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SITTING DAYS—2012

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SEVENTH PERIOD

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

House of Representatives Office holders
Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP,
Mrs Yvette Maree D’Ath MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Ms Sharon Joy Grierson MP,
Dr Andrew Keith Leigh MP, Ms Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP,
Mr Geoffrey Raymond Lyons MP, Mr Robert George Mitchell MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP,
Mr Robert James Murray Oakeshott MP, Ms Deborah Mary O’Neill MP,
Ms Amanda Louise Rishworth MP, Mr Michael Stuart Symon MP,
Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP,
Mr Anthony Harold Curties Windsor 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 Ed Husic 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
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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</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—C Mills
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<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Public Service and Integrity</td>
<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jan McLucas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon David Bradbury MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills</td>
<td>The Hon Sharon Bird MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy</td>
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<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Tony Abbott MP</td>
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<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mr Don Randall MP</td>
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<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction</td>
<td>The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee)</td>
<td>(Mr Jamie Briggs MP)</td>
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<td>the Leader of the Opposition on the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband</td>
<td>The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
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<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
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<td>Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP</td>
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<td>The Hon John Cobb MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<tr>
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Tuesday, 21 August 2012

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 14:00 and made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Carbon Pricing

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister that this is the second anniversary of the last election. With the next election less than 12 months away, when will the Prime Minister swallow her pride, admit her breach of faith and apologise to the people of Australia for falsely promising 'there will be no carbon tax under a government I lead'?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:01): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question—breathtaking in its originality. I could not possibly have predicted that! This is the second anniversary of the election in 2010, and since the two years passed, we have moved to put a price on carbon because that is the right thing to do in Australia's national interest. The Leader of the Opposition proudly stood on that platform in the 2007 election himself. We have put a price on carbon so we cut carbon pollution, so we tackle climate change; we have done it in a Labor way, in a fair way, by providing benefits to working families: tax cuts to people who earn less than $80,000 a year; an increase, again, to the pension we had already provided—an historic increase, too—and more money in family payments for people who are doing the hard work of bringing up children.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister is talking about since the election. The question was: will she apologise for breaching her promise before the last election.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call and will refer to the question before the chair.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. There are no number of points of order, no measure of reinterpretation of the question, that gets away from the single fact at the heart of this: there is bipartisan support in this country to cut carbon pollution by five per cent by 2020. There used to be bipartisan support to do that in the cheapest way, by putting a price on carbon. The Leader of the Opposition used to believe that—indeed, in his heart of hearts, he still does. For two long years now he has been involved in a destructive, reckless, negative fear campaign, and the Leader of the Opposition can see the time now where his destructive, negative fear campaign is going to run out of puff.

To the Leader of the Opposition I say: we will continue, as a Labor government, doing the great Labor things that built this country—strengthening our economy, so that people have jobs; improving the healthcare system, and long-neglected areas like mental health in aged care; improving our children's schools, and not allowing the Leader of the Opposition to rip money out of public education; ensuring we are ready for the challenges of the future, whether it is broadband, new infrastructure, a clean energy future or a new approach to skills; and we will deliver the National Disability Insurance Scheme, because it will be a great Labor reform. For another year, what the Leader of the Opposition will do is what he has done for the last two: just say no.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Madam Deputy Speaker,
Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. If the Prime Minister is to be believed, why didn't she have the decency before the election to stand up before the people and say 'there will be a carbon tax under a government I lead'? Why didn't she have the honesty and the decency to say that before the election?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:05): To the Leader of the Opposition, who raises once again the matters that he has been on for two years like a broken record, here he goes. The Leader of the Opposition well knows that Labor stood in 2007 for putting a price on carbon. The Leader of the Opposition stood for election in 2007 saying he wanted to put a price on carbon. In the 2010 election we spoke to the Australian people—

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister was asked a very simple question: why didn't she tell the truth before the last election?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Leader of the House?

Mrs Mirabella interjecting—

Mr Albanese: I would ask the member for Indi to withdraw her interjection.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: As I did not hear the member for Indi's interjection—

Government members: We did!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am the chair. I am sure everybody else would love the job. If you want to come on down, it is quite a lot of fun, but I am currently the Deputy Speaker—

An opposition member: Are you getting paid for it?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, I am not getting paid for it, okay—just to make you all happy! Anyway, could we have some civility. This is actually a very serious matter. As I did not hear the interjection, I will not ask for it to be withdrawn. But I will advise, as I have been trying to for the last couple of days, the word 'lied' is not to be used in this parliament in any circumstances. The Leader of the House.

Mr Albanese: Deputy Speaker, you nailed it in one with that prediction. That was indeed the statement made by the member for Indi, and she should withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the Deputy Speaker is above being bullied. I am not going to ask the member for Indi to withdraw, but if I do hear it again I will. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: In the 2010 election campaign we spoke to the Australian people about the need for an emissions trading scheme. We will get to that emissions trading scheme—admittedly, not in a way that I predicted, but we will get there in the nation's interest. We will get there, to the platform that John Howard stood on, the Leader of the Opposition stood on, and the member for Wentworth stood on, in 2007. And we will get to the result that they still believe in now. Because, despite all of this reckless negativity, what is a clear and undeniable fact is that every living leader of the Liberal Party supports pricing carbon, including this one.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (14:08): I inform the House that we have present in the gallery today the Minister of Immigration from the New Zealand parliament, the Hon. Nathan Guy, and I would like to welcome him to the chamber this afternoon.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Carbon Pricing

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): Can the Prime Minister confirm that before the last election she said, on at least half a dozen occasions, that there would be no carbon price until there was ‘a deep and lasting consensus’? Again I ask the Prime Minister: why didn't she tell the truth before the last election?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:09): This parliament supported carbon pricing, and the Leader of the Opposition would have voted for it if he was true to his real beliefs.

Economy

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (14:09): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the major reforms the government is undertaking to improve our schools, our economy and our community?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:09): I thank the member for Greenway for her question. We have been working hard over two years to make sure we keep the Australian economy strong. We have been working hard so that Australians have got the benefit of jobs—800,000 jobs created since we came to government. And our economic indicators are the envy of the world. The Australian economy is in the lead in the world, and we should be proud of it. We should be particularly proud of it because the Australian community working together built this economy.

But we have never taken anything about the future of our economy for granted. We have worked each and every day to make sure Australians have the benefit of that prosperity in the future. That is about delivering the infrastructure our nation needs, including the National Broadband Network. It is about building a clean energy future. It is about making sure we meet the demands of employers for skills so people can have jobs. It is about extending university places to more Australians, including those from poorer households. And of course the list goes on of how we have prepared for a strong economy for the future.

But there is nothing more important in that preparation than what is happening in Australia’s schools. What is happening in Australia’s schools today will define the strength of our economy in the future. That is why we are so determined to take the opportunity, following the independent review—the once-in-40-year opportunity—to drive school improvement, and to ensure that we drive school improvement for every school in the country. We want to see Australian children—each and every one of them—in a great school. We want to see improvement in every school. This is our perspective, and I shared it with the Association of Independent Schools yesterday. I took that opportunity to talk about the benefits for every child in every school.

The Leader of the Opposition took the opportunity to outline that every public school is on his hit list. He said current funding for private schools is an injustice.

Mr Pyne: Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, as the coalition is the only party supporting more money for public schools—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. There was no point of order. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: The Manager of Opposition Business, who has just raised the point of order, said today:

The current level of funding for independent schools and government schools is appropriate.
That is, there is no need for more. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition said that the current—

Mr Pyne: Deputy Speaker—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. He should be aware, in his capacity, that there are the forms of the House, and for continual abuse of points of order action will be taken. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: That builds on the Leader of the Opposition saying yesterday that the current level of funding for public schools is an injustice—that is, that they should get less. A plan for cuts, a plan for no increases—that is what the Liberals stand for on public schools.

Ms Julie Bishop: Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, I find it offensive and disorderly for the Prime Minister to continue to make false accusations about the coalition's policies for funding for public schools. Under standing order 92, where a member's conduct is considered offensive or disorderly, the Speaker can intervene. I find the Prime Minister's continual false statements about coalition policy to be offensive—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: I know many find quoting the Leader of the Opposition offensive, but he did say 'injustice' and by that he meant cutbacks for public schools—(Time expired)

Carbon Pricing

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (14:14): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the fact that HM Gem Engines, a 50-year-old business based in Dandenong, is facing an increased electricity bill of $150,000 a year because of the carbon tax and to the statement by the owner, Bruce Parker, 'To introduce a carbon tax at a time like this is an absolute disgrace.' Why won't the Prime Minister apologise to Mr Parker for promising, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead?'

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:14): To the member's question, as I have indicated in this parliament on more than one occasion, I am concerned about businesses that are suffering with high electricity prices, with the 50, 60 and 70 per cent we have seen flowing in various states across the nation. I am concerned about that, which is why I am driving a process for change at the Council of Australian Governments meeting in December. I am concerned about that. I presume if the member is genuine about his question, he is concerned about that too.

On the impact of carbon pricing on electricity, we have always been very clear about that and always been very clear that that is why we are providing assistance to households and why we are providing support to businesses, including support to manufacturing businesses, through the ability to work with us for cleaner energy processes, a cleaner energy way of working.

I would remind the member that since the announcement of the carbon price GDP in our nation has increased by three per cent, household consumption has increased by three per cent and new business investment has increased by 20 per cent. That is—

Mr Billson: Madam Deputy President, I rise on a point of order. It was actually about
breaking the promise, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead,' and whether the Prime Minister will—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Dunkley will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is answering the question. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: As the member well knows, as someone who stood in the 2007 election, he has been in favour of carbon pricing. Let me quote his exact words. He said:

It was actually the coalition that instigated work on the emissions trading scheme. … in … a report that I helped author back in 1998 which talks about regulatory arrangements for trading in greenhouse gas emissions—1998!

… … …

The coalition’s commitment to an ETS is demonstrable.

So, like me, the member supports a price on carbon. The member should therefore say that in supporting a price on carbon it is important to work with businesses as they adapt to carbon pricing, and we are prepared to do so. What is not appropriate is to engage in a fear campaign not based on the facts, and it is not appropriate for the member who supports a price on carbon to come into this parliament now or to say to that business that he does not do so.

Mr Billson interjecting—

Mr Randall interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Dunkley! The member for Canning may bring on a cup of tea very shortly if he is not careful.

Schools

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for School Education and Minister for Early Childhood and Youth. Will the minister update the House on the development of the government's plans to improve all Australian schools?

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (14:17): I thank the member for Deakin for his question because in his schools he is already seeing the benefit of this government's investment in education. There are about 40 schools there that have had an investment of around $78 million, and members on this side of the House know how important a role schools play, particularly when they are well invested in and have good facilities in educating Australia's students.

You can see the commitment to education reform from what this government has done. The pace and depth of reform has been extraordinary—a quality national curriculum, investing in teacher quality and doubling the quantum of investment. But the point that is most important in all of this is that these investments and reforms have been intended for all students in all schools. That is the point. Whether it is in a Catholic school, an independent school or a government school, national partnerships that we have delivered—

Mr Pyne: You're all froth and no beer.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Sturt!

Mr GARRETT: have been based on the need of these students. Our approach to national school improvement will be the same.

The Leader of the Opposition does not agree. He sees injustice in the way independent schools are funded, but how he intends to treat that injustice is difficult to figure out, because the only thing on the record are cuts from the opposition of $2.8 billion to these national partnerships. Then we have the member for Sturt, who is in the
House for a change, saying that class sizes do not matter and there is no need to worry about equity, and asking 'Why don't we sack one in seven teachers while we're at it?'—all on the record.

Our approach is clear. We want to build on the reforms underway and have an education funding system that is transparent and effective. That is why we commissioned the Gonski review panel, as the Prime Minister said, an important education review—incidentally, made up of eminent Australians from across the political and educational spectrum—

Mr Pyne: Where's the government's response?

Mr Garrett: and endorsed by many in the community. Interestingly enough it was endorsed, I saw, by the member for Calare, who on his website was kind enough to observe:
There is widespread acknowledgement that every child should have access to the best possible education …
He got that part right. Then comes the punchline:
The Coalition hopes that the Gonski Review will lead to better school systems across Australia …
I could not have said it any better if I had tried. But at the end of the day let's not forget what this panel said. They found:
… differences in educational outcomes should not be the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions.

Mr Pyne: Well get on with it then.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Sturt is warned.

Mr Garrett: We on this side of the House could not agree more, and that is why we will continue with these significant and important education reforms.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Martin Ferguson interjecting—

Government members interjecting—

The Deputy Speaker: Order! The Leader of the House, the minister for resources and other government members, the member for Dickson has the call and will be heard in silence.

Carbon Pricing

Mr Dutton (Dickson) (14:21): My question is to the Prime Minister.

Mr Albanese: Oh, come on!

The Deputy Speaker (Ms AE Burke): Order! I did warn the Leader of the House.

Mr Dutton: I refer the Prime Minister to Ben Turner, who runs a small business employing five people in my electorate. Ben's latest power bill has skyrocketed to $2,000 with a 25 per cent increase to his retail electricity charges as a direct result of the carbon tax.

Given small business owners will receive no compensation for these rising costs, why won't the Prime Minister apologise to them for promising, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead'?

Ms Gillard (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:22): I thank the member for his question. As I have said in answer to a large number of questions, small businesses do not directly pay the carbon price. That is paid by the nation's biggest polluters.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Gillard: No amount of shrieking and screaming from the opposition changes that fact. Of course we see the opposition so desperate to continue their negative campaign that there is no fact they will not deny if it gets in the way of their negativity. The fact is that the carbon price is paid by a relatively small number of businesses that generate a lot of carbon pollution. We have
always said that some of that price would be passed through, including in the cost of electricity. Understanding that, we have always said to small businesses that we have put consumers in a position where they have available to them increased money in their pay packet because of tax cuts and increased money in their bank accounts because of an increase in the pension or an increase in family payments. So we have said to small businesses that we understand that they will pass these costs through.

At the same time, we are working to support the competitiveness of Australian businesses and their transition to a cleaner energy future. This is important for our nation's future. It is important for us to move to a cleaner energy future—to seize the natural advantages that come from abundant sunshine and from wind, tidal, and geothermal power—from having access to sources of clean energy. Indeed, I want our nation to be a world leader when it comes to clean energy technologies. That is one of the many ways in which I believe our nation will make our fortune—

Mr Dutton: I rise on a point of order. Ben's business cannot afford to pass these costs on. His electricity bill is $2,000. He is getting no compensation and the Prime Minister should be—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Dickson will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call and will refer to the question before the chair.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much. For small business owners like Ben and for business owners around the nation we want to see our national economy modern, transformed, ready to seize the opportunities of the future. A clean energy future is a significant part of that. Prime Minister Howard believed that. The member who asked the question believed it when he stood in the election campaign in 2007. And no amount of embracing destructive negativity since takes away from that simple fact. The member who asked the question has been in favour of carbon pricing in the past and, once he gets through this negative bluster, he will be acknowledging he is still in favour of carbon pricing now, as is the Leader of the Opposition and every other living Liberal leader.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (14:25): Just before I call the member I want to recognise in the gallery today a group of Australian Union of Jewish Students and welcome them to the chamber today.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Taxation

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (14:25): My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, comprehensive tax reform advocates like New South Wales Treasurer Mike Baird, Ken Henry, and myself and many other MPs, have been repeatedly making the point that only 10 taxes in Australia do 90 per cent of the work of raising revenue to fund government services, while the other 115 taxes only do 10 per cent of the work. Treasurer, do you accept this basic point and what are you doing to reduce the number of inefficient taxes in Australia?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:26): I thank the member for Lyne for his very important question. It goes to the heart of the sustainability of our tax system and the future prosperity of our economy. This government has already delivered three rounds of personal income tax reforms—or cuts, if you like—and we did put in place a comprehensive review of the tax system,
encompassing both federal and state matters. So all of that is on the public record. And one of the first recommendations of that report in terms of priorities was putting in place a resource rent tax, which we have done and which we have passed through the parliament. But the revenue from that is also funding further tax reform—for example, the $6,500 instant asset write-off is being funded from that fundamental tax reform.

The government has also embraced loss carry-back, a fundamental reform, particularly for many small businesses which are facing structural pressures in our economy. We have also boosted our national savings, which I think is very important not only as a part of tax reform but also in ensuring that we have national savings to buttress our prosperity into the future. Most fundamentally, we have tripled the tax-free threshold. You do not pay a dollar of tax until you earn something like $18,200. The other thing we have done is to keep tax as a share of GDP below the level that we have inherited. Tax is 22.1 per cent of GDP—well below the 23.7 per cent of GDP that we inherited. In fact, if we were taxing like those opposite were taxing, revenue would be up by well over an additional $20 billion.

But we understand that there is a need to continue with tax reform, and the member would be very familiar with the tax forum that we held last year—a very constructive process. And coming out of that, we have put in place the Business Tax Working Group, which is looking very seriously at how we progress tax reform in the company tax area. We also have the superannuation roundtable going, which is looking, in particular, at ways to target and deliver concessions within the superannuation system, as well as the Not-for-profit Sector Tax Concession Working Group.

As the member would also be aware we have the GST review, which is having a look at how the GST distributions impact on state tax reform. Finally, we have the work which is being done by Mr Baird and Mr Snelling—having a look at how we harmonise state taxation and how we reinforce state taxation bases. I am looking forward to seeing a report from them in the not-too-distant future about what the states intend to do in all of those areas.

This is a pretty fundamental agenda. We have gone a long way down the road for tax reform but, as the member has indicated, we have got some way to go. Of course there is a very stark contrast with those opposite, who are proposing to put up company tax—(Time expired)

Mer Oakeshott: Treasurer, if I have read your answer correctly, you are accepting the point that it is your job to increase the use of efficient taxes and decrease the use of the inefficient ones. Can you name an inefficient tax you have removed or are removing, can you name an efficient one you are promoting and wanting to seek work harder and, most importantly, can you name an agreement reached with a state government on tax reform anywhere in Australia? (Time expired)

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: the Independents are entitled to one supplementary question each week. I point out to you that the member for Denison had one yesterday and therefore it is not in order for the member for Lyne to have a supplementary question today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms AE Burke): The issue of supplementaries has not been bedded down in the standing orders—it is by agreement. I will allow the supplementary. I think it was last week that the member for Denison asked a
Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:30): I am certainly looking forward to the recommendations which will come forward from the state Treasurers when it comes to their inefficient state taxes—certainly that is a process which is in place. What we have put in place is the MRRT, which I think is a very important reform, which achieves all of the objectives that the member opposite has outlined and of course is opposed by those opposite who want to give a very big tax cut to Gina Rinehart and Clive Palmer. That is one of the most fundamental reforms. But let us have a look at the $6,500 instant asset write-off—which replaces a complex set of systems, a complex set of paperwork, going right down the line—that was recommended to us by the tax review.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr SWAN: Here we go again—a bit sensitive about tax, are we?

Mr Hockey: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I am endeavouring to help my colleague and friend the member for Lyne, who asked the Treasurer to be relevant. Name one inefficient tax that you have abolished.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. Points of order are not opportunities for debate. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr SWAN: Very simply, the write-off rules which apply to capital items purchased by small businesses have been replaced by the $6,500 instant asset write-off, pumping $1 billion into the economy to increase the cash flow of small business—something we are all very proud of and something that was opposed by those opposite.

Economy

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (14:32): I too have a question for the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline for the House the importance of delivering the big reforms like improving our schools, investing in infrastructure and putting a price on carbon based on hard facts and real evidence?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:32): I thank the member for Reid for that question. The reforms of the past have helped deliver the prosperity that we have today, and the reforms of today will help deliver the prosperity of tomorrow. That is why, for example, the mining resource rent tax is so important to deliver those reforms that I was talking to the member for Lyne about before. The $6,500 instant asset write-off is a fundamental reform for up to 2.7 million small businesses. We are all proud of that. We on this side of the House are proud of putting a price on carbon so that our children and our grandchildren can have a clean energy future. I am proud of what we have done in terms of workforce participation—a tripling of the tax-free threshold, a fundamental reform to lift workforce participation. I am proud of the doubling of investment in infrastructure—most particularly the NBN but also road, rail and port. All of these are very big reforms.

But there is no reform that I am prouder of than what this government is doing not just in skills and training—including the $3 billion on the table in the last budget—but in education more generally. We have got an additional 150,000 students in our tertiary system. It is about what we are doing and will continue to do in our schools, both primary and secondary. Nothing matters more to our future prosperity than the investment in the education of our young people, and that comes through primary and
secondary education. In those areas, in those schools, not only do we get the productivity of the future, what we get is opportunity for all of our students.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: how could it be directly relevant for the Treasurer to talk about something the government has not done?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Manager of Opposition will resume his seat. Continual abuse of points of order will not be tolerated. The Treasurer has the call; he is being relevant to the question.

Mr SWAN: We know that the opposition does not support investing in better schools. We know that the Leader of the Opposition wants to get the axe out and axe funding for public schools. That is what he meant yesterday when he was talking about ‘the injustice’.

Ms Julie Bishop: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: under standing order 92(b) I find it offensive and disorderly for the Treasurer to continue to make false accusations and perpetuate falsity about the coalition’s policy.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr SWAN: Everybody in this House knows that there is a $70 billion crater in the budget bottom line of the Liberal and National parties because the shadow Treasurer said so on breakfast television. We know that they have a secret plan to slash funding for health and education because of that $70 billion crater they have in their budget bottom line. What we now also know from the shadow Treasurer today is that he says they have got all their policies costed—they are all actually out there.

Ms Julie Bishop: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: yesterday we saw some scenes in this parliament that some would say appeared disorderly. If the Treasurer continues to make untrue statements and perpetuate falsities it leads to disorderly conduct in the chamber. I find it offensive and disorderly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. I would advise that standing orders do not take provocation into consideration. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr SWAN: It is very simple. We on this side of the House understand the importance of investment in schools when it comes to productivity and opportunity in our society. They do have a plan to slash public funding of schools and they are now going to run a campaign, not unlike what they ran when it came to carbon pricing, but their scare campaign is going to fall apart all around.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Before we take the next question, I ask you, under standing order 90, how could it not be an imputation of improper motives to suggest things of the opposition members like myself that are simply utterly false statements? I would ask you to bring the Treasurer back to order when he does that repeatedly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat.

Mr Melham interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Banks has form as well. The Manager of Opposition Business is aware there are other forms of the House in which he can pursue this issue. If I pulled up every speaker in this House on behalf of every other speaker in this House on the basis of what they thought was an untruth, I do not think a speech would be given. The member for Reid, are you seeking the call on a supplementary?
Mr Murphy: Thank you.

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am not trivialising it. The member for Reid will resume his seat. My apologies to the member for Reid. The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. I am not trivialising this. I am making a point that, probably, if you all go and now reflect on many of the speeches that have been given in this parliament in this session by many people on all sides of this parliament, standing order 90 has been observed more in the breach than in reality. I am finding it very difficult to pull up everybody because I do not think we would get through a speech in this place.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, with the greatest respect to you, I ask you to reflect in future on ejecting members from the House who are responding to disorderly conduct from the government ministers and the Prime Minister—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Manager of Opposition Business is aware there are other forms of the House. Interjecting, calling out and not observing the standing orders is not one of them. There are other forms of the House, and I would welcome people to use them at the end of question time.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (14:39): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. The Treasurer has just spoken about the importance of getting the facts right when talking about the impacts of carbon pricing. Treasurer, are there any examples that show what happens when the facts are misrepresented?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Treasurer has the call and I am seeking his assistance not to provoke the opposition too much.

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:40): We said that carbon pricing will have a modest impact on prices in our economy. The Treasury modelling shows that the price impact would be 0.7 per cent—less than one cent in the dollar. That is why I was shocked to see reports yesterday suggesting a butcher in my electorate was increasing prices by 15 to 20 per cent. The ACCC investigated these reports and found that the butcher had been misquoted.

I had the pleasure of speaking to the butcher, Luke, this morning. He is a great young man. He has got a great business. He has a very good reputation in my electorate and he deserves a lot better than being dragged into some political scare campaign by those opposite, which is not based on facts. They were in here yesterday with the results of a so-called study but, as we go through it, we find it is just simply not true. They never bothered to check the facts; in fact, they do not care about the facts. They do not care who they hurt, what business they hurt or what community they hurt. They will go out there and make these extraordinary claims. The chickens are all coming home to roost for the Leader of the Opposition. He is the most aggressively negative opposition leader in our history. He is all opposition and no leadership.

Mr Buchholz interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Wright is not amusing.

Carbon Pricing

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (14:41): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the fact that the Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Co-operative in my electorate is facing an increase in its power bill of $24,000 this year because of the carbon tax. I also refer the Prime Minister to
the statement of the general manager, Mr Dale Sumner, that 'the carbon tax will ultimately lead to the end of the co-operative or to increased costs. Fishermen are price takers. We do not have the luxury to pass the costs onto customers'. Does the Prime Minister regret telling small businesses yesterday to pass on the cost of the carbon tax when, in so many cases, they simply cannot?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:42): To the member who asked the question, we have just seen the Treasurer deal with the so-called facts from a question yesterday and, clearly, what the opposition said then was wrong so, of course, I will check what the member is putting today. But I would say to him generally, he would be well aware of what I have said in this place about small businesses over a long period of time now and the expectation we have that small businesses, including people who sell fish, are in a position to pass through costs because we have put more money in the hands of consumers.

When Prime Minister Howard was in office, he acknowledged all of these impacts of a carbon price and said it was still important that we had a carbon price in our nation so that we could reduce carbon pollution, tackle climate change and get onto using cleaner energy sources. The members of the front bench who were here in 2007 stood on that platform of supporting carbon pricing. Ever since, we have seen fear raised in the community and I am not surprised that a local business person in the member's electorate may be reflecting some of that irresponsible fear campaign because people have had to deal with a lot of nonsense over the time period since we announced our intention to price carbon. When you stand back and look at the facts of what has happened since we priced carbon, for some reason today the opposition is saying—first time ever—that it is interested in facts. Well, if it was interested in facts it would know Whyalla has not been wiped off the map, we continue to mine coal and we have seen the modest cost-of-living impacts we predicted. We have seen—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Prime Minister will resume her seat.

Mr Chester: On a point of order of relevance, Madam Deputy Speaker: Whyalla is a long way from Lakes Entrance, Prime Minister. I would like you to refer to Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Co-operative.

Ms GILLARD: It is a long way away and still there. That is my point. It is a long way away and still there, despite what has been claimed about carbon pricing. We always said to small businesses like the one the member refers to that there would be an impact on electricity and we would anticipate that being passed through to consumers. We have also said that we are very concerned for those small businesses. The electricity price impacts, the bigger impacts, they are seeing coming from other sources, and we are working on that as we move towards the December Council of Australian Governments meeting. Because we care about businesses like the one the member refers to, we have put in place a broad range of new policies for small businesses, including the instant asset write-off—opposed every step of the way by the member who asked the question and the opposition.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (14:45): I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a parliamentary delegation from the United Kingdom. On behalf of the House, I extend a very warm welcome to the delegation.
Honourable members: Hear! Hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Carbon Pricing

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (14:45): I seek leave to table the statement from the general manager of the Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Co-operative where he makes the point 'We don't have the luxury to pass the costs on to consumers.'

Leave not granted.

Mr Christensen interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Dawson is warned!

Climate Change

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (14:46): My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and Minister for Industry and Innovation. Will the minister update the House on international efforts to tackle dangerous climate change? How does Australia compare with the rest of the world and why is it important that the debate on tackling climate change is guided by facts and not fiction?

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (14:47): I thank my friend the member for Banks for his question, because today the Climate Commission has released a new and independent assessment of international action on climate change. It concludes that almost every major economy is tackling climate change. No fewer than 90 countries, representing 90 per cent of the world's economy, have put programs in place to cut greenhouse gas emissions. From next year, the report finds, around 850 million people will live in countries or states with a carbon price set by an emissions trading scheme. Of course, the international community has committed to binding emissions reduction obligations to take effect from 2020, and countries are starting to move to that position. Notwithstanding all of these facts and this new independent report by the Climate Commission, the Leader of the Opposition is still on the record as saying: 'There is no sign, no sign whatsoever, that the rest of the world is going to do things like introduce carbon taxes or emissions trading schemes.' That flies completely in the face of all the facts and all of the measures that countries around the world are taking. You have to ask yourself: is it ignorance or is it pure mendacity that we are dealing with here?

Whatever it is, it is a virus that is infecting the coalition. Yesterday the member for Hughes—I think it was—for example, cited figures from a Sydney high school to attack the carbon price and, within an hour of question time concluding, the school's deputy principal had this to say: 'We know nothing about it. I don't know where they got those numbers.' When subsequently questioned by the Financial Review, the member for Hughes's office had to say they did not know where the figures came from. They did not know, but the figures were put up in question time.

Yesterday the opposition also tried to mislead over the carbon price impact on the electricity bill of a meat-processing facility called Australian Country Choice. The carbon price impact—this is a fact—would equate to less than one cent for every kilogram of beef that is produced from that facility. Coles are currently selling a Country Choice steak for $19.48 a kilo, and less than one cent of that is attributable to the carbon price impact. This anti-carbon-price crusade run by the coalition is littered with nothing but deceit and fraudulent claims. You should try telling the truth for once.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Mackellar is warned!

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (14:50): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. Minister, in your answer you mentioned the meat industry. Can you outline for the House what opportunities the carbon price creates for the meat industry?

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (14:50): The meat industry does have a lot of opportunities, under the carbon pricing arrangements, to improve its efficiency, its productivity and its competitiveness. With simple technology—for example, by covering a settlement pond at a meatworks—methane gas can be captured and used to generate electricity and potentially remove an abattoir that has a carbon price liability from that liability altogether. If the methane is used to generate electricity, they can generate their own power and even sell that electricity back into the grid. One abattoir that I am aware of is examining technology known as a biodigester. The waste products go in one end, methane is used to generate electricity, and fertiliser and drinkable water are produced as a result.

The carbon price has stimulated the investigation of all of these technologies, and the government is providing competitive grants to assist the meat industry to put them into place. They will drive efficiency improvements; they will cut costs. Compare these facts with the fictions from the coalition, particularly Senator Barnaby Joyce's ridiculous claim that a lamb roast will cost $100 under the carbon price. The facts are that the meat industry will work well with the government to reduce their emissions and cut their energy bills.

Carbon Pricing

Mr O'DOWD (Flynn) (14:52): My question is the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to a statement of Tom Maguire of Teys meatworks—a company on the carbon tax hit list—in my electorate. Mr Maguire said:

We could close this plant for a period of time in the year … and therefore our total emissions … would … be below 25,000 (tonnes).

Will the Prime Minister advise Teys meatworks what to do: shut down for a month or pay the carbon tax bill of some $600,000?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:52): To the member's question: first and foremost I would refer him to the answer just given by the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, who has explained very clearly and in great detail the circumstances of the meat industry.

Mr O'Dowd interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Flynn will resume his seat; the Prime Minister has just commenced her answer. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: He has just explained the circumstances of the meat industry and some of the opportunities there are for people in the meat industry because of the way we put a price on carbon and because of the way the programs that we have set up to work with this industry are able to work with meat producers. If the member is directly concerned about the circumstances of this meat producer he should be referring to the minister's answer and to those opportunities.

To the member who asked the question: I am not surprised to receive this question from him, when he has said in this House in the past that there is no evidence that CO₂ in the atmosphere controls the climate—that is,
he denies the science; he denies that we need to do anything about carbon pollution. We know that there is a healthy constituency of deniers—

*Mr Pyne interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Prime Minister will return to the question. The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister will return to the question.

**Mr Albanese:** Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: if you do not believe in the science then you do not believe in pricing carbon, and that is why it is relevant.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call. She was asked a specific question and I would draw her back to the question before the chair.

**Ms Gillard:** Certainly there are opportunities for people in the meat industry; I refer the member to them. We are determined to cut carbon pollution. We know that the Leader of the Opposition supports putting a price on carbon and that he would keep this carbon price if he were ever Prime Minister—that is, he shares the belief of every other living Liberal leader. I understand the member who asked the question may have a different view about whether carbon should be priced, but this Leader of the Opposition certainly believes in pricing carbon and he will keep this carbon price if he is ever Prime Minister.

**Health and Hospitals**

**Mr Perrett** (Moreton) (14:55): My question is to the Minister for Health. Will the minister update the House on how the government is getting on with the job of ensuring all Australians have access to quality health care?

**Ms Plibersek** (Sydney—Minister for Health) (14:55): I thank the member for Moreton. I got a little bit excited when the member for Dickson got up earlier; I thought I might have got a health question from the member for Dickson. It is 252 days since I have been health minister, and there has not been a question yet from the member for Dickson. In fact, it is 1,098 days since the shadow minister for health has asked a minister for health a question—that is 155 weeks; nearly three years.

Human history is about builders and wreckers. We are the builders; they are the wreckers. Nowhere is that more obvious than in our health system.

*Mr Robert interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** The member for Fadden will be led outside in a minute if he is not careful.

