not read like a basket of luxuries. Immediately terminated were social sport programs, including tennis, soccer, indoor soccer, volleyball and cricket. For those who think that might be trivial, I care about health and for students who spend long hours on the campus waiting between one lecture and the next, they actually need an easy way to keep up their exercise levels. These sporting associations play a very important part in campus life, particularly if you are there for a long period of time. The UWS yearly planner calendars which had been provided free of charge were abolished. The shuttle bus ser-
vices between stations and campuses were abolished. The funding subsidies to all five childcare centres were abolished. Quite a lot of the men and women who put their children in those childcare centres were dependent on those subsidised centres. The childcare for school holidays program was abolished. The service assisting students to find casual employment was abolished, a change which dramatically impacts on the people most in need of finding employment, so those who have less money behind them suffered the greatest impact in the most appalling way. Prices went up in the affordable cafeteria, and the vice-chancellor has often said to me that that was one of the things that she found most distressing, that there were so many students on campus who were actually depending on that but could no longer do so. So you can see that the VSU, rather than targeting luxuries, undermined sport and exercise, campus safety and support for parents looking after children.

As well as the services terminated at UWS, the introduction of VSU also substantially reduced a number of other services. The number of student book scholarships of $100 each was reduced from 600 to 30. That is 570 people that would have greatly valued that who lost it each year. Funding for orientation week was reduced from some $100,000 to only $35,000. Emergency loans to students were reduced from $300 per loan to $200 per loan and the number of loans was reduced by 80 per cent. Annual direct funding for sporting clubs was reduced and fees and charges for use of on-campus facilities increased. Opening hours for on-campus counselling services were cut back, again services absolutely essential to many of the people that attend the University of Western Sydney. Annual funding for interuniversity sport was reduced from $141,000 to $16,000.

So what did voluntary student unionism attack under the previous government? It attacked modest scholarships to help students who could not afford the books they needed to complete their course, it attacked services to orient new students to university, it attacked funding for sport and exercise, it attacked counselling services for students going through a tough patch.

The story at University of Western Sydney was repeated nationally, as consultations with the universities in 2008 found that $170 million had been stripped from funding for services and amenities, resulting in the decline and in some instances complete closure of health, counselling, employment, childcare and welfare support services. Also what went was the building of new facilities. We would all know that in our older universities there are extraordinary facilities for sport, health, cafeterias, clubs, you name it, that had been built over years. All that was well and truly put on hold. VSU did not undermine unions or political activism; it undermined fundamental services that helped students to navigate university life and achieve success in their studies and that enabled them to participate in sport and the university community. We have established that VSU did great damage to essential services.

The second point that should be considered is the replacement cost of these services. Again this did not introduce user pays; the taxpayer paid. We all paid, so it was the opposite of user pays. By their very nature, essential services cannot simply be discarded; they need to be replaced. Here is where VSU ran into even greater problems, because replacement was achieved through greater student debt, cuts to other areas of university funding or the taxpayer. It is quite remarkable here. It is students who are being forced to pay the price of the $170 million both directly and indirectly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! The debate is interrupted
in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Bonner Electorate: HubWorks

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (1.45 pm)—I rise to speak about Wynnum Family Day Care and its innovative program and website, HubWorks. HubWorks is a web based childcare management system that allows parents and educators easy access to information directly relevant to their children’s participation in care, including such features as attendance, vacancies and online payment. It has taken two years of hard work and thousands of dollars, but it has all paid off with Cathy Bavage and her team at Wynnum Family Day Care now piloting and building this system for the whole of Australia. Cathy Bavage has also been nominated to head up a national focus group, with leaders from each state to commit to a further two years of expansion into the national framework and other government and community needs.

I want to congratulate Cathy and her team on their insight and courage in having such a strong vision for the future and in pushing the boundaries of what is traditionally a very big cottage industry to bring forth faster, safer and more reliable information sharing. I am confident that, before long, HubWorks will become the world leader in childcare communication.

Reid Electorate: Trade Training Centres in Schools

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (1.46 pm)—I am very pleased to note that my electorate, Reid, will once again benefit from the Labor government’s $2.5 billion Trade Training Centres in Schools Program. Last week the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, the Hon. Peter Garrett, announced that Trinity Catholic College in Auburn has been allocated funding in round 3 under the Australian government’s program.

I congratulate Trinity College on their successful application. I know that improved access to vocational training is a very worthwhile investment in our children’s education and indeed Australia’s future.

The minister announced round 3 funding on the same day he visited a trade training centre already open in my electorate. We are very fortunate to host one of the largest trade training centres in Australia, the Southern Cross Catholic Vocational College. The college offers an array of courses, including hospitality, children’s services, construction, entertainment industry and furniture making—and the list goes on. The minister was able to see firsthand the wonderful work of the teachers and students at the college and inspect the world-class facilities available to students in and around my local area, all made possible under the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program. I note that the minister was particularly interested to see the recording studio that will be utilised by entertainment industry students. I sincerely thank him for taking the time to visit the college. I very much look forward to the expansion of the opportunities available to our local secondary school students with the recently announced funding for Trinity Catholic College.

Remembrance Day

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (1.47 pm)—Remembrance Day marked the 92nd anniversary of the signing of the armistice which ended World War I. On November 11, at 11 am, many of us stopped what we were doing to remember the sacrifice of more than 102,000 Australians who have been killed in war. On the Sunday before this year’s Remembrance Day service, many local veterans and people from across the community in my electorate of Mitchell also gathered at a service in Castle Hill. It was deeply moving to see the respect and sincerity that so many in
our community hold towards those who have served and continue to serve our country.

It was, however, extremely disappointing to learn that Remembrance Day was largely ignored by some universities and government agencies and by many in the corporate sector. One interstate government agency, for example, regarded the observance of one minute’s silence as ‘potentially culturally offensive’, until community sentiment led to a change of heart.

It is so important that, so many years on from World War I, we continue to remember this important sacrifice of so many Australians. Our men and women in uniform continue to serve in often difficult and dangerous environments. This year the names of 10 Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan were added to the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial.

I join the calls of my colleagues, particularly Senator Michael Ronaldson, in ensuring that government agencies and departments, in particular, continue to ensure that Remembrance Day is observed on the 11th of the 11th at 11 am and that, even so many years later, we do indeed take seriously the sacrifice of so many brave Australian soldiers.

Tourism Directions Conference

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (1.49 pm)—I bring to the attention of the House that this week the Minister for Tourism, Martin Ferguson, officially opened the first ever Tourism Directions conference at Parliament House here in Canberra. The Tourism Directions conference, hosted by the minister’s department and Tourism Australia, was a notable success in bringing together more than 300 representatives of the industry to assess the current position of Australia’s $33 billion tourism industry as well as future challenges and opportunities. At this conference the first ever Australian tourism: state of the industry report, prepared by Tourism Research Australia, was released along with the latest predictions from the Tourism Forecasting Committee.

The high Australian dollar and the strength of our economy are making it attractive for Australians to holiday overseas. Australia’s governments spend almost $500 million on marketing tourism annually, and the Tourism Directions conference will become an annual event to help position the industry for long-term success. The future success of the industry is dependent on marketing and the supply-side reform that is being driven by the government’s National Long-Term Tourism Strategy.

The conference also recognised that Australia’s tourism industry is well placed to meet the needs of the growing Asian market, provided that the tourism industry can increase productivity and provide consumers with better value for money. The Chinese market alone is predicted to grow by—(Time expired)

Forde Electorate: Beenleigh RSL

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (1.51 pm)—The community of Forde prides itself on its community spirit and rich history, and this is epitomised by the work of the Beenleigh RSL. Recently, a rare World War I medal was found by Boronia Heights resident Gus Burns. Whilst going through the paperwork of his late father, John Burns, who was a World War II veteran and engineer, Mr Burns found a Distinguished Conduct Medal. Mr Burns handed the medal over to the Beenleigh RSL who, after an extensive search to find the owner through the inscription and war records, were successful in identifying Army medic Private Edgar Gorham as the recipient.

Private Gorham received the medal for bravery, as a stretcher-bearer. The DCM was considered the second-highest award for gal-
lantry in action, after the Victoria Cross, and for all army ranks below commissioned officers. Only 1,800 of these medals were awarded to Australians in World War I, proving the rarity of the find. Following media reports, a Rockhampton family came forth to their local RSL as relatives of Private Gorham. The claim was authenticated through documentation, and Beenleigh RSL President, Tom Childs, was excited that the once homeless medal could now be claimed.

This story is just one of many of community spirit within the Forde electorate and pride in the work of the Beenleigh RSL.

(Time expired)

Iran: Religious Freedom

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (1.52 pm)—I wish to add my voice to those in this place, including those of the members for Blair and Fremantle, calling for improved human rights, in particular religious freedom, in Iran. I recently met with representatives of the Baha’i faith in the southern highlands of New South Wales and was briefed by them on the trial and reported sentencing of seven Baha’i leaders in Iran. I understand that these seven were part of an informal group already well known to Iranian authorities and that their arrest in 2008 was both sudden and arbitrary.

Their recent sentencing to 20 years of imprisonment took place following a flawed legal process during which they categorically denied all charges. The sentencing has been condemned around the world, including by members in this place and the Australian government, which has expressed deep concern.

We should all be concerned when we hear of human rights violations, whether in Australia or in the distant countries in which individuals can be arrested and held in custody for over two years with no charges laid and no access to legal advice for most of that time. As a member of the Australian parliament I am committed to ensuring that the rights of individuals are protected and that the application of state law requires due process, fairness and transparency. I have put on record my call to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to do more to protect the rights of individuals and to end religious persecution.

Hasluck Electorate: Multicultural Fair

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (1.54 pm)—I was proud to attend the 10th annual multicultural food fair organised successfully by the city of Gosnells. People from across the southern half of Hasluck came in their droves on Friday, 12 November, to taste some of the different and exotic foods. The popular member for the state seat of Southern River, Peter Abetz, and the hardworking mayor of Gosnells, Olwen Searle, were both warmly received at the event.

What makes the Gosnells multicultural food fair so special is the way in which it celebrates the area’s strong diversity. The rich aromas of Maori, Chinese, Italian, Turkish, Russian, Sri Lankan and Indigenous food, amongst others, wafted through the warm night air. The sounds of the WA Police Pipe Band were juxtaposed with the rhythms of various other cultural performances and the evening of entertainment reached its crescendo with a magnificent fireworks display.

The food was exceptional and it was great to meet with local families in Hasluck from all walks of life and to hear their stories. It is another example of how local government is working to re-establish the strong bond of community that we all once used to share and talk about so proudly. I look forward to supporting the city of Gosnells in the future and attending the 11th annual multicultural food fair in 2011.
MindMatters Inaugural School Recognition Event

Dr LEIGHT (Fraser) (1.55 pm)—On 4 November I represented the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Mark Butler, at the MindMatters inaugural school recognition event at the Canberra Business Events Centre, Regatta Point. MindMatters is a national mental health initiative, funded by the federal government and implemented by Principals Australia, which promotes a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing in Australian secondary schools.

I proudly presented awards to an outstanding group of students, teachers and principals from all across Australia. The 16 schools and colleges included Mount Barker College in Western Australia, Adelaide Secondary School of English, Taminmin College in the Northern Territory and Canberra’s own Marist College. I would also like to acknowledge Sheree Vertigan and Heather Parkes, from Principals Australia.

Research has shown that many mental health problems among adults had their origins in childhood. We know that 14 per cent of young Australians aged between four and 17 have mental health problems, while only one out of four of those will receive professional health care. These children may face increased difficulty forming and maintaining positive relationships and engaging in schooling. The mental health of Australian children directly impacts Australia’s social and economic wellbeing.

I thank MindMatters and all participants for an outstanding awards event that celebrated not only their hard work and commitment but also the wealth of vital knowledge that is gained from delivering mental health education in Australian schools.

Biosecurity: Kiwifruit Industry

Dr STONE (Murray) (1.57 pm)—Australia’s kiwifruit industry has thrived in a virtually disease-free environment protected by highly vigilant expert growers and our perfect climate and soil types. They in fact produce very superior fruit. Over 70 per cent of Australia’s kiwifruit is grown in the Goulburn Valley in my electorate. It is a very important industry for its income earnings and its job generation.

Tragically, parts of Italy’s kiwifruit industry have now been devastated by an outbreak of an incurable bacterial canker, *Pseudomonas syringae pv actinidiae*, or PSA. Closer to home, the same disease has now been confirmed in at least two orchards in New Zealand. The bacteria attacks young kiwi fruit in particular, and the golden varieties. Growers with the disease in their orchards can only cut out the diseased branches or remove the vines altogether. There is no cure.

Australia’s supermarkets import quantities of kiwifruit from Italy and from New Zealand. There are at least six containers of kiwifruit on the water from Italy as we speak. Two have recently arrived. So far, Biosecurity Australia has only put a ban on the importation of kiwifruit plant material—this is from the regions with bacterial canker. I have begged the minister to go further and direct Biosecurity Australia to look harder at this issue and take no risks. To protect our industry, Biosecurity needs to be more vigilant. We must also now stop the importation of fresh kiwifruit from the diseased locations. (Time expired)

Perth: LNG 18 Conference

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (1.58 pm)—I would like to bring to the attention of the House that Perth has won the right to host LNG 18, the world’s biggest and most prestigious LNG conference. LNG 18, to be held in 2016, is expected to attract over 4,000 participants from over 70 countries, including energy ministers, executive officers of global oil and gas companies, academics,
journalists and over 200 exhibiting companies, providing an important boost for the Perth tourism sector. The success of Perth’s bid is further recognition of Australia’s position as an emerging LNG powerhouse. In 2008-09, Australia exported 15.4 million tonnes of LNG worth $10.1 billion and our exports are expected to reach 17.9 million tonnes in 2009-10. In 2009 Australia was the world’s fourth-largest exporter of LNG. This ranking could increase to our being the second-largest exporter by 2015. This is important because LNG is a cleaner fuel that will assist Australia, and our trading partners, to make the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The conference is held every three years with global LNG industry and government leaders meeting to discuss technical, commercial and economic issues relating to the LNG industry. The conference was last awarded to Australia in 1998. Perth is a world-class city for conferences—as we will see with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to be held there this time next year—and for the exchanging of ideas and is deserving of this opportunity. It is great news for our local tourism operators, who will benefit from the thousands of international visitors who will travel to Perth for the event.

The SPEAKER—Order! The time for members’ statements has concluded.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENT

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—On indulgence: I say to the House and more generally that the world awoke this morning to the happy news that Prince William and Kate Middleton have become engaged. They actually became engaged last month and will marry in London next year.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—It is getting a jubilant reception in the House of Representatives—that is lovely! I can advise the House that Her Excellency the Governor-General has today written to the couple extending the warmest congratulations of the Australian people. All of us join with the Governor-General in wishing the couple well.

Mr Speaker, being an ardent reader of magazines, I am sure you are aware that speculation has swirled for some time about a possible royal wedding. Speculation does tend to swirl on such matters. Now we know that a royal wedding will occur. We know that a royal wedding involves considerations beyond the personal and the domestic. It marks the start of a lifelong journey in the service of the British people. Kate Middleton begins that journey with our best wishes and our support. By all accounts, Ms Middleton is a down-to-earth young woman with the grace and good humour necessary for the role in front of her and the challenging decades ahead. As Prince William showed on his visit to Australia earlier this year, he is a young man of great charm and a high sense of duty who is able to connect with working people, with ordinary people, and he did that whilst here in Australia. He has a deep instinct for charitable work and community work.

This is a happy day for the royal family and a happy day for the Middleton family. We know the pride they must be feeling and they must also have the dawning sense that this is no ordinary wedding. But today we look beyond the pageantry to see two young people very much in love and we personally wish them well.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.02 pm)—On indulgence: I rise as leader of her Majesty’s loyal opposition to support the statement by the Prime Minister and to congratulate her on the en-
thusiasm and dignity which she has shown on this occasion. As leader of her Majesty’s loyal opposition, I also rise to congratulate Prince William, our future king, and Ms Kate Middleton on their engagement. I say that every Australian should rejoice at their happiness on this day. The royal family, like any family, can feel ‘the thousand natural shocks/ That flesh is heir to’. Even so, its members have exemplified duty and service and inspired millions in this country and throughout the world.

Prince William visited Australia earlier this year. He first saw Australia from the arms of his mother, Diana, the late Princess of Wales, in 1983. Australians have always shown great warmth to members of the royal family, and we look forward to welcoming Prince William and his bride as soon as that can be managed.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Electricity Prices

Mr ABBOTT (2.04 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to Labor national executive member Paul Howes’s statement that it is ‘a rubbish argument’ to claim that a carbon price will not push up electricity costs. Paul Howes said, ‘The whole point of putting a price on carbon is to make things more expensive so we do not use them.’ I ask the Prime Minister, isn’t her claim that a new tax on electricity will not push up prices further evidence that she has lost her grip on what happens in the real world?

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. That was clearly out of order under standing order 100(d).

The SPEAKER—I will allow the question.

Ms GILLARD—Paul Howes and many people have views on the climate change debate. I have my views. I have my views about the operation of the electricity market. I have my views about the need to ensure that we price carbon to drive a fuel switch. I have my views about how we best enable innovation in the sector and the competitiveness of renewable energy. If the Leader of the Opposition had been paying any attention in question time yesterday then he would know that I actually answered a question directly on this point and I refer him to that answer. I also refer him to my speeches on the topic so that he can get more detail.

What I can say to the Leader of the Opposition about how people form their views about carbon pricing is that people work through this issue and think about it. I think there is only one person in this debate who has ever been described as a weather vane on climate change. Of course, that description was by the member for Wentworth of the Leader of the Opposition when he recorded that:

Tony himself has, in just four or five months, publicly advocated the blocking of the ETS, the passing of the ETS, the amending of the ETS and, if the amendments were satisfactory, passing it, and now the blocking of it.

His only redeeming virtue in this remarkable lack of conviction is that every time he announced a new position to me he would preface it with ‘Mate, mate, I know I am a bit of a weather vane on this, but …’

There is only one person in this debate who is a weather vane, and that is the man who asked the question.

Education

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (2.07 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Why is investing in education crucial to the government’s reform agenda?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Braddon for his question. He came to this parliament after a proud track record in edu-
cation, having been a school teacher and a school principal, and in this place he has pursued education issues because of his passion and enthusiasm to make sure that every child gets a great education. As I have said, my vision, the government’s vision, for the future of this country is that we have a strong economy that is ready for the challenges of the future and that we have the benefit of opportunities for all Australians—that every Australian gets the opportunity to succeed and prosper. But the truth is that in our nation today there are children who do not get a fair opportunity to succeed and prosper because there are children who do not get a great quality education. As a government we have set about, reform by reform, piece by piece, transforming that. We have understood that in order to make sure every child gets a great opportunity you need to start with early childhood education. We have invested in making sure that children in the year before formal school get the benefits of preschool and early education that are vital to ensuring that kids get a good opportunity in life.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I am not surprised that the shadow minister is interjecting at this point because the track record of the Howard government in this area was ‘Can’t be bothered looking at early childhood education’.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will resume her seat. There is a limit to what I believe people think that they can do in defiance of standing order 65(b) and the Manager of Opposition Business continues—

Mr Hartsuyker interjecting—

The SPEAKER—He should actually contain himself, and he is warned. The member for Cowper is close to being warned. That is exactly my point. Ten minutes in and I have been subjected to 10 minutes of what I would describe as prattling. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—A great quality school education is a foundation stone for opportunities in life. That is why this government has delivered a transformational reform agenda on school education and matched it with new resources. We have almost doubled the amount of money going into school education. We are working on teacher quality, national curriculum, transparency, trade training centres, reform to empower principals and reforms to reward teachers. We have also embarked on huge capital improvements to schools such as Building the Education Revolution, trade training centres and computers in schools. We are proud of that agenda.

We care passionately about every child in every school and the retort of the opposition to this after the election campaign was ‘Cut school funding’ because that is what they stood for in the election campaign. We too understand that, in order to give people opportunities in life, we need a vocational education and training sector that is ready for modern challenges and is a truly national system. That requires reform and it requires resources and we have been driving reform and providing new resources to vocational education and training. The opposition slogan in this regard in the last election was ‘Cuts to apprenticeships’. That is what they stood for.

We too have been driving a reform agenda in universities so that they can be properly resourced and properly structured for the modern age. We know that the opposition stands for neglect of universities. We believe in opportunity for all. We understand education is the critical foundation stone to that and we are getting on with the job of delivering the education revolution as a result.
Mr PYNE (2.12 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the comments of Karl Bitar, the National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party, when he said that Labor made some obvious political mistakes during the campaign, amongst them the announcement of the citizens assembly and the Epping to Parramatta rail announcement. Does the Prime Minister agree that these policy announcements were obvious political mistakes and further evidence that the government has lost its way?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the shadow minister for education for his question. It does seem somewhat remarkable to me that on the day when the government has advised the Australian community of the new information that will be available on the My School website—a website that is transforming the way we think about national education and a website the opposition is now cat-calling about—it never had the guts or the courage or the reform drive when in government to get anything done on school transparency. It never cared once over 12 years about disadvantaged kids and it did not even have a list of the most disadvantaged schools. That is how little it cared, and on a day like today we have this kind of question.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will resume her seat.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will cease interjecting.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Those on my left should not get so excited.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, on a point of order which goes to relevance: I simply cannot draw a link between the My School website and the question asked by the Manager of Opposition Business.

The SPEAKER—The question concluding with the words, ‘Is this further evidence that the Prime Minister has lost her way?’ opens the door for a range of responses. But I remind the Prime Minister of the requirement of the standing orders for her answer to be directly relevant to the question.

Mr Randall—Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Canning will wait. The member for Canning is being given the call for a point of order. The member for Canning.

Mr Randall—Mr Speaker, the point of order is that I want the Prime Minister to withdraw that we do not care about disabled children. In the program Adopt a Politician, I have an adopted disabled person. I find it offensive.

The SPEAKER—As I understand it, those were not the exact words that were used. The Prime Minister might assist—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! If the member for Canning wishes these things to be dealt with properly, it really would assist if he sits there quietly and listens to the explanation. I invite the Prime Minister to continue her response—and on this occasion, so that there is no misunderstanding—not as a withdrawal but as a clarification of what she said so that the member for Canning might understand what is attempting to be done here as a solution to what he has as a problem of, perhaps,
perception. The member for Prime Minister. Sorry—the minister for regional Australia is the cause of my misspeak, and he will sit there quietly. The Prime Minister.

Ms GILLARD—As I was saying, on the question of education policy and disadvantaged children, if you care about disadvantaged children then as a government you go out of your way to identify disadvantaged schools. This government has and the Howard government never did.

Ms Julie Bishop—That is not true!

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—to the shadow minister for education—

The SPEAKER—the Deputy Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, I take personal offence at the explicit suggestion by the Prime Minister that the Howard government did not care for disadvantaged children, and I ask—

The SPEAKER—the Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat.

Ms Julie Bishop—did not care for disadvantaged children, and I ask—

The SPEAKER—the Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. I do not believe, on the precedence of this place, that the Prime Minister has made comments that require withdrawal. It assists if, in question time, both the questions and the answers have less debate, because the only recourse I can indicate to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that she has is other forms of the House. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—in reply to the question from the shadow minister for education, the government of course is getting on with the job of building a stronger economy ready for the challenges of the future. We are getting on with the job of making sure we are governing for all Australians and providing opportunity for all. There is nothing more important to that than providing a great quality education, and the government has taken another step forward on that today. I would have thought that was of some interest to the shadow minister for education.

But it is clear from the question that he has asked that these questions of school reform are not of any interest to him. I would say to him on the question that he has asked that the government will of course provide the funding for the construction of the Epping to Parramatta rail line as promised. The opposition might be completely unconcerned about infrastructure needs for the people of Sydney, but we are of course concerned about those infrastructure needs and we are concerned about driving community consensus and acting on pricing carbon, and if the shadow minister for education is in any doubt about that I refer him to my answers in this House yesterday.

Education

Ms SMYTH (2.19 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, what reforms is the government undertaking to deliver a better education system?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for La Trobe for her question and know that she is very concerned to ensure that schools in her area benefit from the government’s reform agenda and that we are offering every child in every school a great education. The principles that are driving our reform agenda are of course transparency: we want to make sure that parents and community members that care about education have more information than they have ever had before. And we want to make sure that we are focused on improving results for kids. That means that you have got to invest in teacher quality, that means that you have got to invest in literacy and numeracy, that
means that you have got to invest in the most
disadvantaged schools in the country and
that means that you have got to invest in
school capital, because school capital mat-
ters. You need to keep building on those re-
forms, and this government will.

We will be providing greater empower-
ment for school principals, having already
during the life of this government, since
2007, taken more steps to empower school
principals than any government before in the
history of this nation at the national level. We
will build on our rewards for schools and
teachers to keep investing in the quality
journey, to keep saying to every teacher, to
every school, ‘No matter how good you are
today, we want you to be better tomorrow.’ If
you are going to drive this agenda then you
have to have the information, which is why
the announcement I made a little bit earlier
today with the minister for school education
about the new form of the My School web-
site, My School 2.0, is so important. This is
making sure that parents have more informa-
tion than they have ever had before.

Significantly, compared with the earlier
version of the website, we will now have
information on the financial resources avail-
able to schools from the federal government,
from state governments and the amount col-
clected from parents. We have improved the
index which enables you to look at the dis-
advantage of schools. Until such an index
was created under this government’s leader-
ship, there was not one. Over the 12 years of
the Howard government there was no way of
listing which were the most disadvantaged
schools in the country because the Howard
government had not bothered to collect or
analyse the information. If you care about
disadvantage then you need to know where
disadvantage lies. We have ensured that we
know where disadvantage lies through the
construction of this special index, which has
now been improved in this version of the My
School website. And of course we can com-
pare schools with schools that serve similar
students because of this special index, and
that reveals where best practice is and also
where underperformance is, so we can share
the best practice and we can remedy the un-
derperformance.

This version of the website, My School
2.0, for the first time can give you data over
time. This is the first time that we have had
kids sit tests so we can compare their learn-
ing journey over two years. I know Austra-
lian parents will be excited about this new
information. They were excited about My
School—2½ million parents visited the web-
site. We look forward to being able to launch
the website in December and feed the com-
community’s thirst for this information in order
to keep improving education.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.24 pm)—I inform the
House that we have present in the gallery
this afternoon the Hon. Grace Portolesi, the
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Recon-
ciliation in South Australia. She is also the
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister
for Youth and Minister for Volunteers. On
behalf of the House I extend a very warm
welcome to our visitor.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Climate Change

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (2.24 pm)—
My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer
the Prime Minister to the statement by the
Minister for Resources and Energy yesterday
that a price on carbon is required to drive a
transition in electricity generation from coal
fired to gas fired power. Keith Orchison, who
the minister praised last night at his book
launch, has stated that a carbon price of $30
per tonne would be the minimum required to
drive such a transition. Does the Prime Min-
ister agree that a carbon price of $30 a tonne or more will be needed to reduce carbon emissions from electricity generation—yes or no?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Groom for his question. He is a man that I find I am in a lot of agreement with. I was in a lot of agreement with him when before the election he so fulsomely talked about how electricity prices were going to rise because of underinvestment. He talked about that before the election. He was very honest then, and he is a shadow minister who has obviously not signed up to the Leader of the Opposition’s fear and scare campaign, trying to create the impression that if you price carbon then that is the sole issue. Somehow, the Leader of the Opposition is trying to create a fear campaign, pretending to the world that he is in a position to keep electricity prices down, when of course the member asking the question was very clear—

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—And the member for Sturt’s status in this House is clear. He has been warned.

Ms GILLARD—I was going to the honesty of the member for Groom on electricity price questions, and I refer the House to his words before the election, where he talked about the enormous investment needed in electricity generation. He talked about the impact that would have on power prices. He is on exactly the same page on these questions as Premier Colin Barnett, who has talked about the need for power increases to feed investment. So if we are going to have this debate—

Mr Ian Macfarlane—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the question was not on electricity prices. It was on a carbon price. I ask the Prime Minister to answer the question.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will relate her response to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I was asked about carbon pricing and electricity prices, and I am of course going to the question of what is driving electricity prices and drawing the House’s attention yet again to the wise words of the member for Groom. What I would say to the member for Groom as well is that he is someone who in the past has understood the need to price carbon in this country if we are to tackle climate change. Indeed, he devoted many hours of his life to endeavouring, across the political divide, to find a constructive solution, a bipartisan solution, to the question of pricing carbon. I regret that people like the member for Groom, who have that kind of goodwill, are no longer allowed to reach out across the political divide because the Leader of the Opposition has defined his role in politics as three-word slogans and wrecking things—always putting the political interest in front of the national interest. I can say to the member for Groom in respect of the question that he has asked: we as a government will continue to work on the issues of pricing carbon. He may well at some point find himself in a position to work constructively with us, because I know that is what he would prefer to do.

Mr Ian Macfarlane—Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. I refer the Prime Minister to Mr Orchison’s statement that a $30 a tonne carbon price would by itself force up household electricity prices by at least 25 per cent over and above the doubling of electricity prices that the Prime Minister agreed yesterday will occur in the absence of a carbon price. I ask the Prime Minister: what confidence can Australian people have in a government that had lost its way in June and that has found its way, when her broken promise from the election campaign will hit families and households where it hurts—in their pockets?

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. A supplementary question
under the standing orders does not imply the
need for supplementary rhetoric. What it re-
quires is a direct question based upon the
answer given to the original question.

Mr Pyne—On the point of order, Mr
Speaker. The supplementary question goes to
electricity prices, which, of course, the Prime
Minister talked about in her answer to the
question about carbon prices.

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt
will resume his seat. When he has made a
point of order he should not continue to
make remarks when he walks back, even if
he is making those remarks to his colleagues,
because I am not sure who he makes those
remarks to. The point raised by the Leader of
the House is important in that I did indicate
some guidelines for supplementary ques-
tions. I have to say that in regard to the first
part of the supplementary question of the
member for Groom, he upheld those guide-
lines very well.

Mr Ian Macfarlane interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I will get on record that
he claims not to have written the second part.
By the by, could I just say that my attitude
has been to allow things like the second part
of the question, that does allow the an-
twer to be a bit wider than the questioners
perhaps would like. If I am trying to be any-
thing, it is to be consistent. As I say, the point
made by the Leader of the House about look-
ing at the guidelines for supplementary ques-
tions is well made, but I indicate that in this
case the supplementary question is in order.

Ms GILLARD—In answer to the sup-
plemetary question, I say the following:
lesson No. 1, if you are given a question by
the Manager of Opposition Business, do not
read all of it; lesson No. 2, on the question of
carbon pricing, there will be thousands, in-
deed, I suspect, hundreds of thousands of
Australians, who will have something to say
in this debate. And that is a good thing. That
is why we have a democracy, that is why we
have a debate and that is how we work
through to consensus that people get to ex-
press a view. As those hundreds of thousands
of Australians are having something to say, I
understand that on each and every day the
opposition will run in here trying to use these
quotes for a fear campaign. What I would
say to Australians is: do not fall for the fear
campaign. As a nation, we can work through
and find a solution here. One of the things
that fortify me is that if you are prepared to
work with people you can find a good solu-
tion.

Sometimes in this parliament in the past
we have seen people prepared to work to-
gether. I draw the member for Groom back to
his statements, for example, about the Car-
bon Pollution Reduction Scheme. He worked
hard on it and at the end of those negotia-
tions he said about it things like: ‘I think
we’ve got an exceptional package. I’m very
happy with the deal. It’s a deal which will
protect jobs and industries in Australia.’ He
went on to say: ‘What we’ve done is protect
not only the power industry but in fact the
energy security supply in Victoria so the
lights will stay on for industry and house-
holds.’ I have to say that if we, in a spirit of
consensus, work through on the question of
carbon pricing and at the end of it people are
using words like ‘exceptional deal’, ‘protect
jobs and industries in Australia’ and ‘keep
the lights on’, I will be pretty well pleased.
There we have it. You can, if you are pre-
pared to work through, get to good solutions.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of or-
der. I simply ask: how can an emissions trad-
ing scheme that the Prime Minister urged be
dumped be relevant to a question about car-on pricing?

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Oppo-
sition Business will resume his seat. That is
not a point of order. He will not come to the
dispatch box to add argument. I accept that
he can raise a point of order if he believes
that the answer is not relevant to the ques-
tion, but he cannot come and add argument.

Mr Stephen Smith—Mr Speaker, I rise
on a point of order, which is that the Man-
ger of Opposition Business came to the dis-
patch box, allegedly on a point of order, but
did not make a point of order. He is on four
warnings in two days.

Ms Gillard—In conclusion, I say to
the member for Groom: I know he is a per-
son of goodwill and if he can ever work his
way around the negativity, bitterness and
tantrum-throwing of the Leader of the Oppo-
sition, let us know and we will have a dis-
cussion about carbon pricing.

Schools

Ms Vamvakou (2.35 pm)—My
question is to the Minister for School Educa-
tion, Early Childhood and Youth. How will
the My School website deliver greater trans-
parency and information to parents?

Mr Garrett—I thank the member for
Calwell for her question. I know that she has
a strong interest in education, and represents
her constituents in her electorate very well.
Today, I was pleased to join the Prime Minis-
ter as we previewed the new My School
website—My School 2.0.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Garrett—The opposition’s com-
ments continue to indicate that they do not
fully understand the website’s importance.
So, Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity
through you to point out to the opposition
that it is important that parents and the teach-
ing community have access to transparent
information about schooling in order to en-
able them to make decisions in relation to
education generally. It seems to me that that
is one of the most important things about the
My School website, and it is something that
the Australian community fully recognises,
given that this website has had over four mil-
lion visits in its current form since it was first
launched in January of this year.

This comes on top of an unprecedented re-
form agenda and the significant resourcing
for education that has been a feature of this
government. It is the case that under the new
and updated My School website we will have
the opportunity, as the Prime Minister has
pointed out, to assess the progress that stu-
dents are making in their schools in those
literacy and numeracy subjects they are
tested for under NAPLAN. That is how we
learn—from the best performers. That is how
we know to address any poor performers
who have been left behind. The fact is that
the My School website was a world first, and
it is incredibly important for Australia that
we have a website that is improved, a web-
site that is updated and a website that has
rich information that can assist students, par-
ents and the broader school community.

When the site goes live in December, for
the very first time we will provide informa-
tion on school finances across schooling sec-
tors at the national level—something that has
never happened before. This information will
enable parents and teachers to follow a co-
hort of students as they move through school
levels and see how they are progressing in
literacy and numeracy. That is really impor-
tant for parents and really important for stu-
dents too.

My School has nothing to do with naming
and shaming. It is all about lifting education
standards; about ensuring that we have
transparency in education. It is an issue that
is of great importance to all Australians. This
government fervently believes that a great
education is something which every child in
this country deserves and needs, and we will
deliver that to them. A quality education con-
tributes to our national economy and it also
enables all students, regardless of where they live, regardless of which school they go to, to fulfil their true potential. Education is not something those opposite took very seriously when they were in government. They were the flagpole fetishists who never, ever focused on the real deliveries that were needed.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Mr GARRETT—The opposition leader says he liked his flagpole. They delivered flagpoles; we are delivering specific and additional investment on schooling to benefit students right around Australia. Look at the contribution and the commitment that this government has made through the national partnerships program—$1.5 billion for low socioeconomic schools, over $500 million in improving teacher quality, over $500 million for numeracy and literacy—(Time expired)

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.39 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a parliamentary delegation from Mongolia led by Mr Nymaa Enkhbold, Deputy Chairman of the State Great Hural. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Electricity Prices

Mr TRUSS (2.40 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the New South Wales Energy and Water Ombudsman, who this week reported a 41 per cent increase in the number of people having difficulty paying their electricity bills. Given that families are already struggling to pay their electricity bills, is not the Prime Minister’s plan to push up electricity prices even further with her carbon tax another example of the government having lost its way?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question, and I thank him for asking a question which proves the point that the government and I have been making over the last few weeks, which is that we are seeing rising electricity prices—yes, we are. We are seeing rising electricity prices in a context where there is no price for carbon. The member knows that. The fact that we were going to see rising electricity prices was honestly spoken about by the member for Groom the day before the last election. We are seeing rising electricity prices because we have had underinvestment in supply capacity, and the best advice from industry is that continuing uncertainty about pricing carbon means that industry is anxious about how it is going to make its investments in the future.

So, having just had a decade or more of underinvestment, would it not be completely negligent and not in the national interest to allow another decade of underinvestment to roll out because we did not give the industry the certainty it needed to know where it could invest, what sort of investments it should have been making, the technology it should have been using—all of the things that go with investment decisions worth billions and billions and billions of dollars? In giving the industry certainty we would be avoiding that underinvestment which puts real pressure on prices; avoiding that underinvestment which puts real pressure on supply. When the member for Groom said when we were last talking about pricing carbon that he was satisfied with the outcome of those discussions and that as a result of those discussions we had avoided electricity outages in Victoria, he was making an important point.

The member who asked me the question is basically saying that he is content to fear-monger in this debate; he is content to be in denial of the needs of the future; he is con-
tent to see another decade of underinvestment in electricity. That means he is content to see upwards pressure on prices and insufficient supply, risking outages for Australian households and businesses because electricity is simply not there for them when they need it to run their business or when they need it to cook their dinner at home. I will leave the opposition to go out and argue to Australians why it wants energy uncertainty for them for the future. We will work our way through the issue of pricing carbon. If the opposition ever divert from their current course of three-word slogans, of wrecking, of negativity and bitterness, they can feel free to give us a call because we are prepared to have the opposition work through this important national reform with us.

Schools

Mr FITZGIBBON (2.44 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government in his capacity as the Minister representing the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations. Minister, how is the government investing in infrastructure to make schools better so that every child gets a great education, including those living in regional Australia?

Mr CREAN—I thank the member for Hunter for his question and for his strong commitment to the importance of education in the development of this country. As the Prime Minister and the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth have indicated, this government has a very strong commitment to investing in infrastructure to make schools better so that every child gets a great education, including those living in regional Australia?

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Mr CREAN—I thank the member for Hunter for his question and for his strong commitment to the importance of education in the development of this country. As the Prime Minister and the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth have indicated, this government has a very strong commitment to investing in infrastructure to make schools better so that every child gets a great education, including those living in regional Australia?

Mr CREAN—I thank the member for Hunter for his question and for his strong commitment to the importance of education in the development of this country. As the Prime Minister and the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth have indicated, this government has a very strong commitment to investing in infrastructure to make schools better so that every child gets a great education, including those living in regional Australia?
side been elected this expenditure would have stopped. They went to the last election promising to cut the trade training centres and promising to end the expenditure on the school infrastructure scheme. Those on that side of the parliament have no commitment to the future of this country by sensibly investing in education. They come in here and criticise and carp; we get on with the task of investing in the nation’s future.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will leave the chamber for one hour!

The member for Sturt then left the chamber.

Cost of Living

Mr HOCKEY (2.48 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Over the past 12 months, electricity prices have increased by 12.5 per cent, water and sewerage prices have increased by nearly 13 per cent, the cost of hospital and medical services have increased by seven per cent, the cost of child care has risen by 7.2 per cent and the cost of education has increased by nearly six per cent. On top of this, the rise in the standard variable home mortgage rate has increased repayments by over $1,200 per annum on a mortgage of $300,000. When will the Prime Minister find her way and do something to control the cost of living for everyday Australian families?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the shadow Treasurer for his question. As he went through those statistics, what was going through my mind was, ‘Thank goodness we saved Australia from the great big new tax on everything he was planning to support their paid parental leave scheme.’ Thank goodness we saved Australians from that big new tax, which would have flowed through to Woolworths and Coles and put prices up. Thank goodness for that. Thank goodness that, as a government who understands that working families are under real price pressure, we saved those working families from Work Choices mark 2. Your cost of living is defined not just by what you go and buy and pay for but what you are getting in the door.

Mr Simpkins interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Cowan is warned!

Ms GILLARD—The shadow Treasurer was the prime advocate of Work Choices and the prime defender of the pay cuts and loss of conditions that it imposed on working Australians. Thank goodness we do not face the reintroduction of Work Choices.

We as a government are providing support to families under cost-of-living pressures. We understand that they press on people. For example, we have provided tax cuts for three years in a row to assist working families. We have provided the education tax rebate to assist with the costs of getting kids to school, something that did not exist before this government. We will, as promised, add to it so that it includes school uniforms. We increased the childcare tax rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent. Under this government, unlike under the Howard government, families with children in child care can get more assistance with their out-of-pocket costs for child care. We will move through and deliver the additional measures that we have promised. We will move through and deliver the new family tax benefit arrangements for families with teenagers, because we understand that teenagers are not cheaper to look after than children at an earlier age. We are also proud that we were able to deliver a major pension rise for Australians. It is often Australians with fixed incomes who suffer the most when prices rise. So we are taking a series of steps to assist with cost of living.

I would say to the shadow Treasurer, who, I presume, is joining in the fear campaign of the opposition that, if he were being honest,
he would be saying to his colleagues that it is in the best interests of this nation for us to be harnessing our strong economy, coming out of the global financial crisis so strong, by getting ready for the challenges of the future. That of course does require us to work through the debate about pricing carbon, it does require us to have the infrastructure of the future, such as the NBN, and it does require us to address human capital reforms, the reform agenda of this government. We will leave the three-word slogans and fear-mongering to the other side.Remarkably, the shadow Treasurer has been out in the public domain in the last 24 hours or so, saying that it is difficult to get debates going in Australia about substantive issues and complaining about the media cycle. I can share some of those concerns with the shadow Treasurer and I do hope for a deeper debate in this country, because it will expose to the Australian people just how shallow he is.

**Education Funding**

Mr GIBBONS (2.53 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. I ask: will the Treasurer explain the importance of education investment to a stronger economy?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Bendigo for his question, because this government believes that education and training is not only the engine room of a strong economy but the essential foundation of a prosperous and fairer society. That is why, from day one, Labor have pursued a deep commitment to improvement in education and training not just as a matter of economic necessity but as a matter of social progress. We know that we have to do better when it comes to skills training. This is particularly important given the investment pipeline that we are seeing in the years ahead—a very big task ahead in terms of skills training.

But we also need to make sure that the quality of our education can match all of the requirements of the jobs for the future. We see education and training at the very foundation of not only a prosperous society but also a prosperous economy, because it is also the key to productivity improvement. What we have seen over the past three years is a 40 per cent increase in training dollars. That has been essential. It will be essential to meet, in particular, the emerging needs and demand for further skilled labour and the apprenticeships that must come with that. That is why in the budget we extended the Apprenticeship Kickstart program and we established the Critical Skills Investment Fund. That is why in MYEFO last week we funded the trades apprentice income bonus in that important document.

We also understand how important schools education is as well, and the government’s efforts in this regard were commended in the OECD report this week. We have moved and made further commitments during the election campaign to provide new support for parents, students and teachers through high-quality online materials. We have, of course, provided incentives to improve school attendance and student performance, with rewards of up to $75,000 for primary schools and up to $100,000 for secondary schools. So much is being done and it is being done because we recognise that, in the economy of the future, knowledge and human capital are the key to future employment opportunities. Of course, the educational success of our children will determine how productive we as a nation are into the future.

Ultimately, education is the key to opportunity, as well as to prosperity. These are the very big issues that have the attention of the government. Of course, we have the shadow Treasurer over there who is more focused on lawnmowers and leaf blowers, but we on this side of the House are focused on the very big questions.
Interest Rates

Mr ROBB (2.56 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the fact that, after seven interest rate rises in a row under this government, a family with an average mortgage is now almost $6,000 a year worse off. Prime Minister, isn’t it true that interest rates would be significantly lower today had $10 billion not been wasted on programs such as insulation and school halls? And why won’t the government take steps to reduce the need to borrow $100 million a day when that is adding further upward pressure on interest rates?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Goldstein for his question. I would say to the member for Goldstein that, if he is seriously concerned about debt and deficit questions, I can only imagine how anxious he was when he created the $11 billion black hole in the opposition’s costings. After the election campaign, after the complete refusal by the opposition to get its programs properly costed, the shadow minister would come in here—

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Goldstein for his question. I would say to the member for Goldstein that, if he is seriously concerned about debt and deficit questions, I can only imagine how anxious he was when he created the $11 billion black hole in the opposition’s costings. After the election campaign, after the complete refusal by the opposition to get its programs properly costed, the shadow minister would come in here—

Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister is directly defying your ruling to be relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will directly relate her response to the question, with less debate.

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Goldstein for his question. I would say to the member for Goldstein that, if he is seriously concerned about debt and deficit questions, I can only imagine how anxious he was when he created the $11 billion black hole in the opposition’s costings. After the election campaign, after the complete refusal by the opposition to get its programs properly costed, the shadow minister would come in here—

Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This answer is not directly relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will directly relate her comments to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you, Mr Speaker. On the question of prudent government financing, an $11 billion black hole is a very substantial problem and the member for Goldstein can answer to the Australian community for that. On the question of debt and deficit questions and prudent government financing, the member for Goldstein may also like to answer to the Australian community for why he and members of the coalition are preventing the passing in the Senate of a piece of legislation worth $1.9 billion in savings. How is it that the opposition can come into this place and actually claim any fiscal credibility, when that is their voting conduct? If you want to talk the talk then you really have to engage in the action that goes with it, and supporting a savings bill is part of that action.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will directly relate her response to the question, with less debate.

Ms GILLARD—I was asked specifically about stimulus payments. I was asked specifically about stimulus payments that have gone to supporting jobs. This government is proud of having supported jobs during the global financial crisis. When the world moved into the global financial crisis and accompanying global recession, it was the right thing to do to provide economic stimulus to support jobs—absolutely the right thing to do. I am proud that as a government we chose, as one of the single biggest targets for that stimulus, Australian schools. That was the right thing to do as well.

Whilst the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government was answering his question, members of the opposition, particularly the shadow Treasurer, were saying, ‘What have school halls got to do with productivity?’ Well, I suggest he goes and visits a school that has a new classroom, new flexible learning areas that enable teaching in a different way—

Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The Prime Minister is directly defying your ruling to be relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Cowper will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is responding.

Ms GILLARD—And of course the expenditure into Australian schools, the transformation of learning spaces which enables teaching to be done in a different way, is go-
ing to be part of tomorrow’s productivity because productivity is very largely defined by the skills and capacities of the Australian people, and there is nothing more important to those future skills and capacities than what is happening in Australian schools today. So it was the right thing to provide economic stimulus to support jobs. The member for Goldstein may have preferred to see more people unemployed. That was not our way. We believe in the benefits and dignity of work.

And now, of course, it is the right thing to engage in the biggest fiscal consolidation process since the 1960s to bring the budget to surplus in 2012-13 as promised. We promised it during the election campaign. We had our promises properly costed. We provided matching savings. What that showed is that we would keep the bottom line and bring the budget to surplus in 2012-13, and we will.

Vocational Education and Training

Ms LIVERMORE (3.02 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism. How is the government assisting to train workers around Biloela to take advantage of the job opportunities presented by the resources boom?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. She is a person who has had a long-term commitment to education and training. In that context, coming from a resource-rich region, she understands the importance of government investing in a practical way in apprenticeship training. She therefore has been a long-time supporter of the government’s apprenticeships in schools program related to the development of our trade in schools initiative. But the House is also well aware that we as a nation are under a lot of pressure at the moment because of a huge pipeline investment in our resources sector in Australia. Since May alone, $24 billion has been invested in new projects in Australia. One of those key projects is, for example, the British Gas coal seam methane project in Central Queensland, a single investment of $15 billion.

For us as a nation, the real priorities there are how we lift productivity. Central to lifting productivity is investment in key initiatives such as infrastructure—but also apprenticeships and education. I am therefore delighted to indicate to the House that the government, having opened in October this year stage 1 of the Biloela apprenticeships centre, at a cost of $1.5 million, is now in a position to work with the Gladstone Area Group Apprentices company to secure the completion of this very important local apprenticeships centre with the commitment of an additional million dollars.

In terms of this area, I indicate that, with respect to the British Gas project alone, we are talking about 5,000 jobs during construction and around 1,000 permanent jobs in the region with the operation of the LNG processing plant at Gladstone. But, from the point of view of local parents—and I spoke to some of these parents and the young apprentices when I visited Biloela not that long ago—this apprenticeship centre is so important to them. It means that they are keeping their children in the local region, in local high-skill apprenticeship training. It also overcomes some of the fears of those parents with respect to what has been a long-term issue of travelling long distances to areas such as Gladstone, Brisbane, Mackay or Rockhampton for apprenticeship training. Doing it locally is important to parents; it is also important to the young men and women whom I visited and discussed these issues with during my recent discussions at Biloela.

So I simply say that the Banana Engineering Skills Training Centre, which will now go forward at Biloela with the support of the
Gladstone Area Group Apprentices Ltd company, is a very important local initiative. It shows the benefit of government investing in education and training. It shows how these investments can add to Australia’s productivity and, in doing so, ensure that we maintain our competitiveness and attract more investment to Australia. It is good for industry and it is good for young men and women wanting to explore high-skilled apprenticeship and trade opportunities in Central Queensland.

Tourism

Mr OAKESHOTT (3.05 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, the small-business retail and domestic tourism sectors are under pressure right now from a combination of consumer online overseas retailing, international rather than domestic travel and challenges in accessing affordable credit post GFC. In the light of these pressures, what is the government doing to aggressively promote ‘Buy Australian’ and ‘Holiday Australian’ campaigns in the lead-up to Christmas, a key time for the Australian small-business retail and tourism communities?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member very much for his question. He raises the very important question of tourism. Of course, he would know that in his own electorate—because he comes from a very beautiful part of Australia—and right around the country tourism is a very major employer. In fact, almost one in every 12 working Australians is engaged in the tourism sector or connected to the sector, and it is our largest export services industry, worth $23 billion.

He is also right that this is an industry under some pressure at the moment. The strength of the Australian dollar is making it difficult for local tourism operators and we do want to make sure that we are getting the message to Australians that they can go and look at very beautiful parts of Australia on holidays and spend their tourism dollars here. That is why the government launched in March last year the campaign from Tourism Australia that is called No Leave, No Life. I suspect there would be a number of members of this parliament, and indeed of the parliamentary press gallery, that could understand the resonance of those words: no leave, no life. We do want to see Australians using their leave. The campaign is already delivering results. Since its launch the total accumulated annual leave balance has fallen from 123 million days to 117 million days, so people are starting to use their leave, which is a good thing.

Each morning and afternoon this month as people are starting to turn their mind to what we will do at Christmas—will we work through; will we take some leave?—they will hear on radio in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth about the No Leave, No Life campaign. They will have the opportunity to win a $2,000 voucher for an Aussie holiday as part of that promotion. On 4 December the second No Leave, No Life reality TV series will run on the Seven network, showing hardworking Australians taking a holiday, so that is another promotion venture to get people out and about. I am advised that the last time there was such a reality TV program it attracted 1.1 million viewers.

Apart from getting Australians to holiday at home, we do want to get people from overseas coming here to our country, and that is why excitement is being generated around Oprah Winfrey coming to broadcast her very successful TV show from Australia, which is making a difference. The simple fact is that we made an investment of $1.5 million in this visit and it has already generated over $17 million worth of free advertising in Australia to talk to people about Australia.
These are the promotional endeavours we are engaged in, but of course every member of parliament can play their part by picking up on the No Leave, No Life campaign and talking to their constituents about the importance of a holiday and the wonderful ways of having a holiday here in Australia.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I would ask that you ask the Prime Minister to table that three-page note in response to the question without notice.

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

Ms GILLARD—I was referring to a confidential document, Mr Speaker.

Skills Training

Mr LYONS (3.10 pm)—My question is to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. Will the minister explain the importance of skills to building a more productive economy?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the member for his question. The connection between skills and a more productive economy is a direct and clear one, unarguable, and it is one that this government understands very well. That is why we are investing in Australia’s schools and universities to ensure that all Australian students have the skills they need to build a successful career and for us to have a successful economy. It is a pretty challenging time for students around Australia at the moment. Senior students have been sitting their final exams in the last few weeks and I would like to congratulate those who have finished. They will be feeling a sense of relief. Best of luck to those who are still going. Of course, many students are still thinking about what they will do next year, and this government is about supporting schools to prepare young people for successful careers. That is why we are investing in the Trades Training Centres in Schools program, an investment of some $2.5 billion over 10 years to enable all secondary students across the nation to access vocational education through trade training centres.

On 4 November this year I was pleased to announce another 58 projects receiving funding under round 3 of the program with in-principle funding of some $219 million—58 projects benefiting 195 schools, boosting the skills of thousands of students. These centres are being built all around the country. There has been great feedback from teachers, students and school communities. Amongst those I visited is the Southern Cross Catholic Vocational College in Sydney, where I went with my colleague the member for Reid and there are hairdressing and hospitality classes in action. I went to Broadford Secondary College with the member for McEwen to see the site for the new Central Ranges Trade Training Centre. Students there will be training for hospitality and tourism. These centres are making a real difference to students because they can get hands-on experience in the trade while they are still at school.

I notice they are pretty popular with the opposition as well. The member for Gilmore was commenting on how ‘delighted’ she was that Vincentia High in her electorate was funded in round 3. The member for Dunkley said he was ‘thrilled’ with the funding to establish a trades training centre. But the opposition were pledging to cut $230 million from trades training centres at the last election, and now the shadow minister for education has been kicked out of the parliament. So there you go.

As well as that, the government wants to support students to make sure that they have a tertiary education opportunity in their lives. We have committed $2.1 billion over five years from 2010 for the government to fund a place for all Australians accepted into eligible undergraduate degrees. This is a significant commitment by the Gillard govern-
ment. What it means is that we are supporting high-quality teaching and learning, we are building new links between universities and disadvantaged schools, we are rewarding institutions that meet the quality outcomes and we are making absolutely sure that every student that comes through school gets the opportunity to either go to tertiary learning if it suits them or to take vocational skills training, which of course contributes significantly to our economy. This is something that those opposite do not understand. A trades training centre in a community brings together the whole of the community to encourage these students to build their capacities and skills so that they can actually contribute to our economy. This is something that we on this side of the House, the government of this country, take with absolute seriousness.

Ms GILLARD—Can I say to the young people in the gallery that the member refers to: of course I am concerned about their personal circumstances. Of course, as Prime Minister, I am concerned about their circumstances. I am concerned about the circumstances of any Australian, particularly any young Australian who is battling illness and disease. I am very concerned about that. The government, through what it does—funding health—wants to be able to assist people in the best way possible. I also say to the young people in the gallery, and to the member, that there is a longstanding bipartisan process for dealing with the listing of pharmaceuticals. That longstanding process is that we do not have politicians pick which medicines should go on the list. We have medical experts work through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. When they make a positive recommendation—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—Perhaps I could say the next sentence. When they make a positive recommendation—and this was true under the Howard government too, so settle back down—the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee deals with the medical issues and makes a recommendation. Then the question of price is worked through by a pricing authority. It happened every time under the Howard government as well—to those members who are so excited about the question. Then government makes decisions on the basis of that. The Leader of the Opposition well knows this. He would well recall that when he was minister for health there were some celebrated examples of long-term delay in funding medicines. I just want to point that out to members opposite, because I think that is something they should contemplate—that this has been an issue in the past.
Obviously, for the three young people in the gallery, I am very happy to receive any material from them that they would like me to see—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dickson. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—I am very, very happy to receive any material from them. I am very happy to hear from them personally. I say to them that the government does have a proper process here. It is a process that has been gone through by governments in the past. These young people have our personal best wishes, compassion and support. What we do not want to see in this parliament—and what I think members of goodwill would hold themselves out against—is the politicising of questions like this one.

Broadband

Mr ADAMS (3.19 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. Will the minister explain the benefits of the National Broadband Network and what it will deliver to schools and education?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Lyons for his question. He understands that the National Broadband Network, which is being first rolled out in Tasmania, his home state, will transform education. Whether you are in Sydney, Tasmania, Mount Isa or Broken Hill, it will make a massive difference. It will change the link between educational opportunity and location. It is the most significant step we could take to change the spatial dimension of educational disadvantage in this country.

Labor’s plan will be an enabler of opportunity right across the country. New teaching applications, whether in our schools, our TAFEs or our universities, will flourish, using 3-D and interactive videoconferencing, specialist training and other measures. Together with our Computers in Schools program, broadband will give students full access to the opportunities of the 21st century. Universal high-speed broadband will also transform tertiary education. A specialty course taught in one university could be available right across the country. Regional centres like Port Macquarie will be able to keep their best and brightest rather than lose them to the city universities.

When I was growing up, my cousins used to come down to Sydney from Coffs Harbour and Grafton because, once they finished school, they needed to come to the city to get educational opportunities. That will change. There are other advantages as well, and I will use one particular example. As part of the economic stimulus package, through the infrastructure employment program, we have funded $13 million to transform the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. That will make a big difference to this iconic institution in the inner city of Sydney. But it will make a difference to the whole nation, because, as part of that project, the National Centre for Creative Learning digital classroom—there in the heartland, right on Sydney Harbour—will provide cutting edge visual arts infrastructure and education in regional and remote Australia, including teacher training and development, programs for children with special needs, online galleries, films and historical research. The Director of the MCA, Liz Ann Macgregor, has said that that would simply not be possible without the National Broadband Network. This is a transformative educational program and, indeed, the National Broadband Network will make it possible.

But, of course, you cannot be part of the solution if you do not even get the problem. The shadow minister has said that the NBN is an answer to a problem that has not even been identified. If they do not know what the problem is with access and the difference
that a transformative national broadband network will be able to achieve, then it is no wonder that they have a policy of just wrecking the NBN.

Asylum Seekers

Mr RANDALL (3.23 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister that there are 5,360 people being detained by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, an increase of more than 200 per cent since the beginning of this year. Given that the budget forecasts a 50 per cent decline in detention and processing costs over the next two years, what will be the actual hit on the budget bottom line of the government losing its way and facing a blow-out in the cost of unauthorised arrivals because of its failed border protection policies?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. Obviously the government budgets, as governments in the past have budgeted, for the detention of unauthorised arrivals. For example, the Howard government spent, on the construction of Christmas Island, hundreds of millions of dollars in order to build that facility. So, detention arrangements do have to be paid for, and the government has made appropriate provision to pay for those detention arrangements.

I would also say to the member that he would have heard me in this House in the past describe the opposition’s slogan in relation to unauthorised arrivals—its three-word slogan, a three-word slogan that it went to the election with. Now I am in a position—

Mr Hartsuyker—I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. The question was very specific. It asked about a blow-out in the government’s budget.

The SPEAKER—It probably would have been a very good question if it had finished at that point. But then it went on with arguments. This is my problem. This opens the door to answers that perhaps the questioner does not want.

Ms GILLARD—The general policy area was asked about in the last few words of the question, so I am making my answer directly relevant to that. On the general policy area of unauthorised arrivals, the member who asked the question would have in the past heard me talk about the opposition’s three-word slogan. Well, actually, there has been an overnight development. They used to have a three-word slogan of ‘Stop the boats.’ Overnight, as a result of statements by the shadow minister for immigration, their new slogan is: ‘Lay out the welcome mat for 3,750 asylum seekers.’ That is what the opposition now stands for in this debate. That is what they want to send as a message to people smugglers. The first 3,750 are fine. Well, on this side of the House we are not laying out the welcome mat the way the shadow minister wants to with his new policy—

Opposition members interjecting—

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

Ms GILLARD—his new policy of “Let’s put out the welcome mat for 3,750 asylum seekers”—

Opposition members interjecting—

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

Ms GILLARD—Instead, what we are going to do is the work required in our region for a regional protection framework and regional processing centre, because what we want to do with people smugglers is send them a very clear message that they no longer have a product to sell.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Those on my left will come to order!

Ms GILLARD—So we will leave the opposition with their new-found welcome mat
policy—they have moved to two words instead of three—and we will be working methodically on the long-term policy agenda of a regional protection framework and regional processing centre.

Cost of Living

Ms BURKE (3.27 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. How is the government supporting families with the cost of raising children and how does this help support a child’s education?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Chisholm for her question. She understands that, for Labor, supporting families is fundamental to what we are on about. What we are delivering to families is what we want to be defined by. Everyone on this side of the parliament knows that supporting families is fundamental to the prosperity of our nation. We also know that many families around Australia are facing serious cost-of-living pressures, and that is particularly the case with the cost of their children’s education.