**Ms Plibersek:** The Gillard government investment in health means 2,000 more nurses in our emergency departments, 5½ thousand more GPs in practice or in training, 1,300 extra subacute beds, more than 60 GP superclinics and more than 420 infrastructure grants. In fact, the GP infrastructure grants and the GP superclinics have been welcomed by many opposite—usually in their electorates, not in here. I saw that the member for Gilmore was welcoming, quite rightly, one of these marvellous investments in her own community recently. Unfortunately, this is one of the programs that the Leader of the Opposition says he would cut—a $355 million cut. You simply cannot have it both ways. As health minister, the Leader of the Opposition cut $1 billion from our public hospital system. That meant longer waiting times for emergency and for surgery. He saw the GP shortage blow out and bulk-billing rates at rock bottom. In the 2010 election he promised to cut $5 billion from health spending. You only need to look around at the states and territories to see what that sort
of cut would mean: in Queensland, cutting breast screening services, $80 million coming out of hospitals and 4,000 health workers cut; in Victoria $25 million from community health services, including $1 million out of women’s health; and, in New South Wales, cuts to emergency after hours—I know that up at the Mullumbimby hospital they are going to lose their after-hours doctor—and 3,600 staff from the health department are reported to be cut.

Mr Dutton: Under your government!

Ms PLIBERSEK: It is under the New South Wales government, which manages the New South Wales health system. In fact, under this government we see historically high rates of bulk-billing, we see PBS reforms that have reduced the cost of 1,000 medicines by as much as $15 a packet and we see a GP hotline providing after-hours care to more than 100,000 people in their own home. I have to say that this government is for building; those opposite are for wrecking, and we see it in health more than anywhere. (Time expired)

Carbon Pricing

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (14:58): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the fact that the West Adelaide Football Club is facing an increase of $32,000 in its power bill this year because of the carbon tax and to the statement of its CEO, Mr Kym Russell, who said:

… junior development will be the first thing that gets cut - money that we spend in our promotional zones are probably the first things that will have to go."

Why won't the Prime Minister apologise to the parents of junior footballers and to Mr Kym Russell for promising 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead'?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:59): To the member's question: first, the question asserts something which is false. It is misleading to attribute, as the member has, the entire electricity price rise experienced by football clubs, or indeed any other entity, to the carbon price.

Indeed, the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency's office spoke to the West Adelaide Football Club this morning, who confirmed that around half of the price rise quoted in theAdvertiser was due to network costs—that is, it is due to the kinds of costs I have been raising publicly and that initially the Leader of the Opposition denied existed. It is due to those kinds of costs.

As the member who asked the question may know from my statements and the government's statements, we are concerned about the impact of those network costs. The Leader of the Opposition denied their existence and then backflipped on this yesterday and said that there are substantial price rises due to things like this. We are determined to make a difference to these problems in our electricity system. That is why I am determined to drive a process of change at the Council of Australian Governments meeting.

Firstly, the question is misleading. Secondly—

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister was asked whether she would apologise to the parents of junior footballers for saying, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead'—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is answering the question.

Ms GILLARD: I understand that the opposition would be embarrassed when once again their fear campaign has been shown to be false, but I do believe I have an obligation to the House, when a question that contains a falsity is asked, to correct that falsity. I say to
the member who asked the question that Treasury modelling has estimated that the carbon impact price on sport and recreation is at 0.3 per cent or around 20c per week. This includes the impact on football clubs. This means that clubs can very slightly raise ticket prices. We are talking about a couple of cents against a background where we have provided an average assistance to households of $10.10 a week. So, in terms of carbon pricing, the people who attend that sporting club will have seen the benefit of tax cuts, pension increases and family payment increases.

I have indicated the modest impact of carbon pricing. Fifty per cent of this increase is about the network cost, and the member has offered no answer to that. The Leader of the Opposition until recently denied its existence. But we are determined to get on with the job of making a difference for these kinds of power price rises for the future.

Mr Briggs: I seek leave to table the article.

Leave not granted.

Employment

Ms Smyth (La Trobe) (15:03): My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation. Will the minister update the House on how the government is making sure that the jobs and workplaces of the future are safe and highly skilled? Has the minister identified any recent risks to this?

Mr Shorten (Maribyrnong—Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations) (15:03): I thank the member for La Trobe for her question because I can assure her and all members of the House that we are standing up for everyday Aussies, that we are standing up for ordinary people when it comes to jobs and skills. I am pleased to report to the House that, when it comes to jobs, since this government was elected in 2007 there have been 810,000 new jobs created in Australia. I am also pleased to report to the House that it is forecasted that in the next five years there will be another 830,000 jobs created.

I am also pleased to report to the House that the work on skills is continuing, courtesy of this government. In the next four years, 375,000 people will receive vocational education qualifications, courtesy of the funding of this federal government. I am also pleased to report that there are 462,000 trainees and apprentices currently being educated, courtesy of the support of this government. This is what good governments do to help training and skills.

I am pleased that in the member for La Trobe's own seat, courtesy of the Building the Education Revolution, Timbarra Primary School, Narre Warren North Primary School and Hillcrest Christian College have all received valuable support and infrastructure which they would not have got but for the fact that Labor is in power.

Then I am asked about what risks there are to jobs and skills in the workplaces of the future. Of course, there is always a risk. The risk is a political party seeking to form government who will not reveal their policies on workplace relations. I think we all know where this part of the answer is going, don’t we? What a conniption those opposite had last week when Senator Xenophon belled the cat. At least he talked about what those on the far right want to talk about. He has proposed scrapping penalty rates unless you work for 10 hours a day or after the first 38 hours in a week. That is what Senator Xenophon said. I do not agree with what he is saying, but I respect the fact that he is not too frightened, unlike those opposite, to reveal what he actually thinks.
But if those opposite lack the ticker to reveal their policies then we have to go searching for their policies. Where they are best found is in the antics of the east coast premiers. Who on earth dreamed up in Victoria cutting $300 million to TAFEs? A Liberal Premier dreamed that up. Who on earth dreamed up cutting workers compensation—

*Mr Morrison interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** The member for Cook is warned!

**Mr SHORTEN:** Who dreamed up cutting workers compensation in New South Wales? It was a Liberal Premier. Who in Queensland dreamed up cutting 25,000 jobs? It was an LNP Premier. These people in Queensland, where you have Jeff Kennett-lite trying to run the state, show the real truth of the opposition. You cannot be trusted to run the government because you are no good for skills or— *(Time expired)*

**Economy**

**Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (15:06):** My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister guarantee not to increase the government debt to pay for the government's big new spending promises on an NDIS, submarines and asylum seekers? Will the Prime Minister give that guarantee to the Australian people now?

**Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:07):** I have to say I am admiring of the member for North Sydney's gumption. He obviously thinks the best means of defence is attack. This government will bring the budget to surplus. The opposition has $70 billion unaccounted for. The shadow finance minister has acknowledged that on TV, and the way they will find that is by cutting health and education—

**Mr Hockey:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The point of order is relevance. I asked the Prime Minister: will she guarantee that she will not increase government debt to pay for her bills?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** The Prime Minister has just commenced her answer. I will listen carefully.

*Mrs Mirabella interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Indi is now pushing the envelope.

**Ms GILLARD:** We will fund our Labor agenda by finding offsetting savings and making the necessary arrangements in the government's budget, as we have shown our ability to do, and we will bring the budget to surplus. We will do those things just as we have done. We found $100 billion of savings to fund key aspects of our agenda. We will continue to work to manage the government's budget responsibly at every step of the way and to bring the budget to surplus. The risk to the budget, of course, is the plans of the Leader of the Opposition—the $70 billion that he intends to cut out of schools, cut out of health, cut out of support to families. This week we have had revealed to us one of the big targets, and that is state schools.

**Mr Pyne:** Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. She is defying your ruling. You asked her to be directly relevant and it was a very specific question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I actually stated I would listen carefully to the Prime Minister's answer as she had only just commenced. It is for the chair to determine relevancy or not.

**Mr Albanese:** A point of order, Deputy Speaker: under the standing order which requires that people be referred to according to their titles, 'Prime Minister' is the title.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: Let me say to the member for North Sydney again: next time he wants to ask a question like this, bring in what shows where your $70 billion worth of cuts are going to fall. Bring in how much money is going to be cut out of each public school.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will return to the question before the chair.

Ms GILLARD: The Australian people are entitled to know that. What they will know from us is we will manage the budget responsibly.

MOTIONS
Gillard Government Censure

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (15:10): I move:
That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for North Sydney moving immediately—

That this House condemns the Government for failing to honour its promises to the Australian people over the past two years, in particular its failure to:

(1) spend money prudently,
(2) balance the federal budget,
(3) control government debt,
(4) contain cost-of-living pressures for Australian families, and
(5) keep its promises to the Australian people.

This is urgent—

Mr Albanese: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: there are provisions for a suspension of standing orders under the processes of the parliament with regard to House of Reps Practice. House of Reps Practice refers to the process by which that normally happens. Today, out of the blue, out of nothing, at the end of question time we just had this absurd suspension of standing orders on something that they did not—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The member for North Sydney has the call.

Mr HOCKEY: I used to think the Prime Minister saw the whips office as a safe haven. It is not safe out there—

Mr Albanese: Madam Deputy Speaker—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney will resume his seat.

Mr Albanese: I move:
That the member be no longer heard.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the member be no longer heard.

The House divided. [15:15]

(The Deputy Speaker—Ms AE Burke)

Ayes ...................... 67
Noes ...................... 73
Majority ............... 6

AYES
Adams, DGH
Bird, SL
Bradbury, DJ
Burke, AS
Byrne, AM
Cheeseman, DL
Collins, JM
Crean, SF
D’Ath, YM
Elliot, MJ
Emerson, CA
Ferguson, MJ
Garrett, PR
Gibbons, SW
Gray, G
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP (teller)
Jones, SP
King, CF
Lyons, GR

Albanese, AN
Bowen, CE
Brodтmann, G
Butler, MC
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Combet, GI
Danby, M
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, LTD
Fitzgibbon, JA
Georganas, S
Gillard, JE
Grierson, SJ
Hall, JG (teller)
Jenkins, HA
Kelly, MJ
Leigh, AK
Macklin, JL

CHAMBER
Question negatived.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:23): Is the motion seconded?

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (15:23): I second the motion. The Treasurer dreams of being called 'surplus Swan', but he will be forever known as 'wasteful Wayne'. Warren Buffet predicted this when he said, 'It's only when the tide goes out that you discover—

Mr Albanese: Madam Deputy Speaker, a point of order: we do not have a copy of the motion before the House that is being attempted to be moved.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Copies of the motion are being sought.

Mr ROBB: As I was saying, the Treasurer will be known as 'wasteful Wayne'.

Mr Albanese: Madam Deputy Speaker, another point of order: having had the opportunity to look at the motion now, I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the member be no longer heard.

The House divided. [15:28]

The Deputy Speaker (Ms AE Burke)

Ayes ......................67
Noes ......................73
Majority.................6

AYES
Adams, DGH
Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Bowen, CE

NOES
Wyatt, KG

PAIRS
Husic, EN
Livermore, KF
O'Dwyer, KM
Crook, AJ
Baldwin, RC

AYES
Marles, RD
Melham, D
Murphy, JP
O’Neill, DM
Parke, M
Plibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Roxon, NL
Saffin, JA
Sidebottom, PS
Smyth, L
Swan, WM
Thomson, KJ
Zappia, A

NOES
Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Bandt, AP
Bishop, JI
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coulton, M (teller)
Entsch, WG
Forrest, JA
Gambbaro, T
Griggs, NL
Hartseyker, L
Hockey, JB
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Kelly, C
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
Mirabella, S
Moylan, JE
Oakeshott, RJM
Prentice, J
Ramsey, RE
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Schultz, AJ
Secker, PD (teller)
Smith, ADH
Southcott, AJ
Tehan, DT
Truss, WE
Turnbull, MB
Vasta, RX
Wilkie, AD

McClelland, RB
Mitchell, RG
Neumann, SK
Owens, J
Perrett, GD
Ripoll, BF
Rowland, MA
Shorten, WR
Smith, SF
Snowdon, WE
Symon, MS
Vamvakinou, M

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Briggs, JE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Cobb, JK
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gash, J
Haase, BW
Hawke, AG
Hunt, GA
Jensen, DG
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
Neville, PC
O'Dowd, KD
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL
Solomlonay, AM
Stone, SN
Thomson, CR
Tudge, AE
Van Manen, AJ
Washer, MJ
Windsor, AHC

CHAMBER
**AYES**

Bradbury, DJ  
Burke, AS  
Byrne, AM  
Cheeseeman, DL  
Collins, JM  
Crean, SF  
D’Ath, YM  
Elliot, MJ  
Emerson, CA  
Ferguson, MJ  
Garrett, PR  
Gibbons, SW  
Gray, G  
Griffin, AP  
Hayes, CP (teller)  
Jones, SP  
King, CF  
Lyons, GR  
Marles, RD  
Melham, D  
Murphy, JP  
O’Neill, DM  
Parke, M  
Pibersek, TJ  
Rishworth, AL  
Roxon, NL  
Saffin, JA  
Sidebottom, PS  
Smyth, L  
Swan, WM  
Thomson, KJ  
Zappia, A

**NOES**

Brodmann, G  
Butler, MC  
Champion, ND  
Clare, JD  
Combet, GI  
Danby, M  
Dreyfus, MA  
Ellis, KM  
Ferguson, LDT  
Georganas, S  
Gillard, JE  
Gieri, SJ  
Hall, JG (teller)  
Jenkins, HA  
Kelly, MJ  
Leigh, AK  
Macklin, JL  
McClelland, RB  
Mitchell, RG  
Neumann, SK  
Owens, J  
Perrett, GD  
Ripoll, BF  
Rowland, MA  
Rudd, KM  
Shorten, WR  
Smith, SF  
Snowdon, WE  
Symon, MS  
Vamvakianou, M

**NOES**

Marino, NB  
Matheson, RG  
Mirabella, S  
Moylan, JE  
Oakeshott, RM  
Prentice, J  
Ramsey, RE  
Robb, AJ  
Roy, WB  
Schultz, AJ  
Secker, PD (teller)  
Smith, ADH  
Southcott, AJ  
Tehan, DT  
Truss, WE  
Turnbull, MB  
Vasta, RX  
Wilkie, AD  
Wyatt, KG

**NOES**

Markus, LE  
McCormack, MF  
Morrison, SJ  
Neville, PC  
O’Dowd, KD  
Pye, CM  
Randall, DJ  
Robert, SR  
Ruddock, PM  
Scott, BC  
Simpkins, LXL  
Somlyay, AM  
Stone, SN  
Thomson, CR  
Tudge, AE  
Van Manen, AJ  
Washer, MJ  
Windsor, AHC

**PAIRS**

Husic, EN  
Livermore, KF  
O’Dwyer, KM  
Crook, AJ  
O’Connor, BPJ  
Baldwin, RC

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms AE Burke) (15:35): The time for the debate has expired.

Ms Gillard: Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

**PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS**

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (15:35): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms AE Burke): Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr ABBOTT: Serially, in question time today.

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER**: The Leader of the Opposition has the call.
Mr ABBOTT: The health minister claimed that I had cut $1 billion from hospital funding. This is false. Hospital funding increased by 17 per cent in real terms when I was the health minister. The Prime Minister claimed, falsely, that I intended to cut funding from public schools. In fact, no school will be worse off under the coalition; there will be no hit-list, like the Prime Minister's—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition knows that he can only refer to where he claims to have been misrepresented.

Mr ABBOTT: Finally, the Prime Minister claimed that I would keep the carbon tax. Let me just say: when I say 'there will be no carbon tax under a government I lead' I am telling the truth.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:36): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Does the Manager of Opposition Business claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr PYNE: I do, most grievously.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business has the call.

Mr PYNE: In question time today the Prime Minister selectively quoted from a transcript of mine from a doorstop interview this morning, in an attempt to pretend that I somehow have a policy of reducing funding to public schools. Why is the Leader of the House standing at the dispatch box?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the House is seeking the call.

Mr PYNE: On what basis?

Mr Albanese: Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, if the member just wants to table the document, it will be allowed and we can move on.

Mr PYNE: The Prime Minister's assertion is patently false. In fact, I said: I can make the guarantee that no school will be worse off under a Coalition government—because our policy is the current quantum of funds plus six per cent indexation for non-government schools and government schools. Further, I said, 'Yesterday the Prime Minister tried to convince people of a base lie, and the Leader of the Opposition and I took exception to it.' Further, I said, 'The coalition is the only political party with the policy of putting more funds into both public and non-government schools to a six per cent indexation—'

(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (15:38): Deputy Speaker, I seek to make a personal explanation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Does the member for Dunkley claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr BILLSON: I have, terribly so.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Dunkley has the call.

Mr BILLSON: In question time today the Prime Minister asserted that I supported her carbon policy, selectively quoting from a speech in 2009 referring back to a report from 1998, when I enjoyed the company of the former Speaker.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member must demonstrate where he has been misrepresented.

Mr BILLSON: It is completely false to suggest that amounted to support for her policy. When I told the electorate I did not support a carbon tax, I meant it, and I keep my word.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (15:39): Deputy Speaker, I seek to make a personal explanation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the member for Dickson claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr DUTTON: Yes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Dickson has the call.

Mr DUTTON: During question time today the Prime Minister asserted that I went to the election with a lie similar to hers at the last election, and that is not true.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Dickson knows he cannot—

Mr DUTTON: Sorry, an untruth. I am sorry. It was a mistruth which of course—

Mr Albanese: Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, this is the second member out of the last three getting to their feet so that they can use a word that you have ruled disorderly. He should withdraw.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mackellar is not assisting. The member for Dickson has the call. He will demonstrate where he has been misrepresented.

Mr DUTTON: I am happy to help the House and withdraw. It was a gross misrepresentation, and I did not seek to mislead the people at the last election. I was clear in that I did not support a carbon tax. I will not support a carbon tax. And I will be voting with Tony Abbott to vote it down.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions in Writing

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (15:40): Deputy Speaker, I would like to seek your assistance under standing order 105(b) in relation to unanswered questions in writing in my name on the Notice Paper. To assist you, the questions that I would like you to pursue on my behalf, if you could, are:

question No. 359 asked on 11 May 2011;
question No. 361 asked on 11 May 2011;
question No. 362 asked on 11 May 2011;
question No. 363 asked on 11 May 2011;
question No. 424 asked on 15 June 2011;
question No. 425 asked on 15 June 2011;
question No. 499 asked on 16 August 2011;
question No. 794 asked on 7 February 2012;
question Nos 797, 822 and 826, also asked on 7 February 2012; question No. 832 asked on 9 February 2012; question No. 839 asked on 16 February 2012; question No. 1,001 asked on 8 May 2012; question No. 1,013 asked on 21 May 2012; question No. 1,017 asked on 28 May 2012—

An opposition member: Who’s the minister? Name them.

Mr FLETCHER: It is a disturbing range of ministers. To continue: question No. 1,054 asked on 18 June 2012, of the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation; and question No. 1,071 asked of the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. I think that is the complete list, but I reserve the right to come back if I find more.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): In accordance with the standing orders, I will follow up the member’s request.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (15:42): I seek an opportunity to make a personal explanation.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Does the member for Mayo claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr BRIGGS: I do.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mayo has the call.

Mr BRIGGS: During question time the Prime Minister, in answer to the question about the West Adelaide Football Club’s carbon tax bill, asserted that the information contained in the question was wrong. I quoted directly from an Adelaide Advertiser article which said—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mayo must demonstrate where he has been misrepresented.

Mr BRIGGS: And the chief executive, Kym Russell, who I know also—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mayo must demonstrate where he has been misrepresented.

Mr BRIGGS: She asserted that I had deliberately misrepresented the position. The chief executive of the West Adelaide Football Club, Mr Kym Russell, was quoted directly this morning and, I will note, so were the chief executives of South Adelaide Football Club, North Adelaide Football Club, Central Districts Football Club and the Woodville West Torrens Football Club.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mayo will resume his seat.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions in Writing

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (15:43): In accordance with standing order 105(b), replies to written questions unanswered having been on the Notice Paper for more than 60 days, I ask that you kindly write to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport seeking reasons for the delay in answering question No. 955, which was submitted on 22 March. I have previously had to ask for this to be followed up, on 23 May, and I would ask that you follow that up again. I ask that you write to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, seeking reasons for the delay in answering question No. 1,114, and to the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Justice seeking reasons for the delay in answering the following questions: question Nos 1,021, 1,023 to 1,025, 1,027 to 1,039, 1,041 to 1,050, 1,076 and 1,116.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): I thank the member. In accordance with the standing orders, I will follow up his request.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (15:44): I wish to make a personal explanation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr CRAIG KELLY: Yes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please proceed.

Mr CRAIG KELLY: Today in question time the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency made the assertion that a question I asked yesterday during question time had a statement of untruth in it. I draw the House’s attention to an article in yesterday's Daily Telegraph, by the journalist Bruce McDougall, which confirms that the price increase from Ingleburn High School is $447.28 and quotes a teacher from that high school.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Hughes must demonstrate where he has been misrepresented. The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The member for Hughes has finished his statement.

Mr Briggs interjecting—
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Solomon had better stop interjecting.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Question Time: Points of Order

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:45): Deputy Speaker, I have a question for you in relation to some rulings over the last two days. Today I took a couple of points of order, as did other members on our side under standing order 90 and also under standing order 92(b). Standing order 90, in particular, says:

All imputations of improper motives … shall be considered highly disorderly.

We took a point of order on the basis—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Leader of the House!

Mr Randall: Will you stop him interjecting all the time?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Canning will stop this annoying chitchat over the table. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is raising a very important point and I think she should be heard in silence.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: I maintained, and other members maintained, that where the Prime Minister and other ministers repeatedly perpetuated a falsity, that was highly disorderly. You, Deputy Speaker, said in those circumstances under section 90 there are other forms or other means by which this can be dealt with in the House—meaning, presumably, personal explanations and the like. However, under standing order 92(ii), 'when a member’s conduct is considered offensive or disorderly' the Speaker is able to intervene, if the Speaker does consider that the conduct was 'offensive or disorderly'. In this case, that conduct was the Prime Minister continually making false claims about coalition policies. Standing order 94 includes sanctions against disorderly conduct, of which the Deputy Speaker is well aware. My question, Deputy Speaker, for clarity, is the interaction between standing order 90, about 'highly disorderly' conduct and where the Speaker should intervene when the conduct is 'offensive or disorderly'. I would ask if you would advise me, and, through that, other members on our side, as to the process in these matters.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:47): I, like her, have been in this place for a long time and it is very difficult for the chair to determine what other people consider an untruth from either side of the parliament. The difficulty the chair has is that it is about the perception of the individuals. House of Representatives Practice on page 499 reads:

Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language. Parliamentary language is never more desirable than when a Member is canvassing the opinions and conduct of his opponents in debate. It is difficult therefore rule something in or out of order, and I actually have not made any deliberative rulings in the last six weeks I have been in the chair. The Leader of the House wants to speak to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's point.

Mr Albanese: I note the legitimate point that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition makes regarding imputations that are made against members, but I would ask that perhaps the opposition consider the nature of the questions that are being asked and whether indeed they are absolutely contrary to standing order 90 in that a majority of them end or begin with a personal criticism of the Prime Minister which contains an imputation of an improper motive. That is what their questions do from question 1 to question 10 every single day.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:49): My point arises because over the last two days the Prime Minister has repeatedly stated a false
accusation against the Leader of the Opposition—

A government member interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has the call and will be heard in silence.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: And on taking this matter up by means of a point of order I have sought to claim that we find it offensive and disorderly that the Prime Minister continues to claim, falsely, that the opposition has a particular policy when patently we do not. It is a falsity that is perpetuated. That leads to the kind of conduct that we see and the argy-bargy between the two sides, which led to an outcome yesterday which is obviously the reason I am raising it today. I would appreciate some indication of whether or not the Prime Minister can continue to falsely claim that the coalition will cut public funding. We have said time and time again that that is false, and yet it has not been seen as disorderly conduct.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:50): The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order on the question—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. There is no question. Is the Manager of Opposition Business seeking clarification?

Mr Pyne: Yes. Madam Deputy Speaker, in the interests of trying to be helpful, I remember that Speaker Halverson in fact used to rule that if a personal explanation had been taken on a matter and the assertion continued to be made, that was disorderly, and he ruled it out of order on numerous occasions. I might ask you to direct your attention to Speaker Halverson—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat.

Mr Albanese: I am going to make the point, in order to conclude the debate, perhaps, that this is why the Speaker made a ruling that he would not discuss rulings at this point, at the end of question time—so that we do not have these lengthy debates and that if people wanted to raise issues they could raise them with him in his office.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will resume his seat. I will refer everyone to House of Representatives Practice 499 to 502 and to the previous parliament, where there were many personal explanations given by the same member of the opposition, and the claims were still continually made.

Parliamentary Language

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (15:52): Last week on several occasions the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency referred to the opposition, as a group, as making mendacious claims. My question to you is: can you advise the House why to accuse someone of lying is unparliamentary but—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member will resume his seat and he can read House of Representatives Practice 499 to 502 and get the answer for himself.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

Report No. 1 of 2012-13

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

**DOCUMENTS**

**Presentation**

**Mr Albanese** (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:53): Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members earlier today. Details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

Debate adjourned.

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Schools**

The **Deputy Speaker** (Ms AE Burke) (15:53): The Speaker has received letters from the honourable member for La Trobe and the honourable the Leader of the Opposition proposing that definite matters of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion today. As required by standing order 46 the Speaker has selected the matter which, in his opinion, is the most urgent and important—that is, that proposed by the honourable member for La Trobe, namely:

The immediate need for bipartisan support to improve our schools and give our children a better future.

**Mr Pyne:** That's outrageous.

The **Deputy Speaker:** If the member for Sturt has a difficulty, he can take this one up with the Speaker. I will not put up with that.

**Mr Pyne:** It's not your fault.

The **Deputy Speaker:** That is what I am trying to point out. I therefore call upon the honourable 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—*

**Ms Smyth** (La Trobe) (15:54): Clearly that push for bipartisan support has gotten off to a great start with the member for Sturt's contribution! Both sides of this House have spoken at length about the opportunities presented to our nation in what is termed 'the Asian century'. Both sides of this House have spoken about the benefits that come with being a part of our region. Yet, when it comes to the key driver of prosperity for our country, when it comes to the thing that this government—indeed, any government—can do best to give our own people opportunity, skills and a future with some certainty, it is only ever Labor that stands for meaningful investment in education. Once again we are seeing that that is the case.

I have some hope about the prospects for bipartisan support for better funding of education and for an improvement in education. I have some hope. I say that because last night, in the Federation Chamber, four members of this House stood up and spoke very strongly about their concerns about education cuts put forward and implemented by the state Liberal government in Victoria. They expressed very clearly their concern. Curiously, there was only one lonesome member of the coalition benches, the member for Riverina, who was prepared to stand up and defend the Baillieu government's cuts to education. There was only one member of the coalition—indeed it was left to a member of the National Party—who would defend education cuts in Victoria.

That gives me some hope that members opposite are starting to reflect upon what it means to cut funding from schools and from TAFE, and what it means to cut things like education allowances that enable students to get the kind of education they deserve. That leads me to believe that at least some members of the back bench are prepared to entertain the prospect that we might have a
bipartisan approach to improved school funding.

It is also important in this place, and in the context of this debate, to reflect on some other members of the opposition benches who have demonstrated what might be regarded as bipartisan support for the improvement of school funding. The member for Aston, for instance, has joined me on at least one occasion, at the opening of a Building the Education Revolution project in Fern Tree Gully. So I assume, from his attendance on that day, that he is at least prepared to support—if not in votes, at least in voice—increased education funding for schools in our area.

I note also that the member for Bowman has been out very clearly 'giving a Gonski'. He was very clearly happy to be photographed 'giving a Gonski'. I know that members in this place are somewhat alarmed by things like the Victorian Liberal government's decision to undercut TAFE spending, which means that so many people, particularly in regional Victoria, who rely on TAFEs for local economies as well as for the obvious vocational education and training of young people within the regions. I know that for so many of those members the defunding of TAFEs is a significant cause for concern.

For instance, the member for Gippsland took part in a debate in this place in relation to the future of TAFE funding in Victoria not terribly long ago and did express some reservations about those funding cuts. So I begin this debate by saying that I think there is hope, at least on the coalition back benches, for some measure of bipartisan support when it comes to ensuring that our students have the funding that they need in schools and to ensure that we improve our schools and give our children a better future.

It is an important national debate begun by this side of the House, because, as we all know, it has been 40 years since the last meaningful funding review of schools. What an opportunity we have to look at the sources of funding available to schools. What an opportunity we now have to consider how best our country might support students into the future and in this Asian century.

While we have heard members of the back bench indicating their support for things like TAFE and while we have seen, through last night's reticence to come forward and defend the Victorian Liberal government's cuts to education, some indication that members of the coalition are prepared to talk about school funding and are prepared to give support for improved school funding, there are still those, largely on the opposition front benches, who have entirely retrograde views about education funding in this country. We heard quite clearly the member for Sturt, who began this debate so supportive of any kind of discussion about education investment! We have seen him talking about the repeal of any Gonski reforms—the repeal of any funding changes that might result from the Gonski review. We know that he has already pledged to cut around $3 billion from education and we know that the opposition went to the last election with a policy which resulted in around $3 billion being stripped from education. So that is just the starting point for members like the member for Sturt.

In July the member for Sturt stated on Lateline that he does not believe that a person's socioeconomic background affects their educational outcomes. He made that point quite plainly. So it is unlikely that members such as the member for Sturt are likely to consider entering into a bipartisan approach to education. In terms of the socioeconomic background of a person affecting their capacity—(Quorum formed) As I was saying, the member for Sturt has made it very clear that he does not believe...
that a person's socioeconomic background affects their educational outcomes—despite the fact that we know that, by year 9, the gap in reading, writing and science literacy between disadvantaged and advantaged students is equivalent to around two years of schooling. That is an extraordinary figure but it is one that the education spokesperson from the opposition frontbench is unwilling to even hear.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the Leader of the Opposition is echoing those kinds of sentiments when he says that public schools should be the ones to face funding cuts—because public schools are somehow getting an advantage. From my point of view, it seems that the opposition will be going to the next election with the coalition's plan for real action on quality education but with 'except if you are at a public school' added in a set of square brackets. That is the point that has been made by the member for Sturt over months and months when he has talked about things like socioeconomic background not affecting educational outcomes. It is exactly the same thing that the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday in his remarks about the funding of public schools.

In my view, while it is possible that members of the coalition backbench might be prepared to stand up for education, it is certainly clear to all of us on this side that neither the Leader of the Opposition nor the opposition's spokesperson on education take at all seriously the need to look at funding mechanisms for our schools and the next 40 years of education funding. It should come as no surprise to any of us really because while this government has almost doubled education funding during its time in office, the opposition's track record has been to oppose every progressive measure to support schools, to support early learning, to support things like higher education. While this government has stood for $2.4 billion in computers in schools, the Liberals opposed it. While this government has stood for over $16 billion in capital investments in schools, the Liberals opposed it. While this government has stood for $2.5 billion in trade training centres, the Liberals opposed it.

For electorates like mine, those figures have very significant effects. In my electorate alone we have seen $110 million supporting 61 schools that would have got absolutely nothing in capital investment from those opposite—and they know it well. In my electorate the Computers in Schools program has delivered around 6,000 computers in my local area alone. In my electorate the trade training centre program has delivered around $13 million to three trade training centres that will service the needs of students in the immediate area. So these things have a practical and real effect.

In this year's budget alone we have allocated around $13.6 billion for school, early childhood and youth programs. We have invested in these programs because we believe education and training gives people the opportunity to go on to fulfilling work and fulfilling lives. Education creates opportunity and improves our society. For so many of those students in whose education we have invested since coming to office, it means the capacity to go on to tertiary education. It builds on our existing commitment to tertiary education. In terms of the practical effects of those kinds of progressive policies, in Victoria alone, as a result of this government's uncapping of tertiary places, which is the next step in education for students at primary and secondary schools in my electorate, we have seen an increase of 25 per cent in the number of students who will go on to tertiary study since our government came to office.
In my electorate alone, it is 36.1 per cent. It is an extraordinary number of people who are now going to university and to higher education institutions, people who would simply not have been able to do so had it not been for this Labor government.

The opportunities that are presented through our investment at primary school in early learning, in secondary school through our investments in TAFE via the states and through our investment in tertiary education will change the lives of so many Australians. It will mean that they have employment prospects that otherwise would not have been available to them and it will mean that our country stands to do far better in the international arena and in our region educationally and economically. It is for these reasons that it is important that we have a bipartisan conversation and bipartisan support to improve our schools and to give our children a better future.

It is extraordinary that the opposition has seen fit in this place to stand against any kind of discussion about school funding reform. Not only have they opposed practical measures that we put in place that delivered capital investment for schools, that delivered national partnership programs which improve literacy and numeracy and provide support for schools delivering those kinds of educational outcomes that are important for our children's future, but they stand opposed to even the discussion of education funding reform, pre-empting at every point any kind of discussion which would see a fairer approach to school funding.

This government has taken the opportunity to look at school funding, a very difficult issue, a very complex issue and one that has been dealt with sensibly and appropriately through the Gonski review. This government is working in a methodical way to deliver school funding reform yet the opposition is not prepared to entertain a sensible conversation on it. But it is hardly surprising considering what we have seen when state Liberal governments come to office. Victoria is a prime example of that. Its vision for students is one in which TAFE funding is cut, school funding is cut and education maintenance allowances are cut.

(Time expired)

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (16:09): I thought I must have been given the wrong topic for this matter of public importance debate today because the topic in front of me says we are going to be discussing:
The immediate need for bipartisan support to improve our schools and give our children a better future.

I emphasise the word 'bipartisan', which typically means that you are reaching across the chamber and trying to embrace those opposite to try and find some compromise. But what we have seen, as members in the gallery would have observed, is 15 minutes of bipartisanship like we have not seen for some time.

Let me offer an olive branch to those opposite on the government benches. There is indeed bipartisan support for the intent of this MPI. We on this side certainly would like to improve our schools and give our children a better future; absolutely we would like to see that achieved. I do not doubt the sincerity of those opposite on the government benches who would also like to see that achieved. However, where we do disagree is in the mechanism to achieve that. You will not find bipartisan support in this chamber for wasting billions of dollars. You will not find bipartisan support in this chamber for adding additional red tape to the school sector and you will certainly not find bipartisan support for cutting the funds of 3,200 schools across the country. What you will find bipartisan support for is measures to improve teacher quality, a stronger
curriculum and ensuring that no school in the country receives reduced funding. I would like to expand on some of those points.

By and large we actually have exceptionally good schools in this country. When you look at the international testing data, we have performed consistently well for decades now—in the top band of performance. For example, in the last OECD PISA test, out of 65 countries, we performed ninth in reading, 10th in science and 15th in maths. We also have very good social mobility and social equity in our school system, despite what some people may say.

But, despite our absolute levels of performance, we have declined in recent years and quite considerably so. Indeed, we are one of only four OECD countries that has declined in our performance both in absolute terms and in relative terms as well. We are starting to be overtaken by our near Asian neighbours. In Shanghai for example, the average 15-year-old maths student is now performing two to three years above his or her Australian counterpart at the same age level. In science and maths they are about 15 months ahead and that is similar to some of the other countries in our region. This has occurred despite there being a 44 per cent increase in real funding in schools over the last nine years. So we can do better and, indeed, we must do better to maintain our standards, to constantly improve our standards and to offer the best chance in life for our school children. The question is: what should be done to improve our schools? Here is where we do depart from the government in the prescription for what should be done.

The government has been saying for years now that it has got an enormous education revolution occurring throughout the nation. But what we really have had is billions of dollars of waste and the creation of further bureaucracies, which will further strangle our schools. Probably the No.1 thing it has talked about ad nauseam is the Building the Education Revolution program. This was a $16 billion program but all the analysis, all the independent reviews and our own anecdotal evidence show that we received about $8 billion worth of value out of that $16 billion program. We know, for example, that school halls were built in schools which were closing. We know that school halls were built alongside existing school halls. Every single member in this chamber knows examples of overly expensive school halls built in their electorate. In mine there was a school hall built right beside another school hall. Meanwhile there are other schools which are falling apart, where the maintenance has not been done and where they needed a further injection of funding. We absolutely support injections of capital funds into schools, but we do not support it being done in the way that the government did it, where over $8 billion was wasted in that program—an enormous amount of money. They will not get bipartisan support for programs where money is wasted like that.

Equally, they will not get bipartisan support for some of the teacher quality measures they are putting in place. I fear that they are just adding another layer of red tape. I am pleased that the government has recognised that teacher quality is important—indeed, it is the single most important thing in improving student outcomes. It is great that they have identified that, but their primary reform is the development of what they call the National Professional Standards for Teachers and school principals. This sounds very grand and sounds fantastic, but you need to look at the detail of this to assess whether it will actually improve the quality of teaching or whether it will just hinder teachers. My concern is that it will do the latter. This
teacher standards process is going to require each of Australia's 250,000 schoolteachers to be centrally assessed against 37 different categories. Each of those 37 categories has three or four subcategories, so there will be an incredible 100 to 150 points that every teacher across the country has to be assessed against centrally—not by the school principal but by a central bureaucracy—and they will have to do that on a very regular basis.

This is not going to improve the quality of our teachers. It is another classic case where the government announces a grandiose sounding program, but, when you look into the detail, it may actually have the reverse effect to what is intended. In this case my concern is that this will just consume teachers' time, as they will be going through enormous checklists on a very regular basis, against 150 minuscule items, in order to continue their advancement. What really should be occurring is that the school community, led by the school principal himself or herself, should be making those assessments about the performance of the schoolteacher.

Finally and most importantly, we will not provide bipartisan support on the government's proposal—supposedly to improve school education—to cut the funding of 3,200 schools across this nation. It is not me that is suggesting that. This government has put forward a blueprint for school funding—the Gonski review—and this blueprint has been assessed by the Victorian education department—

**Mr Perrett:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: under standing order 90, about reflections on members, I find that imputation about what I am supporting in Labor Party policy to be highly disorderly and offensive.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams):** Order! The honourable member will withdraw.

**Mr TUDGE:** We had an earlier ruling by the Deputy Speaker precisely on this matter in relation to that section of the standing orders, and there was no request to withdraw at that time. However, for the purpose of the House I will withdraw.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I am very pleased that you have done that and I thank you.

**Mr TUDGE:** I refer to the Victorian education department's analysis of the Gonski review, which was published in the *Sunday Herald Sun* just a couple of days ago, which showed that 3,200 schools across the nation would be worse off under the Gonski reforms. It is not just the wealthy schools across the country—which we know those opposite dislike and have targeted in the past—this was down to the very poorest schools in the community. I had four schools in my electorate that were targeted and on this hit list—four low-fee Catholic primary schools. St Luke's, for example, in Wantirna services an ordinary middle-class community and charges fees of $1,200. According to this Victorian education department analysis, it is going to lose $218,000. That is $750 per student. If this school is to make up for that lost funding in school fees, it will have to increase its school fees by something like 60 or 70 per cent, up to around $2,000. Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School in Bayswater is going to lose a similar amount. St Jude the Apostle Primary School and Holy Trinity Primary School in my electorate will also be affected. There are 3,200 schools across the country that will be affected, in the electorates of members opposite as well as in every single coalition electorate.

We will not be providing bipartisan support for cuts to non-government schools
or to government schools. You can have our guarantee upon that, Mr Deputy Speaker. They will get bipartisan support for the intent to lift the performance of our schools, but you do not do that by cutting the funds of 3,200 schools across the nation.

Government members interjecting—

Mr TUDGE: Those opposite are interjecting, saying: 'No, no, of course we are going to give extra money to schools!' The Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, just yesterday afternoon, was asked a simple question: he was asked to guarantee that no school would be worse off under the Gonski proposals. It was a simple question. Do you know what he did? He evaded; he could not guarantee it. He has been asked repeatedly to guarantee that no school will be worse off in real terms. He cannot guarantee it, because he knows he has a hit list.

The last time Labor put forward a non-government-school funding policy was eight years ago, and we know how that policy went. It was the famous Mark Latham hit list policy of 2004. In those days only 59 schools were targeted. Today, 3,200 schools across the nation have been targeted. We will not be supporting that.

A few things are required. I will highlight at least three that the coalition has been putting forward as constructive mechanisms to improve the performance of our schools. The first one of course is to guarantee that every school will have real funding increases of six per cent a year. That is the first guarantee. Those on the government side cannot guarantee that. The second thing is to put in place mechanisms to improve the performance and quality of teachers. We know that that is the single most important measure to improve school performance. We also want to give school principals greater independence so that they can manage their school appropriately. We like the model, of 100 independent government schools, that the Western Australian government is introducing. We believe that that type of model should be rolled out further. Finally, there should be a strong and rigorous school curriculum which is benchmarked against the best curriculums in the world, not against some of the weakest. Those are the things which need to be put in place in order to improve school performance. If the government were to propose those things, it would get bipartisan support.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (16:24): I am always happy to rise to talk about education. I commend the member for La Trobe for this optimistic matter of public importance motion. I say optimistic because she is seeking the support of those opposite on education, a topic that is in the nation's interest.

Education is my background. Before I became a lawyer and a member of parliament, I worked in the education sector. I worked in state schools in the country and Catholic schools in the city. I worked as a teacher for 11 years and as a union organiser in the independent education sector. I worked as a union organiser all over regional Queensland dealing with the private school sector. I worked with both the very wealthiest schools in Queensland, where I was proud to be the organiser working with the very first protected action at one of our grammar schools, and some of the very poorest schools: some of the private schools in Aboriginal communities and some of the Christian and Catholic schools where people can barely scrape together enough money for uniforms or even, on occasion, for food. That was my background before coming into the parliament. So I do have a particular understanding of education.

Education is a major reason why many of my colleagues here joined the Labor Party in
the first place. If you believe in education, if part of your nature is that you like a fight and if you want to change the world, you normally join the Labor Party. If you like a fight but do not want to change the world, you join the Greens. If you do not want to change the world at all, if you do not want to make any difference, you join the National Party. If you do not want to make a difference and you have had a rails run in life, what do you do? You join the Liberal Party.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: I can hear those opposite gagging on their silver spoons. The reality is that, if you believe in education, if you believe in equality and justice and opportunity—those great Labor values that have persisted since we went under the tree of knowledge in Barcaldine in the 1890s—you join the Labor Party.

Mr O'Dowd: It's gone!

Mr PERRETT: We know where it is, and it is our tree, even though it is in your electorate. It is in Barcaldine, and it is our tree of knowledge, not yours. I was so surprised to hear the shadow minister for education, the member for Sturt, state on Lateline in July that the socioeconomic status of a student does not impact on their educational outcomes. That is pure bunkum! The reality is that it has a great impact. I have great schools—great state schools and great private schools—in my electorate. Two of the top 10 improving state schools in Queensland—Corinda State High School and MacGregor State High School—are in my electorate. They are big schools. I taught in North Queensland with the principal of one of them. I also have national partnership schools in my electorate. I have small, poor Catholic schools and I have small, poor state schools that are benefitting from the national partnerships program—even the school my son goes to is benefiting, because of its significant African population. So I know the things that impact on improvement.

The reality is that, when it comes to improving the future of Australia, we must invest in education. I know things are good, or reasonably good—it is a patchy economy—but we need to do more. At the moment, the economy is growing at above its long-term average, at its fastest pace in over four years. Compared to the rest of the world, it is miles ahead: low unemployment, 13-year-low inflation, strong consumption growth with high national savings—people have put their credit cards away. That is not good if you are in retail, but the reality is that we are saving more. Out of the 200 economies around the world, ours is one of only seven that have a sovereign AAA credit rating from the three major credit ratings agencies.

How they can get a jeremiad going from next door with these figures I do not know. It is the fastest annual growth in labour productivity in a decade. As we all know, the measure of an economy is its productivity. Sadly, for the last 10 or so years productivity has been flatlining. We need to do more. I will touch on that. But I would also point out that since election night when we came to office in 2007 there has been $919 billion of private investment. In fact, in the last quarter we had it at the highest level of GDP percentage in the last 40 years, at 16 per cent. Productivity is what it is all about. That is why you invest in education. It is not just education for education's sake; it is the future of the nation.

I know that those opposite do not like these figures, and they would like to close down my contribution—

Mr Van Manen: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would just like you to bring the member for Moreton back to the topic of the MPI, which is education and
bipartisan support to improve our schools. It is nothing to do with the current economic state of the country.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams): The honourable member will address the question before the chair.

Mr PERRETT: I did not think we could uncouple education and productivity in any argument. To do that you would have to be a paid-up member of the Flat Earth Society. (Quorum formed) It is sad when people are objecting to an MPI on a bipartisan motion about education funding.

I was surprised to read in the paper today the part of the member for Warringah's speech to the Independent Schools Council yesterday where he said:
The 34 per cent of Australians who attend independent schools get just 21 per cent of government funding … So there is no question of injustice to public schools here. If anything, the injustice is the other way.

That is what they have flagged. They have remarked that at the moment there is too much money going into state schools. That is unbelievable. I do not know how anybody who goes to a state school in their electorate could argue that, for a start. Surely not even in Warringah would we be arguing that those schools have too much money.

The Labor government have doubled the education budget since we came to power. We built 3,000 libraries. What did they contribute over 12 years? It was 3,000 flagpoles. I will stack my libraries up against your flagpoles any day. We will make a great contribution to productivity; you will make a great contribution on Anzac Day. That is good. That is important. But I will take our 3,000 libraries any day. (Time expired)

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (16:35): It is good to see the member for Moreton got a little bit more time. I have listened to two government speakers in this debate and I would have to say that any notion of bipartisan support on this MPI is sadly lacking. For the member for Moreton's edification before he leaves the chamber, I came through the state school system. I am very proud of that fact. I agree that we need to give our schools a robust financial foundation for the future and, equally, we need to give our children a sound foundation for the future.

But the question I raise, as with anything that this government seems to do, is about the fact that they seem to have all this funding available but no way to pay for it. If we are going to spend an extra $5 billion on top of our existing funding to the education system, my first question is: how is the government going to pay for it? It has not yet explained that fundamental question of funding these promises. Or is it going to be the case that the very students that are supposedly going to be assisted through this extra funding proposed under the Gonski model when they enter the workforce are going to be the ones paying the debt and the interest that paid for their education? Is that a question that this government opposite can actually answer? No, they cannot because they have not been able to tell us yet how this is going to be funded.

We hear all this rhetoric of the education revolution, but what we really need is to support what we have and what we have built upon and use that as an existing foundation to continue to improve our education system. We need to improve the quality of our curriculum. We need to improve the training and experience of our teachers, to improve the environment in our schools. In order to get these things done, it is paramount that we continue to apply an appropriate level of funding to those schools.

It is quite evident that this government, from reports over the weekend, is more than
a little reluctant to actually achieve that outcome, with some 3,200 schools potentially at risk of losing funding. Under that model there are some six schools in my local electorate which would lose some $3 million. How are we going to improve those schools in my electorate, schools such as Waterford State School? My old primary school will lose almost $1½ million. Eagleby South State School will lose some $700,000, Highland Reserve State School some $400,000, Beenleigh State School close to $250,000, Shailer Park State School over $200,000 and Assisi Catholic College some $50,000. Most of these schools are located within the lower socioeconomic areas of my electorate, and these are schools that have been working extraordinarily hard to improve the educational outcomes for their students. Many of those students have disabilities and special learning requirements.

To juxtapose the government's position with ours, the coalition has quite clearly said that it is our policy to maintain the current level of funding plus a yearly six per cent indexation, meaning over four years both government and non-government schools will receive recurrent funding increases under a coalition government. Compare this to Labor's spin of 'no school will lose a dollar in funding'. Well, we heard there would be no carbon tax as well and look what happened there. It is easy for the government to say that no school will lose a dollar in funding, but is it a dollar of funding today or is it in real terms, meaning that their payments will be indexed, or will there be no indexation and just the current funding arrangement, thereby meaning schools will actually lose funding?

Historically, Australia's education system has performed relatively well. According to the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment 2009 results, of the 65 assessed school systems, Australia was ranked ninth in reading, 10th in science and 15th in mathematics. These results were significantly above the OECD average on all three measures and ranked us clearly above nations like the US, UK, Germany and France.

It is sad to say, though, that between 2000 and 2009 Australia was one of only four countries to record a statistically significant decline in student reading performance. Yet this decline occurred despite education spending over that period increasing in real terms by some 44 per cent. In other words, we have been paying more and achieving less. For the last five years we have heard the constant refrain from the current federal government about an education revolution, but instead of a revolution we have seen a masterclass in wasteful spending and appalling mismanagement, all without any tangible impact on what actually matters: improving how and what teachers are teaching so student outcomes can be improved.

I would like to make another point in relation to improving our schools, and that is about the misconception that non-government schools should receive less funding support because they are considered privileged. There are probably a few facts that are worth noting in relation to school funding. There is a lot of discussion that private schools receive funding unfairly. Let's look at some of the facts. Government schools currently receive some 78 per cent of the total funding from all governments and educate 66 per cent of all students. Non-government schools receive 22 per cent of funding and educate 34 per cent of students. There is no support for the argument that non-government schools receive an unfair distribution of the funding. In addition to that, the parents who send their children to those non-government schools pay taxes like
everybody else and a portion of their taxes is going to support not only their school but also the government school sector. So there is absolutely no merit in the argument of unfairness in funding. We have clearly stated that we will maintain funding to both the non-government school sector and the government school sector.

Mr Mitchell: You're at odds with your leader!

Mr VAN MANEN: That is entirely consistent with what he had to say, so you need to check—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lyons): We will not have debate across the chamber.

Mr VAN MANEN: what was said in its entirety. Whilst I accept the premise of the member's MPI, what we need to see from this government is bipartisan support, because in four or five years of being in government they have not demonstrated it in any manner whatsoever. To them bipartisan support means that we accept every idea that they put on the table and they are not prepared to consider any idea or any alternative that we put up.

We have seen that in any number of pieces of legislation where we have sought to implement amendments to produce better outcomes for that particular legislation and the government nearly always has voted those amendments down. Then, some six months later, some bright spark genius decides, 'Oh, now we'll make this amendment look like ours and pass an amendment to the law.' Well, why not do it in the first place and have a decent piece of legislation from the get-go?

It is a coalition government that will restore hope, reward and opportunity to the education system, by providing clarity and certainty on their funding requirements for the future. (Time expired)

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (16:45): I am very pleased to speak on this MPI today, because making sure that we have the best education system is so important to people on this side of the House. But it is also important to the young people in the gallery today. I see some schoolchildren in the gallery today. We should not be doing it for ourselves; we should be doing it for them.

A bipartisan approach to this is so critically important. But what we have heard from the other side of the chamber today is just no. 'No, we're not going to agree with you, because you've suggested it.' It is just no, no, no, no, no. There is a long track record of the Liberal Party saying no to initiatives in education. We have had many announcements by the coalition to cut education funding for initiatives that this government put forward, very sensible initiatives. But of course the Liberal and National parties have said no: 'Because it was the Labor Party's initiative, we are just going to say no.'

The first of those was the trades training centres in schools. I have seen trades training centres in my local schools, and they have made a real difference to students there. They have ensured that young people who do not necessarily feel that they want to follow an academic path can get a certificate I, II or III. This is quite in contrast to the elite trades training centres that the previous government put up. They did not allow every school student to get access. In fact, only 200 students in my electorate could get access to that school. Instead, through a huge investment by this government, we have been able to ensure that many other school students get the opportunity for a trades training option at school. But of course the coalition is going to cut that, as announced in August 2010.
The Digital Education Revolution is another very important initiative. (Quorum formed) It is not surprising that the opposition are playing these interfering tactics, because I have a long list of cuts that they were willing to make to education: to the Digital Education Revolution; the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality; the Smarter Schools National Partnerships for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities, the Reward for School Improvement; and the list goes on. They want to cut all of these programs and just say no.

Their most recent negativity has come from the member for Sturt, who said that he will just repeal the Gonski reforms. He is not interested in looking at the system that actually will deliver better outcomes for students. And, let's face it, that is what we on this side of the House want to ensure. We want to ensure that no matter where you come from around this country you get a great education that will be the passport to the rest of your life.

We on this side of the House know, as do many academics and people who have studied in this area, that socioeconomics does make a difference in your opportunities when it comes to education; it does affect how you might go in the future. That is why there has been a focus by this government on literacy and numeracy and on low socioeconomics. But the Manager of Opposition Business, who spends more time doing that than focusing on education, has said that socioeconomics does not affect children's outcomes and chances when it comes to education. I think everyone on this side of the House would be appalled to hear that. He should go out to some schools in low socioeconomic areas to listen to the teachers, listen to what they need, listen to what is affecting them on the ground and actually come up with a policy that addresses some of these issues to ensure that we can continue to make our school system a much better system.

On this side of the House we are focused on that. We are focused on how we can look at funding that has not been looked at for many, many years. But there is a false argument coming from those on the other side, and that is that somehow the Labor Party is against private schools. That is not true. We have made clear that we will assist all schools, whether that be through our Building the Education Revolution, which those on the opposite side opposed and which we delivered to all schools, or through the Digital Education Revolution which we delivered to all schools, or through the school chaplaincy program or our $200 million for students with disability. We are delivering to all school sectors.

Of course, we know those on the other side of the House will not deliver to all school sectors. We know those on the other side will just make cuts to public education—cuts to students—often in areas that need the money the most. The member for Sturt does not even acknowledge that to be the case. But of course they will make cuts to public education. That will affect students in my electorate quite significantly. I think the comments on this by the Leader of the Opposition were really quite poor. Once again, we are seeing the Leader of the Opposition trying to create his old fear campaign of misinformation in the community. He has form on this, and he will continue to do it.

But on this side of the House we are going to get on with the job. The Howard government did not have a very good record when it came to schools. We have heard a lot about our record—a record I am very proud of. They talked a lot about a national curriculum.
in the 11½ years they were in government—a lot of talk, no action. It took the election of a Labor government to actually deliver a national curriculum, to do the hard yards, to get it in place and to ensure that we are actually rolling that out. Of course, there was some money and infrastructure to put up flagpoles. Flagpoles have been put up quite readily in my electorate. That does not radically change the education system. I hate to give that news to the opposition, but it does not radically change it. It is important, but it certainly does not radically change it.

As the member for Greenway mentioned, as part of the Digital Education Revolution many electronic whiteboards were put into classrooms, and they are delivering exciting—(Time expired)

Mr IRONS (Swan) (16:55): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance about the immediate need for bipartisan support to improve our schools and give our children a better future. The first thing I will say is that this MPI is typical of the government. So obsessed with spin over substance, they have put up an MPI about the need to improve our schools and give our kids a better future. Talk about the bleeding obvious. Of course we the coalition support our kids and want a better future. It is a given.

What the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth needs to do is to come into this chamber and explain to the parliament why the government is wasting our time on pointless politics and spin instead of actually getting down to the job of improving education in Australia. This whole debate reminds me of an article written about the federal government by a WA public servant in 2010 which argued that 'an education policy that can't be delivered isn't worth the paper it's written on'. Sadly, the government still does not seem to understand this, even after four years of waste and education policy stuff-ups. The government is not shy when it comes to flashy policy announcements and big press conferences on the subject. But, when it comes to actually delivering, this is a government that time and time again is found wanting. In that article, a story was used to illustrate the importance of implementation in the policy process, and I will repeat it for the benefit of the members present and for the young people whom the member for Kingston acknowledged earlier in the chamber.

It is the story of the owl and the mouse. The mouse, faced with the constant threat posed by other animals in the forest, asked the owl how he could avoid being eaten. The wise old owl, known as the smartest animal in the forest, replied that the best way would be to join him atop one of the branches of the many trees high above the forest floor. The mouse saw the wisdom of the owl's thinking and over the next few days proceeded to try everything he could to get to that lofty branch. He clawed, jumped up and climbed his way up the tree but never got very far before falling back to the ground. Weary and beaten, the mouse finally asked the owl how he could get up to the branch. The owl replied that he was just the policy person and did not concern himself with implementation.

The moral of the story is that it is not enough for the government just to say it will do things—to say that every child will get a laptop or that the number of training colleges should be increased. The real worth for Australia is in actually delivering on those promises. The laptops were raised by members opposite in terms of how good they think that laptop program is. I would just remind them of some of the waste involved with that. There was a particular public school in Western Australia where it was
compulsory for every student to have their own laptops. But this government, in its wisdom, still delivered over 300 laptops to that school, and I think they are still sitting in their boxes, because they did not need them: 'Let's not get down and make sure we work efficiently; let's just deliver a policy and a box of laptops, and we can go out and tell everyone how great we are because we've delivered laptops that probably never got used.'

Sadly, the Prime Minister doesn't seem to realise that promises actually need to be delivered on. As with the carbon tax, which is supposed to be an environmental policy but fails to stop emission increases, this government has consistently placed spin and media opportunities over the need to deliver on policy. This MPI merely insults the many voices that have cautioned the government against their wasteful policy approaches over the last four to five years. The reality is that only the coalition is genuinely committed to across-the-board increases for both government and non-government schools, inclusive of full indexation, which sees funding rise by approximately six per cent per year. Every school knows that under the coalition they would not have their recurrent funding cut and every school would get real funding increases, allowing them to properly plan for the future. We know that under modelling leaked over the weekend, one in three schools will be worse off under the government's policy, including 2,330 government schools.

Labor Senator Cameron on the ABC last night declared new taxes should be imposed, which would cost more than $26 billion. Yet again we have the government reverting to type. This is a government that thinks new taxes can substitute for good policy and, as we have seen with the carbon tax, this attitude is not limited to the education portfolio.

This government, when they cannot fix a problem, just throws money at it—and, when that does not work, they blame someone else. After the four biggest budget deficits in Australia's history, the government have already cooked the books to claim their imaginary surplus next year. It would not be surprising if the government put new spending measures on the nation's credit card to prop up their education promises. The Australian public can be confident that the coalition will not cut funding for any schools, and that we will give those schools the certainty they need to plan for the future.

I am getting more than a little frustrated with the federal government! We have one of the most significant changes to funding in education on the horizon through the Gonski Report and the states are being informed of federal policies through the media. I think it is often glossed over by this government that it is actually the states who own, operate and primarily fund state government schools, yet we see that even the states are being kept in the dark on education reform. Perhaps the government is not communicating with Minister Collier to avoid revealing the $305 million funding to be cut from WA, hitting hundreds of public, Catholic and independent schools. That was reported over the weekend. If those reports are true, it would appear the federal government is again treating my home state of WA as a cash-cow for a federal government spending binge. According to
the reports, WA is listed as the only state who will lose cash overall, with 688 schools to potentially emerge as losers.

Over the weekend, the Sunday Telegraph went as far as to describe the debate as having an Alice-in-Wonderland quality, as it said:

… down, down the rabbit hole, talk of fairness, lollipops, teacher quality and promises of a "no loser" policy abound—

Given the spin and political games played by the government on this issue I would say the Sunday Telegraph could be forgiven by being a little bit cynical of the government's policy direction. Much of the education policy debate is skewed by popular myths put out there about school funding. Proponents of the government's policies often use biased statistics to misrepresent the funding situation to claim that Australia lags behind the OECD average on overall school education funding. The reality is that, when parental contributions are included, Australia spends around the equivalent of 3.6 per cent of GDP on school education, a total investment only marginally below the OECD average of 3.8 per cent.

Much of the reporting in the media does not fairly represent the state-school funding situation. The statistics do not take into account the state and territory funding available to state government schools. Government schools receive 78.7 per cent of the total funding from all governments and educate 66 per cent of all students in Australia. Non-government schools, on the other hand, receive 22 per cent of funding and educate 34 per cent of students.

Often the claim is made by those who want to run our school system down that Australia is a low-equity country in comparison to the OECD. Again, this is a false claim. Since 2003 Australia's PISA results have been in the high-equity and high-performance quadrant. As is common with those government members who cut their teeth as far-left political activists when at university, the Prime Minister often frames education debate through a social-equality lens. This obsession by the government over many years continues to misdirect policy priorities, as the government pursues an ideology out of fashion since the 1980s instead of good policy. This is why we often see reports of funding cuts for private schools, as the government itches to return to a divisive 'class war' education policy.

The Gonski report itself states that 86 to 87 per cent of student performance is linked to factors other than socioeconomic status, such as the quality of the teachers, parental engagement, the school and principal autonomy. The coalition believes that, while additional support to disadvantaged students is important, it is also equally important to concentrate on the other policy areas known to be linked to student performance. There will be a clear choice for Australians at the next election: sincere, practical policy proposals from the coalition that do not just look good on paper but are able to be implemented, verses a record of waste and political trickery from this government. Thank you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lyons): Order! The discussion is now concluded.

COMMITTEES
Privileges and Members’ Interests Committee
Membership
Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (17:05): by leave—
I move:
That Mr Cheeseman be discharged from the Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests
and that, in his place, Ms Smyth be appointed a member of the committee.

Question agreed to.

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lyons) (17:05): I have received a message from the Senate informing the House that Senator Edwards has been discharged from the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights and Senator Smith has been appointed a member of the committee.

BILLS

Tax Laws Amendment (Cross-Border Transfer Pricing) Bill (No. 1) 2012

Returned from Senate

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

Customs Amendment (Smuggled Tobacco) Bill 2012

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (17:06): by leave—I move:

That the bill be referred to the Federation Chamber for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

Greenhouse and Energy Minimum Standards (Registration Fees) Bill 2012

Report from Committee

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (17:07): I seek leave to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts on the Greenhouse and Energy Minimum Standards Bill 2012 and the Greenhouse and Energy Minimum Standards (Registration Fees) Bill 2012 in discharge of the committee's requirement to provide advisory reports on the bills, and to present a copy of my statement.

Leave granted.

Mr ZAPPIA: The committee has endorsed the content of this statement. I particularly thank the member for Moore and the member for Forrest, who joined me in a meeting of the committee only yesterday in preparation of the statement. Two bills, the Greenhouse and Energy Minimum Standards Bill 2012 and the Greenhouse and Energy Standards (Registration Fees) Bill 2012, were referred to the committee on 31 May this year. At the next meeting of the committee, on 21 June, it was noted that the provisions of the bill were to be referred to the Senate committee, also for inquiry and report. The House committee noted that the Senate committee planned to report by 15 August.

At the time, the committee unanimously decided to write to Senator Cameron, Chair of the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee. The letter, published on our committee's website, included three main points, the first being that at that stage about 150 bills in about 80 packages had been referred to House committees for review since the beginning of the 43rd Parliament. Second, while this is a welcome and valuable review mechanism, parliamentary inquiries should also seek to ensure that the resources of the parliament are appropriately used. When legislation is referred to similar committees in both houses, submissions and hearings can be unnecessarily duplicated for little additional benefit. Third, given the Senate committee has an inquiry process underway, the House committee would effectively wait to see what observations and conclusions
were made about the bill at the conclusion of that inquiry and then, based on those outcomes, may seek to take further action. The letter to Senator Cameron also noted that the House Selection Committee had given reasons for the referral of the legislation. That is, 'that the scheme may increase costs and green tape for those involved'.

At its meeting on Thursday last week the House committee briefly considered the Senate committee's report, which had been presented in the Senate the previous evening and contained a majority and a dissenting report. The Senate inquiry received two submissions, from Lighting Council Australia and the Clean Energy Council, both of which were generally positive about the scheme and its principles.

Answers to questions on notice suggesting two concerns raised in the LCA submission were provided by the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency on 10 August, and these answers were published on the Senate website. The dissenting report of the Senate committee claimed that those two concerns relating to the extent of criminal sanctions and the risk that commercially sensitive data may be inadvertently made public had not been satisfactorily addressed. The House climate change committee was of the view that its deliberations on the legislation would be assisted if a short public hearing were held to follow up on some of the issues raised. This hearing was held yesterday.

The reasons for referral given by the House Selection Committee, that the scheme may increase costs and green tape, were not examined explicitly by the Senate committee in the course of its inquiry and did not arise in submissions to the inquiry. This committee notes that, on the contrary, there appears to be strong agreement that the overall benefits from the scheme are that national standardisation and harmonisation will increase consistency and serve to lower costs and the regulatory burden on business.

In its submission to this inquiry the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has noted that the legislation introduces a national framework and is in response to a strong recommendation from industry stakeholders. According to the department, the legislation replaces seven state laws and four state regulators and removes 'inconsistencies from the state legislation, including harmonising costs and application processes, enabling a more consistent enforcement program and that will level the playing field in all jurisdictions'. Concerns about aspects of the scheme had been raised in the dissenting report of the Senate committee, which concluded that further consideration not occur until, 'the minister or government respond to concerns highlighted by the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee relating to the level criminal sanctions' and 'sections relating to the conferral of powers providing requiring the provision of sales data be opposed'.

The committee raised these concerns with representatives of the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency at yesterday's public hearing and received advice that Mr Dreyfus, Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, provided a response to the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee also on 10 August outlining changes now being made to the legislation and explanatory memorandum. This response has been incorporated into the eighth report of the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee, dated 15 August. The committee has determined that the views of parliamentarians would best be heard during the parliamentary debates on the legislation and accordingly recommends that the bills be further debated in the House.
Ms O'NEILL: On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, I present the committee's report entitled Statutory oversight of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, together with evidence received by the committee, and I ask leave of the House to make a short statement in conjunction with the report.

Leave granted.

Ms O'NEILL: The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services continually scrutinises the activities of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. As the House would be aware, section 243 of the ASIC Act directs the committee to inquire into and report on ASIC's activities and matters relating to those activities to which parliament's attention should be directed. In fulfilment of this statutory function, the committee holds several oversight hearings per year and routinely directs matters of interest to parliament's attention. Today I am pleased to speak to the committee's most recent report, which draws on the evidence obtained through the oversight hearing held in June this year.

With regard to the regulator's response and the collapse of Trio Capital, I have some particular comments that I would like to make. Notably, the hearing provided the committee the opportunity to formally inquire into the commission's activities in response to the committee's inquiry into the collapse of Trio Capital. The committee tabled its report into this corporate collapse in May this year, and it obtained an overview of ASIC's response in relation to the lessons of the Trio Capital collapse.

The Trio Capital inquiry highlighted the need for effective and timely communication between all regulatory agencies supervising Australia's financial market. I can report that the regulators appear to be taking the committee's concerns in this regard very seriously and indeed are enhancing processes they had already in place. The committee learned that ASIC and the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority are exploring options to further improve information sharing between the two agencies. We were very pleased to hear that. The committee will continue to monitor the coordination between ASIC and APRA, and we look forward to receiving a more detailed overview of the measures that the regulators will take to improve communication.

The adequacy of the threshold requirements regulating access to an Australian financial services licence, known as an AFSL, is a recurring topic of committee discussion with the financial services regulator. This matter was again raised in discussions with ASIC at the June oversight hearing. ASIC advised us that a person banned from holding an AFSL can meet the requirements to be qualified to act as a director of a financial services company. This was of some concern to the committee, and I note that one of my committee members, who was at the hearing, is here in the House this evening. There appears to be a marked disconnect between the qualifications required to be an adviser in a company providing financial advice and the qualifications required to be a director of that same company. I draw the House's attention to the comments by ASIC Chairman, Mr Greg Medcraft:

An ordinary person would probably think that if somebody is banned from financial services they
ought to be banned from being a director of financial services company.