We also know that it is our responsibility to help those families with those pressures. That is why we are delivering improvements in the family tax benefit, why we have increased childcare assistance, why we have introduced the education tax refund and added other benefits to the education tax refund and why, from 1 January next year, we are delivering Australia’s first national paid parental leave scheme. We intend to deliver on our election commitment to help parents with teenagers aged between 16 and 18. As the Prime Minister has said many times, many of those who have had teenagers know that they do not get any cheaper as they get older. We will be increasing family tax benefit part A by up to $4,000 a year on condition that those young people go to school or participate in vocational education and training.

This is going to help around 650,000 families over the next five years. That is 650,000 families who will be better off, because this government understands the pressures on families. This was never delivered by those opposite. We understand just how important it is to make sure that families have that extra financial support for the cost of their teenagers, whether it is for the extra books they need at school or the extra bills. We know teenagers have bottomless appetites. We are saying that, in return, they have to go to school or be in vocational education and training. We know those opposite like to talk about these issues. They go on and on about them. But when they were in government they never delivered this change to the family tax benefit system or linked it with an obligation to make sure that those children go to school or are in vocational education and training.

We are also going to deliver a health check-up for four-year-olds, a requirement that will be linked to the payment of the family tax benefit part A supplement for parents who are on income support, which is worth around $720 a year. Once again, these changes reflect our values and say to parents: ‘We’ll be there to support you. We will provide the support, but we also expect you to make sure you get these health checks done, that you get your children to school and that you make sure that your teenagers are staying on at school or getting a vocational education.’

The only promise we have heard from those opposite is one to increase the cost of living for families, a great big new Liberal tax that would have seen the cost of everything that everyone buys at the supermarket go up. That is the Liberal Party’s approach to family policy. Ours is all about improving services. (Time expired)
Ms Gillard—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (3.32 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr MORRISON—Yes, in two instances.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr MORRISON—in the first instance, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship in a personal explanation he provided to the House yesterday misrepresented a statement I made in this House when he claimed that I said that offshore refugee and skill visa applications were not subject to judicial review. I said that I stood by my earlier comments that certain offshore applications would not be reviewable by the High Court rather than his broader claim of judicial review.

In the second instance, the minister argued in making his personal explanation on this matter that I had misrepresented the law. Again, I have been misrepresented in his claim that I misrepresented the law when he argued that any decision to refuse a visa application is subject to review by the High Court. I did not misrepresent the law. Contrary to the minister’s understanding, the remedies mentioned in section 75 of the Constitution to the High Court for appeal do not apply to the cases I referred to, in that there is no obligation on the government to exercise a power to grant or consider granting a visa. I refer the House to Leach v the Queen (2007) 230 CLR 1 for support.

Similarly, the High Court found that there is no duty to exercise power under the act, and where the act is being administered in accordance with that regime, no rights or interests are created that would vest the court with jurisdiction.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member has now outlined where he was misrepresented.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee

Report No. 6

The SPEAKER (3.33 pm)—I present the Selection Committee’s report No. 6 relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and private members’ business on Monday, 22 November 2010. The report will be printed in today’s Hansard and the committee’s determinations will appear on tomorrow’s Notice Paper. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members’ business on Monday, 22 November 2010, and other matters

1. The committee met in private session on Tuesday, 16 November 2010.
2. The committee determined the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members’ business on Monday, 22 November 2010, as follows:

   Items for House of Representatives Chamber (10.10 am to 12 noon)

   COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION BUSINESS

   Presentation and statements

I Standing Committee on Regional Australia

Statements concerning the Committee’s inquiry into the socio-economic impact of the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.25 am.

Speech time limits—

Mr Windsor (Chair)—10 minutes.
Mr Sidebottom (Deputy Chair)—5 minutes.
PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
Notices

1 MR BILLSON: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Competition and Consumer Act 2010, and for related purposes. (Competition and Consumer (Price Signalling) Amendment Bill 2010). (Notice given 15 November 2010.)

Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

2 MR MURPHY: To move—That this House acknowledges that climate change is:
(1) real; and
(2) human-induced. (Notice given 15 November 2010.)

Time allotted—35 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr Murphy—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day

1 ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL 2010 (Mr Hartsuyker): Second reading (from 15 November 2010).

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 12 noon.

Speech time limits—
Mr Hartsuyker—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for House of Representatives Chamber
(8 to 9.30 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
Notices

3 MR DANBY: To move:
That this House:
(1) congratulates Mr Liu Xiaobo for having been awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize;
(2) notes that:
(a) Mr Liu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for ‘his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China’;
(b) on 23 December 2009 Mr Liu was tried for ‘inciting subversion of state power’, and on 25 December 2009 sentenced to eleven years’ imprisonment and two years’ deprivation of political rights;
(c) Mr Liu was tried in the context of his advocacy for the petition known as ‘Charter 08’ which was initially signed by 350 Chinese intellectuals and human rights activists; and
(d) ‘Charter 08’ calls for 19 changes to improve human rights in China, including an independent legal system, freedom of association and the elimination of one-party rule;
(3) calls for Mr Liu to be released and his sentence repealed; and
(4) supports the right of Chinese citizens to call for political reform, greater protection of human rights and democratisation in their country. (Notice given 18 October 2010.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr Danby—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.
Orders of the Day

1 Banking Amendment (Delivering Essential Financial Services) Bill 2010 (Mr Bandt): Second reading (from 15 November 2010).

Time allotted—30 minutes.
Speech time limits—

Mr Bandt—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices—continued

4 Mr Katter: To move—that this House:

(1) resolves that it will oppose any sale of the Australian Securities Exchange that would provide majority foreign ownership; and

(2) notes that such a sale would not merely involve the ASX as an asset, but may hand over to a foreign corporation the regulatory function inherent in a stock exchange. (Notice given 28 October 2010.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 9.30 pm.
Speech time limits—

Mr Katter—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Main Committee (approx 11 am to approx 1.30 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Orders of the day

1 Paid Parental Leave (Reduction of Compliance Burden for Employers) Amendment Bill 2010 (Mr Billson): Second reading (from 15 November 2010).

Time allotted—40 minutes.
Speech time limits—

Mr Billson—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices

1 Mr Hayes: To move—that this House:

(1) notes that 25 November marks White Ribbon Day, the symbol of the United Nations’ International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women;

(2) recognises that White Ribbon Day aims to prevent violence against women by increasing public awareness and education by challenging the attitudes and behaviours that allow violence to continue;

(3) asks all Australian men to challenge these attitudes and behaviours, so that we can begin to drive real change in our community;

(4) asks all Australian men to join the ‘My Oath Campaign’ and take the oath: I swear never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women;

(5) notes with concern that one in three women will experience physical violence, and one in five will experience sexual violence over their lifetime;

(6) understands that domestic and family violence are primary causes of homelessness;

(7) acknowledges the cost of violence against women and their children to the Australian economy was estimated to be $13.6 billion in 2008-09, and if we take no action to shine a light on this violence, that cost will hit an estimated $15.6 billion by 2021-22; and

(8) asks all Members to show that they are challenging violence against women by wearing a white ribbon or wristband on White Ribbon Day. (Notice given 18 October 2010.)
Time allotted—30 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mr Hayes—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.
(Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins)
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

2 MR PYNE: To move:
That this House:
(1) expresses its concern that the Government’s deadline to have the national curriculum available for implementation from January 2011 will result in a substandard curriculum; and
(2) requires the Government to delay the implementation of the national curriculum until January 2012 for K 10 in the areas of English, maths, science and history. (Notice given 28 October 2010.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mr Pyne—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.
(Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins)
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

3 MR BRIGGS: To move:
That this House:
(1) notes:
(a) the announcement on 18 October 2010 by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship about the commissioning of a detention facility at Inverbrackie in South Australia costing $9.7 million to accommodate 400 people, consisting of family groups who are undergoing refugee status assessment;
(b) that the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship failed to consult with the State Government of SA, the Adelaide Hills Council and the local Woodside community on the commissioning of this facility; and
(c) that the Prime Minister visited the Adelaide Hills on the Sunday 17 October 2010 immediately prior to the announcement and made no mention of the plan to commission the detention facility at Inverbrackie;
(2) provides a reference to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to undertake the following inquiry:
(a) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquire into the commissioning of a detention facility for 400 people comprising family groups at Inverbrackie, including:
(i) the suitability of the site for locating a detention facility for the purpose of accommodating family groups in comparison with alternative options available to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship;
(ii) the impact of the operation of the facility on the local community, including on health, education, recreation, transport, police and other community services;
(iii) the impact on defence operations, personnel and family groups based at the Inverbrackie facility;
(iv) the impact of the facility on the local economy and small business;
(v) the level of community support for the commissioning of the facility;
(vi) the level of cost and extent of services and facilities provided to clients at the detention facility; and
(vii) potential risks that need to be managed for the successful operation of the facility;
(b) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration undertake public hearings in Woodside, SA and Canberra, ACT to facilitate the participation of community members, local service providers, council officers and state and federal departmental officials to assist the Committee with its inquiry; and

(c) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration report back no later than the first sitting week of Parliament in 2011; and

(3) calls on the Government to postpone commissioning the detention facility for 400 people including family groups at Inverbrackie, until such time as the Committee has reported and the Government has provided a response to that report to the Parliament. (Notice given 25 October 2010.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 1.30 pm

Speech time limits—
Mr Briggs—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Main Committee (approx 6.30 to 9 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Notices

4 MS PARKE: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) on 17 December 2010 Australia will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(b) the Convention on the Rights of the Child is an attempt to ensure that children everywhere have the best opportunity in life regardless of where they live, their race or gender, including the right to go to school, to have access to shelter and food, to play and to have their opinions heard and respected; and

(c) there has been significant progress in that 10 000 fewer children die per day than they did twenty years ago but there are still 8 million children dying each year before their fifth birthdays of causes that are easily preventable through such simple and inexpensive measures as insecticide-treated mosquito nets, vaccinations, breast-feeding for six months, clean water and sanitation;

(2) applauds the work done for the benefit of children internationally by United Nations agencies, in particular UNICEF (the United Nations Children’s Fund), and Non Government Organisations, such as World Vision, Save the Children and Marie Stopes International;

(3) notes that while on the whole children in Australia fare better than children in other parts of the world, there remains significant issues to be tackled in Australia including child abuse and neglect, youth homelessness and the disadvantage suffered by indigenous children;

(4) applauds the work done for the benefit of Australian children by the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, as well as the Australian Human Rights Commission and Child Commissioners in the States and Territories;

(5) welcomes the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020 as endorsed at the Council of Australian Governments meeting on 30 April 2009; and

(6) calls upon the federal government to further consider:

(a) incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Federal legislation; and

(b) appointing a National Commissioner for Children. (Notice given 25 October 2010.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Ms Parke—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

5 MR SIDEBOTTOM: To move—That this House:

(1) acknowledges the Government’s recent increased commitment to the replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which
(a) increased the previous commitment of $145 million in 2008 10, to $210 million for the 2011 13 period;
(b) recognised the importance of the Global Fund in the treatment and prevention of AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the three major infectious diseases;
(c) acknowledges the Global Fund as a highly effective funding mechanism for promoting global health and preventing 5.7 million deaths from AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in some of the world poorest countries; and
(d) recognises the need to better fund the work of the Global Fund to deliver increases in the provision of antiretroviral therapy, tuberculosis treatment, long lasting insecticidal nets to prevent malaria, and treatment of women for mother-to-child transmission of HIV; and

(2) urges all aid donor countries in the world to fund their fair share of the global amount required by the Fund, which is estimated to be $20 billion over the next three years. (Notice given 15 November 2010.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr Sidebottom—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

6 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 Programs;

(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:
(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. (Notice given 16 November 2010.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr Hunt—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

7 MS HALL: To move:
That this House:
(1) notes:
   (a) that Australia is one of the most obese nations in the developed world;
   (b) that obesity is a growing problem in Australia;
   (c) the recommendations of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing tabled on 1 June 2009;
   (d) the findings and research of the George Institute and the Baker IDI Foundation;
   (e) the findings and strategies developed by the National Preventative Health Taskforce in relation to obesity; and
   (f) that the cost of the obesity epidemic to government at all levels is enormous and urgently needs to be addressed;

(2) calls on all:
   (a) levels of government to recognise the severity of the obesity problem in Australia and its cost;
   (b) levels of government to continue to develop strategies to address Australia’s obesity epidemic; and
   (c) communities, and those living in them, adopt healthy lifestyles which include healthy eating and exercise;

(3) acknowledges the contribution of the Minister for Health and Ageing in:
   (a) raising community awareness of the obesity epidemic; and
   (b) investing in preventative health programs. (Notice given 25 October 2010.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Ms Hall—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

8 MR RIPOLL: To move—That this House notes that:

(1) the Intergenerational Report predicts Australia’s population may reach 35.9 million by 2050;

(2) population growth continues to be centred around Australia’s capital cities;

(3) the electorate of Oxley contains parts of Ipswich East, one of the statistical areas that has seen the largest population increases in Australia between 2004 and 2009;

(4) continuing population growth is placing pressure on the sustainability of Australian cities and the lifestyles of their residents;

(5) a ‘business as usual’ approach to planning and development will no longer be sufficient for the future needs of Australian cities;

(6) building Sustainable Cities must become a policy priority for all levels of government; and

(7) the future sustainability of Australian cities must include a need to ‘decentralise’ the capital cities and encourage major employers, such as government department, to regional and outer urban centres. (Notice given 18 October 2010.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 9 pm

Speech time limits—
Mr Ripoll—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

3. The committee determined that the Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010 be referred to the Standing Committee on Economics for report by the end of the Autumn period of sittings in 2011.
4. The committee recommended that the following items of private Members’ business be voted on:

Orders of the Day
Mental health (resumption of debate, from 25 October 2010, on motion of Mr Dutton)
Joint Select Committee on Broadband (resumption of debate, from 25 October 2010, on the motion of Mr Turnbull)
Overseas trained doctors (resumption of debate, from 18 October 2010, on the motion of Mr Scott)
Special disability trusts (resumption of debate, from 18 October 2010, on the motion of Mrs Moylan)

Notice
Climate change (Notice of motion given by Mr Murphy on 15 November 2010).

5. The committee notes that it has recommended, in Report No. 3 of 21 October 2010, that the House adopt principles endorsed by the committee for selection of private Members’ items.

DOCUMENTS
Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.34 pm)—Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings. I move:
That the House take note of the following documents:
Migration Act 1958—Section 486O—Assessment of detention arrangements—2010 Personal identifiers 600/10 to 610/10—Commonwealth and Immigration Ombudsman’s reports.
Government response to Ombudsman’s reports.
Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Cost of Living
The SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the honourable member for North Sydney proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The failure of the Government to take decisive action on the cost of living for Australian families.

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 HOCKEY (North Sydney) (3.34 pm)—Listening carefully to that question time, I was able to reflect with my colleagues on the fact that—although perhaps we did not pick it up—in the last days of Kevin Rudd, the member for Griffith, as Prime Minister he became increasingly shrill when answering questions in question time. He was clearly a man under pressure. Perhaps we did not pick it up in the way that we should have, but we did notice that it had occurred.

What I and my colleagues picked up today is that this week our Prime Minister has been incredibly shrill. Our Prime Minister has been extremely nasty and has begun to answer every question with a nasty statement personally attacking the individual who asked the question. Quite clearly, she is missing the praetorian guard that normally a prime minister has that is capable of delivering the blows in question time. But what is most surprising about this is that the Prime Minister should fall into this form so quickly after an election. Just a few months after the election, the Prime Minister seems to have her own backbench acting like an ill disciplined bunch—be it the member for Capri-
cornia who today came out and said that she supports gay marriage even though the Prime Minister herself says that she does not or the member for Wills, who said it yesterday and talked about gay marriage, at the same time as the Minister for Trade said, ‘These are the things that should not distract us.’

But, of course, the Prime Minister has had cause to be distracted—be it the words of Citizen Graham Richardson, be it the words of Citizen Paul Howes or be it the words of Citizen Karl Bitar. This is a government that, before our eyes, is fracturing. The problem for Australian families is that they are being left out of the equation. Australian families are no longer being discussed by this government. Australian families are the victims of this government. Australian families are being left behind by a government that has so carelessly forgotten their interests.

The Labor Party in government no longer is talking about the cost of electricity; it is the coalition that is talking about the cost of electricity. The Labor Party in government does not talk about the 13 per cent increase in the cost of water; it is the coalition that talks about it. The Labor Party does not talk about the increase in hospital prices of seven per cent; it is the coalition that talks about it. The Labor Party, which pretends to care about child care, does not talk about child care. Child care has gone up seven per cent in the last year alone, well above the inflation figure—let alone education expenses more generally which have gone up six per cent. It is the coalition that is raising these issues. It is the coalition that has laid down a plan. It is the coalition that raises the challenge of rising interest rates. It is the coalition that has the courage to lay down a nine-point plan to get more competition into banking. It is the coalition that has the courage to introduce into this place legislation that takes on the big banks and oil companies on price signalling. It is the coalition that is getting on with the job of doing something for those families that are struggling under the everyday increases in prices. That is because we understand what people are going through.

Many Australians are asking themselves how it is that we are in a mining boom and how it is that we are meant to have this great economy, this wonderful economy—as the Treasurer and Prime Minister keeps saying, the strongest economy in the OECD—and yet we are paying more and getting less. That is what they are asking themselves. It is a reasonable comment. Quite clearly, the Australian economy is patchy. Quite clearly, the Australian economy is performing at different speeds. Quite clearly, there are some people who are doing exceptionally well and we say, ‘Hoorah! We want that, we want our country to be strong,’ but there are so many Australian families that are wondering now how they are going to pay for Christmas presents. I am serious about it, because if you have got a $300,000 mortgage then in the last fortnight alone your mortgage repayment after tax has gone up $1,000.

There may well be lots of economic justification for the RBA moving on interest rates, and it may well be the case that there are so-called justifications for the banks moving above the RBA rate—none of which I buy—but I say to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, emphatically that to simply ignore the impact on Australian families is wrong. The Leader of the Opposition will not do it, the coalition will not do it, because we are prepared to stand up for people that at the moment are voiceless in Gillard Australia. We are prepared to speak for those people. We are prepared to recognise that the cost of living is hurting and that a new carbon tax will increase electricity bills. If Paul Howes says it, believe it to be true because he is simply reflecting what is common sense, that if you put a carbon price and a tax on electricity it
will go up in price. That is something that every Australian family is going to face.

On top of that, with rising interest rates, economists—be they compassionate people or not—can at times provide solace. When the markets factor in an increase of at least another 50 basis points from the Reserve Bank over the next 12 months, that means more hurt for everyday Australian families. It means higher interest rates, higher credit card rates and higher small business loans, and Australian families are wondering how they are going to pay for it, and they are right to. I thought, as they thought, and the rhetoric says, that education is free, but education has gone up seven per cent in the last 12 months. We are meant to have a free universal medical system, but we know it is not free because hospital and medical services have increased seven per cent. We know that if you live in the outer western suburbs of Sydney or Melbourne, or if you live in the suburbs of Brisbane or any other major capital city or, for that matter, any of the regional cities, it is very hard to own a home unless both parents are working. So many of those parents desperately need child care. It is not a lifestyle choice any more. The cost of housing is so beyond Australian families that we now have one of the least affordable home entry points in the developed world. Believe that—and it is directly linked to the fact that there is insufficient supply because you have got state governments that are more focused on re-election than they are on making hard decisions about zoning. It is also about a political party, the Labor Party, that is more focused on preserving its power than making its power work for the benefit of the people.

The fundamental point here is that for everyday Australians there is less and less choice. There is less choice in the cost of housing, there is less choice in the cost of electricity, there is less choice in the cost of telecommunications, there is less choice in hospital care and there is less choice in education. They have to pay these bills—they have no choice. According to the official data, the CPI—which increasingly the Reserve Bank itself has said is not a proper indicator of the everyday cost of living—comes in at a reasonable level. Why? Because computers and flat screen TVs have come down 20 per cent, primarily because of the strong Australian dollar and because these products in general have come down from China. But that distorts the figure because, if you are really struggling to meet the bills, you are not focused on a flat screen TV. You are focused on how to pay the electricity bill, the water bill, how to pay for school uniforms and how to pay for school excursions—whether your kids can come to Canberra or not. They are the bills people fret over.

As we approach Christmas it has not been the usual practice of the Reserve Bank to increase interest rates in December, because that is like a body blow to the heart of retail in Australia. But that body blow has been delivered by the Reserve Bank and it has been delivered by the banks. It has all come about because of this government’s inability to control its expenditure and this government’s inability to make a hard decision.

That is what I said to the Prime Minister across the table today: ‘You have no ticker.’ And she does not have any ticker. She has no courage; she has no core. The Prime Minister does not understand that in order to deliver real reform and in order to share the opportunity of the future you have to make hard decisions. It was this coalition, including the shadow minister for finance and my colleagues, who went with courage in the election campaign and announced $50 billion of cuts to government expenditure—and they were hard cuts and we know they were not popular, but they were the right thing to do.
They were the right thing to do because we know that when you have the most generous terms of trade in 50 years, that when you have an economy growing at above three per cent and that when you have inflation at a reasonable level, if you do not run budget surpluses then when the bad times come again you are ill prepared. We know that because we have been there. We know that you can never climb a mountain unless you do the training. We know that you can never deliver security into the future unless the government itself has prepared the nation for the darkest of days. We know that because we have been there. And we are scathing and we will not let up at all on this government for its lack of courage, because we have displayed the courage that it does not have. We are the ones that have been prepared to do the yards, to get the budget back to surplus faster, to ensure that we can start to pay down some of that debt—and the debt is going to be a major issue into the future.

Bear this in mind: Ireland and Portugal are on the threshold of absolute collapse, and Spain is not so far away. In 2011-12 you are going to see one of the biggest bond refinancing programs the world has ever seen on any measure, as all the sovereign debt of these countries that have borrowed so much over the years needs to be borrowed again. On top of that, corporations rolling over their debt means that ultimately Australia should not be in the position of going with a begging bowl to the rest of world, begging the world to pay for school halls that are still being built four years after the negative quarter, begging for the world to pay for all of the waste—the record waste from the Gillard government and the Rudd government—and begging the world to pay for the massive deficits and debt that have been left behind by countless state Labor governments. We are going to the world and begging them for their money at exactly the wrong time, which puts our economy in peril. It puts our welfare at peril at a time when we are sucking the juices out of the world, trying to take advantage of a mining boom and a commodity boom when we need that capital to grow the mines.

I say to you, Mr Deputy Speaker: this is a difficult time to run the Australian economy, and the government has got it dead wrong. Every Australian family knows that if they are spending more than they are collecting, if their debt continues to grow, then the day will come when the bank comes knocking. So, too, for our country. If we continue to borrow money at a hundred million dollars a day at a time when we are in a prosperous environment then I say to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, when the tough times come there are few bullets left in the gun of the government to try and ensure that Australians get through the darkest hours.

This is a significant moment. We will have Australians fretting about Christmas. We will have Australians fretting about the bills that come after Christmas. We will have Australians who wonder why they have been left behind by the Gillard government. I say to those Australians on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition and my colleagues: we will not forget you, we will not leave you behind, we will always speak for you and we in the coalition will have the courage to make the hard decisions that ensure that Australia can get through the tough times and that your families can get through the tough times.

Mr Sidebottom—A sonic effort!

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (3.49 pm)—I absolutely agree with the member for Braddon: that was a sonic effort, an effort of 15 minutes of noise, an effort of 15 minutes of negativity from the shadow Treasurer. There was absolutely nothing positive—not one positive
contribution, not one positive policy idea from the shadow Treasurer. He talked about
debt and deficit and we will recall that dur-
ing the election campaign the shadow Treas-
urer and the opposition finance spokesperson
refused to allow the Treasury and the de-
partment of finance to look at their costings.
Immediately after the election we found out
why. We found out that in fact there was an
$11 billion black hole in their costings, $11
billion that they got wrong that would have
affected the federal budget if they had won
the election.

Interestingly enough in this debate today
the one policy that they did take to the elec-
tion that would have had a devastating effect
on families, the shadow Treasurer failed to
mention. That one policy was their determi-
nation to put a new Liberal tax on every sin-
gle family in this country, an extra 1½ per
cent tax on business that would have put up
the cost of everything that everyone buys at
the supermarket—not just families of course
but pensioners and carers; it does not matter
who you are. Every time you went to the
supermarket, every time you bought petrol,
every time you had to go to a hardware store,
this Liberal Party would have seen an in-
crease in your costs. Of course it is not just
the Labor government saying this. Listen to
the National Independent Retailers Associa-
tion CEO. He said that costs for businesses
would be passed on to smaller operators and
consumers. This of course will be no surprise
to anyone who has to manage their budget.
They know that an extra tax that the Liberal
Party wanted to put on everything was going
to end up in increases in their cost of living.

But, as we have just seen from this
shadow Treasurer, every single time they
stand up in this parliament all they are is
negative—negative about everything. All
they want to do is tear things down, not put
up any sensible or positive proposals that
would in fact help Australian families. By
contrast, the government are determined to
do everything we possibly can to support
Australian families. We do understand that
families are under financial pressure, and
that is why we went to the election with a
number of new policies to support families.
It is also why we took the action that we took
during the global financial crisis, because
there is one thing in particular that is so im-
portant to the family budget, and that is for
mum or dad or both to have a job. There is
nothing more important in making sure that
families have the money that they need to
meet their costs, and particularly to meet the
costs of bringing up their children. That is
why we are so pleased to see the way in
which the economy has recovered, the way
in which hundreds of thousands of jobs—in
fact, 375,000 jobs—have been created in the
past year, and almost three-quarters of the
jobs created in the past year have been full-
time jobs, full-time jobs that mean that
mums and dads have more chance of being
able to adequately look after their families.
We know that these are the most important
things for Australian families.

The OECD economic survey of Australia
that came out this week said that the Austra-
lian economy has been one of the most resil-
ient in the OECD during the economic and
financial crisis. That report went on to praise
the Australian government, saying that our
stimulus package was among the most effec-
tive in the OECD. But of course all we get
from those opposite is carping, negativity
and criticism about what this government did
to make sure that jobs were protected in this
country.

I want to take the opportunity afforded to
us in this debate to go through a number of
other measures that the government has put
in place to support families and to make sure
that they are helped with their cost of living
pressures. One of those, which came in a
number of tranches, was the tax cuts that we
delivered to individuals and to families. Take someone on $50,000. They are in fact now paying $1,750 less in tax each year—an 18 per cent cut in their tax—because of decisions made by this government. We are going to make it easier for people to do their tax returns and we are also going to have tax relief for savings accounts. This will be particularly important. We are introducing a 50 per cent tax break for the first $500 of interest on savings from 1 July 2012. These are practical forms of assistance to Australian taxpayers, real things that make a difference to individuals and families—not the noise and bluster that we heard from those opposite.

As many will have heard me say on a number of occasions, we are very pleased to be introducing Australia’s first national paid parental leave scheme, because one of the times in a family’s life when they are under significant financial pressure is when a new baby comes into the family. We know that there are many, many families in Australia who have never had access to paid parental leave, so we are bringing about this major change. Eligible parents will be able to get 18 weeks of paid leave, paid at the federal minimum wage—around $570 a week before tax. Of course, it is this government that is delivering this change from 1 January next year. It was never delivered by those opposite. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition was so famously heard to say that paid parental leave would be delivered ‘over his dead body’. So much for the Liberal and National parties caring at all about the financial pressures that are on families when a new baby comes into the family. We expect around 148,000 parents will be eligible each year for this historic reform.

We have also made very significant changes to child care. The shadow Treasurer talked about the importance of child care. He of course made no policy promises that would address the costs of child care. By contrast, this government during our last period in government increased the childcare rebate from 30 per cent, which is where it was under the Liberal government, to 50 per cent of parents’ out-of-pocket costs. We do understand that child care is a very significant cost in the budget of many, many parents. We have also increased the maximum amount that parents can claim per child. It has gone up under this government from a bit over $4,300 to $7½ thousand a year per child. We also changed the childcare rebate to a quarterly payment so that parents did not have to wait so long. Under the previous government they had to wait for a very long time to get the benefit, but from 1 July next year we are improving that benefit again. We are going to make sure that parents will be able to receive the childcare rebate fortnightly rather than having to wait and receive it quarterly. But of course we do not hear any of those initiatives from those opposite.

It was this government that introduced the education tax rebate. We also heard from the shadow Treasurer in his 15-minute bluster before that yes, parents do have costs from sending their children to school. That is why this government introduced an education tax refund, and that is now delivering to 1.3 million families—1.3 million families are benefitting from the change that this government introduced. Of course, we are not just sticking with what we did during the last parliament, when we had benefits that covered laptops and textbooks. We are also extending this benefit to the cost of uniforms. We introduced the Teen Dental Plan, and that too has been a major benefit to many families. In fact, we have seen 950,000 preventive dental checks undertaken so far. Families can, if they are eligible, receive a rebate of up to $150 each time their child gets a check.

One of the major changes we have made, which the previous government refused to
fix while they had the opportunity when they were in government for such a long time, was to the problems that occurred with family tax benefit when a child hit 16 years of age. During the last election campaign this government made a commitment to increase family tax benefit part A for families who have teenagers aged 16 to 18. That was never done by those opposite—it has never even thought about by those opposite—but it will be delivered by this government because we know that children get more expensive, not cheaper, as they get older. For those families who are eligible, this will mean up to $4,000 extra a year, but the children will have to be in school or training. That, too, is a major change that this government has introduced. This government wants to see young people continue their education and training because we know that will make such a huge difference to their future earning capacity and to their future ability to look after their families. We expect that this will benefit around 650,000 families over the next five years. That is 650,000 families who are going to be better off because of this government’s action. It was not thought about by those opposite, it was not promised by them during the election campaign and it was not raised in this debate by the opposition’s treasury spokesperson because they do not have any positive ideas to do anything to really support families. They just want to be negative, and bluster and carry on.

Under the previous Howard government a proposal to increase the pension for some of the most disadvantaged people in the community was taken to cabinet but was rejected. It was rejected by the previous Liberal government. It was this Labor government that delivered the most significant improvements to the pension that we have seen in 100 years. This was not just an increase to the base payment, but also a very significant improvement to the indexation arrangements. People who are on the pension—the age pension, the disability support pension and those who are on the carer payment—have received over the last year, from September 2009 to September 2010, an extra $115 a fortnight in their pockets because of the changes we have made. That is for a single pensioner on the maximum rate. That was never delivered by those opposite and it was not talked about by the shadow Treasurer in his rant today. If you are a pensioner or are struggling to make ends meet, we want you to know that we are not a government that is going to put up the cost of living through a new 1½ per cent tax. We are a government that has delivered the changes to the pension that so many people were so desperate for so long.

This government understands just how critical it is to be there, to make sure that we support families in times of need and, especially, with the costs of educating children. That is why we know we have to do what we are doing to support those families who have children with a disability and why we are increasing support for those families. This opposition is hell-bent on being negative and on trying to tear things down, rather than coming in here and putting forward positive proposals that might actually make a difference to families’ lives. This government will just keep on doing the right thing by families and providing the support that they need. That is what we believe in.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (4.04 pm)—This Prime Minister and this government are in denial about electricity prices under their carbon tax—or emissions trading scheme—proposals. This government and this Prime Minister are engaged in a grand deception of the Australian people, with the pretence that the increase in electricity prices which is inevitable as a consequence of their policy will simply not occur. There will be electricity price rises. That is the design, structure
and intent of their policy. That is what a carbon price is meant to do and that is what they are denying. It is time for the government to be held to account on the impact of electricity prices over and above that which would have occurred in any event. All of these prices have an impact on the cost of living, which is fundamental for mums and dads, pensioners, seniors, small business owners and farmers.

The starting point for today is, first, to set out the facts about the additional costs to electricity prices for consumers and small businesses as a consequence of the government’s intended and designed policy. The second thing is to deal with the fact that this comes about as a direct consequence of a fundamental breach of a core, bedrock promise made by the Prime Minister on 16 August, the Monday immediately before the election, and on election eve, Friday, 20 August. Then, the Prime Minister said to the Australian people: ‘I rule out a carbon tax.’ This is not a minor breach; this is a major and fundamental breach. The third thing is to deal with the fact that there is an alternative which can deal with emissions, without the impact on cost of living that is proposed by the government.

Let me deal with the facts. First, let us begin with what the Prime Minister of the day, the member for Griffith, said on 3 February this year in this place at the dispatch box. Mr Rudd was asked about the impact of the emissions trading scheme proposed by the government on electricity prices in addition to what would occur in any event. His answer was very simple. He told the House that Treasury modelling indicated that:

… in 2011-12 electricity prices would go up by seven per cent and that in 2012-13 they would go up by 12 per cent.

All up, he told the House that there would be a 19 per cent increase in the first two years of the government’s emissions trading scheme over and above all other electricity price changes.

The great myth being perpetuated by the Prime Minister and the government at this moment is that electricity prices would have gone up and therefore there is not going to be any impact. Let it be absolutely clear that there are two effects in place here. Firstly, there are underlying pressures on electricity as a result of network changes resulting from retail costs and margins and from other changes to wholesale electricity including tightening fuel costs. They exist, as the member for Groom has acknowledged elsewhere, as I have acknowledged, and as others have acknowledged. But over and above that—in addition to, on top of—there is a CPRS emissions trading scheme, or carbon tax, effect. Everyone in this House knows that. Everyone in this House knows that electricity prices for consumers will rise as a consequence of the government scheme in addition to what would have occurred in any event.

Let me move beyond what the member for Griffith has said about the government’s own Treasury modelling of a 19 per cent impact over and above every other electricity price effect in the first two years of the scheme. In March of this year the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales, in their review of retail tariffs and charges for electricity, made it clear that they would authorise a 35 per cent increase over three years for electricity if there was no CPRS and a 60 per cent price rise if there was. In other words, there would be an additional 25 per cent if there was an emissions trading scheme or a carbon tax. There can be no starker demonstration. They calculated the cost of the price rises in electricity to consumers without an emissions trading scheme or carbon tax, and then with one. The differential is an additional 25 per cent over
the first three years. It is likely to rise, on the estimates of many, to the extent that there will be a doubling effect on the price of electricity over the coming eight to nine years.

The third of the sources is no less than Professor Garnaut, who at page 387 of his report made the position absolutely clear:

A major part, if not all, of the costs faced by electricity generators will be passed down the chain from electricity generators, distributors and retailers and finally to households through higher prices for electricity.

These higher prices will require households to spend a greater proportion of their incomes to obtain the same goods and services purchased before the introduction of an emissions price. This will reduce households’ real incomes and purchasing power.

Electricity prices will go up as a consequence of the emissions trading scheme or a carbon tax. Anything less than acknowledgement of that by the government is a pure distortion, a pure lie, a pure deception—and they know it. Fourthly, the same figures were given at page 122 of the BCA paper of 2009 prepared by Port Jackson Partners:

The ETS would have a 60 per cent increase on wholesale prices which would translate to a 24 per cent additional impact on consumer prices.

‘Just be honest’ is the message. The fifth of the elements of evidence is that Paul Howes himself made it absolutely clear on 9 November that it was ‘a rubbish argument to claim that a carbon tax won’t push up electricity prices’. He goes on:

... the whole point of putting a price on carbon is to make things more expensive so you don’t use them.

That is the theory; that is the purpose; that is the intent; that is the structure of what they are proposing. And that will be the effect. If they want to argue that, let us have a debate on mechanisms. At the moment we are engaged in a sheer case of undeniable distortion, deception and lying by the government which is simply not able to face the consequences and the costs of its action—and that will be a driving up of electricity prices for consumers over and above what would otherwise occur. This all leads to what we see from the Prime Minister, which is the deception. She said on 16 August, four days before an election:

There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.

She said on 20 August, on election eve, as reported on the front page of the Australian:

I rule out a carbon tax.

I repeat: ‘I rule out a carbon tax’. This was not a minor deception; this was a fundamental, bedrock pledge on election eve as part of her pitch to Australia. The Prime Minister has broken that pledge. She knows that there will be an increase in electricity prices in the first three years of between 24 and 26 per cent, in addition to everything else, as a consequence of what she is proposing. If she believes in it, she should argue for it. If she believes in it, she should have the courage to accept the consequences. If she believes in it, she should tell the Australian people the truth. That is the test for this Prime Minister and she should release the full Treasury modelling of the impact of electricity prices on consumer prices under her scheme before parliament rises.

That leads me to the third element of my contribution. There is an alternative. We have set down a very clear approach, which is abatement purchasing; engaging in a carbon buy-back. We see elements of this scheme in place in Japan and in Switzerland. It is what Canada has proposed as their scheme, and it is how the New South Wales Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme works. Under that scheme each tonne of abatement procured at the moment costs about $7.15, as opposed to the government’s proposal of, in the first year, $4½ billion of revenue to pur-
chase 13 million tonnes—an effective abatement price of $340 per tonne. It is an extraordinarily ineffective scheme. The reason it is ineffective is that there is a massive dead weight cost associated with it. It translates to massively higher electricity prices, whereas if you target the problem by specifically purchasing the carbon buybacks which are necessary then you can clean up the environment but at a massively lower cost because there is no dead weight overhang.

That is the simple alternative approach. We will match the targets, we will achieve the time frames, and we will do it without the massive increase in electricity prices. The test for the Prime Minister is absolutely clear—release the Treasury modelling on the effects of the emissions trading scheme on electricity prices by the end of next week; come clean and be open with the Australian people and tell them that electricity prices are going up. (Time expired).

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs) (4.14 pm)—This debate has confirmed that the opposition are the masters of carp. This debate—

Mr Ian Macfarlane—Masters of what? I didn’t quite catch that.

Mr MARLES—The masters of carp; masters of carping and bleating. The opposition are the masters of fearmongering. We heard the shadow Treasurer in this matter of public importance discussion talk about Australia. The phrase used was ‘We go with a begging bowl to the rest of the world,’ when the reality is that we stand here today with one of the lowest public debts in the world. We heard the shadow Treasurer talking about our economy ‘being in peril’, when the OECD has just said that we have one of the most robust and resilient economies in the world. I think that I heard it right when I heard the shadow Treasurer talking about Australia in the same breath as Ireland and Portugal. This is fearmongering at its worst; this is carping and bleating at its worst.

What we have seen with the shadow Treasurer over the last few weeks when he has tried to mount an argument in relation to the cost of living or the banks has been thought bubbles here, knee-jerk reactions over there, a slogan next and him jumping up and down with ever greater feverishness on the one spot like a hyperactive frog. The shadow Treasurer is a man who has absolutely no solutions whatsoever.

Despite the carping and the bleating of the opposition, despite the slogans and the populism, despite the cynical politicking and despite the utter absence of any solutions whatsoever to the real issues that are facing the Australian people, on the positive side we have a government that has recognised from day one the difficulties that are facing the Australian people. We understand the difficulties faced, such as rising grocery prices, paying the mortgage and petrol prices. We know the difficulties that are being faced in balancing the household budget.

That is why we took the action that we did at the height of the global financial crisis at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009. And if you want to talk about ‘decisive action’—words used in this matter of public importance—that action was decisive. The Labor government took decisive action to bring direct stimulus payments to those who most needed it: families, pensioners, carers and self-funded retirees. It is a great example.
of how this government has from day one been keenly aware of the pressures that families are under.

That is why we have taken other decisive actions, such as raising the pension. Since September 2009, the pension has been increased by $115 a fortnight and $97 a fortnight for couples. We have indexed that to wages, which are growing faster than the rate of inflation, so that pensions have a degree of protection from price increases in our economy. This is the biggest reform to the pension in 100 years. There are 2.1 million age pensioners receiving that benefit, 764,000 disability support pensioners and 167,000 care payment recipients. It stands as decisive action in stark contrast to the inaction on the pension by the Howard government over a period of 11 years.

We can also look at paid parental leave. From 1 January next year, 148,000 new parents each year will be eligible to receive 18 weeks at the minimum wage, a value in excess of $10,000. Applications for that are being taken right now. That is again decisive action that stands in stark contrast to the inaction of the Howard government over 11 long years.

When we are talking about the cost of living, one of the most important things that we need to understand is that it is not just about what needs to be paid out; it is also about what you can bring in—the revenue, if you like, for a household; the wage packets. The most decisive action of this Labor government was abolishing Work Choices. Work Choices will be etched on the tombstone of the Howard government. Work Choices monstered the household budget and income by giving rise to a loss of penalty rates for working on weekends, for example, a loss of shift work allowances and a loss of overtime. Studies have estimated that casual and part-time sales assistants lost 12 per cent of their earnings under Work Choices. Full-time working women under Australian workplace agreements—that legislated scheme of workplace contracts—were $87.40 per week worse off than their counterparts working under collective agreements.

In that brief window of light that the then Howard government allowed to be shone upon the scheme of AWAs, we learnt very rapidly that 64 per cent of AWAs were cutting annual leave loading, 63 per cent were cutting penalty rates, 52 per cent were cutting shift work loadings, 51 per cent were cutting overtime loadings, 46 per cent were cutting public holiday pay and one in five were providing workers with no pay rise at all and in some cases preventing a pay rise for up to five years. That is what we had under the Howard government.

As much as Work Choices is etched on the tombstone of that government, we have seen attempts to resurrect Work Choices by the Abbott opposition. In the lead-up to this election—on day one, I think—we heard Tony the politician talk about giving the Fair Work Act a go.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—The parliamentary secretary should be aware of standing order 64.

Mr MARLES—We heard the Leader of the Opposition talked about giving the Fair Work Act a fair go. That is what the Leader of the Opposition said when being a politician. But when it came to Tony Abbott the conviction politician—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The parliamentary secretary ought not to disregard my gentle advice.

Mr MARLES—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. When it came to the Leader of the Opposition priding himself on being a conviction politician and on being an ideologue, we know that he regarded Work Choices as one of the great achievements of the Howard
government, which is why he said that he could not rule out any changes to the Fair Work Act going forward. That was the real indication of where the opposition would go when it comes to Work Choices. It may be on the tombstone of the Howard government, but the Abbott opposition is attempting to resurrect it and it was up there front and centre when it came to the last election.

In terms of dealing with the cost of living, you can look at the decisive action that this government has taken in relation to manufacturing jobs, with almost one million jobs in that industry. For example, the $6.2 billion car industry package is a critical thing in my electorate, particularly for those people who work at Ford in the suburb of Norlane because of the cost-of-living issues they face. In 2007, in the dying days of the Howard government, Ford took a decision to close their engine plant, which said everything about the sense of confidence, or rather the lack of it, that they had in the future of manufacturing under the Howard government.

In 2008, with renewed confidence in what the government was doing for manufacturing we saw that decision overturned. One thousand jobs were saved right there—not to mention the indirect jobs—in the economy. That was decisive action, which absolutely affected the people in my electorate of Corio in meeting the costs of living. That action stands in stark contrast to the opposition, which, frankly, would not know industry policy if it jumped up and bit them on the nose. At the end of the day, what we in this country have is an economy in fantastic health. That is what we hear from the OECD when they talk about our economy being ‘one of the most resilient’ economies in the world. There were 375,000 jobs created last year, and 200,000 jobs were saved by virtue of the stimulus packages that we put in place, which were opposed by the opposition—stimulus packages which are now praised by the OECD. Labor have a record of decisive action. The economy that we now preside over is the envy of the world and it stands in contrast to the populist, rank and cynical politics that we see from the opposition. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I call the honourable member for Dawson on what is probably his maiden participation in a matter of public importance debate.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (4.24 pm)—In rising to speak on this matter of public importance it is absolutely clear to me that this government has failed to take decisive action to tackle the cost of living for Australian families. Wherever I go in my regional electorate of Dawson I hear the same stories, from workers, small business men and women, farmers and pensioners—that they are struggling with the rising costs of living. Earlier this year, the Mackay based Regional Social Development Centre came out on the attack on this issue in the local media. At that time, the headline of the local Mackay newspaper the Daily Mercury read ‘Mackay families struggle with rise’. The article read:

HOUSEHOLD bills are set to skyrocket - and our families will pay the price, with homelessness, domestic violence, gambling and drug use expected to rise as a result.

Some people, including long-time residents, will be forced out of the region as they struggle to meet unexpected costs, according to Mackay Regional Council for Social Development business development co-ordinator Deborah Rae.
Electricity bills are expected to rise 13 per cent next financial year, adding to already spiralling household costs; and increased operating expenses could force Mackay Regional Council to lift rates by double figures in coming months.

Ms Rae is quoted as saying:

"The number of families who are struggling is bigger than most people realise; it's difficult to capture that number because many families who come to our region and who struggle leave because of the unexpectedly high cost of living."

Ms Rae said the number of homeless people in Mackay had significantly risen in recent years, as had the number of people forced to move to other, more affordable, areas.

This is serious stuff. The rising cost of living is hurting families in the Mackay region and in the electorate of Dawson. And it is also hurting those who are trying to help those families. I refer to another article from the Daily Mercury, this one titled ‘Soaring costs hurt charity workers’. The article reads:

AFTER years of offering help to those who are struggling, the Mackay chapter of the Tribe of Judah—a local charity—has itself been hit hard.

With rental prices on the rise, the charity has become a victim, enduring a rent rise of more than double.

The article goes on:

“Our rent is going from about $23,000 to about $46,500,” Pastor Hayhoe said.

Pastor Hayhoe is from the Tribe of Judah. The problem of rental costs and housing costs is a massive one in the Mackay region. Last year the 6th annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey examined 272 markets in six countries, including Australia, the US, the UK, Canada and New Zealand. The study included Mackay, in my electorate of Dawson, and found that the housing market was severely unaffordable. That fact is not news to many first home buyers in the Mackay region who are trying to get into the housing market. The data released from the survey revealed that the cost of living in some regions throughout Queensland is comparable to the cost of living in New York or London, cities that are renowned as the most expensive in the world.

Last year, at a time when the then Prime Minister was the man who said he was going to ‘ease the squeeze’ for Australian families, the Daily Mercury reported, under the headline ‘Rent in Mackay set to skyrocket’:

MACKAY is heading into a rental property squeeze and prices are set to head skywards as houses become scarce.

So what is the government doing?

Mrs Andrews—Nothing!

Mr CHRISTENSEN—I would like to say ‘nothing’. At least that would mean they were indifferent to the problem. But the reality is that they are making the situation worse. Under the former Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, the government had two programs that dealt with housing affordability: the National Rental Affordability Scheme and the Housing Affordability Fund. I note that both those programs have been abandoned, at least according to comments made during the election.

Electricity costs are on the rise, as I said, with the Regional Social Development Council in Mackay expecting them to go up by at least 13 per cent this financial year. And it will probably be more than that. What are the government doing about that? Again, I would like to say ‘nothing’ because it would be better to be indifferent than to be part of the problem. But they are part of the problem. They want to introduce a carbon tax—a tax that they promised not to introduce and a tax that will hit everyone, pushing up the price of just about everything, notably electricity.

There is a lot of talk about the need for a carbon tax because of certainty, as if the cer-
tainty of a carbon tax is some sort of a good thing. You do not accept a bad thing just because it is certain or just to get certainty. If that were the case, you would wake up in the morning, send all your money to the ATO and then shoot yourself, because the only things in life that are certain are death and taxes. This carbon tax will impact families in more ways than one. Not only will it put up the price of everything but it will also put the squeeze on investment and jobs.

In September, the Mackay Whitsunday Regional Economic Development Corporation—about which I have to mention that the Labor candidate for Dawson sits on the board—expressed their concerns about this carbon tax. Again from the *Daily Mercury*:

Regional Economic Development Corporation … chief executive officer Narelle Pearse … said she was concerned about the effect a carbon tax could have on the Bowen Basin.

“It certainly is a risk for our region. It’s something the government has been talking about for some time,” she said.

Well, it certainly is a risk for our region. It is a risk for our nation and it is a risk for Australian families. A letter to the editor in today’s *Daily Mercury* pretty much summed up my views. It said, ‘Gillard’s ideas need to be consigned to the scrap heap before she wrecks more of the economy.’ We in the coalition have a better way of dealing with climate and the environment, and it will not cost jobs or family budgets.

Costs are increasing and this government is doing nothing but adding to the problem. As the Prime Minister said recently, the government has pretty much lost its way. And I would say that it continues to lose its way when it does nothing to help ordinary Australian families with the continual cost-of-living increases. I note that the *Australian* picked up on this the other day. They drew an analogy between the government and that very frustrating TV show, *Lost*. They said:

Labor’s *Lost* begins with a plane crash that strands the surviving passengers of Kevin 07 on a tropical island, forcing Labor MPs and the independents to work together to stay alive.

But their survival is immediately threatened by various mysterious entities, including a carbon price, the haunting ghost of Kevin Rudd, an unseen creature that roams the jungle (the “Latham”), and the island’s malevolent, and largely unseen, inhabitants, known as “Focus Groups”.

Being a fan of cult TV shows, that snippet got me thinking of other descriptors for the government in terms of TV shows.

We could look at the rainbow coalition of Labor, extreme Greens and a few Independents. It is certainly not *The Brady Bunch* but perhaps it is more *Diff’rent Strokes*. We could look at Senator Bob Brown and the Prime Minister almost arm in arm at recent press conferences and conclude it is *The Odd Couple*. Then again, perhaps not; it might be more *Who’s The Boss?* We could look at the promise—the promise that was made to the Australian people before the election—of no carbon tax, a promise that was made by the Prime Minister twice, as has been said in this chamber. And then we could look at the incessant push for such a tax as soon as Labor formed government. That is pretty much the TV show *Lie To Me*, isn’t it?

We could look at the absolute mess that we are getting into already because of this government on water and the Murray-Darling, on illegal immigration, on the unravelling mining tax or on the NBN white elephant. It is all turning into a mess. So we could be forgiven for thinking those on the other side are a bunch of Muppets, or perhaps we are being run by *The Dukes of Hazard*. We could take Senator Doug Cameron at his word about these guys being zombies and wonder if we are in *The Twilight Zone* or perhaps if *The Addams Family* are in charge. We could look at the fact that this govern-
The government thinks it is going to solve the illegal immigration problem through East Timor when East Timor does not agree with that. The government must be living on Fantasy Island.

But the big issue of the day is of course banks and rising interest rates and the fact that the government has done nothing to counter the problem of them putting interest rates above the RBA cash levels. What we have had from the government is a bit more than nothing: a lot of talk, a lot of bluster, a lot of barking at the gate. We have a Treasurer who has issued more than 30 separate warnings to the banks not to raise interest rate levels above RBA levels, and every warning has been ignored. It struck me then that the perfect TV show for the government is *Get Smart*. We have our own Maxwell in the Treasurer himself. Cornered by the four big banks all threatening to pull the rates trigger, he puffs out his chest and says: ‘Would you believe that I have this place surrounded with a SWAT team, an armoured personnel carrier and a dozen killer attack dogs? No? Would you believe a security guard, a Mini Moke and an angry pit bull? How about an old lady, a stroller and a puddle?’ The Treasurer is the Maxwell Smart of Australian politics and, for all the bluff and bluster, his government is doing absolutely nothing about the banks and their reprehensible actions.

We have a government that is lost in a mess, doing nothing but adding to the problems that Australian families are facing. We can only hope that the crossbenchers supporting this mob see the light soon, or it is going to be *Mission: Impossible* to turn this ship around.

**Mr NEUMANN** (Blair) (4.34 pm)—I listened to the member for North Sydney, the member for Flinders and the member for Dawson—15 minutes of carping, 10 minutes of moaning and 10 minutes of jocularity, with not one answer for the Australian people, not one policy, not one proposal and not one idea from all three about how to assist Australian families. We understand that Australian families are struggling. We understand that these are difficult days. We have been through the global financial crisis. But guess what. We went to an election not more than a couple of months ago with the Leader of the Opposition promising to impose additional costs on Australian families, proposing to impose a cost of about $10 billion on businesses that would push up prices and blow holes in the budget of working Australians. He would have imposed a 1.5 per cent tax on 3½ thousand Australian businesses. That would have meant higher prices for grocery stores, department stores and petrol stations and businesses passing them on to small business. He did not think it was going to have an impact on those four million people engaged in small business in this country—2.4 million small businesses across this land. He was kidding himself. Guess what. The coalition took to the last election a policy of cuts—cuts to services, cuts to funding for schools, cuts to hospitals, cuts to e-health, and getting rid of the National Broadband Network.

The opposition leader was proposing to take us backwards—backwards on Work Choices and backwards on cuts to all aspects of community, making it easier to sack people. The idea that you would resurrect Work Choices in another name—and they could not even get it right within an hour of the election being called—and the idea that you would possibly entrust the architects and the apostles of Work Choices with the treasury bench once again would have seen low-income earners, working-class people, women, suffer at the hands of those opposite. What was their record on AWAs? We heard the member for North Sydney talk a lot
about what we know. What did they do? They brought in AWAs, and the consequence of AWAs was that women on average earned $87.40 per week less, and worse if they worked in cleaning or retail. That was the consequence and that is the record of those opposite.

What is their proposal? Nothing at all; nothing to ease the pressure on Australians. We are acting, we have acted and we will act. For numerous election cycles in a row the coalition claimed that they were the great supporters of families in this country. Guess what. Their rhetoric was not borne out. We had the 10 interest rate rises under those opposite. They now criticise us when they know very well that monetary policy is established by the Reserve Bank independently. Since we have been in power, we have reduced the tax burden on Australian families, with income tax reductions three years in a row. We have abolished Work Choices and brought in a fairer, simpler system for Australian families that gives families a chance. We have increased the childcare rebate and extended the education tax refund to include school uniforms. That is what we are doing. Those opposite did not do any of those things when they were in power.

The Prime Minister has committed us to a strong economy, a sustainable Australia and better education services for our families. Through getting the economy right, acting decisively, supporting jobs through the global financial crisis, 375,000 jobs have been created in the last 12 months, which was absolutely critical. We have been boosting savings, building skills and improving infrastructure. Investments in road, rail and ports have seen $37 billion in infrastructure in those areas alone. This is far more than the coalition did. And workers work in those industries, they work on those roads and in those ports and on the railway lines. This is giving them jobs, giving them opportunities. We have improved health and hospitals with increased funding to those areas to put on new people.

We have achieved lower debt and lower deficit, and lower unemployment than most countries in the world, the countries that the member for North Sydney mentioned in his speech, ranting and raving on with not an idea about what he would do if he were in power—not a word; big on rhetoric, poor on action. We will bring the budget back to surplus by 2012-13 and it is not going to be by luck nor by chance but by decisive, determined action by this Labor government.

We have delivered pension reform and you can see it clearly: $115 per fortnight more for single pensioners, $97 per fortnight more for couples on a pension. It is the biggest pension reform this country has ever seen. Did those opposite do this? They took a proposal to cabinet, not long before they were ousted in 2007, to increase pensions, but it was knocked back. It took a Labor government to undertake secure and sustainable pension reform in this country to give pensioners a chance. Those opposite did not. We have seen 2.1 million age pensioners, 764,000 disability support pensioners and 167,000 carer payment recipients benefit from these unprecedented reforms, which are about easing cost-of-living pressure on Australians. The member for North Sydney did not address any of those issues in his speech.

From 1 January 2012 families with teenagers aged 16 to 18 in school or equivalent vocational training will benefit from even more significant reforms, such as increasing the maximum payment rate of family tax benefit part A by more than $150 per fortnight. And 650,000 Australian families will benefit as a result of these changes. Those opposite carp and moan about Building the Education Revolution, the BER. In my electorate 65 schools received $108 million for
much needed community infrastructure: vital improvements to libraries, to multipurpose halls, to classrooms; digital whiteboards—we have seen it all in my electorate. On each and every occasion I go to a BER project, I ask the project manager, the builder and the school principal what is being done, how many jobs are being created, how many jobs are being supported, and how many local jobs. On each and every occasion the same message comes back: local jobs supported, local jobs created, the names of local builders, local carpenters, local electricians given. That is what is important and that is why we did it, supporting local jobs, helping with cost-of-living pressures for Australian families in local areas. If those opposite do not think that in the suburbs they represent that is important to help with cost-of-living pressures, they are kidding themselves. Early decisive action during the global financial crisis was absolutely critical for Australian families. That is why we spent $16.2 billion to support jobs. Those opposite opposed it. They come in here and they carp and they moan. They have really got a gall to talk about cost-of-living pressures, because their rhetoric does not match reality and their voting record in this place does not match their alleged support for working Australian families. They spent most of this morning attacking the very organisations that support low- and middle-income families, the trade union movement. They have spent most of the day pursuing their ideological obsession. We have heard speech after speech by those opposite. They do not care for those people who are struggling with cost-of-living pressures. Their voting record in this place shows it and their actions out there show it. Their failure to provide one idea today about how they are going to help working families is a clear indication of their complete lack of policy ideas and their philosophical vacuum.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! The discussion has concluded.

CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENT (CLUSTER MUNITIONS PROHIBITION) BILL 2010
Referred to Main Committee
Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (4.45 pm)—by leave—I move:
That the bill be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.
Question agreed to.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PREVENTIVE HEALTH AGENCY BILL 2010
Consideration of Senate Message
Bill returned from the Senate with an amendment.
Ordered that the amendment be considered immediately.

Senate’s amendment—
(1) Page 8 (after line 30), after clause 11, insert:

11A Publication
The CEO must cause a copy of any advice given or recommendations made in undertaking the CEO’s functions under subsection 11(1) to be published on the ANPHA’s web site within 12 months of providing the advice or making the recommendations.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (4.46 pm)—I move:
That the amendment be agreed to.

I will speak very briefly on the Australian National Preventive Health Agency Bill 2010, as I understand will the opposition. The government recognises the importance of taking decisive action to address issues of prevention and to make sure we are improving the health of our community not only now but into the future. I note the amendment that has been made by the Senate. The
Senate has amended the bill to now require that the CEO of the agency publish all advice or recommendations given on the agency’s website within 12 months of its being provided.

While I emphasise to the House that the agency will be independent, it is important that the agency be able to provide frank and fearless advice to governments. We are prepared to accept this amendment, although we did raise that the agency would be subject to the usual Public Service statutory agency checks and balances, which we believe would be sufficient. That is, it will be required to provide an annual report, it will be required to provide strategic plans on its proposed work, it will be required to publish a report on the state of preventive health in Australia every two years and its CEO will have to appear before Senate estimates. Nevertheless, we appreciate the will that has been expressed by the Senate. We are determined to have this preventive agency established. I note that the former Prime Minister is here at the table. This is an area that he has been very passionate about. We are prepared to accept this amendment in order to have this vital National Preventive Health Agency established.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (4.47 pm)—The opposition supported this amendment to the Australian National Preventive Health Agency Bill 2010 in the Senate and supported a similar amendment when the bill was last debated in the House. The National Preventative Health Taskforce recommended that the National Preventive Health Agency be an independent statutory body. It has been set up so that the advice and recommendations will be provided to the minister and the minister alone. That is why we thought—and Senator Xenophon and the Greens also thought, and it was originally Senator Xenophon’s idea—that the advice and recommendations from the CEO to the minister should be made publicly available. The amendment, as the Minister for Health and Ageing has said, states that it should be made publicly available within 12 months of being provided.

The Reserve Bank of Australia provides the minutes of its meetings within six weeks. The Productivity Commission makes its recommendations publicly available. This is an important step in transparency. The advice and recommendations from the CEO will be available for all of the parliament and for all of the public. We will be able to see the ideas, and if ministers do not take up those ideas then oppositions and others will have the opportunity to ask why not and might have the opportunity to take up some of those ideas themselves. So we support the motion to agree to the amendment and welcome the minister’s backflip on this.

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (4.49 pm)—I move:

That orders of the day Nos. 3, 4 and 5, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2010 MEASURES No. 4) BILL 2010
Second Reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (4.50 pm)—in reply—I thank those members who have contributed to this debate on the Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No. 4) Bill 2010. The amendments contained in schedule 1 ensure that the underlying policy objective of this
The underlying policy objective is that the appropriate amount of GST is collected and the appropriate amount of input tax credits claimed in situations where there are payments between parties in a supply chain which indirectly alter the price received or paid by the parties for the things supplied. These amendments will take effect from 1 July 2010, which is also the date of the effect of the original measure providing for GST adjustments for third-party payments.

Schedule 2 amends the income tax laws to provide a CGT rollover for taxpayers who replace an entitlement to water with one or more different water entitlements. This rollover ensures that the CGT is not a barrier to transformation. Transformation is the process by which an irrigator permanently changes their right to water against an operator into a statutory licence held by an entity other than the operator. Transformation facilitates water market trading and the efficient use of water resources. Schedule 2 also allows termination fees to be recognised when calculating a capital gain or capital loss on an asset by including these costs in the assets cost base. This change applies to all the assets and not just those relating to water.

In schedule 3, the taxation of financial arrangements provisions represent several major legislative reforms that affect a wide range of financial arrangements, including those of a complex nature. These reforms were implemented in four stages: stage 1 was the implementation of the debt equity provisions; stage 2 was the implementation of the foreign currency gains and losses provisions; and stages 3 and 4 focused on the tax treatment of hedges and tax timing treatment of financial arrangements other than hedges.

The taxation of financial arrangements provisions modernise the financial taxation system by better reflecting the economic and commercial substance of financial arrangements. The proposed TOFA amendments in this bill are primarily to make minor policy refinements and technical amendments and corrections to TOFA stages 3 and 4 provisions to clarify the law and to ensure that the law operates as intended. The amendments will improve tax certainty and reduce compliance costs and are the result of the ongoing monitoring and consultation undertaken by the government to ensure that the provisions operate as intended. The proposed amendments also extend the transitional period for the application of the debt equity provisions to 1 July 2010 for upper tier 2 capital instruments issued before 1 July 2001. The amendments will allow the issuers of certain upper tier 2 instruments to transition into the proposed upper tier 2 regulations.

This bill also contains a number of amendments to the foreign currency gains and losses provisions. These amendments will extend the scope of a number of compliance cost-saving measures in the tax law, as well as ensure that the provisions operate as intended. The development of the amendments has benefited from the consultation with industry representatives and professional bodies. These minor technical amendments to the foreign currency gains and losses and provisions are part of a package of amendments that was initially announced by the coalition government on 5 August 2004, to apply from 1 July 2003. These are good sensible changes, and on 13 May the Treasurer and the then assistant secretary announced that the government would proceed with these amendments and the amendments would have effect from 1 July 2003. The amendments will now apply from 17 December 2003 to be consistent with the commencement date of the foreign currency gains and losses provisions. However, affected taxpayers should not be disadvantaged
by this application date as the initial announcement in 2004 contained a significant amount of detail with respect to the amendments so that affected taxpayers could manage their tax affairs or carry on their activities with the knowledge of the amendments and their impacts.

Schedule 4 amends the income tax laws to make it easier for takeovers and mergers regulated by the Corporations Act to qualify for the CGT scrip-for-scrip rollover. These amendments carve out takeover bids that do not contravene key provisions of the Corporations Act, and approved schemes of arrangement, from having to meet the rollover requirement, but the target entity’s interest holders can participate in the arrangement on substantially the same terms. These amendments ensure that the scrip-for-scrip rollover operates more effectively.

Schedule 5 implements the government’s 2010-11 budget measure to increase the threshold above which a taxpayer may claim the net medical expenses tax offset. The claim threshold will increase from $1,500 to $2,000, with effect from 1 July 2010. The amendments will also introduce annual indexation of the claim threshold to the consumer price index. The first indexation adjustment of the claim threshold will take place on 1 July 2011. The threshold above which a taxpayer may claim the net medical expenses tax offset has not been increased since the 2002-03 income year. Since that time medical costs and wages have increased significantly. This has made it easier for taxpayers to become eligible for the net medical expenses tax offset. These are important amendments that will help to reduce the long-term cost to the budget of a rapidly growing expenditure and ensure the ongoing sustainability of the net medical expenses tax offset.

Schedule 6 amends the deductible gift recipient provisions of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997. Taxpayers can claim an income tax deduction for gifts to organisations that are DGRs. This schedule adds two new organisations to the act, namely One Laptop per Child Australia Ltd and the Mary MacKillop Canonisation Gift Fund. It also extends the period for which the Xanana Vocational Education Trust can receive deductible gifts until 30 December 2010. Making these organisations deductible gift recipients will assist them in attracting public support for their activities.

Schedule 7 amends the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 to extend deductible gift recipient status to all volunteer fire brigades. This recognises the important community service performed by volunteer fire brigades. Volunteer fire brigades aim to prevent, respond to and assist with recovery from a range of fire related emergencies, including preventing bushfires from reaching people in built-up communities. Schedule 7 allows all entities providing volunteer based emergency services, including volunteer fire brigades, to access tax deductible donations and it extends deductible gift recipient status to all state and territory government bodies that coordinate volunteer fire brigades and state emergency service units.

This bill deserves the support of the parliament. It is good policy. The Gillard government is committed to tackling tax reform, and we have a clear plan. The government intends to simplify personal tax for 6.4 million Australians, to reward personal savings of over five million Australians, boost superannuation for 8.4 million Australians and expand superannuation concessions, and cut company tax for all taxes, including cutting and simplifying tax for up to 2.4 million small businesses. The government has a real tax plan, while the opposition’s tax plan is nothing more than a piece of paper where all
the information is already publicly available. I encourage the opposition to cease and de-
sist from cheap political stunts—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—my encouragement falls
on deaf ears—and to assist the government
to deliver real reform. Voting for today’s bill
is one further step in this House. I commend
this bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General rec-
ommending appropriation announced.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (4.58
pm)—by leave—I move amendments (1) and
(2):

(1) Clause 2, page 3 (before line 1), table item
15, omit “Schedule 7”, substitute “Schedules
7 and 8”.

(2) Schedule 7, page 47 (after line 3), add:
Schedule 8—Providing tax receipts to in-
dividual taxpayers

Income Tax Assessment Act 1936

1 After section 174

Insert:

174A Taxation receipt to be provided with
notice of assessment

(1) A notice of assessment for an individ-
ual under section 174 for the financial
year ending 30 June 2011 or any later
financial year must be accompanied by
a taxation receipt, setting out:

(a) a break-down of how the amount of
the assessment was spent on differ-
ent functions in the financial year
(calculated by applying the propor-
tion of the Budget expenditure on
each function to the amount of the
assessment); and

(b) the level of Australian Government
net debt.

(2) A taxation receipt for subsection (1)
must, at a minimum, contain the infor-
mation shown in the following table:

| Item | Information to be included in taxa-
tion receipt |
|------|----------------|
| 1    | The name and tax file number of the
taxpayer. |
| 2    | The amount of the assessment. |
| 3    | The level of Australian Government
net debt at the end of the financial
year and at the end of the previous
financial year. |
| 4    | The taxpayer’s share of the Australian
Government net debt for the financial
year, to be calculated by dividing the
Australian Government net debt by
the number of individual taxpayers. |
| 5    | How much of the taxation revenue
raised under the assessment was ex-
pended for the welfare function, broken
down into the following sub-functions:

(a) aged pension entitlements;

(b) disability pension entitle-
ments;

(c) family benefit entitlements;

(d) unemployment and sickness
benefit entitlements;

(e) other welfare benefit enti-
tlements. |
| 6    | How much of the taxation revenue
raised under the assessment was ex-
pended for each of the following
functions:

(a) health;

(b) education;

(c) defence;

(d) foreign affairs and eco-

momic aid;

(e) recreation and culture;

(f) housing and community
services;

(g) industry assistance and fuel
subsidies; |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Information to be included in taxation receipt</th>
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<td>(h)</td>
<td>public order;</td>
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<td>(i)</td>
<td>transport and communications;</td>
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<td>(j)</td>
<td>labour and industrial relations.</td>
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7 How much of the taxation revenue raised under the assessment was expended in transfers to the states, territories and local government authorities.

8 How much of the taxation revenue raised under the assessment was expended to service public debt interest.

9 How much of the taxation revenue raised under the assessment was expended for other public services.

Note: The amounts specified for the purposes of table items 5 to 9 are to be calculated by reference to the nominal proportion of Budget expenditure constituted by each function.

I am disappointed that the government is not accepting our amendments. You have got a lean and hungry look there, old Billy!

Mr Shorten—No-one would say that about you!

Mr HOCKEY—We know you! I’m on Kevin’s side! I’ve always been on his side!

Mr Shorten interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY—No, I’m on his side. We’re all on his side.

Mr Shorten—It’s the Sunrise—

Mr HOCKEY—I know it’s Sunrise. I give in.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—I think the season of goodwill has started early!

Mr HOCKEY—I have a soft spot for the member for Griffith. Unlike the Assistant Treasurer, I do have a soft spot for him. He is a good man. Just keep your hands well displayed there, Bill! Keep them up; keep them above the table! We do not know what you have in your holster, old son; we can only guess! He is the one who has to go through the metal detector on the way into parliament! You have to be careful of the smiley ones! I am having a great time paying out on this guy, but I had better get back to the amendments.

The amendments are about giving Australians proper information. We all recall the sanctimonious line from the now Prime Minister that the sunshine was going to come in. The member for Lyne repeated it: ‘Let the sun shine. Let us have a transparent and open parliament.’ When we first tested the government on that, asking for all the information on the Henry tax review, what did they do? They closed it down. Ken Henry ran off and got flawed legal advice from the Australian Government Solicitor that the clerks of the parliament were lying and that the parliament did not have the power to order the release of all the documents on the Henry tax review. Lord knows about the Henry tax review. To be fair to the member for Griffith, he was set up by that lean and hungry Treasurer, who went to him and said, ‘We are going to have this tax review.’ It was the Treasurer who came up with the idea of the mining tax. What a disaster that was.

Australians have the right to know where their taxes are going. It was the coalition, as part of its transparency platform in the lead-up to the election, that outlined that every Australian taxpayer should get a tax receipt from the tax office. I emphasise that it would cost the tax office very little to send a letter out to people saying, ‘Thank you for paying tax.’ Our mock tax receipt says:

The Australian Government thanks you for the $20,000 tax* you have paid for 2010-11. This tax receipt details where your taxes have been spent (based on a nominal distribution of Budget ex-
penses by function) and the level of Australian Government debt.

We also tell the taxpayer how much the level of Australian net debt is, which is a damn good idea, and we tell them, if they are paying $20,000 in tax, exactly where that money would go—for example, $6,480 on welfare, $3,200 on health, $1,860 on education, $1,180 on defence, $280 on transport and communications, $540 on public debt interest and so on. So we are putting to the Australian taxpayer exactly where their money is being spent by the Australian government.

The benefit of this is that it makes it more explicable than the budget itself, which deals in billions and billions of dollars, and it explains exactly to those people who pay the tax where the money is going and how reliable and trustworthy the government is. That is probably why the government want to oppose these amendments. They do not want disclosure. They do not want to tell the Australian taxpayer exactly where their money is being spent by the Australian government.

The benefit of this is that it makes it more explicable than the budget itself, which deals in billions and billions of dollars, and it explains exactly to those people who pay the tax where the money is going and how reliable and trustworthy the government is. That is probably why the government want to oppose these amendments. They do not want disclosure. They do not want to tell the Australian people where they are spending their money, because that is the Labor Party. They spend. They are very good at that. They are accomplished. They are world leaders in that regard. But I would say that the Australian people do want to know where that money is going.

This is as much a challenge for the Labor Party as it is for the Independents. Isn’t this about transparency? Isn’t this about honesty? Isn’t this being upfront with the Australian people? I know that this is immensely popular out there with the Australian people. They do want to know where their money is going. They do want to know how the government is spending their money. If the Labor Party were serious about transparency and honesty and if they were serious not just about Sunrise but about sunshine then I would say to them that they should support this sensible amendment which will cost very little to implement but, at the end of the day, will give Australians more information about how their money is being spent.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (5.04 pm)—The government will be rejecting these amendments.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—I will just ask the opposition to move over their emotional shock and surprise. It is a little ironic getting advice from the opposition about transparency to people. I remember that when they put through—and the member for Mayo will remember this well because he was one of the architects of Work Choices—their industrial relations anti-worker legislation they made it a lot harder for workers to get information off their pay slips. So it is a little rich now to get advice about taxation information when in fact we know the colour of the coalition. When they are in power, they go after workers and they do not put information on pay slips. Talk of transparency from the opposition is inconsistent with their proven track record. The member for Mayo is a very clever, cunning operator. He understands exactly—

Mr Briggs interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—I withdraw the word ‘cunning’. The information that the opposition wants to include on where taxpayers’ money is spent is currently in the public domain. I understand perfectly well that the opposition would like a cheat sheet, because it would help them in what they do. But the budget papers are available on the internet. This would merely duplicate existing information. This is a legislative amendment version of the Manager of Opposition Business’s constant inane requests in this place to table newspaper clippings, which are already on the public record. Budget updates will mean that the information on the tax receipt would differ depending on which day tax-
payers received their assessment. Something printed today may not reflect the precise circumstances in the updated information of a modern government.

The member for North Sydney’s proposal also does not accurately reflect the significant contribution other taxes, such as business taxes, make to funding welfare, health, schools, highways, the environmental projects so unbefriended of the opposition, consular services, defending our country and so on and so forth. Furthermore, if accepted, the opposition’s proposed amendments would come at a significant cost and increase complexity for the Australian Taxation Office. They would certainly need to explore the legal implications of providing this great big paper chase.

Other points which should be made when one considers the merit of the opposition’s amendments is that if taxpayers are not satisfied with the published allocation—in other words, they do not agree with the information they have received in what I have to say is a fairly unsophisticated, Hockeyesque format on a single piece of paper—we could see all sorts of litigation with the ATO. This would also have significant resource implications. I would remind the shadow Treasurer of the law of unintended consequences.

The implementation of the shadow Treasurer’s amendments will mean that we have the tax file numbers of millions of pay-as-you-go taxpayers floating around raising security concerns about information integrity. The reality is that there is no policy substance to these amendments. Rather, what we see is an attempt to grandstand and an ill-fated attempt to demonstrate continuing irrelevance to the process of legislation in this parliament.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (5.07 pm)—On Monday the shadow Treasurer said that he would move these amendments and the government froze, despite the fact that the shadow Treasurer foreshadowed these very initiatives during the election—simple initiatives that say to Australian taxpayers as shareholders of Australia, ‘You deserve to know how your taxes are being spent.’ After the shadow Treasurer foreshadowed that he would move these very straightforward and not complex amendments that say to every taxpayer, ‘We will tell you how your taxes are spent’—something that is most basic in a tax system and certainly, as the shadow Treasurer pointed out, most basic in a new paradigm of openness where we are going to let the sunshine in; in fact, we were going to tear the roof off the House of Representatives—what did the government do? The government closed down debate on their own legislation on Monday and the contribution we have just heard from the Assistant Treasurer is, amazingly, the product of 48 hours work. For 48 hours, they have been trying to come up with a ragbag of excuses on how to say to Australian taxpayers, ‘We are not going to tell you how your individual taxes are spent.’ It is as pure and simple as that.

The shadow Treasurer’s amendments are very straightforward. They say, ‘For a given amount of tax you pay, we will tell you how that money is spent proportionately within the budget.’ As the shadow Treasurer pointed out, it includes all areas of expenditure, including net debt. Obviously, this is something the government is sensitive about. We think that for taxpayers to be able to access that information is sensible and basic. The Assistant Treasurer said that all this information is available. Forty-eight hours of work and presumably advice from the Taxation Office and he has got it completely wrong. The information on general spending is available and the pie charts are available, but what is not available is the amounts on a given amount of tax paid by an individual.
That is the purpose of these amendments. As the shadow Treasurer said, if someone has paid $20,000 in tax, notionally here are the dollar amounts per item that the Commonwealth is spending.

It is very interesting in this debate that the Assistant Treasurer stands here and says he is rejecting the amendments. It is very easy to see why. When the amendments were put forward, the government wanted to think about them. The Assistant Treasurer was not here at that point—he was delayed, I understand—but the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer was here and said he needed to adjourn the debate to think about the amendments. Having thought about them, he presumably went to the Taxation Office and everywhere in the ministerial wing to ask people to think of every possible excuse they could, including the bizarre excuse we just heard that taxpayers may not like the way the government is spending money and may litigate. I have to tell you that they know in many respects the level of the debt but they do not know their individual components. This is laughable. We here on this side of the House are going to stand up for Australian taxpayers.

To those members opposite—I notice the member for McEwen, my neighbour here—and other members here, it will be very interesting to see how you vote on these amendments because you will be saying to every taxpayer in your electorate that as their representative you went to Canberra and one of your first acts as a new member of parliament was to vote to prevent them from finding out how their taxes were spent. That is going to be one of your first votes before Christmas. A great Christmas present! With the Labor Party, on so many issues, the public comes second best. The Assistant Treasurer’s tone was almost like, ‘We cannot tell them the truth, they cannot handle the truth.’ His contribution today, after 48 hours of preparation, shows that the government at their heart want to conceal information. As the shadow Treasurer said, this is a classic example of the very thing the Independents are arguing for and they should vote for that accordingly.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (5.13 pm)—I genuinely acknowledge the call prior to one of my ill-disciplined colleagues in front. At the beginning of the Assistant Treasurer’s remarks on the Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No. 4) Bill 2010 he proclaimed to be the great defender of workers’ rights in this country in his former position as head of the AWU, now taken over by the man who wants to be Bill Shorten. We know that when the Assistant Treasurer was there he used to talk about how important it was to have strong unfair dismissal protections in our country for working families and for workers. This year, of course, we saw the greatest unfair dismissal this country has ever seen—a walk upstart case of unlawful dismissal—and I would be very happy to brief the member for Griffith on our options in the Federal Court if he wishes to proceed down that line.

The Assistant Treasurer, who as the great defender of unfair dismissals that he once was, did not seem to think that it was such a great protection for that Aussie worker on 23 June this year.

The amendments moved by the shadow Treasurer are good amendments. Firstly, they go through with an election commitment. Obviously members on the other side—as Dougie Cameron described them, the ‘lobotomised zombies’—do not understand that when you make an election commitment it is very important that you keep it. When you say that you are not going to introduce a carbon tax, you do not introduce a carbon tax. When you say that you are going to produce an information sheet for the Australian taxpayer on where their money has been spent, you go through with the promise to produce
the receipt on where their money has been spent. That is for those on the other side—the zombies, as Dougie Cameron describes them—to learn. Senator Dougie Cameron has always been a good friend to the Assistant Treasurer.

The receipt outlines importantly where the Australian government spends its money. I think taxpayers would be interested in how much of their taxes each year are going to these important services, to these important issues like defence spending, like foreign affairs. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, who is at the table, has been talking in recent days about foreign aid, and I am sure the Australian public would like to know how much they are individually contributing to each of these projects around the world. I think that is an important element. But they would also like to know how much they are contributing to interest payments each year. We see here, thanks to the shadow Treasurer’s hard work with this, that out of this taxpayer’s $20,000 in tax they would be paying $540 in interest on Labor’s debt. Had they got this receipt under a Liberal government, that number would be zero.

Mr Hockey—They would be earning interest.

Mr BRIGGS—Indeed, they would be, because we saved money. We left money in the bank for a Labor government to come along. I think it is an acknowledged mistake of the former government to leave that much money for Labor to come along and spend so readily.

This is a good example of what the MPI today was about, which is taking real action on issues which are important to Australians, making these commitments in the election campaign about taking real action and then following through with them after the election. As the shadow Treasurer and the member for Casey so rightly pointed out, we heard much after the election about letting the sunshine in and telling Australians about what happens here and having a transparent approach to the parliament, yet when Labor get back in office, when they get their opportunity again, they do not go through with that and instead they avoid and they use all the excuses in the world.

There were some great excuses in the Assistant Treasurer’s remarks. I thought the classic was that the security of our country would be put at risk if information on what is happening to the Australian people’s money were sent to them. That is a fascinating excuse—and of course security is often used as an excuse when governments cannot win debates. I think what it has more to do with is the security of the Australian Labor Party, because when the Australian taxpayer finds out what this government has done to the economy, how much money it has spent, how much money it has borrowed and how much money it has wasted, the security of the Australian Labor Party will come under great question.

These amendments should be supported. They were a promise made by us during the election campaign. They are a promise made by us now. They should go ahead and I fully support them.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (5.18 pm)—I want to congratulate those coalition members that have spoken previous to me in this debate and in particular applaud the amendments that have been moved by the shadow Treasurer. If there is one compact that we as parliamentarians have with the Australian people it is to be responsible with the use of their money. If there is one critical condition of the contract formed between the members of this place and the people whose tax we take off them it is that we will use their money effectively for the best interests of this nation. With that in mind I am very upset
that the Labor Party Assistant Treasurer refuses to undertake these simple amendments, which would go to the very core of ensuring that we as a parliament deal with that central compact of our agreement with the Australian people.

The shadow Treasurer made very clear in the lead-up to the last election that, if elected, we would provide Australian taxpayers with a receipt and that this receipt would detail information about the way in which their money was being spent. We think that is important. We on this side of the House make no apology for the fact that we believe that both history and common sense show that we are better managers of taxpayers’ money than the Australian Labor Party. A short, cursory glance of history will tell us that it is the coalition that pays down $96 billion of debt, that it is the coalition that provides for the future through the Higher Education Endowment Fund, through the Medicare fund, through the Future Fund. It is the coalition that brings down taxes, with over $150 billion in personal income tax cuts. That is our track record. Contrast it with that of the mob opposite, who in the short course of less than three years took Australia from a net savings position to now being mired with a forecast net public debt of around $95 billion. So I think it is understandable that Australians want to know how their money is being spent.

A tax receipt like this one—the sample that was provided by the shadow Treasurer—does exactly that. It outlines the way in which taxpayers’ money is being spent. This receipt is not a great burden on the ATO. It is not much of an imposition on the ATO because we already know that information is returned to taxpayers by the tax office when they complete their tax return. And it does not matter that it does not deal with other forms of taxes paid to government, such as company tax, because this receipt details information specific to a taxpayer. It details, based on the amount of tax that you pay, how your money is being spent—not what proportion of tax you are paying relative to companies, not how company tax is being rolled out, but how every dollar that you spend is being spent by government.

I think the real reason why the Assistant Treasurer does not want this transparency, the real reason why the Assistant Treasurer runs from providing information to the Australian people, is what this actually would show. Take, for example, this line item, ‘public debt interest’. On this notional tax receipt of $20,000, it accounts for 540 bucks. I suspect that, after another couple of years of this Labor government, it would probably be the single biggest bar on the chart—up there with welfare, up there with what we are contributing in terms of transfers to state and local governments.

Australians have a right to demand of their parliamentarians the effective use of their taxpayer dollars. After all, it does not sit comfortably with coalition members to think that we know how to spend money better than they do. We do not. We actually think they as consumers have a better idea of how to spend a dollar than we do. But there are some areas where of course government must step into the role—national security and defence are of course top line.

The reality is that those opposite have a very different view. Those opposite believe in their beating hearts that they know better how to spend a taxpayer’s dollar than the taxpayer themselves, because what else would explain their insatiable quest and the insatiable appetite that Labor members have for taxing taxpayers and spending their money on their own little pet projects? That is exactly the reason why the coalition will stand up for taxpayers and will say in plain English: let’s provide the taxpayers of Aus-
tralia with a receipt that explains exactly how their money is being spent so that year on year they can see whether or not the way in which this particular government—or indeed any subsequent government—spends their money is the way that they would like to see their money spent. If they have a problem with it, they might look at alternatives. But I think it is a great shame that the Australian Labor Party does not have the courage to provide this transparency to taxpayers.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (5.23 pm)—I was reluctant to speak, but in view of the last couple of contributions a couple of things just have to be corrected for the sake of accuracy. First of all, this information is available. It is available on the internet. It is available when the media report the budget. It is also available in the budget papers. There is a degree of cost and complexity in this coalition thought bubble dreamed up in a frenetic rush in the lead-up to an election. In terms of security and what have you, I do not believe it is a great idea to double the number of bits of information floating around with people’s tax file numbers. Also, I do not see why, if the opposition truly believe in transparency, they have neglected in their amendments all small businesses and businesses who pay tax. Instead, they are just looking at one section of the economy—

Mr Hockey—Next time!

Mr SHORTEN—There may well be a next time, because the contributions of the member for Mayo and others put a view about the government and said that somehow the coalition are better economic managers. Let’s be very clear: we have the lowest public debt as a proportion of GDP of any First World nation.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—The coalition members’ shouting does not make this any less true. We have some of the best job numbers of any developed nation in the world. We also, in the time of this government, have increased the pensions for the people who most need increases in support. As for taxation, this government’s record on taxation is second to none. We have implemented tax cuts every budget ever since we came in. We have increased thresholds. We have also lowered company tax from 30 to 29 per cent and it is our intention to support people in their retirement by improving superannuation. These amendments only seek to add to the cost and burden of the administration of the Public Service, and indeed the contributions of the coalition still deny the reality of the strong economic record of this government.

Ms O’Dwyer (Higgins) (5.25 pm)—We on this side of the chamber believe in smaller government and lower tax. We understand that taxpayer dollars are hard earned. They need to be used carefully, they need to be used responsibly and, most importantly, there needs to be accountability. We in government had a record of cutting taxes. The Rudd, now Gillard, government want to put up taxes. And why do they want to do this? Because they are addicted to spending. There is the alcopops tax, the car tax, the mining tax and the soon-to-be carbon tax. They brought forward the Henry tax review so that they could have a simpler, fairer tax system, and yet of all those 125 taxes listed in there the only suggestion they could come up with was to introduce a brand new tax—the mining tax. They are not making it simpler, not making it fairer. They are certainly making it harder for Australian taxpayers.

We are asking for accountability from this government. We are asking for amendments that we think are highly reasonable. The amendments that we have asked for would put in place a new requirement for the Aus-
The Australian Taxation Office to accompany a notice of assessment for an individual with a receipt showing how their tax has been spent in the financial year for which that assessment applies. The dollar amount spent on the key categories of government expenditure would be based on nominal proportions of budget expenditure constituted by each function. The amendments also put in place a new requirement for the Australian Taxation Office to accompany a notice of assessment for an individual with a receipt showing the level of Australian government net debt.

Why is it that this government thinks that this is such a radical suggestion? Why is it, in this new paradigm of letting the sunshine in, that they are not prepared to let there be proper accountability? The very fact that they are prepared to reject these amendments exposes them today. It exposes a toxic culture of secrecy in this government. Let’s not forget that this toxic culture of secrecy is not a one-off. It is not simply about not providing a proper tax receipt to Australian taxpayers; it is a culture of secrecy that we have seen in things like the Building the Education Revolution program. We asked for a proper judicial inquiry. They rejected this. Instead, they picked a reviewer of their own to provide a review into their own project. It is a project that has wasted billions of dollars of taxpayers’ money. We only need to look to the pink batts scheme. Again, we asked for a proper judicial inquiry and instead they rejected this and closed down the scheme with not so much as an explanation to all of those small businesses out there that had been put in a difficult situation by this current government.

Finally, we have the NBN. Only this week there have been warnings from the OECD that it would be wrong to pick winners, it would be wrong to legislate to reduce competition, it would be wrong to waste taxpayer dollars and that instead we should be considering value for money. But again they are not prepared to have a cost-benefit analysis done, because they are not prepared to be an accountable government. The reason they are not prepared to be accountable, of course, is that they are an arrogant government. They do not believe that they need to be accountable to the Australian people, and it does not matter how many times Julia Gillard says that she is a reformer, that she is an economic conservative. It does not matter how many times she says it. When we were in government and we brought forward real economic reforms, she opposed them.

Mrs Mirabella—Every single time.

Ms O’DWYER—She opposed them every single time, every single reform. So it is no surprise that again the Julia Gillard government is opposing this reform, a reform that would make it clear to the Australian taxpayers exactly how their money is to be spent, exactly what the debt is that this government is getting us into and the impost that it will have on their family, on their small business and on their children for generations to come.

Julia Gillard and this government are wreckers of the Australian economy and they want to keep it a secret for as long as they can. It might work for New South Wales Labor but it does not work here. We will hold this government to account. We will continue to push for proper reforms and we will continue to push for accountability. We think that if they are for real they will not be lobotomised zombies; they will actually support this reform. They are lost in the wilderness and they only have the Greens for guides. They should instead stand up and be accountable to the Australian people, accountable to the taxpayers, and support our reform. (Time expired)
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The question is that the amendments be agreed to. I call the minister.

Mr Anthony Smith—Another after-thought! What have you thought of now?

Mr Hockey—are you defending yourself again? Who will defend you?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney might want to hang around for his division. I haven’t had to do much recently. It would be quite entertaining. The minister has the call.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (5.30 pm)—I listened to the contributions of the member for Casey, the member for Moncrieff, the member for Mayo and the member for Higgins—people whom I think could fairly be described as the best and brightest of the coalition, although unfortunately not receiving the promotion that they should; no doubt they are long overdue and no doubt the member for North Sydney will get his promotion in the end—and in listening to their contributions, whilst they were perhaps what you would call vituperative and prejudiced, one thing I noticed as I was reading amendment (2) was that it says one of the items that should be included in the taxation receipt—

Mr Anthony Smith—Oh, is that the first time you’ve read it?

Mr SHORTEN—It did not take that long to read. One of the items on the taxation receipt is the level of Australian net debt for the end of the financial year. I understand that number comes out in August of the year of the budget, so you send out the tax receipt but the net debt figure comes out in August. With regard to that—

Mr Hockey—it can’t keep pace with your spending—oh my God!

Mr SHORTEN—If the member for North Sydney could just show a little patience rather than precociousness. The proposition is that every taxpayer, under this coalition thought bubble dreamed up in the frenetic rush leading up to an election, would receive this information. The problem with the coalition proposition, I realise, is that the net debt figure comes out in August. The shadow Treasurer may not be aware that quite a lot of people actually process their tax before the time of that figure, and one of the consequences of the coalition’s amendment would be that millions of Australians might have their tax returns delayed to fit in with this.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—Unlike the member for North Sydney and the best and brightest of the coalition—and, no favouritism, I should have included the member for Kooyong in that too; I apologise for that—I think that one of the consequences of this amendment would be that millions of Australians would not get their tax returns. I can understand that the coalition may not be in touch with ordinary Australians and understand how important a tax return is to Australians, but delaying it for some political thought bubble which the opposition still, in some sort of quixotic crusade, wants to persist with is unfair on millions of Australians.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (5.33 pm)—The election we just went to was one fought on commitment. You had the coalition commitment to cut $50 billion from the budget to bring $50 billion of savings to this House. Commitments are easy; anyone can make them. The difference between Labor and us is on the commitment side. Commitments are easy to make; it is the keeping of the commitment that is the hard part. You can write commitments anywhere: “There will be no carbon price under any govern-
ment I lead’—there you go!’ Then it is gone. You do not have to keep it. It is the keeping of the commitment that sets you aside as a truly great government.

The Prime Minister accuses us of three-word slogans. Well, in relation to this bill I would like to try this one on for size when it comes to taxation: ‘Fairer, lower, simpler’. There is a three-word slogan you can hang your hat on. Then there is responsibility to the electorate. During the campaign we spoke to our constituents. We spoke to the PAYE people who are struggling with real cost-of-living pressures—not just the housing mortgage, not just the rising electricity prices, but the cost of fruit and vegetables, milk, bread, butter, school fees. The whole thing is just so hard for the people of Australia at the moment.

Small business is crumbling under the weight of bureaucracy being loaded on by this government. Every small business man to whom I spoke said that the problem was that they were prepared to grow their businesses but they could not afford the compliance costs under this government’s stack of legislation to make it harder for them to grow their business and therefore grow prosperity.

As I said in my maiden speech, it is not about the amount of tax being paid, which is about right; it is about the way it is collected and the way it is displayed. We all pay tax, and as far as the general public are concerned it just disappears—it comes in and they do not have any ownership over where it goes. Our amendment will give the general public, the PAYE taxpayer, ownership of where their tax dollar is going. Imagine the joy, Deputy Speaker, when you open your statement and it says that your tax dollar has helped improve roads, has provided life-saving operations, has helped with foreign aid and defence.

The government’s problem may be that they simply do not know where the money has gone—or could it be that they do know and they do not want the statement to come out saying: your money has gone on pink batts; your money has gone on the foreign minister’s airfares; your money has gone to state government blackholes. Maybe it would say, ‘The $20,000 tax that you paid has gone into four square metres of a BER project’—a project that, if that bloke had paid the $20,000 to a carpenter or builder, would have come in at about $1,500 per square metre.

Or interest on government debt. We have just taken your whole $20,000 and paid it off net government debt. They do not pay it off government debt. Who am I kidding? Or cost blow-outs or illegal immigrant detention centres in your suburb. The people of Australia deserve to know and should have access to this information. Imagine the joy of knowing that your tax dollars have helped put in a PET scanner in Townsville and the amount of money that has saved. A PET scanner in Townsville under our program would have cost $2.5 million; under the government’s program it would cost over nine. Under the government’s program, it would take another two years to put in; under our program, it would take less than six months. The way the invoice would come out, there would be ownership there and it is simple, it is fair, it is clear and it is lower. It should be done.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (5.38 pm)—The level of Australian government debt is high and spiralling out of control. Taxation levels are high and getting higher under the Gillard government, which is addicted to spending. Prior to the 21 August election, this government promised there would be no carbon tax. Now the Prime Minister labours about why a carbon tax is not only a certainty but needed. Why is it needed? Why is a carbon tax, which will
push business and household electricity prices through the roof, needed? We now hear horror stories of age pensioners who are not getting out of bed in the morning during winter, not because they are sick but because they cannot afford to turn the heater on to stay warm. The warmest place for them is to stay in bed. Is this the Australia we want for our future? Is this the Australia we want our children to inherit? I think not.

Our tax dollars are being wasted on such things as the Building the Education Revolution school halls rip-off and the Home Insulation Program—reasonable initiatives in theory but hopelessly carried out, like everything else this government touches. Why not a proper cost-benefit analysis on the National Broadband Network? It is going to cost taxpayers of this nation $43 billion of their hard-earned money. Since the government was elected—or was put there—it has spent $600,000 on an audit into defence spending. They have barely looked under a mouse pad, according to the shadow minister for defence. This spend-happy government is slugging average families—families already hurting, already struggling—more and more each and every day. Families are the backbone of this nation but they are having their backs broken by the spineless Gillard government, which so often says something and does the complete opposite.

Let us see the government be more transparent and tell the taxpayers of this nation where their hard-earned taxes are really being spent. It is not a paper chase, as the member for Maribyrnong called it; it is called transparency, being accountable, upfront, honest. Let us tell taxpayers where their taxes are being spent and how much tax they are paying proportionately within the federal budget. Despite inheriting a $20 billion surplus in 2007, the surplus left by the Howard government, naught dollars net debt and $60 billion in the Future Fund, Labor is delivering $78.5 million in net debt or $3,500 per person and has a budget deficit of $40.8 million, the biggest since World War II. Labor is borrowing $100 million a day. How can we as a nation continue with this debt while slugging our taxpayers in this way? We cannot, must not and, hopefully, will not. Many taxpayers get a tax return. They are not getting much return from those opposite. Let us hope that those opposite are not returned after the next election.

The coalition allocated $5.8 billion for water-saving infrastructure in the 2007 Water Act. Of that money, only $300 million of the $700 million which should have been spent to date has been rolled out. Not one cent has been spent in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, the food bowl of the nation. The hard-working irrigation farmers who sustain and feed this nation would like to know where their money is going. A tax receipt for Australian taxpayers would tell the family farmers exactly where their money is going. I urge all to support the amendments put forward by the shadow Treasurer. If those opposite do not want to support these amendments, what are they trying to hide?

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (5.42 pm)—I rise to endorse wholeheartedly these amendments. This is about accountability—and this side of the House is the side for accountability. Over there, the government are very good at claiming that they build things, with big signs out the front. They are very good at that but when it comes down to accountability and overseeing where the money has gone, explaining the break-up to the Australian people—a person’s $20,000 of personal tax or $40,000—the government are not quite so good about saying that some of it went to debt, and a lot of it is going to debt these days, or to the blow-outs on border control. They are happy to talk about photo
opportunities at schools but not so happy about explaining how the debt comes into it.

The reality is that Australians do not like paying tax—I think we can be certain of that. They will be very unhappy to see where a lot of their taxes have gone. That is the reason the government have such a big problem with this. They are very unhappy about having to explain to the Australian people what this government has been about in the past three years—outrageous and reckless spending and huge taxation. That is what it is really all about. I do not need to look all the time over at that side because, as we get to the division on this matter, we are also going to be looking at this side, where the Independents sit. They are the ones who, after the last election, allegedly championed a reform with the government about accountability and transparency. So we will see what side the Independents are on. Do they care about accountability?

We already know that the government stands against accountability. It stands against the Australian people knowing where every tax dollar will go. It is not as though we are trying to break it down to the minutia against all programs and departments. I think the Australian people would be very interested in seeing how much the failures in border protection are costing them and how much the national debt is costing them as well.

The more things change here the more they stay the same. We had a lot of discussion about how this was going to be a brand new parliament, a new paradigm and how the sun would shine in. The sun is not shining in very far today and it is not reaching the government’s side of the chamber by any means. If we look at the debt levels that have been introduced by this government and compare those with the times when this country actually had a surplus, delivered by this team on this side of the House, there is a big difference. If we produce in the future a breakdown of where everyone’s taxes go, or if we applied what we are proposing now to what we had when this country had a surplus, up against debt that would be a zero. What a big difference it is now.

Mr Hockey—It would be a credit.

Mr SIMPKINS—A credit. That is why Peter Costello was able to deliver all those tax refunds. That is where it all came out. The Australian people saw the realities of tax refunds reducing personal tax, and that is because of that funny word called the ‘surplus’. It is something that this government has not yet found. It has found a lot of ways to spend and a lot of ways to tax, but it has not got to that surplus part.

Mr Shorten—Thirty seconds to go, Luke.

Mr SIMPKINS—What I would say, Minister, before I finish is that I was expecting you to stand up before I spoke but then I realised that your office has done such a poor job of preparing you today that you have had only a few notes to write down along the way. Maybe your notes next time are coming soon. They will be far less credible. If that is the result of all you have had in 48 hours, there is nothing left to come from you, Minister. (Time expired)

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (5.47 pm)—You can learn a lot about a politician by asking who their political heroes are. If you ask the members opposite, they will point to two men: Paul Keating, who gave us the recession we had to have, and Gough Whitlam, who drove this country near to bankruptcy and had to borrow money from Saddam Hussein to save this country. Who do we on this side of politics look to as our political heroes? We look to Margaret Thatcher, and what did Margaret Thatcher say? ‘The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.’
We look to Ronald Reagan. What did Ronald Reagan say about the socialist approach to the economy? ‘If something moves they regulate it. If it keeps moving they tax it. And if it stops moving they subsidise it.’

Who else do we look to on this side of politics as our political heroes? John Howard and Peter Costello. What did they do? They paid back $96 billion of Labor debt. What did they do? They overcame Beazley’s $10 billion black hole. What did they do? They have produced the lowest inflation and unemployment rates in decades. What did they do? They had the vision to create a $50 billion Future Fund and a $5 billion-plus Higher Education Endowment Fund.

The best way you can help somebody is to help them get a job, and the best way you can help a person get a job is by creating a strong economy—because at the end of the day governments have great responsibilities. We have heard about defence, we have heard about the environment and we have heard about health, but if you do not run the economy well you will not be able to support the Australian people. That is why I rise to support the Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No. 4) Bill 2010.

Mr Frydenberg—The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—I am pleased the member has finally got to the amendments before the House. I was beginning to think that we needed to get back there.

Mr Frydenberg—The insertion of a new schedule 8 will provide tax receipts to individual taxpayers. It will require the ATO to accompany a notice of an assessment for an individual with a receipt showing how that tax was paid for a particular financial year and how that money was spent on the key categories of government expenditure. Importantly, it will also show the level of Australian government net debt. Why do those members opposite not support these amendments? The reason is that they do not want to let the Australian people in on the big secret that we are borrowing $100 million a day. They do not believe that it is Australian taxpayers who know how best to spend their money and they do not want to explain to the Australian people why a desperate Rudd government had to resort to a mining tax. They do not want to let the Australian people know why a desperate Gillard government wants to run to a carbon tax. They do not want to explain to the Australian people why they want to cut the health insurance rebate and they do not want to explain to the Australian people why they are not prepared to support independent and Catholic schools.

This should be no surprise because, if you look at this government’s record, remember that the member for Griffith, who has departed this chamber, went to the 2007 election promising to be a fiscal conservative but never stuck to his word. Instead, he wasted billions of dollars on the tragic pink batts program, $43 billion which the government plans to spend on the NBN, the catastrophic Green Loans scheme—and we all know about the BER scheme and the huge wastage that has taken place there. When you look at the government’s economic record and when you look at its economic team—the Prime Minister, the Minister for Finance and De-regulation, the Treasurer and the Assistant Treasurer—they do not have any small business experience and they do not have the economic record to stand on. (Time expired)

Mr Hockey (North Sydney)—We have heard very good contributions to the debate from the member for Mayo, the member for Moncrieff, the member for Higgins—in the great tradition of the former member for Higgins—the member for Riverina, the member for Cowan, the member for Kooyong and the member for...
Casey, who put forward an erudite argument in favour of—

Mr Shorten interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY—Does he? I am paying too great a tribute. You should listen to what I say, Bill, you really should. Just open your ears, mate. All of them made a significant contribution and I was waiting for the plethora of Labor members to come into this place and back the Assistant Treasurer. I want to give you a little tip, old fella: if you want to get the numbers against Julia, you will have to do better than that. You will have to get a few others in here. There was not one member of the government backbench prepared to support the Assistant Treasurer in this debate. Even in my old days as a minister, if we were in committee, I would roll out some backbenchers. Even if I had to explain to them in detail what the debate was about, they would still come in to defend me and the government. But here we have the Assistant Treasurer standing on his lonesome out in the middle of the Simpson Desert. He will probably run into Burke and Wills, because they are lost as well.

In his numerous defences of the indefensible position of the government, the Assistant Treasurer has cited every single conceivable reason why this amendment should be opposed on the basis of national security—the fear that al-Qaeda is going to take away all that information about Australian taxpayers’ contributions each year. He has cited the post office, he has cited the tax office and he has cited the Treasury. Soon we will have the Altona chapter of the Girl Guides opposing the provision of transparent information to Australian taxpayers. Or perhaps he will cite someone of a more left wing nature: the people’s liberation front of Liberia—they oppose Australians getting information about where their tax is going. This is exactly what they cling to. The people’s liberation front of Liberia, being stacked out in the Assistant Treasurer’s branch, are already committed to the Labor Party, as are the Girl Guides of Altona, who assisted the Prime Minister with her preselection after she could not win preselection against old Lindsay Tanner.

Speaking of the old finance minister, where is he? Where is the economic credibility of the Labor Party? It retired after one term. No wonder! The poor old fellow, he threw his arms in the air and said: ‘What happened? I thought we were fiscal conservatives. I believed Kevin. I believed those ads that we are fiscal conservatives in the Labor Party. You know what? He was a man of honour. You would share this view, Deputy Speaker—the former member for Melbourne was a man of honour; he was a man of integrity. He cringed at the spendathon of the Labor Party. Sadly there is not one person left within the fibre and ranks of the parliamentary Labor Party that believes in surpluses, let alone ever delivers a surplus.

Old Swannie there, every year he comes out and says: ‘We are going to deliver a surplus’—with feigned indignation and a reach for the water—‘we will deliver a surplus one day. Once upon a time, we will deliver a surplus.’ He says it emphatically so everyone believes him, but of course Labor never has delivered a surplus and, sadly, it never will deliver a surplus. That is why they do not want taxpayers to know where their money is going. That is why they do not want transparency.

In the deal with the Independents after the recent election, there they were—the Labor Party and the Independents were going to blow the lid off Canberra so that everyone could see the entrails of the workings of government. They were going to have a transparent government, an honest government. ‘Let the sunshine in. Turn off the
lights, we will not need them any more because—forget Freedom of Information which never worked at any rate—we are going to release all the documents. We are going to tell everyone in Australia exactly where their money is going, how it is spent and how the wheels turn in government.’ If the wheels ever do turn in government.

We will keep introducing this amendment. Every time there is a tax bill, we will make this the signature of the Labor Party’s failure, its failure to deliver transparency to Australian taxpayers. We believe in honesty. We believe in transparency. (Time expired)

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (5.57 pm)—I have been listening very carefully to the member for North Sydney’s contribution. Whilst he has failed to convince me—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—in a complete shock and upset outcome—I did want to clarify something, as I offered to do before, in the interests of putting some clarity in this debate, putting some fact as opposed to thunder into this debate. In the proposed coalition amendment, under item 3 in the table the coalition proposed an item, among others, that would have to be included in this tax receipt. Item 3 refers to the level of Australian government net debt at the end of the financial year and at the end of the previous financial year. So the coalition are proposing that this information is a must have in this must-have receipt. I did say in an earlier contribution that this number was not available until August. I was therefore making the point that, if in a rush of blood to the head we voted for this coalition excitement, tax returns lodged on 1 July would have to wait beyond 30 July until whenever the figure is available in August.

I am vaguely grateful for the extensive, extemporaneous and somewhat cliched contributions from some of the members of the opposition—not the ones I mentioned before by name—because what I have discovered is that the Australian government net debt is not published as part of the final budget outcome; it is generally published before the end of September. For example, if we were to lose our senses and in some sort of random act of legislative madness all vote for this Liberal amendment—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN—Okay, I will not use the word ‘madness’ but instead, say, ‘legislative red tape’. If we did vote for this amendment the number required for the tax receipt for the 2010-11 income year will not be available until three months after the processing of returns commences on 1 July. So if we were to vote for this amendment what we would be doing is delaying people’s tax returns for up to two months because many Australians file their tax returns straight-away. Indeed, under the Liberal amendment—or the coalition amendment, because
let us not forget the National Party, the country cousins of the Liberal Party—

**Mr McCormack**—Hear, hear!

**Mr Shorten**—The member for Riverina agrees that they are the country cousins of the Liberals. Under this amendment we would be incurring interest payments on the Taxation Office or we would be delaying payments. When you have a political thought bubble it is always important to remember to look at the law of unintended consequences and to work through the implications. There is one reason above all else you should not vote for this amendment: why would you want to cost millions of taxpayers and delay their returns?

**Mr Hockey** (North Sydney) (6.01 pm)—That is the most laughable suggestion about this amendment that I have heard—that somehow sending people a receipt is going to hold up their tax returns or any receipt they are going to receive from the Taxation Office. You guys are seriously a joke. The Taxation Office—

**Mr Shorten**—Because it is not finalised.

**Mr Anthony Smith**—Because it keeps going up!

**Mr Hockey**—That is right. The problem is that net debt keeps growing and they cannot keep up. They are running on the spot and they cannot keep up with net debt. The number keeps changing. It keeps turning over like an old pokie in an RSL. That is their problem. That is what they are worried about—the number might not keep up with what it actually is.

The budget papers actually publish net debt figures. You know what is amazing? The budget papers come out before 30 June. He is worried about the receipt going out to people after 30 June, but the budget numbers, with a net debt estimate, come out before 30 June. You have been set up, Bill. You have got to watch yourself, mate. People are setting you up everywhere. Kevin was setting you up by sitting in here while you were speaking. I am just trying to help you.

**The Deputy Speaker** (Ms AE Burke)—The member for North Sydney will refer to members by their appropriate titles.

**Mr Hockey**—Okay, the member for Griffith was setting you up. This is the political learning curve for you. That is what it is. So when you get advice that you cannot publish net debt in these figures, I would say to you, ‘You can.’ You publish numbers all the time. The MYEFO that comes out has new updated net debt figures. Even the PEFO before an election comes out with a net debt figure. It is amazing how the government can pull out a net debt figure when it suits it, but when it has to actually write to individual taxpayers and tell them what the net debt figure is it is all too hard.

This just illustrates the fact that this is a government that does not want to be transparent. I say emphatically again that we will move this amendment every single time a tax bill comes on until the Australian people find
out exactly where their tax is going—something the Labor Party does not want to tell them.

Question put:

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

The House divided. [6.09 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

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**AYES**

Abbott, A.J.  
Andrews, K.  
Baldwin, R.C.  
Bishop, J.I.  
Broadbent, R.  
Chester, D.  
Ciobo, S.M.  
Coulton, M.  
Entsch, W.  
Forrest, J.A.  
Gambaro, T.  
Griggs, N.  
Hartsuyker, L.  
Hockey, J.B.  
Irons, S.J.  
Jones, K.  
Ley, S.P.  
Marino, N.B.  
Matheson, R.  
Mirabella, S.  
Moylan, J.E.  
O’Dowd, K.  
Prentice, J.  
Ramsey, R.  
Robb, A.  
Ruddock, P.M.  
Scott, B.C.  
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.  
Combet, G.  
Crook, T.  
Danby, M.  
Elliot, J.  
Emerson, C.A.  
Ferguson, M.J.  
Garrett, P.  
Gibbons, S.W.  
Gray, G.  
Griffin, A.P.  
Hayes, C.P.  
Jones, S.  
Kelly, M.J.  
Leigh, A.  
Lyons, G.  
Marles, R.D.  
Melham, D.  
Murphy, J.  
O’Connor, B.P.  
Oakeshott, R.J.M.  
Parke, M.  
Ripoll, B.F.  
Rowland, M.  
Rudd, K.M.  
Sidebottom, S.  
Smyth, L.  
Swan, W.M.  
Thomson, C.  
Vamvakionou, M.  
Windsor, A.H.C.  

**PAIRS**

Bishop, B.K.  
Plibersek, T.  
Robert, S.R.  

* denotes teller

Question negatived.

Bill agreed to.

**CHAMBER**
Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (6.18 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Third Reading

HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (STUDENT SERVICES AND AMENITIES) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (6.19 pm)—Some universities indicated that they were forced to redirect funding out of research and teaching budgets to support services and amenities that would otherwise have been cut. Others highlighted price hikes for parking, food and child care. Universities Australia, the peak body representing the university sector, stated in 2008 that:

Universities have struggled for years to prop up essential student services through cross-subsidisation from other parts of already stretched university budgets, to redress the damage that resulted from the Coalition Government’s disastrous Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) legislation

In its submission to the review, the Australian Olympic Committee noted that there had also been a serious impact on sport, stating:

…the introduction of the VSU legislation has had a direct negative impact on the number of students (particularly women) participating in sport and, for the longer term, the maintenance and upgrading of sporting infrastructure and facilities and the retention of world class coaches.

The Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010 aims to support universities and students to help undo that damage. The bill makes amendments to require higher education providers that receive Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding to comply with the new student services, amenities, representation and advocacy guidelines. This means that for the first time universities will be required to implement national access to services benchmarks for all domestic Australian students—in line with the arrangements that already exist for international students. These important benchmarks will ensure that all Australian students are provided with information on how to access important health, welfare and financial services, and are provided with access to advocacy services. The bill also introduces, for the first time, national student representation protocols to ensure that students have an opportunity to participate in university governance structures.

Let me be clear, this bill is not a return to student unionism. Section 19.37(1) of the Higher Education Support Act 2003, which prohibits a provider from requiring a student to be a member of a student organisation, is unchanged. The new benchmarks will help ensure students have access to advocacy support services to support student appeals and vital help for students who may need extra assistance on matters that can be overwhelming and unfamiliar. They also ensure that universities provide opportunities for democratic student representation, so that student views are taken into account during the decision-making process. This is a value that is reflected in the democratic rights that underpin our nation and community.

Over and above these basic services, representation and advocacy rights, the bill will also provide universities with the option to implement a services fee capped at a maximum of $250 per year—$254 in 2011 due to indexation—to invest in quality services and amenities. Universities that choose to levy a fee will be expected to consult with students on the nature of the services and amenities...
and enhanced advocacy that the fee would support. To ensure that the fee is not a financial barrier, any university introducing the fee must also provide eligible students with the option of taking out a HECS-style loan under a new component of the Higher Education Loan Program—SA-HELP.

The bill specifically outlines what the fee can be used to fund. The content of these provisions has been developed in consultation with the higher education sector and other key stakeholders. In addition, the bill prohibits universities from allowing the expenditure of any funds raised from a compulsory student services and amenities fee to support political parties, or support the election of a person to the Commonwealth, state or territory legislatures or to a local government body. The bill will help to secure the future of universities and the critical role they have in Australia’s education future. For many students from low socioeconomic backgrounds it will provide the range of services that make university attendance possible, such as child care, subsidised parking and subsidised travel to and from railway stations.

I believe that this is a balanced, practical solution that enables universities, students and the government to work in partnership to rebuild important student supports and services and ensure independent student representation and advocacy. We believe that these support services are of particular importance to the vibrancy of regional campuses and provide essential support for students from regional areas. The government will continue to work in partnership with higher education providers and students and take responsible action to ensure quality and sustainable student services and representation into the future.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (6.24 pm)—I rise to oppose the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010. It is no surprise to coalition members that one of the first agenda items of the Gillard government is the introduction of a compulsory fee for students of $250 per annum, and indeed the provisions of this bill index that fee so that this tax on students will continue to rise. Considering what we have seen in the first tranche of legislation from this government, it is fair for us to assume that the taxation of students, imposing higher fees and charges on those seeking to further their education, is indeed the top priority of the Australian government. That is very disappointing—every student in the country can look at this and say, well, this is the most pressing priority of this parliament. Ensuring that this fee for services is charged is something that this government regards as more important than the so-called greatest moral issue of our time, climate change; it is more important than financial services reform and relieving pressure on families. We have to rake in more money from students allegedly to provide services.

I note that similar legislation failed twice in the previous parliament. It was rejected because it was seen, quite rightly, as an attempt to reimpose compulsory student unionism. The government now argues that this bill is somehow better because all it seeks to do is charge a $250 fee, and it prescribes how that can be spent by university administrations. I do not see how it is better. I do not see how it is better to say that now a university administration can charge this services fee and then spend it in the ways prescribed by this legislation, and that that will produce a better outcome than having a body controlled by students doing it. It seems to me to be an odd and specious argument.

It is interesting to note that these services, being the justification for this fee, are paid for whether the student wants them or not. It is important to note that this is actually writ-
ten into the legislation. Subclause 19-37(5) states:

(5) that a higher education provider requires a person enrolled, seeking to enrol, with the provider to pay for a period starting on or after 1 January 2011 to support the provision to students of amenities and services not of an academic nature, regardless of whether the person chooses to use any of those amenities and services;

That is exactly why I oppose this legislation. We are levying students to pay for services, as it says here in the legislation, regardless of whether the person chooses to use any of these amenities and services. There could be nothing more ridiculous than levying these people in this way. The member for Parramatta spoke about people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. I came from western Sydney; I actually grew up in North Parramatta and Carlingford. I went to Sydney University and I know that many of my friends and I found that the ability to go to university was hindered by compulsory unionism and the $300 to $400 fee paid every semester to the university union. Yet it is argued that somehow the levying of a fee for services and amenities that students might not use will benefit people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. We really understand what this bill is about. It is revitalising what Labor student activists have always sought, and that is what they define as activism on campus; having student life. That is code for taking money off hardworking students and people from low socioeconomic backgrounds to support political activism.

This legislation says that you are not allowed to use the money levied to finance federal, state or local political candidates. Of course what is missing in that definition is a reference to third-party political campaigns or entities. Clause 19-38(4) lists a number of things that a university may spend this compulsory fee on. What is not prohibited by this legislation and what is not prohibited in section 1 is funding of third-party campaigns, such as those by organisations like GetUp! that seek to influence the political debate and to change the nature of our society. I think that that is quite deliberate. That is a deliberate move by this government to leave out third-party campaigns, unions and other organisations. In part 4, what we see is that helping students obtain employment or career advice or help from unions is not prohibited by this proposed legislation in the House today. We all know the reason for that: the transferral of hard-earned student dollars to unions and third-party organisations to engage in the political debate.

What we have seen since the introduction of the Howard government’s voluntary student unionism regime has been students having their own money to use to choose their own goods and services on campus. Those services have continued to be provided in a fashion that is in line with the demand for them on those campuses. If anyone here in this place is seriously suggesting that the union on any single campus in this country provides better food than a private provider could or is seriously suggesting that their childcare services were better than those of private providers or that other services that can be easily provided by private providers—especially in metropolitan areas—were better provided by a student union then I would like to hear that argument. That was not the experience at the University of Sydney. In fact, union-provided food was regarded universally by the student body as a bit of a joke; it was a constant source of amusement over many years. And it was not a service that could not have been provided by independent providers on campus at a better standard and at a cheaper price.

The words ‘regardless of whether a student wants or needs a service or amenity’ are written into this legislation. That is the key flaw in this particular bill.
Proposed section 19-38(4) states that subsection (3) does not prohibit expenditure for certain purposes. It also reveals what I think are several flaws in this proposed bill. Once again, the government is picking the winners on campus—what activities can be funded and what activities cannot be funded by this fee. Once again, we see a nanny state approach to all the legislation that comes before this House from this government: ‘We will decide what services students need.’ And of course there is a list.

When you look at this list, it is not simply confined to health services or childcare services—the things that we hear so much about from those opposite. We know the statistics. What we are talking about is one per cent of students or less who need or use those services. We are not talking about the vast bulk of students; we are talking about a very small minority. On this list, there are things like supporting debating by students. We are actually charging people from low socioeconomic backgrounds $250 to support debating by other students. Is that a service that is so vital and so desperately needed that we need to fund it by a compulsory levy whether a person needs that service or not?

Let us have a look at what else is on this list. We are supporting artistic activities by students. Yes, of course we would be. The Labor Party would of course compulsorily levy people who work very hard to go to university so that some students can engage in what they describe as art. Who will decide what that artistic activity is? We do not know that. But we do know what kind of quality of art it will be. And we will be paying for it. When you look down this list, it is not a list of vital do-or-die services without which there would be people out on the streets or children not cared for. It is art. It is debating. It is all of those sorts of things.

Even sport and recreational activities are problematic. I want to address this very briefly. I am a big supporter of sport. I play sport. I use sports services. And I pay for them. This concept that somehow the general population of the student body, which includes many students who have to work or come from average backgrounds, has to somehow subsidise elite rugby and other sports on any campus in this country has always been a flaw in compulsory unionism. It remains a flaw in this legislation before us today, as sport is exempted. Taking the hard-earned money of one group and giving it to another group to support their chosen activity is a problem. There is nothing wrong with sport on campus. It is a fine tradition and institution. But if money is taken off others without their choice or consent then it is a very flawed system. We are going back to this idea that the government will decide what services students need, and particular people with an agenda inside this government will continue to prescribe lists like that in proposed subsection (4).

We also see in here a list of advocacy and other services. These are things that, as the Labor Party’s drafting in this bill suggests to us, students may not want and may not need. I would suggest again that 99.9 per cent of students will never want or need these services, and yet all students will be required to pay for them, for a small amount of activity.

I want to turn to some other events in relation to this legislation. There has been a huge rush in bringing forward this legislation before the House today. I have spoken about this being defeated two times before in the previous parliament. But the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training rushed its inquiry into this legislation. That committee had a government majority and they gave just six days for people to make submissions, thereby denying many individuals—students or other
people around this country—the right to say what they think about every student being charged a compulsory fee for services and amenities that they may not want or need. The stated reason was the rush to put this bill through before the 2011 academic year. But when I look at the list of reasons I do not find that compelling.

We know what this is about. We know that political activity has dropped on campuses. The funding of third-party political organisations has dropped on campus. That is a good thing. People on campus are now free to vote or not vote in elections and to participate or not in political life. What we see in the voting returns on campuses around the nation is that very few students vote for these organisations. They do not choose to participate in political activity. That is the way that it should be. We should not force or compel people to pay a fee for services that they may not want or need and then have that money given to a political organisation that they may not support or may not choose to be involved in. It ends up being for the edification of those people involved in politics. I am one of those people, but I do not support this.

I want to record that, in their submissions, the Australian Liberal Students Federation, led by Sasha Uher, made a fantastic contribution to this debate, highlighting many of the practical reasons why this legislation will be detrimental to students around the country. University campuses are no different than any other part of our society. The concept that this bill will somehow improve standards of services for people when you are taking $250 out of the pockets of every student is flawed.

This bill means $250 less for textbooks, study materials, transport, the cost of living and, at best, means more HECS debt. This is where you come to the very odd position taken by the Labor Party: they oppose HECS and HECS debt increases when, really, HECS is designed in the understanding that education is an economic asset and improving your education improves your ability to obtain remuneration in our economy today. Therefore, we say you ought to make a contribution for the economic asset that the government is giving you and that society is providing you with. It is a reasonable and fair scheme that is working well.

But the Labor Party of course do not agree with the principle that you ought to make a contribution to your own education and that if you are going to receive such an economic asset and do better in your life you ought to return something to the system. Then they say, ‘We have in this legislation a provision which says we will have a fee help scheme.’ We do not need a fee help scheme if there is no compulsory fee. We do not need a fee help scheme if we allow people to have the $250 back in the first place to make their own decisions about student services and things on campus. When you think about every provider in this country that would be keen to get onto a campus to provide their goods and services at the cheapest rate they possibly could—because you are talking about young people, young consumers, people who will set their consumer behaviour for life—it is a golden opportunity for our campuses and universities. One of the great concerns of the coalition, and one of my great concerns as a coalition member, is that in our university and private sector funding for universities we do not encourage the system they have in America—scholarships, private sector involvement, more money being generated into education—which is the way to go.