The committee notes also that the duties applying to AFSL holders under Australia's corporations law include an obligation to 'do all things necessary to ensure that the financial services covered by the licence are provided efficiently, honestly and fairly.' This is not only a legal requirement; it is a community expectation, and with good reason.

Having considered the circumstances surrounding the collapse of Trio Capital, as outlined in its report, the committee concluded that there appears to be a strong case to establish a register of employee representatives from the financial services industry. The committee looks forward to continuing to monitor ASIC's activities to address the pressure points in Australia's financial services system, as identified in the Trio Capital inquiry.

With regard to superannuation, I would like to bring to the attention of the House ASIC's advice regarding the pressures and potential risks associated with the continuing growth of Australia's superannuation pool. While the amount of money we have in superannuation is something of which this country should rightly be proud, it is something that requires careful and close scrutiny to ensure that its integrity is maintained. ASIC advised that the continuing growth of superannuation will be a key pressure area for Australia's financial markets over the coming 12 months and, indeed, the coming decade.

The pressures are particularly acute with regard to the growth of self-managed superannuation funds and increasing SMSF investment in managed investment schemes. The collapse of Trio Capital highlighted areas of potential weakness within Australia's superannuation industry. Many investors who suffered losses as part of the Trio Capital collapse were self-managed superannuation fund investors. This is a sector that is growing very rapidly at the moment. Further, the concern is that those investors were not eligible for compensation for the loss of their funds due to fraud and theft. The committee is pleased that ASIC has advised that this is an area of continuing and high-level focus for the commission. Given its significance to the wellbeing of Australians, particularly those Australians who have worked so hard and are now approaching retirement, the committee will continue to closely monitor ASIC's activities in this area, and will draw relevant matters to the parliament's attention.

Importantly, this afternoon I want to take the opportunity to raise the awareness of those listening to this broadcast, maybe driving home in their car thinking about their retirement, and interested in self-managed super funds. They need to be mindful that, while it is a very effective investment vehicle, it is very, very clear that there is no protection in SMSFs against fraud and theft, and those who are investing need to do so with great care and need to take that very pressing fact into account.

The resources that ASIC currently have at their disposal, the resources available to ASIC, and the continuation of ASIC's expenditures are matters of continuing focus for our committee. In response to the committee's questions, the commission did not provide a detailed explanation of their current budgetary appropriations and own-source revenue. However, they did assure the committee that the commission seeks to optimally use all available resources.

The committee, however, notes that ASIC's areas of responsibility have significantly expanded in recent years. We would be very concerned if the expansion of
the commission’s responsibilities resulted in a reduction in the quality of regulatory services that ASIC provides because of an unforeseen resourcing shortfall. The committee was also advised that the commission is committed to proactive engagement with the market, and that this commitment is a key driver in the allocation of its resources. I think it is fair to say that in the relevant press there have been significant indications of ASIC’s very close attention to the details of what is happening in that sector and very clear advice to and engagement with the sector through the media. The committee approves ASIC’s commitment to this proactive engagement with Australia’s financial markets. The committee also considers it is appropriate for ASIC, when prioritising its resource allocations, to consider not only the current but the emerging needs of Australia’s financial markets. The committee will continue to monitor ASIC’s resources.

In conclusion, I would very much like to thank the secretariat for their assistance in preparing the report and for all their assistance to the committee in the important work that we are doing. I advise the House that we will hold our third ASIC oversight hearing for 2012 on 12 September, focusing in particular on issues of market integrity.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement

Mr BOWEN (McMahons—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (17:21): I move:

That orders of the day Nos. 2 and 3, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 4) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (17:22): In speaking on this Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 4) Bill I will deal with each of the three schedules. I will deal with the first schedule, which is in many respects the most comprehensive schedule, last. I will deal with the less controversial schedules 2 and 3 initially.

This bill was introduced into the House on 28 June by the Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation, the member for Lindsay. The bill, as I just indicated, has three schedules. The first alters the living-away-from-home allowance rules, which is a budget measure. The second clarifies the GST treatment of certain transactions involving incapacitated entities. Finally, the third schedule clarifies the treatment of interest payable on sums overpaid or underpaid by the ATO and taxpayers in the case of amended assessments under the consolidation regime.

As I indicated, I will deal with those final two schedules first. Both are technical amendments that are necessary and cause the opposition no problem whatsoever. In respect of the clarification of GST treatment of incapacitated entities there is a bit of a history to this but, as with most measures, this is seeking to clarify the original intent of the GST legislation, following a court case. That is quite normal in these tax law amendment bills.

The third schedule, dealing with consolidation, is part of the tax treatment of consolidated entities. My colleague at the table at the moment, the member for
McMahon, was dealing with consolidation when he was Assistant Treasurer, so it is a bit of an ongoing feast, isn't it, Minister? The government announced last November that no interest would be payable by the ATO if an overpayment of tax was made by a company and then a subsequent assessment finds a deduction is allowed. A company will not be liable to pay shortfall interest or administrative penalties if an amended tax return increases income tax liability because a deduction is subsequently disallowed. Both these changes are in relation to the amendment of the consolidation regime passed in the Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 2) Bill 2012. Both schedules have a nil financial impact.

Let me now turn my attention to the first schedule if I may—that is, with respect to changes to the living-away-from-home allowance. What this bill proposes to do is to change the rules regarding that allowance to allow a deduction for employees for substantiated accommodation, food and drink expenses above ordinary weekly food and drink expense items. Essentially—I am referring now to the report of the Standing Committee on Economics that inquired into this bill and reported in the last 10 days or so, and specifically to the coalition members' report—the bill would, as those committee members articulate rather well, split the taxation treatment of the food and drink allowance. The first $42, that being ordinary weekly food and drink expenses, would be treated under fringe benefits tax legislation. Then additional reasonable expenses for food and drink would be treated as a tax deduction under the income tax legislation. I will come back to that particular aspect in just a second, because it is a moving issue as far as the government is concerned today.

The other aspect of the government's proposed changes in this legislation is to limit that allowance to a maximum period of 12 months, with fly-in fly-out workers being exempted from that limit. My colleague the member for Wright, with me in the chamber, is a member of that committee and has inquired into this legislation in some detail. I know he has some remarks to make later on in the debate.

I will return to that aspect of this proposal in the legislation essentially to split the taxation treatment between the fringe benefits tax and the income tax systems. It was that that particularly got the focus of all members on that economics committee. Recommendation 5 recommended that the living-away-from-home allowance and associated benefits be treated within one taxation system only. And it went on to say: The committee supports retaining the taxation treatment of living-away-from-home allowances wholly within the fringe benefits tax system.

The government, as I said at the outset, introduced this legislation on 28 June. When they introduced this legislation the Assistant Treasurer said:

The government held two extensive consultation processes in relation to these reforms.

I have to say that with what has occurred at the committee and with what has occurred today every member of this House is right to doubt that statement from the Assistant Treasurer. It is worth checking whether he just says this as a matter of course in every tax law amendment introductory speech. But for the government to have introduced a proposal that would split taxation between the fringe benefits tax and the income tax system and claim they have had extensive consultations, I find that impossible. And not only do I find it impossible; members of the House economics committee found it impossible. You need only look at the submissions that were received. As the coalition members pointed out in arguing that the approach of splitting the tax
treatment of food and drink should be abandoned, the submission to the committee by the legal firm Ashurst stated:

Such a system is likely to be unworkable in practice, will significantly increase compliance costs for employers and employees and will give rise to uncertainty.

If they were consulted with, they certainly were not listened to.

The Tax Institute, in its submission to the committee, also observed that the approach in the bill would introduce an additional compliance burden on the Australian Taxation Office, as pointed out by the coalition members on that committee. Those are just two opinions. And Robert Jeremenko from the Tax Institute pointed out that the tax treatment of the allowance should certainly be determined in either the income tax system or the fringe benefits sphere, not both as is currently the case under the bill.

He said:

We will have a discussion, I am sure, about which one may be preferable. Let us be honest, the tax system does not need any help in being complex, and this is just a case in point. We do not need to cover both systems for this one.

The minister introducing this legislation claims that 'the government held two extensive consultation processes in relation to the reforms'. You cannot have it both ways. Either the consultation processes were not extensive or the minister and those working on this legislation with him did not listen to what was being said. As I said, the committee recommended that this recipe for difficulty and complexity be rectified. So today we have a situation where this bill has been scheduled a number of different times through the day, and just a few hours ago the government provided the opposition with some background on some amendments which, I am told by the clerks, have been moved in just the last couple of hours.

Essentially the government has told the coalition that the amendments will change that original proposal in the bill to ensure that the allowances are taxed entirely within the fringe benefits tax system rather than in the personal income tax system or a combination of both. The amendments which have been tabled, rushed in at this last minute, apparently also expand the definition of fly-in fly-out workers and drive-in drive-out workers for the purposes of the reforms. They will also expand the definitions in some respects and there are a number of other associated measures.

But my point is the obvious one. This is yet another case where the government has put forward a proposal that has proved wholly unworkable. They claim to have had extensive consultation. At the very last minute they realised they were heading completely down the wrong track and listened to the good work of the economics committee, the entire view of those members on the economics committee. So here we are debating this legislation with amendments moved at the very last minute. Well, it is good that they have listened, but, again, these are late amendments that are being circulated on the very day the bill is to be debated.

The coalition have maintained that there is no doubt that there are arguments for reform in this area, but the way the government has gone about it was to propose something that was poorly designed that would add a great deal of complexity. That is certainly not the path the coalition would have taken in government, and we are of course committed to a more streamlined tax system.

The amendments have been moved. As indicated earlier, my understanding is that the coalition have received from the government certain assurances. We will in this debate take the government at their word.
that their last minute announcements that have been circulated will give effect to what they claim will address the concerns that have been obvious and that have been highlighted in great detail after the government have tabled this legislation and after they say they have had extensive consultation. We will not be opposing the amendment or the legislation.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (17:36): I rise to speak in support of the Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No.4) Bill 2012. Like the member for Casey, I intend to deal with the second schedule and the third schedule and then come back to the first. The second schedule deals with incapacitated entities—that is, companies in liquidation. It inserts a tie-breaker provision ensuring that where a representative of an incapacitated entity is in possession or control of the property of a corporation, the GST rules apply to creditors and debtors instead of supplies of property that the representative makes in the satisfaction of a debt that the incapacitated entity owes to the representative. This provides some certainty in the law, particularly for taxpayers who are operating in the mortgage lending sector, which are usually banks or credit unions. It is supported by the industry and is a sensible provision.

The third schedule deals with the consolidation regime announced by the then Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation back in November 2011. It implements an outstanding element of that announcement, namely, that no interest or penalties are payable on overpayments or underpayments of tax because of a claim for a deduction which is allowed or disallowed as a result of those changes to the consolidation regime by the Tax Laws Amendment (2012 measures No.2) Bill 2012.

The first schedule is what I really want to talk about. It comes about by an old standing law which operated from the days of World War II, back in 1945—that is, amendments to the living-away-from-home allowance. This is not something that applies to fly-in fly-out workers. I have about 3,500 of those workers in my electorate travelling to Central Queensland and Western Australia for work. Many of them have a history of working in the coal mining industry and in other mining in and around Ipswich. They are not actually affected by this particular legislation.

There are a number of deficiencies in the current legislation. The living-away-from-home allowance has had many guises and many amendments made to it over the years. But there are mistakes or problems in this area and there are probably three that we can identify. The first is the problem of somebody not actually maintaining a home in that particular location—that is, they do not have their old home or are renting it out and so they are still living away from home. It is not technically their home so they are still able to claim the concession. That is a problem because it allows them to claim a concession that other taxpayers would not be able to claim in the circumstances.

The second problem was if they claim, for example, in excess of their actual expenditure on accommodation and food then they are still able to claim that tax concession in that particular matter.

(Quorum formed) I always thought that the Liberals were interested in tax laws but obviously not. I was going through explaining why this particular tax law was being exploited and abused and obviously they are not interested in good tax law reform. I am glad that my colleagues are so willing to come here and listen but, sadly, they have gone—although I have got the former Speaker here.
The third problem in this legislation was that it could go on for years so it was not a temporary measure. It allowed a small number of people with high incomes to gain concessions which in no way reflected their true income. It simply was not fair or reasonable to ordinary taxpayers who could not get this kind of tax perk. The fact that by closing this down, according to the figures received, it would provide about $1.9 billion over the forward estimates to the taxpayer is a demonstration that this particular method by which people were being paid was being abused. Sadly, it went on for a while and has been a problem.

If you were to give me $1.9 billion, there would be a lot of things I could do in my electorate. If you were to divide $1.9 billion among the 150 members of this House, I am sure a lot of people would spend that money more wisely than by allowing lurks and perks for people who are simply getting taxpayer-funded tax breaks. I think this is good law and this is a sensible provision.

There was extensive consultation on the provision, as the minister said in his second reading speech. The matter was referred to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, and I thank them for their assistance. I want to make it clear that, with the tax concessions for fly-in fly-out arrangements, employees will not be subject to the 12-month limit. We are also saying that a home in Australia has to be maintained while they are living away from home for work purposes. I think that is reasonable. If they are saying they are living away from home, they should retain a home to get the living-away-from-home-allowance tax concession. The 12-month limit for accessing this tax concession is reasonable in the circumstances.

The matter was referred to House's economics committee. The member for Casey made out that this was some sort of aberration and a failure of the government. It is quite common for parliament to refer bills to parliamentary committees for consideration. I am sure all the people in this place have considered bills in their various committees—for example, on the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs or the economics committee or any of the committees that consider bills in this place. The economics committee called for and received submissions in relation to this. The government has responded to the recommendations of the House economics committee. There is nothing untoward or unusual about that. Governments respond to committees' recommendations all the time. Indeed, under this parliamentary arrangement they are duty bound to do so and within a time limit.

The amendments make it clear that we are dealing with what have been described in the past as 'unintended consequences' for this legislation. A number of things are being done, and I understand that the Assistant Treasurer will deal with this matter further in the chamber shortly. As the member for Casey touched on, the recommendations include returning the tax treatment of all living-away-from-home allowances and benefits to a fringe benefit tax system. I agree with the House economics committee. It seems to be a sensible recommendation that has been taken up by the government. Broadening the concession provided to fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out workers to cover those workers who provide their own transport and those whose transport is provided by their employer is another sensible suggestion by the committee. Clarifying the circumstances in which the 12-month time limit may be paused—giving the employer an option to pause, with the effect that no concession can be obtained.
during a pause—is another sensible suggestion.

I thank the committee, chaired by the member for Parramatta, and I thank all those who participated in the inquiry for coming up with some very good suggestions. There are others as well, but I will not take up the time of the chamber by mentioning those. I thank those who made submissions. It is a prudent way for the public to have their say. I thank the Assistant Treasurer for his commitment. That $1.9 billion can be better spent on roads, hospitals and schools than by being given out in lurks and perks for those who are not the average taxpayer who might work in a shop or an accounting practice and go every day to and from work by car, bus or train and not enjoy the concessions available to a few, who, sadly in many cases have exploited the circumstances of the living-away-from-home allowance.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (17:49): I rise to speak on the Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 4) Bill 2012. As the previous speaker said, it is not uncommon for bills to be referred to committees. What is an uncommon practice is for amendments to bills to be tabled just hours before the bill hits the House. That is becoming a more regular occurrence. It has happened with a number of bills I have spoken on recently. What is also becoming more apparent is that in committee hearings—on these tax laws amendments and on other measures—where we have eminent people giving advice or evidence, as well as industry bodies who are unanimous in their position, regrettably those positions will often be discarded in favour of Treasury advice or union advice which is in complete conflict with it. I make that point in reference to comments made earlier by the previous speaker.

The three schedules to this bill are highly concerning. The Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 4) Bill 2012 proposes the following changes. Firstly, it alters the living-away-from-home-allowance, or LAFHA, rules. Secondly, it clarifies the GST treatment for certain transitions involving incapacitated entities, which I will go into further, and it clarifies the treatment of interest payable on sums overpaid or underpaid by the Australian Taxation Office—in this case the amended assessments under the consolidation regime. I want to be clear that I and my colleagues do not oppose this bill—particularly the changes that have been forthcoming at the last moment—but I stress that it is critical that the appropriate policies be implemented if Australia is to have a workplace that is capable of ensuring strong growth for our nation and continued economic success while meeting our future skills needs.

The coalition members of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics strongly support its recommendations that the living-away-from-home allowance and associated benefits be treated within one taxation system. The committee supports retaining the taxation treatment of the living-away-from-home allowance wholly within the fringe benefits tax system. As one who sits on the economics committee, I am pleased that the recommendation has been adopted by the government. At least we now see the benefit of the economics committee recommendations being considered after nearly 30 submissions and contributors to the public inquiry, several weeks ago. One contributor to the inquiry was the legal firm Ashurst Australia, which said in its submission:

… such a system is likely to be unworkable in practice, will significantly increase compliance costs for employers and employees and will give rise to uncertainty.
You have to ask the question: why would we burden people with having to comply with both fringe benefits tax and income tax legislation? Such eminent bodies as the Tax Institute have indicated that the approach in the bill would present an additional compliance burden on the ATO as well. We are seeing yet again the government's continuing habit of making amendments before bills are halfway through a debate or even before they are introduced.

The government's response on this matter indicates a serious disregard for 457 visa holders and proves more concisely Labor's complete lack of interest and empathy for business, in particular for the mining sector, the resources sector and the university sector—in my electorate is the University of Queensland Gatton campus—but, more importantly, for the agriculture and horticulture sector, a sector that is vitally important to my electorate of Wright.

The government does not have appropriate policies in place to address current and future labour shortages in Australia and is, essentially, starting to panic. How can a government fail to realise that temporary labour migration is a useful mechanism to manage labour market fluctuations, demands and gaps? Living-away-from-home allowance is one incentive that has been used by employers to attract skilled workers to Australia and especially to regional areas, where the jobs are, particularly in the mining, resources and university sectors.

With reference to the universities, we heard evidence at the inquiry that we throw our net to the world looking for specialists in their field to come and contribute to research in Australia. There is a small talent pool from which we can try to get people to come here. We heard evidence from universities about the implications of this bill and the ramifications it would have for that sector. Yet the government has made no transitional arrangements for temporary residents, and Treasury has not even undertaken to model such a possibility, despite widespread industry submissions pointing to the detrimental effect and hardship this would cause for both current and prospective 457 visa holders.

These amendments mean that all temporary residents who are not maintaining a home in Australia will lose access to the concession. However, while I acknowledge that there is a problem with exploitation of the current living-away-from-home allowance rules, I believe it is of interest to the wider Australian economy and my electorate that we move forward with accepting these amendments. The exploitation, I believe, is where business owners source personnel from overseas. They pay them, say, $100,000 a year and top them up, over and above that, with the allowance. As I mentioned earlier, the living-away-from-home allowance is one incentive that has been used by employers to attract skilled workers to Australia, particularly to regional areas and to the mining and agricultural sectors.

This bill as originally proposed would essentially have split the taxation treatment of the food and drink allowance, making it more confusing and tying business up in even more red tape. Thankfully, the government has recognised the error of its ways on this issue. The economics committee recognised that introducing this change midstream would mean greater uncertainty for temporary migrants and would potentially damage Australia's attractiveness as a destination for temporary skilled migration. This is particularly relevant for the mining sector, where a guaranteed supply of skilled workers is critical in providing the investor security
needed to get huge projects started and to guarantee long-term investment in Australia for Australians. It would have a detrimental impact upon industry decision making at a time when important investment decisions are being made and need to be encouraged. I stress that they need to be encouraged, not hindered. In particular, I am talking about the mining and resources sector.

I mentioned earlier the university sector and that we want to encourage experts in their field to come to Australia. But I also draw attention to the agricultural sector, which is employing migrants and skilled workers on 457 visas. In Queensland—and I am sure also in other horticulture states—the loss of these workers would be a great disadvantage. Our fruit and vegetable growers depend on these workers; they are hardworking and reliable and are a vital part of farm life at the moment.

While there are only a small number of foreign workers in Australia on 457 visas, their economic contribution is substantial. According to Access Economics estimates, the more than 90,000 people entering on 457 visas in 2010-11 will have generated just on $2.2 billion over three years, or more than $27,000 each, while permanent skilled migrants will generate a net fiscal impact of $22,000 each over three years. Furthermore, the imposition of a 12-month time limit has raised concerns that these measures will create widespread uncertainty and may dissuade people from pursuing temporary visas in Australia, leaving many industries with chronic skills shortages and gaps.

The other section of this amendment is a technical clarification to the tax law, which I do not oppose. It clarifies the GST treatment of a representative who is an 'incapacitated entity.' This means, firstly, that no interest would be payable by the ATO if an overpayment of tax is made by a company and then a subsequent assessment finds a deduction is allowed, and that a company will not be liable to pay the shortfall interest or administrative penalties if an amended tax return increases income tax liability because a deduction is subsequently disallowed. Both these changes are in relation to the amendment of the consolidation regime passed in the Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No 2) Bill 2012.

In conclusion, I reiterate that, while I do not oppose the changes in this amended legislation, it should be noted that they have a very profound impact upon the ability of Australian employers to create attractive compensation packages to attract those skilled workers that Australia vitally needs. With the fact that there is no clear program to ensure that skilled labour will be available in plentiful supply in the future, the simple and inescapable fact of the changes to the living-away-from-home allowance is that this government, without having transitional arrangements, has immediately made 457 visa workers disadvantaged. It has made Australia less competitive when it comes to attracting skilled workers, not to forget the profound change to the landscape of our national ability to attract the best and the brightest to a number of jobs where there is a skilled labour shortage.

This bill shows yet again that the excessive regulations that burden business in this country are reaching new highs. Since November 2007, over 18,000 new regulations have been implemented. Perhaps this government should make a greater effort to understand that there are many people currently working in Australia on 457 visas who have made deliberate financial and career decisions to work here in Australia on the understanding and basis that they would be eligible for the living-away-from-home allowance. To remove this condition without warning does nothing to assist in creating
confidence amongst current and future temporary migrants. So, on top of an already preposterous and hurtful carbon tax, the Australian people and, closer to home, the people of Wright are once again forced to settle for a government that is intent on unnecessary complexities and poor tax system designs.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (18:01): I rise to speak on the Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 4) Bill 2012 and place on record my strong concerns as shadow minister for immigration and citizenship about the government's handling of the proposed changes to the living-away-from-home allowance, particularly as they apply to 457 visa workers who are existing in the country as opposed to those who may come after, who will be aware of and informed of these changes before making their decisions. Labor's failure to consider the ramifications of these changes for existing 457 visa holders and the industries that rely on temporary skilled labour, let alone investigate transitional options for those temporary workers who are already here, is particularly alarming. It demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of how the businesses that rely on these workers operate and the challenges facing, in particular, the minerals and resources sector, with many standing at a decision point when looking to how they will be investing funds in this industry in the years ahead in terms of the minerals boom. This government does not understand that those looking to invest in Australia, and our resources projects in particular, may simply decide to take their money and go somewhere else.

There are currently more than $500 billion worth of mining and resource projects in the pipeline, which the Treasurer likes to talk about so often. The issue is: how many of these projects will actually be realised? The June Business Outlook by Deloitte Access Economics stated that the 'current spike in investment is due to decisions taken a while back, whereas we are getting few new mining mega-projects across the line'. Of the 393 resource projects listed in April, 75 per cent remain uncommitted, with a combined potential capital expenditure of $243 billion. The Newport Mining business outlook report for 2012-13 found that just 25 per cent of companies surveyed are planning to invest in major capex projects this year, in comparison with 52 per cent last year.

According to DFAT, planned and committed investment by Australian companies in African resources projects now exceeds $50 billion, with Australian resources companies having more projects in Africa than any other region in the world. They note there are at least 230 Australian companies with around 650 projects in mining exploration, extraction and processing throughout 42 countries in Africa.

The Chinese are also increasing their focus on Africa. The China Mining Association says China is pouring more money into Africa while backing away from traditional markets like Australia mainly because of the cost. Chinese investment in Africa's mining sector in 2011 was $15.6 billion—10 times more than the previous year. China's mining investment in Australia plunged to $1.3 billion in 2011, a 70 per cent drop on the previous year. In the first half of the year, China's total mining investment in Australia was just $140 million.

As an indication of the increased competition we face, Australia's global share of capital raised for mining projects has dropped from 21 per cent to 15 per cent since 2008. While the value of capital raisings in Australia increased slightly from $4.3 billion to $4.5 billion between 2008 and 2011, in Africa it was up 26 per cent, in Canada it
was up 31 per cent and in South America it was up 59 per cent.

The lesson in all of this is that our minerals and resources sector cannot be taken for granted—the coalition understands this—yet those framing public policy in the government, who write about this area of policy and spend the funds raised from it, continue to not understand these matters. If the Treasurer does not change his taxing ways, he will turn the investment pipeline for future projects which he likes to boast about into a pipeline to nowhere.

The LAFHA changes effectively amount to a retrospective tax on Australian companies for employing foreign workers—another punishment tax from this government that will fall disproportionately on the minerals and resources sector. Once again it has been sold by a Treasurer addicted to the envy rhetoric he used to sell the mining tax and the carbon tax, arguing the LAFHA changes would stop 'rorting' by 'highly paid executives and foreign workers at the expense of Australian taxpayers'. This is just another example of poorly executed policy from an inept government that chops and changes policy at the drop of a hat, with often disastrous consequences. This is how Labor has introduced sovereign risk into the investment equation for Australia.

I note, as my colleagues have done, that the government has introduced late-hour amendments, largely in response to the recommendations of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, which seek to ensure the living-away-from-home allowances will be taxed entirely within the FBT system rather than in the personal income tax stream or a combination of both. This will ensure the requirement to pay tax and understand the tax rules remains with the employer and should hopefully create greater consistency with the treatment of other benefits. These amendments will also expand the definition of fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out workers and ensure that provisions which prevent people from accessing transitional treatments if they 'vary' an existing arrangement will only apply to 'material variations', not normal salary increases or things of that nature.

It is for the government to guarantee that these last-minute amendments will in fact do what they say they will and will not have unintended consequences. However, I remain concerned about the government's apathy towards temporary workers and employers whose livelihoods depend on being able to access temporary skilled labour where positions cannot be filled with specialised employees from within Australia's workforce, including the minerals and resources sector.

Our nation's prosperity over decades has been in no small part due to our skilled and productive workforce. Despite the very small number of foreign workers in Australia on 457 visas, their economic contribution to this country continues to be substantial. In May there were 90,280 primary 457 visa holders in the country, with 7,500 working in construction and another 5,200 in mining. The 457s account for less than one per cent of our labour force, yet Access Economics suggests that 457 entrants in the 2010-11 program year will generate $2.2 billion over three years, which works out to be more than $27,000 for each position. Similarly, permanent skilled migrants generate a net fiscal impact of $22,000 each across the space of three years.

A research paper by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research and the Partnership for a New American Economy found that two primary categories of temporary foreign workers in
the US are associated with strong job creation for Americans. The study found:
States with greater numbers of temporary workers in the H-1B program for skilled workers and H-2B program for less-skilled non-agricultural workers had higher employment among US natives. Adding 100 H-1B workers created an additional 183 jobs for US citizens. Adding 100 H-2B visa class workers created 464 jobs for Americans.

The coalition does not see temporary labour migration as a threat to Australian jobs. Rather, it is an important tool to secure the future of businesses to ensure they can employ more Australians. A business that has to close because it cannot get the employees it needs employs no-one. It is lose-lose every time for everyone.

Of course we need safeguards. The coalition will retain the sanctions and penalty regime implemented following the Deegan review, and we will come down hard on those who abuse the system we would operate if we were elected. An employer abusing the 457 program can expect the same tough stance from a coalition government as anyone else seeking to undermine the integrity of our immigration program, including on our borders. But circumstances arise where gaps open up and demand for skills cannot be met as swiftly as required by project deadlines. It was the coalition who introduced 457 visas and we believe temporary migration remains a useful tool to manage labour market fluctuations. We have consistently made the point that our migration program should be a supplement, not a substitute, for the Australian workforce, to fill gaps that open up by the way our population grows naturally.

Companies behind large resource projects need security guarantees for their investors to ensure access to the skilled workers they need to operate these projects viably in Australia. That is why the coalition supported the government's enterprise migration agreements policy when it was included in the 2011-12 budget. In principle, it is a sound policy designed to safeguard investment in our country and protect Australian jobs. If backed up and competently implemented, enterprise migration agreements are good policy.

Sadly for the Roy Hill project, the first to engage this new policy, the government's EMA policy has so far proved to be a mirage. Despite bipartisan support, the government still managed to score an own goal on this policy. On the day of her own government's announcement of the Roy Hill EMA, the Prime Minister amazingly claimed to be 'furios', caving in to union pressure and hanging her immigration minister out to dry, casting doubt over the arrangement and the policy. DIAC officials testified at estimates:
... a lot of those businesses are waiting for the first application to be approved to see what sorts of concessions the government has approved before they make a decision to proceed.

The Roy Hill EMA is the first experiment and so far it has only set a precedent for uncertainty.

Our Prime Minister cannot be trusted not to change the rules on projects like this once an agreement or investment has been made. The living-away-from-home allowance debacle I think is a case in point. Historically, the living-away-from-home allowance has been one option used by employers as an incentive to attract skilled workers to Australia. This is particularly important for the resource and mining sectors. Businesses and employers need to have confidence that they can make important decisions about future investment and projects that might have a three- to five-year life, without the government changing the rules every few minutes.
Despite the impact these changes will have on existing 457 holders and reliant industries, the government has made no transitional arrangements available for these temporary residents. What is even worse is that it was revealed in answers to questions on notice posed by the House committee investigating these bills that Treasury had not even been asked to look at running a model over such a possibility. The coalition requested this bill be referred to the House Standing Committee on Economics to seek further clarification on the potential for unintended consequences to arise. The committee received widespread submissions from industry highlighting the damage this would do to Australia's reputation and the hardships this could cause for current and prospective 457 visa holders.

Introducing this change midstream runs the risk of triggering great doubt for temporary migrants and potentially damages Australia's attractiveness as a destination for temporary skilled migration, and the bill will be paid by Australian companies employing these workers who will have to pay the gross amount. So make no mistake: this bill will create a tax burden in addition to what is already being paid by these companies, simply for the fact that they currently have temporary 457 workers on their books. This is particularly pertinent in the mining sector, where guaranteed labour supply of skilled workers is time critical in providing investor security to get megaprojects off the ground and ensure long-term investment in Australia and Australian jobs.

Extensive consultation with industry has consistently raised concerns that these measures will create widespread uncertainty and may dissuade people from pursuing temporary visas in Australia and leave many industries with chronic skills shortages and gaps. You just cannot go changing the rules all the time and expect people to believe you when you say they are not going to change again.

The other issue I wanted to raise was that in the report tabled last week coalition members of the committee, including me, expressed concern in supplementary comments to the majority report over the lack of consideration given to the flow-on effects for 457 visa holders and, consequently, Australia's sovereign risk. The government has estimated the measure will provide $50 million in 2012-13 and $217 million in 2013-14. An additional $353 million is expected in 2014-15 and just under $400 million in 2015-16. Treasury admitted in response to coalition questions that, given the uncertainty around how individuals choose to respond to the policy, there is a high degree of uncertainty about the respective contribution of different revenue components to the total fiscal impact.

The coalition put to Treasury two scenarios extrapolated from Department of Immigration and Citizenship data, as opposed to ATO numbers, which suggested the additional tax revenue of this scheme could exceed $550 million per financial year. These figures suggest—and I put it on record here—that this measure could have a significant tax windfall for the government, and they have failed to investigate it. And, knowing that there was potentially additional revenue here, the government did not seek to address the retrospectivity issues of this bill. As a result it has allowed the perception to now be confirmed that the government will change the rules on you midstream.

When asked whether, based on those models, the department agreed the revenue was likely to exceed their estimates, they answered, 'No; the Treasury modelling has been informed by data provided by the ATO.' Treasury noted that 'revenue from 457 visa holders is not expected to increase
significantly year on year’, yet no further details were offered as to modelling scenarios that may have involved fluctuating 457 numbers, given this visa program is market driven.

Treasury indicated that for the purpose of modelling it was assumed that around 50 per cent of employees will convert LAFH allowances and benefits into salary wages. However, they have not indicated how this was arrived at. Treasury have indicated that costings were modelled 'on the notion of average rate of LAFH allowances or benefit, which reflected a range of family compositions'. However, Treasury did not indicate what the ATO considered to be the average rate of LAFH allowance or the nature of family compositions. Furthermore, Treasury have not provided their costings in calculations relating to food and accommodation allowances, and there are many different permutations and combinations that could result from the removal of the living-away-from-home allowance. What all this adds up to is that the Treasury did not model parallel transitional provisions for 457 visa holders. When asked about this, the Treasury simply did not have the costings for these scenarios.

What is concerning here is that when you make changes you should always avoid retrospectivity, because retrospectivity is not a taxation principle that, I hope, anyone in this House would support. The impact of this retrospectivity is just another big tax on the mineral and resources sector in particular. It is a tax from this government on people who have employed foreign workers.

**Mr BRADBURY** (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (18:16): I would like to thank those members who have contributed to this debate. The Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 4) Bill 2012 amends various taxation laws in order to implement a range of improvements to Australia's tax laws. Schedule 1 amends the tax laws to better target the tax concession for living-away-from-home allowances and benefits to people who are legitimately maintaining a home away from their actual home in Australia, for an initial period. These reforms will ensure that this taxpayer funded tax break cannot be misused or exploited.