There is no disguising what the Labor government is up to in this legislation. They see the taxation of students as one of their first priorities for the new government. This is the new paradigm: higher taxes and
Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa—
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural
Affairs and Settlement Services) (6.39 pm)—
That was an interesting contribution—on the
one side whingeing and whining that we are
not charging students thousands of dollars
for their education and then complaining
about the introduction of a fee of $250 to
provide services at university. A comment by
Senator Barnaby Joyce to Patricia Karvelas
in the Australian on 26 February 2009 sum-
marises some of the realities of this issue.
Senator Joyce quite correctly said:
I still believe that university is more than just the
academic, it’s the development of the person as a
whole, but this issue is now secondary to the state
election in Queensland and the global financial
crisis.

While the Queensland election is on, I’ll have to
fall into line … but (if the vote comes after the
election) it’s a different kettle of fish.

He articulated on a number of occasions, as
did National Party members, the reality of
the campuses that was particularly hurt-
ing, such as the University of Western Syd-
ney, the universities that more recently have
emerged in the suburbs of Australia and
those in rural and regional areas.

I must confess that my university period
was not associated with university politics. I
did not have the slightest interest in it, so I
cannot be accused of coming to this after
those battles. I do, however, believe that
there are very strong reasons for the Higher
Education Legislation Amendment (Student
Services and Amenities) Bill 2010, and I
think we have a reasonable compromise
here. On the one hand the postgraduates as-
sociation and others say that we are not giv-
ing enough power to students in this com-
promise position, and then we have the more
extreme elements of the opposition going to
the barricades in opposition to this minimal
change.

I agree with Senator Joyce that university
is not just about the exams; it is about the
fuller life. One of the characteristics of the
Howard government was to set up a conflict
between a rounded education—the arts and a
broader education—and rhetoric about how
they only wanted to put people through
TAFE colleges and the Labor Party was not
interested in anyone but the elite. That came
through in the previous speech. But this is
just a guise for the opposition’s belief that
funding of universities should be shifted
from the taxpayer to become more dependent
upon the private sector and thereby the uni-
versities should jump to the tune of the pri-
vate sector with regard to who is produced
and in what manner and where academic
studies go. We are even seeing the picture,
particularly in areas such as pharmaceuticals,
of a very disconcerting line between the de-
mands of private enterprise and genuine aca-
demic research.

The previous contribution essentially ridi-
culed the need for debating, as though any-
body from the working class or the western
suburbs would never be interested in it. I can
assure him that in schools such as Granville
Boys High School in my former electorate
there is great pride and interest in having a
debating team. Going up against more select
areas is something that is very much to the
benefit of the school. There were rather puer-
ile shots at the art that might be produced, as
though nothing worth while could ever come
out of universities with regard to artistic pur-
suits, and there was philistinism about how it
is all superfluous and unnecessary. I must
confess that, whilst not having been active in
university politics, I actually appreciated
many of the things that were available. A
lifelong interest in cinema was probably cre-
ated by Wednesday afternoon films at the
theatre. The availability of other entertain-
ment around the university did not really hurt me in life. This is a thing that is worth funding.

Where the decline has occurred is not in the elite universities. We have had comments about rugby union at the University of Sydney. This is such a furphy. The speaker before me actually understands that the revival of the University of Sydney rugby union club has been accomplished by a very effective utilisation of their alumni—actually going out to them and raising money from those sources. Sydney university’s rugby union club is no way dependent upon these fees. Quite frankly, they are piddling compared to the amount of money that that club needs to survive and which it does raise.

When we talk about sport at university, we are not talking about the University of Sydney first grade rugby union team or the rowing. We are talking about interfaculty sport. We are talking about the provision of squash courts in the university for those who are interested. We are talking about the provision of tennis courts for those who have the time at any time during the week.

These services are reasonable and necessary. The argument that because everyone does not utilise them and therefore we should not have a fee from the general body to support them is the kind of logic we have seen from the Liberal Party recently in the Liverpool council in Sydney, where they are seeking to close down public libraries because, as they see it, a lot of people—including most of the councillors, apparently—do not read books. That is the kind of logic: because everyone does not utilise a service, it should not be cross-subsidised by the general public.

Quite frankly, these services are not going to be viable in many cases without the ability to fund them. As I say, if you go around the campuses of this country, you will find that where they are really being hurt is in those more recently established universities which do not have as strong corporate support as the more established—those that have not had the history and the time to have put those facilities together.

I know from my own dealings particularly with the University of Western Sydney that the concern over the previous government’s legislation is not just coming from a few university radicals who want to spend the other students’ money in regard to gay liberation, environmental causes, Fatah or Hamas. That is a very, very minor ingredient in how these funds would be utilised. There is once again a contradiction by the member for Mitchell. On the one hand, he is carrying on about the fact that the government is prescriptive in regard to what the money can be spent on. It is the nanny state, according to him, in that we actually have a list of what it can be utilised for. Of course, if we had not left out political causes and radical efforts at university, that would be his biggest complaint. We prescribe that it is not to be used for these political mechanisms, and that is why there is a list that encompasses what is reasonable.

I think it is more than reasonable that those things that are prescribed are assisted by a general fee. We know that they cover the areas of sports recreation and various clubs and societies. Isn’t it reasonable that the university body would help fund faculty associations, annual dramatic performances and various language groups, whether they are an Italian students’ group at Sydney university or an association for ancient Greek? Is there something deplorable about trying to promote those kinds of activities? As to child care, certainly I think it is more than reasonable that a facility is provided for those students who need that, and similarly counselling. He lampoons advocacy. Apparently there should not be a voice there for students, they should not have the ability to articulate
a position around issues that are important to them and they should not have legal services.

As we have seen, I believe that this is a sensible compromise. Some people might say that it has not gone far enough, but, as we see around this country, there is broad support for it from the university leadership. I believe that concerns with the legacies of 25 years of juvenile university politics are not a reason why we should not have a reasonable compromise on funding reasonable facilities in universities around this country.

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (6.48 pm)—I rise to speak on the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010 having been a student leader myself back in the early nineties, having worked with Dr Nelson in the early 2000s—in 2005, if I recall correctly—to abolish compulsory student union fees and as a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, which inquired very briefly into this bill and tabled our report in this parliament. It is an issue which I have thought a lot about over many, many years, and it is an issue which many people on this side of this chamber are very passionate about, as are many thousands of students across the nation.

I am strongly opposed to this bill, which in effect reintroduces compulsory student union fees. There are three primary reasons why I am against the bill. First of all, it is against the principle of choice. Second, there is the creation of inequity through the operation of this bill. Third, if any type of fee is introduced, inevitably it will end up funding party political campaigns.

Before making my substantive arguments, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some grave reservations in relation to the process by which the Standing Committee on Education and Employment undertook its inquiry into this bill. The bill was referred to the committee on 21 October 2010 for inquiry, and the committee was originally instructed to report during the autumn sittings in 2011. The committee tabled the report on Monday, 15 November 2010. This gave the committee just three weeks to receive submissions from the public, consider those submissions and report to the parliament. Thirty-six submissions from interested persons were received in this time, only 20 of which were received before the nominated closing date.

Given the wide impact this bill will have if it is passed into law, many more submissions ought to have been received and a more appropriate time frame ought to have been made available for the committee to consider all the evidence presented to it and to consult with relevant parties to come to a more rounded evaluation of the evidence presented and the issues involved. The short time frame did not allow any time for face-to-face hearings, as is usually the practice when bills as important and as contentious as this come before a standing committee. The committee itself would have benefited from the opportunity to conduct face-to-face hearings, but the government majority on the committee ensured that that could not take place.

I would also like to highlight the awkward timing of this inquiry, such as it was. The inquiry fell largely within the university examination period for many universities, meaning that many of the most affected parties—individual students—were not afforded the opportunity to give evidence either in writing or face to face. Those individual students who did find the time to make submissions to the inquiry are to be commended.

Why the rush? One person who put in a submission to the inquiry, Ms Arabella Haddon-Casey, put it as such:
The vast majority of students do not have a clue that the government is considering imposing compulsory fees upon them. If it was such a big issue, surely students around Australia would be demanding compulsory service fees?

I think she put that very well. Why the rush? There is no great demand for compulsory fees to be reintroduced. The vast majority of students are not aware that this bill is coming before the parliament. Yet we only gave three weeks to inquire into this process. I think that is unsatisfactory and I hope it is not an indication of what is going to come in the future.

Let me go to my substantive arguments. First of all there is a fundamental principle at hand here with this bill. That is individual choice. Since Brendan Nelson when he was education minister introduced voluntary student unionism into this country in 2005, students have had real choice on campuses. They have had choices over what services to join, they have had choices over what political activities to be part of, they have had choice over whether or not they want to join the gymnasium and they have had choice over whether or not they want their own money to subsidise the food in the local cafeterias. These are everyday decisions made by grown-up adults. The students have relished this opportunity to make their own decisions for themselves. Choice is fundamentally part of the DNA of every human being. We want choice in terms of how we live our lives; we want maximum freedom over our own decisions. But this bill overturns that choice. If it goes through, students will find they will be unable to enrol in the publicly funded universities unless they pay a compulsory fee for services that they do not want, unless they give money which will inevitably end up funding political campaigns. The government contends that it believes in choice. These days it talks about it even in this parliament. But we know that we should not look at what the government says but what the government does. The National Broadband Network is a case in point, where the government wants to reintroduce a government monopoly and significantly diminish choice.

Under this legislation students will be forced to pay a compulsory fee for services that they may not want. They will pay a compulsory fee where inevitably some of that money ends up funding political campaigns. This is fundamentally at odds with freedom of choice. Over the last few years students have voted with their feet. Sometimes they have agreed to join student unions or student guilds. Others have not, and that is fundamentally their choice. In the case of one of the submissions to the inquiry, Cameron Sinclair had not been a member; he chose not to be a member in one particular year. Then in his third year in 2009 the Curtin Student Guild modified its membership fee structure in an effort to be more attractive to potential members. For $99 students would receive a $50 food and drink voucher for on-campus outlets in addition to discounts, access to social events and the other services guild members can access. Finally, he said, guild membership provided value for money and he chose to rejoin. He says that this is the perfect example of how voluntary student membership encourages student organisations to attract members by catering to student needs. I think that is a very good submission that Mr Sinclair has made and it perfectly encapsulates how he and thousands of others are quite happy to make informed decisions for themselves and, if a package is attractive enough, they will join the particular guild. In this case, in his third year he did decide to join that particular guild. He did not need to be forced to and, had he been forced to, the guild probably would not be providing the services that he, and thousands of other students, wanted. But by virtue of
being voluntary the guild had to think through exactly what the students wanted and make their offer attractive to the students so that they would join the guild.

The second substantive argument is in relation to equity. This bill would create significant inequities for students across campuses in Australia. It would be levied on mature age students, on part-time students, on students who study by correspondence, students who live large distances from campuses and students who work to pay their way through university. None of these groups have the same opportunities to use the student services that many other people do. Again I refer to a number of the submissions received which illustrate very powerfully this point and how individuals feel hard done by by the prospect of again having to pay a compulsory fee for services which they will not be actually able to use. I go first of all to Dr Michael Ayling. He writes:

My concern relates to the possible relevance of such taxes to distance education students. I am enrolled at the University of New England for a Graduate Diploma of Economics in 2011 [as a distance education student]. …It is not my intention to ever visit the UNE campus in Armidale. …Yet it is still envisaged that I should pay the new tax.

How is a compulsory fee for Dr Ayling equitable to him when he is doing a distance education course and he will never step foot on campus? How is that equitable?

Here is another submission, this time by Alyson Richards. She writes:

I am currently studying an undergraduate degree part time. I work full time during the day and attend classes 2/3 nights a week. Due to me not being on campus full time and certainly not in the day time I do not have the option of using the amenities that this new compulsory tax is supposedly funding. So I will be forced to pay a fee towards facilities I do not even have the option of using!

There are thousands upon thousands upon thousands of students in that same position: mature age students, low-income students who have to work tirelessly in order to fund their way through university, distance education students—all of these students spend very little time on campus other than attending lectures if indeed they are able to get there for those lectures. They should not have to pay a compulsory fee, because it is inequitable for them to do so.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! It being 7 pm, the debate is interrupted. The honourable member for Aston will have the opportunity to continue his remarks at the appropriate time.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee
Report No. 7

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) (7.00 pm)—I present the Selection Committee’s report No. 7 relating to the consideration of bills introduced from 15 to 17 November 2010 and another matter. The report will be printed in today’s Hansard. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of bills introduced 15 to 17 November 2010, and another matter
1. The committee met in private session on Wednesday, 17 November 2010.
2. The committee determined that the following bills not be referred to committees:
   - Australian Research Council Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2010
   - Banking Amendment (Delivering Essential Financial Services) Bill 2010
   - Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval of Overseas Service) Bill 2010
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- Environment Protection (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2010
- Family Law Amendment (Validation of Certain Parenting Orders and Other Measures) Bill 2010
- Health Insurance Amendment (Compliance) Bill 2010
- Law and Justice Legislation Amendment (Identity Crimes and Other Measures) Bill 2010
- Native Title Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2010
- Paid Parental Leave (Reduction of Compliance Burden for Employers) Amendment Bill 2010
- Screen Australia (Transfer of Assets) Bill 2010
- Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010

3. The committee also decided to amend its determinations in respect of private Members’ business on Monday, 22 November 2010, as reported to the House earlier today, by substituting the motion from Ms Saffin relating to the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (notice given 16 November 2010) for the motion from Ms Hall relating to obesity (notice given 25 October 2010).

4. Ms Saffin’s notice was not available to the committee to be selected at its meeting yesterday. The committee’s decision to amend its determination was taken given the bipartisan recognition of the significance of the matter, and the merit of debate by the Australian House of Representatives at this time. It is not a precedent for future action by the committee.

1 The committee has determined to refer the Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010 to a committee, Report No. 6 of 17 November 2010 refers.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! It now being slightly past 7 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Wandin Yallock Primary School

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (7.00 pm)—On Sunday, 7 November, I had the pleasure of attending Wandin Yallock Primary School’s 140th birthday celebration. Established in 1870, Wandin Yallock Primary School obviously has a wonderful history. It was established just 35 years after the founding of Melbourne and 30 years before Federation. The history of the school is very rich indeed.

Past and present students, teachers and their families were in attendance on the day. There were even some students from the 1920s and earlier, who retold their stories of a different time in Wandin and at Wandin Yallock Primary School. It was a wonderful day of activities and a wonderful celebration of the history of the school. Murrundindi performed the welcome to country and provided a blessing to the school community. He also was able to describe his family’s connection with Wandin Yallock Primary School back to 1903.

One past student at this 140th birthday celebration was 100-year-old Frank Gaudion. He was born in 1910 and he began his schooling in the midst of the First World War. His great niece, Tania Hodgson, read out his reflections of life and community in the Yarra Valley way back then. It was a very special moment indeed. Frank talked about his time in 1916 and his memory of the end of the First World War and the beginnings of Remembrance Day, which of course was just a few days away from the birthday celebration. Frank had the honour of cutting the birthday cake.

Many people in the school community ensured that this event was a tremendous success. I want to congratulate some of the key organisers for all their hard work and effort.
They include Sally Parrot, Amanda Williams, Therese Myring, Sara McPherson, Alicia Mann, Alex Findlay, Georgie Johnson, Cathy Hollingworth, Colleen Garner, Veronica Gamble, Sue Lennie, Peta McKay, Tony Spargo, Gary McKay and Brad Johnson. Special congratulations go to the school’s principal, Christine Sheil, and to the school council president, Peta McKay, whom I have mentioned. They ensured that the celebrations went incredibly well and without a hitch. I know that there were many other volunteers there on the day, including Tracy, from our local swimming lessons, who was there at the sausage sizzle. The support of these volunteers epitomises the great school community at Wandin Yallock.

Tonight I also pay tribute to Croydon Hills Primary School. I had the pleasure of presenting Australian flags to a group of students going on a study and cultural exchange to South Korea. In fact, they are there as we speak. Croydon Hills Primary School received a $20,000 grant from the Australia-Korea Foundation, which has greatly assisted the school to take 20 students on this year’s tour. The students were very excited before they headed off, and I am sure they are having a wonderful time that will be critical to their education. They are young ambassadors not just for their school but for their country. They will bring back not only great stories to tell their school community but also great lessons that will form a part of their education.

I congratulate those students: Brilee Barrow, Armelia Botha, Aiden Cruse, Daniel Culshaw, Alyse Dines, Harry Evely, Jessica Hammet, Chris Kadlis, Georgia Kane, Matt Laurie, Sandra Li, Holly Millsom, Stephanie Mortlock Christopher Newlands, James Parker, Christopher Thompson, Pippa Thompson, Tristan Unwin, Murphy Whitmore and Lauren Woolley. I am sure the students will have a great time while they are in South Korea and will bring back many rich memories for the years to come.

Banks Electorate: Pole Depot Community Centre

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (7.05 pm)—The Pole Depot Community Centre at Penshurst in my electorate of Banks has operated for 30 years, contributing to the local community in the St George and surrounding regions. It aims to create a healthy and resilient local community by providing help in people’s life journey and vital support in times of need. Some of the services include before-and-after-school care for children aged five to 12 years; vacation care; support groups and activities for carers; activities for seniors; services and support for people with disabilities; Youth Zone, providing support and services for young people aged 11 to 24 years; and Chinese community support services.

The name ‘Pole Depot’ comes from the nature of the building’s original use, as a storage warehouse for electricity poles. The Pole Depot Community Centre has been in operation since 1975, when a grant from the federal government made it possible for Hurstville council to purchase the building and reserve it for use as a community project. In May 1978 the first neighbourhood community worker was appointed. Since then, the centre’s services have been expanded to meet the needs of the community. There are currently 34 staff.

As a community centre, Pole Depot received funding from a number of government departments and other organisations in 2009-10, including the Community Services agency and Disability and Home Care agency of the New South Wales Department of Human Services, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, the Australian Sports Commission, the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service...
and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, which provided funding through the Jobs Fund for the Bilingual Respite Care Project, the Community Cafe and Handyman Project. The local councils—Hurstville, Kogarah and Rockdale—provide further funding through their community services grants program, together with organisations such as Carers NSW, Alzheimer’s Australia, St George Masonic Club, Bexley RSL, Earlwood Bardwell Park RSL, Music Australia, Penshurst RSL and the Lugarno Lions Club.

In the St George area there are many people from a Chinese background. Pole Depot targets the community, providing services and support across a range of areas, including English classes, Chinese Frail Elderly Day Care and parenting courses to its members. It also assists with their orientation to all aspects of their life in Australia, including social, cultural, economic and public aspects.

In its 2009-10 annual report, Pole Depot reported that it had provided the following day care and transport services to those of Chinese background. Centre based day care activities totalled 10,195 hours, including 2,863 hours on Saturdays and 7,332 hours on Sundays. On Saturdays, an average of 16 elderly people attended weekly, while on Sundays the average attendance is 35. Transport trips totalled 3,631, with 2,204 trips on Saturdays and 1,427 trips on Sundays.

I particularly want to mention the centre director, Kim Buhagiar, who brings a high level of professionalism, compassion and expertise to her role. The management team provide her with excellent support.

Pole Depot has become an integral part of our community and has developed a strong reputation in its ability to identify local needs and create appropriate responses to those needs. I am fortunate to have the Pole Depot in the electorate of Banks offering caring and experience to the community. We should not underestimate that. Pole Depot’s mission is to identify the needs of the local community, and meet these needs by providing services, and to encourage the development of neighbourhood networks. The Pole Depot Community Centre board of 2009-10 included Lesley Pullen, who became a committee member in 2001; Catherine Swankie, who became a committee member in 2004; Robin Bevan; William Osmo, who became a committee member in 2006; Norm Sandstrom, who became a committee member in 2003; Greg Kent; and Bruce Terlecki, who had 35 years experience working for the Commonwealth government and brings to the board managerial and project management skills as well as experience on school councils. I know Bruce personally because he looked after all of us from 1990, when I first came into the federal parliament. He was at the time the New South Wales director within DOFA. Lastly, there is James Kelly, who grew up in Bexley. He is the latest addition to the board. I commend the Pole Depot on the work they do for the community.

Flinders Electorate: State Government Services

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (7.10 pm)—This evening I want to raise three items of community dissatisfaction with the state government in Victoria. As we approach the eve of the election I have been approached by the community in relation to all of these issues as they have not had satisfaction from the state government and they wished the issues to be raised within the jurisdiction of the federal parliament.

First, on the Mornington Peninsula, we have seen dangerous dereliction of the emergency services and in particular the ambulance services. Martin Dixon, the state member, and I have previously raised these issues,
but the state government has been utterly inadequate. We have seen a stark reminder of how the emergency services are underresourced. In particular, police recently had to take a Sorrento woman who had overdosed to hospital in their squad car because the nearest ambulance was in Keysborough, 40 minutes away. Secondly, there was an 87-year-old woman suffering from severe respiratory distress who had to wait 41 minutes for an ambulance in Rye, with potentially catastrophic consequences. In addition, in the same week it emerged that Ambulance Victoria had been unable to attend more than 60 calls over the course of a single evening, more broadly, due to a lack of resources. These are life-threatening incidents, all of which have posed risks to constituents in the electorate of Flinders at the federal level and in particular in the electorate of Nepean at the state level. It is time for a dramatic overhaul of the emergency services. The workers, the ambulance operators, the drivers and the paramedics do a magnificent job. They have simply not been given the overarching support services and resources needed to carry out their job. The ‘tooth to tail ratio’—to use military terms—is unacceptably low. In emergency services terms it means that there is not enough grunt given where it is needed.

This brings me to the second of the complaints within the electorate, which concerns the Cardinia Primary School. The school, through the auspices of the school council president, recently approached me. They had a deal with the state and federal governments under the BER program that they would not lose their basketball court. That deal has been broken. I was called in after they had no luck with the state government and after the new member for La Trobe, Laura Smyth, refused to visit the school. I urge her to visit the school, which is on my northern border and her southern border. It is technically on her side of the road, but, in the absence of adequate support, I have treated it as a school within my electorate. The school has lost the basketball court. It is a breach of the agreement, it is a fraud on the school and it is a disappointment to the children. The member for La Trobe should visit the school as a matter of priority, and the state and federal governments must honour their deal immediately.

Finally, I recently visited the Koo Wee Rup Secondary College, a great school with tremendous teachers but inadequate buildings. It was built to accommodate 600 students but it has an enrolment of 1,000 or so and it is growing fast. The dedicated staff, under the leadership of Principal Kym Bridgford—and let me make it clear that he was not the complainant—have to deal every day with dilapidated classrooms, a minuscule library, a shortage of toilets and changing facilities, cramped staff facilities and a canteen dating back to the Second World War. It is time for a complete rebuild of that school. I am delighted that the state opposition has pledged $7 million to commence the rebuilding of the school, should it take office on 27 November. I would like the state government to match it, and that way the school community will be protected, whoever wins.

Trade Training Centres

Mr LYONS (Bass) (7.14 pm)—I rise to speak tonight on the impressive trade training centre projects that I was honoured to open recently in my electorate of Bass. The Dorset Trade Training Centre and the George Town Trade Training Centre were both funded by the Commonwealth’s Trade Training Centres in Schools Program, and the results are something that all should be proud of. The principal of Scottsdale High, Ann Fedyk, which is the location of the Dorset Trade Training Centre, described the funding as a ‘dream come true’ for her students and the wider school community. The facilities
that have been provided to these areas, some of which have not received significant funding for 20 or 30 years, are terrific. The schools involved are very appreciative of their new facilities.

The Trade Training Centres in Schools Program is an important element of the Australian government’s Building the Education Revolution, helping to ensure that students have access to quality education and training opportunities. The trades training centres will also provide an opportunity for young people to complete their education and be ready to start work or to gain an apprenticeship. The program will also help to address national skills shortages in traditional trades and emerging industries by improving the relevance and responsiveness of the trade training programs in secondary schools.

Ms Fedyk said at the opening of the Dorset Trade Training Centre:

I can still remember the day we heard that we’d been successful in gaining the dollars—we’d have the money to make our dream of improving the opportunities and training pathways for our children and for adult learners in Dorset a reality. As the students would say ‘it was awesome’.

Ms Fedyk followed by saying:

Perhaps one of the greatest outcomes of this project is that it shows that when we work collaboratively, not only do we succeed in creating the facility that we’re standing in today, but we role model strong and purposeful leadership to the young people in our community. We show what can be achieved by working together and we instil a level of confidence in the fact that despite recent tough times, a bright future filled with possibilities lie ahead.

The praise for the program does not stop here. Principal of Winnaleah District High School, Mrs Sharon Woodberry, said that the construction of the Dorset Trade Training Centre would allow students aged between 16 and 19 who previously had to travel for long distances to access similar facilities the opportunity to study closer to home. For those who do not know, Winnaleah is about an hour-and-a-half drive from Launceston. We know that travel can be a big factor in school retention rates. If these facilities were not available, some of these students might not have been able to further their studies at all.

I was also given the opportunity to open the George Town Trade Training Centre at Port Dalrymple School recently. Again, the feedback was extremely positive and praise was given for the program. In his speech at the opening of the centre, Mr Philip Challis, the principal of Port Dalrymple School, recognised the existing excellent collaboration with local industry and business that has delivered an outstanding program for pathways into training and apprenticeships. That same robust collaboration and contribution of local industry leaders enabled their successful application. Mr Challis summed up the cooperation and relationships that the trade training centres create within local school communities and the broader community very well. He said:

We look forward to the realisation of the vision of our Trade Training Centre consortium; a strong partnership of George Town Secondary schools with industry, business and Polytechnic, that directly engages our local community in provision of expanded education and training options for young people; meets industry training needs for existing and future employees; and allows governance with true consultation and collaboration.

I think that the praise for the program that came from all three principals involved in the Dorset and George Town trade training centres explains the positive outcomes of the program very well. They talk about the positive effects on not only the students but the wider community. The benefits are wide-reaching and help many facets of local communities. (Time expired)
Relay for Life

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (7.20 pm)—I rise to acknowledge the random acts of kindness that happen continually in my electorate of Wright and, as I noted in my maiden speech, the numerous generous acts that happen on a daily basis throughout my electorate by the silent majority who go quietly about their business. However, it would be remiss of me not to mention the good work done by the Jimboomba branch of Cancer Council Queensland, who held their annual Relay for Life a few weeks ago. Relay for Life is a walk which is a national fundraiser of which you all would be aware. The people in attendance were the family and friends of cancer sufferers who wish to acknowledge and offer support to those who are suffering, to those families which are affected and, more importantly, to those who have survived the most dreadful and indiscriminate disease that is cancer.

Despite it being a wet day in Jimboomba, which caused the relocation of the walk to an undercover car park at the nearby shopping centre, this did not dampen the spirit or enthusiasm of those who attended. It is most comforting for those who attend to witness the proud local community spirit and support. The Jimboomba branch encourages the Relay for Life participating teams of walkers to theme their participation by dressing up in team colours. Seeing teams of people dressing up in a variety of costumes, coloured hair and team T-shirts added to the atmosphere of making it a fun night, helping to reflect on the sadness that cancer brings not only to the person afflicted but to the whole family involved. I was humbled to walk the first lap with a group of survivors of cancer. How lucky they are to have achieved this status.

Besides being a great event to raise community awareness of how far-reaching cancer is within society, the event also showcased the community at large, who gave generously towards the fundraising contributions. This year, the Jimboomba branch alone raised over $55,000. This is a remarkable outcome for such a small but growing community in my electorate, and it is indicative of the community spirit. These are the unselfish, random acts of kindness offered by one of my local community groups. This $55,000 will go towards much needed research by one of my local community groups. This $55,000 will go towards much needed research by one of my local community groups.

Another local champion of fundraising for the Cancer Council in Jimboomba, and now employed by them, is Di Dixon. Di has also worked tirelessly for the community for many years and I congratulate and acknowledge their work and selfless endeavours for the benefit of others.

Groups like these throughout the electorate of Wright need to be congratulated for their continued and tireless efforts for the benefit of others. Schools throughout Wright are currently celebrating their awards nights where students receive acknowledgement for academic, athletic and leadership achievements. It is a special time for the seniors as they prepare to leave one phase of their life and commence another, whether it be preparing to enter the workforce, head off to university or to take the more fashionable gap year.

A recent highlight for me was to attend the Boonah State High School award ceremony last week. The new principal of the school, Bronwyn Johnstone, is very proud of her new charge after her promotion to the Boonah school. I also acknowledge the outgoing P&C president Wendy Creighton, whose guidance and drive has contributed to
many of the schools successes. To Wendy: on behalf of the community, I thank you for your years of professional service.

Emmaus College in Jimboomba also conducted their awards ceremony last Friday. Amidst the talent of academic and sports awards, it was the musical presentation by a range of ages that was most appreciated by their peers. The college experiences growth in student numbers each year as the local community grows and develops.

I also acknowledge the Beaudesert State High School for their school based apprenticeship award night held recently. Students participated in the workforce as part of their curriculum to achieve workplace certificates in numerous fields—a great initiative that gives both the student and the employer the benefits of try before you buy. Part of the success of the Beaudesert skill based apprenticeship scheme is the commitment by the parents of the students, of which a few would awake at 3.30 am to have select students at their chosen place of employment by 4 am—a fantastic effort which will be rewarded by instilling a strong work ethic in their child. To the students, parents and staff of the school: I congratulate you.

I hope that Wright continues to provide opportunities and a well-balanced education for our young people, for they are the future of Australia. I take this opportunity to wish all the seniors that are leaving year 12 every success with whatever endeavour they choose.

Capricornia Electorate: Schools and Trade Training Centres

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (7.25 pm)—It seems like we are on bit of theme here because I too want to talk about my school speech nights from the last couple of weeks and to talk about some great news that we have in Capricornia on trade training centres. It was great in the fortnight that we were away from Canberra to be back home for quite a number of my school speech nights, stretching from the Capricorn Coast, out through a lot of the mining towns and up into the northern part of the electorate to places like Mirani and Sarina. It was great to be there to congratulate the students and teachers, and the parents for the support they have given their children through this year of schooling. We all wish them well in their future endeavours.

I could not help thinking in question time today that the parents and teachers particularly, but also the students, would have been very reassured had they been able to hear question time because every single question from this side of the House was about skills and education. I think that everyone sitting in those auditoriums over the last couple of weeks would have been very pleased to know that the government places such priority on something that they as parents, teachers and students clearly see as very important and valuable as well.

I got the great news about the latest round of trade training centres while I was on the road between schools speech nights in my mining towns. A cluster of schools within the Bowen Basin, made up of Dysart, Capella, Clermont and Middlemount schools, was successful in attaining trade training centres. Those schools have gotten together to put forward a cluster proposal whereby the different schools will host different facilities covering a range of different trades. Dysart State High School is going to have a diesel-fitting facility. Clermont and Capella will share a facility focusing on rural operations, which is very important to that district. Clermont State High School will also have a facility for gaining construction qualifications and Capella State High School will be able to host the hospitality facilities. Those schools will be able to share facilities and students from right across the Central High-
lands will be able to obtain up to certificate III across quite a range of skill areas.

It is also great news for those communities that young people will be able to pursue opportunities within those rural towns—and opportunities abound in places like Dysart, Middlemount, Clermont and Capella, whether it is in the mining industry or in the support services that go with it. It is really great news. I know that the schools worked very hard to put their application together. They put a lot of thought into how they could work cooperatively and also draw in other organisations within the community who have also been very supportive—organisations such as Isaac Regional Council, for one, and also the mining companies such as Rio Tinto, BMA and Anglo who operate in those towns.

We are just about ready to open a trade training centre from the very first round of funding, and that is the one at Rockhampton State High School in my home town of Rockhampton. Rockhampton State High School were very quick off the mark when we took office in 2007, getting me over to tell me about their plans now that we are making available $2½ billion for trade training centres. Very soon they will be in a position to open their engineering and manufacturing trade training centre.

During the election, one of the reasons I knew that we had to retain government was that we were going to continue this very important funding program for trade training centres. Schools would have been missing out on these facilities and young people in my electorate would have been missing out on terrific opportunities if the coalition had been successful in the election because they were going to cut trade training centres. How they could do that when, if they had spent any time in my electorate, they would have seen the massive opportunities that are there for skilled workers and the huge need that exists for skilled workers. They are completely out of touch. This is a priority not just for our country but also for the young people who are looking for these opportunities. (Time expired)

**Victorian Government**

Ms O’DWYER (Higgins) (7.30 pm)—It is a great privilege to represent the federal seat of Higgins and I will never tire of attending the citizenship ceremonies, the schools, the local fetes and the listening posts, whether in High Street, Ashburton, or Cato Street, Prahran, or the listening posts that I attend outside local shopping strips and also outside our local stations. But there is something that has happened over the last month—the chatter has become a lot louder in my electorate that the Brumby government in Victoria has got to go.

I represent a federal electorate which has five state seats within it: Prahran, Oakleigh, Hawthorn, Malvern and Burwood. In each of those state seats there is a Liberal candidate who is passionate about their community and who is fighting for the issues that are so important to where they live and work—people like Clem Newton-Brown, who is the candidate for Prahran, Theo Zographos in Oakleigh, Ted Baillieu in Hawthorn, Michael O’Brien in Malvern and Graham Watt in Burwood. They are working hard in conjunction with their state upper house colleagues for the southern metropolitan region—people like Andrea Coote and Georgie Crozier. Each of these Liberal candidates is working hard to hold a tired 11-year-old Brumby government to account for their policy failures and to prosecute their vision for a future in Victoria that can be so much brighter.

Victorians face a real choice on 27 November. They can choose more of the same, they can choose a do-nothing government—a government that is wasteful, a government...
that is arrogant—or they can choose the opposite: a Baillieu government, a government that will fix the problems and build for the future. The task facing the coalition in Victoria is great. They need to win 13 seats in order to win government, just less than a seven per cent swing. With less than a four per cent swing, 3.75 per cent in fact, we will see a hung parliament. This would be a travesty for the people of Victoria.

What is important are some of the issues that our local candidates are campaigning for. I want to touch on a couple of the issues that are so important to my electorate of Higgins and issues that I know our local candidates are passionate about. The first is the issue of clearways, which has been a campaign that Clem Newton-Brown has been working on for a very long period of time, because he understands that extended clearway hours will have a very detrimental impact on small business and on local employment and that it will have a very significant impact on the local economy. He understands that the local amenity is not improved by these extended clearway times and he understands too that the decision of the Brumby government has been made without any consultation. So a coalition government will scrap the Brumby government’s blanket changes to clearway times within a 10-kilometre radius of the CBD.

Public transport is another issue that is so critically important in the electorate. It is important both in Oakleigh and also in Prahran, and in Hawthorn, Malvern and Burwood. The issue of public transport is all about having safe and reliable public transport in Victoria; public transport that is punctual, comfortable and clean. A Baillieu government will deliver more trains for the people of Victoria—40 new trains for the Melbourne suburban network.

The other issue that is so critically important for the people of Higgins is the issue of planning. We have seen with the arrogant Brumby government that they are taking choice away from local residents. They are taking it away from local councils who represent those local residents and instead giving that power to the Minister for Planning, who makes decisions not based on the understanding of the amenity of the local area but according to his own particular criteria. Well, we do not think that this is right. We think that choice should be with the local residents who are affected by the decisions made with respect to planning. This is an issue that I know in particular Michael O’Brien and Ted Baillieu have also been campaigning hard on.

Finally, the issue of safer streets is an issue that Graham Watt, the candidate for Burwood, is so passionate about, which is why he wants more police on the street in Ashburton. The choice is clear. Let us hope the choice that is made on 27 November is a good one. (Time expired)

Prison Education Programs

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (7.35 pm)—I rise tonight to acknowledge the importance of prison education programs for both prisoner rehabilitation and the welfare of Australian society. I commend the efforts of prison staff, justice staff, volunteers and detainees, who are working together to develop and implement prison education programs across Australia. The current incarceration rate in Australia today is 175 prisoners per 100,000 adults, up from 112 prisoners per 100,000 adults in 1990. For the most part, the growth in Australia’s prison population has been driven not by a rise in crime but by law changes, such as tougher bail conditions and mandatory non-parole periods.

On 2 November 2010, I spent a morning behind bars at the Alexander Maconochie
Centre, Australia’s first ‘human rights jail’. The jail operates in compliance with the ACT Human Rights Act as well as with the World Health Organisation’s Healthy Prison concept. The concept provides that everyone within a prison must feel safe, be treated with respect, have opportunities for self-improvement, have the chance to maintain contact with their families and be prepared for release.

However, despite the dedication of Australia’s correction officers and corrections management departments, some prisoners lose trust in the officers’ capacity to protect them and uphold their basic rights. Some prisoners do not believe that the officers believe that the prisoners can make a positive contribution to society. Such prisoners have a real prospect of losing all respect for the Australian community and legal system, and of losing all fear of breaking the law.

The Alexander Maconochie Centre aims to rehabilitate prisoners. However, such reformation cannot occur without intervention in the prison culture—the mentality and the way of life that may protect the inmates while they are detained but that presents real dangers both to Australian society and to the inmates themselves once they are released.

Many prisoners have not completed high school. Research by David Deming of Carnegie Mellon University in Pennsylvania indicates that formal education drastically reduces the arrest rate among adolescents that are most at risk of committing crimes. Work for the Australian Institute of Criminology by Jason Payne and Jeremy Prichard has found that prisoners with lower educational attainment are more likely to reoffend. Increasing the educational opportunities available to people at risk of reoffending would reap huge rewards for the community. After all, the costs of repeated incarceration and of future crimes are far higher than the cost of better education programs.

Prison education programs, when well designed and implemented, can reveal to prisoners the possibility of an alternative mindset to the prison culture. Prisoners are encouraged to realise that the prison culture need not define or limit them. Education programs offer the detainees an insight into the world, their community and the people who work to improve it. Prison education programs are run by prison staff or independent teachers, often on a volunteer basis, and vary in content across different prisons. Detainees may commence or resume their schooling, covering any topic from initial literacy and numeracy skills to the qualification requirements for secondary or tertiary graduation, or trades such as welding or carpentry. The programs may be aimed at reeducating sex offenders, alcohol or drug addicts, violent offenders or prisoners with behavioural disorders. Prisoners may be offered financial planning advice or legal literacy education to help them understand their rights and responsibilities within the prison and the wider community.

Ultimately, prisoners are offered an alternative perspective on the world and aided to understand how their behaviour sits in the context of the wider community. By facilitating contact within the prison population and the wider community, prisoners are reengaged with society and can develop respectful relationships with people on the outside. However, education programs must be designed to target prisoners’ needs effectively: the subject matter should be applicable to prisoners and presented in a way that prisoners can understand. As a society, we need to work harder to increase the take-up of prison education programs. For example, in the case of private prisons, governments should consider writing contracts that pay
providers more when they succeed in raising inmates’ education levels.

For Australia, the total cost of prisons is nearly $3 billion per year, or about $100,000 per prisoner. Yet the real cost of incarceration comes afterwards, with ex-prisoners more likely to commit further crimes and less likely to find a job. Sexual violence in prison probably is not as common as in the 1990s—when New South Wales magistrate David Heilpern estimated that one-quarter of young male prisoners were raped—but the rate is likely higher than in the outside world. It is critical that we make prisons safe if we are to make rehabilitation programs work in Australian jails.

The continued success of prison education programs relies upon Australians’ support. Getting prison policy right is not easy, but if there is one country that can show the way it should be Australia. (Time expired)

Aged Care

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (7.40 pm)—It is undeniable that Australia’s ageing population is presenting some big challenges for our aged-care sector. Australia has proportionally more people needing some form of assistance or care, and fewer taxpayers to pay for those services. Almost 20 per cent of the Hinkler electorate is aged over 65 years, making us one of the favourite electorates in the nation for seniors. People come to our region for its lifestyle and climate, so it is understandable that the Wide Bay region has a significant population of older people. Unfortunately, it seems our pressing need for aged-care beds and services is not recognised by this government. In recent years, the number of beds allocated to the region has dwindled. In the last year of the Howard government, the Wide Bay Burnett region was allocated 146 beds; the best we can hope for this time around is 140. Clearly, this figure does not reflect the fact that the demand for aged-care services and other suitable facilities throughout the region is growing every year, and of course the capital cost of buildings is increasing exponentially.

In Bundaberg we have at least one new aged-care facility, which will comprise 60 high-care beds and 60 low-care beds, which has been held up for the past three years because of a change of ownership, the transfer of allocated beds and the effects of the global financial crisis. In the last round, not a single aged-care provider on the Fraser Coast was allocated beds. This means the region has for some time experienced increasing pressure on its aged-care facilities. Throw in the various local government requirements involved in building a new facility or expanding an existing one and you can understand why it is not uncommon for there to be a lag time between beds being allocated and beds actually appearing on the ground.

Very soon we expect the announcement regarding which providers in the Wide Bay region will receive funding for beds and community care packages under the 2009-10 aged care approvals round. I sincerely hope that the region’s full allocation of 140 beds is achieved in this upcoming round. Considering that the Wide Bay region includes Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Maryborough and the hinterland areas stretching from Monto to Kingaroy, these beds will be stretched thin. The fact that the region did not get its full allocation under the previous round, where only 120 beds of the 200 promised were delivered, makes me even less optimistic. In fact, the entire state of Queensland was short-changed, with 2,416 aged-care beds promised but only 1,605 delivered in the last round. What is even more depressing is that very few of the beds in the Wide Bay region that have been delivered are operable. Recently the Torbay Aged Care and Retirement Village in Hervey Bay opened its Parklands Retirement Haven facility, which offers 48
aged-care beds—20 low care and 28 high care. When the facility is fully developed, it will offer 150 beds, all of them sorely needed. So there is work to be done at all levels—local government with approvals and development application hold-ups, state governments with sensible, unoppressive building standards and the Commonwealth with a recognition of the cost of providing aged care on the one hand and the need to provide capital resources in some areas on the other.

When it comes time for people to move into a care facility, I want families to have a choice about where their loved one lives—preferably in a place close to their home community, friends and families. It is a tragedy to see people having to live 100 or more kilometres away from where their family lives and where their roots are. It is a very lonely existence. From my visits to nursing homes, I can tell you that is so, Mr Deputy Speaker.

No matter how nice the facility is, that loneliness really impacts on a lot of people and their holistic quality of life. We have more seniors needing a bed than ever before and regional centres simply do not have the capacity to cope if the beds are not in place. Already far too many Australians are travelling hundreds of kilometres to the nearest vacant aged care bed, and it is hard to believe any government could be happy with this state of affairs.

**Petrie Electorate: Redcliffe Community Association**

**Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (7.45 pm)—**Tonight I wish to talk about one of the fantastic community organisations in my electorate and about the networking that is going on in my local community—and I touched on this briefly earlier today in my contribution in the Main Committee to the debate on the proposed address-in-reply. We have community organisations that are out there engaging with the business community to provide support and to work cooperatively to create initiatives. One of those organisations in the electorate of Petrie is the Redcliffe Community Association, which has joined with local businesses to establish the RCA Support Crew. Under this initiative, people in the community can join the support crew as a member and get benefits and newsletters about what the community organisation is doing in relation to domestic violence, homelessness and support for our youth. Businesses that have signed up and posted their RCA support crew signs will give discounts to members. What a fantastic initiative: businesses joining with the community, giving back to the community and, in return, being supported by the community. It is just fantastic.

I would like to recognise some of those businesses—the corporate sponsors of the support crew. They are the Belvedere Hotel, and particularly PJ, who is behind this initiative; JT Press; Peninsula Auto Zone; Peninsula Fair Shopping Centre; the Redcliffe & Bayside Herald; St George Kippa-Ring; Village Motors—Shane Newcombe and the Newcombe families have been amazing in their support for the Redcliffe Community Association; Poison Apple Studios; the Peninsula Education Precinct; and WOW Event Management, which is the business of Luke and Kerry Seymour. They do a lot in relation to event management in the local area. They support so many community initiatives. These guys have been behind this initiative and supported it all the way. You can see signs about it everywhere. You get flyers talking about big discounts and what you can do when you shop at these businesses.

Importantly, the initiative is getting the message out into our communities about what these community organisations do. They are not-for-profit organisations. They survive on grants but they need to find a way
of getting revenue to keep their initiatives going and to have good staff who are there year-in, year-out, because you need consistency. When you are dealing with domestic violence and homelessness you need the same faces in those roles—experience in our communities. That is what this initiative is all about. The Redcliffe Community Association, in helping to establish this wonderful RCA Support Crew, held the big Shine Ball, which was an amazing event at the Belvedere Hotel. The Redcliffe Community Association has done me the honour of making me an ambassador for the association.

We are a fantastic community—we have a significant proportion of volunteers—but the reality is that we have our challenges and we need to face up to them. This fits very well with what the government is trying to do with social inclusion. The government has now, through the Minister for Social Inclusion and DEEWR, established an online Australian Social Innovation Forum, which is called OnIMPACT, to provide registered participants the opportunity to share information, facilitate networks, participate in discussions and engage in ongoing collaborations between government, social enterprise and the philanthropic and corporate sectors. We see it already happening in our community and now the government has taken the next step of providing this online forum to help bring these groups together. With the latest announcement, of the Social Enterprise Development and Investment Fund, we are taking that still one step further. This is a fantastic announcement. Enterprises that deliver innovative solutions to social challenges, including barriers to employment, are receiving greater support than ever through the Australian government’s initiatives. This project is about bringing partnerships together; bringing the corporate sector together with our community organisations and providing them with the funds to establish social enterprises that provide these important services in our community. I congratulate the Minister for Social Inclusion and the federal Labor government for these initiatives and I especially congratulate the Redcliffe Community Association and those businesses that do so much. They certainly deserve recognition. *(Time expired)*

**Bowman Electorate: Citizen of the Year Awards**

**Mr LAMING** (Bowman) *(7.50 pm)*—Each year in the 600 square kilometres of tranquil Brisbane coastline we call Redlands, we recognise outstanding residents through the annual Australia Day awards, which acknowledge high-achieving members of the community who have made outstanding contributions and given freely of their time, knowledge and enthusiasm to promote the wellbeing of our local area. I congratulate those who won awards this year.

The Citizen of the Year for 2010 was the late Michael Meehan, who served initially with the Royal Australian Navy and the fire service but moved to help kids with special needs and other young people. His achievements include setting up Special Kids Inc, which was a major supporter of Noah’s Ark, and he also opened the Redlands wheelchair and mobility aids bank. Michael secured around 50 wheelchairs, a range of walkers, crutches and other aids, all of which he stored in his shed. Schoolies prep camps were another of his innovations, taking Year 11 and 12 teenagers to the Gold Coast to teach them life skills and prepare them for schoolies. Michael had already been awarded the Queensland Local Hero Award. He had a severe disability and managed, despite that, to raise his two sons. We lost Michael this year, and it was a great loss to our community. He was a wonderful contributor throughout his life in Redlands.
Other nominees for Senior Citizen of the Year included Denis Alexander, Ron Bailey, Ian Busst, Belle Castles, Bruce E Green, John Jenkins, David Parr and Veronica Vayanos—congratulations and thank you to them all.

The Local Hero Award in Redlands went to Tony Chapman. Tony volunteers at least three days a week at the Oakland Street community garden, which is accessed by the entire community including many with a disability. For over four years Tony has generously given his time and helped many people. His selfless acts have led to a wonderful community garden. Other nominees included Patricia Aldridge, Miriam Attwood, Dr Karen Barry, Penny Hewitt, Dean Booyse, Jan Desbrow, Pastor Ron Favaloro, Alan and Linda Harcourt from Redlands RSL, Ted Jones, Tracy Lowe, Rick Mackenzie, Dee McGuigan, Douglas McVicar, Mirian Morton, Dr Lynn Olivier, Don Palfrey, Tom Short, Robyn Tennant, Rosemary Tyndall, Les Warner, Catherine Williams, Rod Young and Lakis Zeniou.

Our Cultural Award had two winners—Terry Annesley has worked tirelessly in the performing arts area for the past 15 years, volunteering his time and talents at a range of events across Redlands; and for over 30 years Lewis Callow has enriched Redlands, and the arts sector in particular, specifically with his commitment to furthering the appreciation of choral and band music in the area.

There was a Special Recognition for Achievement at an International Level, and that went to Christopher Elves. In 2009, Christopher won an Emmy for composing the soundtrack to Animalia, the animated children’s adaptation of Graeme Base’s book. Christopher moved to Australia in 1995 and has written numerous scores and jingles for film and television. He is now one of Australia’s most well-known and awarded screen composers. Other nominees included actor Paul Bishop, songwriter Andrew Carins, baritone Andrew Collins, artist Brylee Langley, Scottish dancing’s Peter Ovenden and artist/photographer Narelle Renn.

Our Environmental Achievement Award went to Jack Jackson, the principal for the Stradbroke Wildlife Rescue Service. Jack is passionate about wildlife and plays a major role in saving animals on North Stradbroke Island. Other nominees included landscape architect Emma Baker, Councillor Debra Henry, Carmel Rackmann, our Moreton Bay researcher Dr Kathy Townsend, Russell Island’s Rod Young and of course the Stradbroke Wildlife Rescue Service.

The Sports Award went to our own Amanda Phillips, a weightlifter with a very impressive sporting career. She has represented Australia at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and at every Commonwealth Games since. She finished 11th in Delhi. Other nominees included Barbara Dowling and Pamela Tobiasen, club stalwarts of the Redlands Australian rules football team, karate’s Glenn Irvine, beach volleyball’s Corey Leathart and of course swimming’s David Urquhart.

Finally the Community Organisation Award went to the Redlands State Emergency Service, which in 2009 was recognised as the Queensland SES unit of the year, with contributions made right across Queensland. They attended 50 storms in Redlands in 2009 and were involved in the Gap storm clean-up and the Ingham floods. This team is known for its innovative training programs, including an Australian first chainsaw trailer, which was invented and built by the team. We are a small community, a parochial community and great things are achieved in the area, one of the finest parts of Queensland.
O'Connor Electorate: Albany Community Care Respite Centre

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (7.55 pm)—I would like to point out a significant issue in my electorate of O'Connor. The city of Albany, located in the south of O'Connor, has a brand new respite centre—the Albany Community Care Respite Centre. There is a great need for respite care in Albany and the surrounding areas, but the centre, which only opened this year, is unable to secure enough ongoing funding to be open more than one week per month.

This respite centre is a state of the art facility, built with a generous amount of community support early this year to provide respite care, predominantly to aged care recipients—however there is also some capacity for the centre to provide respite care for people with disabilities. While the community worked hard to establish this centre, the lack of federal support means that it is unable to operate on a full-time basis. I am told that there has been no new funding allocated under the National Respite for Carers Program—Cottage Respite since 2005. This brand new facility is therefore only able to operate for up to one week per month, providing a maximum of 420 respite days per year. The total funding required to operate the facility 52 weeks a year is just $386,000 per annum, which would provide 1,472 respite days per year.

This centre is of vital importance to my electorate, as it will provide a service not only for the city of Albany but the entire catchment area of the Great Southern, with some clients coming from as far as Perth, 412 kilometres away, Esperance, 480 kilometres away, and even Kalgoorlie, almost 800 kilometres away. Currently the facility is booked more than six months in advance, and the few beds that are available in nursing homes in the Albany area are also in very high demand—and they are primarily allocated for emergency respite care.

I cannot stress enough how vitally important this service is, especially to a major regional centre such as Albany and the Great Southern. Respite centres are an absolutely vital service for carers who work to provide care 24 hours a day, seven days a week without any opportunity for a break. A respite break—whether it be for a few hours while in town to do some jobs or a week while taking a holiday—can significantly increase the duration that a carer will continue to provide care. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or terminal illness, or even who are frail.

According to statistics from Carers Australia more than one in eight Australians provide care of this kind. There are an estimated 2.9 million carers in Australia, who are alleviating government of a financial burden worth more than $40 billion—for very little in return. In WA, there are around 250,000 carers. The very best way that government can acknowledge our carers and the vitally important role they play in the community is to make sure they have access to respite care. We need funding to make respite available. It is as simple as that.

I recently met with a constituent from my electorate, a man in his 70s who has been providing care for his wife for more than a decade. For more than a decade this man has provided a service to Australia by caring for his wife. The toll it has taken on his body is great, as he is required to help with all aspects of her care, such as bathing and getting in and out of the car. I can only imagine the toll it has taken on other aspects of his life. Earlier this year, this man decided he wanted to take a holiday to visit his children. That is not a big ask. Despite trying to book more than six months in advance, he has been told...
there will be no respite beds available. I can only imagine the cost to the taxpayer if he had decided to place his wife into government care more than a decade ago. More than a decade of care, and he cannot even take a week off to visit his children.

We need funding to make respite available. I stress this again. It is vitally important to our carers who alleviate the government of a $40 billion burden—and $386,000 each year is not a big ask when you consider how much these carers have already sacrificed.

House adjourned at 8.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Gray to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, and by reason of the urgent nature of the works, it is expedient that the following work be carried out without having been referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: The Western Cape Residential campus, Weipa, Queensland.

Mr Albanese to move:

That the Member for Holt, Mr Byrne; the Member for Banks, Mr Melham; the Member for Melbourne Ports, Mr Danby; the Member for Denison, Mr Wilkie; and the Member for Berowra, Mr Ruddock; be appointed to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security.

Mr Albanese to move:

(1) That a Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office be appointed to examine the proposal to establish a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO). It is proposed that the PBO will provide information to assist the Parliament in its consideration of matters related to the budget, by undertaking fiscal analysis and other relevant research and by providing policy costings advice. The PBO will also promote greater public awareness of key budget and fiscal policy issues. The Joint Select Committee will inquire into and report on:

(a) the appropriate mandate for the Parliament Budget Office (PBO);
(b) the nature of information needed to assist the Parliament in its consideration of matters related to the budget;
(c) the role and adequacy of current institutions and processes in providing this information, and the areas in which additional support is required;
(d) the scope for a PBO to fulfil its mandate in a cost-effective manner; and
(e) bearing in mind these considerations, the most appropriate structure, resourcing and protocols for a PBO, including but not limited to:
   (i) the PBO’s functions and lines of accountability and oversight;
   (ii) the routine work expected of the PBO and the minimum reporting requirements;
   (iii) the protocols for members of parliament requesting non-routine work of the PBO, including the types of work and the rules for prioritising and carrying out these requests;
   (iv) the protocols around access to and disclosure of the PBO’s work and any confidentiality requirements;
   (v) the protocols around the PBO’s relationships with other institutions and processes, including government departments and agencies; and
   (vi) an appropriate level of staffing, appropriate qualifications for staff, and resources to allow the PBO to fulfil its mandate; and
(f) in conducting its inquiry, the Committee may choose to consider the operation and effectiveness of similar offices in other parliamentary democracies and their relevance to Australian circumstances.

(2) That the committee consist of 10 members, 3 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, and one non-aligned Member, 2 Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, one Senator to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, and one Senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators.

(3) That every nomination of a member of the committee be notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(4) That the members of the committee hold office as a joint select committee until presentation of the committee’s report or the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time, whichever is the earlier.

(5) That the committee elect a government member as its chair.

(6) That the committee elect a member as its deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

(7) That, in the event of an equally divided vote, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(8) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(9) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.

(10) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.

(11) That 2 members of a subcommittee constitute the quorum of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.

(12) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.

(13) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.

(14) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit.

(15) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

(16) That the committee may report from time to time but that it present its final report no later than 31 March 2011.

(17) That the provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

(18) That a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

Mr Laurie Ferguson to move:

That this House notes that:

(1) the Sri Lankan Government declared an end to the war in Sri Lanka in May 2009;

(2) on 22 June 2010 the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a panel of experts to advise him on accountability concerning any alleged violations of international humanitarian law during the final stages of the conflict in Sri Lanka;

(3) the panel:
(a) officially began its work on 16 September 2010; and
(b) is looking into the modalities, applicable international standards and comparative experience with regard to accountability processes, taking into account the nature and scope of any essential foundation for durable peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka;

(4) through the panel, the Secretary-General expects to enable the United Nations to make a constructive contribution in this regard;

(5) on 18 October 2010 the panel invited individuals and organisations to make submissions in respect of its work, and will accept submissions until 15 December 2010;

(6) in light of the panel’s review, Australia’s close ties with Sri Lanka and continuing reports by several reputable human rights organisations, such as the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Elders, as well as governments including in Britain, there has been a call for an international independent investigation into war crimes committed by all parties during the final stages of the war in Sri Lanka; and

(7) Australia, as a respected and responsible member of the international community and Asian neighbourhood, can help accomplish better outcomes in Sri Lanka in the return towards a civil society, particularly for the Tamil minority, and that such actions:
(a) would further assist with the creation of durable solutions to what has been a humanitarian crisis on Australia’s doorstep in Sri Lanka; and
(b) could also help partially alleviate the flow of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka.
Wednesday, 17 November 2010

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) took the chair at 9.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Herbert Electorate: Roads

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (9.30 am)—There is a road in Townsville that is a two-way street. It is quite a pleasant drive and is also a link between the major industrial suburbs of Garbutt and the Bohle. Townsville’s economy depends strongly on a strong industrial sector, and these two suburbs are the hub of that sector. From engineering works to transport, from auction houses to the busy Townsville Airport, from industrial retailers to construction companies, these two suburbs are a lifeblood for our city that is second to none, yet we treat them as a second-class citizens.

This link, Blakey’s Crossing, is critical to the wellbeing both of Townsville and of the industrial sector of our economy. The problem is that this road continually goes under water. As my mate Richo says, ‘It goes under in a sun shower.’ I am not talking about during the peak of the wet season. I am talking about it being under water during the dry season. A simple storm can bring traffic chaos to Townsville’s industrial precinct. It has been under water on countless days every year. When the road is under water the major arterial road, Woolcock Street, becomes clogged with industrial traffic, and delays of hours occur. Some people just turn around and go home. The traffic at the Mather Street roundabout backs up for kilometres each way, and Duckworth Street is not far behind in experiencing delays caused by Blakey’s Crossing being impassable.

We have an opportunity to fix Blakey’s Crossing. It is a small job requiring some $21 million. The alternative is to spend over $70 million to install a flyover at the Mather Street roundabout, which is the most impassable of the intersections hit during the rainy periods. If we do not act now, the incredible growth of our northern beaches suburbs will also make the Duckworth Street roundabout a clogged arterial road, and more surgery will be needed. The loss of productivity is obvious; the way to fix it is simple. This is an opportunity for local, state and federal governments to come together for a solution that will make our industrial hubs accessible 365 days a year. We could pick up on countless hours of productivity. We could lower the collective blood pressure of an entire travelling workforce. I urge the government to please fund the $21 million needed to flood-proof Blakey’s Crossing.

World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing and Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport) (9.33 am)—Today I would really like to recognise the importance of road safety. It is something that I feel very strongly about and something that all Australians should feel very strongly about. This Sunday, 21 November, is the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. The world day of remembrance, supported by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration, gives road users a chance to reflect on the trauma caused by road crashes, the impact on the victims and their families.

Road crashes affect people across all corners of the world—across Australia and across my own electorate of Ballarat. Australia’s fatality rate for 2009 was 6.8 deaths per 100,000 people
which, for the first time since 1990, was higher than the OECD median. The statistics show that 75 per cent of deaths and 64 per cent of serious injuries occur on regional or remote roads. In the three years ended December 2009, 405 people were involved in accidents along the Western Freeway from Melbourne to Ballarat. This resulted in 194 people experiencing minor injuries, 204 being hospitalised and seven losing their lives. In those same three years, another 755 people were involved in accidents across the City of Ballarat, with a further 458 people experiencing minor injuries, 286 being hospitalised and 11 losing their lives. These figures are difficult to comprehend, more so for those families who have known somebody involved.

The World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, on 21 November, will remember those involved in accidents and is a moment to reflect on the importance of road safety. The federal government is committed to road safety. There is a lot we are doing and a lot more that can be done. We have been working with all state and territory governments on the next national draft road safety strategy. The strategy aims to support and strengthen national cooperation efforts to reduce the number of Australians killed or injured on our roads. The Australian Transport Council will soon be releasing that draft for public comment and the strategy highlights the need for safe roads, safe speeds, safe vehicles and safe people.

All levels of government are responsible for delivering safe transport infrastructure, and it is the responsibility of individuals to treat our roads and others with the respect that they deserve. The responsibility is a shared one. We all have a responsibility to other road users to be safe, not sorry. We have a responsibility to our families and to our friends to make it home safely and to ensure all other drivers are safe around us. With the holiday season fast approaching, I urge everyone to take the time to think about the importance of acting responsibly—drivers, passengers, motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians. On Sunday I will be remembering the victims of road safety accidents, and I wish everybody safety on our roads.

Longman Electorate: Health and Roads

WYATT ROY (Longman) (9.36 am)—I want to take this opportunity to inform the House about two examples—two of many in the electorate of Longman—where local infrastructure has been overlooked by the state government in Queensland. The first relates to the Caboolture hospital. During the election campaign, the critical situation facing local hospital services in Caboolture was probably the local issue most often raised with me. The adequacy of local health services is the most important issue in Longman, without question. It is raised with me on a daily basis by locals, whether they are people using the hospital or doctors and nurses working there. Issues include the lack of provision for rehabilitation, the constant requirement of ambulances to ramp at the local hospital and the lack of beds and essential services.

In addition to the chronic health conditions I have mentioned, mental health needs are simply not being addressed. The coalition had a well-supported policy for an early intervention psychosis centre to be built at Caboolture, and I urge the current government to put partisan politics aside and support that initiative, which was warmly welcomed by local medical professionals. We have all heard the phrases such as ‘ramping’, ‘bedlock’ and so on, but what they all boil down to is a lack of essential planning for local health services in growing regions. Successive Labor governments in the state have simply not planned ahead for clear and identifiable need.
Speaking of infrastructure needs, I take this opportunity to also highlight the need for either a new bridge to Bribie Island or expansion of the existing bridge. The current bridge has two lanes and was constructed almost 50 years ago, in 1963. The population of Bribie Island was then a handful of the around 20,000 who live there today. Recently, there was a serious accident on the bridge which cut residents off from the mainland for several hours. Many of the residents are older and, if they need to travel into Caboolture or down to Brisbane for urgent medical attention, it is just not possible to do so when the bridge is blocked like this. This problem is underlined by the fact that there is no after-hours emergency medical clinic on Bribie Island, in spite of the large number of permanent and older residents and the huge influx of tourists coming on to the island in the summer months. The state member for Pumicestone has been asking for studies to see whether a new bridge is warranted. My feedback is that the people do not want studies. Anyone who crosses the bridge in the morning or evening peak hour knows that a new crossing is needed. It is just a matter of the state government committing to it and putting it on the state infrastructure plan.

It is this lack of planning by the state government that has let down the people of Longman. Everyone knows that major new infrastructure cannot be provided overnight, and the key is to assess and identify the need early and then give it the necessary priority and allocate the necessary funding to fulfil the local need. Unfortunately, the state government does not appear to understand that. Mismanagement and waste have resulted in a situation where the provision of basic infrastructure appears to have become out of reach of the Queensland Labor government. These are just two critical areas where the Bligh Labor government has been sitting on its hands—it needs to act now. (Time expired)

Kingston Electorate: Essay Competition

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (9.39 am)—On 28 October the member for Mayo and I co-hosted a program for student winners of the South Coast Local Service Area essay competition here at Parliament House. This essay competition, set up by the South Coast Local Service Area, is open to year 10 students within the South Coast and Hills Fleurieu Local Service Areas. The essay topic was about how police and other organisations could provide better road safety messages. Sixteen students from 11 schools across the area put forward some very innovative and interesting ideas in their essays. The range of different ideas included providing defensive driving courses for all drivers; access to interest-free loans and HECS type debts to ensure the most inexperienced drivers purchased vehicles that were fitted with modern safety features; ensuring that penalties for drink- and drug-driving included community service at injury rehabilitation centres to really get the message across about how dangerous road injuries can be; involvement of GPS technology to govern the speeds of vehicles at speed limit changes; and limiting speedometers to 110 kilometres per hour so as not to encourage excessive speeds.

These were some of the ideas generated from young people about how to improve road safety in our local area. Road safety is an important issue. I would really like to congratulate the local service area and in particular Sergeant Gordon Little; Constable Amanda Dawson; Sergeant Mark Thomas; Paula Tonkin, the Christies Beach High School teacher; and Aimee Bodsworth, a Blue Light volunteer. They really put a lot of effort into organising this.

We were very lucky to also have the members for North Sydney and Kingsford Smith visit the young people, and I know that they got a real buzz out of it. This initiative really does
need to be congratulated. It is about crime prevention and getting the ideas of local young people—to get them thinking about road safety but also to develop their leadership in the community. This was a very good initiative and I look forward, as I am sure the member for Mayo does, to continuing to support this important initiative. Some of the students did indicate—I do not have the time to quote them—that it was a very valuable experience for them, including not just coming to Parliament House but also their walk up to Mount Kosciuszko. I commend the program and congratulate everyone involved. (Time expired)

Mayo Electorate: Local Government

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (9.42 am)—I endorse the very fine remarks of the safe seat member for Kingston. It was a good day and I thank her for her cooperation in organising it.

I rise today to reflect on the council elections in South Australia on the weekend, particularly those councils in my area, and the changes to some of the mayoral arrangements in local government. Particularly I want to pay tribute to three mayors who are no longer continuing, either by retirement or by the decision of electors. The first is Peter Whitford, who has retired as Mayor of Yankalilla. Peter has been a stalwart of local government in South Australia in the Yankalilla area. He was first elected to the Myponga ward in 1981. He has represented that ward since that time and in the last several elections has been the mayor for the area and has done an outstanding job, particularly in taking up the digital TV issue, which of course is a big issue in the area of Yankalilla, which has not had access to digital TV. Peter’s son-in-law, Robert Brokenshire, is a state member of parliament, so Peter has had a long-time involvement with the political system. I thank Peter and Madge for their service to the community and wish them well in their future.

I also thank the retiring Mayor of Victor Harbor, Mary-Lou Corcoran, who comes from a different political colour to me but I must say did an absolutely outstanding job in her four years as mayor. Far be it for those on the other side to take my advice, but I would have thought that, given the state of the current state Labor Party, it would be a very, very wise choice if they made sure that there was a seat—

Ms Rishworth—Hear, hear! Might run her against you, Jamie.

Mr BRIGGS—I think she is actually moving into areas which you would be more interested in, member for Kingston. It would be good if she were put into state parliament, which I understand is her desire, because I think she would make a good contribution, although obviously I do not necessarily agree with everything she pursues.

The final person I would like to mention is Mayor Bill Cooksley, who was unsuccessful in his bid for re-election in the Adelaide Hills Council. I pay tribute to Bill. We have not necessarily always agreed with each other on different issues, but he has served his community extremely well in his time and I wish him very well in the future. I am sure Bill will stay involved in local issues.

I congratulate those who were re-elected: in Mount Barker my friend Mayor Ann Ferguson; Brian Hurn in the Barossa Valley; and Lorraine Rosenberg in the Onkaparinga area, who had an outstanding result given that she had about 53 people running against her. I also congratulate new mayors Graham Philp in Victor Harbor and Bill Spragg in the Adelaide Hills Council, and those who were uncontested: Kym McHugh at Alexandrina, who would dare, and Jayne Bates on Kangaroo Island. (Time expired)
Home and Community Care Services

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (9.45 am)—I would like to draw the Committee’s attention to the recent boost of $1.3 million in funding for Home and Community Care services in the ACT. The additional funding will bring the federal government’s contribution to the ACT HACC program to $15.2 million, which represents an increase of 7.9 per cent on the 2009-10 funding.

The HACC program provides a comprehensive, coordinated and integrated range of maintenance and support services to help the frail, the aged, and young people with a disability, and their carers, to continue to live independently in the community. The HACC funding will support a range of services including Meals on Wheels, home care, respite and social programs and community transport. Most importantly, it will help 11,000 vulnerable members of the ACT community.

During my campaign I visited the Marymead Child and Family Centre in Narrabundah to learn about the services this well-known and well-respected Canberra institution provides to the community. Marymead works with single parent families; the unemployed; families struggling with substance abuse, significant breakdown, conflict and violence; or people whose situation is exacerbated by poor and temporary housing issues. So I was delighted to hear Marymead will receive over $26,000 in HACC funding to help it continue to enhance the wellbeing of children, young people and families in times of need.

Tandem Respite is a group that promotes independence and quality of life. Tandem Respite will receive over $23,000 in HACC funding to provide home based support with a support worker in the individual’s or family’s home. Tandem Respite also provides recreational based support through a support worker who takes children and young people out in the community to develop important social skills.

Koomarri, which is based in Phillip in my electorate, assists the disabled and their carers with employment and life skills. Koomarri will receive $144,000 to enhance independent living skills such as cooking, nutrition, health, fitness and computing. Communities@Work, which provides an enormous array of services throughout Canberra and is based in Tuggeranong near my electorate office, will receive $67,000 to buy a new 12-seater bus with wheelchair lifter to transport the frail, aged and disabled to social activities and health services. Other organisations in my electorate that received funding are: Community Options, Australian Red Cross, Community Connections, Just Better Care Community Services and Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation.

I commend these organisations for their great work in helping those most in need in the Canberra community. I also commend and thank the Gillard government, particularly the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, for the HACC funding.

Bulimba Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (9.48 am)—It is with regret that I rise today to expose Labor’s unconscionable treatment of a very valuable community group in my electorate of Bonner, the Bulimba Creek catchment group. This Labor government has refused to honour a promise made by the former minister for the environment, the Hon. Peter Garrett, during the 2010 election campaign to deliver $58,000 to rehabilitate the vulnerable flying fox colony at Aquarium Passage, Hemmant.
The local volunteer Hemmant-Tingalpa conservation group, supported by B4C, applied for a Care for Country grant, which was submitted under the Community Action Grants program, in April 2010. They were subsequently contacted by the previous member for Bonner and the minister for the environment, Peter Garrett, on 11 August, prior to the federal election.

A meeting took place at which Minister Garrett made a verbal commitment to deliver the Care for Country grant of $58,000. This promise was covered by the *Wynnum Herald*, which shows Minister Garrett proudly posing for a photo at the time of the announcement.

However, on 22 October 2010, B4C received a letter from Australian Government Land and Coasts department informing them that their Care for Country grant application had been rejected and placed on a reserve list. Bizarrely, the letter also stated:
Your proposal was not among those recommended for funding at this stage.
Well, that is not what Minister Garrett promised. What an outrageous backflip. B4C is a group that faithfully serves the community and the environment. And like many other community organisations, they trusted what this Labor government said they would deliver if re-elected to govern. This broken promise will gravely impact on B4C’s capability in staffing, staging and preparing the works planned for that site.

If the Gillard government thought that rehabilitation of this flying fox colony was a worthy project during the election, then I ask them to provide the people of Bonner with an explanation as to what has changed in the three months since the election. Clearly what has not changed is Labor’s inability to honour the promises that they make to the community. Labor cannot play politics with community groups. I ask this government to honour its commitment to the B4C and, if they do not, every representative of this government should hang their head in shame.

**La Trobe Electorate: Primary Schools**

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (9.50 am)—Over the last few weeks I have had reason to focus again on education, excellence in teaching and the opportunities for lifelong learning that are available in my electorate of La Trobe. Since parliament last met, I have been fortunate to have visited many educators and students in my electorate and I would like to remark today on a few of them.

I have been extremely impressed by three schools in my electorate in recent weeks—all of them primary schools, all of them with a community focus, all of them creating a sense of generosity and community involvement amongst their students.

Kallista Primary School was kind enough to invite me to its recent fair at which I was able to open the school’s excellent new junior learning centre completed under the BER program. I was impressed by its kitchen garden program and particularly by the dedication of children, staff, parents and others in the school community to an education which values community and our environment.

I recently visited Harkaway Primary School, which is presently finalising its own BER project. I was impressed by the respectful way with which children at Harkaway treated each other, their teachers and parents. In particular I was impressed by the way that children with special needs were assisted by teachers and other students thoughtfully and without fuss.
I was pleased to visit St Thomas More’s Primary School in Belgrave to open its new school hall that was completed recently under the BER program—and not before time. Though the school community was fond of the old hall, it had fallen into some disrepair and the children now have a new oval to play on. The building will make it easier for the school community to gather together for special events, and I have no doubt that they will use it to its full potential.

I was delighted to have had an opportunity to visit Mount Dandenong Preschool last week to present a national excellence in teaching award to a tremendously dedicated teacher, Jo Gaissl. I was able to see Jo in action, teaching a class of littlies and her enthusiasm for education was unmistakeable.

At the other end of the lifelong learning spectrum, I met with Casey U3A for its recent 20th anniversary celebration. The U3A is around 300 members strong and, as many here will know, presents ways for those who are senior residents in our community to continue to learn new skills and talents, and to socialise. The Casey U3A also regularly engages in debate and the exchange of ideas around issues of public policy. I was pleased to have been able to contribute to some of that debate in recent weeks and hope to again in future.

Whatever one’s time in life, there must be good opportunities for education. Education has been, and will continue to be, a central focus of this government in terms of financial commitments and policy and structural reforms to education. Education has obvious value in terms of skill development but, for my part, it has its most significant value in shaping the kind of society that we wish to live in. All of those educators and students I have met with in recent weeks seem to have been similarly disposed and it has been a pleasure to meet them.

Hasluck Electorate: Midland and Gosnells PCYCs

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (9.53 am)—I rise to speak today about some fine examples of groups and organisations that are working hard to provide opportunities for young people in my electorate of Hasluck in a bid to reduce crime.

I would first like to talk about two brilliant groups at the opposite ends of Hasluck but both with a shared goal. The Midland and Gosnells PCYCs are committed to looking after the needs of young people, many of whom have troubled backgrounds. Young people gravitate towards these centres for their normal programs but also in times of trouble. Recently, after the suicide of a young member, these kids—and they are tough kids—descended upon the PCYC to reflect and many of them cried. This is how at home and safe they feel there.

The PCYC is so important for some of the disadvantaged youth who might otherwise have turned to drugs or alcohol to cope with the terrible hand that some of them have been dealt in life. One young man sought counsel at the PCYC after he came home to a traumatic and shocking domestic violence incident. He knew where to turn, and the staff of PCYC took him in with open arms and looked after him during his difficult time.

There are many dedicated people who give so much at the Midland PCYC and the Gosnells PCYC, without asking anything in return. Today I would like to single out two of them. First Class Constable Kay Turner at the Gosnells PCYC is a well-known figure in the community. Not only has she dedicated countless hours to improving the lives of the area’s young people but she was also nominated for the WA Police Officer of the Year Award 2010. In Midland one person who is highly regarded among young people is the police officer Susan Stern. All
the young people I spoke to during the election campaign and since have talked of her as a second mother. For some of them she is the only female role model they have ever known.

Another project that is reaping the rewards of young people flocking to its doors is Midnight Basketball. Proving successful around Australia, the Midland chapter of Midnight Basketball is already showing results. It has a proven program of ensuring its crowd of 12- to 18-year-olds take part in workshops—covering anger management, self-esteem and positive choice decision-making, substance and physical abuse, and learning job skills—before playing basketball. These kids are taught how to work and have fun.

Contrast this positivity in the community and real action that is helping young people with the policies of this wasteful Labor government. Programs like this deserve to be supported and can continue to be successful well into the future, with just a relatively small investment, instead of wasting billions and billions of taxpayer dollars on the NBN or taxing our industries with the MRRT or carbon tax. The Labor Party needs to inject real money into real programs that have real and positive effects.

Lyne Electorate: Employment

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (9.56 am)—I am pleased to hear the member for Hasluck talking about Midnight Basketball; it is a widely supported program, and is expanding on the Mid North Coast. I strongly endorse his words as to the success of that program. On a related theme, employment and education in Aboriginal communities and also in the entire community of the Mid North Coast is something that we have been working on at a community level for some time. I am pleased to report that we are seeing results. Unemployment rates on the Mid North Coast are now some of the lowest that they have ever been. Importantly, the gap between state and national averages and local averages has closed substantially. It is good work by many that has helped achieved this.

There are a few strategic documents that are the foundations of that campaign. The Mid North Coast Group of Councils has been strategic in the work. As an organisation the councils have been working more closely together and therefore being more strategic in the outcomes they achieve. Alongside that, the Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast strategic plan is an important document and an important vehicle for achieving place based outcomes at a community level. In parallel with that, over the last couple of years the Keep Australia Working funding, and work that has been bringing together the whole range of partners at a local level to put together a regional employment plan and actually implement it, have been successful and important parts of the campaign.

On 2 December in Taree we will see the second jobs and skills expo for the Mid North Coast. The first was a huge success, with 400 long-term unemployed Mid North Coast residents getting direct access to jobs on that day. We hope the day in Taree will be a similar success.

The reason for saying all of that is that the Startup Business Development Program was not successful under the jobs funding applications. I hope it can be reconsidered by government. It is a bottom-up start-up business program. It currently has successfully employed about 100 people, not only in someone else’s businesses but in their own businesses. It is a program that has encouraged innovation and entrepreneurship from the ground up. I ask the government to rethink their refusal of support for that program. It is a program that is working. It is a pro-
gram that wants to expand into communities such as Taree, Kempsey, Coffs Harbour and Wagga Wagga. If that can be supported, I think it will do a lot more good work in the employment field. 

(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 28 October, on motion by Mr Shorten:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (10.00 am)—I rise on behalf of the coalition to speak in support of the International Financial Institutions Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. The issues within this bill build on bipartisan support over a number of years. The bill has two key objectives and I will briefly run through each of them. Firstly, as we know from the explanatory memorandum and the minister’s introductory speech, it authorises subscription to additional capital stock in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which is part of the World Bank, at a total cost of around $51.6 million. That additional stock will enable the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to better carry out its purpose of providing loans to developing countries. It will do so in terms of the lending levels necessary at this point in time and in prudential standards that are necessary. Specifically, it authorises a subscription by Australia to 7,128 additional shares in the capital stock at a price of around US$120,635 a share, making that total commitment as I just indicated of $51.6 million.

Secondly, the bill incorporates changes to the agreement to the International Finance Corporation and to the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency Convention. The International Finance Corporation promotes sustainable private sector investment in developing countries and is part of the World Bank group, the largest multilateral source of private sector financing in developing countries, with more than 180 member countries. The changes to the articles of agreement reflect an increase in voice and participation of developing and transition economies. As the minister’s second reading speech pointed out, specifically it will do this by increasing basic votes of those participants and in doing so that will implement a G20 commitment.

The amendments with respect to the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency Convention, are four-fold: to enable insurance coverage of stand-alone debt; to allow changes for the process of investor registration; to allow for greater insurance coverage of existing assets; and to eliminate one requirement relating to coverage of additional non-commercial risks. They have been outlined in detail by the Assistant Treasurer and they are outlined in detail, of course, in the explanatory memorandum. As I said, this is a bill that has bipartisan support. It builds on much of the good work done in the last decade or so and I commend the bill to the House.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (10.04 am)—According to the World Bank, there are currently around 900 million people in the world living on less than a dollar a day. The World Bank calls this extreme poverty. That means there are 900 million people who woke up today to try to feed a
family on approximately what many of us in the room would have spent on our morning coffee.

Oxford development economist Paul Collier, who is visiting Australia next week, has referred to this challenge as that of lifting what he calls the ‘bottom billion’ out of poverty. These are the people living in countries that have experienced stagnant growth rates and where flows of aid in the past have frankly not done what we hoped they would. On balance, aid has raised living standards but we know that mistakes have been made. We know that foreign aid requires more than good intentions.

Effective development economics requires an ongoing assessment of what we do and a critical focus to balance the optimism and the best of intentions that go with our aid programs. I very much appreciated having the opportunity to speak with various groups in my electorate about these challenges we face in overseas aid—groups such as Micah Challenge, World Vision and Oxfam.

Essential to what Australia does in the foreign aid portfolio is the modernisation of the multilateral banks. These institutions have been critical in the fight against global poverty and it is important we make sure that we as Australians do what we can to make sure that the multilateral banks continue to respond to new challenges. Australia’s engagement with multilateral organisations extends the reach and scope of Australia’s country and regional aid programs.

The World Bank is one of the central partners in Australia’s aid program. Its convening power allows it to lead donor coordination at a country level and a sectoral level. In days like these it is worth mentioning that the World Bank is a bank that we can be proud of.

The International Financial Institutions Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 will do two things. Firstly, it will give effect to Australia’s G20 commitments to ensure that the multilateral banks have sufficient capital to be as responsive and flexible as possible in the environment that follows the global financial crisis. Secondly, the bill will also allow Australia to adopt a proposed amendment to the articles of agreement to the International Finance Corporation—the IFC—and four amendments to the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency Convention that have recently been adopted by that agency’s council of governors.

Australia’s increased investment will also allow the World Bank to provide lending to middle income countries, such as Indonesia and China, to support their recovery. The investment will also provide greater resources for those in the ‘bottom billion’ and will also allow for more rigorous evaluation of what works in increasing living standards and what does not work.

Growth in developing countries during the period of the global financial crisis fell from an average of about seven per cent in the preceding five years before the GFC to just 1.6 per cent in 2009. That has meant that an additional 64 million people around the world have been thrown into extreme poverty—the equivalent of feeding a family on less than the price of a cup of Australian coffee.

World Bank lending is playing a critical role in supporting recovery in developing economies and therefore supporting recovery in the global economy. Some developing countries are doing well—China of course comes to mind—but the crisis is going to have significant lasting impacts by increasing the poverty of the most vulnerable people in the world.
The World Bank and the IMF played a key role in the crisis. Indeed, I cannot resist pointing out on this occasion that when the IMF looked at Australia’s policy response, it was one of the international organisations—though by no means the only one—that noted that Australia’s fiscal stimulus was timely and appropriate to the needs of the crisis. Direct responses included US$750 billion by the IMF and US$235 billion by the World Bank. In its recent meetings, the G20 has committed to achieving an extra US$350 billion in capital increases for the World Bank, which will allow the World Bank to nearly double its lending.

The G20 is also committed to ensuring that developing countries increase their voting power within the World Bank. It is these voice reforms which the legislation today is going towards. It is important that Australia demonstrates commitment to the G20 agenda by ensuring prompt implementation of these reforms.

Australia has much to gain by increasing its support for the World Bank. Subscription to more shares shows Australia acting as a good international citizen, particularly in response to the global financial crisis. It is also in our national interest to live in a world with less poverty. Australians have shown through their individual contributions to non-government aid that they believe passionately that a world without poverty is a goal worth striving towards. I believe Australians want their government to work towards the same goal. The capital increase demonstrates the government’s willingness to be a global leader on issues related to development and our commitment to the World Bank. It fulfils the G20 commitment to ensure adequate capital resources. In this sense, the reforms we are speaking about today are of a piece with the review of the aid program announced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs this week.

These amendments introduce no substantial changes to Australia’s obligations to either the IFC or the MIGA. Australia’s actual shareholding will remain unchanged as a result of the increase in basic votes, while its voting share will decline marginally—and I will come to that issue in a moment.

First, I want to briefly mention what the World Bank and its various arms do. The overall goal of the World Bank is to provide financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world, but it does that through five separate arms: (1) the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, is the oldest arm of the World Bank and its goal is to reduce poverty in middle-income countries and creditworthy poorer countries, operating in the traditional way that the World Bank has since its inception; (2) a newer arm of the World Bank, the International Development Association, IDA, focuses on the world’s poorest countries. Their work is complemented by that of the International Finance Corporation, IFC, the MIGA and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes; (3) the IFC contributes to the World Bank’s overall poverty reduction mandate by operating with the private sector in both middle- and low-income countries. The IFC is the largest provider of multilateral financing for the private sector in the developing world; (4) the MIGA promotes foreign investment into emerging economies by offering political risk insurance or guarantees to investors and lenders. It also provides technical assistance and advice to help developing countries attract and retain that critical foreign investment that can allow them to grow out of poverty; and finally (5) the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes is an autonomous institution that supports foreign investment by providing international facilities for conciliation and arbitration of investment disputes between foreign investors and their host countries.
The World Bank’s work focuses on overcoming poverty through inclusive and sustainable globalisation. The World Bank seeks to alleviate poverty in developing countries by building the climate for investment, jobs and sustainable growth and by investing in and empowering poor people to participate in development. Participatory development is a critical arm of the new strategy to bring more people in the world out of poverty. Together, the arms of the World Bank provide low-interest loans, interest-free credits and grants to developing countries for a wide array of purposes that include investments in education, health and public administration; infrastructure; financial and private sector development; agriculture and environment; and natural resource management.

The reforms that this bill envisages are part of a new World Bank strategy that arose in its 2010 meetings. The World Bank has set its strategic priorities as follows: to target the poor and the vulnerable, to create opportunities for growth, to promote global collective action, to strengthen governance, to manage risk and, importantly, to prepare for crises. Australia is a strong supporter of the new World Bank strategy. Australia is supporting the World Bank’s key role in promoting development. It is worth remembering that the World Bank only employs about 10,000 people—half the number of the Australian Taxation Office—and over 3,000 of those employees work in the more than 100 country offices in the developing world. Many of my friends, including Patrick Barron, have spent time working in those different World Bank offices. I have seen firsthand, in visiting the World Bank offices in Jakarta, the important work that is done in those field offices as well as in the central office in Washington, DC.

I mentioned that I would come to the issue of reduced voting power, because it is obviously an issue that raises an eyebrow to be bringing forward legislation which reduces Australia’s voting share. The first point that is worth making about this is that the reduction is very small. Australia currently holds 1.49 per cent of voting power, and this will be reduced to 1.33 per cent following the second phase of voice reforms implemented in this bill. It is a small decrease which is part of a large package of reforms, recognising that the World Bank has to keep pace with changes in the world economic environment and that, if we do not modernise the World Bank, the institution risks becoming out of date and not serving those who need it the most.

Shareholding in the World Bank, including the IBRD and the IFC, is subject to periodic capital increases. Australia last subscribed to additional shares through the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Share Increase) Act 1988 and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (General Capital Increase) Act 1989. Australia’s total shareholding in the IBRD totals 24,464 shares and in the IFC totals 47,329 shares.

In conclusion, Australia has been part of the multilateral banks since the very beginning. Indeed, you might ask why we were not there from 1944. The answer actually comes back to the history of my own party when it was first faced with the Bretton Woods agreement in 1944. In his biography of Ben Chifley, David Day points out that it was Chifley who wanted his colleagues to ratify the Bretton Woods agreement immediately in 1944.

Mr Broadbent—A very good author.

Dr LEIGH—Indeed. But he delayed it because he faced considerable opposition within caucus, particularly from Eddie Ward, and he eventually pushed back. As David Day writes:
Chifley had a vision of a postwar Australia that would put the 1930’s depression behind it forever. It would be an outward looking country engaged with the world through trade, diplomacy and economic aid.

After his caucus colleagues supported the Bretton Woods agreement—though only by 33 votes to 24—Chifley told this House:

Perhaps the experiment will fair. But no country which has any regard for the cause of humanity can, for some selfish reason or because some ghosts of the past happen to walk or because of fears created by their experience of a financial and economic depression, refuse to become parties to this agreement. If we have any love for mankind and desire to free future generations from the terrible happenings of the last 30 years, we must put our faith in these organisations.

Australia has done that. The ninth World Bank president—and one of its most successful—was Australian-born James Wolfensohn, who served from 1995 to 2005. More broadly, Australia as a nation has been a consistent supporter of the work of the multilateral banks. As the bank modernises, so must our policy response. We owe nothing less to the world’s poorest.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (10.17 am)—I begin by thanking all members who contributed to the debate—the member for Casey and the member for Fraser for his very wide-ranging and informed contribution to this debate on the International Financial Institutions Legislation Amendment Bill 2010, which will implement parts of the reform agenda of the World Bank.

The first purpose of the bill is to amend the International Monetary Agreements Act 1947 to enable Australia to subscribe to its additional capital share at the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The second purpose of the bill is to amend the International Finance Corporation Act 1955 to allow Australia to adopt a proposed amendment to articles of agreement of the International Finance Corporation and to amend the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency Act 1997 to adopt four amendments to the MIGA convention which have been recently adopted by the MIGA Council of Governors. In so doing, the bill will deliver on the commitment at the G20 Pittsburgh and Toronto summits to ensure that the international financial institutions have appropriate capital for their resourcing needs as well as the commitment to ensure developing countries increase their voting power at the World Bank.

In its quick and effective response to the crisis, the G20 has built a reputation as the premier forum for international economic cooperation. Recognising the central role of the international financial institutions in mobilising critical financing in response to the financial and economic crisis, the G20 committed to achieving US$350 billion in capital increases for the multilateral development banks.

Growth in developing countries fell from an average of about seven per cent in the five years preceding the crisis to 1.6 per cent in 2009, resulting in an additional 64 million people living in extreme poverty in 2010. The World Bank is playing a critical role in supporting recovery in developing economies and, therefore, the global economy. As the global recovery still faces significant challenges, it is important that G20 countries follow through on these commitments by implementing the necessary changes domestically. Australia’s capital contribution would be at a cost of around US$51.6 million to be paid in over five years. This subscription appeared as a capital measure in the 2010-11 budget and does not impact on the budget bottom line. Australia’s contribution would represent a very small part of Australia’s aid program over this period.
The G20 also committed to ongoing and important governance reforms to make the international financial institutions more transparent, accountable and effective. The capital increase will implement the important voice reforms agreed by shareholders of the World Bank, which will increase the voting power of developing and transition countries. The G20 endorsed this package of voice reforms, which will strengthen the long-term effectiveness and legitimacy of the World Bank Group.

This bill will allow Australia to adopt a proposed amendment to the articles of agreement of the IFC that will improve the voice and participation of developing and transition economies in the IFC by increasing their basic votes, implementing the G20 commitment. The bill will also allow Australia to adopt four amendments to the MIGA Convention recently adopted by MIGA’s council of governors. This will modernise MIGA’s mandate and expand the agency’s scope, allowing a greater range of projects to be eligible for MIGA coverage.

These reforms will enhance the relevance of these institutions. It is important that Australia demonstrates its commitment to the G20 agenda by ensuring prompt implementation of these reforms. Strengthening the legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of the international financial institutions will make them even stronger partners for us in the future.

Supporting this bill will enable Australia to demonstrate its leadership globally, as well as supporting recovery from the global recession in our region. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed 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 SCHULTZ (Hume) (10.23 am)—The 2010 federal election was the fifth occasion on which I have contested the federal seat of Hume. At the outset, I wish to thank the constituents of the Hume electorate for their generosity in electing me once again to be their representative in the historical federal seat of Hume. I would particularly like to acknowledge the significant single contribution made by those people who worked on polling booths and scrutinised in what can only be described as the most atrocious and physically trying conditions I can remember.

Cold piercing wind, rain and low temperatures tested these loyal people who stoically stood their ground and worked to ensure the Liberal vote was maximised. Redistribution leading up to a federal election invariably creates difficulties for candidates in marshalling suffi-
cient numbers of people to work for them in the new areas inherited through the redistribution process. In my case, despite not having represented the Weddin, Cowra and Cootamundra shires since 2001, people rallied to my call for support, and I once again thank them all for it.

During the campaign, there were many issues of concern raised by many people from all walks of life who were concerned about the direction in which the current government was taking this country and how it was impacting on their lives. Escalating electricity and gas costs were impacting on the ability of pensioners and low-income families to maintain their household budgets and were so bad in some areas they were cutting back on daily food consumption or restricting the time they were using their heating and cooking appliances within their homes.

Small business is also being dramatically affected by the increase in energy costs, rent increases and Fair Work Australia IR laws to the extent they advised me they are facing three options: (a) downsizing their workforce, with casual workers being the first to go, (b) downsizing their workforce and restructuring their business so they can absorb increased operating costs and maintain a viable business, and (c) counting their financial losses and shutting down their business.

Introducing a carbon tax, which the experts say will increase the cost of electricity by a further 19 per cent to 26 per cent, will further compound the problems centred around the ability of pensioners, low-income earners and small business people to live within the tight budgetary constraints forced on them by the ever-increasing cost of living. It does not stop there for small business. They are now starting to feel the pressures bearing down on them from the Julia Gillard Fair Work Australia industrial award, more specifically the retail industry award.

These pressures can be best described by reading correspondence forwarded by a constituent to Senator Ursula Stephens following on from a letter of response from the then Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard, as a result of representations made by Senator Stephens to the Deputy Prime Minister on my constituents’ behalf. I now quote the correspondence in total in the interests of highlighting the indifference shown by the Labor government via its current Prime Minister, in her previous role as the former Deputy Prime Minister, to small business and the contribution it delivers to our nation’s economy and employment. This letter contains a significant and compelling message:

Good Morning Senator Stephens,

Thank you for forwarding the response by the then Deputy Prime Minister, Ms Gillard, to my and my bakery team’s concerns regarding the commencement of the new General Retail Industry Award (2010). Firstly, she contends that there was “wide consultation” and “extensive input” into the award modernisation. Well please let me know how many small businesses, corner stores, coffee shops, hardware stores, etc. were involved. These little business people are unrepresented because, unlike big business or trade unions, we do not have people on our payroll to look out for all these “opportunities” to make submissions nor do we have the time or people to prepare them.

I note in Ms Gillard’s response she advises that it is Government Policy that those who work “unsociable hours” should be compensated with extra reward in the form of penalty rates for late nights and weekends, etc.

In these modern days, surely it is up to the employee to decide whether work hours are “unsociable” and for them to decide whether they wish to work those hours or not. Some don’t want to work weekends or public holidays. That’s fine. But many do want to work—and without penalty rates.
We have employees who now have a proper job in their home town, who now do not have to spend 2 hours a day travelling in their own vehicles (no public transport in the bush) at a cost to them of over $100 a week. They are happy not to have to rely on Centrelink payments. Many have said they are not interested in penalty rates—they are just so happy to have a job in great business, and, in their town. No-one is compelled to work at all and often when no one wants to work on a public holiday, the proprietors fill the spots. No penalty rates for them. What makes employees better, more valuable people than their employers?

Just for your information a person over the age of 21 working on a public holiday costs our business over $50 per hour now. With the recent increase in the national wage and the introduction of this new award regime that cost will rise over $60 per hour, so you can see why most small businesses are just crumbling under the pressure and closing on weekends and public holidays and some (and a growing number) closing altogether. Employing people in small business is now mostly seen as pure stupidity and a recipe for financial and industrial disaster. We have to add a surcharge to our prices on weekends and public holidays and we cop substantial flack from the public for that.

The sentiment in business (the “small” business industry—not the big companies) is that it is just too hard. Any business that has employees is poison and is becoming pretty much unsaleable.

And interestingly enough, talking to government funded employment organisations as I was recently, they confirm that (in their words) they feel “very sorry for the owners of any small business that employs people “because” all the odds are against them.

By the same token as responsible employers, in order to retain the services of our employees we must look after them, ensure their workplace is safe and that they (in their minds - not ours) are fairly rewarded for the work they do.

That surely is the employee’s decision—not a decision to be made by someone stuck in a small office in a capital city who is well aware that the small business just cannot afford to close as they would suffer great losses and possibly lose their mortgaged home.

Secondly, the Federal Labor Government and the Trade Union movement happily go about lifting wage rates and penalty rates when, in our business, we have had no requests from any employee for such adjustments. The trade union may have members who are employed in the large industry companies who may be members of the Baking Manufacturers Industry Association of Australia (BMIAA) but very few, if any at all, of the small country bakeries/coffee outlets are members of that association. So what about consulting with us? Get out and visit (not orchestrated promo visits) some small businesses and get the message.

The Federal Labor Government and the Trade Union Movement really need to be aware that the big manufacturers don’t really care about wage adjustments because “nobody pays”. The CEO doesn’t pay the wages, the Directors don’t pay the wages. It just comes out of the bank account. And maybe the shareholders get 1 cent less in their dividend or more likely—the manufacturer just lifts their price to their customer and the price of bread in the supermarket rises by 5 cents.

But in my little businesses (and all the others) the extra costs come out of MY pocket and these award changes will cost ME $80,000 pa. That is, it adds 20% to my wage costs. And we have explained this to our employees and they are aghast and agree that it is not fair or workable as, in order to get some return on investment, jobs will go and/or prices will rise.

So we have had no information or warning about this catastrophic financial free kick against small business.

The Award system merely reduces all employees to mediocrity. The hard working employee gets the award, the slack one who takes smoke breaks and gets in 10 minutes late, and takes ‘sickies’, gets the award also. And of course we cannot dismiss the slack one thanks to the Unfair Dismissal rules. But can they decide they don’t want to work today? Of course. And what can we do about it. Nothing!!
And it shouldn’t be the number of employees that determines whether a business is small or large. Why don’t you consider the profitability as well. That would knock quite a few from large to small status.

And I would say to the ALP it is long overdue that the Labor Government really needs to understand that when a business person invests in a business they should be looking to achieve a clear profit of 20—30% on investment. In fact the government should give them a medal or a grant per employee to compensate for the grief. Because at present, we risk our homes, health and families for little reward. By the way—a tax deduction is of little benefit if there is not a profit.

And I note Ms Gillard refers to IFAs and that IFAs can be used provided that employees can be no worse off overall. Is there a like provision in the industrial relations rules somewhere that ensures that the employer is no worse off overall as well. I don’t think so.

So again, don’t swan around shopping centres getting photo opportunities for Ms Gillard allegedly consulting with small business. Come out to the coal face and sit down in the office and see the small business owners battle to put a few dollars in their pockets after making sure that all their employees are no worse off’.

And finally, perhaps the ALP forget that I am a worker myself—and a bloody hard worker. A lot harder worker than most of my employees. I’m the one who opens my accounting office at 7.30am and am still here at 7.32pm most days of the week. I’m the one who actually creates wealth by creating 8 jobs in my practice. Not any government. And if that’s not stupid enough of me I open a bakery 1.5 hours away that I visit weekly and get back to Goulburn at 12.30am after a 6.30am start the previous day. And there I created another 20 jobs. And who pays my super, holidays, sick leave and long service leave.

And just a fascinating comment from a knowledgeable person on recent developments in the PMs job and Australia generally.

It was with interest I was discussing superannuation matters with a client who has been working in Australia for many years as a foreign correspondent for a number of European News agencies. He is a citizen of Australia as are his wife and children. They have a small rural block.

We were discussing his super which is currently in a Swiss managed fund in Switzerland and I suggested that it may be prudent to move the super into an Australian Fund. His reply was a bit shocking for an Aussie. He replied, ‘not on your life. I do not trust this government. They have already fiddled with super and I do not trust them to leave super alone. Far better I leave it where it is and I can sleep at night’. And anyway, he added, ‘I do not want my super invested in a country where the person who is promoted at an election as the alternative PM, and elected as such, can be ousted by non-elected people. When that happens in other countries its called a coup. So we have seen a Trade Union coup of the Australian PM.’

I could not argue with him.

I do apologise for my very long winded response, but I do look forward to your comments to my, and most small business concerns with the Australian Trade Union Party.

Yours sincerely, Grant L Pearce

As I understand it, to date this gentleman has not had a response from Senator Stephens.

The lack of infrastructure commitment by the federal government, including road funding, was raised repeatedly during the campaign, and the Barton Highway duplication between the Hume Highway and the ACT attracted considerable public debate following a number of tragic accidents.

Accident statistics sourced from police show that from 1 January 2000 to 7 October 2010 there were some 300 crashes on the single-carriageway section of the Barton Highway. The statistics show that there were 86 injuries and 13 fatalities in that 10-year period caused by
vehicles crossing the road for various reasons and colliding with an oncoming vehicle, tree or embankment. Overtaking manoeuvres where oncoming vehicles were brought into play and vehicles being hit from behind and forced into oncoming traffic were also attributed as causes for some of these crashes. Police officers say there appear to be no common denominator to these accidents. Some involved alcohol, some were on wet days, some involved front-wheel-drive vehicles and some were fatigue related.

Police quite obviously are unable to say that dual carriageways would have prevented all of the fatality and injury accidents but, from their experience, they believe dual carriageways do prevent contact with oncoming vehicles, thereby minimising the seriousness of most collisions. As an addendum to that, I note the massive loss of life that occurred on the Hume Highway in the sections that were single carriageway until such time as the dual carriageway system was funded and built.

Unfortunately, successive ministers from both sides of the political spectrum—and the side that I represent is one of them—have delayed and obfuscated on the obvious need to urgently duplicate this significant piece of vital road infrastructure, despite various reports from motor organisations such as the NRMA, which classed the Barton Highway as one of the worst roads in the country. Significant criticism centred on the fact that it is an arterial route into the Australian Capital Territory.

In the case of the current minister, it is apparent from my observations during the election campaign that he believes the covering of a saleyard complex to protect domestic animals is more important than reducing serious injuries and fatalities on highways such as the Barton Highway.

Time does not allow me to discuss all of the issues of concern raised with me but, interestingly, what did concern me during the campaign period was the lack of policies centred around agriculture—another savage indictment not only of the agriculture minister of the government of the day but previous agriculture ministers and shadow agriculture ministers. After just under 10 years of drought, serious rainfall commenced in December 2009 and continued to fall throughout 2010, giving farmers much needed relief and a promise of the best crop season for many years. That promise has come to fruition but, as is always the case in agriculture, the crops, whilst being acclaimed as the best in 20 years are being subjected to the elements of Mother Nature which threatens to take the gloss off what should be the most positive financial outcome farmers have experienced in a decade.

Those elements include the threat of a locust plague, the level of which has not been seen in some 60 years and which I have raised in this place a few weeks back, and continual rainfall, which has saturated the land to the extent that it could damage crops, thereby affecting yield and quality. It does not stop there because, due to the season that we have had since the drought broke in December 2009, we have had a massive build-up of fuel on public and private land. The risk of devastating firestorms is out there and there does not appear to be too much movement with regard to governments at all political levels getting off their backsides to be ready for that.

Then we had the debacle of the Murray-Darling Basin plan, released by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority on 8 October 2010 which, without due consideration and proper consultative process with the irrigators and rural communities, threatens the very survival of the irrigators who produce the food within the basin. Rural towns reliant on the economic benefits...
derived from those irrigation areas are under threat from this ill-conceived ambush of rural Australia.

How could any government be so ignorant and blind to the harsh reality of the vulnerability of farmers, who are financially, physically and mentally exhausted after years of debilitating drought and little, if any, income? Fortunately, the angry reaction of farmers, small business and rural residents within the basin has forced government to take two steps backward and reassess this cold-hearted, jack-booted approach to an issue that can be resolved cooperatively with the very people who rely on the environment for a living.

Farmers have proved time and time again that they have the commitment and the ability to recognise the need to conserve our most precious resource, water. As an example, apple and grape growers use computer-driven micro jet watering systems triggered by sensors in the ground which tell the computer when the vines and the trees need water. This technology has assisted some apple-growing areas to produce five times the volume of apples with the same amount of water they used 100 years ago. That shows the commitment of people who rely on the land and the environment for their living. That is the commitment that they have to conserve our very precious resource—water—and that is something that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority should take on board.

Why has the incompetence of government allowed the commonsense approach of addressing the modernisation of water infrastructure, which was funded by the previous government to the tune of $5.9 billion, to be dumped when it had the ability to make the system more efficient and continue to produce food efficiently, maintain the economic viability of the industry, and help support towns reliant on the most efficient producers of food in the world? Hopefully the Senate inquiry into the Murray-Darling Basin hopeless, industry- and soul-destroying plan will come up with the answers, putting the management of the Murray-Darling Basin into perspective. I also trust they will look at the history of the system which has seen Mother Nature put under such stress before that the rivers in the system have dried up.

I thank the House for the opportunity of putting these things on record, particularly the very detailed letter from the small business man in the town of Boorowa. It is a classic example of how small business people are being affected by the decisions of government. I thank the House for its indulgence.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON** (Wills) (10.43 am)—I want to thank the people of Wills for putting their trust and confidence in me for a sixth time to represent them in this place. Indeed, Labor in Wills improved its two-party preferred vote and we stand on the electoral pendulum at 72.6 per cent as the second-strongest Labor seat in Australia. It is a source of considerable pride. I thank my campaign team and my family for the steadfast support that they have provided to me in good times and in bad. They give me the strength to go on and I am very much in their debt.

In August last year I raised in the parliament the issue of population, advancing two propositions: first, that the world has a population problem and, second, that Australia has a population problem. I was therefore really pleased to hear the Prime Minister say, in her first significant statement after she became Prime Minister in June, that she did not believe in a ‘big Australia’. Big Australia had become the shorthand expression for the 36 million population that Treasury has said Australia will reach by 2050 if we run a net overseas migration program of 180,000 per annum between now and 2050.
Prime Minister Gillard pursued this conviction into the federal election campaign, telling her own constituents:

I do not support the idea of a ‘big Australia’ with arbitrary targets of 40 million people. We need to stop and take a breath.

She said that she did not want us hurtling towards a big Australia and that we should not sacrifice our wonderful environment or our unique quality of community life.

Ultimately, I do not think population was a major vote changer in the recent election. The Liberal opposition neutralised our foray into this area by advocating a cut in net overseas migration to 170,000 per annum. We were able to counter this thrust in turn by pointing out that net overseas migration is already trending back to this number. The fact is that the 170,000 figure will still give us a population of 35 million by 2050—not much to excite the voters there.

There is no doubt in my mind that, if Prime Minister Gillard had put her opposition to a big Australia into tangible form, by setting a lower net migration target, or if the Leader of the Opposition had picked a lower status quo altering number, there were votes there for the taking. Given the closeness of the election result, it is something worth thinking about. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister’s clear opposition to a big Australia has created a strong expectation around Australia that we will see a change in direction from the rapid population growth path of recent times, once the panels she has appointed to investigate the issues have done their work and reported early next year.

Of course this will be an ongoing battle. The big business and property developer forces, who are both the cheer squad for and beneficiaries of rapid population growth, have no intention of submitting quietly. They will continue to press for high migration at every available opportunity. They claim that high migration improves our standard of living. Given this incessant claim, it is very interesting to examine the issue of living standards. There is no doubt that many people today are experiencing real cost-of-living pressures. There is no doubt in my mind that the rising cost of living and the difficulty ordinary Australians are having in making ends meet have been behind the fall in Labor’s electoral standing this year. Indeed, I heard the opposition take this issue up in a matter of public importance during the first sitting week of the parliament after the election. They had plenty to say on what they assured us was the government’s failure to act to help ordinary Australians with cost-of-living pressures. They also waxed lyrical with concerns about the impact of action to tackle climate change on the cost of living. What they did not produce was anything at all which might assist people who are presently battling to make ends meet. Given the opposition has produced no plan of any kind to deal with cost-of-living pressures, I have come to the conclusion, unfortunate but unavoidable, that the opposition is not fair dinkum about tackling cost-of-living pressures and is simply seeking to make political capital from them.

But they are at least right about the existence of cost-of-living pressures. These pressures arise from a number of sources, but the key cause, the most important cause, is population growth. Population growth leads to greater demand for products, and that greater demand puts upward pressure on prices. This is particularly evident in our basic resources of land, water and energy. These resources have limits, and population pressures are forcing us to turn to more expensive methods of meeting demand, such as desalination plants for water and deep-water drilling for petrol.
The cost-of-living pressures are most clearly evident in electricity and gas prices and local council rates. Over the past 10 years, electricity prices have almost doubled across Australia’s eight capital cities. The most populated cities, Melbourne and Sydney, have seen the highest price rises, and prices have more than doubled in the past 10 years. In real terms, across Australia, electricity prices have increased by over 40 per cent over the 10 years. Melbourne prices have risen by over 50 per cent in real terms—52 per cent. So have Sydney’s—51 per cent. In Brisbane, real electricity prices have gone up by over 38 per cent, and in Adelaide real electricity prices have gone up by over 26 per cent.

You might think that more people—a growing population—would lead to economies of scale and lead to lower electricity prices, but you would be wrong. Rising electricity prices do not just show up on the household bills I have referred to; they also show up in the rising cost of electricity per kilowatt hour. Instead of rising population causing lower prices, it leads to a need for extra infrastructure and therefore higher prices. The more crowded a city becomes, the higher the cost of doing business. Congestion costs kick in and just maintaining electricity infrastructure becomes more expensive. In Victoria, electricity and water bills are up 25 to 60 per cent from 2005 and gas is 20 per cent higher. Prices in Sydney since 2005 have jumped over 60 per cent, and in Brisbane by over 50 per cent.

It is untrue—and mischievously untrue—to assert that rising electricity prices are a consequence of carbon trading or measures to reduce carbon emissions. It is, or should be, well known that Australia has no emissions trading scheme or carbon tax. As for other measures, as the Clean Energy Council has pointed out, the cost of supporting residential solar power is a ‘drop in the ocean’ compared to ‘billions of dollars in network costs’. It points out:

The Australian Energy Regulator estimates the cost of improving the electricity network in NSW at more than $14 billion over five years. Based on the 50 MW installed under the NSW Solar Bonus Scheme, the cost of solar electricity from the current scheme is less than 4 per cent of this.

Rising electricity prices hit pensioners and the poor particularly hard. Melbourne has had a very cold winter—and the weather during the federal election campaign was no exception. One of my campaign workers visited a woman pensioner who had asked for our assistance with a postal vote. The inside of the house was as chilly as the outside. When my campaign worker inquired about this, the woman said that she could not afford to heat her house. This woman was enduring a harsh winter without any artificial heating. It is far from satisfactory. For many pensioners, rising electricity bills have made it very hard to make ends meet.

The situation with water bills and gas bills is not much better. Again, a rising population is putting upward pressure on water and gas prices. We have already got at the easy water and the easy gas. Augmenting our supplies involves things like desalination plants and pipelines, which come at greater expense than our present supplies.

It is a similar unhappy story with local council rates. I always expected that more people in my municipality would lead to lower rate bills due to economies of scale and more people sharing the rate load. The opposite has been the case. In nominal terms, council rates in Melbourne have increased by over 100 per cent—more than doubled—from 2000 to 2010. In real terms, rates have increased by over 48 per cent. Across the eight capital cities, rates have increased by 60 per cent in the last 10 years and, in real terms, rates have increased by over 23 per cent. Sydney council rates, which are subject to capping by the state government, have increased by less but have still risen over the last 10 years by 41 per cent and over 10 per cent.
in real terms. Regrettably, this pattern of increasing rates is set to continue. Victorians will pay an average of $79 more in their rates in 2010-11—up by over six per cent from last year based on the draft council budgets. This is of course above the CPI and again underscores the impact of rising population on local government finances.

These costs of population growth—rising electricity prices, rising water prices, rising gas prices, rising council rates—are being borne most of all by those who can least afford them; fixed-income earners and pensioners in particular. It is all very well for the opposition to cry crocodile tears over cost-of-living pressures on ordinary Australians, but if you are genuine about this problem you will come up with an alternative proposal to the present arrangements. The opposition has not done so.

I believe there are things we can do. We are not powerless about electricity prices. At present electricity prices are overseen by regulatory authorities. For example, in New South Wales it is the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, and in Queensland it is the Queensland Competition Authority. It is said that price-cap regulation is only a transitional measure during the development of retail markets and that governments are moving towards the eventual removal of price caps. Looking at the evidence of the past decade or two of electricity privatisation and price deregulation, I am concerned about what this trend will mean for household electricity consumers, particularly pensioners and others on fixed incomes.

I do not agree with the moves towards electricity price deregulation. Indeed, I think it is high time pensioners and other household electricity consumers got some relief from ever-rising electricity prices. I think regulatory authorities should limit electricity price rises for household consumers to the percentage amount by which pensions rise. This would give pensioners and fixed-income earners some badly needed respite.

I urge electricity pricing regulatory authorities to consider the hardship which the rises over the past decade have caused and to think about pensioners who are struggling to make ends meet when they consider applications for price rises. I know there will be objections to this. Some people will say the market should set prices, but electricity is an essential item and electricity consumers have not been able to prevent prices rising way above CPI by shopping around. Consumers need government to be involved in the price of such an essential item.

Some people will ask: how will electricity companies invest in new infrastructure if they cannot charge higher prices? My response is: at present the costs of rapid population growth are being borne by ordinary household consumers in general and pensioners and those on fixed incomes in particular. These costs should be borne by the beneficiaries of growth—the property industry. Electricity companies should not be prevented from recovering the costs of new infrastructure from the new developments which necessitate it. Household consumers should not be asked to subsidise infrastructure development over which they have no control. I also know there will be objections from some people who say that we need electricity prices to rise as a pathway to cutting our carbon footprint. They believe rising prices will encourage people to reduce their electricity use and/or turn to renewable cleaner sources of energy generation.

The first problem with this view is that it is too vulnerable to political scare campaigns. We hear it from the opposition all the time and it is going on right around the world. The second problem with this view is that it does not do justice to the real hardship experienced by low-income earners when electricity prices rise. I know that there were provisions in Labor’s car-
bon pollution reduction scheme to compensate low income earners for the impact of higher electricity prices on them. I also acknowledge the work of organisations like the Brotherhood of St Laurence which have engaged in the climate debate in a constructive way, seeking to tackle the carbon problem while at the same time protecting the interests of the poorest people in our society. But it remains the fact that low-income people are doing it tough now and they are entitled to get some relief from ever-rising electricity prices.

The third problem with this view is that it may have been acting as a climate change panacea, distracting attention from many other good and worthy options for reducing carbon emissions. I think there are many different ways of skinning the climate cat, and some of the more important ones lie in the areas of agriculture, soil carbon and re-establishing natural landscapes.

I want to deal with the claim that Australia needs more migrants because we are short of workers. It is just not so. Our unemployment rate is over five per cent. We have over 422,000 Australians looking for work. Many of them are young Australians aged between 15 and 24 who really need to get off to the right start in life. In October it was reported that Broadmeadows has an unemployment rate of 15.9 per cent. Broadmeadows is just beyond the northern boundary of my electorate and I know it very well. According to the 2006 census, of the people in Broadmeadows aged 25 and over, over 50 per cent were born in non-English-speaking countries. For men aged 25 to 44, over 47 per cent of the non-English-speaking country born reported income of less than $399 per week. This is entrenched unemployment, poverty and disadvantage.

If we continue running a high migration program, they might go and work in iron ore mines in the Pilbara but the evidence is not promising. It suggests that significant numbers will simply get caught up in a cycle of unemployment, poverty and disadvantage, as has happened in Broadmeadows. So I suggest that, before we succumb to the wailing of employers crying skill shortages, we put our talents to finding work for those 15.9 per cent unemployed in Broadmeadows, who are entitled to our attention. I do not care whether we find them work in Broadmeadows or in the Pilbara, but let us not talk about skill shortages again until we have got them into the workplace.

While high migration is being used as a battering ram to keep down the pay of ordinary workers, CEO salaries are skyrocketing. The ACTU has released a survey today showing that the typical CEO is taking home almost a hundred times the pay of the average worker. Executive pay at Australia’s 50 largest companies rose by nearly a million dollars, over 17 per cent, last year while the average pay of a full-time worker rose just $3,200, or five per cent. One of the great things about Australia has been its egalitarian nature, where Jack was as good as his master. But if the boss is being paid 100 times as much as an average worker, is Australia really still the land of the fair go? I believe the ACTU’s proposals to limit the tax deductibility of salaries to a million dollars or to cap executive salaries to a multiple of the earnings of ordinary workers have merit and should be seriously considered by this parliament.

Returning to the impact of council rates, there is one state which retains the power to cap rates—New South Wales, where the minister for local government annually determines the amount by which councils can increase their general revenue. Given the lack of state government powers, rising council rates are not easily addressed but it is a serious problem. I was recently advised that the former Kodak site in East Coburg recently sold for $79 million to the
Perth based Satterley Property Group, almost double what Urbex is believed to have paid for it in 2006. The reason that Urbex was able to double its money in just four years is of course that the land value has risen. Who underwrites this spectacular land value rise and the spectacular profit for Urbex that accompanies it? That would be the long-suffering ratepayers of Moreland whose rates pay for the community infrastructure which surrounds the Kodak site and makes the land as valuable as it is. They also underwrite the rising value of the land by tolerating the downside of the increased population: traffic congestion, more competition for community facilities and open space, loss of privacy and sunlight which comes with high-rise et cetera. My view is that local councils should not acquiesce in or, even worse, encourage high rise monstrosities which put pressure on local infrastructure and reduce the quality of life for local residents.

One community in America which is campaigning for a stable population has come up with a campaign slogan which goes, ‘Don’t build it and they won’t come.’ The property lobby will complain that this would make housing less affordable but the fact is that it is their high migration policies which have damaged housing affordability. Unless and until we reduce high migration and net overseas migration to the levels of the early 1990s we will continue to see housing affordability decline. A home of your own, the great Australian dream, will disappear as surely as it has done in other countries which have gone down the high migration, high population road, and our young people will have been let down. It is time we cut the rapid migration program, stabilised our population and got on with providing the infrastructure and services that people need. Unless and until we do this, both federal and state governments from whichever political party will be dogs chasing their tails, forever in catch-up mode, unable to really help ordinary people with cost of living pressures or other pressures of daily life and wondering why it is that the voters do not seem to like us.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (11.02 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, I rise to give my address-in-reply. I would first like to congratulate you on your selection to the Speaker’s panel. If I had been in the main chamber I would have been congratulating the Speaker on his re-election to the panel.

For the people of Swan I would like to get a few things on the record following the 2007 election. I thank them for giving me the opportunity to serve and represent the electorate in this place again. I do not take this role for granted and will continue to work hard for the people of Swan. To the Liberal Party and its members, executive and staff, I also thank you for the opportunity to carry the flag for the Liberal Party and its values, which I share, and for the people of Swan in the 43rd Parliament.

During the last term I was often asked when I was going to start my next campaign and I always replied that it started on the 14 December 2007, when I was officially declared the member for Swan. Our next campaign has already started and my division members and supporters are revelling in the fact they are involved in a marginal seat—for some of them it is like living on the edge.

Mr Speaker, during the last term to win the seat of Swan we faced many challenges. Once I detail them the value of the thanks I will make to people who assisted me and the Liberal Party will be even more significant because all the hard work they had to do to overcome these challenges placed before the team to win Swan will be apparent. In late 2008 we faced a redistribution that made us notionally a Labor seat. In 2007 I won the seat by 164 votes and
after the redistribution, if you use the notional votes from the booths in the new areas, we were starting 649 votes behind. We were faced with winning the seat off Labor for the second time after the redistribution reflected exactly the Labor submission to the AEC.

The next challenge was to face a candidate who was described in the West Australian as a potential future leader. The West also said on 19 July:

Then there is the “notional” Labor seat of Swan, held by Liberal Steve Irons but where Labor held a 0.27 per cent margin after the redistribution. In a state where the Coalition is expected to shore up its support, it is arguably the most fascinating race of all.

“Labor have got a very good candidate … (like Ms Gillard a lawyer with Slater and Gordon, where he specialised in asbestos litigation), and 15 months ago he might have been favoured to win,” Dr Phillips said.

So we also faced the challenge of an opponent who would have the backing of his former employer, Slater and Gordon. I know they also manned at least one booth on election day, along with the people from the eastern states who had flown in to support the Labor candidate. There is a reason they flew in, but I will go into that explanation later.

Next we faced the ballot draw, which placed the Labor candidate in position 1 on the ballot paper, and Labor took full advantage of that by making their how-to-vote card a ‘donkey vote’ card.

In Swan we also faced a concerted effort from the union-Labor Party front called GetUp!. The pretence of independence they sell to the public is a complete fallacy and the recent release of details about them receiving a $1.2 million union donation is proof of that. I will continue to alert the people in my electorate to the fact that this group are a fraud when they represent themselves as independent.

The Labor Party must have wanted this seat desperately and all the big guns came into the electorate swinging. With the state Labor heavyweights already holding three local seats in my electorate—the seats of Belmont, Victoria Park and Cannington, held by the state opposition leader, the state opposition Treasurer and the former state secretary of the Labor Party—I and my team were faced with combating their combined efforts and resources in my campaign to retain Swan. They used every possible opportunity they could to promote the candidate, even to the point of getting him to attend citizenship ceremonies. The citizenship ceremony charter states in section 10 that these ceremonies are for elected representatives, but Labor had no shame in turning them into political campaigning opportunities in Swan, which contravenes the code.