The schedule implements the reforms that were announced as part of last year’s Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook and also the reforms announced in this year's budget. As part of the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, in November last year the government announced two reforms to the tax concession. First, in order to be able to access the tax concession, temporary residents will need to be maintaining a home in Australia for their immediate use and enjoyment at all times that they are required to live away from home for work. This addresses the anomalous situation where a temporary resident worker could receive much more take-home pay than an Australian worker performing the same task. Second, all individuals will need to substantiate their actual expenditure on accommodation and food, where it goes beyond the commissioner's reasonable amount.

In this year's budget we announced two new reforms to the tax concession. To be able to access the tax concession, permanent residents will need to be maintaining a home in Australia for their immediate use and enjoyment at all times that they are required to live away for work. There will be a 12-month time limit on how long all people, other than fly-in-fly-out and drive-in-drive-out workers can access the tax concession.

The government has held a number of consultation processes in relation to these
reforms. I would like to thank those individual and organisations that made submissions. In response to the submissions received, the government deferred the general start date of the reforms from 1 July 2012 to 1 October 2012, with the reforms announced at the budg...
Part 1—Main amendment
Fringe Benefits Tax Assessment Act 1986

1 Subdivision B of Division 7 of Part III
Repeal the Subdivision, substitute:
Subdivision B—Taxable value of living-away-
from-home allowance fringe benefits

31 Taxable value—employee maintains a
home in Australia

(1) This section applies to a living-away-
from-home allowance fringe benefit covered by
subsection 30(1) in relation to a year of tax to the
extent that the employee satisfies all of the
following for the fringe benefit and the period to
which it relates:
(a) section 31C (about maintaining an
Australian home);
(b) section 31D (about the first 12 months);
(c) section 31F (about declarations).

(2) Subject to this Part, the taxable value of
the fringe benefit in relation to the year of tax is
the amount of the fringe benefit reduced by:
(a) any exempt accommodation component; and
(b) any exempt food component.

31A Taxable value—fly-in fly-out and drive-
in drive-out employees

(1) This section applies to a living-away-
from-home allowance fringe benefit covered by
subsection 30(1) in relation to a year of tax to the
extent that the employee satisfies all of the
following for the fringe benefit and the period to
which it relates:
(a) the requirement that the employee has
residential accommodation at or near his or her
usual place of employment;
(b) section 31E (about extra requirements
for these employees);
(c) section 31F (about declarations).

(2) Subject to this Part, the taxable value of
the fringe benefit in relation to the year of tax is
the amount of the fringe benefit reduced by:
(a) any exempt accommodation component; and
(b) any exempt food component.

31B Taxable value—any other case

(1) This section applies to a living-away-
from-home allowance fringe benefit in relation to
a year of tax to the extent that neither section 31
nor 31A applies to the fringe benefit and the
period to which it relates.

(2) Subject to this Part, the taxable value of
the fringe benefit in relation to the year of tax is
the amount of the fringe benefit.

Subdivision C—Related provisions

31C Maintaining a home in Australia

The employee satisfies this section if:
(a) the place in Australia where the
employee usually resides when in Australia:
(i) is a unit of accommodation in which
the person or the employee's spouse has an
ownership interest (within the meaning of the
Income Tax Assessment Act 1997); and
(ii) continues to be available for the
employee's immediate use and enjoyment during
the period that the duties of that employment
require the employee to live away from it; and
(b) it is reasonable to expect that the
employee will resume living at that place when
that period ends.

31D First 12 months employee is required to
live away from home

(1) The employee satisfies this section if the
fringe benefit relates only to all or part of the first
12 months that the duties of that employment
require the employee to live away from the place
in Australia where he or she usually resides when
in Australia.

(2) Each of the following paragraphs applies
for the purposes of subsection (1):
(a) the employer may pause the 12-month period;

(b) start a separate 12-month period if:

(i) the employer later requires the employee to live at another location for the purposes of that employment; and

(ii) it would be unreasonable to expect the employee to commute to that other location from an earlier location for which the employer provided a benefit of the same kind to the employee;

(c) other changes in the nature of that employment are irrelevant;

(d) treat as one employer any of the employee’s earlier employers that is or has been an associate of the current employer.

31E Fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out requirements

The employee satisfies this section if:

(a) the employee, on a regular and rotational basis:

(i) works for a number of days and has a number of days off (but not the same days in consecutive weeks); and

(ii) on completion of the working days, travels from his or her usual place of employment to his or her normal residence and, on completion of the days of off, returns to that usual place of employment; and

(b) the basis of work described in paragraph (a) is customary for employees performing similar duties in that industry; and

(c) it would be unreasonable to expect the employee to travel on a daily basis on work days between:

(i) his or her usual place of employment; and

(ii) his or her normal residence;

having regard to the location of those places; and

(d) it is reasonable to expect that the employee will resume living in his or her normal residence when the duties of that employment no longer require him or her to live away from it.

31F Declarations

(1) The employee satisfies this section if the employee gives the employer a declaration, in a form approved by the Commissioner, purporting to set out:

(a) for a fringe benefit to which section 31 (about employees who maintain an Australian home) applies:

(i) the address of the place in Australia where the employee usually resides when in Australia; and

(ii) that section 31C is satisfied for that place; and

(iii) the address of each place where the employee actually resided during the period to which the benefit relates; or

(b) for a fringe benefit to which section 31A (about employees who fly-in fly-out or drive-in drive-out) applies:

(i) the address of the employee’s usual place of residence; and

(ii) that paragraph 31E(d) is satisfied for the employee’s normal residence; and

(iii) the address of each place where the employee actually resided during the period to which the benefit relates.

(2) The employee must give the employer the declaration before the declaration date for the year of tax during which the benefit was provided.

31G Substantiating related expenses

(1) This section applies to the following expenses incurred by the employee:

(a) an expense for the accommodation of eligible family members during the period to which a living-away-from-home allowance fringe benefit relates;

(b) an expense for food or drink for eligible family members during the period to which a living-away-from-home allowance fringe benefit relates, if the total of those food or drink expenses for that period exceeds the amount the Commissioner considers reasonable.

(2) The employee substantiates the expense if the employee:
(a) before the declaration date for the year of tax during which the fringe benefit was provided, gives the employer:

(i) documentary evidence of the expense, or a copy; or

(ii) a declaration, in a form approved by the Commissioner, purporting to set out information about the expense; and

(b) if the employee gives a declaration under subparagraph (a)(ii)—retains documentary evidence of the expense for a period of 5 years starting at that declaration date.

Note: Substantiating expenses increases the exempt accommodation component, and exempt food component, for working out the taxable value of the relevant fringe benefit.

31H Exempt food component

(1) The exempt food component, in relation to a living-away-from-home allowance fringe benefit, is so much of the result of subsection (2) as is equal to the total of the expenses that:

(a) are incurred by the employee for food or drink for eligible family members during the period to which the fringe benefit relates; and

(b) if section 31G applies to the expenses—are substantiated under that section.

(2) Work out the result of the following:

Food component – Applicable statutory food total

where:

applicable statutory food total means the total of the statutory food amounts for eligible family members for the period to which the fringe benefit relates, reduced (but not below zero) by any amount that:

(a) might reasonably be expected to be the total normal food or drink expenses for those eligible family members had they remained living in their normal residence during that period; and

(b) was taken into account in working out the food component.

Part 2—Other amendments

Fringe Benefits Tax Assessment Act 1986

2 At the end of paragraphs 21(a), (b) and (ba) Add "and".

3 Paragraphs 21(c) and (d)

Repeal the paragraphs, substitute:

(c) the accommodation is required solely because the duties of that employment require the employee to live away from his or her normal residence; and

(d) the employee satisfies:

(i) sections 31C (about maintaining an Australian home) and 31D (about the first 12 months); or

(ii) section 31E (about fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out requirements); and

(e) the employee gives to the employer, before the declaration date, a declaration, in a form approved by the Commissioner, purporting to set out:

(i) if the employee satisfies sections 31C and 31D—the matters in subparagraphs 31F(1)(a)(i) to (iii); or

(ii) if the employee satisfies section 31E—the matters in subparagraphs 31F(1)(b)(i) to (iii);

4 Paragraph 30(1)(b)

Omit "employee is required to live away from his or her usual place of residence in order to perform the duties of that employment", substitute "duties of that employment require the employee to live away from his or her usual place of residence".

5 Paragraph 30(2)(f)

Omit "employee is required to live away from his or her usual place of residence in order to perform the duties of that employment", substitute "duties of that employment require the employee to live away from his or her usual place of residence".

6 At the end of paragraph 47(5)(a)

Add "and".

7 Paragraph 47(5)(b)

Repeal the paragraph, substitute:

(b) the unit of accommodation is for the accommodation of eligible family members and is provided solely because the duties of that employment require the employee to live away from his or her normal residence; and
(ba) the employee satisfies:

(i) sections 31C (about maintaining an Australian home) and 31D (about the first 12 months); or

(ii) section 31E (about fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out requirements); and

8 Paragraph 47(5)(d)

Omit "either", substitute "any".

9 Subparagraph 47(5)(d)(ii)

Repeal the subparagraph, substitute:

(ii) if the employee satisfies sections 31C and 31D—the employee gives to the employer, before the declaration date, a declaration, in a form approved by the Commissioner, purporting to set out the matters in subparagraphs 31F(1)(a)(i) to (iii);

(iii) if the employee satisfies section 31E—the employee gives to the employer, before the declaration date, a declaration, in a form approved by the Commissioner, purporting to set out the matters in subparagraphs 31F(1)(b)(i) to (iii);
food component, in relation to a living-away-from-home allowance fringe benefit, means so much (if any) of the fringe benefit as might reasonably be concluded to be compensation for expenses to be incurred by the employee for food or drink for eligible family members during the period to which the fringe benefit relates.

19 Subsection 136(1) (at the end of subparagraph (a)(i) of the definition of living-away-from-home food fringe benefit)
Add "and".

20 Subsection 136(1) (subparagraph (a)(iii) of the definition of living-away-from-home food fringe benefit)
Repeal the subparagraph, substitute:
(iii) the food or drink was for consumption by eligible family members at a time when the duties of that employment required the employee to live away from his or her normal residence; or

21 Subsection 136(1) (at the end of subparagraph (b)(i) of the definition of living-away-from-home food fringe benefit)
Add "and".

22 Subsection 136(1) (subparagraph (b)(iii) of the definition of living-away-from-home food fringe benefit)
Repeal the subparagraph, substitute:
(iii) the food or drink was for consumption by eligible family members at a time when the duties of that employment required the employee to live away from his or her normal residence.

23 Subsection 136(1)
Insert:

normal residence, in relation to an employee, means:
(a) if the employee's usual place of residence is in Australia—the employee's usual place of residence; or
(b) otherwise—either:
(i) the employee's usual place of residence; or
(ii) the place in Australia where the employee usually resides when in Australia.

24 Subsection 136(1) (definition of recipients allowance)
Repeal the definition.

25 Subsection 136(1) (definition of recipients allowance period)
Repeal the definition.

Part 3—Application and transitional provisions

26 Application of amendments
The amendments made by this Schedule apply in relation to an employee who, on or after 1 October 2012, lives away from his or her normal residence (whether a benefit provided for living away from that residence on or after that day was paid before, on or after that day).

27 Transitional—existing employment arrangements
(1) During the transitional period, disregard paragraph 31C(a) and section 31D of the Fringe Benefits Tax Assessment Act 1986 if:
(a) the employee is neither a temporary resident nor a foreign resident; and
(b) during the entire period:
(i) starting at the Budget time; and
(ii) ending on 30 September 2012;
that employment was covered by an eligible employment arrangement that was neither varied in a material way nor renewed.

(2) During the transitional period, disregard section 31D of the Fringe Benefits Tax Assessment Act 1986 if:
(a) the employee is a temporary resident or a foreign resident; and
(b) during the entire period:
(i) starting at the Budget time; and
(ii) ending on 30 September 2012;
that employment was covered by an eligible employment arrangement that was neither varied in a material way nor renewed.

(3) In this item:

Budget time means 7.30 pm, by legal time in the Australian Capital Territory, on 8 May 2012.

eligible employment arrangement means an arrangement under which:
(a) the employer; or
(b) an associate of the employer;
commits to provide the employee with an allowance or benefit for the employee's accommodation, food or drink while the duties of that employment require the employee to live away from his or her normal residence.

*foreign resident* has the same meaning as in the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

*temporary resident* has the same meaning as in the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

*transitional period* means the period:

(a) starting on 1 October 2012; and  
(b) ending at the earliest of:  
(i) 30 June 2014; and  
(ii) the time the eligible employment arrangement referred to in paragraph (1)(b) or (2)(b) ends; and  
(iii) the first time that eligible employment arrangement is varied in a material way or renewed.

28 Transitional—first 12 months for existing arrangements

(1) This item applies if, on 1 October 2012:

(a) an employee's duties of employment require the employee to live away from the place in Australia where he or she usually resides when in Australia; or

(b) the employee expects that his or her duties of employment will require him or her to resume living away from the place in Australia where he or she usually resides when in Australia.

(2) Treat the 12-month period referred to in subsection 31D(1) of the *Fringe Benefits Tax Assessment Act 1986* as if it were the first 12 months on or after 1 October 2012 that the employee lives away from that place as so required.

Question agreed to.  
Bill, as amended, agreed to.

**Third Reading**

**Mr BRADBURY** (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (18:23): by leave—I move:  
That this bill be now read a third time.  
Question agreed to.
assistance to compensate them for the increased costs they face associated with the toxic carbon tax. But, while members on the opposite side of the House clap and cheer and sing and dance at passing the world's biggest carbon tax and its flow-on costs to veterans, without compensation, they then come into this chamber and declare that fair indexation would be too expensive to implement. While veterans tell me—and they constantly tell the government—that they are struggling to make ends meet, Labor turns around and says to them that it does not care about their concerns and deliberately misleads the Australian community about how we can implement fair indexation.

I do of course acknowledge the undeniable fact that the Treasurer and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs cannot sit down and find $100 million over the forward estimates to support fair indexation, because of the gross incompetence and poor and reckless financial management by the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments. I acknowledge that, because of this incompetence and despite the constant pleas from the veterans' community, they increased military superannuation pensions by only 0.1 per cent. Labor's wasteful and reckless spending in so many other areas has left them unable to meet their commitment in 2007 and their now-broken promise to reform pensions and prevent erosion of pensions arising from unfair indexation.

In the context of increasing cost of living, the coalition will also propose an amendment to fix the deeply flawed and unfair Veterans' Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, to deliver fairness for disabled veterans with high pharmaceutical costs. At present, the Labor government's legislation has created two classes of disabled veterans: those with qualifying service and those without. My office has received inquiries from some of our most disabled veterans, who do not receive assistance under the scheme and are, as you can imagine, extremely frustrated and angry. Across the country up to 1,500 of our most disabled veterans slip through the cracks under Labor's scheme. This is because they receive the special rate of TPI but do not have appropriate qualifying service as defined by the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986.

The coalition has a plan to fix this situation, a plan we took to the 2010 election and a plan we will take to the next election. Under our election promise, more than 80,000 disabled veterans would be provided with financial relief under a comprehensive veterans' pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme. We identified the need to fix the situation such that there will no longer be two classes of veterans, and all veterans with a disability would have no out-of-pocket pharmaceutical related expenses. We proposed a scheme by which eligible veterans would pay for only 30 scripts per year—that is, once they reach the veterans' pharmaceutical safety net, veterans pay not a dollar more for their scripts. Such an approach also removes cumbersome requirements placed on eligible veterans with complicated reimbursements.

Our plan provides assurance to veterans such that they would no longer have to wait until the new year before they could again receive financial relief for the cost of pharmaceuticals. The coalition will therefore move amendments which would enable all special rate or TPI ex-servicemen to become eligible for the veterans' pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme. As I have mentioned, this means the coverage will be extended to all of the approximately 1,500 special rate pensioners who do not have qualifying service. These proposed amendments provide fairness, justice and peace of mind to all veterans.
This proposal, based on the government's advice about the average cost of reimbursement and the approximate number of 1,500 recipients of the special rate pensions, will cost up to $234,000. In the context of the full government scheme, which is budgeted to cost $30 million over the next four years, we are not talking about a lot of money. Yet we have a government so incompetent that it cannot implement a policy that will cost only $234,000 a year. However, one can never justify a policy based solely on cost; one justifies policies because they are the right thing to do.

The coalition plans to repeal the carbon tax, and not just because it is a $9 billion a year carbon tax that pushes up electricity prices and increases cost-of-living pressures. We will repeal the carbon tax because it is the wrong policy approach that does nothing to benefit the environment.

The coalition opposes wasting more than $56 billion on the National Broadband Network not only because it is gross mismanagement of taxpayers' money but also because we know that it can be done faster, cheaper and more affordably.

Similarly, the coalition supports fair indexation of military superannuation pensions because people on those pensions are doing it tough and they deserve fair indexation. We support spending an extra $234,000 a year on disabled veterans because they deserve and need the funding. Not only will the next election be a referendum on the carbon tax; it will be an election on how the Australian government supports the veteran community. It will be an election to restore hope, reward and opportunity to Australian veterans and their families.

**Dr MIKE KELLY** (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence) (18:31): I am proud to speak on the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill because this government has an incredible record of delivering for veterans in this country—greater than any government preceding it. It is amazing to hear the coalition talking about this, because they talk the talk but they fail to walk the walk. The issues that they have raised in this debate demonstrate their hypocrisy. For 12 years they did nothing in so many of the areas they have highlighted. I will come back to that point.

I will summarise how this bill improves the situation for a lot of veterans. The bill will make it clear within the Veterans' Entitlements Act that travel for medical appointments can be approved by DVA even after it has been undertaken. That will clearly be sanctioned by the legislation to clear up any doubt. For sailors in Operation Damask VI who served in a period between 13 January and 19 January 1993, an anomaly has been resolved and that period has been reclassified as operational service, enabling them to get access to things like subsidised home loans and insurance under the Defence Service Homes Act. In relation to the power to extend special assistance or benefits to persons to whom they are not otherwise available under the act, this legislation will enable special assistance to be created via legislative instrument so there will be a more timely response to these issues as they will not have to go through the mechanism of a regulation. The estates of deceased veterans or members who were in receipt of the special rate for the extreme disablement adjustment disability payment and died in indigent circumstances will now have the
bereavement payment exempt for income tax purposes. We will also see the reimbursement of all out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the purchase of pharmaceuticals under the RPBS, so that from 1 January 2013 we could see up to 70,000 veterans and members becoming eligible for annual automatic reimbursement of those costs.

There are some other technical clean-up issues associated with this legislation, but let us recall the government’s record in resolving veterans’ issues—it is an outstanding one. From 20 March 2008 all veterans’ compensation pensions have been indexed with reference to both CPI and MTAWE, and then from 20 September 2009 we added the additional index of the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index—the PBLCI. We managed to resolve the issue for all veterans with compensation pensions and TPI status. We also increased the extreme disablement adjustment pension and non-economic loss compensation payments. We improved indexation of and provided an increase in the war widow’s domestic allowance, we contributed $50 million to provide concessions for senior cardholders who use public transport services outside their home, and on 20 March 2008, the utilities allowance for eligible pensioners was increased to $500 per annum, paid in quarterly instalments. We had secure and sustainable pension reforms for 320,000 service pensioners and war widows, adding $1.1 billion to the budget as at the 2009-10 budget.

We increased funding for the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training program. We introduced a comprehensive Australian Defence Force Mental Health Lifestyle Package, and we improved mental health support in line with the Dunt review recommendations. More than $92 million has been allocated for the implementation of both of those key initiatives of that review.

We have extended repeat prescriptions for the chronically ill, we have included young ex-service people with disabilities in the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement for the first time, and we have improved community care and support for those with chronic and complex conditions, with $152.7 million being put into an initiative to increase community based support for those with those conditions. We have provided zero real interest loans for aged-care facilities, and we extended income support supplements to widows without dependants in July 2008, abolishing the age restriction on that payment.

We also introduced the Vietnam Veterans Family Study, and it is appropriate to mention that in the context and shadow of Vietnam Veterans Day. We have extended bereavement payments for single TPI and EDA veterans who die without sufficient assets to pay for a funeral. There is automatic granting of war widow pensions to widows of TTI and intermediate rate pensioners. We increased financial assistance for ex-service organisations—an additional $5 million, with total funding of $14.9 million over four years. There is a new consultation framework for the ex-service community through the introduction of the PMAC, which I know has been well received by many veterans. We also formed a special claims unit that has cut processing times in DVA, and that has certainly been well received because it has had an effect on those processing times. We established an independent Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal, and that has produced a large number of results for so many longstanding issues that have been festering for over 60 years. I am very proud to say that I had a strong personal role in resolving things like the Long Tan gallantry citations—again in the context of Vietnam Veterans Day it is important to highlight...
that—and the criteria for the Australian Defence Medal and recognition of service of the 4th Battalion RAR in Malaysia in a period from 1966 to 1967 were also resolved by the work of the tribunal.

I was also proud to be involved in resolving the post-armistice Korean service issues. Many veterans came to me early on in the 2007 campaign to highlight their situation and I am proud to say we were able to introduce the Australian General Service Medal for Korea from early 2010 and to make sure these proud veterans were able to wear the Return from Active Service Badge. We also declared the Ballarat Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial to be a national memorial and granted $160,000 over four years for its maintenance. I am particularly proud of that effort as my grandfather's name is on the memorial—he was a survivor of the Thai-Burma Railway. We have also committed $10 million for an interpretive trail on the Western Front to highlight that legacy, a legacy which has, I think, been sadly neglected over many years—with the emphasis having been quite rightly on Gallipoli.

We have also looked particularly at the legacy of war for our wounded personnel. We introduced the Simpson Program of enhanced services and support, which is costing $21.2 million over four years. It is intended to minimise financial disadvantage, provide housing assistance, develop a comprehensive training and reskilling program and ensure access to specialist rehabilitation. I acknowledge the work of two young officers, John Bale and Cavin Wilson, who have established the Soldier On organisation, which is also looking to improve the lot of our wounded personnel.

This government resolved the longstanding and festering story of the F-111 deseat-reseat issue. We also resolved the British nuclear test issue, providing $24.2 million for disability pensions for those who suffer from conditions caused by those nuclear tests, as well as for war widow pensions. We resolved the issue of certain submarine special operations from 1978 to 1992. These were reclassified from July 2010 to allow the provision of service pensions, health care and gold cards to up to 890 submariners who served during that period. We resolved the RAAF Ubon issue—that period in Thailand between 31 May 1962 and July 1962 now qualifies as operational service. I know a lot of RAAF personnel who were personally involved during that period who are very grateful for that resolution.

We have just heard reference to the impact of the carbon price. It is as well to remind ourselves not only of the household assistance package flowing through to all low- and middle-income earners but also of the fact we have added to that—self-funded retirees who have not reached eligible pension age and are not taxed are able to apply for low-income supplements of $300 a year through Centrelink. This has been just a very quick, broadbrush summary of the great range of measures this government has taken to improve the lot of veterans. You can never do enough for our veterans and we should always be trying to do more.

I take this opportunity to address another issue, one which has been raised by my good friend the member for Fadden in association with the candidate who is opposing me in the electorate of Eden-Monaro at the next election. A press release was recently put out claiming that I should be putting forward a private member's bill to address the situation of non-compensation TPI pensioners in relation to the indexation issue. Of course both the member for Fadden and the Liberal candidate in Eden-Monaro would well know that, as a member of the executive, it is not...
technically possible for me to raise a private member's bill. But it is also not necessary for me to raise a private member's bill for this issue to be resolved.

This is an issue which I have worked very hard on since that campaign in 2007. There have been many steps on the way to resolving this issue, including the Matthews review and the introduction of the new indexation mechanism—the PBLCI—about which there has been a fair bit of debate. I point out that the candidate in Eden-Monaro, Mr Hendy, was a member of the Howard government for its 12 years in office—and nothing was done to resolve this issue. If he had spent less time putting the work he did into introducing Work Choices—which he has proudly claimed in front of the Bungendore Chamber of Commerce and Industry to be the father of—and if he had spent less time involving himself in the children overboard scandal, victimising people like Admiral David Shackleton, who lives in Narooma in my electorate and who has very bitter memories of that period, and focused on the needs of veterans, perhaps he could have pushed for something to be done during the 12 years the Howard government had rivers of gold with which to do address the issue.

Instead, they allowed people like Nick Minchin to say that he was not going to do anything to fix the circumstances of these people—because that would be looking after fat cats. Senator Minchin has repeatedly argued, in recent times, that the coalition should walk away from this measure. They have now proposed to introduce indexation but only for a certain category of military personnel—and ignoring all of the other civil service people who are in the same financial situation. In my view, these people should also be looked after—I represent the ones who live in Eden-Monaro.

The utmost hypocrisy is coming from the coalition on this issue. I point out that a coalition would have to deal with its $70 billion black hole—they have announced an array of new policy proposals and their great big new tax to pay for their paid parental leave scheme. There are massive areas of spending which, we know, they do not have proper costings to support. This military superannuation indexation policy would be the very first promise they would throw overboard—to coin a phrase. There is absolutely no question about it—nobody could take the coalition's commitment to deliver on this policy promise seriously. They have never been able to do it in the past. They never showed an intention to fix it during the 12 years they had those rivers of gold with which to do something about it. There is absolutely no way they would deliver on this policy promise. The first thing they would do if they got into government would be to say, 'Now we have gotten hold of the books, clearly circumstances have changed and clearly we are not in a position to deliver—

Mr Robert: Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, I raise a point of order relating to standing order 90, reflections on members. I made the personal guarantee yesterday and last night that we would deliver this important reform of indexation of pensions, and I will deliver it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member will resume his seat.

Dr MIKE KELLY: I have no doubt that the member for Fadden has serious intentions in this regard, but I also have no doubt that there is no chance that his team will even attempt to deliver on this—

Mr Robert: I guarantee it!
DR MIKE KELLY: because they have never done it in the past. It would be the first thing they would throw overboard. They would get in there and say, 'Sorry, we did intended to do it.' The evidence I have for that is Senator Ronaldson's speech at the Victorian RSL recently, where he talked about all the things he would like to do if the coalition were ever to get into government. He could only say, 'Well, I don't think I'd be able to do it because the budgetary situation just wouldn't allow me to.' There would be a lot of hands on hearts and beating of chests and false tears, and they would say, 'We would've liked to have done it, but once we got hold of the books we found out we couldn't.'

I am intent on actually delivering a result. I really believe we can do this, we can find a way to do it, and I will never cease my efforts to achieve an outcome in this respect. I am committed to work for as long as it takes to achieve that result.

MR CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (18:46): In speaking on the Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 and the coalition's amendment, I seek to represent those in my electorate who have served in this country's armed forces, those who continue to serve in the armed forces and all the people in my electorate who honour and respect our veterans. Sadly, honouring and respecting our veterans is not unanimous in this country, and I feel it is not unanimous in this parliament either.

While this bill makes a number of important legislative changes that the Liberal-National coalition supports, there is still something missing. Fair treatment of our veterans is missing. The coalition has long recognised that this particular element was missing and has moved on numerous occasions to correct the situation. I speak of course of fair indexation. In 2010, the Liberal-National coalition announced a commitment to fair indexation, but this government has repeatedly signalled that it does not want that particular type of fairness for our veterans. The government has blocked every move to make the treatment of veterans fair. The coalition's commitment included fair indexation for veterans who are superannuants under the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Scheme and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme, or the DFRB and the DFRDB.

The reason the coalition made this commitment is that we believe our veterans deserves a fair go. Without fair indexation, the level at which our veterans are looked after declines. It will decline this year. It will decline further next year. It will continue to decline as long as the real cost of living keeps increasing faster and further than the indexation.

I would like to use a specific example here to illustrate my point. I have received numerous letters from veterans who tell me that they are being ripped off by this unfair indexation. I spoke with John Markham, in my electorate, about the advice he was given about DFRDB at the end of last financial year. He was told, in a letter:

… the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has recently announced an upward movement in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) over the past six month period from September 2011 to March 2012. As a result your DFRDB pension will increase by 0.1% on 12 July 2012.

The letter then goes on to advise that the increase means an extra $1.03 in his gross fortnightly pension—that is a mere $1.03 added to his gross fortnightly pension. But, because the Australian Taxation Office changed the way they withhold tax, his net fortnightly pension actually went down by $30.97. Does that sound like fair indexation—an extra dollar a fortnight that is gobbled up by a $32 a fortnight tax take by
this government? What can this veteran splurge on with those extra funds from that indexation rate of 0.1 per cent! As another veteran pointed out to me, during the same six months the ABS statistics for expenses paid by a pensioner increased as follows: transport costs went up 1.1 per cent, or 11 times the DFRDB rate; insurance costs, up 1.6 per cent; rents, up two per cent; and health costs, up 3.2 per cent, 32 times the DFRDB rate. But these are national figures, of course, and in North Queensland we can only dream of cost increases like that! The cost of body corporate insurance for the kinds of units and apartments that many veterans live in has increased by 200, 500 and as much as 1,000 per cent throughout North Queensland, so you cannot tell me the cost of living has gone up just 0.1 per cent in my neck of the woods.

The very least anyone with any respect for our veterans could do is vote for fair indexation. I am left wondering what it is that this government has against our retired Defence Force personnel. They seem to have this thing against our Defence forces and other good Australians who work in the Defence forces. Maybe the government would prefer these people just went away. Perhaps the Greens are controlling their puppet government on defence matters as well, because it is after all Greens policy that they want a reduction in Australian and global military expenditure. At least they are upfront about it. Their belief, according to their stated principles, is:

... genuine security rests on cooperation, fair economic and social development, environmental sustainability, and respect for human rights, rather than on military capabilities.

I suppose fairies and mushrooms can be thrown into that as well! The Labor government demonstrated with their budget in May that they do not even want to maintain the existing Defence Force. In fact, I spoke in the debate on the appropriation bills about how this government is worse for our Defence forces than the Taliban. How much respect can the government have for defence and our Defence personnel when they are slashing—

Mr Shorten: Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, on a point of order: I do not mind if the member for Dawson strays from the subject and is not relevant, but to impugn the motives of the government as being akin to those of the Taliban is disrespectful to our Australian soldiers fighting there. It certainly impugns the motives of the government. You might not like what we do, but to make that insinuation is unworthy.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams): Order! If the honourable member made that remark, I ask him to withdraw.

Mr CHRISTENSEN: I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The honourable member will speak to the bill before the House.

Mr CHRISTENSEN: How much respect does a government have for Defence and our defence personnel if they slash $5½ billion from the defence budget? That is a 10.5 per cent cut to the budget—cutting to the lowest level, as a percentage of GDP, since the eve of World War II. But so deep does this loathing of defence seem to run through the Labor Party that fair indexation has been rejected time and time again.

The coalition took our commitment to fair indexation to the 2010 election and have since worked to promote the issue in parliament. The coalition introduced appropriate legislation to the Senate on 18 November 2010 so that DFRB and DFRDB superannuants would have fair, just and equitable indexation. In March last year, the Greens and Labor called for a Senate inquiry to look into this legislation. Given that more than a dozen inquiries have already
supported fair indexation, calling for any more inquiries can only been seen as a stalling tactic—stalling because it is something the government does not want to do, something that probably most of the Labor Party does not want to do.

It can be hard to work out who really wants fair indexation and who does not. Even the Greens do not know whether they support it or not. I visited a local RSL sub-branch whose members told me that they were most upset by the government and the Greens not supporting fair indexation, and when I posted a comment about that on Facebook I received an email from the recently endorsed Greens candidate for Dawson, Jonathon Dykyj, who said:

I noticed on your Facebook page that you are claiming that the Greens oppose Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefit Pensions indexed to the age pension.

Here is a policy initiative from the 2010 election and it was nothing new for us then either.

He provided the link and then said:

I kindly ask that you do the decent thing and correct the record on your page.

So I had a look at the document Mr Dykyj sent me, the Australian Greens policy initiative Fair indexation for Commonwealth and Defence Force superannuation pensions, which says—this is the Greens policy:

In a long-running campaign, current and former federal public servants and defence force personnel have been pushing to ensure their superannuation pensions are indexed fairly and appropriately. It is a campaign the Australian Greens support wholeheartedly.

That sounds encouraging, but it goes on:

The government went to the last election with a promise to address the indexation issue. Instead it commissioned the Matthews Review, and subsequently decided against changing the indexation measure. Australian Greens leader, Bob Brown—

it is a little bit old—wrote to Minister Tanner earlier this year to urge him to re-consider the government's response to the Matthews' review and revise the indexation for Defence Force superannuation pensions. We strongly believe that the government should now act to provide wage-based indexation on the same terms as the aged pension for all Commonwealth and defence force superannuation pensions. The cost for ensuring fair and appropriate wage-linked indexation for Commonwealth public servant superannuation pensions is estimated by the Matthews Review to be around $42 million in 2010-11, increasing in following years. However, the actual cost will be lower when the tax implications are taken into account. The Australia Greens believe these costs are outweighed by the longer term benefits and principle of fairness. When you read that, you would think that we were onto a winner, that they would back fairness for our veterans—that is, until it comes to the crunch, to decision making. On Thursday, 16 July 2011, between the time when the Greens took that policy to the election and the time when they were telling me to do 'the decent thing and correct the record' about what I said about them—there votes are recorded here. So, as the Greens candidate in my area says, I will 'do the right thing' and I 'correct the record'.

The Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2010 third reading majority was zero. It was a tied vote of 34 to 34. Listed under the no voters—to correct the record—are Senator Bob Brown, Senator Hanson-Young and Senator Milne. So, yes, I am doing the right thing and correcting the record! Not only are the Greens opposed to fair indexation for veterans but they lie about their opposition so they do not lose votes. They lied at the election and they are lying still. The only time the truth comes out is at the time it matters. And, if it were not for the Greens saying one thing and doing another, it would seem the Labor Party alone is against fair indexation for veteran pensioners because
the Independents are on board. The member for Lyne believes:

There are many who are frustrated that government, report after report, seems to get the concerns about a lack of purchasing power within the current military superannuation scheme, yet, when it comes to actually doing something about it, the arguments of cost and difficulty in making those changes seem to be directed towards those who have done military service.

So he is on board—but, when it comes to actually voting, doing the real thing, will he be bought off like the Greens were and back the government again? The member for New England, in 2010, asked the former finance minister if he would:

… consider introducing a fairer indexation method for military superannuation pension in line with that used to calculate age and welfare pensions.

He is another one on board—unless he can find someone who will sell their backside. No wonder we are going broke. We have a government that is determined not to do the right thing by veterans.

But let’s go back to the Labor Party’s position on fair indexation. Even the member for Dobell, now free of the shackles of toeing the party line, even though I see him wandering near the Labor whip’s office all the time, may be seeking divine redemption by doing the right thing on this matter. He was reported in the Central Coast Express Advocate as saying he was more than happy to support the veterans’ campaign. But if you go a little closer to the other side, a little closer to the cliff face of political oblivion where those opposite reside, you will see a little row of fingernails along the edge. They are all dangling over the pit of obscurity but desperately clinging on.

Perhaps the member for Blair is thinking about what is coming here, as he has his electorate breathing down his neck. He told the Minister for Finance and Deregulation:

It is ridiculous to expect people to accept a 0.1 per cent increase. That is unviable, given the cost of living. It is too meagre and it needs to change. That is probably the smartest thing that the member for Blair has said. Even the Member for Eden-Monaro, who just spoke here and whom I recognise as one of our veterans, and Senator Kate Lundy have written in support of fair indexation. So it appears that the whole of this country—and certainly the veterans movement—and the parliament, if it were allowed to vote freely, is in favour of fairness. All of this country is in favour of fairness, that is, except for one faction—albeit a large faction—of the Labor Party.

We can hold all the inquiries we like and introduce all the legislation we want on military superannuation pensions, but to create real equality we need either an election or to wait for the faceless men to perform another hatchet job. The coalition and veterans have had enough of waiting; the time for fairness is now. Must we wait four years, just like we did on border protection, for the government to finally concede that the Liberal-National coalition is right once again? We are right—veterans must be fairly recognised through fair indexation.

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (19:01): I rise today to speak on the Veterans Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 because I believe that the coalition’s changes to this legislation are very important for veterans living in Macarthur. The reason that the coalition is pushing for its amendments is simple—we want fair and just treatment for our veterans and military superannuants. While we support the measures contained within the government’s legislation, we simply believe that it could be made better. This is why we are seeking to include fair indexation as a requirement for the passing of this legislation. Then, once the bill is passed through the House, we will seek to make the Veterans’ Pharmaceutical
Reimbursement Scheme the fair system it should be.

It is no secret that my father, Reg, is a Vietnam veteran. He, like thousands of others across this country, deserves the utmost respect by the Australian people and this government. I know that there are many veterans in Macarthur who would like to see fairer arrangements for military superannuants. This was one of the issues raised recently by local veterans in Campbelltown when the shadow minister for veterans affairs, Michael Ronaldson, visited my electorate for a veterans' forum. I agree with their sentiments entirely—there is no reason that defence retirees should not enjoy the same indexation arrangements as other people who have retired. These veterans dedicated their working lives to defending our country. Some were physically injured as a result of their service; others still live with the mental scars. I find it absurd that our veterans do not receive the same treatment as civilian retirees. That is why I stand here today to support the coalition's push to introduce fair, just and equitable arrangements for military superannuants.

The coalition has been pushing for a fairer system for many years. We first announced our fair indexation commitment on 27 June 2010. This commitment extended fair indexation to superannuants aged 55 who are members of the DFRB and DFRDB schemes. Under a coalition government, their pensions will be indexed in the same manner as are aged and service pensions. We took our commitment to the 2010 election, and, despite losing that election, we introduced legislation to the Senate on 18 November 2010 to provide fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants. On 24 March 2011, the Greens and Labor called for a Senate inquiry into the legislation; the coalition, on the other hand, opposed yet another wasteful inquiry. There had already been more than half-a-dozen inquiries, all of which supported fair indexation. The Greens and Labor used the inquiry to oppose fair indexation. This was the first time that the parliament had ever opposed fair indexation. On 16 June 2011, the coalition's fair indexation legislation was defeated in the Senate.

Since then, we have remained committed to the introduction of fair indexation—and that is something which everybody on this side of the House can be proud of. In March this year we made a pledge, which we will honour, to our veterans. This pledge was met with great support at the Macarthur veterans' forum in Campbelltown recently. The pledge says:

A Coalition Government will deliver fair indexation to 57,000 military superannuants and their families.

The Coalition will ensure DFRB and DFRDB military superannuation pensions are indexed in the same way as aged and service pensions. All DFRB and DFRDB superannuants aged 55 and over will benefit.

A Coalition Government will deliver fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB pensions.

Australia's veterans and their families will get the fair go they deserve.

I am proud to say that I support this pledge on behalf of all veterans in Macarthur. I do this because local veterans in my electorate who are DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants have proudly served their nation. There is no reason that we should not recognise the unique nature of military service and deliver fair pension indexation to these men and women and their families. That is why a coalition government will deliver this reform in our first budget. This reform is critical, and we will deliver it—unlike those opposite, who say that it will
cost too much and that the cost of fair indexation is too high.

It is disappointing that our own Minister for Veterans' Affairs has said that a superannuant on $58,000 per year does not need fair indexation and that they are already well-off. However, what he has failed to acknowledge is that the average DFRDB military pension is just $24,386. That is 2½ times less than the figure he quoted in June. I have to ask the question: is the government deliberately misleading the public? If so, for what reason? In June this year, local veterans received an increase of less than $1 per fortnight in their pensions. This is not enough to help them cope with the rising cost of living.

I am always confused when I hear the government say that things will cost too much, especially when they are talking about something as important as looking after those who have proudly served our nation. If the government stopped wasting money on pink batts, school halls, set-top boxes, green loans and advertising their toxic carbon tax broken promise, we would be able to pay for fair indexation many times over. The cost of fair indexation in the first year is estimated to be $4 million, yet this year alone Labor will spend $36 million on carbon tax ads. I think that the government needs to take a good look at its priorities. The coalition will find the funds necessary to introduce fair indexation. At the last election, the coalition identified more than $50 billion in savings to specifically meet the costs of this commitment—so really there are no excuses.

The Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council has released to the government, the parliament and the Australian people the outcome of its case studies conducted over the past two years. These case studies are evidence of the distress being experienced by military pensioners through the inadequacy of the current system of indexation. This issue is over the inadequacy of indexation, which ultimately draws more and more of the military superannuation community in their later years to the benchmark of poverty. If fair indexation is affordable for some 3.5 million age pensioners, why is it not affordable for military superannuation pensioners? Military pensioners need the government to change from its indifference to their plight. They served when and where their country needed them and are worthy of our full support.

Another issue I would like to raise is also an important matter for our veterans, and that is the Veterans’ Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme. Once this legislation passes the House of Representatives, the coalition will seek to amend the legislation to deliver fairness for disabled veterans with high pharmaceutical costs. We believe that the government's current scheme is unfair and the current pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme is flawed. Sadly, it has created two classes of disabled veterans—those with qualifying service and those without. Currently, up to 1,500 of our most disabled veterans receive no assistance from the scheme. These are our most disabled veterans, who are receiving the special rate, or TPI, pension but who do not have qualifying service as defined by the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986.

The coalition will implement a fairer system for veterans' pharmaceutical costs. At the last election we proposed a comprehensive veterans' pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme which delivered financial relief to more than 80,000 disabled veterans. It did not create two classes of veterans, and it ensured that all of our most disabled veterans had no out-of-pocket pharmaceutical expenses. Under the coalition's scheme, a veteran who qualified
for the scheme would only pay for 30 scripts per year. Once they reached this reduced veterans' pharmaceutical safety net, they would pay no more for their scripts. This meant immediate financial relief for our veterans. The coalition's scheme does not require cumbersome reimbursement, yet Labor's scheme leaves veterans waiting for the new year before they receive any financial relief for the cost of pharmaceuticals. It is just not right.

In the Senate, the coalition will move amendments to extend eligibility for the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme to include all special rate, or TPI, ex-service persons. Our amendments will extend the coverage of the scheme beyond those disability pensioners with qualifying service, to include all special rate pensioners as well. This amendment will bring fairness and justice to the current flawed and unfair scheme. These amendments will cost up to $234,000 per year, based on the government's own advice about the average cost of the reimbursement and the approximate number of 1,500 special rate pensioners without qualifying service. The government's scheme is budgeted to cost $30 million over the next four years, so an extra $234,000 is really a modest additional cost to provide the fairness disabled veterans deserve. It is a small price to pay to ensure our most disabled service personnel are not further disadvantaged by Labor's unfair pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme.

These changes are a big deal to Vietnam veterans living in Macarthur. As the cost of living continues to rise, we cannot continue to discriminate against the people who have proudly served our nation. All we are asking for is fairness and equality for all of our pensioners, be it in regard to fair indexation or the veterans pharmaceutical benefit scheme. I do not believe this is too much to ask, and I ask those opposite to support these changes and look after our veterans who have done so much for this wonderful country and its people.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (19:10): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 tonight, because it was just on Saturday that the commemoration of Vietnam Veterans Day took place. I had the honour of attending two ceremonies in Perth. First there was the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia WA Branch's ceremony at the very impressive Vietnam War memorial in Kings Park. The service was very well attended. There were veterans of the Vietnam War and friends and relatives of those who gave their lives for a good cause. There was also the Premier's representative, Mr Michael Sutherland MLA. Although a list said that the opposition leader of WA would attend, he was not actually there. I was there. In fact, as it turned out I was the only representative from federal parliament at that event, which I think is a little bit sad. But I think that, as I talk about this bill tonight and the amendment from the member for Fadden, possibly we can see why the federal government was not represented at that event. But it was a very good event. It was a service that ran well. I would also pay tribute to Major General John Hartley AO (Retired), the National President of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam Association. Major General Hartley spoke very well about the realities of the war that took place with Australian involvement between 1962 and 1973. Major General Hartley spoke very well about the realities of the war and how it is important to keep the support of the public—otherwise wars can be lost.

The second event that I went to to commemorate Vietnam Veterans Day was later in the afternoon, at the Ballajura RSL. The Ballajura RSL is based at Ballajura
Community College, which includes the Ballajura War Memorial and Peace Park, a park and place of reflection and commemoration that was paid for in significant part by the Howard government through a couple of different grants. I thank President Mike Gilmour, Scotty Alcorn, Barry Burley and Brian Rose, and the members, families and friends of the Ballajura sub-branch of the RSL. I thank them for the opportunity to speak at that commemoration.

This bill—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams):** I think the honourable member ought to come back to the bill.

**Mr SIMPKINS:** We are certainly getting back to the bill now, Mr Deputy Speaker. We know that the intent of the bill involves a number of fairly procedural matters, but the part of the bill that I would like to speak to is, of course, the amendment put forward by the member for Fadden. I am very well aware that the issue of fair indexation for DFRDB and DFRB superannuants is a big issue—certainly in recent times. Many constituents have asked me about this. Of course, Terry 'Mad Dog' Malligan is very active in this space, and I fully support Terry. Don Horsley, Bill Bekendam and Daniel Armour have all contacted me in fairly recent times to talk to me about it. As we know, there is an issue in this country at the moment about 57,000 military superannuants and their families and the need to have their military superannuation pensions indexed in the same way as the age pension and the service pensions for those aged 55 and over.

It is important that we remember that, as part of the 2010 election campaign—and before that as well—the coalition was very clear on this. The Leader of the Opposition has signed a pledge, and we have all given our commitment to our veterans and these military superannuants that the coalition parties will be backing them at the earliest opportunity. Although some might think the earliest opportunity will be after the next election, I would say that this is an excellent opportunity right now to provide fair indexation. I know that, within this chamber, the Independents seem to be on the record for supporting fair indexation. The member for Lyne certainly should, when the time comes for a vote, stand with us on the coalition side. The member for New England should also be there as well, certainly given the fact that the, albeit a reserve unit, has a great history and I believe is based within his electorate. And, obviously, the member for Denison as well—someone who has a background in the Army—should also be in support of fair indexation.

Of course, we can always rely on the Greens to never support anything that supports our veterans. They are always self-serving in the first degree, and always against anything to do with the armed forces that this country needs and depends upon. But it is shaping up, in my view, as a great opportunity to provide the fair indexation at the earliest opportunity—and the earliest opportunity may well be tonight, or at least tomorrow, when this bill comes to a vote. I certainly join with that member for Fadden and my other colleagues for their advocacy on behalf of this worthy and just venture.

The government loves to speak about scare campaigns—and Minister Wong is on the record for the claim, ridiculously and, no doubt, to coin the favourite phrase of one of the ministers: mendacious—that our plan of indexation would cost $1.7 billion to begin and $4.5 billion to fully implement. But the reality is that we are really talking, across the forward estimates, of between $100 million and $150 million to implement, to take this fair indexation to where it should be.
So it is the case that, as I said before, the earliest opportunity to provide the long-awaited and fully justified fair indexation is upon us now in this House. It is an opportunity for those who claim to stand for the interests of veterans to stand very clearly and vote—rather to sit, really, on the side of this amendment from the member for Fadden—and put their money where their mouth is. It is the opportunity for everyone to be on the record and to finally be counted.

I know that, particularly in Western Australia—and probably around the rest of the country as well—we have seen a number of picket lines put up outside Labor senators' and members' offices to talk about fair indexation. Particularly, just days after Vietnam Veterans Day, it is a time—as I said before, 57,000 veterans and family members—when everyone is extremely focused on this matter. We have very clearly made the commitment. The leader, Tony Abbott, has made the pledge. The team stands absolutely behind Tony—which is something we at least can say in this House: that we stand behind our leader—and it does provide us with that opportunity now to be counted.

So I call upon the Independents, when they come back to the chamber, to remember who they stand for and whether they wish to just continue in lock-step with the government or whether they want to be counted on the side of veterans. It will be an opportunity where the veteran community will get a very clear and salient message about who is on whose side—and at this point it is not looking good for the government. But it does provide the opportunity for the government, in the hours ahead of this debate, to redeem themselves and come back and do the right thing. So the opportunity to do the right thing is upon us. It does not need to wait for the next election. But, in any case, we are about to vote for the right thing, and it is just a shame that those on the other side in the Labor Party will not be.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (19:20): I rise to speak on the Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. This bill makes a number of minor changes to legislation that affects veterans. These changes will allow how expenses are paid for veterans who are travelling for medical treatment; introduce a formal legislative mechanism to provide special assistance in a more timely way; replace old references to the pharmaceutical and telephone allowances, with the MRCA supplement; and exempt bereavement payments from being classed as income in the social security income test; among several other small changes. All these are worthy changes.

In speaking about issues affecting veterans, the elephant in the room is always this government's complete ignorance of what the ex-servicemen of this country are really crying out for: fair indexation of the Defence Force Retirement Benefits and Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme—DFRB and DFRDB. The coalition will be proposing two amendments to this bill. The first of this is to delay further debate until this government brings legislation to fairly index DFRDB pensions into this parliament.

In speaking about issues affecting veterans, the elephant in the room is always this government's complete ignorance of what the ex-servicemen of this country are really crying out for: fair indexation of the Defence Force Retirement Benefits and Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme—DFRB and DFRDB. The coalition will be proposing two amendments to this bill. The first of this is to delay further debate until this government brings legislation to fairly index DFRDB pensions into this parliament. That is the issue that veterans are talking about. That is the issue that they are talking to me about. That is the issue that they want to see action taken on. It is about time this Labor government took some notice.
The DFRDB is indexed differently to other pensions, like the age and service pensions. DFRDB is simply tied to the CPI, while other pensions from the government are connected to the CPI, male average weekly earnings or the cost-of-living index, whichever one is the largest. That means, every year since the Whitlam government brought about these changes, DFRDB recipients fell a little bit further behind. After 40 years that has left a big gap between what the government thinks is good enough for veterans and what is good enough for the recipients of other pensions. I do not specifically blame this government over the nonaction on this matter. I blame the Howard government. I blame the Keating government. I blame the Hawke government. I blame the Fraser government. I blame the Whitlam government. Everyone has had a chance to do the right thing here, and none has. This government has the chance to do the right thing. This government is the one that took the policy to the 2007 election that it would do something about it. This government stood up there and told the veterans they would do it, and they have done nothing.

Once you add in the world's biggest carbon tax, even without any direct compensation, veterans have been hung out to dry as they struggle to cope with rising living costs. There are 57,000 recipients of DFRDB and DFRB pensions. These are people who have dedicated their lives to selfless service. For the record, to qualify for DFRDB you must have a minimum of 20 years' service to your country in one of the services. That means packing up your family and moving every two years around the country to places you probably do not want to go—of course everyone does want to go when they come to Townsville. We have the opportunity to reward that service with a little bit more financial security and support in their retirement. You simply cannot overstate the impact that correcting this injustice will have on those recipients and on their families.

As well as having the largest Defence base in the country, Townsville has a strong community of veterans. On the weekend we had Vietnam Veterans Day. I was talking to an ex-RAAF member. His first tour of duty to Townsville was in 1959. He brought his wife up in 1962. They made the decision then that no matter where they finished their career in the RAAF—and he went to Vietnam; he went all the way around the world—they would retire in Townsville. They are now tried and true grey nomads based in Townsville. Townsville has a strong community of veterans, and they have been fighting for this change for years. And they are only asking for what is fair. It is important to remember that they are not asking for anything extra. All they are asking is for what is right and fair and to be treated equally. They are not even looking for compensation to account for the 40 years that their pensions have been falling behind. They just want their pensions finally indexed against the same measures as everyone else's.

In June last year I tabled a petition in this House calling for fair indexation. We had 12,620 signatures. Support very quickly came from all over Townsville and the entire country, and from overseas. The veterans community are united in their fight for this. We on this side understand that. We are determined to see the process of military superannuation reform begun. That is what we went to the last election saying we would do. Two years ago I was elected and said to the people of Townsville that, if we made government, we would bring this about. That is what we have continued to fight for, with Tony Abbott restating in March the coalition's commitment to fix this problem if
we are successful at the next election. He has signed the pledge.

In 2007, the Labor Party were apparently on board with this issue as well. It made their list of policies leading up to the election, only to make their list of broken promises afterwards—surprise, surprise. But then they vowed to prevent further erosion of veterans pensions due to unfair indexation. Veterans have now had to watch their pension levels eroded for another five years since that phoney promise was made. We on this side have already put forward the alternative. In 2010 we introduced the bill that would solve this problem once and for all. With help from their Greens alliance partners and Senator Xenophon, the Labor Party shot the bill down and they have spent more time trying to criticise than they have listening to the veterans community or coming up with their own policy.

I would like to refer to the member for Fadden's speech. He said that now is the time for the members of the government to stand up and consider the veterans in their electorate. The member for Blair knows how unfair the current indexation arrangement is. He described the last paltry 0.1 per cent DFRDB increase as:

… unviable, given the cost of living. It is too meagre and it needs to change.

It is amazing what you will say out in public that you will not say in here. The member for Eden-Monaro and Parliamentary Secretary for Defence has acknowledged in a letter to the former finance minister signed by himself and Kate Lundy:

… many people genuinely believe that prior to the 2007 election, the ALP had committed to determining a "fairer" method of indexation, and a 'review' would provide the direction …

It is entirely appropriate, fair and consistent with our election commitment that the introduction of this improved indexation arrangement should coincide with that for pensions and benefits as announced by Minister Macklin.

What happened to that? That is right: nothing. Nothing happened with that. It went by the wayside.

And in his effort tonight the member for Eden-Monaro stated in his speech that Labor had established the Vietnam Veterans' Family Study. This is just plain and simply wrong. He cannot be more wrong. The Howard government established the study in 2006, and it was originally supposed to be that detailed that they were given 10 years to do the study and then come back and report in 2016. But such was the urgency, such was the dedication that they brought in, it was so far ahead of schedule that it was due to be completed this year. Labor budget cuts will, however, delay the finalisation until after 2014, all because they are chasing a phantom surplus. Shame on you.

And then we have the Greens and Independents who are propping up this government and stopping this reform going through. To quote from the Greens' policy in 2010:

We strongly believe that the Government should now act to provide wage-based indexation on the same terms as the Aged Pension for all … defence force superannuation pensions.

What happened to that? That is right: they voted against it. The member for Denison, in highlighting this problem in this House less than 12 months ago, said:

The ALP should be condemned for not doing something about it since its election in 2007. He will have his chance on this amendment. The member for Lyne has moved two motions, both with full coalition support, calling for fair indexation. These were also supported by the member for New England, who has even raised this issue in the past in a question to the former finance minister.
This is where I have a problem, because the member for Lyne and the member for New England, who seconded both these motions, can get the government to bring in a carbon tax, but they did not take it to an election. When it comes to fairness on DFRDB and DFRB, all they can offer is hollow words in parliamentary motions. Where are they on this? Come on! What are they actually saying on this and where are they? They are as hollow as the words they say.

Lastly, the member for Dobell, who found his support for this campaign around the same time he found his independence in this House, is on the record saying—once again, what he says to people in public is different to what he says in parliament—at a fair indexation protest:

I am the only MP of the Central Coast who is prepared to support them—there are two others who won't.

That all of you can say time after time that you support the veterans cause and then turn around and support a government that has reneged on its promise to do just that is shameful. Now is your opportunity to follow your words through with a vote.

Once again, I do not excuse any government for not doing this. This government is in power and has the opportunity to do the right thing. This is about delivering fairness and respecting the service of these men and their families to the defence forces over the decades. Once again, I call on this government to do the right thing and get on board with this change. There are enough people in this parliament who get why this has to happen. Instead, we have so far only seen them reject outright the changes necessary to right this wrong.

I recently had the shadow minister for veterans affairs, Senator Michael Ronaldson, in town to sign the coalition's pledge to commit to DFRDB reform. This was also an important opportunity to discuss with Townsville's veterans community the issues that were affecting them. We were welcomed by the Thuringowa RSL branch, the Vietnam Veterans Federation Townsville, and the TPI, or Totally and Permanently Disabled Ex Servicepersons Association. It was a great opportunity to sign the DFRDB pledge in front of them and show them just how seriously the coalition are taking this issue. I say to them again: a coalition government, and only a coalition government, will take responsibility for our commitments, and we will deliver on this vital promise. You have the signed pledges; now to prove it. You have Tony Abbott's word on this, you have Michael Ronaldson's word on it and you have my word on it.

I will just raise one other issue while I have the time. I often have veterans coming to me to discuss the different problems they have in dealing with the Department of Veterans' Affairs. I understand that there will always be some problems in government departments and I respect the job done by those working for them, especially the staff in Townsville, who do an absolutely tremendous job. But last week we again saw in Townsville a problem come up that defies all common sense. As reported in the Townsville Bulletin, a former RAAF pilot was being chased up by the Department of Veterans' Affairs regarding an overpayment on his pension of the grand sum of one cent. Even putting aside the issue of how you can overpay someone's pension by one cent, where is the logic in spending far more money hounding someone over an overpayment than the payment is actually worth? He got a letter and he got phone calls chasing one cent. By the time you consider the stamp, the stationery, the wages, the time and the calls to discuss the matter, this incredible debacle will have cost both the
department and the veteran involved a lot more than that one cent. If I were them, I would send them 10c and ask for the 9c in change. This situation sums up perfectly the bureaucracy problems that we have, not just in the DVA but with this government. It is wasting money and it is wasting time, and it is wearing thin with all Australians. What we need is a government that is prepared to stop public sector waste. With this government's record, I think we will be waiting until they are out of office for that to happen.

The second amendment to this bill that the coalition is proposing is to bring a new schedule to this legislation that will allow veterans who are receiving the special rate TPI pension access to the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme. This will give eligibility for this scheme to the roughly 1,500 people on special pensions with qualifying service. Once again, this is about providing fairness and assistance to those who have served our country. The overall cost of the DFRDB is between $100 million and $150 million gross, and I must say that that is also taxable, so that is not the net amount.

In the coalition, we hear the voices of those who have served our country. We understand not just what they want but why it is entirely reasonable. Our policy for veterans is to give them fair indexation of their pensions. That is what we took to the last election, that is what we have fought for since then, and that is what we will do if successful at the next election. It is about time this government started to listen as well.

**Wyatt Roy** (Longman) (19:35): I rise tonight to speak to the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. Let me begin tonight by acknowledging the contribution of the previous speaker, the member for Herbert. He and I have had many conversations about this issue and I know his heart is very much in this fight. It is good to know that we stand on this side of the House together trying to achieve a positive outcome for our veterans.

Last month I held the Longman Veterans' Community Forum, an opportunity for the veteran community to raise their concerns about matters pertaining to veterans affairs as well as ask for clarification on any questions they have about veterans affairs policy. I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleague Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson for his time in attending the Longman Veterans' Community Forum and for taking the opportunity to take on board the feedback from members of my community who are personally impacted by the decisions made with regards to veterans affairs.

During this forum many and varied concerns were brought to light, including the difficulties individuals are experiencing with the administration of veterans affairs services. The member for Herbert had an excellent example of that, of one cent being chased down from a veteran. The difficulties include the lack of mental health support services and the culture of disrespect that our veterans feel they are met with by the broader community, including when they return from service abroad. The attendees of the forum felt that more can be done to support them and honour the sacrifices made and the unique nature of military service.

All of the points that were raised at the community forum were very valid and worthy of further consideration. But these concerns pale in comparison to the overarching veterans affairs issue that was raised at the community forum. The very first comment of the day and the first question that was put to me and to Senator Ronaldson was about fair indexation of the Defence Force Retirement Benefits, DFRB,
scheme, and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits, DFRDB, scheme. Attendees at the forum wanted to know what was being done to achieve fair indexation of those two military superannuation pensions. They were unhappy that despite the many allusions by the federal Labor Party members to delivering fair indexation they had not seen any change of their position on this issue.

Earlier this year our DFRDB and DFRB recipients were delivered a meagre 0.1 per cent increase via indexation, which for some translated into a mere 47c per week increase. After consistent campaigning from the Liberal-National coalition on this issue it is most disappointing that, two years on, Labor is still holding out from delivering fair indexation.

The answer to their questions, which I had to give to the veterans in my community, was not encouraging. I wanted to be able to say to the local veterans in my community that their federal government was in the process of taking steps to fairly index the DFRDB and DFRB. I wanted to give them some hope. But the reality is that this was not the case. While many Labor members are prepared to talk the talk, it would seem that they have never been prepared to walk the walk. It is beyond belief that this Labor government has not delivered fair indexation. At every opportunity, this Labor government has walked away from the veterans of Longman and of this country. And we on this side of the chamber have provided many opportunities in this place for Labor, the Greens and the Independents to act.

Not only have Labor failed to take the lead to deliver for our veterans, they have taken active steps to block the coalition from delivering it. It would seem Labor are desperate to avoid giving our veterans the respect that is due to them. After the 2010 election, the coalition introduced legislation to implement fair indexation of the DFRDB and DFRB, but Labor sided with the Greens to ensure that our veterans would not receive a fair go. This politically motivated decision means that instead of directing funds into securing the future of our veterans, this federal Labor government decided to continue their reckless spending spree and addiction to failed government programs.

I cannot help but wonder when I see that the Labor-Greens government can find $10 billion of taxpayers' money to sink into a dodgy clean energy finance corporation but cannot find money for our nation's veterans. They can find $10 billion to keep their mates, the Greens, happy. I cannot help but wonder where this Labor government's priorities are, for they seem to have forgotten the very people that they once claimed to represent. The Labor members of this place would rather stand next to the Greens than stand up for our veterans.

I also cannot help but be discouraged when I speak to veterans who are telling me that they are struggling to buy their groceries, pay their electricity bills and put fuel in their cars. I am hearing them tell me that they are forgoing even the smallest of luxuries because the money is not available, because their payments are able to buy less and less. In real terms, they are watching their payments decrease, rather than stay constant or increase. As the cost of living skyrockets for all Australians, this Labor government continues to make decisions that are in fact making cost-of-living pressures worse, not better, and this is putting more strain on the already stretched budgets of those relying on the DFRB and DFRDB.

I have veterans telling me that the last increase they got was a mere 47c—an increase which does absolutely nothing to
alleviate the cost increases across the board that we have seen recently. It does not buy a loaf of bread or a litre of milk. It does nothing to help them get by. They are telling me that 47c a week is an insult. They are right. How can those opposite stand idly by as our veterans struggle like this? Why is it that Labor members of this place are more at home standing next to the Greens instead of standing up for our veterans?

Our veterans should not find themselves in this situation. Our veterans, who have given us so much—made so many unthinkable sacrifices for our country and our future—deserve to be treated fairly. They deserve for their military superannuation to be treated with an indexation that reflects the cost of living. This is about fairness, justice and equity for military superannuants relying on pensions which are not keeping pace with the cost of living.

The Liberal-National coalition have fought long and hard for action on this issue. And we are not about to give up. We are committed to delivering fair indexation for military superannuants. We believe that the DFRB and DFRDB military superannuation pensioners aged 55 and over should have their pensions indexed in the same way as age and service pensioners. We will not end the fight for fair indexation for our DFRDB and DFRB recipients until that is delivered. We remain absolutely committed to fair indexation and will continue to put pressure on those opposite until they finally concede that the veterans of Australia are worthy of having their military superannuation fairly indexed.

I am proud to stand up for delivering a fair go for the veterans in my local community and across the nation a fair go. I am convinced that the only way—I am sorry to say that it has come to this—to achieve fair indexation is to change the government. Whatever we will achieve in this place, I am afraid that Labor will once again team up with its Green mates in the Senate and deny veterans a fair go. But I am hopeful that maybe, just maybe, we will be surprised by a change of heart from the Labor Party.

I call on the Independent members in this place tonight to support this amendment, and support our veterans with fair indexation of the DFRDB and DFRB. I know that the member for Lyne and the member for New England have previously supported our fight for a fair outcome for veterans on this issue and I encourage them again to stand up for veterans in their electorates and around the country to deliver a fair result. I note that it has been reported in local media that the member for Dobell has also come out in support of fair indexation for veterans, and I call on him to indeed support them when it counts—in this place tonight, with this amendment.

Let’s not delay one more day, one more hour. The time has come for this parliament to make a stand. Our veterans have waited long enough to see a resolution. These men and women have proudly served our nation. It is time the nation recognised the unique nature of military service and delivered fair pension indexation to these men and women.

As the elected representatives of this nation, let’s make a stand in this place tonight and deliver a fair go for our veterans. It is no longer acceptable that this Labor government continues to linger around the edges of policy while at the same time wholly dismissing the everyday concerns of veterans, ex-service personnel and their families. The lack of fair indexation for the
Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (19:46): It is with great pleasure that I rise tonight to speak on the Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 and the coalition’s amendments. I will start by sharing a few thoughts and reflections about a recent trip I had the pleasure of taking with members of our Defence Force as part of the ADF parliamentary program. I spent five or six days with members and with the ship’s company on HMAS Anzac. When we talk about veterans we are talking about people such as the crew of HMAS Anzac who are going to spend the next 6½ months separated from their families. These are people who are dedicated to their job of protecting our interests in the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea against piracy, drug smuggling and people smuggling. These people are on board the ship 24/7, working to protect our nation, and many others, from pirates and others. My trip was a tremendous experience and, I think, very relevant given the topic that we are speaking about tonight.

This bill seeks to amend the Veterans' Entitlements Act and other legislation to give effect to a few minor measures. These measures will clarify arrangements in terms of travel payments, provide for the more timely provision of special assistance and ensure that the debt recovery provisions and regulations within the Veterans' Entitlements Act are tidied up. They will make some technical amendments to the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act and rationalise maintenance income provisions. They will exempt bereavement payments from income for the purposes of the social security income test. They will exempt reimbursements made under the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme from income tax. In addition we have moved some amendments to defer the debate on this until DFRDB and DFRB indexation is included. It is in these key areas that the legislation can be made better, and we as a coalition seek to do so.

To start with, it is worth noting that the changes in the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme have not been widely welcomed by the veteran and ex-service community. It is instructive to note that it was initially promised during the 2007 campaign but then it was delayed and reintroduced in the 2010 campaign. We believe this scheme is unfair as some 1,500 of our most disabled ex-service people who are in receipt of a disability pension but do not have qualifying service are excluded from this scheme. Our feedback is that the veteran community does not support a divide being drawn between those with qualifying service and those without. By contrast, the coalition’s proposal at the last election included all special rate, or TPI, veterans in the scheme and was tailored to ensure that all veterans and ex-service people in receipt of a disability pension at or above 50 per cent of the general rate qualified for the scheme.

The RSL stands for the abolition of out-of-pocket pharmaceutical expenses for all veterans. The same position is held by Legacy, the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia and the Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia. This is therefore an important opportunity for parliament to
extend the coverage of this scheme within this legislative amendment.

The member for Fadden has moved an amendment to prevent further debate on the legislation until such a time as the government introduces legislation, or amends this legislation, to include fair indexation of DFRB and DFRDB military superannuation pensions in line with the coalition's commitment in this area.