As for the federal Labor heavies, we had the entire cabinet in Swan in May, their last community cabinet in Australia before the election. Many of the locals who attended and had time with the ministers felt that it was a sham and there was little or no interest in local issues from the ministers. They felt the whole night was carefully scripted and an arranged event that never really got to the core issues that many of my constituents face. After that event, up to election day, Prime Minister Gillard came to Swan at least three times and former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, affectionately known as ‘the silver bodgie’, also visited, which he had also done in the 2007 election. Bob Hawke in an election opinion piece on 6 August said about WA:

Overall I did not get the anti-Labor feeling in WA that is suggested by the polls—perhaps I am being unduly optimistic but we may see a net gain over there.
Sorry, Bob, you got that wrong: 12 seats out of the 15 WA seats went to the conservatives. It makes you wonder if Bob had his mind on other issues besides what faces Western Australians.

We had many government ministers visit. It was a continuous stream coming through a revolving door and handing out financial commitments and cheques. All in all there were commitments of over half a billion dollars for the electorate of Swan from the government for this election, and I only hope they start to deliver soon. The downside of their biggest commitment of $480 million was that it was based purely on the MRRT getting up. You would have thought that with the results from Western Australia and Queensland, regarded as the two mining states, the message on the mining tax is loud and clear: the people in these states do not want it.

It is interesting to see that the only three companies that have come to any agreement on this tax are prepared to walk away from the agreement because they believe there has been a clear contravention of the agreement by the government. That comes as no surprise, and I can tell you that none of the mining companies I spoke to in WA, which were the mid-sized miners, ever believed it would go ahead as promised, because they just do not trust this government. They all say that this government says one thing and then does another. If there were any message I could give to the people of Western Australia about the MRRT, it would be that it is a false claim by the government that the MRRT will benefit all Australians and belongs to all Australians. I challenge any government member to tell the people of WA when they ever benefited from the coal in Victoria. We only have to look at the backflips on the promises on carbon tax and the offshore processing centres for victims of the people-smuggling trade that were made before the election—those promises have been broken as well. So I say to the three big miners: you should not be surprised. On behalf of the people in my electorate and the people of WA, the message to the Gillard government is, ‘We do not want a mining tax.’

Since I have mentioned people smuggling I remind the Prime Minister that the people of WA do not want you to enhance the people smuggling trade, but stop it. The expansion of Curtin, and now the plan to utilise Northam in WA, is not what you promised at the election. It is no wonder that the people of WA think this government stands for nothing.

We had the NBN promise to the people of Victoria Park in my electorate, with great fanfare from the Prime Minister and the Labor candidate. Why the obvious choice of Belmont was not picked is beyond me, but I guess the Labor Party saw more votes being gained in the Victoria Park area than in the Belmont area, which had a submission that was ranked highly by the communication minister’s office. Even the promise to the people of Victoria Park is no longer guaranteed, as the focus has moved to regional areas. I do not have an issue with the focus being on regional areas but, when the promise to my electorate was obviously a grab for votes, I would suggest again that the people of Swan will see this government as standing for nothing.

Earlier I spoke about people from interstate being flown in to man the booths for the Labor Party, which my booth workers and I commented on after the election. It was not until I read an article by Robert Taylor in the West Australian on 1 September that I understood the reason for that, which I would like to get on the record. The article’s headline was ‘Divided campaign causes big split’ and it said:
In the aftermath of Labor’s desultory Federal election campaign, questions are being asked about the role of one of the State’s most powerful political figures, a man largely unknown outside the ALP.

The article states that my opponent:

… would not have been the ALP candidate for Swan without Mr Bullock’s imprimatur because the Shoppies control the numbers which decide such things.

It also says that the campaign chairman, the WA upper house MP Ms Kate Doust, confirmed that Mr Bullock ‘hit the roof’ when campaign volunteers rang him not only once but twice to ask if he could contribute to the cause of the Labor candidate for Swan. Ms Doust said that she did not know who the volunteer was. The fallout between Ms Doust and Mr Bullock was that:

… two weeks before polling day, the union boss pulled his considerable troops out of Swan and sent them north to Cowan, where his friend Chas Hopkins was fighting a losing campaign against Liberal incumbent Luke Simpkins.

That is why my volunteers found that there were Labor people on the booths in Swan who were from interstate or did not even live in the electorate of Swan.

While we are talking about Cowan I would like to congratulate Luke Simpkins, who is the doorknocking king of Cowan. Luke and I came into this place in 2007—the only new seats across the country for the Liberal Party in the 2007 election. The other new Liberal members elected in 2007, who are a fantastic group, were all returned in 2010. It is great to see them back; they deserve to be here.

There are many people in WA who I need to thank and congratulate, but I would also like to mention the member for O’Connor, Wilson Tuckey who lost his seat. Wilson owns a property in my electorate of Swan and during my first term he gave me plenty of words of advice—some sought and some unsolicited. His advice was always well researched, either through experience or through diligence, and I learnt some very good lessons on points of order in the chamber, which he was kind enough to frequently raise. Over his 30 years, Wilson has made an enormous contribution not only to this place but to Western Australia. I wish him well and I will make sure I log onto his blog from time to time to check his sage words of advice.

I must also congratulate the class of 2010 and give a warm welcome to all the new members, particularly those on this side of the House. I would also like to mention the new member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt, who is the first Indigenous member in this place. Ken’s first speech was fantastic and I personally related to many of the experiences that he mentioned in his speech. I am sure that he will be a superb member for Hasluck. He has a bright future here and his wealth of experience, both vocational and personal, will assist him and be of benefit to his constituents in Hasluck.

To the other WA members—Nola Marino, Michael Keenan, Mal Washer, Judi Moylan, Barry Haase and Dennis Jensen—I look forward to sharing the long trek from WA to this place with you over the next term of parliament. It is a testing trip, as many of our eastern state colleagues who have done it understand. Standing up for WA when this Labor government seems determined to destroy the fabric of Western Australia’s lifestyle and economic success by imposing the MRRT and short-changing us on the GST is a responsibility that none of us, including our strong Senate team, will shirk. We will embrace the challenge on
behalf of WA because the people of WA have put their trust in us by giving the coalition their overwhelming support. We will not fail to take the fight up to the government.

During the campaign Tony Abbott worked tirelessly for the coalition and his stamina was second to none. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for visiting Swan during the campaign. At one stage he and I were pulling out weeds at the Canning River regional park area with local volunteer groups. They do fantastic work in the local area and they are among the many active groups in my electorate who need support from local, state and federal governments.

I cannot thank the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, Julie Bishop, enough for her support in Swan and for helping me make sure we won the coffee bean count at the Belmont shopping centre. Julie and I attended the recent Bali bombing memorial dawn service in Kings Park together. It was a reminder of the many challenges faced around the world today that are caused by terrorists from nations that want to impose their will upon us through violence and terror. Julie, your contribution at the election, not only in WA but across Australia, was nothing short of excellent and I know your WA colleagues are proud of you.

To the member for Canning and former member for Swan, Don Randall, thank you for all your advice about campaigning and about this place and for the opportunity to discuss our love of WA and golf. I know the task you faced in Canning was enormous and I congratulate you on your magnificent victory over former WA state minister Alannah MacTiernan. Every time I heard her on the radio and saw the press reports, I just could not believe how much confidence she oozed—she was acting like she had already won the seat. Don, I knew you could win and I assured everyone who asked that you are a fighter and a scraper and that you would be very hard to beat. Your experience and tenacity as a marginal seat campaigner is admired by many of your colleagues and you again showed that that reputation is earned, not just bestowed.

Issues such as debt, the deficit and the disastrous mining tax were certainly key election issues. However, there were also key local issues and these were many and varied. Members will have heard me talk about these at length in the past. I want to take the time to briefly mention some of these now. The environment was a key concern. My electorate is surrounded on three sides by water. There are some precious freshwater and estuarine wetland environments containing some spectacular biodiversity.

During the last term, I spoke out against the Rudd-Gillard government’s neglect of the environment, particularly its cuts to the budget of the Perth NRM. These cuts made it harder for the many environmental groups in my electorate to tackle pervasive problems such as the spread of the noxious weed hydrocotyle. That is why a particular highlight of the campaign for me was when I was able to announce with Western Australian Premier Colin Barnett a fantastic $1 million commitment to tackle the environmental problems in the Swan and Canning River systems, including a specific amount dedicated to addressing the hydrocotyle problem. In addition to this, we made some fabulous commitments for the green army projects across the electorate in spots such as Tomato Lake in Kewdale. I assure the people of Swan that I will continue to fight for better resources for our environment.

Railway crime was also an issue. As members will be aware, I have been fighting for improvements to the Thornlie to Armadale train line for quite some time. After a bashing at Burswood train station, I began distributing surveys along the train line asking residents to suggest improvements. There was a massive response. I took briefings from the police and
Transperth and inspected the CCTV monitoring facility at Perth Central station. As a result of this research and the community feedback, I was pleased to be able to secure an election commitment of $150,000 to upgrade the CCTV at Burswood train station. I note that the Labor Party also made a commitment of $100,000 to that problem. It is good that we both saw it as an issue that needed to be dealt with. Hopefully, the Labor Party will meet their commitment.

There was also the issue of roads. Several of Perth’s major freeways and road arteries cut through my electorate of Swan. Many of these roads are congested and require upgrading. It was great that the Liberal Party managed to commit to upgrading the Great Eastern Highway and the airport roads without the great big mining tax that I mentioned early in my speech.

I want to talk about another road issue that we were able to address: the Manning Road on-ramp. People have been calling for a southbound on-ramp for the Manning Road since the 1980s in order to reduce congestion and improve road safety. There had never been any action, with the Labor candidate for Canning once asserting it was not a priority despite widespread support. During the election we were able to secure a commitment of $10 million for the on-ramp. The Labor candidate in Swan also called for this commitment, so he did realise there was an issue.

Crime and antisocial behaviour is a key concern in many parts of my electorate as well but, since I am running out of time and there are a few people I need to thank, I will move on from local issues to that. There were many others in WA who should be thanked, particularly the people at Menzies House. They ran such an efficient, smooth-sailing campaign ship that I am sure any private enterprise would be happy to have the people at Menzies House running their business. There were many people from the Swan division who volunteered their time, their energy and their wisdom in supporting the Liberal Swan campaign. I thank the Swan division executive, the branch presidents, the division members, the booth captains and all the booth volunteers on the day. Many of those people also helped with letterbox drops. Throughout the campaign, they helped with envelope stuffing and yard signage. It was a great effort from the many people who are committed to the cause. We also had support from the Swan Women’s division. Their support was a sign of the strong growth in the division since 2007.

I would really like to mention some of the staff, because they did such a good job and I think they deserve some recognition. As you know, staff who work for members and senators also face the loss of their jobs when we face an election. If we do not win they lose their jobs, and so it is under that pressure that they also help us with our constituent work as well as committing their own time on weekends and after hours volunteering in our campaigns. That is what my staff did and they did it magnificently.

First of all, I will mention my office manager, Karen McGrath, who kept running things smoothly. Karen is a wise old hand at campaigns, and she and her hardworking husband—the state member for South Perth, John McGrath—were out nearly every weekend doing letterbox drops for me around the electorate. Karen has resigned since the election and I wish her well. We will miss her in the office. Karen was very experienced, having also worked with Wilson Tuckey and Senator Chris Ellison.

Jonathan Martin is still with me and in Canberra this week; he works tirelessly on the weekends and after hours. His commitment was magnificent. Emma Langoulant has left the team to join her partner in Melbourne; her work ethic and great sense of humour was always MAIN COMMITTEE
appreciated and I wish she could have stayed working with me. But the draw of Melbourne and her boyfriend was too strong and I hope it all works out for her.

Jo Chapman joined the team late last year and has brought considerable expertise in journalism, broadcasting and community engagement by making sure that I was everywhere. Jo brought her kids along to the weekend events and morning walks to make it a real family deal. I also want to mention her husband, Roger, who through his company helped us to deliver a much-needed wheelchair to a woman in Mongolia. One of the charity groups was going to have to pay nearly $1,000 to get that wheelchair to Mongolia but he organised it through his company, which was actually doing some work in Mongolia at the time.

Tisha Grubi was a graduate from the Esther Foundation who joined my office and was always ready to help with whatever needed to be done. Tisha is currently in Uganda at the moment doing missionary work, but will return to Australia soon to take up a cadetship with the ATO. It was a pleasure having Tisha in the office and for me to be a part of her return to society from the disaster that her life had become. Tisha is a star and I just know that she has a great life ahead of her with her beautiful daughter, Sky. The Esther Foundation has done a super job with her and many other young women in Western Australia and throughout Australia.

Over my first term I have been assisted at various times very capably by Marion Shannon, Helen Leslie, Annette Livesey and Victoria Jackson—a big thank you to all of you. I would also like to mention that support I received from WA senators such as Senators Eggleston, Back, Johnston and Cormann. To my mates Travis Burrows, Gordon Thomson, Jim Crone, Mike O’Neill, George Jones and Frank Parker, thanks for all your help.

The Young Liberals were just great and I had them out every morning waving signs and banners along various points out on the highways and roads in Swan. To my supporters, many of whom are not Liberals but who give up their time to support me, I appreciate that.

Finally, to my son Jarrad I say that all of what we do here in this place is for the betterment of this great nation, but without your support and the sacrifices you make personally I would not be able to do this job. You have had to become independent very early in your life, and you have had to spend time alone without me or your mother being there for you. The anniversary of the Forgotten Australians apology yesterday reminds me that you had to experience loneliness, but the support network through your school and friends has been of assistance to both of us and you have become a fine young man.

I want the residents of Swan to know that I will continue to do my utmost to represent them.

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (11.23 am)—It is an honour once again to make an address-in-reply speech as the elected member for Chisholm. I am constantly amazed that I am still in this place. I stood for preselection in 1997 with the famous words to my husband, ‘It’s all right—I can’t win.’ Twelve years down the track I still marvel at the concept that what I thought was pie in the sky resulted in five election wins in a row.

Back in 1997 when I stood for preselection it was on the basis that nobody else wanted to and I was the last candidate standing. When I was advised that the then sitting member of the seat, Dr Michael Wooldridge, who was a minister in the Howard government and quite a well-respected and liked local member, had swapped seats I think my jaw hit the floor. I kept wait-
ing for the phone call from the ALP head office to say, ‘You know how you were preselected unopposed? We have changed our minds.’ They have not, and I have been preselected unopposed ever since.

I want to thank very much at the outset the people of my electorate of Chisholm for the great faith they have shown in me over all these years—12 years as the federal member. It has been a delight, an honour and a joy, sometimes a disappointment, sometimes a frustration and often a struggle, but on the whole it has been an exercise that gives great joy to me as an individual, also knowing that we are giving back so much as well.

When you talk to people who volunteer—I am not sure that we could ever consider ourselves volunteers—they never say that it is about the thanks; it is always about the joy of giving and being involved. I think that is the way it is for members of parliament. When everybody asks, ‘Why did you enter parliament?’ you stand there and look at them and in some respects you think, ‘Yes, why did I do this to myself?’ But the reason mostly is—everybody, through the history of ages, has quoted this—‘to make the world a better place’. If we can leave this place saying that in our own little patch we have done something that will leave it a better place then that is a good thing.

One of the joys of having been here for so long was finally getting into government and being able to do some good things in my electorate. One of the absolute frustrations of being in opposition for nine years was going to many events but never actually being able to say, ‘We’re delivering. We’re doing. We’re here; we’re offering.’ One of the bizarre things about being in an inner metropolitan seat is that there is not often a lot of announcements, a lot of cutting of ribbons or other things that go on. For the nine years in opposition there was program money but there were no announcements: ‘We’re going to do this,’ or ‘We’re going to do that.’ It was incredibly frustrating and demoralising, especially when there were fantastic things that needed to be done within my seat. So one of the absolute joys and pleasures over the last three years has been going out and saying: ‘Hey, I’ve got something to deliver for you. I’m the one who is going to cut the ribbon and open something that the government has funded.’ Not that that is what the job is all about, but it is a reward for the many community groups and wonderful institutions in my electorate who have been tirelessly working towards the betterment of their facilities. So the last three years have been a culmination—seeing things happen and making promises for the future.

My seat of Chisholm, as I have said, is wall to wall suburbia—houses. It is where people live. Most people live in suburbs but we never talk about them, which I find quite bizarre. We talk about regions and the inner city but most people in Australia live in the ‘burbs’. They live in the suburbs. That is the kind of area that I represent. I am proud to do that. My constituency is an amazing group of individuals. It is a highly diverse mix of ethnicities, religions and ages. Although I have an ageing electorate there are also new people moving into the electorate. This year a lot of the primary schools are staggering enrolments in their prep years; they are not quite sure how they are going to accommodate them all. That is a bit of a shock for an area that has had an ageing population.

My electorate is also a highly expensive area to move into. Buying a house and bringing up a family in my neck of the woods is quite a challenge. That is why we have not seen a lot of baby growth in the area, but in the last couple of years this has changed. So the constituents are an interesting mix, including of a lot older ethnic groups—a large population of Greeks.
and Italians. There are many groups that are very committed to maintaining their cultural identity, and I am really proud to be part of that in my electorate. The maintenance of language, culture and distinction is something we should encourage, and I enjoy participating with all of those groups. Now we have the emerging Chinese and Indian groups who are moving into the electorate and making their mark within the business sector, where they are bringing prosperity.

Nobody gets into parliament alone, and I am going to thank people now so that I do not get to the end and forget them all. As always, there was a huge group of people who came out. Because this time around people were saying that my margin is now safe—I always find that quite entertaining—I did not see many people from state or head office. I will be honest: I did not see too many ministers. So it was really very much a local grassroots campaign, and I want to thank those people who spent tireless hours in the cold. It was so cold during this election—let’s never have a winter one again—but those people were there at train stations and they were there letterboxing and doorknocking in the misery. They were there manning the pre-poll for three weeks as the sleet and the rain came over them.

I want to thank, in no particular order, Joy Banerji; Megan Berry; Kathleen Brasher; Peter Chandler; the magnificent Howard and Marie Hodgens, who have been there with me since day one; Anne Hyde; Dan Juleff, who appeared from nowhere this campaign and was just fantastic; and Allan Clausen, who has also been there for a very long time. I am eternally grateful to Wendy Dickenson, who managed to turn up in between her husband’s 101 medical appointments, and the magnificent George and Joan Edwards, who I am sad to say I will lose in this current redistribution. I am eternally grateful for their endless support. I would also like to thank Pat Gault and the magnificent Cyril and Jan Kennedy. Cyril must have been at the Oakleigh pre-poll every day. There was also Adele Mach and I want to thank Brenton Ward, who managed to turn up in between his nursing shifts. His wife is probably never going to speak to me again. I would also like to thank Andrew Kaighan, Raff Ciccone, Tony and Barbara Dwyer, Lorie and Dave Werner and Kerry Perrett. Lorie managed to come to my office even though she had just had a knee reconstructed, so thank you very much. I know I have left people out. I also want to thank very much Mary and Will Chiron, who I know are drafted constantly by their mother. I owe you big-time for the Saturdays you spent on pre-poll. To people like Conrad, who just appeared out of the blue, thank you very much for all the amazing work you did.

I thank all my state colleagues for their support and assistance throughout the campaign. At the moment, they are in their own battles to maintain their seats—and, in my neck of the woods, we have some very marginal seats. In particular, I thank Bob Stensholt, who was always there for me. He is an amazing campaigner and I thank him very much. I thank Ann Barker—‘Annie Oakley’—who is one of those stalwarts who have been there for a long time. I thank Maxine Morand, who is a terrific local member—and I hope people recognise that in two weeks time—and Hong Lim. The local members have done so much and we really act as a team, which is just terrific. Some people do not have the same sort of relationship with their local members. I am very lucky in the work that we all do together.

I would also like to thank my staff. I thank Joe for running a phenomenal campaign. He came in young and enthusiastic with all of these ideas—and of course we kept saying, ‘We’ve done it five times and this is how we do it.’ He persevered and ran a terrific campaign, and I
am incredibly grateful. I thank Jason for answering 101 endearing queries from constituents. He has an electric-light mind. We have one of the most highly educated electorates in the country, so we get some really good theories. I thank Jason for his ability to do that. I thank Janet for doing everything and managing it in the midst of everything else. I am eternally grateful. I thank Rick for his assistance. He knows everything, but occasionally we let him know that he does not. To Sophie, Liana and David, I say a big thank you for being on my staff but also for doing the extra yards and literally not having a weekend for many weeks. I had surgery just prior to the election and was not able to drive, so I am eternally grateful to everybody who picked me up and took me places as well—and I probably was not on my game, so I want to thank them all for picking up the pieces during that time. I particularly want to thank the lovely Lindy, who, unfortunately, I lost because of the changes in my circumstances. Her dedication throughout the campaign and in the harrowing 10 weeks of uncertainty afterwards is testimony to her amazing dedication not only to the ALP but also to me. I am eternally grateful for that.

It has been an amazing experience being the federal member for Chisholm. My electorate is home to three phenomenal educational institutions and they are the core of my electorate: Monash University, which is just about the largest university in the Southern Hemisphere and certainly the largest university in Australia; Box Hill TAFE—I always include TAFE in higher education and I am very pleased to see that the federal government has recognised TAFE as part of the higher education sector and not just as a poor second cousin; and also the city campus of Deakin University at Burwood. One thing we did last year and during the election campaign was to announce some terrific funding for these institutions. Last week I had the pleasure of opening the $2.8 million green hub skills centre at Box Hill TAFE, to which the federal government committed $2.7 million. This is a new facility to teach state-of-the-art technology to actually deal with what businesses want today. It has a new solar energy rooftop generation system and solar training facility—you can actually walk on the roof and work on this thing—a new rain harvesting system and a green plumbing training facility. Box Hill TAFE will be able to deliver in real time new skills and advantages that industry is crying out for. This facility also recognises the changing environment—people are saying with their feet and with their dollars that they recognise climate change is happening and they want to adapt their own homes to make them sustainable within their own environment. This is a terrific thing.

We have also announced another amazing facility at Box Hill TAFE—$15 million towards a new integrated technology hub, which will boost green skills and create an additional 3,103 student places. The hub will provide Box Hill TAFE with a facility to train graduates in a simulated workplace environment in the building, electronic and mechanical industries. As I said last week, Box Hill TAFE is taking over the suburb of Box Hill. It is an amazing institution that is recognised worldwide. It provides skills for now and into the future. This $15 million project will add enormously to the work that is being done there.

I had the pleasure of going to Monash University with the Prime Minister to open the $29 million Centre for Green Chemistry, which supports 700 jobs. Again, all of this money is going towards the creation of green skills and new jobs into the future. Green chemistry is an amazing initiative, and we should be talking more about it. The centre is up and running. It works in conjunction with business in the area and CSIRO to create technologies for now and
the future. The $89.9 million towards the New Horizons Centre at the Monash medical STRIP again focuses on technologies, innovations and industries for the future. I am very much looking forward to the completion of that amazing facility.

Further funding of $16 million will go towards the redevelopment of the entire site at Gippsland TAFE. I have often spoken about Gippsland TAFE in this place. This TAFE teaches people how to be linesmen—going up poles and doing things like that—and, as my father said, it has not changed since he did his training there as a sparky centuries ago. So the whole development of this centre will be a great enhancement and will ensure that people are being trained in the here and now.

We have also undertaken some terrific local initiatives that will assist the community. On Saturday, I will be opening the new Wembley Park sports precinct, to which the federal government committed $2.3 million. This is a terrific project. Wembley Park hosts soccer. It is an absolute boom game in my neck of the woods, and having lots of Greeks and Italians probably contributes to that. Certainly Wembley Park had been getting fairly tired. The City of Whitehorse has been facilitating this project. We have seen the construction of a new soccer pavilion and new male and female toilets—which is terrific because females are really getting into soccer. Funding will allow for the provision of a new roof, installation signs and new fencing, along with the refurbishment of existing grandstands and change rooms. You can see already that this has had a great impact on the local community.

At the other end of my electorate in the city of Monash we have seen work nearing completion on the youth and community hub at Batesford Reserve. This project has been in the pipeline for years. It has been a terrific model and idea by council to consolidate a lot of the groups in the area who need space. We had the land but we did not have the money for building. So, when the federal government came along with $4 million towards this project, Monash council jumped at it and now we are going to see an amazing facility in an underprivileged area of my community. The services will include youth counselling and support, community health services and Monash Link. The community health facility will also be incorporated into neighbourhood programs of education and training, adult education, U3A and the tenants association. Everybody is coming into this hub. It is one spot where everyone can be together. The integration of services is a terrific model. I was there when the first stone was laid. I have not seen it since, but my state colleague the member Burwood assures me that it is a magnificent building, and I am very much looking forward to opening it.

In my electorate of Chisholm I have two very large public hospitals and quite a number of private hospitals. The Monash Medical Centre, which would be one of the largest hospitals going, has been the recipient of $3.1 million for a very innovative idea—the 23-hour care unit. It is being funded through the government’s Elective Surgery Waiting List Reduction Plan. The idea is that this 23-hour unit will be for small elective surgery, where you will be able to go in and out in one day. You are not allowed to be in the ward for longer than 23 hours. It will be for specific surgery that sometimes gets bumped off the list because it is not as important as other things. This innovative project will mean that many people who need vital surgery—some conditions can be life threatening and cause a lot of pain—will receive it. It has been an amazing thing and it is now up and running. I want to commend everyone at the Monash Medical Centre for the great work they have done. In the process, they also had to relocate their endoscopy suite, which I had the pleasure of opening earlier this year. The relo-

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cation of the endoscopy suite has ensured that the hospital can provide greater placement of services to the literally thousands of people who go through the Monash Medical Centre every day.

I have sat in the emergency waiting centre at Monash hospital on more than one occasion in the past with my father, so I can tell you that it is a hospital that is utilised.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 11.40 am to 11.53 am

Ms BURKE—Before the division I was talking about the wonderful things that we have been doing in my electorate. There are some things that still need to be addressed and done. I want to commend and thank the state government for its commitment to the rebuild of Box Hill Hospital, but I think there is more that could be done and I will be continuing to fight for federal funding towards that hospital. It is a very large hospital that services not only my constituency but large constituencies all across Victoria, going down to Gippsland, and the hospital even services parts of Tasmania. So I am committed to ensuring that Box Hill Hospital gets the full rebuild it needs.

I also want to recognise the great work that is being done on funding additional medical places in hospitals and also in the private sector. Epworth Eastern is doing great work to ensure that our trainee doctors and allied health people and nurses have placements. One of the issues we have nowadays is to ensure that there are enough places whereby people can get appropriate training and qualifications. I am thankful that we have funded additional money for that area.

I come to one of the other projects that are ongoing. It is of great concern to the community, and I continue to call upon the state and federal governments to look at ways of resolving it. It is the issue of the train line at Clayton Road and an urgent underpass. Some integrated unit is needed for that terrible situation. The train line is so close to the Monash Medical Centre hospital. We are going to see some tragedy occur in a very short time frame. In the morning the boom gates can be down for 50 minutes of an hour because of the volume of trains going through the area. This situation cannot continue and I call upon everybody to recognise this.

And in the last minute available to me, I want to also thank the people who really make it possible—that is, our families. Without their support and undivided care and attention we could not be here. Certainly in my situation, having come to this place and then having my children, without the love, care and support and the unending work that Steve, my husband, does behind the scenes, it just would not be possible. People ask me, ‘How do you do it?’ I say: ‘Don’t ask me. I leave my husband at home as a single parent for 20 weeks of the year!’ And he has done it for the entire lives of our children. To Maddy and John, thank you for your ongoing support and understanding. John wants me to become a regular mother one of these days, and probably I will, maybe some time in the near or distant future. I keep assuring him that he gets the best of both worlds, because occasionally I can take a lot of time off, so he should recognise this. I also want to thank my mother, but she should not have gone to Perth during the election, that was just uncalled for, and all my wonderful brothers and sisters.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (11.55 am)—I am pleased to rise to speak in reply to the Governor-General’s address. What I want to talk about in particular is the question of produc-
tivity, which was a key theme in the remarks the Governor-General made—scripted obviously for her, as is usual practice, by the government. It has also been a theme that we have heard quite a bit about from the Prime Minister and from the previous prime minister, including during his frenetic dash around the country in the week of Australia Day where he spoke a lot about productivity.

The Governor-General had this to say in her address:

Foremost among those challenges is the need to build a high-productivity, high-participation, high-skill economy that delivers sustainable growth for all Australians.

The government will advance its economic reform agenda to lift productivity and competitiveness and prepare for the future, through reforms to taxation, superannuation and business regulation, and through investments in education and infrastructure to drive future growth.

I want essentially to argue three propositions today. The first is that it is reasonably uncontroversial that Australia had good productivity performance for quite a number of years thanks to a bipartisan program of microeconomic reform, which was pursued for around 25 years until 2007, when it came to a screeching halt. The second thing I want to talk about is the issues that ought to be on the agenda now in policy terms if we are serious about improving Australia’s productivity growth. And then the third is to contrast what is called for as items that ought to be on the agenda by many expert commentators with the depressing reality of what we are in fact seeing when it comes to the approach of this government.

Therefore, let me start with the proposition that we have seen substantial microeconomic reform over the past 25 years and that that has been a contributor to our productivity performance. And there are many commentators who make this observation. Let me cite the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Glenn Stevens. He gave a speech couple of years ago to the alumni of the University of Sydney economics department, where he studied, and indeed where I studied—I noticed with some concern that some of the professors that he cited from when he was there 10 years ahead of me were still there when I was there so that suggests to me that I am somewhat older than I thought that I was. The Governor of the Reserve Bank had this to say:

Those who have looked into this in detail—namely, the performance of the Australian economy—have posited several possible contributing factors, including better macroeconomic policy frameworks, a wide range of microeconomic reforms in labour and product markets, and luck.

What does Professor Fred Hilmer have to say? He is now the Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, but in the early 1990s he was instrumental in developing the competition policy framework, which was so important to Australia’s microeconomic performance throughout the nineties and to productivity improvements which followed as a result.

In a recent speech Professor Hilmer reflected on these forces. He noted that the federal government has ‘reaffirmed the importance of productivity in a number of reports’. He cited the Australia to 2050: future challenges intergenerational report, which talked of the criticality of the three Ps—productivity, participation and population—and which referred to productivity growth as the main driver of economic growth and living standards in the future. Pro-
Professor Hilmer went on to note that ‘despite the professed commitment to improving productivity, recent performance is not encouraging’. He talked about the consequences of that bipartisan commitment to microeconomic reform throughout the eighties and nineties that I spoke about before, but he noted that in the last several years multifactor productivity growth has again slumped, averaging only 0.4 per cent per annum.

Interestingly, I note that the Department of Finance and Deregulation in its brief to incoming ministers recently released under freedom of information agreed with this analysis. The department noted productivity performance is a key determinant of living standards and that, following microeconomic reform in the 1990s, productivity surged but productivity growth has now been slowing and that that presents an important challenge for this term of government. So, so far, uncontroversial; there appears to be a consensus amongst many experts in this field that we had good microeconomic reform progress for many, many years, but it came to a screeching halt in 2007 and as a result we are seeing a decline in productivity growth.

The second issue that I want to address is the question of what ought to be on the public policy agenda now if we are serious about productivity improvement. Again, the first thing I want to do is go to the speech that Professor Hilmer made quite recently. He talked about the fact that there are plenty of forces which he described as ‘enablers’ of productivity growth, such as infrastructure, skills, the legal and institutional framework, labour market flexibility and technological progress. But he also made the point that there are three key incentives which are drivers of productivity growth: competition, tax and corporate governance. He made the point that there needs to be a shift from focusing on incentives to focusing on enablers. If I can quote Professor Hilmer directly, he said this:

While both incentives and enablers are important, without incentives enablers have a limited impact on productivity.

So he is drawing a clear distinction between things that are nice to have and things that are really important in driving productivity.

The next person that I would like to cite on this topic is Gary Banks, Chairman of the Productivity Commission. He makes the point that, notwithstanding the emphasis we have seen from this government in talking about education, research and development and so on, the recent slump in Australia’s productivity was not caused by any lack of spending on education and training or by a falloff in research and development or even infrastructure. In other words, the challenges which need to be addressed when it comes to genuine productivity reform are more substantive and underlying than merely pumping more money into education and research and development.

He talks, interestingly, about some of the drivers of poor productivity performance. He talks about government procurement and notes quite critically the recent decision by the New South Wales government to introduce a price preference of up to 25 per cent for locally supplied goods and services. I cannot pretend to be shocked when I learn that the completely hopeless New South Wales Labor government is being fingered for poor performance on productivity, consistent with its atrocious performance on just about every other indicator one could mention. Gary Banks also talks about that longstanding recipient of industry assistance initiatives, the automotive industry, and notes that there is a real temptation to hand out cash to the automotive sector. He talks critically about that being done by the Australian govern-
ment and it follows that if we are serious about productivity we have to question the kind of approaches that are being pursued in this area.

Again, it is interesting to look at what the Department of Finance and Deregulation has to say on the question of productivity growth and the issues which need to be on the agenda. Looking at the incoming government brief, the department of finance talks about productivity savings made to date in regulatory reform activities such as in the seamless National Partnership Agreement, but then talks about unfinished business, including the removal of retail price caps in relation to electricity generation, the removal of state based regulation of road transport and rail and maritime safety and other areas. The point I am making is that, when you look at the detail of what the experts in the area say are the issues that need to be addressed, if we are to get serious about improving productivity growth in Australia, you see that there is a yawning gap between the issues identified by the experts and the agenda of the current government.

That brings me to the third area I would like to talk about: what is it that we are actually seeing being done by this government as opposed to its rhetoric about the topic of productivity? Let me start by going to some of the things that Professor Hilmer has had to say. He has talked about the great attraction that this government has for regulation in so many areas. I will quote verbatim what he had to say:

There are a number of examples of regulation being introduced that appear to continue this trend of increasing anti-competitive regulation which include:

- Prohibiting financial planning trailing commissions versus simply requiring full disclosure;
- Unwillingness to let economics determine energy and conservation choices;
- Unwillingness to allow a market solution for the provision of broadband;
- Restricting overseas ownership of housing; and
- Reducing the degrees of freedom available to universities when competing for students and funding.

Professor Hilmer may not have wanted to make the point in these terms but I am happy to make the political point, the important point, that when you look at what this government is doing—and he has cited a number of instances—you see it is pursuing an agenda which is completely at odds with its stated preference and desire to improve productivity.

Let me come to the next issue about which we see a yawning gap between the performance of this government and the rhetoric—that is, how major infrastructure projects ought to be assessed. The Chairman of the Productivity Commission—again, in the speech he made last year—talked about, as a second potential source of productivity gain, those larger scale nation-building infrastructure proposals which were brought forward and selected without the opportunity to conduct adequate cost-benefit analysis. I wonder what he might have been referring to there. I wonder whether he was referring to this government’s stated policy of committing $43 billion to the National Broadband Network while refusing to conduct a cost-benefit analysis. Is it any surprise that the Chairman of the Productivity Commission is raising his eyebrows at this conduct on the part of this government, which is so at odds with the stated emphasis of pursuing gains in productivity?

It is not only Gary Banks, Chairman of the Productivity Commission, who is raising concerns about the issue of cost-benefit analysis. What does the Department of Finance and Deregulation have to say in its incoming ministerial brief? ‘There would be benefit in expanding
and strengthening the established Infrastructure Australia processes.’ Of course there would be if the biggest single infrastructure project in Australia’s history—as we keep being told—has completely sidestepped the Infrastructure Australia processes. What a remarkably disciplined piece of understatement this is from professional bureaucrats who are presumably gritting their teeth as they write it. They go on to say, ‘There is a strong case for finance to play a stronger role in this area through updating its guidelines on cost-benefit analysis.’ What they also might want to do is publish them and circulate them to the office of every minister in this building because apparently no copy has been seen in the office of the broadband minister, Senator Stephen Conroy.

There is also in the incoming brief a very interesting proposal which is again relevant to the question about whether this government’s performance on microeconomic reform and seeking and delivering improvements in productivity is in line with its rhetoric. What are the government’s own officials saying to the government? They are saying this: Infrastructure needs can also be addressed by making better use of existing infrastructure. And what do we see when it comes to the National Broadband Network? Do we seek the better use of existing infrastructure, or do we see the payment of $11 billion of taxpayers’ money to the owner of the largest telecommunications network in this country to trash it, to rip it up, to throw it out, to say that this network will not be available to anybody to use even if they would quite like to have the choice of using this network as an alternative to the National Broadband Network? Do we see ‘making better use of infrastructure’ as is recommended by the department of finance in its incoming ministerial brief, or do we see precisely the opposite of that from a government which is acting in a way that is wholly inconsistent with its stated rhetoric about pursuing policies which will deliver improved productivity growth? I am very sorry to report that we see the latter.

Is it only the department of finance which has expressed concerns about this? Is it only the Productivity Commission which has expressed concerns about this? Funnily enough, it is not. What has the OECD had to say about the question of microeconomic policy in the telecommunications area? Once again, you get a strong sense, as you review what the OECD has said, that the officials are gritting their teeth as they try as best they can to convey their deep concern about the approach which is being taken by this government. Talking about the heads of agreement between the National Broadband Network and Telstra, the OECD said:

The heads of agreement signed with Telstra eliminate competition between the new fibre optic network and the existing technological platforms … This implies a de facto restoration of a public monopoly over the supply of access to wholesale Internet services. Multiple empirical studies have stressed the value of competition between technological platforms for the dissemination of broadband services. Moreover, such a monopolistic incumbent could forestall the development of, as yet unknown, superior technological alternatives.

We have a government which claims to be concerned about driving improvements in Australia’s rate of productivity growth. It is uncontroversial, between the major parties, that that is a worthwhile goal; it is uncontroversial that achieving improvements in productivity growth is critical to growth in our gross domestic product and to the welfare of Australians; and it is uncontroversial that you will only achieve material improvements in productivity growth if you are pursuing a sustained and disciplined program of microeconomic reform. Regrettably, al-
though the rhetoric of this government is designed to give the impression that that is precisely its objective, its behaviour—its conduct—is quite the opposite.

I think the framework which Professor Fred Hilmer has articulated is an extremely instructive one. Professor Fred Hilmer is the man who was responsible in the early nineties for the carriage of the competition reforms which were so critical to the improved microeconomic performance of this country. Professor Hilmer has now taken the opportunity to review Australia’s progress in microeconomic reform and productivity growth and to ask the question: how are we doing now compared to that hard work, that detailed program of work, throughout the nineties which delivered such sustained improvement in productivity and in the welfare of Australians?

The framework which Professor Hilmer has used to analyse this question is to draw a distinction between incentives and enablers and to make the point that ultimately it is about incentives for behaviour by participants in the economy. You can talk all you like about spending money on various areas. As we know under this government ‘reform’ is a codeword for ‘spending’. The real benefits in terms of microeconomic reform and productivity improvements are only going to be realised and achieved if we are serious about continuing to deploy the force of these incentives which Professor Hilmer talks about—competition, tax and corporate governance.

What we have seen in the last three years is that 2½ decades of consensus on microeconomic reform has come to a shuddering halt. We have a government which is making the popular and easy decisions. We have a government which has never turned its back on an opportunity to spend money. We need to get serious about improving productivity. Let us see the action match the rhetoric.

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (12.16 pm)—I rise, of course, to also offer an address-in-reply to the speech delivered by the Governor-General during the official opening of the 43rd Parliament. As noted by Her Excellency, the configuration of this parliament poses challenges not experienced in our Commonwealth for seven decades. It has facilitated a need for renewal and change that we are witnessing and has prompted the formation of the Gillard government through an agreement with the Greens and two Independents.

The Gillard Labor government are determined that, through strong leadership, consultation and a common-sense approach to public policy, we will deliver more for the people of Australia. At the forefront of the government’s priorities is the need to ensure that the economy remains flexible and strong. We are committed to sensible fiscal measures that will see the budget return to surplus by 2012-13. Our economic reform agenda includes changes to the nation’s taxation system together with amendments to business regulation and superannuation. Proceeds of the proposed mineral resource rent tax will fund cuts to business tax, enable a rise in the superannuation guarantee levy from nine to 12 per cent and allow for ongoing investments in infrastructure to help drive national productivity and growth. All of this will broaden our economy so that more people can benefit from the country’s prosperity regardless of where they live.

The ongoing rollout of the National Broadband Network is also very important. It will help expand economic opportunities in regional areas and improve service delivery in important
service areas such as education, health care and small business. Making high-speed broadband available across this country will markedly lift productivity.

The Gillard government has also committed to addressing cost-of-living pressures faced by many families. The new Paid Parental Leave scheme comes into effect from 1 January next year. Under that program eligible working parents of newborns and adopted babies will receive 18 weeks parental leave pay at the federal minimum wage. That is a historic achievement by this government, and it is something that in my former work as a trade union leader I worked very hard to achieve. We have increased the childcare rebate as well to 50 per cent. The education tax refund will extend to cover the cost of school uniforms, and family support payments are set to increase by up to $4,000 a year for teenagers enrolled in school or vocational training.

As the coalition becomes clearer in its yearning for a return to Work Choices, the government will stand by its values and a fair and balanced workplace relations policy. The dignity afforded to working people is extremely important—that they are treated with decency and respect in their workplace. The Gillard Labor government will continue to improve access to services as well as to the financial viability of our health system through the National Health and Hospitals Network. GP superclinics will expand into more regional and suburban communities while support will be offered to families late at night or on weekends through a national GP after-hours hotline. The government also plans to invest more into integrated aged-care services and places. All of these initiatives are extremely important for Australian people.

Tackling climate change is also a defining issue for this government. Of course I am very committed to meeting this challenge and, with my department, I will work for our country in my role as the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Climate scientists from around the world are telling us that the levels of carbon pollution being emitted into the atmosphere are contributing to climate change. The government accept and respect the climate science and we are committed to building consensus on our policy response. This is clearly in our long-term national interests. Our economy and our environment are extremely sensitive to the challenges of climate change, and the fact is that the longer we delay taking action to reduce the emissions intensity in our own economy the greater the harm and the more it will cost to reduce carbon pollution in the future.

So we must make a start now, and that is why the government is providing strong support for investment in renewable energy. We have legislated a renewable energy target ensuring that at least 20 per cent of our electricity supply will come from renewable energy sources by the year 2020. In fact, modelling suggests that the scheme that will come into effect from 1 January 2011 is likely to deliver slightly better than that, in the order of 22 per cent of renewable energy by 2020. Nineteen billion dollars worth of investment in renewable energy generation is anticipated.

The government is also keen to promote greater energy efficiency in industry and homes as part of our climate change strategy. Recently the government released a Prime Minister’s Task Group on Energy Efficiency report which reinforced the government’s approach and the need for a price on carbon as well. And on that specific issue, it is widely recognised that, to drive down emissions in our economy—that is, to cut carbon pollution—in the most cost-effective way, we need to implement a carbon price. A carbon price in effect will put a price tag on each tonne of pollution going into the atmosphere. It is a major economic reform that will
create an incentive to reduce pollution, unlock investment in clean energy and create jobs, and drive investment into low-emissions technology. Many in the business community—including BHP Billiton CEO, Marius Kloppers, AGL Energy CEO, Michael Fraser, the President of the Business Council of Australia and many other business leaders, along with many who are in leadership roles in the non-government organisations and environment groups around the country—strongly support putting a price on carbon because they know it will provide investment certainty and allow business to start moving towards a low carbon pollution future.

To achieve consensus on the best approach to introducing a carbon price the government has formed the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee, comprising the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and me, Senator Brown and Senator Milne and Independent MPs the member for Lyne and the member for New England. That committee is now well and truly into its work program. Also, as part of our approach of building consensus, two roundtables have been established. One will engage the business community and the other will engage a range of non-government organisations, including environment groups, unions and representatives of the social services sector. Discussions at the roundtables will focus on the introduction of a carbon price and offer advice to the government on other issues surrounding climate change.

The Prime Minister has also announced plans to establish a climate change commission. This commission will engage with the community to promote a better understanding of climate change science and how a carbon price would operate. The government is finalising plans for the commission at the moment and will announce the commission’s make-up and work plan in the near future. We are getting on with the job of tackling climate change because the longer investment uncertainty clouds our economy the greater the impact on prices and jobs, ultimately. To this end the government is also investing record amounts directly to support research and new technologies in renewable energy—solar, wind power and other areas of energy efficiency.

The government’s program that I have pointed to has particular relevance to my own region in the Hunter in New South Wales and in my electorate of Charlton. Recently I had the privilege of joining the Prime Minister to sign contracts for the Smart Grid, Smart City project, which will be implemented predominantly across the Hunter region, including in my electorate. Over the next three years, this $500 million initiative, of which $100 million was allocated by the government, will demonstrate how an electricity network of the future can use information and communications to improve the efficiency of power generation and power distribution and its use at the domestic and business levels. Under a consortium led by Energy Australia, 50,000 households in Newcastle, the Upper Hunter and parts of Sydney will have the opportunity to participate in the trial and learn much more about how to reduce their energy usage and, therefore, their electricity bills.

The Hunter region is also at the forefront of several other research projects and innovative trials. Important research into renewable energy and solar technologies is being carried out by the CSIRO Energy Centre in Newcastle, while the government has committed $30 million towards establishing the Newcastle Institute for Energy and Resources. This institute will be developed at the University of Newcastle, through the sustainability round of the Education Investment Fund. It will bring together up to 400 researchers in the Hunter to advance research in clean energy production, energy efficiency and the minimisation of carbon emis-
sions. I was there only a couple of weeks ago and was shown the potentiality for support for a program that may, for example, be able to improve the efficiency of coal fired electricity generation by a margin of 20 per cent in a number of power generation stations in New South Wales. That project alone, if it were ultimately successful and commercially applied, could therefore make a significant contribution to emissions reductions.

Not too far away, though, and now also within the boundaries of my own electorate, another 400 researchers will soon be devoting their time to a range of medical research projects, after the government delivered a total of $48.5 million towards the construction of a world-class research hub for the Hunter Medical Research Institute. Once complete, the new facility will not only align services with existing health infrastructure at the John Hunter Hospital campus but also encourage collaborations and the development of new approaches to tackling major health issues. It will deliver improved health care to the wider community as a result of research outcomes and reduced health costs and by enhancing opportunities for commercialisation. I am very proud that we have that project at the Hunter Medical Research Institute in the region and of the contribution that it makes at a national level.

Each of the projects I have just described will play a vital role in delivering for a modern Australia, with the additional benefit of creating many more job opportunities for Australians. I am also pleased to report to the House that construction of the much anticipated GP super-clinic in my electorate, based on the south-western side of Lake Macquarie, is now nearing completion. The federally funded initiative will reduce the patient to doctor ratio in Morisset and its surrounding areas as well as boost the delivery of other important allied primary health services to the local community, and these are desperately needed.

The Gillard Labor government is delivering on its commitment here to prioritise national health. In Charlton, almost $250,000 has been allocated, for example, to the Glendale Medical Centre under the Innovative Clinical Teaching and Training Grants program. This will allow for the construction of purpose-built teaching and training facilities, benefiting students from the nearby University of Newcastle and, of course, benefiting the citizens in the Glendale area, where there is a high demand for, and insufficient supply of, these important primary healthcare services.

The government has provided the biggest boost to the pension in our nation’s history, and this is particularly important in my electorate. More than 26,000 pensioners across Charlton, which is a relatively high proportion in electorates across the country, benefited from the latest increase on 20 September, when the maximum fortnightly rate increased to $716.10 for singles and to $1,079.60 for couples. The government also plans to introduce a more generous work bonus for age pensioners who choose to engage in part-time work, meaning they can earn up to $6,500 without affecting their pension. This is a very positive step for pensioners.

The people of Charlton also stand to benefit from signature infrastructure projects that are being carried out by the government. Work is underway on the multibillion dollar Hunter Expressway, for example. It will help to address traffic congestion at the end of the F3 Freeway north of Sydney and on other local arterial roads. This is a civil engineering project in excess of $1.5 billion. Public transport will also be in the spotlight as part of a $20 million feasibility study into a major high-speed rail project connecting Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne via Newcastle. More libraries, more multipurpose halls, classrooms and administration facilities are being officially opened throughout my electorate thanks, of course, to the government’s
economic stimulus package. This initiative was absolutely vital in providing employment opportunities in my region for local tradespeople. It has been welcomed by local schools. I have not had one complaint about the BER, only extremely positive feedback. There are schools that have not seen significant capital investment in their infrastructure since the 1950s and 1960s, and they are now enjoying new classrooms, new libraries and new facilities that are much better for teachers, students and the community. All of these things have been strongly welcomed, and I am very pleased that school students are benefiting in this way.

Sports participation in Charlton will receive a welcome boost through new community infrastructure proposed for Wallsend, at the northern end of my electorate. The government has allocated $140,000 to the Northern New South Wales Football Association, to conduct a feasibility study into building elite training and futsal facilities. I was pleased to make that commitment during the election campaign. Meanwhile, upgrades to amenities at Evans Park in Cardiff are also nearing completion, which is another result of the economic stimulus funding. Young people on the south-western side of Lake Macquarie will also have access to a variety of community activities from next month. The PCYC in Morisset is about to be reborn, which is welcome news, following a major overhaul of a dilapidated building. The government has worked in partnership with the Lake Macquarie City Council and local partners to bring that about with a funding grant of approximately $120,000. It has been strongly supported by the council and the local community.

So there are many very positive initiatives of the government at a national level and a local level, as I am sure any fair-minded member of parliament would observe, that have made a tremendous difference to people’s lives over the previous term of government and will continue to do so during this term. I am very pleased to say that the outlook for my electorate is extremely positive. While there are a number of infrastructure investments that remain outstanding and that I intend to work very hard to support and while there are a number of other projects that I am going to continue to work through with the local community, I am very proud of what has been achieved over the last three years. The Gillard government is obviously committed to addressing the cost-of-living pressures faced by many families and I will continue to work very hard to represent the interests of people in my electorate in this respect.

Finally, I take this brief opportunity to thank those who supported me during the recent election campaign in my electorate. I thank all of those in my electorate office and particularly all of the members of the Labor Party branches, who came out as usual to support the Labor candidate, and all of the volunteers. Most of all, I recognise and respect the support that I was able to achieve from the voters within the electorate of Charlton. I am tremendously privileged to represent them.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (12.33 pm)—I am happy to speak in this place today in reply to the Governor-General’s address. The 2010 federal election was, of course, a great sea change in Australian history, a time when Australians did stand up for a different vision of what they wanted from their federal government and sought a new direction from it. The reason they did that follows on from what the member for Charlton has just said. He said that any fair-minded member of parliament would need to look at the performance of the government and assess it carefully. That is what voters in the electorate of Mitchell did do at the last federal election. They took a very careful look at the policies, the results and the delivery of services that were provided by the federal government in the last term.
In this place, I have spoken at length about Building the Education Revolution and it just so happens that in my electorate of Mitchell there have been serious problems with federal government service delivery in the BER program. Some members of parliament might say, ‘That’s only confined to one or two schools or a very small percentage.’ If you are in a school community that has been badly affected by government failure then you feel it. Communities in my electorate have certainly felt that failure quite keenly. What am I talking about? Annangrove is an example. I want to acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition and our education spokesperson, the member for Sturt, who paid a visit to the community in Annangrove during the federal election to launch our national education policy. That community has a school of 90 pupils. It received a BER grant of around $900,000—an opportunity, one would have thought, to make a significant investment in the future of that school for the community.

What could you do with $900,000 to achieve real advancement for the education of those 90 pupils? The school is in a semi-rural area. They asked for new toilet blocks. They asked for more classrooms. They asked for these very important infrastructure upgrades for their community. They were awarded a library. Members here will say, ‘What’s wrong with a library?’ They already had a library. For 90 kids, we have the farcical situation at Annangrove of two libraries sitting right next to each other. The original library has air-conditioning. It is a great little library. It has shelving, connection to the internet and other features. It functions very well. The new library is not air-conditioned, there is no shelving and it is not connected to the internet. That cost $900,000.

There are line items in the BER for expenditure at this school in Annangrove for $60,000 for landscaping. If you ask what landscaping has been done at the school, you will be pointed to a one metre by one metre piece of concrete and 10 plants. It is of great concern to that school. I want to congratulate the P&C president, Donna Hunter, for having the courage to come forward and raise these matters with us. Of course, we have raised this with Mr Orgill and his committee. This is an example of what is wrong with the BER and the delivery mechanisms within the New South Wales government—two libraries for 90 pupils and the new library, which does not work, at a cost of $900,000. Something has gone awfully wrong by anybody’s standards. Members opposite have gone quiet.

I want to talk about another great school in my electorate, Baulkham Hills North Primary School. It just so happens that the president of the P&C at Baulkham Hills North Primary School, Mr Craig Turner, is an architect. When he came across the BER plans for his school—a new school hall; sounds like a worthy project—he found it was going to cost from $1.2 million to $1.3 million. That sounds marvellous! However, the new school hall to be built under the BER was going to fit only 20 more pupils than their existing hall. It was not big enough to hold the whole school. This architect, this representative of his school community—not a partisan political player, not a member of a political party—came to me as the local member and said: ‘Why $1.2 million for this? I can design a building that will house the whole school and have it constructed, and it will deliver the outcome that this great public school needs.’ The answer lies in the bureaucracy and the incompetence of the New South Wales government, and the rigidity of the BER program not allowing enough flexibility for local public schools.

The independent and private schools in my electorate each achieved a great outcome from the money they were granted. They got architect designed structures that were exactly what
they needed for their pupils. The local public schools got a template, mandated outcome by
the state government that did not provide the best outcome for schools in many cases. While
many are grateful—because they have to be grateful for any infrastructure upgrades they
get—they did not get the opportunity that they deserved. Why? Because of the rigid and fool-

ish bureaucratic mechanisms within the New South Wales government.

It is the case in New South Wales that there was a big swing against the Labor Party at the
election. Perhaps the coalition did not go as well as we could have. I know the member for
Dobell will not defend the performance of the New South Wales government because it is
beyond defence in my state. State Labor has underinvested in infrastructure—and the top is-

sue in my electorate is the provision of infrastructure. The north-west rail line has been the
most bitter failure of the New South Wales government. It was promised, cancelled, promised
and cancelled. Also the south-west rail line is a failure.

What we did see in the election campaign was that great, famous commitment of Julia Gil-

lard as the Prime Minister to build a rail line in Sydney. Her advisers on that day—because it
was done on that day and it was done on the back of a coaster—really failed her. There is one
thing that you do not do in Sydney, and even the member for Dobell would acknowledge this:
you do not come out as a politician and say, ‘I am going to build a rail line in Sydney.’ No-

body believes you. Why? We have had a state Labor government for 16 years that has prom-
ised rail lines, including the Parramatta to Epping line, and delivered billboards which said,
‘Coming soon.’ They had cranes up the top of Epping and bulldozers parked on the side of the
road. It was a great PR stunt before a state election. Of course, once the election was over the
bulldozers were moved, the cranes were cancelled and the billboards came down. We never
heard of the Parramatta to Epping rail line until the federal election. Fancy that. Three weeks
out from election day, Julia Gillard says, ‘I’ve come up with an idea to move forward, to
move Sydney forward and that will be the Parramatta to Epping rail link.’ It sounded like a
worthy initiative. It probably lost them just enough votes to lose the seat of Bennelong. I say
to the voters of Sydney and New South Wales ‘thank you’ because we need to punish bad
governments. They need to be dealt with harshly. And there is no worse example of a bad
government in Australia today than the New South Wales state Labor government. It deserves
to be punished. It deserves to be sent a very serious signal—governments in this country can-
not be allowed to get that bad ever again.

Is the federal government now going to commit to building the Parramatta to Epping rail
line? My colleague the member for Bennelong is actively seeking the answers to those ques-
tions affecting his community at Bennelong, and also affecting my community within Hills
Shire. But we do not have any answers yet. Is this a promise that is going to be cancelled? Is
this a pre-election commitment that is going to go by the wayside? We are about to find out.
We will maintain the pressure on this government to deliver the money and the commitment
to upgrade infrastructure in Sydney.

There is no doubt that under the Rudd and Gillard governments that Sydney has missed out
on vital infrastructure funding. There is no allocation of money for infrastructure in the big-
gest city in our country. There was money for some studies on the metro line, but the incom-
petent New South Wales Labor government cancelled the metro line and had to, humiliat-
ingly, return the $51 million for the study to the federal government. There were no other in-
frastucture funding provisions in any of the budgets of the Rudd or Gillard governments—
none in Sydney, our biggest city. It is the city most underinvested in infrastructure in Australia. This is the city we are asking to take the bulk of our migration. This is the city we are trying to urban consolidate—pack in people without the adequate infrastructure to provide for those people. No wonder voters in Sydney are sceptical about immigration. No wonder it has been given a very bad name. My family are migrants to this country. They came here in the waves of migration after World War II and they have worked very hard and built a great life for me and my family today, and I am very grateful to them. That is the experience of so many people in Sydney. Yet, why are so many people in Sydney so concerned about immigration. It is not so much because of the people, the humanity; it is because of the policies of government that have crammed so many people into so little space without the proper infrastructure provision, and there is no better example than the city of Sydney.

The federal government fails to provide infrastructure money even when it lauds its infrastructure funding programs all around the country. There may very well be places where it is funding infrastructure but in Sydney it is not. The communities of Sydney continue to be ignored at both the state and the federal level. And that does mean that we have to change what we are doing in the Sydney basin. Indeed, it will lead to further scepticism about immigration and our migration program because Sydney cannot afford to continue to be the recipient of so many people without provision for them. That is something that has received a lot more attention in recent times.

The coalition did have a clear position on so many issues at the last election, including water protection, repaying our debt and ending waste in government. Ending waste in government was, I think, a theme that really resonated with the community. People knew that under the Howard-Costello years not only was debt repaid, not only were the finances put in order but also provision was made to fund future obligations of the Commonwealth government, particularly Commonwealth superannuants, but also to fund, through the Future Fund, other commitments of the federal government to ensure that there was a financial base.

In Mitchell, this could not be more critical. In my electorate, I have the highest proportion of families with dependent children in Australia. The average income is one of the highest in the country, but we also have one of the highest rates of mortgages—I think we are second—and of McMansions in the entire country. That is a very homogenous society: families with mortgages on over-high-average incomes, but using nearly all of that income, of course, to service mortgage debt. Most cash, as we know, is being put into paying off those mortgages. In the last year, there have been seven interest rate rises—even though the current government said that it was going to do something about interest rates. That is of very serious concern to my electorate.

One of the great things about Mitchell is that we have so many small businesses in the Norwest Business Park. It is a very entrepreneurial and innovative community. But those small businesses are suffering, as they are across the Sydney basin. When I speak to my colleague the member for Macarthur or to the member for Hughes, they tell a similar story about this Christmas: small businesses are finding that there is less cash in people’s pockets as the cost of living escalates and as interest rates also take money out of those pockets.

That is why we are so concerned about banking and financial sector reform. The reason we are—though there is some scepticism opposite—is that, in the life of the Howard government, banks did not raise their rates outside of Reserve Bank movements. This is a very critical
point to understand. That was not through a legislative instrument. That was not an informal agreement. That was not an unwritten agreement with the federal government or Peter Costello. And it was despite an Asian financial crisis, a tech wreck, and many serious world and local economic challenges.

There are many reasons and factors. When you have serious and competent professional people managing your economy, the CEOs of the banks have no choice but to take those people seriously. There has been a marked change in the attitude of the banks towards the federal government. Peter Costello had an arrangement and an understanding with the banks where they knew that they would not move interest rates outside Reserve Bank movements—and that was not by legislative instrument or by pressure but by force of respect and personality and ability: ability to manage the economy and to communicate why interest rates should not be moved outside of Reserve Bank movements. That was a very successful formula during that period.

That is why we have put forward our nine-point plan. It is a plan for the future. It is a plan to ensure that small businesses in Mitchell are able to access finance from banks. People in small business, when they talk to me, speak in a very concerned fashion about how they cannot access finance. With the taxpayer now underwriting the major four banks—which, of course, continues to need to be looked at—we need to look at how we re-encourage competition in the banking sector. How do we get competition in finance so that people can access finance again? If the government is not prepared to look at that, or not prepared to do anything about it, then it should adopt the opposition’s policy, its nine-point plan, to ensure that we have competition in the banking sector. It is vital for there to be competition in funds and to not just have all the money locked up in the big four banks. It will mean pressure on interest rates. It will mean pressure on fees, charges and services. Competition—so important to so many things—is one of our keynote policies.