The coalition announced on 27 June 2010 our commitment to extend fair indexation to superannuants aged 55 years and over to DFRB and DFRDB scheme members. This would result in their pensions being indexed in the very same manner as age and service pensions. Our proposal for fair indexation has had the support of more than half a dozen inquiries, as well as the full support of the veterans living in my electorate. I have met with members of our veteran community, including the pension officers at the Beenleigh RSL, and they have stressed the importance of fair indexation, in addition to a number of other concerns.

In May this year, RSL Australia made a submission to the government in relation to the 2011-12 Veterans' Affairs budget. Indexation was listed as their main priority, followed by free pharmaceuticals for accepted disabilities; the development of a national mental health rehabilitation scheme for veterans suffering with chronic mental health problems; and appropriate residential accommodation for disabled veterans who require 24-hour support but are too young to be in aged care.

It also went on to talk about to removing the barriers to veterans' widows accessing higher levels of community aged care; to adequately resource the provision of the yearly allocation of eight days of in-home respite care under the Veteran's Home Care program; and adjust the rates for veterans' disability pensions by the same increment that was granted at the time for a single rate of service pension in the 2009-10 budget.

Despite losing the last election, we introduced legislation in the Senate in November 2010 to provide fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants. This was followed by the Greens and Labor using the Senate inquiry to oppose fair indexation. This was the first time ever that the parliament had opposed fair indexation and, in a day of shame for the Senate on 16 June 2011, the coalition's fair indexation legislation was defeated. Since then we have remained committed to the introduction of fair indexation and the coalition has a clear commitment to give Australian veterans and their families a fair go.

In addition to the request for fair indexation we are also moving amendments to extend eligibility for the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme to include all special rate or TPI and ex-service persons. This will bring fairness and justice to Labor's flawed and unfair scheme. It is instructive to note that the government's scheme is budgeted to cost $30 million over the next four years, making this extension a modest additional cost to provide the fairness disabled veterans deserve.

Our government recently was quite happy to hand some $12 million to the makers of the Wolverine franchise. There is no requirement to repay those funds yet this is a movie franchise that makes many millions of dollars. I would suggest this $12 million could have been far better invested on behalf of our veterans. By comparison, our amendments will cost up to $234,000 a year based on the government's advice about the average cost of the reimbursement in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the approximate number of 1,500 special rate
pensioners without qualifying service. This is a small price to pay to ensure our disabled service personnel are not further disadvantaged by Labor's unfair pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme.

As an example of the frustrations being felt in the veteran community, I would like to share an email with you from a constituent to highlight the outrage over the current indexation rate of 0.1 per cent. The email said:

I should like to discuss with you your opinion of the 0.1 per cent increase retired servicemen got last week. This has provided me with a $0.72 increase per fortnight. On top of this we now also incur the carbon tax for which we receive no compensation. What can be done about the injustice being done to ex-servicemen or don't you care?

I have said to this constituent and I will say to this House: I do care, and that is why I am speaking on this bill and why I support the amendments put forward by the member for Fadden.

As I mentioned earlier, it would cost only $234,000 a year to have a fairer Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for our disabled service personnel. Given this government's unrivalled ability to waste money on all variety of schemes, $234,000 is a small price to pay for taking care of the veterans who have served this country so magnificently. Earlier this year the government could have already paid for two years at this rate but instead spent $50 million on consultants to make Anzac Day more politically correct in a report on the centenary of Gallipoli.

When the government started its carbon tax advertising blitz it was costing more than $270,000 a day. The government's total carbon tax advertising is predicted to cost close to $70 million. Surely this is excessive and unjust when we have veterans who are fighting for fair indexation yet the government spends $70 million advertising a tax that it promised six days before an election it would not introduce. As I touched on earlier, the government can happily give $12 million to Hugh Jackman and the makers of the Wolverine franchise, which is a multi-million dollar profit-making venture, yet at the same time it continues to actively resist fair indexation and pharmaceutical benefits for our veterans.

Our veterans that have served our country allow us to enjoy the life we enjoy today. It is not only the veterans that have served in the past but also those who are serving us today in Afghanistan, the Middle East, East Timor, Bougainville and many other places around the world that deserve our support, our consideration and the knowledge that for their efforts, when they return to this great country that they have fought for, they will be well and truly looked after.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (19:58): I rise to add my voice to the list of coalition members expressing their concerns in the House about the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. This is an excellent opportunity for this House to act on what is the intention of the majority in this place: to fairly index the DFRDB and DFRB schemes for veterans in this bill. I commend the member for Fadden and the shadow minister, who put this amendment forward, for this initiative because it is a worthwhile initiative for us to be pursuing finally in 2012.

You can still find on the Labor Party's website, funnily enough, that defence of the nation is the top priority of the federal government. In the context of $5 billion worth of cuts to Defence and the lowest level of expenditure on Defence as a proportion of GDP since World War II, some would consider it to be laughable.
Is it the first priority for this government to look after our veterans? You would have been forgiven for thinking so in 2007 when the then shadow minister for veterans' affairs, the member for Bruce, Alan Griffin, made these commitments so vehemently to veterans all around Australia—and then, of course, this government reneged on those promises when it came to office.

I heard from the member for Moreton earlier tonight on Twitter. He was wondering where coalition members were because there were no coalition members at the World Wide Fund for Nature function in Parliament House. I responded to him on Twitter that I was in this chamber preparing to speak on this very important veterans matter, as are many other coalition speakers, because we regard veterans as important and fundamental to this nation. Looking after the indexation of their pensions is fair and proper. It is raising the ire of members opposite that we are not at the World Wide Fund for Nature event. It reminds me of a Ronald Reagan quote. He said that the only species that the environmental movement does not care about is the human species. Perhaps the member for Robertson could reflect on that great quote from a very great man. We do care about our veterans.

In the context of this bill, our second reading amendment is designed to see fair indexation. It is the government's policy. The member for Robertson can raise her voice in support of what has been the government's own policy over many years—to deliver fair indexation and benefits for veterans. That is why this amendment is so pivotal. There is no greater evidence that Labor has lost its way and abandoned its core support base than when it does not move to implement its core promises to veterans, to workers and to those people who have formed its constituency since it formed in 1900. In 2012 we see Labor refusing to commit to what is a modest amount of money in the context of the federal budget—we estimate it is around $100 million. Sometimes the government says that it would be more over the forward costs of the scheme being fairly indexed, but it is a modest amount of money today, when a lot of money is thrown around for other purposes.

We are concerned about some of the poorly drafted parts of this bill, particularly in relation to pharmaceutical benefits. I am very happy to support the idea that there will be an amendment in the Senate to extend the eligibility for the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme to include all special rate or TPI ex-service pensioners. Perhaps the government are unaware that they have drafted this bill poorly, because I cannot understand why you would create two categories of TPI veterans accessing pharmaceutical benefits schemes. Some of the most disabled veterans who receive the special rate or TPI pension do not have qualifying service as defined by the Veterans' Entitlement Act. We do not need to create two classes here. Again, the cost is insignificant and really the government ought to consider its response to this amendment most carefully. We would not seek to embarrass the government if they sought to adopt it, given that it would only be a few hundred thousand dollars a year to see all severely disabled veterans covered equally.

I have been lobbied relentlessly by the veteran community in my electorate. They are a very hardworking bunch of people who have an extraordinary record of service in our armed forces over many years. I would like to mention a few of them, in particular Colonel Don Tait OAM, who is now the president of the Castle Hill RSL subbranch—a very big and effective subbranch in Sydney. They have lobbied for fair indexation of DFRDB and DFRB
pensions for many years. The other members of the executive of the Castle Hill RSL are David Cronin, Phil Everden, John King, Mike Lee, Ron Smith, Brian Walters and all the members who form this nucleus of key veterans that do such a great job in representing veterans' interests.

The member for Werriwa raises the Howard government—and I was not fortunate enough to have been a member of that government—and he is correct that no government has got to the point where the indexation of DFRDB or DFRB pensions has been achieved. As more and more members fill this place, I know he will be concerned to put pressure on his government, which has been in office almost five years—even though we ignore the first three years under Prime Minister Rudd occasionally—to make a commitment to these veterans to deliver this outcome. It is time for him to stop looking back into the past. As he said of the Prime Minister's current problems: 'Don't look into the past; look to the future.' I know the member for Werriwa will be happy to hear that the future is this amendment.

I heard the contribution of the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, the member for Eden-Monaro, earlier. The member for Eden-Monaro has a strong record in relation to Defence, and his contribution to this debate was particularly extraordinary. He said: 'We can never do enough and we should always do more.' This amendment provides the opportunity for the member for Eden-Monaro to do more. As soon as he finished saying that, he went off on a tangent attacking the opposition candidate who has been preselected for the seat of Eden-Monaro, Peter Hendy. I know Peter Hendy well and, if Peter Hendy were here and able to speak in this House, he would tell you that he would support this amendment for veterans. He is a supporter of the coalition's amendment to fairly index DFRDB and DFRB pensions. He would stand up for those veterans in his community of Eden-Monaro. It is time for the member for Eden-Monaro to do the same. He has the opportunity to do just that, afforded by the coalition's amendment here today. I believe he should come back into this chamber and commit himself to that, because in the past he and many other members of this government have written to their own ministers, including Lindsay Tanner when he was the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, calling on the government to do it. The letter to Lindsay Tanner has been quoted many times, but it is worth quoting again:

'It is entirely appropriate, fair and consistent with our—being the Labor Party's—election commitment that the introduction of this improved indexation arrangement should coincide with that for pensions and benefits as announced by Minister Macklin.

We are all in support of that, and this is a good opportunity for the government to do just that.

I want to praise the contributions of the member for Lyne and the member for New England in relation to this matter. They have already supported legislation introduced into the federal parliament by the coalition in 2010, just after the election, to deliver fair, just and equitable indexation for 57,000 ex-service men and women.

Unfortunately, of course, the government and the Greens—the Labor-Greens alliance—used their numbers in the Senate to defeat the coalition's amendment. It was the first time this had faced a legislative defeat in the Parliament of Australia. It was a pretty ugly situation.

We are faced with another such situation today. I encourage all members, including the Independents—among whom is the
member for Dobell, Craig Thomson, who has put himself on the record in relation to this matter—to support fair indexation. This will be yet another acid test of his claims of independence when he is called on to support fair indexation for our veterans. If all the Independents support the measure, it will head off to the Senate. Once again, the Australian Greens and the Labor Party will have to face the fire of public life; they will have to stick to their commitments or yet again break a commitment to this very important community in Australia. It is a community to which all members of this House pay tribute regularly.

It is very concerning that Mr Snowdon, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, does not seem to grasp the significance of these measures. I think that was particularly highlighted in the exchange when Minister Snowdon argued that a superannuant on $58,000 per year did not need fair indexation, that they were already well off. I have spoken in this House on many occasions about Labor's continual class warfare and politics of envy. According to Labor, if you have a pension of $60,000 or if you are a family earning $100,000 in Sydney you are considered to be rich. I have said many times that if you have a dual income of $100,000 with a mortgage in Sydney you are not rich. I do not think a pension of $60,000 means that you are rich. But let us look at the facts. Minister Snowdon failed to acknowledge that the average DFRDB pension is about $24,386—less than half what the minister quoted.

We know that many veterans—I have heard from some myself—received letters earlier this year offering them a $1 increase in their pension. These are people who have served our nation and they are being offered an extra dollar in their pension. Given the real cost-of-living increases and the ongoing expenses they have to face, that is not a just and equitable outcome. I know there are members of the Labor Party opposite who do not believe that is a fair, just and equitable outcome. Given the modest amount of money that this will cost, it is difficult to understand where the government is at on this. Even though there are $5 billion of cuts in Defence, there is $4.7 billion out the door in relation to border protection, there are hundreds of thousands of dollars for a carbon tax advertising and all the other things that are going on, such as money for car-manufacturing workers, we do not have $100 million for our veterans to ensure that they get fair indexation. It is very difficult to understand the government's position, but it is more difficult to understand the position of the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, who is claiming that somehow these people already have it pretty good in relation to their pensions. That is not really a valid argument when veterans are being offered $1 or, in some cases, a few cents extra in their superannuation pension.

This is a very serious issue. I welcome the opportunity to speak on it again. I have raised this matter before on behalf of my veterans and of veterans in western Sydney and Sydney in particular. I believe the coalition has made an excellent decision in putting forward this amendment. The Leader of the Opposition has also made an excellent decision in committing the opposition to this policy in government. I have taken the pledge in front of my veteran community. I am happy to stand in front of the Castle Hill subbranch and the Blacktown subbranch and tell them that is our commitment. I will stand in front of them in opposition and I will stand in front of them in government and tell them that we will deliver it. And we will deliver it in government, because it is the right thing to do.
I believe that the coalition generally believes that defence is the top priority of government. It says that on the Labor Party website still—even though it is fairly embarrassing today, given the context of defence cuts and the passage of this particular bill without proper consideration of indexation. It is pretty embarrassing for the Labor Party to say on its website that defence is the first priority of a national government, but it is there. It is an ode to a past era of Labor, when it did represent veterans, when it did represent the worker, when it did stand up in this place for those people who should be stood up for—that is, our military and service personnel who have done so much for our country and who deserve fair indexation treatment from the federal government.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (20:12): I rise today to talk about the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 and the coalition's efforts to see fair indexation for Defence Force Retirement Benefits and Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits superannuants aged 55 and over. At the heart of these amendments is the idea that our military veterans need to be looked after in retirement. Unlike some in the Labor Party and the Greens, the coalition believes in the unique nature of military service. I hope the Independents will stand and be counted when the time comes to vote on this issue. Australia's service personnel, past and present, after giving so much to their nation, deserve to live out their lives in the knowledge that they have financial security. I have many former service personnel living in my electorate and I want to see them given a fair go.

The Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 contains a number of minor technical amendments to veterans legislation. There are nine in total; however, the No. 1 issue of concern, which the parliament must immediately deal with, is the unfair, unjust and inequitable situation facing our military superannuants. It is no longer acceptable that this Labor government continues to fiddle about the edges of policy while at the same time wholly dismissing the everyday concerns of veterans and ex-service personnel and their families.

Just six weeks ago, when many on the other side of this place rose to enjoy the winter break, military superannuants in my electorate received letters from the Gillard government, explaining that they would be receiving just a few cents more in their pensions—a 0.1 per cent increase—each fortnight. Compare that to the rise in age and service pensions of 0.9 per cent. The paltry rise of 0.1 per cent comes at a time when the carbon tax will push many prices up by 10 per cent, according to the Treasury's modelling.

Also, contrast this with the increase these people would have received from the coalition had our 2011 legislation passed in the Senate. We proposed a ninefold increase in military superannuants' pensions. I would like to briefly detail the nine alterations put forward by the coalition. I realise that others have done this before me and have said the same, but this is so important that the government must hear it over and over until it introduces fair indexation legislation. The time has come for those who truly value our retired Defence Force personnel to take a stand.

Firstly, the coalition wants to clarify payment expenses for treatment of those impacted by the nuclear testing in the past. Secondly, we want to provide more timely provisions of special assistance by way of a legislative instrument in place of current arrangements requiring a regulation. Thirdly, we want to ensure that the debt recovery provisions will be applicable to all relevant
provisions of the Veterans' Entitlements Act. Fourthly, we want to make technical amendments to provisions in the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act that refer to legislative instruments. Fifthly, we want to amend the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act to replace obsolete references to pharmaceutical and telephone allowances under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act supplement. Sixthly, we want an amendment to rationalise the maintenance income provisions of the Veterans' Entitlements Act by repealing redundant definitions used in the Social Security Act. Seventhly, we want to see bereavement payments in respect of indigent veterans or members made exempt as income under a social security test. Eighthly, an amendment will make reimbursements under the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme exempt from income tax. Ninthly, a change would be to make minor technical amendments to the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme.

These amendments are not particularly controversial. They are common-sense alterations to existing legislation. However, they still need to be made. It is a travesty that under the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme, a 2007 Labor commitment which was delayed until the 2010 election campaign, only veterans with qualifying service and in receipt of a disability pension are eligible to have their out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed. This means that approximately 1,500 of Australia's most disabled ex-service personnel who receive a disability pension but do not have qualified service are excluded from the scheme. This is blatantly unfair. The coalition's proposal suggests all special rate or totally and permanently incapacitated veterans in receipt of a disability pension paid at or above 50 per cent of the general rate would automatically qualify.

It is often said that the most important role of the federal government is to ensure that it is defended adequately from all foes—domestic and foreign. I would like to take that concept a step further on two fronts. Firstly, it is the government's duty to ensure that the people who are prepared to stand and be counted when their country needs them or voluntarily serve in our armed forces are looked after properly on their return and in their later years. Also, how are we supposed to attract quality people to serve in our armed forces when they face myriad discrepancies in their retirement compared to those who have not served their country in this way? As I said earlier, the coalition recognises the unique nature of military service. It is as fundamental a responsibility to protect this nation as it is to look after those who put themselves on the line to do it—the Anzacs of the past, present and future.

It is timely that this debate is being held now given Vietnam Veterans Day 2012 and the 50th anniversary of the arrival of Australian troops in Vietnam. Some 521 men died on active duty in Vietnam between 1962 and 1972. This was a huge loss of life and the impact of this is still felt today. By the end of the war, more than 58,000 Australian sons and daughters had taken part in the conflict that shaped a generation. When recognising Australia's contribution in Vietnam, we can never look past the Battle of Long Tan, which took place on 18 August 1966. For those brave 108 men of D Company 6RAR to fight and win the day against a vastly numerically superior enemy was truly an incredible feat. It is against this backdrop that we must reflect on this legislation and view the treatment of our
Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Scheme and Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme military superannuants.

I am lucky enough to enjoy a strong relationship with the RSLs in my electorate. In the north of Hasluck, the Bellevue RSL has a strong membership. In the hills, the Darling Range RSL continues to enjoy strong community support and, in the south, the Gosnells RSL goes from strength to strength every year. These are amazing people who have formed strong bonds with those they served with and recognise that camaraderie is as important now as it was on the battlefield.

I try to be nonpartisan when talking about issues such as this. Our ADF must know that they enjoy the full support of our parliament. They must know that their contribution to the nation is valued and that they are not put in harm's way lightly. They must know that we as parliamentarians will do whatever we can to honour their service and sacrifice. Earlier this year, the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, along with the shadow minister for veterans' affairs, Senator Michael Ronaldson, signed a written pledge to affirm the coalition's commitment to veterans on this occasion.

The coalition's commitment will see Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Scheme and Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme military superannuation pensions being indexed in the same manner as the age and service pensions. Contrast this with the actions of Treasurer Wayne Swan. On the same day the Leader of the Opposition recommitted to providing veterans with fair indexation, the Treasurer rejected outright any such changes.

Labor's commitment at the 2007 election to fix military superannuation is one of its many broken promises. The Gillard Labor government promised much to those in the veteran community but has repeatedly failed to deliver, due to its own self-interest and poll-driven policy paralysis. Unlike Labor, the coalition has consulted widely and listened carefully to the views put forward by veterans, ex-service men and women, ex-service organisations and current ADF personnel. Labor has failed veterans when it comes to military superannuation reform. Labor has failed to respond to the review into military superannuation arrangements, or the Podger review, which it has had for over four years.

Labor's wasteful and reckless spending in so many other areas has left them unable to meet their commitment of 2007 to prevent further erosion of veterans pensions due to unfair indexation. Labor had no military superannuation policy at the last election and it continues to have no policy on military superannuation reform. Labor used more paper in criticising the coalition's plan to tackle an important and pressing issue in the veteran community than in actually setting out a plan to tackle it themselves.

Times are tough in the community for many, many people. A government should do all it can to make things easier, not harder, for its citizens. Let me quote a small paragraph from an email that was sent to me about this very issue. It is poignant and a reminder that there are multiple sides to this tale. The government has a moral obligation to give our veterans a fair go, not just a financial one. The email speaks to the entire veteran community, not just those doing it tough. The author believes it is not the Australian way to ignore our comrades just because some of them might not be as impacted as others. So please indulge me while I quote from this email:

... whether or not you are a Defence Force Retirement Benefits and Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits superannuant, you should be concerned about the Senate's latest
decision to negate the Fairer Indexation Bill on 16 June. We have always been a team, we have stood by each other, we have defended our mates, especially those who are in difficult situations. We need your help now.

Those last words resonate strongly with me and those who have contacted my office about this issue. Looking after your mates does not stop just because you have stopped serving.

The financial distress experienced by our veteran community is unacceptable. Sadly, Labor and the Greens are too caught up in ideological policies and not in alleviating some of this distress. How does wasting billions of hard-earned dollars on pie-in-the-sky schemes help our veterans or the wider community? When examining the track record, it is of concern that we have a section of our community who have fought, who have stood and faced the anger and the fire in the battlefield, and we have seen the neglect of their contribution to the freedoms and the moments that we enjoy on a daily basis in the way that we live within this community. Yet those who have sacrificed their time and their efforts in defending us against the foes that are common to our allies and ourselves are being overlooked. I cannot understand why it is that those who give so much are given so little.

It is important that we look after the service personnel who served this country to give us the freedoms that we enjoy. I find it fascinating that Minister Snowdon, who has been around to a number of veterans, veterans organisations and RSLs, makes commitments but does not deliver. Many of the service men and women whom I have met in my electorate and in the broader community are absolutely angry at the fact that they have been ignored.

I had the privilege of spending seven days on the HMAS Melbourne and I saw firsthand the way in which our service men and women gladly dedicate themselves to defending this country. They are at the forefront of conflict. They are there in times of both peace and war, working to make sure that we enjoy the freedoms that each and every one of us in this country has. So it is time for us to seriously give back to them, give them the financial peace that they deserve, give them the opportunity, in their later years after serving their country, to have financial security so they do not have to worry about the next meal on the table, so they do not have to struggle to live each day as it evolves. I want to acknowledge every veteran within my community, because I think that I and all of us owe them so much for the contribution that they have made in making our society the way we enjoy it—so rich, so free. We owe them for the liberties that they have given us.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (20:27): I rise to support the amendment moved by the member for Fadden to the second reading of the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. I hope that there are people in the south-west who are watching this debate this evening. I acknowledge them as I acknowledge all of the veterans not only in the south-west but all around Australia. I have very great respect for them and I believe that the indexation of military superannuation pensions is worthy of support by all in this parliament, and so is the amendment before the House.

The coalition has a very proud record of supporting our ADF veterans and ex-service personnel. The coalition announced a fair indexation commitment to superannuants aged 55 and over under the DFRB and DFRDB schemes in June 2010. We took this commitment to the 2010 election and we have not given up ever since. We have not given up. We are still working on your behalf. We introduced legislation to the
Senate in November 2010 to provide fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants. In March 2011 the Greens and Labor called for a Senate inquiry into the legislation and then simply used that inquiry to oppose fair indexation—the first time the parliament has ever opposed fair indexation. What an indictment of this government and the Greens, that they oppose fair indexation for our military personnel. On 16 June 2011 the coalition's fair indexation legislation was defeated by that Labor-Greens alliance.

Fair indexation remains our policy and our commitment. On 5 March this year the Leader of the Opposition together with the shadow minister for veterans affairs, Senator Michael Ronaldson, signed the coalition's pledge to deliver fair indexation, and we will.

A coalition government will deliver fair indexation to the 57,000 military superannuants and their families. And do not forget those families. The coalition will ensure that military superannuation pensions are indexed in the same way as age and service pensions. All DFRB and DFRDB superannuants aged 55 and over will benefit.

Last week we acknowledged and showed respect for Vietnam Veterans Day and recognised, as we should, the sacrifice and the contribution made by our veterans, who were so shabbily and badly treated when they returned. I attended a very moving ceremony at the Diggers Club in Waterloo in the south-west to honour and show respect for the local men and women who served in Vietnam. The Australian Army sent 42,407 troops to Vietnam between 1962 and 1973. The Royal Australian Air Force sent 4,443 personnel the and the Royal Australian Navy 13,500 personnel. Of the nearly 60,000 Australians who served in the Vietnam War between 1962 and 1972, 521 were killed in action and more than 3,000 were wounded in action.

This year is particularly important because we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first Australian troops in Vietnam, in 1962. The first group in were the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, who were sent to South Vietnam in July 1962 to provide support and training to South Vietnamese troops. Training Team Vietnam was a vital component of Australia's war effort. As well as being the first in they were the last out at the end of the campaign. Their work was absolutely outstanding. I would like to recognise one person in particular: Warrant Officer LD 'Aussie' Osbourn. He was raised in Warner Glen in my electorate. He volunteered for the team in 1964 and completed three tours, finishing in 1971. Aussie spent almost the entire war period in Vietnam as a part of the Australian war effort. Although he has now passed on, he is far from forgotten. I would also like to recognise Major Vin Murphy, now of Bethany Village, who is another of our Vietnam vets in the Forrest electorate.

The battle of Long Tan is remembered as a classic Australian struggle against massive odds. The 108 men of D Company 6RAR fought against an estimated 2,000 enemy soldiers. They are nationally and internationally recognised for their tenacity, their courage and their bravery under fire. Bill Wood of Australind was there that day. Bill was originally a farmer from Greenbushes, which was up until recently in the Forrest electorate. He is a local legend. Other battles deserve no lesser recognition, although Long Tan sits high in our national conscience. All of our veterans and their families deserve respect and our support and acknowledgement for their sacrifice and commitment.
I acknowledge all of the RSLs and our ADF returned servicemen and servicewomen in the south-west and around Australia. I call on all members in this House to show that same level of respect to all of our veterans. Support the coalition’s amendment and support the fair indexation of the DFRB and the DFRDB legislation that we have before us.

I would suggest that I would be one of a few people in this place who would know directly about the sacrifice made by our servicemen and servicewomen and their families, because I am the daughter of a war widow. I know very well the sacrifice that my mother and my two older sisters made, as did the families of the other 16 men from the Brunswick and Harvey areas who lost their lives during the war. It is where I live and where my mother's husband lived and worked. I know what it did to our family. And I know what it did to the broader community every time Brunswick or Harvey lost another one of its sons. The whole community felt it.

We ask for an incredible commitment from our ADF people. Every time I go out on one of the Defence Force Parliamentary Program tours, I am again reminded of the incredible commitment and the sacrifice that our men and women make. But I equally understand and respect the sacrifice their families make. I saw my mother make the ultimate sacrifice, as her husband did. He lost his life on the banks of the Busu River in New Guinea in 1943. I saw what it did not only to my mother, in her later life, but to my sisters for all of their lives. One of them, my sister Judy, did not have any memories of her father because she was so young when he went to war. He went because Australia was under real threat at the time. Darwin had been bombed, Japanese submarines had entered Sydney Harbour, and it looked like we in this country were going to be overrun. Jack Leonard was one of the oldest people to enlist. He was 43. He volunteered and went off to New Guinea. He spent his last night in a little dugout hole on the beach. He and his mate, who was only 19, had to dig out enough of a hole to be able to lie in it and keep their heads down. They were in the 2nd/28th and they were the forward patrol. There was gunfire across their heads for most of the night, so they had to keep their heads down. It was raining incessantly and they had to try to keep their noses out of the water but keep their heads beneath the gunfire. The next day Jack lost his life. He was surrounded by a ring of six dead Japanese soldiers, whom he had had to deal with in hand-to-hand combat. He lost his life as a result of a sniper shot.

This story is replicated right around Australia, and that is why we know what it is that we ask of our ADF men and women when we ask them to take on the missions this parliament decides that they should. They go there knowing exactly what they are there to do. Yes, they are exceptionally well trained. And, yes, they do the job we ask of them very well.

Recently I was in East Timor, and last year I had the absolute privilege of being in Afghanistan with our men and women. We know the sacrifice that we ask of them. And we know, because some of them will see five or seven tours of duty, the risk that is involved and the amount of commitment that they display as well as what their families give up.

In recognising some of that, we see before the parliament an opportunity for everybody in this place to show the level of respect that these men and women have earned, not only by what they have done for us but by what they continue to do. We owe it to them to never, ever not show respect for what we ask them to do. We have, in this place, that...
moral obligation. I tell you right now, if my mother—that war widow—was alive, she would be saying, 'Nola, this is something that everybody in this place should do.' So I am asking you on the other side, for my mother and for everybody else who has suffered and is suffering, and all of those Vietnam vets and all of those who are really asking for our support: please, please give it. For this one measure that we have in our amendments, please show the respect that our ADF men and women deserve. I believe we really need to honour their service.

This is not a big ask. To all the military service men and women out there, I say that we on this side understand exactly what you have done for this country. That is why the amendments we propose have such a great influence on us and why we take this so seriously. We are incredibly committed to this, and I personally will have great pleasure in signing the pledge that this is what we will do. I say to the other side that I am very disappointed, as the daughter of a war widow, that there are not more of you who are choosing to speak on this matter and recognise just what we ask of our people when they go overseas, or even when they are here in Australia, and the enormous commitment they make on our nation's behalf. I hope you think really seriously about this. This impacts on people's lives every day. We owe it to the people who have gone out there and put their lives on the line, as they did. They did exactly what we asked of them as a nation. They did it exceptionally well, and they made incredible sacrifices on our behalf.

To all the veterans out there, no matter where you are in Australia, I will stand up for you, and I know that my side of politics will stand up for you. I of all people understand exactly what it is that you have done, are doing and will do for this nation. I thank you and I show great respect. And I say to those on the other side: please, please support the amendment that has been moved by the member for Fadden.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (20:41): I rise to speak on the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill as the representative of many veterans and a strong supporter of causes that recognise the great role played by veterans in our nation's development and the need to provide strong social and financial support for veterans and their families. This bill implements a range of minor technical amendments to several pieces of legislation which affect veterans and their families. The coalition supports these measures, but we also believe that this legislation can be improved, and we will be seeking the government's support to work collaboratively to make these improvements. This includes an amendment that will defer this legislation in order to impose a fair indexation standard as a requirement for the passing of this legislation.

We do not move this amendment lightly. We believe the government should immediately introduce fair, just and equitable arrangements for military superannuants. By deferring passage of the bill until it includes fair indexation legislation, we are stating loud and clear that the time has come for this important development. Through my work at street stalls, at shopping centres and doorknocking, I have spoken to many Bennelong veterans who have implored me to fight for fair indexation. Through this amendment, I am honouring their service and delivering on my commitment to the Bennelong electorate.

In June 2010, prior to my entry into parliament, the coalition announced our fair indexation commitment. This extended fair indexation to superannuants aged 55 and over to members of the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Scheme and the Defence
Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme. We have made a commitment to Australia's former warriors that under a coalition government their pensions will be indexed in the same manner as the age and service pensions. We took this commitment to the 2010 election and, despite returning to the opposition benches, introduced legislation to the Senate in November 2010 to provide fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants.

True to form, four months later the Labor-Greens alliance decided to refer this legislation to an inquiry. There have already been more than half-a-dozen inquiries, all of which supported fair indexation. The coalition just wants to get things done to support our veterans, and we therefore opposed yet another inquiry. True to form, the Labor-Greens alliance set a new precedent by using the inquiry to oppose fair indexation.

Finally, on 16 June 2011, in a day of shame for the Australian Senate, the coalition's fair indexation legislation was defeated. Since then, the coalition has remained committed to the introduction of fair indexation. In September last year the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, told the RSL National Congress:

It has long been to me and my colleagues in the coalition verging on the scandalous that defence retirees do not enjoy the same indexation arrangements as other people who have retired.

The coalition committed to addressing the indexation arrangements going into the 2010 election. Sadly, we were not able to form a government after that election but we didn't let that stop us.

We brought private members legislation into the parliament for decent indexation for Defence Force retirees and, I regret to say, that that legislation was not supported.

This commitment was reiterated earlier this year when the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister for veterans' affairs, Senator Michael Ronaldson, signed the coalition's pledge to deliver fair indexation. The pledge reads:

The Coalition's clear commitment to our veterans:

A Coalition Government will deliver fair indexation to 57,000 military superannuants and their families.

The Coalition will ensure DFRB and DFRDB military superannuation pensions are indexed in the same way as aged and service pensions. All DFRB and DFRDB superannuants aged 55 and over will benefit.

Only a Coalition Government will deliver fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB pensions.

With your support, Australia's veterans and their families will get the fair go they deserve.

For the veterans in Bennelong, and my fellow constituents who may not have served our nation but have the utmost respect for the actions and sacrifices of those who did, I am delighted to take this opportunity to support this pledge. This is not an idle promise; this is a critical reform. Unlike the Gillard government and their promises that there will be no carbon tax, this promise is locked in and will be delivered by an Abbott government in our first budget. Unfortunately for veterans, in Bennelong and across the nation, they are being punished twice. Not only has this government denied them fair indexation but they have also denied veterans any specific or direct compensation to assist with the increased costs associated with the carbon tax. Their excuse? It will cost too much. How much is a fair go worth for our veterans?

Amazingly, a few months ago, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Warren Snowdon, argued that a superannuant on $58,000 per year did not need fair
indexation, saying that they were already well off. What the minister did not acknowledge is that the average DFRDB military pension is just $24,386—less than half the figure he quoted. It seems that Labor is continuing to play the politics of envy and to deliberately mislead the public.

Deceptive claims are being made that the coalition's scheme is not funded. It is estimated the coalition's policy will cost $100 million and yet we have identified more than $50 billion in savings to specifically meet the costs of these and other positive policies. It is clear to all Australians that, if this government stopped wasting money on pink batts, school halls, cash for clunkers and advertising their carbon tax broken promise, we would be able to pay for a fair go for veterans over and over again. For example, the cost of fair indexation in the first year is estimated to be $4 million, yet, in this year alone, Labor will spend $36 million—nine times more—just on carbon tax ads. Their priorities are simply all wrong.