I want to turn now to some other key factors affecting Mitchell and to local issues within the campaign. I want to thank and congratulate my friends in the Indian community in Sydney. The Indian community, at the last election, being dominated by very hard-working small business people, adopted the view that it was time to seek a better alternative in government. We had many successful functions with the Indian community. We visited their temples in Wentworthville. They were very encouraging of the deputy opposition leader, Julie Bishop, who made a visit to my electorate—for which I was very grateful—to hear about their key issues. The Indian community in Sydney is very concerned about those key issues: competent management of the economy, and the performance of the federal government in doing something for small business and ensuring that we have a safe and well-funded infrastructure program for the Sydney basin. So I do want to thank and congratulate those members of the Indian community who came forward and worked so closely with us to ensure that there was a good understanding of coalition policy and that people had a genuine choice within the Sydney basin.

It is, of course, a great scandal in Australia that, when an incoming government is sent a strong signal by the electorate of, ‘You have got your settings wrong. You have failed us so badly,’ they do not heed the messages from that very strong signal. In fact the opposite has occurred. What I find most distressing about this current government is that from the outset the Prime Minister has flagged her intention to abandon all of her core election promises. She
has even had the gall to say to the electorate, ‘We are going to abandon our core promises. We are going to go down a different path.’ That signals that we now have a government that is run by a minority group: the Australian Greens. One of the great features of this parliament will be to what extent the Greens dominate the agenda of the Australian government going forward. I do not think, if they are allowed to dominate in the way they have been dominating in the first session of this parliament, that things will improve in Australia.

The government’s vaunted carbon tax, which of course they swore they would not implement in the election campaign, of course now becomes a core commitment of this government. We did not hear a lot about climate change in the election campaign. That is because in the world today and in the Australian community there is a growing—I hesitate to use the word ‘scepticism’—concern about the validity of the climate change argument and about whether the political takeout of climate change has been the correct one. There is a very big difference between what the scientists tell us about climate change and what the politicians say. Issues are regularly hijacked by politicians for their own benefit. I would suggest that in this case there is a growing view in the world today that climate change has been hijacked for political benefit by left-of-centre political parties.

There are sensible and competent things we can do to help the environment. The coalition had a plan for some direct action to do practical things that would benefit the environment and not just implement new taxes. If the way to solve the environmental situation in the world today is to raise tax, why wouldn’t everybody be for it? If all we had to do was apply new taxes, charges and fees, that would be a very simple way to fix things. Of course the reality is that new taxes, charges and fees will not produce environmental benefit.

The government abandoning the promise not to implement a carbon tax is going to resonate with the electorate. People do not want a carbon tax on the back of rapidly rising electricity prices, particularly in New South Wales. That is after a decade of underinvestment in electricity generation by the New South Wales state Labor government. The privatisation of electricity tore two or three state Labor governments into pieces over the electricity generation question of how much they were to invest in electricity. We are already paying the price with massive increases in electricity prices. Utility prices in Sydney are probably the most common concern. Yet this government proposes to implement a major new tax that will, of course, push up the price of electricity rapidly. It is of grave concern that the Greens may well continue to dominate the Australian government agenda for the years ahead.

I want to say a big thank you to the people of Mitchell for the opportunity to represent them in this place for the next three years. It is a great honour. I am grateful to them for the support they showed me at the last election and I pledge to work in their interest and to ensure that we get better infrastructure and services in the north-west of Sydney, and that our economy and finances allow people to get ahead, allow businesses to generate employment and opportunity and allow our families to affordably live in the Sydney basin and to have a bit of room for their kids. I thank you for the opportunity.

**Sitting suspended from 12.54 pm to 4.00 pm**

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (4.00 pm)—It is both my pleasure and my privilege to be giving this address in reply as the federal member for Petrie for a second term. I am humbled by the trust the people of my communities have put in me. I also know that with this trust comes heavy responsibility. For that reason I must start this address by acknowledging the community and
saying thank you for making the decision to continue to support me and the Gillard Labor government. I would also like to thank my staff for their tremendous effort and support over the past three years. It has been almost three years to the day since I was first elected, and the staff have been there to support me throughout this entire time, with only one permanent staff member moving on to a higher position within a state government minister’s office.

I would also like to thank the volunteers and relief staff who have worked with me in the office from time to time. They have all played an important role in our office. I would also like to thank the ALP branch members and supporters who have supported me not only through the election this year but since I was first preselected in 2006. They have continued to provide their ongoing support and to work hard with me for the betterment of our local community. No one person can win an election and it is this group of dedicated people who have ensured that I was returned as the member for Petrie.

To the Petrie campaign team, and particularly James Sullivan, the campaign manager, once again I thank you so much for your efforts and the tremendous jobs that you did, especially keeping me moving and out on those stalls at 5.30 every morning during winter, which was certainly a challenge, even with Brisbane weather. As every candidate knows, you certainly go through highs and lows over the period of a campaign and it is the people around you who give you strength to keep going. My supporters and the community did this. Thank you also to the Australian Workers Union. We have heard much criticism today in other debates in the chamber about the union movement throughout Australia, and it is once again disappointing to listen to such arguments. It just reinforces why there are still workers across this country who feel intimidated about belonging to a union and having that membership known openly throughout their workplace and about having the right to representation. I am a union member, I am proud of it, and I will continue to speak publicly about the important roles that unions play in workplaces throughout this country.

That brings me to the most important acknowledgement—that is, to my family. To my broader family—my father, my sister and her family, and my brother and his family—thank you for your support. I said in my first speech that my family and friends could not quite understand why I would want to put my hand up to do a job like this. I do not think their opinions have changed much. If anything, they have watched how hard I have worked and the nights I no longer have with my family and the weekends that I no longer can socialise with others, and are even more surprised that any person would want to be an elected member. But my reasons are clear, and I will go through them shortly.

I must say to my husband, George, that his belief in me gives me the confidence to put myself forward. My children, Emma and Cameron, have grown up so much over the past three years of my first term, and I certainly do not just mean in size—although they are catching up with me quickly. But my children, through my role as an elected representative, are learning more about the world around them, that governments at all levels and people of all political persuasions have an important role to play in shaping that world. I thank my husband and my children for their ongoing love and support.

I have learnt a lot in my first term as the federal member for Petrie. I am certainly wiser to the needs of the community and the challenges that we face in addressing those needs. Having said that, my resolve to work my hardest to advocate strongly on behalf of my communities has not diminished or wavered in any way. In taking a moment to revisit my first speech I was
reminded of my words on that Monday, 18 February 2008. I spoke of how the efforts of businesses, community groups and individuals throughout my electorate gave me hope and inspiration, strength and energy. I believe I am even more inspired and more determined today than ever before. I am optimistic about the future for my local communities and for this nation. I am optimistic because I know what Labor was able to achieve in its first three years in government and I am confident of what we can achieve in the future under a Labor government.

I would like to take just a moment to look at what some of those past achievements have been. Labor was the first government of this Commonwealth to hold a welcome to country in this national parliament. Labor was the first government to apologise to the stolen generation, a moment in time that I will forever be proud to have been associated with. Labor was the first government to apologise to the forgotten Australians and Labor is the first government to introduce a paid parental leave scheme. It was the federal Labor government that saw this country through the worst global financial crisis that the world has seen since the Great Depression. It was the Labor government that acted swiftly and decisively, before many countries around the world, to initiate a stimulus package to support local jobs and invest in public infrastructure, where the private sector had all but walked away. It was the Labor government that provided much-needed support to our financial institutions to protect people’s savings. Our government is now the envy of the developed nations for our economic credentials and the strong economic performance that we are exhibiting as a nation.

Of course it is this Labor government that has put in place—and the analysis shows it is on track—measures to get the budget back into surplus by 2012-13. It was the stimulus announced in October 2008 and the Nation Building Program introduced in February 2009 that helped my local communities. The injection of payments to many pensioners and low- to middle-income earners, and an urging by the government to spend that money locally, meant local businesses, especially the retail sector, were able to weather the financial storm over the Christmas period in 2008 much better than they otherwise would have. This meant that jobs were saved. The investment in community projects through the Jobs Fund and the local governments meant additional work in the local area. The knock-on effect in infrastructure investment also meant that the government was supporting jobs not only in construction but in the retail, wholesale and manufacturing sectors and where the materials were being sourced. For all of its faults, we should also acknowledge that thousands of homes were insulated by reputable companies and that that insulation is serving those homeowners well.

To my mind, the greatest investment of all has been the investment in education. The Nation Building Program included the largest investment in capital infrastructure that our schools have ever seen. Across the electorate of Petrie we have new multipurpose halls and fantastic libraries. We have refurbished classrooms in our primary and secondary schools, we have new outdoor learning areas, we have new courtyards, we have new shaded areas. These schools have been transformed. Whether it is Clontarf Beach State School, Kippa-Ring State School, Aspley State School, Bald Hills State School, St Paul’s School, Grace Lutheran Primary School, Grace Lutheran College or many more, they all tell me the same thing: they are thrilled with their new facilities. The principals, teachers, parents and students are celebrating the fact that they have facilities which they never envisaged they would have. The contractors tell me about the jobs that have been saved. I hear a chorus of contractors telling me that if it were not for the school building work their businesses would have collapsed a year ago.
Much more work is still being done. Buildings are still being erected and new science and language centres are near completion. In addition, schools across the electorate have received computers under the computers in schools program and these schools are now at a two for one ratio. Trade training centres are being built. Schools are now getting new projects and new facilities under the Local Schools Working Together pilot project. Two schools in my electorate, a state government school and a private school—Redcliffe State High School and Southern Cross Catholic College—have joined together, through Local Schools Working Together, to build a performing arts centre. That centre will be used not only by the students but by the broader community, as will the school halls. Quite often I drive past these school halls—at school hours, in the evenings or on weekends—and I can see them being used by our local church and community groups. These are facilities for the whole community.

Our investment in schools goes well beyond infrastructure. It includes the development of national curricula, the My School website, the national partnership program and more support for national numeracy and literacy programs. These are all positive things that this government started in just its first term of government.

It was this Labor government, in its first term, that increased the base rate of the pension, providing people with much needed additional income. The Labor government did so much in just its first term. We must not forget that, in that first term, we did what we promised the Australian people we would do—we got rid of Work Choices. We provided three lots of tax cuts; we increased the childcare rebate; we invested massively in health, in GP training places and in nurses; and we continue to invest and move forward with our health reform agenda. These are all great things that we did in just our first term.

I am very proud, my electorate of Petrie having chosen to return me as their representative, to talk about some of the new initiatives that we are now taking on as part of our second term. The most important initiative is one that our local community has been wanting for a hundred years, with a corridor having been set aside for it for 32 years. This federal Labor government has delivered an agreement with our local council, the Moreton Bay Regional Council, and the Bligh state government to finally get a real commitment to the Moreton Bay Rail Link. The project will deliver a 12.6-kilometre rail line from Petrie to Kippa-Ring and six new train stations at Kallangur, Murrumba Downs, Mango Hill, Kinsellas Road, Rothwell and Kippa-Ring.

The people in the electorate of Petrie never thought they would see this happen. It is this federal government that made sure that we delivered. What does this project mean for our community? With 84,000 people living along the line, it will mean an incredible change. Every full train will take some 600 cars off the road and reduce carbon emissions. There will be increases in business opportunities and benefits for our schools. The schools in the area have been saying to me, ‘We have to hire a coach to try to go into the city, to the museum, to take the kids on excursions, but now we will be able to catch public transport.’ In the past, there have been parents who could not afford the high cost of some of those excursions. Now those excursions will be much more affordable.

The program is for construction to start in 2012 and by 2016 the six stations will be operational. But we are not waiting until 2012. The surveying work has already started and this Saturday the first public consultation on the project will take place in the North Lakes community. People will be able to come along, see the proposed line and talk about the proposed
train stations and what the project means for our local area. It is only a matter of weeks since
the election and we have started work on this line. That is absolutely incredible.

That is not all we are doing for our local community. We are building a GP superclinic. We
started this superclinic in the first term of government but we have invested further money
into this clinic so that when it opens in June next year this will be a state-of-the-art clinic. The
additional funding we have promised the Redcliffe Hospital Foundation, as the provider of
this superclinic, means that they are going to be able to go out and start delivering health ser-
VICES and programs in planned aged care and outreach services even sooner—before the cen-
tre is even opened. This is fantastic. This centre will have a dental school and GPs will be
trained for the first time on the Redcliffe Peninsula. There is not one GP being trained in the
area. This new GP superclinic will be training.

There are new stormwater initiatives—the Fitzgibbon Stormwater Harvesting Project and
the Fitzgibbon Potable Roofwater Project. These are amazing projects that will deliver 133
million litres of new water supplies to the area. That is equivalent to 53 Olympic size swim-
ing pools. These new estates will have their own water and take pressure off our existing
dams. These are wonderful initiatives. The federal government has committed $7.13 million
for those two projects to be rolled out by the Queensland Urban Land Development Authority.

Last but not least—and one which is very close to my heart—deals with the young people
in our area. We will be building a North Lakes Youth Space. It is so desperately needed in this
area that is growing so rapidly. This suburb has been there for only 10 years, but it still has
another five years of growth to occur before it gets to capacity and we do not have sufficient
youth services. The fact is that new families have come in over the last 10 years and these
kids have grown up and are now teenagers and they do not have much to do in the area. We
have invested $3 million to build a new Youth Space. We will not only provide a safe place
for these young people to come but also have support services, counselling and services to
assist them in getting skills and going into the workplace and assisting those most in need in
our local community.

These are just some of the things that we are doing. Of course, the National Broadband
Network is so important in our area. Mr Deputy Speaker, you would appreciate the need for
the National Broadband Network. We may be just outer metropolitan areas but we have many
suburbs where people cannot get connection in their home. We need a fast broadband system.
The people in the electorate of Petrie want a fast broadband system, and that is what we as a
Labor government will be delivering to them.

We will continue our investment in education and I will continue to be a very passionate
advocate for investing in our schools and working with our schools in some many areas—not
just the curriculum or the capital investment. There is an important funding review going on. I
meet regularly with my schools across the private and public sectors and the state education
bodies so that we can talk about the issues important to them and I can be a strong advocate
on their behalf in this parliament.

We will continue with our health reforms. Our local hospitals are very excited about where
we are going in the future with health reform. We have amazing nurse practitioners already
operating in our emergency departments and we want to see more of them. We are training
nurse practitioners for other hospitals in the region now because of the excellent work that our
nurse practitioners are doing and the pressure they are taking off the emergency department
by supporting those doctors. They will be working directly in conjunction with our new superclinic. If a person comes in they are triaged as category 4 or 5 and they are sent straight over to the clinic, which is open until 10 pm at night seven days a week and is bulkbilled, and they will be able to get treated there, taking pressure off the emergency department.

These are fantastic initiatives. This is what the Labor government are doing. We have done so much in our first three years and we have so much more to do. I look forward to working with my communities to achieve that.

My communities are doing such amazing things. The networking that I am seeing—the cooperation between community organisations, not-for-profit organisations, and businesses—in my electorate now is incredible. Big businesses such as car dealerships are joining with our community associations to help our youths. Many local restaurants are helping community organisations to raise funds for our young kids, to make sure that their basic needs are met for going to school. So they have books and pencils, they have school uniforms and shoes, and they are able to go on excursions. That is what bringing businesses in with community organisations can do. And by partnering with the government we can achieve so much for our local area.

I look forward to facing those challenges—and we do have many challenges, especially with the growth in our area, which is significant. Ours is the third fastest growing area in South-East Queensland. We do need to face those challenges. But together, as a community, we can face those challenges, and I look forward to continuing my strong advocacy on behalf of the people in the electorate of Petrie.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (4.20 pm)—It is a great privilege and a humbling experience to have been chosen by the people living in the electorate of Indi to again be their federal member. I owe them a great debt of gratitude. I will be, as I always have been, fearless in my advocacy of the values and concerns of the people of my electorate. I would also like to put on the record my gratitude to those who helped in my campaign: the Liberal Party members, the thousands of supporters, and of course my long-suffering staff and family.

In many respects it has never been a harder time to be a representative of a rural electorate, and that is because so much that we hold dear is under threat. So many important decisions that need to be made to lay the foundation for future prosperity outside metropolitan areas are not being made and, where they are, they are having dire consequences. Decisions are being made for the whole country, for which our children will suffer through increased taxes. They will bear the significant burden of repaying debt, to pay for disastrous decisions: the huge white elephant of the NBN, the problems and financial cost we will have from illegal immigration when the boats keep coming, and the great big new tax that the Labor Party wants to impose. These are some of our broader challenges. Then there is all the money that is being spent on very expensive sheds and schools which, if I wanted to put one on my farm, would cost at most a fifth of the price. This money will not be available in the future for very important, prudent, good spending and investment in social and built infrastructure in Australia, and we will be paying interest on this very bad spending.

There have been a couple of issues of particular importance to my electorate. We have seen billions of dollars wasted in national programs by the Labor Party. Let us look at a couple of examples. In north-east Victoria, we have had a project worth $600 million to revitalise the main railway line, the Melbourne to Sydney line, between Albury-Wodonga and Melbourne.
You would think that when significant funds were spent on upgrading infrastructure there would be improvements, but not only have we had slower services because of 80 danger points; we now have no train services. The train line is so bad that we can no longer have safe train travel. It is almost Monty Python-esque in its absurdity. It would be funny if it were not such a disgraceful example of mismanagement of something as basic as that.

The issue of water is the No. 1 environmental issue for Australia. It is the No. 1 issue for my electorate. Yet we have seen the handling of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan being nothing short of absolute amateurish incompetence. From the outset it was obvious that the government did not care about the basin, because it is a rural issue and they do not really care about the country. When the Labor Party won the 2007 election, it took them 18 months to appoint the MDBA commissioners. It is little wonder that everything is running behind schedule when such delays occurred in the first instance. The coalition had a very sensible $10 billion 10-point plan but the government could not accept that. They had to come up with their own program, and they still do not know where they are heading. We had a good plan that would have returned health to the river, primarily by investing in river communities to ensure that they were able to produce more food with less water. Innovation and investment in better productivity are the sorts of things that help a nation grow its economy and maintain its standard of living—but none of that from the Labor Party.

We foresaw the problems that have engulfed the Labor Party with the release of the draft. We produced an election policy just months ago that called for a full socioeconomic study on the impacts of basin reform. It outlined a plan to get water-saving infrastructure projects back on track, proposed more funding for community adjustment and established a fund to identify and kick-start new projects for sustainable water use. We have seen the Labor Party try to hide behind the Water Act. They say, ‘It’s not really our problem; it’s the Water Act.’ But the reality is that the Howard government had provided for balanced outcomes, and Labor’s position is just another example of their refusal to be grown-up and responsible politicians. Those on the opposite side who form government need to take responsibility for their actions.

The act already requires Labor to engage in a way ‘that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes’, and the recent outcry and distress from rural communities was because these very outcomes were utterly ignored. The Prime Minister was exposed as engaging in a great election lie when she said:

I am determined we will do what is necessary to implement the Murray-Darling Basin Authority plan.

But now she says:

It would be highly inappropriate for me to announce a government decision at this stage …

The problem is that Labor do not do the hard yakka in the first place. They do not assess the situation. They do not gather all the relevant scientific information and regional data that is required and that is essential to produce a national plan worthy of implementation. This ridiculous rush has resulted in a situation where the Ovens catchment in my electorate will effectively have 70 per cent of its irrigation water cut. This catchment already returns 95 per cent of its 1,804 gigalitres back into the system and currently irrigates only 0.7 per cent of the total water in the Ovens system. So you can see the one-size-fits-all rushed approach has potentially disproportionately disadvantaged a highly efficient and effective and very small irrigation water-using area in the basin.

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There is much work to be done, and we are not going to allow the government to get away with this sloppy work. We will not rest until we get a detailed plan which appreciates that the basin is a diverse area, with different needs and uses. The government’s incompetence on water policy mimics what we have seen from the state Labor Party over the last few years. The Labor Party broke their previous election promise not to pipe water north of the divide; but, lo and behold, their great big white elephant, which rips out water from north-east Victoria and delivers it to the city, was built, breaking an election promise. Recently, they have had to stop water coming down the pipe because, lo and behold, it rained. If they did not have an ideologically intransient position of no more dams, they could have invested the wasted money that has gone on building the pipeline in building dams. We need to be able to understand rainfall patterns in Australia to capture the water when it falls so that we can use it later. Past visionaries in representative positions in parliaments were able to make these decisions, but the Labor Party are incapable of doing so because they have a simple rule: no more dams. It is as was described by one Labor senator: robotic zombies following this mantra.

At Wonthaggi they have proceeded with a desalination plant without even thinking about different options. Kenneth Davidson from the *Age* has done some very good work in revealing some of the very alarming statistics. The Victorian taxpayer has lost upwards of $3 billion through this project, and this $3 billion to $4 billion at the beginning equates to an extra $11 billion in interest charges over the next three decades. Imagine what better projects this money could have been spent on. In Australia this costs $32 million per gigalitre, which is simply ludicrous when you compare it to $5.5 million per gigalitre for a plant recently announced in Saudi Arabia.

While this is all very dispiriting, of course, it is not a surprise. As I said, they don’t care about country Australia; they don’t care about the issues that matter in non-metropolitan Victoria. It is no surprise that Julia Gillard visited a regional electorate only once in the entire campaign. That is truly telling. Perhaps it mirrors her attitudes to pensioners and the armed forces. It has been reported that she does not think pensioners and those in the armed forces vote Labor, so she has not really cared about policies catering to them. Perhaps she thinks that regional Australians do not vote Labor, they predominantly vote for the coalition, so why should you care about them. She has never pretended to govern for all. She has excelled at the politics of politics, but she has utterly failed in being a visionary. She has utterly failed with every single policy that she has touched. It is the reverse Midas touch, and it is very sad for Australia.

In my own portfolio we have seen some very dismal failures. We know that it is critically important for our economy, for our progress as a nation, to maintain productivity. Essential in productivity is innovation and investment in research and development that underpins that innovation. We have seen a minister who thinks it is okay to slash support in critical areas for Australia’s future like commercialisation and research and development, but sees no object to spending money on wasteful causes. He is the sort of person who takes extreme umbrage and offence and tries to intimidate people when they make this rather obvious and self-evident point.

While I know it is not something he personally wants to introduce, he has lost the plot so badly that he has been lumped with the job of pushing through the visionless this policy of the cash-for-clunkers scheme, which is a shemozzle. Minister Garrett, who represents him in the
House of Representatives, does not even know the name of the program. Minister Garrett, the
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, who is supposed to know all about all the
government’s great and wonderful plans to reduce emissions, cannot even tell you how much
cash-for-clunkers is going to cost, even though it is plan is to supposedly reduce our carbon
emissions. It was a bad idea, it was formed on the run, the whole concept has been discredited
internationally and no less than four ministers over the last three weeks have not been able to
speak with one voice and get their lines on it right. She should just break this election prom-
ise. This is one election promise she should break. Do all the Australian taxpayers a favour
and dump this dud.

This would follow, of course, from one of her more spectacular failures—the $1.7 billion
blow-out in the Building the Education Revolution. Interestingly, in Victoria only 20 per cent
of the buildings have been completed after 15 months. So when you hear the government say
that they have saved us from recession, it is all garbage. What they have actually done is hock
this nation’s future because if this money was so critical to stimulating the Australian econ-
omy why have only 20 per cent of the buildings been completed? What is the continued $100
million a day being borrowed by the government doing to interest rates? It is pushing them
up—that is what it is doing. The government are out there in the marketplace competing with
business and private individuals for finance and they are pushing the price of interest rates up.
It is Australian families who are suffering and who will continue to suffer.

We saw millions of dollars go offshore with the pink batts fiasco when overseas crime
gangs came to Australia, registered and then sent money overseas. We have seen the extraor-
dinary waste of money in other mismanaged programs such as the $850 million blow-out the
solar homes program, the $300 million wasted on the Green Loans Program, the $50 million
wasted on the stimulus advertising, the $14 million wasted on the climate change advertising
and the $2 million wasted on the 2020 Summit. That is almost the price of a packet of lollies
compared to the sheer volume of funds wasted by this government. It will continue because
they have no other solution—if there is a problem, they will just throw money at it.

The reality is that before the Labor Party won in 2007 Australia was engaged in reform
through a government that made the difficult decisions. Between 1998 and 2007 Julia Gillard,
and those who now sit on the frontbench, opposed every major economic reform of the How-
ard government, even though we have been fortunate enough to have been beneficiaries of
those reforms during the recent financial crisis. Now she is running the most economically
incompetent government in living memory. It is a government that has turned a $20 billion
surplus into a $57 billion deficit in such a short space of time.

We saw her make a particular election promise to stop the boats but a lot of us knew she
was not fair dinkum. She just had to say something to keep people happy and to allay their
concerns. She said she would stop the boats, but she did not know how to do it and she really
did not care as long as she could make it through the election. She tried to look tough—she
even took a marginal seat colleague and a brigade of journalists to tour the harbour on a gun
boat. She devised a grand plan for a regional detention centre in East Timor and announced it
before discussing it with the East Timorese government.

But what do we have now? A record number of boats are coming to Australia and they are
not going to stop, because the carpet has been rolled out. And true to form, the factions in the
Labor Party do not want her to stop the boats coming in. They believe we should have an

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open-door policy. She pretends to talk tough but people are starting to see through the rhetoric and the lies.

One of the worst policies that this government could inflict on Australia—and there is a lot of competition—is the NBN. We have a Prime Minister who says, ‘I believe spending every dollar carefully is important.’ So Madam Prime Minister, where is the cost-benefit analysis of the NBN? What are you saying to the thousands of people who are going to be left behind because you refuse to have a broad and visionary outlook on technology with regard to broadband? Why don’t you allow a full cost-benefit analysis so that people can see how much it will actually cost? What happened to your famous words you said soon after forming government, ‘So let’s draw back the curtains and let the sun shine in, let our parliament be more open than it was before’? And what about, ‘We will be held to higher standards of transparency and reform and it’s in that spirit I approach the task of forming a government’? What a load of rubbish. What an absolute embarrassment. Labor will spend billions of dollars, plunging our nation into debt, just to create a giant monopoly—a white elephant—that will destroy competition, increase the digital divide and increase costs.

That does take the cake, but perhaps it will be outdone by the Prime Minister’s broken promise regarding climate change. What was her solution? Her solution was to frame Kevin Rudd, stab him in the back, take over and then announce the most ridiculous election promise of all time: a citizens assembly. After emphatically ruling out a carbon tax during the election campaign, she is now going to back such a tax. She cannot be taken on her word, because it does not mean anything. There is no track record of actually living up to any promises, and the Australian public are seeing through that. The Australian people deserve something better than—to paraphrase a long-time Labor hero—a political party run by ruthless, robotic machine men who preside over lobotomised zombies. We deserve the vision, the passion, the ideas, the diversity—

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (4.40 pm)—It is always a pleasure to speak in the address-in-reply debate, because it gives members of parliament so much scope to talk about anything they want. It also provides us an opportunity to talk about some of the things that happen in our electorates, certainly to address some of the good things that this government has done, to review programs and to look at some of the positive things and not just be on about three-word slogans and everything negative. There are lots of good things, and we should talk about those as well.

It might be easy for some people to forget the good work that is being done by this Labor government, not only through its first term but coming into the second term. We came into office in very difficult times, when difficult decisions had to be made. This is a good government and I am very proud of it for the things that we have succeeded in doing—things that were very difficult and done in difficult times.

One of this government’s greatest achievements, and it is just one of them, was its economic stewardship of the stimulus package and the way that we helped guide Australia through what is accepted globally as one of the worst economic downturns in the last 70 years—a global financial crisis which had an enormous impact right across North America, South America, Europe and the developed world. Certainly we felt it here, but not to the same extent. That was due mainly to the efforts of this government to make sure that did not happen. In fact, we did such a good job of that that it is now quite common for some people to
question whether a GFC actually occurred at all. I talk at a lot of different forums—economic forums and forums on financial services—and I often ask people, ‘Who actually believes that we even had a financial crisis?’ For some people, they just did not feel the pain that is associated with a recession or a global financial crisis. And that is a good thing. It is a good thing that in Australia we did not go through that same experience, that we did not feel that pain that was felt by so many other countries around the world.

In fact, we were very focused—not only in terms of the stimulus package itself but also in terms of what the stimulus package actually does in practice and has done. Our primary focus in this area was the saving of jobs, the preservation of jobs. According to reports done by the OECD, our stimulus package and the measures we took through the global financial crisis saved more than 200,000 jobs. In fact, Professor Joseph Stiglitz, a former World Bank chief economist, said that this government actually did a ‘fantastic job’ of saving the country from problems. Of course, he was referring to the problems of job losses, interest rate rises, people losing their homes and so many other things associated with the global financial crisis and an economic recession. Professor Stiglitz also said that the stimulus package, when compared with the US, was ‘better conceptually, in size and design.’ He also said that it was carefully thought out, the way we got the money out into the community, the staging of it, and all the concerns that went into the delivery were well done. Basically he gave this government a really big tick in terms of the way we handled the global financial crisis, our response to the crisis and the measures that we introduced. I think it is important to understand that, because many people did not feel the full harsh impact of that crisis.

Some people may say, that we went a little bit too far or we spent a little bit too much. It is always a fine line. It is always a close call when a government has to make that big decision about how far it goes. Do you go just a little bit short, still have the recession and waste the money that you put in there, or do you aim to get it spot on? Every report, every economist, everyone out there has said that we actually got it just right. So it is a great credit to the work that Treasurer Wayne Swan and the government did.

It is easy now for people to almost laugh it off as if it did not happen. But the reality is that it did happen and it was the worst in 70 years. The reason it did not happen for us is, in a sense, because of the work we did. So I am very proud of that work. How do people view our economy? The reality is that our economy is the envy of the developed world. Every other comparable economy would gladly trade their economy for ours any day of the week.

Australia’s unemployment rate, for example, is at around five and a bit per cent—5.2, 5.3, 5.4. That is what most people would consider close to full employment, which is a great number. Of course it is never low enough. I think that is the reality for all of us in this place. We would like to see unemployment as low as possible. Australia’s unemployment rate is about half the rate of comparable nations across the world. You only have to look at Europe, where they have more than 10 per cent unemployment across the board or the United States where they have about 10 per cent unemployment, to see that Australia is much better off. That does not mean for one moment that that unemployment rate is low enough—no rate is low enough—but having it in the low fives means that we are doing something right.

It is interesting to note that the MYEFO released earlier this month forecast that Australia’s economy will grow by about 3¼ per cent in 2010-11 and by another 3¼ per cent in 2011-12. By any measure, that is quite a healthy figure. It is certainly within the RBA range of where
growth should be. I think it is important that we note that. There would be some—and dare I say some in the opposition if not most of the opposition—who would criticise that. It is never quite good enough for them. But it is a sound figure. It is a manageable figure and it is the right amount of growth for this nation.

Some people say, particularly those in the opposition, that our debt, our national sovereignty, is in jeopardy because of our sovereign debt. They could not be further from the truth. They just could not be more wrong on this very important matter. In fact, net debt is forecast to peak at around 6.4 per cent of GDP in 2011-12. That is quite a respectable, manageable and low figure. Some people might say: ‘What does 6.4 per cent represent? What does that mean in real terms?’ Let me make some comparisons. By comparison, net debt in major developed economies is expected to reach around 90 per cent of GDP by 2015. That is 14 times higher than Australia’s, which is expected to peak at a much lower rate.

If you compare developed nations right across the OECD, we are at the bottom end of the net debt scale. We are not just at the lower end by a little bit; we are at the lower end by a massive amount. The amount of national debt and sovereign risk in this country are not only within the expected range but more than well-managed and more than manageable into the future.

One of the best things that this government or any government can do is keep a strong economy and keep people in jobs. The greatest safety net any person has against any downturn is having a job. It should always be the focus of governments to keep the economy strong and keep people in work. Government should make sure that whatever else happens globally—access to funds, the ability to borrow, and every other matter which is so important to people in terms of their economic future—the economy is strong. And that is exactly what we have done. One of the ways we have done that is by making sure we do it in balance—a balance between job creation, keeping interest rates low, continuing to provide government services that are so vital to people and making sure that those government services look after older Australians. Older Australians have provided so much to this country.

Remember we experienced one of the greatest economic downturns in the country. So much for the rivers of gold that used to flow into Canberra in the heady days under the Howard government when the economy was exceptionally strong, globally and nationally. But those rivers of gold were not used to their optimal levels. At the same time that we experienced the global financial crisis here, the greatest contraction of the economy that we had seen in 70 years, this government managed to make one of the greatest pension reforms in 100 years. What we were able to do was deliver to pensioners a real increase for the first time in more than three decades of up to $115 per fortnight for single pensioners and $97 per fortnight for couples, thanks to our reforms of September 2009. But we did not stop there. We felt that it was important to get the balance right as well and to get the indexation right. So we also moved on indexation to make sure that they keep up with the cost of living through a system not based on one index or two indexes and CPI data but on three indexes, making sure that the highest of three indexes is the one that we refer to. Pensioners have made a long-term commitment to this country and so has this government to them. The Gillard government has made a long-term commitment to properly index and properly grow their retirement incomes, not to use some sham puny bonus scheme before an election, which was a cynical scheme under the previous administration.
There is a range of other things that this government did in its two terms, including the delivery of two historic apologies, the first one being to Australia’s Indigenous people and the stolen generation and the second being to the forgotten Australians, those child migrants who grew up in state care. That demonstrates to me the important balance of a government that is practical and logical and can deal with economic issues but has a heart and a soul and can also deal with the issues that have been a stain on Australia’s vast tapestry that needed to be rectified. By making those two apologies, we do not by any means fix all the problems that exist but we do begin the process to right some of the wrongs of the past and to bring some healing and some closure to people that not only deserve it but need it. So I am very proud of those things that we did.

Something that I am just as much proud of is something that is often criticised the most today: the Building the Education Revolution program. I cannot find a better cause or a better way to spend a stimulus funding package than to do it on schools. Firstly, you create local jobs. If anybody here of fair mind goes and talks to contractors and workers, the people who actually help build these new science labs and classrooms and halls and libraries and so forth, and asks just how important it is to them, they will often tell you that if it were not for that project they would be out of work—they would not have a job—and in turn might lose their home.

The importance of that program should never be underestimated. But it flowed much deeper and much further. It was more than just the mere construction of a brick building or a concrete building or a steel building. It was also about changing, for the first time in generations, the outlook of the students and the teachers in those schools, of the parents and of the communities. The sort of response I have had from my schools and from sitting down with students has overwhelmed me. I had the great privilege to sit down with the year 7 students at Durack State School in my electorate when we did something a bit unusual: after we had the hall ceremony we sat down and talked inside the new multipurpose hall, which gets used for unbelievably everything. This is a school that previously really did not have any facilities and its staff could have never dreamed of having the sorts of facilities that we have been able to provide.

I asked the students what this meant to them and, honestly, they responded that for the first time it meant they felt important, it meant they felt that other people cared about them, their school and their community. It meant that for the first time they could have classes which they could not have before. They could actually gather all the year 7s together for the first time. They could gather the year 7s and other years together and hold particular seminars. It meant that for the first time they could get all of the parents together, in one place at the same time, and discuss productivity and education within the school.

I have heard criticism today, as I have heard it many times before, from the opposition, who are so disingenuous about this particular program and so wrong about this particular program. They say it does not deliver productivity. Well, they could not be more wrong on that. They only have to go and talk to school principals and teachers and parents and students and ask them about productivity and ask them what a new science lab or a new classroom means to them. It has not been a perfect program—I acknowledge that. When you deliver 26,000 different projects across thousands of schools across the country, you expect a few little prob-
lems here and there, but the massive vast bulk of people are so positive about them. What all of it has delivered for students is so good that it should never be underestimated.

I also want to briefly mention trade training centres—because you cannot talk about schools and not talk about trade training. Students need to have choices. We live in a complex world. It is a complex educational environment and a complex skills environment. Students ought to have options and flexibility in taking an academic path or a vocational path. You cannot just deliver that in the traditional way of either finishing year 10 or finishing year 12. Students need to stay in school until year 12 but they need pathways, they need to be able to work with industry directly. We have created that through trade training centres.

I want to mention three specific schools—Woodcrest College, Forest Lake State High School and Redbank State High School—which have partnered together in an incredible collaboration to share an expanded facility and provide their students with an endless list of opportunities, with industry directly creating high-skilled high-end jobs. For example, Volvo trucks will provide them with the latest high-tech gearboxes so that when the students finish they will already be skilled in using equipment that is being used out in industry. This sort of stuff you just cannot buy, this sort of stuff you almost cannot dream of, yet we have started to create it in schools. I cannot imagine that anybody could disagree with that; in fact, I know that nobody does. The opposition might talk tough in terms of politics but they could not look a student in the eye and tell them they do not deserve to have those sorts of opportunities.

I want to briefly mention the Ipswich Motorway. There has been a community road safety campaign for well over a decade and a desperate need for a 21st century motorway. To save lives but also provide economic growth in the western corridor of South-East Queensland is of the utmost importance. If it were not for the election of a Labor government in 2007, this motorway would never have happened. The reality is that the motorway is now almost completed—with incredible results. There have been no deaths on the motorway since work began and there have been incredible incremental improvements. I cannot think of a better way to spend $3.2 billion. It has been a fabulous project with incredible outcomes.

I also want to talk about housing as a sustainability issue for Australia and for our cities and how we achieve the living standard that we have today. Housing is one of the critical areas of need and it is related to transport, water, energy and many other issues. The National Housing Supply Council’s very important *State of supply report 2010* has some incredible figures. There is a housing shortage of 178,400 homes in this country. If you conceptualise that in terms of families and individuals, it is a lot of people who really do not have a place to live; it is a lot of homelessness and it is a lot of disadvantage. The shortfall in Queensland is 56,100 homes, which is exceeded only by Sydney. Brisbane and Queensland need to do more work. The council also found that housing remains unaffordable for many households, whether they rent or buy, and that in 2007-08 there were already more than 300,000 lower-income home-buyers in housing stress—that is, paying more than 30 per cent of their gross income on mortgage repayments.

This report paints a picture of neglect over the previous decade or more. That neglect is very hard to deal with today but this government has taken it on by setting up a National Rental Affordability Scheme, whereby we are working with developers and the private sector to ensure that we can provide affordable housing—because people deserve an opportunity to have a decent place to live. We are also working on a range of other areas. We are providing
public housing and more funding and working with the states and local government authorities—and they also need to step up to the block to make sure that they do their part. A great opportunity exists for a new cooperation between the three levels of government to look at those areas. It goes back to housing and sustainability. If we turn our attention to these matters we can solve them. If we continue to grow under the current models and growth patterns then we will have some serious issues in the future about how we provide for our own population, let alone how we fit into the global picture of population.

Listening to the simplistic arguments that you will hear from the other side about boats coming over, as if there is some sort of magic wand, and the simplistic arguments that they put forward on all of these issues, which are interlinked, you realise that during the more than 10 years that they were in government they did nothing about any of them. They might have focused on one or two populist, petty issues, but they did not do anything to fix the structural inefficiencies within this economy or to look at some of the really big issues. The evidence of that is that we have to pick all those up today. The reason we have some serious existing issues to deal with today is because nothing was done in those areas for well over a decade.

It is a great pleasure to talk to the address-in-reply because it gives us an opportunity to lay on the table some of the issues that we think are most important, not only for our electorates or our states, but which are also in the national interest.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (5.00 pm)—It is my pleasure to speak on this address-in-reply. I want to specifically thank my electorate, the people of Stirling, for putting their confidence in me for a third time. It is always good to be returned and to get that vote of confidence, and this time we had a very good electoral result in Stirling. For a swinging seat the margin now is better than it has been in many years, which I would like to think is a reasonably strong endorsement of the work we have done over the past six years.

It is always an honour to be re-endorsed by your electorate. I want to thank them for that, but also thank my campaign team who worked tirelessly to make sure we got the right outcome. My campaign team has been the same since I first won the seat off Labor in 2004—that is, John Franklyn, my campaign manager; Fay Duda, who manages the finances of the campaign and is always tireless in doing all of the things that a campaign requires and has boundless energy; my parents, who have always been very helpful and good political operators in their own right having worked on Liberal Party campaigns for many years before I was in parliament; my office, led by Sallyanne, who did an incredible job and worked very hard; and I also acknowledge Dan and Adam and Pauline and Amelia, my portfolio adviser. My office is an incredibly skilled team, and I do not think I have ever had a better office in the six years I have been in parliament. I thank them very much for their incredible efforts during the course of the campaign that saw us achieve such a wonderful result in Stirling.

In my third term in parliament my focus will be, as always, on my electorate and how we can serve my electorate of Stirling better. I believe that we would have been better served by the election of a Liberal government. In fact I am very confident we would have been better served by the election of a Liberal government. And during the election campaign I was very pleased to be able to make a number of announcements on behalf of the coalition that would have brought great benefits to my electorate. In some cases I have been campaigning for these things to happen for the whole six years I have been in parliament.
Sadly, as far as we are aware the Labor campaign in Stirling did not make one promise on behalf of the Labor Party on what they would do if the Labor government was returned. We thought that was curious, but it was also very disappointing. I am disappointed by the fact that the two Independents made the decision that they did, that the Labor Party was returned to office and, therefore, my electorate of Stirling will not be getting any benefits at all from that.

My No. 1 priority is crime prevention, and we have funded during the past six years some very important crime prevention programs. I was pleased to announce in this campaign that an elected Liberal government would have delivered $1 million to expand crime prevention within the city of Stirling. It would have done that by expanding the closed-circuit television network across many parts of my electorate, and this would have been a massive blow to criminals in Stirling who, to date, have dodged the law. CCTVs are an effective way of assisting police to catch the culprits of crime. Importantly, they also act as a deterrent for criminals.

The $1 million was to be delivered to the City Of Stirling, which is my sole local government authority, to go towards improving CCTV coverage across the city via the provision of CCTV cameras to be installed and deployed in crime hotspots. The City Of Stirling already works closely with the local police to address street level crime on private business premises and public areas throughout the City Of Stirling, and the network would have strengthened this already strong working relationship. The project would have had a huge impact on reducing the rate of crime, including at the Mirrabooka regional centre, Clarko Reserve, Trigg Beach and the Terry Tyzack Aquatic Centre. Unfortunately for the people of Stirling, Labor announced no funding for such a project. Just as Labor is soft on national security, so is it soft on local crime prevention. I will continue to support the city of Stirling in its work to make our local communities safer places to live, and I would like to think that the Labor government would do the same. But, sadly, we have had no indication of that to date.

Another of my top priorities is local roads, and that featured heavily again during the local election campaign. I announced that an elected Liberal government would deliver $10 million to build an overpass at the dangerous Mirrabooka Avenue and Reid Highway intersection. Hundreds of local families have raised this issue with me, as well as the need to improve this notorious black spot. That is why I have fought hard over the past six years to deliver funding to do those things. The intersection, which consistently ranks as the worst black spot in Perth, has been the cause of countless accidents, and therefore it has been a priority of mine since I was elected. Building the overpass would have saved lives. The Western Australian Labor Party said in 2004 and again in 2005 that Mirrabooka Avenue was the worst black spot in Western Australia and promised to do something about it, yet Julia Gillard’s Labor has not committed even one dollar to the project. Once again the people of Stirling have been the ones to pay the price for the policies of an ignorant government whose interest has remained focused on the eastern states.

The local environment also received a double blow from the fallout of the Labor Party’s retaining office. The future of Stirling’s primary education centre for environmental prevention—the Henderson Environmental Centre—is in jeopardy since Labor failed to match the coalition’s commitment to a $100,000 upgrade. As the local member, I announced that the coalition would provide the funding to develop the centre into one of the premier environmental centres in Western Australia. The Henderson Centre has been the driving force behind
the strong presence of environmental activism in Stirling, and my announcement was a proper acknowledgement of the role the centre plays in my community.

Despite a commitment of support from the local and state governments, this worthwhile project appeared to go unnoticed by Labor, and they refused to commit even one dollar to it. I have had to explain to the local environmental groups that use the facility why their Commonwealth government does not value the work that they are doing to promote the environmental message. The upgraded centre would have been used to educate schoolchildren from the northern suburbs on the importance of their local environment as well as to assist university students with research projects while delivering a broader environmental message across the community. It is a great facility that has a lot of potential, but this is a huge loss to the Sterling community and one of my greatest disappointments following the election campaign.

The other great blow delivered to the local environment was the scrapping of local green army projects. Under the coalition government, Stirling would have been the recipient of funding for three green army projects worth $125,000 each. The projects earmarked for the green regional open space, Mettam’s Pool and Trigg Bushland Reserve would have delivered significant training and practical experience in the vital area of environmental management in Stirling. The green army projects were to provide tens of young Australians with the opportunity to work on local community based projects for a six-month period as part of the Liberal program, but the environment as well as an emerging workforce will now miss out on the benefits of these projects.

Despite these projects no longer going ahead, I would like to make a special mention of the existing work being done by hardworking volunteers. It is their work that would have been buttressed by this extra green army funding. These volunteers put in an enormous amount of work to raise environmental awareness in the local community. I mention groups such as the Friends of Trigg Bushland and Stirling Natural Coastcare. They should be commended for their efforts to protect our local environment. I would like to acknowledge the army—literally—of volunteers that gives up a lot of time and effort to go out in their spare time to make the local environment better. I am very disappointed because the green army projects would have gone a long way to helping them in doing what they do so well.

Sporting clubs in Stirling have also been the victim of an absence of any commitments from the Labor campaign in Stirling. During the campaign I was proud to announce that a Liberal government would deliver $95,000 to install a synthetic playing field at the Scarborough Bowls Club. Scarborough Bowls Club is a fantastic local sporting club with membership numbers now exceeding 1,400 people and rising at a rate of 20 new members a month. At present the club has to spend upwards of $25,000 a year to maintain each of their playing surfaces. This cost would have been reduced to zero had the Labor government matched the coalition’s commitment for funding for a new synthetic field. Instead, members will now likely go without the surface which would have lasted for up to 10 years and delivered environmental benefits by reducing the club’s water consumption.

The announcement buoyed the club’s confidence in their push to get their name on the map and it opened new avenues for them to be more competitive when bidding to host state and national championships. While, until the Liberal government is elected I cannot provide the funding that this club so desperately needs, I would like to note that they are a tireless club that continues to work hard in my local community.
Sports, crime prevention and the environment have all suffered in Stirling as a result of Labor’s victory. But I would also like to add a couple of extras to that list. That particularly goes to Indigenous issues in my electorate. These are complex and an ongoing source of concern for me and require more attention from the federal government.

One of the first announcements during the campaign, and one of my proudest, was a re-commitment of the coalition to the Reel Connections program which works in Mirrabooka to try and help the youth there. Mirrabooka is an incredibly multicultural area. It traditionally has been where new arrivals in Western Australia go. It has hosted waves of immigration from the postwar period when it hosted immigrants from southern Europe through to Vietnamese migrants during the wave of immigration after the Vietnam War. Currently it hosts the African arrivals and the Middle Eastern arrivals. Traditionally they would who go out to Mirrabooka because it is an area in Perth that has an available pool of lower priced rental housing and also a host of services at the Mirrabooka town centre. That can lead to problems and there has been an ongoing problem out there with petty crime. There has been an ongoing problem with some of the new arrivals not getting on with some of the existing communities.

We wanted to do something to try and integrate some of those communities more fully into the local community. We did so by funding the Reel Connections program under one of the Howard government’s existing programs. It was under the auspices of the City of Stirling and was very heavily supported by the local police. It was very successful in bringing some of those communities together and promoting cross-cultural understanding in a way that lessened some of those tensions.

Sadly, that funding ran out this year and we committed during the election campaign to re-funding it to the tune of $450,00, but that funding commitment was not matched by the local Labor campaign. We were very disappointed about that because they were asked to do so. Now, of course, that program has lapsed which means that my community will miss out on an incredibly important crime prevention and community building project.

I would like to be standing here today to announce that, if we had had a different election result, all of these worthwhile projects in Stirling would have been funded. But the sad reality is that, during the whole course of the election campaign, the Labor Party did not commit to do one thing within the Stirling community which I thought was relatively extraordinary.

We had the benefit of two prime ministerial visits yet there was not one announcement of anything positive for the community. Indeed, two weeks out from the election Prime Minister Julia Gillard visited my electorate and spent some 45 minutes with the local newspaper in an effort to garner support for the local Labor candidate. But she had not one positive thing to say about improving local roads, protecting the local environment, protecting local jobs or helping the hardworking local police to fight crime. Quite frankly the people of Stirling feel robbed—and rightly so.

Seats on the east coast in the states of Queensland and New South Wales became beneficiaries of Labor’s election spending but seats in Western Australia, including in Stirling, were completely ignored. Indeed, the people of Western Australia are now much worse off as a result of the re-election of the Labor government, with the threat of the mining tax still hanging over our heads in a way that will wreck the local economy. I will continue to fight for the worthwhile projects that I have outlined today and I call on the Labor government to support them as well, because the people of Stirling deserve better.
I will move, in the remaining time I have, from issues in my own electorate to issues in my portfolio of justice, customs and border protection. It has certainly become quite apparent that a change in the Labor Party leadership did nothing to put a party that had allegedly lost its way back on track. One of the areas in which Labor has significantly let the country down is in the protection of Australia’s borders. This crisis is becoming increasingly worse, with illegal boats now arriving at a rate which we have never seen before. In August of 2008 the then Rudd Labor government began the process of rolling back the strong border protection regime that they had inherited from the Howard government. Since that time 189 boats, carrying over 9,000 people have arrived in Australia illegally. This year, 2010, is the worst year on record for illegal boat arrivals. We are only in the middle of November, yet we have had 121 boats arrive. It has become readily apparent that the Gillard Labor government cannot cope with the influx of arrivals, and neither can the detention facilities that we have in Australia.

This year the coalition announced measures that will restore integrity to Australia’s borders. The key principle that we outlined on this issue was to secure our borders. We will stamp out people smuggling and effectively deter illegal and unauthorised arrivals while at the same time treating refugees compassionately in accordance with our international obligations. We will move all processing off shore. We will ensure that unauthorised arrivals seeking asylum are intercepted and processed offshore—not on the Australian mainland as is increasingly the case under this government.

We will reintroduce a non-permanent visa for unauthorised arrivals. The coalition has successfully used this in the past as one of the very important planks to take away the ability of people smugglers to sell their product. We will continue to have compassion and provide for a fair refugee and humanitarian program but we will not skew that program to people who can afford to pay a people smuggler to bring them here illegally. In fact, we will skew it to people who are sitting in refugee camps, particularly in Africa—but also in other parts of the world—because there are people sitting in those refugee camps who would never have the wherewithal to pay a people smuggler to come to Australia illegally. That point has been consistently made to me by people who have arrived here legally, after significantly long waits in refugee camps in Africa, and who have now settled in my electorate. You will not find any greater opposition to illegal boat arrivals than from communities of people who have come here to Australia legally. That point has been made to me over and over again from people who have arrived here from the Sudan, the Congo and other very difficult places in western Africa. Their families still sit rotting in these refugee camps, with no hope of ever leaving those camps and being resettled in another country.

Of course, the very limited hope they might have to join their families here in Australia is being destroyed by the fact that our system of arrivals is now completely skewed towards people who come here illegally. I think this is something that should be better understood by those who are urging compassion for refugees. We believe that that compassion should extend to the fact that people who are sitting in refugee camps should have the possibility to come to Australia on what is a very generous program by international standards.

We believe in an uncompromising approach to protecting Australia’s borders and keeping Australia safe. We are also committed to securing our borders against other threats such as illicit drugs, disease, illegal foreign fishing and, of course, people smuggling. The integrity of our borders can only be maintained with a properly resourced Australian Customs and Border
Protection Service. Since coming to office, Labor has cut funding to the Customs service to the tune of $58.1 million. This has, of course, made Australia’s borders less secure and our nation more vulnerable. During the election campaign, we committed to restore that funding but also to allocate another $30-odd million to make sure that we can improve our program of cargo screening to stop these threats from coming into Australia in the first place. (Time expired)

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (5.21 pm)—It is a great privilege to give this speech as the returning member for the electorate of Wakefield. I am the first Labor member ever re-elected to the division of Wakefield in the history of the seat, and that is certainly a great honour for me. I acknowledge that in the past it has been a far different electorate as far as its electoral boundaries were concerned; it traditionally favoured the conservative side of politics. In my first speech I made reference to Sydney McHugh, who was the Labor member between 1938 and 1940, but I regret that I did not acknowledge the election of Albert Smith, who was the Labor member between 1943 and 1946 and was part of the Curtin government and a former worker at the Knapstein Brewery. It is still a brewery today but also a rather good winery in the Clare Valley and I certainly suggest members visit if they get the chance. At the brewery is a very good picture of Albert Smith when he was a worker there. He made an important contribution during the war years—

Mr Fletcher—The winery is much more new Labor.

Mr CHAMPION—It is a brewery again, which is a good thing.

Mr Fletcher interjecting—

Mr CHAMPION—No doubt, but a good brewery all the same. Albert Smith’s first speech to the parliament had some interesting points, particularly towards the end. He spoke about interest rates, banks and competition and the importance in particular of lending in the rural areas. The more things change, the more they stay the same, I guess. I wanted to acknowledge Albert Smith’s role and his very important contribution to the electorate.

In my maiden speech I also talked about some of the issues that I was passionate about, but I regret that I did not go a great deal into rural living and the joys of growing up in the country. I was taken to task by the Plains Producer, which is a very good rural newspaper. It covers the Adelaide Plains and Balaklava and occasionally it tells me where I have got things wrong. The newspaper suggested that I should have remarked in my maiden speech about rural living, so in an effort to make up for that I will acknowledge that there is no better way to grow up than in a country town and by going to a country high school and playing football in a country league—generally having those experiences that you only get when you grow up in the country. I do not think I would be in this House if I had not grown up in the town of Kapunda and spent my formative adolescent years there. Certainly I would never have worked on a farm or picked apricots or grapes or any of those things. They were formative experiences in my life that have helped me to be a better member of parliament.

My home town of Kapunda has been through a difficult time in the last week and a half or so because of the terrible murders that were committed in the town. A lot of my friends and former schoolmates are quite worried about these events and obviously somewhat disturbed that these terrible crimes have been committed in a very quiet and peaceful country town. We are happy that the police have made an arrest. That is a good thing and hopefully it will put to
rest a lot of the fear that is in the town. But it will be sometime before the town recovers from these terrible events. I would like to extend my condolences to the family and friends of the deceased. On that rather sombre note, I would say that growing up in the country has been a good experience and one that I hope to express a little more in the House where I can.

I want to talk a little about the local elections in the councils in South Australia. As is the case with all elections, some very good people have been re-elected, some very good people have been elected and some very good people have sadly faced defeat. In the council of Light the mayor has been changed. I would like to acknowledge the election of Bill O’Brien, who is a resident of Kapunda. I wish Mr O’Brien all the best and look forward to working with him. We did have a rather pleasant barbecue dinner in Kapunda not so long ago. The former mayor, Robert Hornsey, was also there. I have enjoyed working with him over the last three years. He has been a good mayor and made a good contribution to public life in Kapunda, Freeling and other areas in the district of Light. I noticed in the paper he said that for the first time in 17 years he has an empty diary. No doubt he will get to spend more time on the farm and more time with his lovely wife, Anne.

I would also like to acknowledge three other councillors: Jane Alcorn, Bill Carrick and Ron Kubisch, all of whom are leaving the council. I think they all did a tremendous job. I enjoyed working with them and certainly look forward to seeing them in the community. Special congratulations to Deane Rohrlach, my old principal from Kapunda High, who was re-elected in the Light council.

In Gawler my good friend Brian Sambell was re-elected as mayor. It was a competitive mayoral election with some very fine competition from other candidates. But it was good to see Brian re-elected and it was good to see the election of Brian Thom; my former opponent in this seat, David Strauss, who was the Liberal candidate at the last election; and my good friend Adrian Shackley, who always reminds me that the Gawler River and the environment at Gawler are important things.

In Mallala my good friend Marcus Strudwicke was re-elected. I would especially like to acknowledge Joe Daniele, who has contributed to the area and the council for decades. He is a very strong spokesman for the Two Wells ward of the Mallala council. I would also like to acknowledge Tony Flaherty, who is head of the local RSL and will be leaving council. He is a strong contributor in the town of Mallala.

In Playford a new mayor has been elected—Glenn Docherty. I have already talked to Glenn. He is the youngest mayor in Playford’s history. It is good to have youth and vigour around the place. I am keen to work with him and make sure that the city of Playford is a vibrant place and a place where young families can get a go; likewise, my commiserations to Martin Lindsell, who was the mayor of that city for four years and a former mayor of Munno Para. I think he gave the job his all during that period.

I would also like to acknowledge the election of some of the other councillors. In particular, it is good to see people like Geoff Boundy, Dino Musolino, Duncan MacMillan, Andrew Craig, Joe Federico, Nick Cava, Gay Smallwood-Smith, Julie Norris, Coral Gooley and Max O’Reilly returned. They are all passionate about the city. Likewise, it is good to see some of the new entrants: Marilyn Baker, Nik Skrob, Adam Sherwood and Denis Davey. Denis is a real character. It will be interesting to see all that he brings to that role. I look forward to seeing the poetry about the council meetings.
In Salisbury, Gillian Aldridge was re-elected unopposed, which is the best form of election. She is a great mayor of Salisbury and I would obviously wish her well. Salisbury is a great council. It has a very good group of councillors who always work together.

In Wakefield Regional Council it was good to see James Maitland re-elected. He has been a strong voice for rural health and I think had cause to know just how important that is in the last 12 months. I look forward to working with him and the Wakefield Regional Council, as I look forward to working with Mayor Allan Aughey, who was re-elected unopposed in Clare and Gilbert Valleys Council. I look forward to working with those gentlemen in the future, particularly in the Wakefield group of councils. I have worked closely with that group—with Terry Bell, the director—to make sure that the councils, the state government and the federal government are all focusing on the same priorities in terms of infrastructure and really being a bit entrepreneurial about what we seek from government and making sure what we put up is the best quality project.

With the remaining time I have got I want to talk about the projects I have committed to over two elections, particularly the ones that we are still developing and still finishing off. I have spoken many times about the ones we have completed—things like the Craigmore television retransmission tower, which has fixed a problem for about 15,000 residents who had intermittent television reception. I am glad that we fixed that. It was a very popular commitment and an even more popular achievement by this government.

I also look forward to working with the Angle Vale community on their community sports hub. That town has been waiting a long time for its own oval and for sports facilities. They have done well with pretty substandard facilities that had a question mark about their ownership between the council, the education department and local landowners. That has created some uncertainty over the years. I have been working with sports groups in the area, in particular Colin Sherriff from the Angle Vale footy club; Bob Wharton from the Angle Vale Cricket Club; Peter Dommerdich, James Balacco, Sharine Pritchard and Michelle Wilson from the Angle Vale Soccer and Community Club; and Jeff Boundy, the council leader, who has been a passionate spokesperson for that project. It is good to see it finally getting to the point where we can break ground and actually build this excellent facility, which is a partnership between the City of Playford and the federal government. I look forward to really making sure that that gets delivered. It will have change rooms, a canteen, meeting spaces and public toilets that the local community can make the most of.

Likewise I look forward to working with the Gawler council and the town of Gawler on the Gawler rivers project. It is a very important $5 million project, with $3 million of federal funding, on the North Para and South Para rivers. Basically it is a partnership between the council and the environment and heritage association to re-create a linear park and walking trails along most of the two rivers in Gawler, which really do define Gawler in so many ways. It is an area that is utilised at the moment but perhaps not to its full capacity.

We want to really revitalise these parklands, provide walking and cycling connections between Dead Man’s Pass, Clonlea and the river junction. We want to make sure that it is accessible to elderly and disabled residents of Gawler and that you can ride your scooter on it. We want to make sure that people can walk and ride along it and that there is erosion and pest control and revegetation of degraded areas. It is a particularly picturesque part of Gawler. There is nothing more beautiful than this area in the twilight, and I look forward to many
more people being able to use it as a result of federal funding and the partnership that we have
built with the council and the heritage association of Gawler. It is a very popular project and
something we are very committed to.

Likewise, in the election we managed to get a commitment on a feasibility study to water-
proof Greater Gawler. The northern suburbs of my electorate have been pioneers in the reuse
of stormwater. Salisbury council has been a world leader, and certainly a leader in Australia,
in the reuse of stormwater—cleaning it up through wetlands, pumping it into an aquifer and
then reusing it for a range of industrial and other uses, mainly to water the parks and gardens
but also for manufacturing. Often the water is cleaner and less contaminated in many ways for
industrial use than the water they get out of the mains, so it has been a great boon to Salis-
bury. The previous government did provide some funding to roll it out in northern Adelaide to
the cities of Playford and Tea Tree Gully, and that is something we supported. It certainly al-
lowed the City of Playford and the City of Salisbury to build very efficient and popular aqui-
er storage recharge systems.

The conventional wisdom had been that you could not do this in Gawler because it had a
fractured aquifer. But, working with the Wakefield group of councils, we had a look at it and
decided that we would utilise some of the expertise that has been used in Salisbury. Chris
Kaufmann, who is a water engineer, and Terry Bell have been looking into this and they have
come up with a project with the district of Light, which is adjacent to the town of Gawler,
which has an aquifer that is suitable for aquifer storage recharge. Basically, they are trying to
create a proposal to supply about 2.5 gigalitres of non-potable urban water through this
scheme by about mid-2013. That would be a very valuable project to enhance urban water-
ways and to enhance the flood protection that has been done by the Gawler River Floodplain
Management Authority. But, more importantly, it would help us plan for growth in this area
and, in particular, it would allow, through the purple pipe system, irrigation of council re-
erves, sports fields, caravan parks, the golf course, the industry at Kingsford estate and, most
importantly, new subdivisions and dwellings.

We think that that is particularly important because in the district of Light Roseworthy is
one of the places identified for major metropolitan growth in Adelaide’s 30-year plan. It is
particularly important—and people say this all the time—that we should put in the infrastruc-
ture before we put in the houses, and this project is attempting to do that. I will be working on
the project in the future.

You do not get re-elected without a lot of thankyous, and I will attempt to make them as
quickly as possible. I have got to thank some union secretaries: Peter Malinauskas from the
SDA, Sonia Menickella, Jon Gee, the Regional Secretary of the Vehicle Division—

Mr Fletcher interjecting—

Mr CHAMPION—I knew that would get the opposition going—Bob Donnelly, the state
secretary of the CEPU, John Camillo from the AMWU and Jamie Newland from the Maritime
Union of Australia. I also have to thank the NUW. All those unions helped with my campaign.
I am very proud to have their help and I have always been proud to be a unionist. I think it is a
good thing.

I also thank my campaign team and, in particular, my campaign manager, Aemon Bourke.
Aemon was a particularly committed campaign manager. He has always been a great friend
and I really do appreciate all the hard work that he did. He and his wife, Emily, who was Amanda Rishworth’s campaign manager, are now having twins, so I do not think either of them will be working terribly hard on a campaign in the future; they will be working on their family and I wish them well with that.

I also thank Josh Peak and Tom Carrick-Smith. I thank my office—Mat Werfel, Rob Klose and Andrew Anson. I also thank Jess Nitschke, who has been a great help but, sadly, has left my office now. I also thank some of the people on the ground—Stephen Hollingworth, Craig Withers, Sonia Smethurst, Kym Thodey, Carmel Rosier, Brad Johnson, Brent Gorman, Graham Klose, Deb Filipone, Deralyn Mulroney, Tim Palmer, Malcolm Klose, Jenny Werfel, Alan Nelson, Robert Potter, Sean Hill, Juan Legaspi, Adam Brown, Andy Marshall, Guy Ballentyne and Susan Cunningham, from Clare, as well. I thank all those people. They have been a great help. I think all my colleagues as well. I thank the House.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (5.41 pm)—Members of parliament have many great privileges in this place, but none is greater than the privilege that is bestowed on each of us when we are elected to this place and when we are returned to this place. It is a great delight to return to this place. I am pleased to be back and I am pleased to be returned by the constituents of Cook, who have been very generous. I sincerely thank all of them for the trust they have again put in me to represent them. While members of parliament have many responsibilities in this place, there is none greater than the responsibility we have to our constituents—and that will always be my No. 1 priority while ever I remain in this place according to their grace and favour.

The local campaign in Cook, in Sydney’s Sutherland Shire, addressed many issues and there were many topics of concern. Many of these topics of concern were also shared with the neighbouring electorate of Hughes. I am particularly pleased to be joined in the parliament by the new member for Hughes, Mr Craig Kelly, who was elected to this place for the first time on the occasion of the last election. The member for Hughes gave an outstanding maiden speech to the parliament just this week and I commend him for it. I look forward to us working closely together as Liberal federal MPs for the shire. I worked closely with the former member for Hughes, Danna Vale, who retired at the last election. I pay tribute to her. She was a role model as a member of parliament, a role model as a local member and a role model as a human being. Her heart was full of compassion for the people she represented and for those much further afield. I pay tribute to Danna Vale in this place.

The local agenda of issues are matters that are close to my heart. The issues that particularly caught attention were largely about ensuring that we can preserve the lifestyle that we enjoy in the shire. The shire is a magic place to live and raise a family, and it has always been my primary commitment in this place to keep it that way and preserve it for future generations. The F6 remains on the drawing board, as it has been since the early fifties, and I hope we are going to have a government at some time that will finally build this road. That is primarily the responsibility of the New South Wales government. I am sure the member for Bradfield would join with me in looking forward to March next year, when we will finally put the Labor government in New South Wales out of its misery and, more importantly, end the misery that the people of New South Wales have had to endure. Of all the bad Labor governments, this one is truly a Rolls-Royce achiever. Mind you, the federal government here in Canberra is already showing early signs of being a worthy competitor to Carr, Iemma—I am
starting to lose count of how many premiers there have been. I am sure that in history the Gillard government will be up there with, if not exceeding, the incompetence we have seen in New South Wales.

But the issue of the F6 is an important one, because it goes to the missing link in Sydney’s road system. That is not just important for the shire. It is important for the St George area. It is important for inner south-western Sydney. It is important for the Illawarra. It is the missing link that needs to be filled. At the last election, the coalition, once again, took a pledge to the people of Cook, Hughes, Gilmore and other places, that we would fund an appropriate alignment study and a feasibility study to ensure that this project could finally get to shovel-ready stage.

One of the great indictments of the Rudd and Gillard governments’ economic stimulus package is that, of all the billions that they have spent on infrastructure, only one in seven of those dollars was spent on economic infrastructure and projects such as the one that I am calling for here with the F6. It will be a tunnel under the shire that will connect the Illawarra to the city without heavy traffic spewing out its fumes on the families who live in the shire. Not only will those families not have that heavy traffic on their roads, but also they will be able to enjoy the economic benefits of the project itself—the benefits that will come from the project having been completed and providing the economic advantages that will come from the linking of the Illawarra to the city and the shire to the city. So we remain committed, as the Liberal Party in this federal parliament, to that objective.

Aircraft noise is a topic that spans the political horizon. It is a topic in Sydney which members both Labor and Liberal—and, I suspect, at some time in the future, Green—will contend with because of the nature of the operations of Sydney airport. I commend Sydney airport for the way it handles matters, but I remain continually concerned at some of the practices of Airservices Australia. Most recently, during this campaign and over the last couple of years, we have been concerned in the shire about the Boree 4 standard arrival path, which has increased in use. That has increased the frequency of incidence of noise over suburbs in my electorate of Cook—and not only in my electorate but also in the electorates of the members for Banks, Barton, Watson, Grayndler and Reid—as a result of the increase in the use of this standard arrival path.

There is also the Rivet 9 standard arrival path which is used often by members when we are returning to Sydney from this place. For some mystical reason, it has been decided that planes on this path should pass over our homes rather than a national park when coming into Sydney. I am very pleased to report that, since the last election, the minister for transport—who, equally, is from an electorate which is affected by these issues—has been very constructive in taking on these issues on my behalf. We have had some positive discussions and I am looking forward to getting—at our next meeting, which he had indicated we would have before this year closes—a report on progress on those two particular issues. So aircraft noise will remain a very important issue locally and I will continue to keep it top-of-mind as I represent the constituents of Cook.

There was also the need to support our local community organisations. The shire is very much a place that likes to help itself. It is made up of tens, if not hundreds, of organisations, out there supporting our community. Whether it is sports clubs, or local charities like the Sylvanvale Foundation, Civic Disability Services or Enough is Enough with Ken Marslew, or
other groups, these organisations are out there just doing the jobs that make our community function. We are truly blessed in the shire to have such a level of community engagement and spirit. It truly enriches the lives of all of the families and people who live there.

An initiative that we introduced in my last term, the Cook Community Classic—which seeks to provide support for these organisations through a series of sports carnivals, raffles, ocean swims and gala balls—is now in its third year. Last Friday evening—with the support of Jason Morrison from 2GB, who came down to host and MC the event; many other charities, in particular Caringbah Rotary; and our numerous sponsors—we raised around $40,000 net. That followed a similar effort last year. We have the ocean swim coming up this Sunday at Cronulla Beach and other activities including a beach soccer tournament for under-10s. This is a truly great community-owned initiative. I have been very pleased to work with the Bate Bay surf clubs to get it off the ground. We see it grow in success every year, and I am sure it will be a success again this weekend.

But it was these issues of advocacy on local matters which can be effected in this place together with working as a facilitator in the community that have been the model I have sought to follow in the last term and I am very pleased that the community has responded so generously at the last election in sending me here with an increased margin. But, of course, the community was also concerned about matters beyond the local ones. In particular, the waste and mismanagement of the Rudd-Gillard government was something that was very top-of-mind, and perhaps it was because of what they saw in the waste of funds going into school projects in my electorate—and I am talking about over $1 million paid in special commissions, to contractors who were not from our area, that were handled through the monolith of the New South Wales state government bureaucracy, a very secretive process. One contractor was delivering projects for the entire region while small contractors, small businesses and others were very frustrated by their inability to access any of these programs as a million dollars alone was paid just in commissions. The community was mystified by the waste and mismanagement of public money. While elements of the program might be appreciated, they have come at a heavy cost.

People in my electorate understand that because the people in the shire understand the value of a dollar. They run their own businesses. They pay their own bills. They know that every dollar matters and that you do not spend dollars unwisely in your private life, because if you do then people in your family will miss out, so the people who are close to you and whom you want to help will miss out. The people in the shire expect nothing more from this government than they expect from themselves, that the government spends its money wisely and on things that make a difference in their lives. That is why we are here. They were massively disappointed and outraged by the waste and mismanagement they saw from the Rudd-Gillard government in their first term and by the vote that was conveyed in the election—they certainly did not want to see that government returned.

The other issue is debt and deficit. The borrowing of $100 million a day was something that outraged them again. This was a key theme that ran through the course of the election and continues to run to this day as constituents continue to raise the matters with me.

At a portfolio level as the shadow minister for immigration and citizenship, I note there were many issues that were part of the national debate. I will touch on a couple of them here. The first is to do with the area of population. The coalition made a simple statement that the
levels of net overseas migration that were running under the course of the previous term of
government were unsustainably high, and I am sure the Deputy Speaker shares some sympa-
thathy with that view, having articulated it courageously as well. We might not agree on some of
the solutions or detail but I think we certainly see one thing: unsustainable rates of population
growth rob future generations of the quality of life that we enjoy today, and that is not some-
ting that we in this place can allow to happen as custodians of matters that affect those out-
comes. We made this point and we made it regularly, and I would reject the point made par-
ticularly in that debate that this population growth was a function of skilled migration, be-
cause the ABS figures showed particularly most recently, with the breakdown of net overseas
migration—the figure that we focused on—that only a third of net overseas migration at the
high levels was actually accounted for by skilled migration. That is for both the temporary
and the permanent classes. There were other factors involved, but net overseas migration was
something that we believed needed to be better managed.

The government suggested that this was something that could not be managed because it
was largely in the area of temporary migration. The government needs to understand one
thing: temporary migration is going to be a more significant component of our immigration
intake into the future so we had better get a handle on it and work out ways by which this can
be better handled, better quoted and better organised; otherwise it will continue to run away
from us and we will be unable to deal with the consequences that follow. We argued for a pro-
ductivity and sustainability commission to advise governments on what was a sustainable
band of population growth. We argued that government should set migration programs that
ensured that we were able to stay within those bands that we would then set as government.

This was a responsible approach that would give the community confidence that migration
programs were not pulled out of the air but subject to some real scrutiny around what was
sustainable. How do we know what is sustainable? By looking at what the delivery of infra-
structure is going to be on the ground. Everyone knows that we can have a greater capacity
for growth if we invest in the capacity for growth, but everyone also knows that the delivery
of this capacity on the ground, whether it is infrastructure or services, simply has not been
happening. The punters—the Australian people—are not mugs. They are not going to accept
unsustainable rates of population growth when they know that the capacity to absorb and deal
with that is not being put in place on the ground.

Regarding border protection, a clear difference was shown during the course of the election
campaign. This issue is out of control. Six thousand people have arrived illegally by boat this
year. There are 5,360 people in detention, creating a rolling crisis in our detention network.
Both of these are gold-medal record accomplishments that no government should seek to
achieve but that this government has filled its trophy cabinet with. This is an indictment on
this government and it remains asleep. The government thought that the issue here was the
debate—the debate was about the debate. Senator Evans, the former Minister for Immigration
and Citizenship, confided to a group at the University of New South Wales that his great fail-
ure was that he had failed to control the debate. Apparently that was his great failure. The new
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship says he wants to elevate the debate. I need to re-
mind the government that the issue here is not the debate. We are not trying to run a talk
show; we are actually trying to run a parliament which puts in place a government that will do
productive things. We are not here to run a debate; we are here to put in place policies that
affect the issues that the Australian people are concerned about—and they are concerned about this issue because they believe, and I think rightly so, that the integrity of our migration program is being compromised by the weak policies of this government.

We need to preserve the confidence and integrity of this program in such a way that does not create a situation where women currently at risk in places such as Africa, the Middle East, parts of Asia and Latin America—and who have family members who have come Australia as offshore applicants as part of our humanitarian program—continue to suffer. They are being crowded out of our refugee and humanitarian program because of the border protection failures of this government. There are simply no places left. While they wait in their hellholes, others come and get access to visas in far less time. The coalition believe that is fundamentally unjust, so the coalition will stand up for those women who are waiting, and we have no problem with the suggestion that others may have to wait longer to ensure that their opportunity is not denied.

We have put forward a clear policy: temporary protection visas, third-country processing, turning around boats where the circumstances permit, which are very limited, and tightening the process around what has become a ‘no-doc’ entry process for illegal boat arrivals. Fewer than one in five people who were processed in the last two years actually had documentation, and for those from Afghanistan it was only 13 per cent. That compares to more than nine out of 10 people who arrive by plane and subsequently seek asylum. We said that if there was a reasonable possibility that you have discarded your documentation then we will presume against you for refugee determination. Of course, the returns policy needs to be fair dinkum. It cannot be just a donation to the International Organisation for Migration. This government needs a return policy that ensures that, if you are unsuccessful, you are returned.

In the time remaining, I would like to thank the many people who once again ensured that I was able to return to this place as the member for Cook. In particular, I want to thank Mike Douglas, who is the chairman of my campaign committee, and the many hundreds of volunteers that Mike led, enabling me to not only take up the campaign in Cook but also to support my colleagues around the country and be part of the national debate on matters that were of great importance. I also want to acknowledge Wade McInerney, the chair of the Cook FEC, and the work of the FEC, which was involved in supporting our local party. I want to thank all the supporters of the Cook Endeavour Forum, in particular our chairman, Mike Tynan, the first father of business and of the shire. Mike is an extraordinary man who is of great achievement and I thank him very much for his support. Also, Kevin Schreiber worked so hard in all of the areas supporting that forum.

I want to thank my staff and in particular those who were embedded in the electorate office and worked tirelessly: Ann Duffield, my chief of staff; Julian Leembruggen, my tireless media adviser; Troy Loveday; Louise De Domenico, who recently joined the team and did an outstanding job; Latisha Wenlock, who has been with me for quite a period of time; and Matt Versi, who has done a great job in my office—he is a young man with a big future. I want to thank all of them for their great efforts as well as Julie Adams, who has led the community classic and will be busy preparing for it this weekend.
To my dear wife Jenny and my beautiful children Abbey and Lily: they provide the perspective and context and focus for my life that makes everything else relevant and makes everything else make sense. I thank God for the blessing of them in my life and I am truly grateful.

To Tony Abbott: you will forever hold a very special place in the history of the Liberal Party for what you were able to achieve at the last election. It will be surpassed only by what Tony Abbott, the member for Warringah, achieves at the next election when the coalition is elected to government.

I want to thank all my colleagues for their support and I appreciate their encouragement. I want to thank also Malcom Kerr, the state member for Cronulla, who will soon retire. He will be replaced by Mark Speakman, who I look forward to being elected as the Liberal candidate next March. I particularly today want to dedicate this victory to Marg Dyson and Evelyn Thompson, two great Liberals who passed away during the campaign. I thank them for their service. (Time expired)

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (6.01 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker Thomson, I would like to congratulate you for being returned to this place. You have certainly served this place with honour and distinction for many years and I have enjoyed working with you. It is with great pride today that I rise to give my second speech in the address in reply to the Governor-General. Indeed, it is a great pleasure and something that I hold tremendous pride in. To be elected to this place is a tremendous achievement that many of us have striven for over many years. I would like to thank the electors of Corangamite for giving me that opportunity to do this again.

In 2007, when I was first elected, many people in the federal seat of Corangamite were surprised at the outcome. The reason for that surprise was that I became the first Labor member in more than 70 years. I remember getting around the electorate shortly after that victory and being sworn in as a member of parliament, reaffirming my commitment to all of those communities in what is a very, very diverse regional country electorate in Victoria.

Corangamite covers some 7½ thousand square kilometres, covering localities such as Anglesea, Apollo Bay, Barwon Heads, Colac, Inverleigh, Linton, Lorne, Torquay, Winchelsea and many parts of the City of Greater Geelong, particularly the suburbs of Belmont, Grovedale, Highton, Ocean Grove and Portarlington. What makes being a member for Corangamite so rewarding is the diversity of those communities that I represent. All of them are motivated by similar but different issues. All of them derive their incomes from very different and diverse parts of the economy, from beef to crops, dairy, fishing, forestry, sheep, horticulture and organic farming but also from the important tourism industries, manufacturing, technologies, health and universities. That is what makes representing this seat so enjoyable—the opportunity to participate in such a diverse debate.

Indeed it is almost impossible to undertake the role of a parliamentarian without loyal and dedicated staff. I would certainly like to place on the record my thanks to Richard Morrow, Joe Taylor, Sonia Kosicki, Annette Downie, Michael Rootes, Shannon Farley and Sue Weymouth. They have all worked for me with dedication over the last 2½ years, providing a tremendous service not only to me but to the people of my electorate by ensuring that their interests have been attended to through the course of that time. I would like to thank them very much for that hard work.
Mr CHEESEMAN—Before the division I was in the process of thanking my staff, who not only have worked tirelessly for me over the last three years but have also worked tirelessly for the electorate to ensure that the issues and interests of my electorate are recognised and responded to on behalf of the Gillard government. I also thank my campaign team, who have also worked tirelessly to campaign with me over the last three years. I particularly acknowledge Rose Hodge, Greg Slater, Lisa Darnanen and many friends and colleagues in Young Labor who have been out with me doorknocking, holding street stalls and ringing and talking to voters on issues that are important to them. Running a political campaign, whether you are a member of the Labor Party or a political opponent, takes an enormous amount of volunteer effort. I certainly very much thank them for that significant resource and help.

I also put on the record my thanks to the Victorian ALP head office and I particularly single out Dean Rizzetti and Nathan Lambert for their support, their advice and their guidance. It has been very much a privilege to work with them. I also thank the trade union movement who, again as they did in 2007, came out and supported me in a very active way to ensure that we were re-elected locally and were able to form a Labor government. I particularly thank the LHMU, the CFMEU, the VBU, the ASU, the NUW, the ETU and the CPSU for their friendship and support over that period of time. It is true that the Liberal Party spent a significant amount of money in trying to win the seat. We were able to respond through the hard work of many, many, many volunteers in getting out there and selling our message.

As I said earlier, my electorate is extremely diverse, both geographically and in terms of the communities within it. We have the Bellarine Peninsula, the Surf Coast—including towns such as Torquay and Jan Juc—and, of course, the famous, iconic Bells Beach. We have the Great Ocean Road, we have the Otways and we have very productive farming land. Representing this tremendous part of Victoria and the very diverse communities within it provides me with enormous satisfaction, for which I thank those communities, and provides enormous challenges in getting our message out there in a way in which is understood by them.

I think it is probably fair to say that the two issues that I predominantly campaigned on in 2007 were Work Choices and climate change. I know many other members of this House campaigned extensively on those issues in 2007. I was delighted that we were able to resolve the Work Choices issues early on in the previous parliament. I know my electorate was grateful for the new regime that we put in place: Fair Work Australia as well as the restoration of workplace rights and terms and conditions that had, quite frankly, been built up by generations of working families. To be able to put in place a mechanism that restored those rights was something that I was tremendously proud of and something that my community responded to in a very strong way.

As I mentioned, the other dominant issue was climate change. Climate change proved to be a difficult issue for the last parliament to respond to. It was particularly difficult for the Liberal Party, which constantly changed its position as it changed leaders. I certainly believe that the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme that we proposed was the right way to go to put a price on carbon and to set about a path of a lower carbon future. We know the history of that legislation and that it was ultimately frustrated in the Senate. It is unfinished business from the 42nd Parliament. I, along with many of my colleagues and my community, certainly hope
that the 43rd Parliament is able to put a price on carbon and is able to respond to those challenges. We know that, if we do not do that, communities in electorates like mine—electorates right across this nation—will struggle as a consequence of not responding to climate change. That is something that I look forward to working with this government and this parliament to resolve over the coming few years.

Through the course of the last parliament the other significant challenge that we had to respond to—one that we were not anticipating during the course of the 2007 election—was the global financial crisis and the crippling impact that that would have on many economies around the globe. The Australian economy, through active government intervention, responded in a very strong way. If we look at what the government did, we see that we put in place programs that would lead to significant investment and a significant flow of capital into the Australian economy that was needed because the private sector was withdrawing capital as equity markets and the like were drying up.

In particular, the Building the Education Revolution—the part that I am most proud of—has led in my electorate and electorates throughout this country to a substantial number of new jobs as companies, builders, subbies, plumbers, plasterers and electricians go about building the new, modern school infrastructure that is so sorely needed across this country. We know that whenever the Australian economy goes into recession it is always the building sector that goes in first and it is always the building sector that comes out of a recession last. I know the importance of that work. There is no doubt that without active government intervention from us the economy would have been in far worse condition than what it is in now.

If we look around the world and we have a look at where other countries are going in responding to the global financial crisis, it is true to say that our economy is a remarkable story in comparison to most of the rest of the OECD. In fact, as each and every month goes past it seems that another economy is sinking further into the abyss of the global financial crisis. It is certainly having devastating consequences. The OECD continues to report these matters to us on a regular basis.

It has been with some pleasure that over the last few months I have been getting around and opening these new school facilities and certainly seeing the delight on the faces of the kids, their parents, their grandparents and, of course, importantly, their teachers, who have in many cases been asking for some time for a substantial capital injection into their schools to build new facilities. I look forward to getting around the electorate and opening some, I think, 57 further projects. I have about 64 schools across my electorate.

During the course of the 2010 federal election, I was out there advocating for the needs of my community. I would particularly like to put on record my thanks to all of the ministry and the cabinet for the commitments that we as a government have given to my electorate. Some of the projects we were able to commit to and now deliver include the duplication of the Princes Highway—something that I have campaigned for for many years—from Waurn Ponds, the outer suburbs of Geelong, right through to Coolac. There is also funding for the Coolac Bluewater Fitness Centre; for the Geelong ring road, an important economic driver in my electorate; and also for many sporting clubs throughout my electorate, including the South Barwon Football and Netball Club, the Torquay Tigers, the Belmont Lions, the Ocean Grove footy club and Winchelsea Community Sports Club. All of these are tremendously important projects for maintaining a fit and healthy lifestyle and certainly projects that I was very
pleased to support. I am very grateful that I was able to secure those commitments for my community.

My community, particularly the outer growth suburbs of Geelong and the Surf Coast, has gone through quite remarkable population growth over the last 10 years or so. It is important that we keep up with the infrastructure requirements and the needs of those communities. It is true to say that the Howard government failed to do that and we have over the last three years been playing catch-up. I have been able to secure those projects to ensure that we provide a quality life, an opportunity for kids to receive a quality education in quality buildings, and an opportunity for those communities to participate fully in sport and recreation. I have been very pleased to be involved in that.

In the very short period of time left I would like to again acknowledge and thank the voters of Corangamite for giving me this opportunity. I am sure many of them in 2007, when they first elected me to this place, were probably surprised, given that I was the first Labor member to represent the seat in more than 70 years. I am certainly of the view that they made a very clear and deliberative decision this time around in 2010 to support me—not only to support me but of course to support a Gillard government.

Indeed, on the pendulum my seat was the last seat that the Gillard government secured. That enabled us to talk to the Independents and the Greens and persuade them that we were the best party to represent the interests of this nation and to govern. I would certainly like to recognise that and to thank the electors of Corangamite not only for returning me to this place but also, importantly, for enabling the Gillard government to be the government for the next three years.

The electors might have been surprised in 2007 and I am sure they were surprised for different reasons in 2010, but I would certainly like to thank them. I look forward to working hard on their behalf over the next three years to secure commitments, projects and opportunities for our community as we go forward. It is a great privilege to be here. Great responsibilities come with that and I certainly look forward to working on behalf of the electors and for them.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (6.36 pm)—The opportunity to stand in this House is a great privilege, and I would like to thank the people of Pearce for trusting me, for a seventh time, to represent their interests. I am continually in awe of the strength of our democracy, even though it is often maligned, and I am continually reminded what a privilege it is to participate in the great democratic process of this House. I am nevertheless mindful of the large number of people who cast informal votes in this election, who clearly feel disenfranchised. The close result serves to remind me—and, indeed everyone in this House—of the duty of care. In my case it is a duty of care in the conduct and consideration of the business of this House and the solemn obligation to work to restore the confidence of those who chose not to engage in this election by voting informally. How good it would be, though, if the public could see more of the constructive, bipartisan nature of the work that goes on here through the committees. That rarely gets aired in the public portrayal of our work in this place.

Of course our system of democracy is not perfect. I am reminded of the words of Sir Robert Menzies who, in his ‘The forgotten people’ radio speech, confessed:

I, like you, am aware of the weaknesses of democracy, of its occasional stupidities and shallowness, its temptation to prefer the rabble-rousing spell binder … But, giving all this in, I believe in democracy as
the only method of government which can produce justice based upon the recognition of enduring human values.

The suite of changes ushered in with this new parliament present me with greater opportunities to speak and represent the people of Pearce, as well as to bring attention to issues that require reform, and I am grateful for the opportunity to make a contribution in that respect. Of course, one of the agreed parliamentary changes has been to have greater independence of the Speaker. I have not had the opportunity in the big House to congratulate the member for Scullin on his reappointment to that high office, but I do so on this occasion of my contribution to the address-in-reply debate.

To successfully contest an election one requires a veritable army of people to assist. And those people seem to necessarily have a great belief in our great democratic processes, because they give a lot of time voluntarily to this cause. It is very much a team effort. It is therefore a great pleasure for me to acknowledge and thank the Western Australian State Director of the Liberal Party, Ben Morton, and his team, including campaign officer Whittney Jago, as well as the State President, Barry Court, and his executive.

The Pearce campaign, I have to say, was brilliantly run by an experienced campaign committee to whom I am indebted. It is more than I deserve. No member could have been better supported than I was, once again, by campaign chair Lane Taylor and the team, including Ron Farris, Stuart Burling, Trevor Hancock, Kirstin Mardardy, Pearce Divisional President Rod Henderson and my staff, Jana Allan, Anne Bagot, Conrad Natoli, Simon Hall, Michael Spark and Ros Wright. My campaign team was supported by the members of the Pearce division of the Liberal Party, and I was particularly grateful to the many generous donors and helpers. We had about 350 volunteers assisting in the lead-up to the election and on the day; I have to say I am extremely grateful for their generous contributions to the success of that campaign in Pearce.

Being the first Liberal woman to be elected to the House of Representatives in Western Australia for the so-called conservative parties in 1993, it is a particular pleasure for me to be able to welcome my fellow Western Australian, the member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt, the first Aboriginal elected to the House of Representatives. His electorate neighbours Pearce. Listening to the member’s address-in-reply speech, I was deeply moved by a quote he read from Nelson Mandela that said:

Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation.

I always get a little choked up when I read that, but I would like to add a personal note: ‘and the daughter of a railway man can take a seat in this great parliament’. Mandela’s words are a timeless reminder that governments should provide to every citizen the opportunity to reach their full potential. Menzies spoke of the many forgotten people in his era whose values he described as relating to homes material, homes human and homes spiritual.

Homes material refers literally to those saving for their own home, and we might care to reflect that the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute estimates that in Australia today more than 860,000 low-income households are currently experiencing housing stress. That is just over 15 per cent of all Australian households. The housing crisis is one I have
spoken on in several successive address-in-reply speeches in this place, and it is a crisis that continues to mount.

Yesterday the *West Australian* reported that there are 55,000 people on the waiting list for social housing in Western Australia alone. Why should this concern us? Well it comes back to the other two homes that Menzies referred to in his forgotten people speech. Explaining the concept of homes human, Menzies remarked:

My home is where my wife and children are. The instinct to be with them is the great instinct of civilised man; the instinct to give them a chance in life …

All parents share this desire to give their child or children the best possible chance in life, yet some families face greater challenges than others. And as this country becomes increasingly wealthy, there is a very substantial underclass of people developing who are not keeping pace with the great wealth growth of others. More than 1.2 million Australians have profound or severe disability, for example, and because of limited services family members often provide most of the care with a disproportionate number of women carrying that work. Carers frequently feel sidelined, financially disadvantaged and despairing at the lack of respite available to them.

Those with mental illnesses face the additional challenge of this illness being swept under the carpet of the nation’s collective conscience. An estimated 20 per cent of the population have suffered mental health disorders, yet our mental health services are desperately underfunded. I applaud the efforts of those generous souls running services such as the Avon Youth in the wheat belt town of Northam in my electorate, and elsewhere, always struggling for funding and doing their best in what can only be described as very challenging circumstances.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth will be holding a workshop in Canberra in December to raise issues affecting children and young people. To some extent this builds on the work that I participated in in the previous parliament as part of the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth looking at the issues that affect children and young people. I am looking forward to attending that workshop, because I think a country, a government and a society can very much be judged on how it cares for its children, its aged and its disadvantaged.

Finally, Menzies spoke of ‘homes spiritual’—going back to that theme—the fabric that draws together. He noted:

In war, as indeed at most times, we become the ready victims of phrases. We speak glibly of many things without pausing to consider what they signify. … We speak of “morale” as if it were a quality … created by others … when in truth there can be no national morale which is not based upon the individual courage of men and women.

The challenges of today are no less onerous than those of previous generations. We face wars of a different kind. It has been a sad duty for me to attend Pearce air base on several occasions as the bodies of some of our young men serving in Afghanistan have been returned to Australia and their broken-hearted families, friends and communities. I pay tribute to our service men and women and their families and hope that, whatever our views may be on the conflict in Afghanistan, we will always seek to honour the memory of these young people and respect the sacrifice they have made in the course of their duty to Australia.

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MAIN COMMITTEE
We face other challenges of varying nature. How are we going to provide water? How are we going to grow enough food? How are we going to provide the amount of infrastructure that such a large continent requires with such a rapidly growing population? We need to think about the energy issues that will confront us in the decades ahead and we need to think about how we can leave our environment in good shape for the future. So I think that, loosely speaking, the wars of today and the challenges of today are no less onerous than those of the Menzies era, just a little different. Our democracy may have its weaknesses, and no doubt this parliamentary term will have its occasional rabble-rousing, but I am personally committed to endeavouring to seek the justice that Menzies so eloquently spoke of and to remember the many forgotten people in our midst today.

Going back to the theme of education, one of the greatest gifts we can give all children and young people, apart from the basics of stable accommodation, good nutrition and a safe and stable community to live in, is education and training. They can then take their place in the wider community confident in the knowledge that they can take control over their own lives. The member for Hasluck has already spoken to me about our mutual interest in education and training. We have committed to working together to ensure that the eastern region of Perth in Western Australia offers opportunity to young people from primary to tertiary level education. We share areas where we have some of the most disadvantaged young people, and most of the places of higher education in Perth are located in the western suburbs or the southern part of the northern suburbs.

It has long been my dream to ensure that we have adequate higher education places in the eastern region. We started on that a few years ago and made good progress. I know that my community in the Avon are keen to ensure that Muresk Agricultural College, which is actually closed at the present time, has a robust future. I am committed to supporting the community in the continuity of courses on the campus to give rural students tertiary opportunities they may not otherwise have. Trade training opportunities are also a priority. Under the previous government we anticipated an Australian Technical College being located in the eastern region to offer further opportunities to young people—and I strongly supported that.

The eastern region is a fast-growing region with tremendous pressures on major roads, such as the Great Eastern Highway and the Great Northern Highway—highways of national significance—and the need for a bypass road through the beautiful Swan Valley and the Chittering is now an urgent priority. I have been pleased to work with the community in an effort to speed up funding commitments by both the state and federal governments. This road carries traffic through the heart of the beautiful Swan Valley—one of the oldest wine-growing regions in Western Australia and an iconic tourist precinct.

With the volume of heavy haulage vehicles using this road due to the mining boom, it is now obvious that this needs urgent priority. A delay in this work will jeopardise future developments in the north-west as this becomes a traffic bottleneck, compromising the integrity of the Swan Valley as a tourist precinct and putting the lives of road users at risk. I had the pleasure of having a meeting with the state minister for transport, Simon O’Brien, just recently to raise this and other issues such as the Great Eastern Highway, which is equally important in carrying the traffic from the eastern seaboard of Australia to the ports and airport and other places in Western Australia.
Given the profile of the Pearce electorate, regional tourism has been a matter of great interest, particularly in the lead-up to the election because it is a major provider of jobs and it boosts the local economy. We need to have a new funding model for regional tourist offices, and I have made a commitment to work to that end. As I said, many small business people become engaged in regional tourism. It is very important to local economies, and at the moment we do not seem to have a funding model that actually fits. There is a great deal of work that could be done for minimum cost with the use of the internet.

Talking about internet use, also marking the civilised man, according to Menzies, is ‘the life which finds room for literature, for arts and for science’. The digital revolution has provided the greatest tool through which we can exchange and experience mankind’s richness of culture and discovery. It is just wonderful if we can learn to use it productively. I suppose it was thought of as a bit of a luxury to begin with, but the internet has fast become a necessity underpinning education, the economy, our social life and even the delivery of health care into the future. But speed has become the singular focus of debate rather than a broader conversation about how we view this powerful technology interacting with and adding value to our daily lives. Vision should drive policy, not technicalities; yet an overarching vision is missing in the debate about the internet and the ability for all people to be able to access it.

Finally, there are many priorities for the electorate of Pearce, including primary health care and while we have largely dealt with the issue of infectious disease, the real challenge today is chronic illness—and diabetes is perhaps one of those illnesses on a relentless march and much more does need to be done to emphasise preventative health. I am pleased to see the government’s recent commitment to preventative health, but one of the key barriers to better preventative health is the pressure on our overworked general practitioners, and access to primary health care could be and should be a major contributor to keeping people healthy.

Again, in the regions that I represent, there is a great deficiency of doctors and of primary health care. It was a matter of great sadness to me and indeed to the whole Avon community that two children recently died as a result of the lack of medical treatment in the country town of Northam. This country town is about an hour and a half out of the centre of the city. It is just a complete tragedy that two children should lose their lives because there was not a doctor on duty at the regional hospital.

I am pleased that, in working with the Wheatbelt GP Network, the minister did send me a note just recently to say that there will be a GP clinic established in Northam to supplement health care there. I have also spoken to the health minister about the need for a rural training school for doctors so that we are not just trying to plug holes all the time but growing our pool of doctors for the wheat belt into the future.

In conclusion, our democracy may have its weaknesses, and no doubt this parliamentary term will have its occasional rabble-rousing, but through it I will endeavour to seek the justice which Menzies so fondly spoke of and not forget the forgotten people.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (6.55 pm)—On 28 September, the Governor-General delivered her address to the 43rd Parliament in which she outlined the government’s national agenda on environment, economic and social policy. The issues that the Governor-General referred to in her speech are all issues of the utmost importance to this nation. Our ability to successfully manage all of those issues and to deliver on the commitments to the Australian people and the
expectations of the Australian people are, I believe, underpinned by how successfully we manage climate change and population growth.

It is my view that, because of the mismanagement of both climate change and population growth, we are facing many of the problems which have become national priorities today. Importantly, climate change and population growth are very much linked. Both are also underpinned by greed—often disguised as economic growth and economic prosperity. There is considerable evidence that population growth is contributing significantly to climate change, which in turn is contributing to population shifts and ultimate sustainability. Notably, it seems that population growth was not on the agenda at the climate change conference in Copenhagen and, if it was, there was very little said about it. If human activity is causing climate change, as the overwhelming scientific evidence concludes, then global population growth will inevitably add to climate change and make climate change adoption measures considerably more difficult. Effective climate change and population growth strategies are the keys to resolving many of the issues which today confront governments around the world and which have largely been caused by a failure to manage growth and ensure that it is sustainable.

I will begin by summarising some key matters relating to climate change. Firstly, regardless of all the protesters, the conspiracy theorists, the extremists and those who simply do not want to accept that climate change is real, the overwhelming scientific evidence from credible scientists and scientific organisations around the world, across a range of scientific disciplines, confirms that the world’s climate is changing, that we are not simply experiencing normal weather cycles and that the problem is serious. If the scientists are right, it is indeed not only the greatest moral, environmental and economic challenge of our time but also the most difficult global challenge ever faced by mankind because it requires a global strategy and, therefore, agreement between countries with different needs, different aspirations, different levels of ability, different agendas and different objectives. Climate change is an incredibly complex matter on which to reach agreement. Not surprisingly, the first attempt to reach agreement on it at Copenhagen had only limited success. However, the Copenhagen conference should never been seen as a failure because, firstly, never before have 192 countries of the world come together to discuss climate change; and, secondly, there was no disagreement that climate change is real and that mankind is a major contributor to it. Those are two critical points for those who wish to criticise Copenhagen as a failure.

Climate change is real and it is already costing nations around the world, including Australia, hundreds of billions of dollars each year in responding to the unprecedented number of natural disasters, ranging from floods to fires through to tornadoes, cyclones, sea surges and tsunamis. The damage caused by each event is immeasurable. Billions of dollars which could otherwise be used to provide the very services that communities are screaming out for are soaked up in repairing the damage caused, in addition to the loss of productivity for months and sometimes years. Consider what we could have done for our health system, for people with mental health issues or other disabilities, with the $13 billion that has been set aside to restore the Murray-Darling Basin. Consider how much more prosperous our nation would have been if the Murray-Darling Basin had been in full or near-full production over the last decade. Consider how many services could have been funded if millions of dollars each year were not being diverted to assist with the natural disasters that are becoming regular occurrences.
To those people who remain sceptical about climate change and still believe that we are simply seeing natural weather pattern cycles and do not believe that greenhouse gas emissions are contributing to climate change I say: research the issue with an open mind. I noticed that only yesterday there was some media commentary with respect to a book, *Merchants of Doubt*, written by Professor Naomi Oreskes and Erik M Conway. The book exposes the campaign being run by the climate change sceptics as being run by the same people who previously ran the campaigns for tobacco companies challenging the dangers of cigarette smoking, the campaign challenging the existence of the ozone hole in the atmosphere and its link to carbon fluorocarbons, the campaign challenging the effects of acid rain and the campaign that caused the delay in regulating DDT in the USA. In summary, climate change and changing weather patterns will result in population shifts. It is also causing food and water shortages, which in turn will lead to an escalation in international conflicts.

I turn to the matter of population sustainability. I do not know what the ideal population should be for Australia or what a sustainable population for Australia should be, but I do know that key social issues, such as stresses in our health system, housing affordability and infrastructure bottlenecks, are all the result of services not keeping up with population growth. We have already fallen well behind in our quest for sustainability. Many of the strategies and policies being implemented now will at best fix the problems of today. As we pour money into addressing today’s immediate priorities, demands will continue to grow with population growth. New, unplanned and unforeseen needs will also arise. Yet we have developed an economy that is dependent on growth. Without growth being factored into future budget forecasts, governments will quickly find their budgets unsustainable. At some point, growth will have to stop. What happens to the budgets then?

It is notable that the advocates of a big Australia and global population growth are the sectors that will profit from an increasing population and, therefore, more consumers. These are the industry sectors that are not content with remaining viable. They continuously strive for growth; they continuously strive for more profits—growth and profits which depend on more and more consumers. You only have to look at the major advocates of a big Australia and population increases around the world and you will find that those campaigns are being driven by those who have the most to gain. Those same sectors inevitably, however, leave governments to pick up the social costs associated with that growth. It is all right for them to make the profits, but, when it comes to the problems and the social consequences of the growth, that is a problem for governments. It should not be. It is a problem for all of us, whether it is in this country or on this earth.

Of course we also have industry sectors that argue for population growth because their own growth is dependent on available labour hire. As we all know, it is also the case that having more labour to choose from is a great bargaining tool for keeping wages down. Again it is all about the bottom line for certain industries. Regrettably, each industry sector is focused on its own needs, its own priorities and its own future. Governments, however, have a much broader responsibility.

Population growth is also a major contributing factor in climate change. More houses, more cars, more industry and more construction means more energy requirements and therefore more pollution. More growth also means more destruction of the very environment and the very elements of nature that would ordinarily assist with neutralising the increased pollution.
In Australia, population growth has caused the loss of much of Australia’s most fertile agricultural land and the flow-on effects to food production. Even with more efficient energy systems, the simple reality is that increased population contributes to increased carbon dioxide emissions. The only beneficiaries of increased population are those who profit from consumption. Regrettably, they do so at the expense of the masses, at the expense of the environment and at the expense of our children and grandchildren. To quote an American saying, ‘We do not inherit our land from our forefathers; we borrow it from our children.’ We have massive responsibilities to future generations. It is also my view that ultimately the environment will prevail. Regardless of what we do, nature will find a way of correcting itself. The sad reality is that when that happens people—future generations—will be the victims.

I want to speak briefly about a couple of other matters. The first issue is one I have already alluded to and which I link to climate change: the state of the Murray-Darling Basin. To put my comments in context, the Murray-Darling Basin covers one million square kilometres, or one-seventh of the Australian landmass. It contributes 39 per cent of national agricultural production. It includes 30,000 wetlands, of which 16 are Ramsar listed. The average annual inflow into the basin is about 10,000 gigalitres. New South Wales takes about 54 per cent of that, Victoria 34 per cent, South Australia seven per cent and Queensland five per cent.

Under the Australian Constitution, the basin comes under the jurisdiction of the states of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. An agreement was reached in 1915 in regard to the management of the system. The agreement has been amended and there have been different agreements over the years, but effectively that was the agreement that set the framework. South Australia capped its licences with respect to new licences that were issued in South Australia using South Australia’s share of the water in about 1969. Then there was an agreement with New South Wales and Victoria where a cap was placed on the river in those two states as well. In the interim, there was a considerable number of new licences issued by the upstream states, and there was an overallocation—as many would come to refer to it—of the water from the Murray-Darling system.

In 2007 the Commonwealth Water Act was brought in by the Howard government. Under that act, an independent Murray-Darling Basin Authority was to be put in place. There was a subsequent agreement between each of the states and the ACT and the federal government on 3 July 2008, which effectively transferred management of the system to the federal government, and the work of the authority began.

The point I make about all this is that the Murray-Darling Basin system is critical to the future of this country. Some three million Australians depend on it for their drinking water supplies, in addition to the agricultural production and our food security. We know that the system has been badly managed. We also know that that was compounded by over a decade of drought. But we also know that we cannot continue to operate and manage the system as it was in previous times. we know that reform is necessary.

This is reform that will be brought in after almost 100 years of allowing the system to be managed in a particular way. Of course it will not be easy, but it is reform that is absolutely necessary. Whilst there is a lot of political debate taking place right now in respect of how the process is going, it is so important for the future of this country that the political bickering be put aside and we get it right in ensuring that the Murray is environmentally sustainable into the future and the communities that depend on it remain viable.
The work that is being done at the moment by both the authority and the parliament is necessary and, I believe, will ultimately lead to a more sustainable system. I would like to think that this work, which was in essence initiated by the previous government and continued by this government, will have bipartisan goodwill so that we get the best results out of it rather than see it become a political football, as it has been in recent weeks.

Australia, like the rest of the world, faces some very difficult challenges into the future. I appreciate the comments of the member for Pearce, who a moment ago made a similar reflection. If you look at issues around the world—whether they be climate change, population growth, the fragile state of the global economy, food security, global refugees, energy security or the emergence of different superpowers around the world—and then come back to Australia and add to those our own local issues of health reform, housing, Indigenous disadvantage, migration, education, our commitment in Afghanistan and so on, you quickly begin to understand that we have some very serious and difficult challenges ahead of us.

We have just been through an election campaign in this country where quite frankly, like most campaigns of recent times, there was far more politicking than there was consideration as to what the real issues of the future are and consideration given to policy directions for the future of this country. But the issues that we are confronted with are very real and very serious. This government has made a commitment to addressing those issues in a measured and serious way. They will not be easy; they will be very difficult issues, and of course they will be used as political footballs from time to time. The reality is, however, that if they are not addressed, regardless of whether this government or another government is in office in three, six or nine years time, they will be the same issues and they will not be easily dealt with.

It is my view that this parliament was elected by the people of this country to look to the best interests of this nation, and the best interests of this nation are not served by disagreeing on every matter, or opposing every matter, or using every political opportunity that you can, but rather by looking at the policies of the government of the day and seeing how those policies can be improved. I believe that anyone who comes up with policies and strategies that ultimately serve the best interests of this nation will get the support of both this parliament and the broader community. On the contrary, if members of this parliament simply continue to quibble and argue among themselves we will rightly be condemned by the Australian people. I look forward to serving in this parliament over the next three years because I look forward to being part of a government that addresses the serious challenges that confront this nation.

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (7.14 pm)—I would first like to place on the record how honoured I am to have been elected for my sixth term in this Australian parliament. At the same time I am humbled and grateful for the confidence extended me by the constituents of Gilmore. There are still many stones left unturned, and I am not yet ready to leave those stones unaddressed. I was pleased to hear the Governor-General speak about the importance of regional Australia, because her comments are directed unequivocally to electorates such as the one I represent. The need for regional infrastructure investment cannot be overstated. Gilmore is a very important part of regional Australia and I will continue to work as a strong advocate to ensure that we receive our fair share. In doing so I have been criticised for crossing jurisdictional borders, but I make no apology for that. Failure on someone else’s part does not constitute an acceptance of the situation on my part.
The challenges were compounded by changes to the electorate boundaries which changed Gilmore from a 4.7 per cent Liberal seat to a notionally Labor seat. This was the third boundary change for me in Gilmore and it made this election contest my hardest yet. So, for the 1,000 people who manned the booths on my behalf, it was a supremely gratifying moment to hear Gilmore be the first seat reported on polling night and with a swing of 5.7 per cent to the Liberals. It was a case deja vu as Gilmore was the first seat announced as a win for the coalition in 1996.

I especially want to thank the constituents of Barrack Heights, Barrack Point, Shellharbour Village, Shell Cove, Flinders, Dunmore, Minnamurra and Kiama for their trust and support. When I doorknocked, many said they had not really had any contact with a Liberal member before. May I assure those residents I will not let them down.

Special mention must be made of my FEC team, John Bennett, Wes Hindmarsh, Liz Too-ley, David Smith, Clive Brooks, Dennis Chugg and David Gray. Most have been with me since 1996. I am grateful to my former staff member, Julia Guy, who returned from England to assist me, and to my current staff who work so hard. Thanks also to my state colleague, Shelley Hancock, the member for South Coast, who will be facing her own election in March 2011.

I particularly want to thank the Calverley family, Tracey, Steve, Jan and Sheridan, from Kiama, who were so determined to assist and gave 110 per cent. I thank all of those who put up signs and corflutes on their properties. Our signs were on private properties, unlike those of my opponents, which were plastered on power poles and in public spaces in blatant defiance of the law. To Kellie Marsh and her team, to the Young Liberals of both the Shoalhaven and Wollongong and to my family—my daughters, granddaughters, sister and brother-in-law—thank you. And special thanks to Dorothy Barker, Pam Coles and Jan Hancock.

Gilmore had two Labor candidates. One was David Boyle, who Sussex Street selected but the local Labor Party branch rejected. There was a second candidate who to this day has still not had the good grace to concede defeat.

My gratitude goes to shadow minister Bronwyn Bishop—she is simply the best—to Julie Bishop, Joe Hockey, Stephen Ciobo, Greg Hunt and, of course, former Prime Minister John Howard and to Tony Abbott, who actually visited Gilmore twice to support my campaign. It is of interest to note that, when we took John Howard into hardcore Labor heartland in the north, it was a remarkable sight. There was not one protester nor one jibe against the Liberal Party. There was just genuine respect and warmth from the crowd at Shellharbour Square shopping centre. As the Illawarra Mercury reporter exclaimed, ‘I would not have believed it if I hadn’t seen it for myself.’

Gilmore struggles with the same challenges that other regional areas face such as low socioeconomic status—Gilmore being in the top 50 most disadvantaged electorates in the country—a lack of transport, high unemployment, a lack of infrastructure, limited health and dental services, long medical waiting lists, growing numbers of people struggling with mental health issues, homelessness, cost of fuel in country areas compared to metropolitan and limited opportunities for our young people. I am pleased that the 43rd Parliament will have a greater and renewed focus on regional Australia to address these issues.

MAIN COMMITTEE
What actually transpires remains to be seen and I have not hesitated to let the Prime Minister know exactly what it is that we want. By confronting the infrastructure and transportation challenges that regional Australia faces we are putting all regional residents on an equal playing field to their metropolitan counterparts, especially as Gilmore has no train services past Bomaderry and relies solely on the Princes Highway. Upgrading infrastructure like the Princes Highway to be at least a dual carriageway in both directions would make accessing goods and services easier and safer for those in the outlying areas.

It would also stimulate opportunities in business and tourism for these areas—something that is sorely needed. For a long time, tourism has provided the backbone of the local economy, and present global circumstances do threaten that. We need the ability and the means to diversify our commercial and industrial product to generate low-skilled jobs and to inoculate our economy against economic fluctuations. An enhanced road transport system must be the necessary first step. It would create employment in the planning, building and post-construction phases.

I point to the Building the Education Revolution program as a case of how not to do it. It is a program that failed to use local skills and products, in many cases bringing little benefit to the local economy. Just last week, I heard of a case where the cement poured at a local school for a BER project is being ripped out to start again. Let us hope that they employ some locals this time to get the job right. While some schools did benefit from this program, their success was eclipsed by the many cases of overspending, over-engineering or simply spending when it was not wanted or needed.

The coalition made a total of 16 commitments to the electorate of Gilmore, which would have been delivered if we had been elected. They include: a $2.6 million Shoalhaven headspace sight, also promised by Labor—and I have to say that the government has just called for tenders for that project; a $1 million Kiama Harbour upgrade to assist them in marine tourism and recreational fishing, which is a huge drawcard for local tourism; a $35 million cancer care centre equipped with a linear accelerator, which was granted by both sides of politics and which was a win-win outcome for our community; $20 million for the Princes Highway, our major highway, which the Labor Party simply refused to commit any funding for; $10 million for the Shellharbour boat harbour marina to boost tourism and future development; and $1 million for CCTV cameras for the safety and security of our residents, especially local businesses, which are paying for the chronic lack of adequate police resources.

We promised $25 million for an Australian technical college, which would ideally have been in conjunction with Vincentia High School, which had been refused one of Labor’s trade training centres not once but three times. Last week, the government finally announced that Vincentia High School will now receive a trade training centre. We promised $1 million for Shoalhaven endoscopic services. We currently have a situation where people are waiting one to three years for a colonoscopy. We would have provided $1 million for Shoalhaven hospital emergency equipment to reduce our growing waiting list for all types of surgery; $500,000 for green army projects for Shellharbour, Kiama, Nowra and Ulladulla and to allow some of our not-so-young unemployed to assist in environmental projects; and $300,000 to make a solar town in Kangaroo Valley.

We promised $2 million for the Dunn and Lewis Bali memorial centre to commence stage 2. I acknowledge the Shoalhaven City Council and this government, who provided funding to
finish stage 1 of the project after the initial $500,000 contribution of the Howard government. We would have given $2 million for a Point Perpendicular cliff walk at the Jervis Bay headland, which is a new, visionary and innovative project that would generate overseas tourism through the promotion of our natural wonders. We promised $1 million for a southern Shoalhaven boat harbour feasibility study. The Shoalhaven does not have a functional boat harbour for the many tourists who need such a facility. We would have given $1.5 million for the Shoalhaven basketball stadium upgrade. The growing popularity of this sport means it has reached the need for upgrades that will allow the local association to host major competitions. We would have given $350,000 to the Shoalhaven regional tourism office and all other regional tourism offices to entice more private operators and to increase opening hours.

All these projects were developed in conjunction with local stakeholders and went through rigorous processes to become the final official commitments. They are exciting, innovative and job-creating projects that I have since forwarded to this government for their consideration and to the Independents who helped form the government with their belief in regional Australia. It is important that our Prime Minister and the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government are aware of such projects, mainly to avoid the need to reinvent the wheel and to work on them with Regional Development Australia bodies. I have specifically invited the new minister for regional development, Simon Crean, to come down and see for himself some of these projects and the other needs that we have in Gilmore. I am delighted that he has agreed to do so, particularly following the tragic accident we recently had on the Nowra Bridge. While the RTA are reviewing my nomination for black spot funding for the site, I also wrote to Mr Crean, highlighting the necessity for a third bridge crossing. This is just one of the matters I intend to discuss with Mr Crean during his visit.

Another minister who I hope will visit the electorate soon is health minister Nicola Roxon. One of only two commitments that the Labor Party made for Gilmore was a $7 million GP superclinic. While I am not one to knock back funding for our electorate, regardless of where it comes from, many of our local GPs have serious concerns about the proposal. I have had meetings with Ms Roxon’s office to highlight some of these concerns, pointing out that a one-stop shop would be difficult for people from all of Gilmore’s 149 far-flung towns and villages to access, due to the limited transport options that we have. I also pointed out that most of our major regional centres have private medical practices that would welcome the opportunity to expand and offer additional services, such as dental or after-hours consultations. I am looking forward to working with the Shoalhaven Division of General Practice to put in a tender for the funding that will achieve this outcome. The tender documents were last week made open for submissions.

Another issue that I will be focusing on in this term is homelessness. I recently held a meeting with all of the local providers in my electorate, which was briefly attended by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Julie Bishop. It became very clear that emergency accommodation is in short supply in Gilmore, as are affordable rental properties. One idea put forward involved the government providing financial incentives for homeowners to house those transitioning from homelessness. It might work on a similar model to the Defence Housing scheme, whereby homeowners allow their properties to be used for a fixed rent, and their home is repainted and well kept by the government. This would have the added bonus of integrating individuals who need assistance into the community, as opposed to building high-
density developments which have the reputation of promoting social instability. We have seen many examples of this locally in the last 12 months, with the state and federal Labor govern-
ments’ public housing stimulus projects. Large-scale developments are being built in Ulla-
dulla, Worrigee, Nowra, Bomaderry, Gerringong and Barrack Heights, without the consent of
council and without public consultation. The Gerringong development is even being built on a
block zoned ‘commercial’, which resulted in enormous public and council opposition. To re-
turn to the original point, of low-cost housing: without financial incentives caution prevails,
and private homeowners simply do not consider potential tenants who do not have the appro-
priate references, income and rental history. We certainly have a severe shortage of low-cost
housing locally, resulting in more strain on public services. However, I recognise that our ex-
isting service providers do an incredible job with the little funding that they have.

I had the privilege of visiting CareSouth’s Nowra youth accommodation and was blown
away by the great work that they do with our young people. They provide temporary housing,
assistance with job seeking and education in essential life skills. I would love to see more of
this in our community, but it was not until we sat down together with all the provider agencies
that we discovered how little we have to address the growing demand. Jim da Silva City Farm
is another great example. It provides long-term accommodation for men struggling in society,
and is a joint venture of the St Vincent de Paul Society and the department of housing. The
men are cared for, offered assistance and, most importantly, given the chance to improve
themselves with volunteering opportunities, friendship and activities—in fact, I can assure
you that they make great scones. I was privileged to have had them as my guests some years
ago in Parliament House. There are people who have faced all sorts of disturbances in life that
many of us cannot even begin to imagine, and they deserve a leg up.

Gilmore’s unemployment rate is chronically above the national average. I have spoken
about this time and time again, as I have of the need to introduce opportunities for job crea-
tion. That means stimulating business investment, and that was the justification behind the
upgrading of Main Road 92. Until the benefits of this road start to emerge, which they are
slowly starting to do, we will still need to identify other ways of generating job opportunities.
The Shoalhaven Jobs Drive, which was for the month of October, was designed to do just
that. It created, in one month, 271 jobs. It is about connecting businesses that have job vacan-
cies with people who want jobs. The idea came about through a discussion we had with our
regional employment coordinator, Jane Robertson, several months ago. I am thrilled that the
idea was taken up and acted upon. I have to say that this success was largely due to the nature
of the Shoalhaven community, which is renowned for pulling together at times like this.

Even for those of us who are lucky enough to be working locally, the median weekly
household income for Gilmore is barely two-thirds of the national average. Low-income
households are finding the rising cost of living particularly tough right now, with soaring elec-
tricity prices and the lingering threat of a carbon tax.

It is no surprise that I get approached by a lot of pensioners and groups who want to know
why they cannot get access to free health and dental services, the same as some of our asylum
seekers get in detention centres, and have somewhere to live. What do I tell them? They can
see with their own eyes how detainees get prompt medical attention, how their children get
full schooling and how they are regularly fed, while many of our pensioners have to forgo
meals just to pay the electricity bills. They are struggling to make ends meet, and as a result
their health and quality of life are slowly but surely degrading. While many rail against detainees being locked in compounds, many of our pensioners are virtual prisoners in their own homes. It is important that we get this issue right to avoid further angst and feelings of resentment within the community and dividing our country even further. The government have not handled this issue well, and it is time they acknowledged this and took action.

On a more positive note, I would like to share with the House a few of the projects that I have been very proud to see completed in my time so far as the member for Gilmore. There is the Shoalhaven university campus, which I hope will, as it grows, inspire more and more students from our area to consider tertiary education. Currently only 30 per cent do, compared to 70 per cent in other areas. There is the Graduate School of Medicine, which aims to address the shortage of doctors in rural and regional Australia—and I am pleased to report that our first home-grown batch of doctors have graduated this year. There is the nursing school, and of course there is Main Road 92, which we celebrated the opening of a few weeks ago with an excited Nerriga community. All of these projects had the support of the Shoalhaven City Council, which we have always worked very well with over the years. I am proud to say that we have three very good councils in Gilmore: Shellharbour, Kiama and Shoalhaven. With each I enjoy a very good relationship.

I cannot finish without making a special mention of the contribution of our local defence bases at HMAS Albatross and HMAS Creswell. The Navy have been very supportive and enjoy an enviable reputation as a responsible corporate citizen. They get involved in all aspects of the community and are always there to lend a helping hand. I am fortunate to be in a position to represent our defence forces, both serving and retired. After leaving the forces, many continue to live in and participate in the community. Their expertise, compassion and energy drive many local community organisations.

We all want what is the best for this community, and I look forward to working with all levels of government again over this next term to continue to get the job done for Gilmore. I thank all in this chamber for their indulgence.

Debate (on motion by Mr Melham) adjourned.

Main Committee adjourned at 7.33 pm
Border Protection Command
(Question No. 12)

Mr Briggs asked the Special Minister of State, in writing, on 30 September 2010:
What was the total cost of the inspection of Border Protection Command on 7 July 2010, including but not limited to the cost of (a) flights, (b) local transport, and (c) accommodation, for the Member for Lindsay?

Mr Gray—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(a) The Department of Finance and Deregulation (Finance) paid an amount of $290.10 for the Hon David Bradbury MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, Member for Lindsay, in relation to air travel from Brisbane to Sydney on 7 July 2010.
I am aware that Mr Bradbury also travelled by Special Purpose Aircraft (SPA), which is administered by the Department of Defence, from Sydney to Darwin on 6 July 2010 and from Darwin to Brisbane on 7 July 2010. Finance has not incurred any costs in relation to the travel by SPA.
(b) Nil.
(c) Nil.