Following the passage of this amended bill to implement fair indexation the coalition will be seeking to make the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme the fair system that it should be and that our veterans, deserve and to deliver fairness for disabled veterans with high pharmaceutical costs. It has become clear that Labor's pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme is deeply flawed and is simply unfair. It has created two classes of disabled veterans—those with qualifying service and those without. As a result, up to 1,500 disabled veterans get no assistance through this scheme. These are our most disabled veterans, receiving the special rate, or TPI, pension but who do not have 'qualifying service' as defined by the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986.

The coalition's system for veterans' pharmaceutical costs is much fairer. At the last election we proposed a comprehensive veterans' pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme which delivered financial relief to more than 80,000 disabled veterans. Importantly, this did not create two classes of veterans, and ensured that all of our most disabled veterans had no out-of-pocket pharmaceutical expenses. The coalition's scheme was also immediate—no cumbersome reimbursements were needed, nor was there a need for technical amendments, as this legislation proposes, to ensure the scheme functioned properly.

Under the coalition's scheme, a veteran who qualified for the scheme would only pay for 30 prescriptions per year. Once they reached this reduced veterans' pharmaceutical safety net, they paid no more for their scripts. This means immediate financial relief for veterans. Significantly, the coalition's scheme did not require cumbersome reimbursements. Labor's scheme leaves veterans waiting for the calendar to tick over to a new year before they receive any financial relief for the cost of pharmaceuticals. The coalition's amendments will be presented in the other place and I look forward to being granted the chance to wholeheartedly support these fair and reasonable initiatives when they come to this House.

In conclusion, I urge the government to learn from their recent backflips in other policy areas and to embrace the coalition's policy that provides fairness for many of our great Australian heroes. Last Saturday we commemorated Vietnam Veterans' Day, and I take this opportunity today to argue that our veterans have given so much for our nation, it is time that we gave back.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (20:51): I too rise to speak on the Veterans' Affairs
Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. This legislation, proposed by the government, makes a series of minor technical amendments to Veterans' Affairs portfolio legislation and to other acts that impact on veterans entitlements.

Most of the amendments, as my colleagues have said, are technical amendments which do not engage in any of the applicable rights of freedom. The amendments proposed are by no means controversial, and the coalition supports the measures being introduced. While it is a good start, the legislation can be made better, and that is what the coalition is seeking to do by proposing these amendments. The coalition seeks to legislate fair indexation as a requirement for the passing of this legislation. As the shadow minister, the member for Fadden, outlined, once passed through the House of Representatives the coalition will seek to make the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme the fair system it deserves to be.

In March of this year I pledged my commitment to veterans. I joined my leader, Tony Abbott, and Senator Michael Ronaldson to pledge our commitment to our veterans. My pledge is here and I would like to seek leave to table my signed pledge.

Leave not granted.

Mrs GRIGGS: That is disappointing. I informed my electorate that as the elected representative I would fight for a fairer system of indexation for the Defence Force Retirement Benefit, or the DFRB, and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefit, the DFRDB, military superannuation pensions. This is not a new platform. It is the same policy that the coalition have been pursuing for some time. In fact, at the 2010 election we committed to fair indexation. Despite the election outcome, the coalition did introduce legislation into the Senate to provide fairness, justice and equity. Unfortunately, the Greens and the Labor Party opposed this legislation. The coalition have remained committed to the introduction of fair indexation. On 20 September 2011 the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, told the RSL National Congress in Melbourne: It has long been to me and my colleagues in the Coalition, verging on the scandalous that defence retirees do not enjoy the same indexation arrangements as other people who have retired.

As I indicated earlier, in March this year while in Bendigo the Leader of the Opposition, together with the shadow minister for veterans' affairs, Senator Michael Ronaldson, signed the coalition's pledge to deliver fair indexation, which is the same pledge that I tried to table. The pledge says:

A Coalition Government will deliver fair indexation to 57,000 military superannuants and their families.

The Coalition will ensure DFRB and DFRDB military superannuation pensions are indexed in the same way as aged and service pensions. All DFRB and DFRDB superannuants aged 55 and over will benefit.

Only a coalition government will deliver fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB pensions.

As I said, I support the pledge made, and through engagement with my local community they know where I stand on this issue. This is a promise I made and it is locked in, just like the other coalition members who have made similar pledges.

In this current period of Australian politics where those opposite are handing out cash left, right and centre, we on this side of the parliament pause to remember those who represented this country and who fought for this nation and those who lost loved ones while away fighting for Australia. Our veterans and their widows represent the
fundamental bedrock of our Defence Force. Stop in any small town or major city and you will always find an RSL supported by a proud membership. In my electorate I have three RSLs, the Darwin RSL, the Darwin North RSL bowls club and the Palmerston RSL. All are very popular amongst the local community.

Veterans and those that remain must not be forgotten or stood aside by this government, because we will never forget but we will forever owe them a debt that cannot be paid with dollars and cents. We must do everything that we can, and what is being proposed by these amendments is just a start.

In my electorate of Solomon we have almost a thousand veterans, partners and dependants. Across Australia there are about 57,000 recipients of military superannuation pensions. The coalition's plan is to provide fair indexation to those people on the pensions. As many of you would remember, Labor has led people to believe that they would provide a fairer deal for ex-service men and women. Unfortunately, in all their time in government, the Rudd-Gillard government has not delivered. In fact, when the coalition's policy went to the Senate it was the Labor-Greens alliance waltzing together which blocked the legislation. It is an absolute shame.

I have been contacted by many veterans in my electorate seeking help because they are struggling to make ends meet. Bill Elliott of Malak recently came to one of my mobile offices to speak to me about the DFRB superannuation. He told me many veterans are feeling the pinch, particularly as they feel that turning their superannuation into a pension has disadvantaged them. Bill asked me several times: 'What have we done wrong? What is the government going to do?' And he said: 'This is unfair. Most men volunteered to serve their country.'

Another constituent from Northlakes in Darwin's northern suburbs who has asked to be referred to as Mr J wrote expressing his concern. He said he receives a DFRB pension from the Navy and he is disappointed that Labor is sticking to the CPI related increase to his pension, which he believes is unfair. Last week I received an email from Rick, who states:

I received $1.29 increase in my COM Super pension. I retired last December after paying 5% of my wage for the past 32 years 20 into COM SUPER thinking I would be able to survive. I won't be able to do it if that's the yearly CPI increase. I had worked for Defence for 38 years before pulling the pin.

Natasha, please make a stand on our behalf. There are many more emails from people like Rick, Bill and Mr J who are pleading for help.

Along with these veterans, as recently as last weekend I was meeting with veterans in my electorate at the Vietnam Veterans Day memorial service where, after the service, I discussed these matters with the people there that will be directly impacted by this. These issues were also raised and echoed by many at the two veterans forums which I have held recently in Darwin, that were attended by the shadow minister for veterans' affairs, Senator Michael Ronaldson, who got to hear firsthand from the veterans in my electorate and take up their concerns. He was quite concerned, and they were really pleased that Senator Ronaldson had actually taken the time, not once but twice, to come to Darwin to listen directly to their issues.

It is no longer acceptable that the Labor government continue to fiddle about the edges of policy while at the same time wholly dismissing the everyday concerns of veterans, ex-service personnel and their
families. Local veterans who are DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants have proudly served their nation. It is time that the nation recognised the unique nature of military service and delivered fair pension indexation to these men and women, and their families.

Not only are our veterans facing unfair indexation, but they are facing the double whammy of the carbon tax, with no direct compensation to assist and offset the increased costs associated with this toxic tax. This is why I am speaking on this amendment. I am voicing the concerns of those Territorians who want fair indexation, who deserve fair indexation. They have made sacrifices and it is only fair that they receive fair indexation.

Not a week goes by that Territorians, in particular our veterans, do not raise with me the fact that they are struggling and veterans say to me that they want fair indexation. Electricity bills are starting to arrive in letterboxes, and households are beginning to feel the pressure of the extra costs which are directly related to the carbon tax. Yet, despite the clear cries of help from veterans struggling to make ends meet, Labor says the scheme is too expensive.

A few months ago, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Warren Snowdon, argued that a superannuant on $58,000 per year did not need fair indexation—that they were already well off. He should know better. He lives in the Territory and he knows that $58,000 is not a lot of money when you live in a regional area like the Northern Territory. What Minister Snowdon failed to acknowledge is that the average DFRDB military superannuation pension is just $24,386—2½ times less than the figure he quoted in June. That same month, veterans were sent letters advising that they would receive a few cents extra per fortnight in their pensions. Many veterans received an increase of less than $1 per fortnight. This is just a disgrace. Then we had Penny Wong claiming that the coalition's costing of $100 million should actually be $1.7 billion, and that to fully implement the scheme will cost $4.5 billion. Factually, the cost to the Commonwealth for fair indexation over the next four years is not $1.7 billion, as claimed by Labor, but approximately $100 million.

Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, as you know, at the last election, the coalition identified more than $50 billion in savings necessary to meet the costs of our commitment. Following the election, the coalition identified more than $170 million in savings, which I can say were later adopted by the Gillard Labor government as savings of their own. We identified savings once to fund this important change, and we will again find the funds necessary to make this important change for our Defence people. If the Gillard Labor government could stop wasting money on poorly implemented initiatives such as pink batts, school halls and cash for clunkers, along with reducing the cost for advertising their toxic carbon tax, there may be some money around and fair indexation could be well and truly funded. The cost of fair indexation in the first year is estimated to be $4 million; yet, in this year alone, Labor will spend $36 million on advertising the carbon tax. It is clear Labor has its priorities in absolutely the wrong order.

In conclusion, the coalition does not move this amendment lightly—nor do I support these proposals lightly. The bill before the House makes a number of important legislative changes which I support. Members such as the member for Dobell and the member for Eden-Monaro claim that they support veterans. Well, if this is true, I urge them to get on board, to come over with their crossbencher mates to support the amendment moved by the shadow minister,
the member for Fadden. I believe the government should now introduce fair, just and equitable arrangements for military superannuants. It is time for fair indexation for our veterans. It is time that the parliament delivered.

I honour the veterans in my electorate and I want them to know that I will continue to fight for fair, better indexation for DFRB and DFRDB superannuants, just as my coalition colleagues will. This is my pledge, along with the other coalition members. We support Defence personnel.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (21:05): I rise to speak on the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. This amendment has been introduced by the member for Fadden and, as he said in his speech, he did not move the amendment lightly. I have spoken in this place a number of times about the immense respect I have for our Defence forces and those that serve and have served in its ranks. They have made important contributions to Australia throughout our short history, for which we today enjoying lasting benefit.

This contribution stretches back to our founding. In our early history, Australia's fundamental institutions, the parliament, the law, and many of our customs, were derived from our British heritage, much of which, including this parliament, remains with us today. From this beginning, a range of factors, but more importantly the actions of our troops during World War I, and Gallipoli in particular, helped us form a national identity that was uniquely ours, uniquely Australian.

I, as do many of my colleagues, take a great deal of pride in participating in Anzac Day each year in my electorate of Swan. It is great to see the many that turn out each year at these ceremonies, the young and the old, to pay their respects to the Anzacs. I know many make the pilgrimage to Gallipoli or the Western Front each year to pay homage to those who give their lives for their country. Furthermore, no country can thrive and prosper without security. You cannot develop a strong economy and you cannot look to the future with confidence if you are a country under fear of threat.

Australia's continued success relies in great part on the ability of our people to look to the future with hope and a hunger for opportunity. Stability and security is a key to producing that environment.

When I express my respect I believe that we need to do more than attend ceremonies. We have a duty also to look after our veterans, and I know many Australians—many on both sides of the House—share this desire. The legislation proposed by the government makes a series of minor technical amendments to various pieces of legislation which affect veterans. As outlined by my colleagues, the coalition support these measures but we believe this legislation can be made better.

It is hard to measure the sacrifices made by those who serve in the Defence Force, or their families. To serve in the Australian military is to serve and protect every single Australian. The very nature of this service deserves recognition in the form of financial security that is fair and reasonable in meeting living standards now and in the future. Fair indexation, as proposed by the coalition, should be part of this bill. Additionally, we will move in the Senate to ensure the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme is made fairer.

When I attend Anzac services each year, and as I interact with veterans in my day to day duties in my electorate of Swan, many servicemen speak to me about the unfairness of the DFRDB and DFRB schemes. They deserve financial security for their
contributions to Australia and I and many of my constituents consider it truly shameful for the government to have raised expectations in 2007 only to ignore these veterans after the election. This broken commitment from the government to provide a better policy joins the long list of broken commitments this government has made since taking office, and it is amongst their most shameful. Not only are our veterans facing unfair indexation, but they are facing the double whammy of the carbon tax, with no direct compensation to assist with the increased costs associated, including the huge jumps in electricity and gas prices that come with that carbon tax.

As I said before, the coalition do not move this amendment lightly. Fair, just and equitable arrangements for military superannuants are overdue for introduction by this government. That is why we will be preventing passage of this current bill through the House until fair indexation legislation is introduced. I stand with my colleagues to draw a line in the sand. The time has come for fair indexation and it is time for the government and the parliament to get behind it.

The coalition have demonstrated consistent support for these changes. The coalition announced our fair indexation commitment on 27 June 2010. Our commitment extended fair indexation from superannuants aged 55 and over to DFRB and DFRDB scheme members. Under a coalition government, their pensions will be indexed in the same way as the age and service pensions. The reform proposed by the coalition on 27 June 2010 was a firm commitment brought to the 2010 election, and despite our loss we introduced legislation to the Senate on 18 November 2010. We remain committed to fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants.

Despite more than half a dozen enquiries into the proposal, all of which supported fair indexation, the Greens and Labor sought to further delay progress on 24 March 2011 by calling for yet another inquiry into the proposal. Unfortunately for the many veterans in my electorate of Swan, who get a raw deal under the current arrangements, the Greens and Labor used the inquiry to attack fair indexation. It was the first time the parliament has ever opposed fair indexation. On a day of shame for both the Greens and the Labor Party they used their Senate majority to reject the proposal on 16 June 2011. Fair indexation was defeated.

Despite the government choosing to ignore veterans, the coalition remains committed to this policy, and in Bendigo on 5 March this year, the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister, Senator Michael Ronaldson, signed the coalition's pledge to deliver fair indexation to veterans. It is worth me reading part of this pledge to the House. The pledge states:

A Coalition Government will deliver fair indexation to 57,000 military superannuants and their families.

And:

The Coalition will ensure DFRB and DFRDB military superannuation pensions are indexed in the same way as aged and service pensions. All DFRB and DFRDB superannuants aged 55 and over will benefit.

I am pleased to say I support this pledge and my constituents in Swan know I offer my full support for fair indexation. If elected, the Leader of the Opposition will deliver this reform in our first budget. The coalition commitment to fix indexation is locked in and we will not rest until things are put right.

The government has resisted fixing indexation on the basis that the cost is too high, despite continual rises in the cost of living putting increased pressure on veterans.
Labor is being deliberately misleading to the public. In June, veterans were sent letters offering them a few extra cents per fortnight in their pensions. Many residents in my electorate of Swan saw this barest of increases as a slap in the face from a government refusing to listen to their concerns. Many veterans received less than $1 per fortnight. The government has continued to claim that fair indexation is too expensive, with Senator Penny Wong claiming, for example, that the scheme will cost not $100 million, as the coalition has indicated, but $4.7 billion to implement.

The senator is being misleading. This point has been reinforced by the Commonwealth Actuary who, in advice to Senator Wong, blew a hole in Labor's claim that the cost of fair indexation is too high. To any superannuants out there, I know that Senator Wong will be in my electorate early in September—on about the 4th—to open a Leisureplex centre in Canning. So if you have something you want to let the senator know about, that is the time to come down and make sure that Senator Wong knows about your thoughts on the indexation. The cost to the Commonwealth is not the inflated $1.7 billion claimed by the minister. I endorse the Leader of the Opposition's statement when he said:

You can turn this into a huge figure. In any one year, it is bearable and we should bear it.

When making this promise at the last election we identified over $50 billion in savings to cover the specific costs of the commitment. The coalition will find the funds necessary to make this change without hurting the budget.

Of course, if the government had not blown billions of dollars on numerous wasteful programs since 2007, they could have funded this index correction many times over. Whether it is pink batts, school halls or giving cash hand-outs to dead people, this government have spent like a drunken sailor since 2007 and now, in order to achieve their political surplus, are sacrificing good initiatives such as this one. If they had been competent fiscal managers as they promised in 2007, I dare say that if they were not obsessed with their political survival they would have supported these initiatives from the start.

As a further example of how off track this government is, the cost of fair indexation in the first year is estimated at $4 million, yet this year alone the government will spend over nine times that amount on carbon tax ads to try and convince people that the most unpopular policy a Labor government has introduced for over a decade is good. The priorities of this government focus on politics and not on producing good outcomes for the Australian people.

I note the support from government members for fair indexing. The member for Blair has written to Finance Minister Senator Wong to express concern. He stated that it was 'ridiculous to expect people to accept a 0.1 per cent increase' and went on to state that 0.1 per cent was 'too meagre and it needs change'. Again, I remind the House that these same pensioners who are receiving indexation have also been hit hard by the carbon tax cost-of-living increases, which will go up and up. Senator Kate Lundy and the member for Eden-Monaro wrote to the former finance minister, Lindsay Tanner, in 2009 urging him to keep their 2007 election commitment, stating 'it is entirely appropriate, fair and consistent with our election commitment that the introduction of this improved indexation arrangement should coincide with that for pensions and benefits as announced by Minister Macklin'. The member for Dobell, expressed his support for these changes as recently as July this year.
Despite the government's attempts to shut down the push for fair indexing with false claims of billion-dollar price tags, the coalition will continue with our push for fair indexing. Our veterans deserve the respect and recognition that the government has so far denied them, and I hope the Independent members of this place will also support the coalition's amendment to legislate fair indexation as a requirement for the passing of this legislation.

Once this legislation passes the House of Representatives the coalition will seek to further amend the legislation to deliver fairness for disabled veterans with high pharmaceutical costs. The government's scheme is deeply unfair. It has created two classes of disabled veterans: those with qualifying service and those without. Up to 1,500 of our most disabled veterans get no assistance from the scheme. They do not have 'qualifying service' as defined by the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986. These are our most disabled veterans who receive a special rate, or TPI, pension but miss out on the scheme's assistance due to the structure of the act. They do not have 'qualifying service' as defined by the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986. These are our most disabled veterans who receive a special rate, or TPI, pension but miss out on the scheme's assistance due to the structure of the act. This is why the coalition will act to fix this to create a fairer system for veterans' pharmaceutical costs. Our commitment at the last election proposed comprehensive reimbursement which would have delivered financial relief to more than 80,000 disabled veterans. Importantly, it did not create two classes of veterans; it ensured out-of-pocket expenses were removed for all of our most disabled veterans. The coalition's scheme meant immediate financial relief for veterans. There are no cumbersome reimbursements—unlike Labor's policy our scheme does not leave veterans waiting until a new financial year to start to receive relief.

In the Senate the coalition's amendments will extend eligibility to include all special rate, or TPI, ex-service persons. Our amendments will extend beyond those disability pensioners with qualifying service to also include all special rate pensions as well. The amendment will bring fairness and justice back to Labor's unfair scheme. The government will struggle to use the cost argument against this proposal given that it will cost less than $234,000 based on the government's advice about the average cost of the reimbursement and the estimated 1,500 special rate pensioners without qualifying service.

These amendments put into the House and the amendments to be put into the Senate deserve to be passed by the parliament. Our veterans, who have served our nation with dignity and honour, deserve recognition and they deserve to be unbound from an unfair system that leaves them struggling with cost-of-living increases which have been made worse by the carbon tax.

The government's legislation does make some good minor changes, but it does not go far enough in addressing the unfair design of the scheme. The fair indexation changes and proposed Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme improvements are long overdue. I urge crossbench and government members to join with the coalition in making these changes for the good of Australia's veteran community.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (21:19): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. We certainly owe a great debt to our veteran community. We sleep in our beds knowing that we can depend on the protection that our armed forces provide. It has been that way in Australia since Federation. Our armed forces have served this nation well, they have kept us safe, they have fought against the odds and they have always prevailed—and that is certainly something for which we owe them a great debt.
The legislation before the House tonight is largely procedural and makes a series of minor technical amendments to legislation that affects the veteran community. It is non-controversial in nature and the coalition support the measures contained within it. But this legislation can be made better and the coalition will seek to do so. Firstly, we will seek to legislate fair indexation as a requirement for the passing of this bill. Secondly, once the legislation is passed through the House of Representatives, the coalition will seek to make the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme the fair system it deserves to be. We believe in fairness for our veteran community, a fairness that has yet to be achieved.

The coalition does not make this amendment lightly. The bill before the House makes a number of changes that the coalition supports. However, the coalition believes that the government should now introduce fair, just and equitable arrangements for military superannuants. By preventing the passage of the current bill through the House until fair indexation legislation is introduced, the coalition will be drawing a line in the sand. The time for fair indexation has come, and it is time for this parliament—this House of Representatives and our Senate—to deliver it.

The coalition announced our fair indexation commitment on 27 June 2010. Our commitment extended fair indexation to superannuants aged 55 years and over to DFRB and DFRDB scheme members.

Under a coalition government, their pensions will be indexed in the same manner as age and service pensions. We took that commitment to the 2010 election but, regrettably, the coalition was not elected. The Prime Minister was able to form a minority government with the support of the Greens and with the support of the Independents. To this date, fairness in military superannuation and taxation has not been achieved.

But, despite losing the election, we introduced legislation into the Senate on 18 November 2010 to provide fair, just and equitable indexation for those DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants. On 24 March 2011 the Greens and Labor called for a Senate inquiry into the legislation. The coalition opposed yet another inquiry. This matter has been the subject of so many inquiries that, I think, there is no need for further discussion. The need for equity is obvious and the coalition support equity. The Greens and Labor used that inquiry to oppose fair indexation, the first time the parliament has ever opposed fair indexation. On 16 June 2011, in a day of shame for the Senate, the coalition's fair indexation legislation was regrettably defeated.

Since then the coalition has remained committed to the introduction of fair indexation. On 20 December 2011 the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, told the RSL National Congress:

It has long been to me and my colleagues in the Coalition, verging on the scandalous that defence retirees do not enjoy the same indexation arrangements as other people who have retired.

The coalition are committed to addressing those indexation arrangements, and so they should. We have a pledge to commit to fair indexation arrangements for our veterans. They served our nation well in the Defence forces. The service by veterans is a unique form of service. It is unlike any other employment. It is a service in which you surrender many of the liberties we enjoy as citizens in this country in order to provide the degree of discipline and provide the degree of services that our military services must provide.
All we have had from Labor in this matter is excuses. We have had one excuse after another. This represents yet another broken promise by Labor. It is a broken promise that the coalition promise to redress. We promise that, on being elected to government, if these amendments fail that we should introduce fair indexation for military superannuants—something that is long overdue. I know that members of the veteran community in my electorate of Cowper have been campaigning long and hard to achieve appropriate indexation of military superannuation as the coalition is proposing. I have had many representations from people right across my electorate. From Kempsey in the south to Maclean in the north to Dorrigo in the west, I have had members of the veteran community say this is unfair. Military service is unique and it should not be discriminated against in the way that our superannuation is indexed. The coalition agree with this view. We are committed to making these changes and certainly look forward to achieving them. I certainly hope we can achieve it in this parliament. If that is not the case, the coalition would certainly, if elected as the next government of this country, pursue a fair and equitable system for veterans.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this legislation. It has been a matter that has concerned the veteran community for too many years. The veteran community feels let down by the government's failure to address this issue. It has been an issue that has been too long in coming. The coalition is committed to achieving those changes and will certainly be pursuing that either through this parliament or when we are elected to government. I know that so many members of our veteran community are deeply concerned. They want the matter addressed and it is high time that occurred. I commend the proposed changes by the coalition to the House.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (21:27): The legislation that we are debating today is about fairness and justice to the veteran community. Deputy Speaker Scott, you and I were former veterans' affairs ministers and we appreciated incredibly strong support from Prime Minister Howard and the Howard government to bring about many changes throughout the veteran system to make sure it was responsive to the changing requirements of the veteran community. I invite the Labor members opposite to delve a bit deeper and they would see it was actually me who started the Podger review to investigate arrangements relating to military superannuation. We were very supportive of some ideas to bring about fairness and justice. It is great to see that even though the coalition is not in government it continues to provide leadership in veterans' affairs and Defence personnel matters.

The veteran community in Dunkley knows very clearly that there is only one side of parliament that will bring about justice in the indexation of DFRDB superannuation payments. There is only one side of politics that recognises that it is one thing to talk about support for the veterans' community but my commitment and that of the coalition was always to provide best-of-breed support for those men and women that we put in harm's way. That is a responsibility that all of us in this place should have and it is certainly a responsibility that seems to be beyond the current veterans' affairs minister. I am courteous and too respectful to go through some of the titles that the current minister is afforded. I am, too, thoughtful about how strongly the veterans' community feels about the lack of representation and advocacy they get from the Labor Party and the Gillard government. But I am aware of the vivid feeling and the strength of support for the coalition's action to bring about fairness in the indexation of DFRDB.
I also want to again pay tribute to our Vietnam veterans’ community. Last weekend was Vietnam Veterans Day. That date is an important date, not only for the veterans community but also for the commemoration of the Battle of Long Tan. It has taken a long time for this nation to right the wrongs of the way in which it treated the veterans coming back from Vietnam, and the measures before the House and the amendment that the coalition has offered are a further example of how it is the Liberal-National Party that can always be counted on to support the veterans community and the serving men and women of the ADF.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (21:30): Order! It being 9.30 pm I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Fly-In Fly-Out Workers

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (21:30): I rise to talk about the implications of fly-in fly-out workers in the resource sector. I will confine my remarks to my own electorate, where we have the Surat and Galilee basins, two enormous resources that are in the construction phase at the moment. The Surat Basin is in the early stages of developing coal seam methane gas, with some coalmines to be opened up—particularly the one at Wandoan, the Xstrata mine—when final approval is given, which may be several years away. The Galilee Basin in central Queensland is in a similar situation; it is a coal resource and it is also in the development stage.

The proposal in both these areas is that the mines will be developed on the basis of having fly-in fly-out workers. I accept that having fly-in fly-out workers may be all right in the construction phase, but once the initial construction for the coal seam methane gas—the development of the wells and the construction of the pump stations and the pipes to deliver the gas to Gladstone for the LNG projects—is completed, a permanent workforce will be needed for the ongoing running of the pump stations and the further construction of wells in the coal seam beds.

My concern is that some of the resource companies want to continue with the fly-in fly-out workers well into the future, well beyond the construction phase. We have seen in some areas along the coast—the Gold Coast, Wide Bay, North Queensland—that towns would like to become hubs for fly-in fly-out workers. In other words, they would be the home for the workers, who would be flown out by business operators to the Surat Basin, for instance, on a more permanent basis, rather than just for the initial construction phase.

I have real concerns about that. The resources companies will be in my electorate for 30, 40 or 50 years, and I want to see them develop bigger towns in our communities over time rather than sucking the wealth out and taking all the wealth of the workers out of the area because they will be living elsewhere. If the Mount Isa mines were discovered today and were developed on the basis of a fly-in fly-out mentality, Mount Isa would not have 20,000 people living in it today—no ifs, no buts. It would be the same for Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie. That is the simple analogy that I am putting to the resource companies and to governments, state and federal. We have to make sure that we are not using these resources just as a milch cow to take the wealth out and to establish bigger communities elsewhere and leave nothing behind. If the wool industry had been built with a fly-in fly-out shearing industry, we would not have those towns right across western Queensland. I want to see these resources deliver something in the
long term and to see communities grow and prosper as a result of the wealth that is trapped beneath the soil.

I have also been talking to the P&C associations in Queensland recently and they are reporting that teachers are telling them that, when fathers go away for a two-week shift, they notice a significant change in the behavioural attitude of many of the children. That disturbs me. As these children are growing up, they do not have two parents at home— (Time expired)

Employment

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (21:35): This evening I want to articulate an increasing trend among constituents coming to my office. My electorate is younger than the national average, so this situation will be more pronounced in many other electorates. Looking at the June 2010 ABS figures, there were on average at that time 58,000 over 55 years of age who were unemployed. During that period, 46 per cent of unemployed older people had been looking for work for more than six months. That compares very negatively with the 32 per cent ratio for those under 55 years of age. In the June quarter of 2010, 97,000 Australians aged 55 years were also underemployed. Amongst older underemployed workers, women were more likely to have been underemployed for more than a year—50 per cent—than men, 33 per cent.

The unemployment of older Australians has both social and economic implications. National Seniors Australia estimates an economic loss of $10.8 billion a year to the Australian economy for not utilising the skills and experience of older Australians. In many areas, there is a real skills deficit with the decline in support for TAFE, which has been very pronounced in Victoria recently. The association estimates a loss of $8.7 billion a year for not utilising the skills and experience of older Australians who want to work but were not looking for work as at September 2008 and a further loss of $2 billion a year for not utilising the skills and experience of 39,000 people who were unemployed and looking for full-time work and a further 17,000 unemployed who were looking for part-time work. There is no endeavour to compel people to work longer than they want to, but it is the reality that many Australians do wish to work longer.

I have had complaints from constituents about the situation in this country—under Labor and Liberal, quite frankly—where companies that are supposedly assisting people are given no responsibility from the government of the day to provide any real support for families where one partner is working. We might say that there is some social equity in that. But, equally, one has to question it when the country is losing out by not using such available skills and productivity of people who are inclined to work because of their desire to do so or for financial reasons. One of the points that are often put to me by these people—it is their perspective on life; it is not always realistic—is their feeling that long-term unemployed people often are not going take up those jobs, for a variety of reasons, but that they are denied assistance, beyond the most cursory levels, to gain employment, even though they may be more inclined to go and take up such employment. They see a proliferation of advertisements that talk about fun-loving teams and young vibrant companies, which they see as code for 'Oldies, don't bother applying.' They also see that many jobs require only two to three or maybe three to five years experience. They ask themselves why the job never talks about needing 20 to 30 years experience. They see clearly that a lot of experience is neither wanted nor valued. Equally, they see in the labour market in this country a disinclination
to give any feedback to people and a lack of encouragement for employers regarding possibilities.

The other thing that bedevils the labour market in this country regards overseas skills. Constantly people bemoan the lack of recognition of qualifications from overseas. I have always thought that that is a secondary problem. The real problem with Australian employers is around the preference for Australian experience. We see employers rejecting people with two and three degrees, with 20 years overseas experience in engineering and science, often in comparable work and economic circumstances, for somebody down the road who has had a few weeks experience in Australia. That unfortunately is an attitude that prevails. I want to reiterate the very real losses in productivity, wellbeing and social support for people in this country from the lack of assistance given in the Australian labour market for people in their late 50s and their view that they are ignored or forgotten and feel that society is not interested in them—yet they can make a very real contribution.

Dunkley Electorate: Health

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (21:40): Madam Deputy Speaker, may I correct something I said when referring to military superannuation earlier? I should have talked about my role in the Podger review, not the Matthews review. I just want to correct the record on that.

Tonight, I draw the attention of the House to a number of interrelated health obstacles and issues of concern to the Dunkley community. First, the Gillard government’s decision to means-test the private health insurance rebate will drive many of the 63,806 Dunkley residents, who represent 15,300 families and 16,940 single adults with private health insurance, out of the private health system. As people drop out of the insurance pool, the costs become more expensive for all those left with cover, which will in turn force even more people to drop or downgrade their insurance coverage. It is estimated that the cost of premiums will increase by 10 per cent, adding further to the cost-of-living pressures that all Dunkley residents who keep their private health insurance currently face. Frankston Hospital does a great job under difficult circumstances but will face even greater demand on its resources as people move out of the private health system and into the already stretched public hospital system.

A second pressure point relates to the vital role played by the after-hours GP Medicentre which is co-located with Frankston Hospital. The Medicentre treats 10,000 patients annually and takes pressure off the Frankston Hospital A&E department by handling less critical cases on a bulk-billing basis for concession card holders and a modest copayment for others. This enables local GP practices to provide extended hours of service without having to open their clinics and attend those extra hours themselves or to be on on-call standby to respond to patient needs. Instead, doctors are rostered on to treat patients after hours and relevant medical information is referred back to the patient’s regular doctor.

Medicentre collaborates with and complements, rather than competes with, GPs and their practices, yet has faced continuing challenges placed on it by this government. While claiming improved access to after-hours GP services is a priority, the Rudd-Gillard government has actually reduced their funding. Support for practice nurses has been removed. Requests to reshape the MBS start time for higher after-hours GP consultation fees for services expressly set up for this purpose go ignored. The expense of securing the formal accreditation has opened no doors for
additional assistance and support. With the Medicentre's funding set to expire at the end of this financial year, its future is unclear and uncertain despite its success, obvious value and crucial role in keeping GPs active through the better work-life balance that it helps to secure.

Keeping GPs active in their career is important for the Dunkley community, with much of the electorate recognised as a district of workforce shortage. A GP Network workforce survey conducted last year identified 65 per cent of respondent practices were subject to workforce shortage pressures and about half of these characterised their situation as urgent. In addition to the inability to replace retiring doctors and fill registrar positions, our local challenges are compounded by having a higher proportion—37 per cent—of local doctors over the age of 55 compared to the state average, and a likely reduction in the working hours of these mature-aged GPs.

Workforce shortages add another push factor for GPs to leave the profession. Patrick Chung from Karingal's Total Care Medical Group has advertised for more than two years in Australasian GP journals for a replacement for a retiring doctor, generating not a single inquiry. Another doctor is approaching retirement age and is keen to hang up his stethoscope if a replacement for him can be found. In Mr Chung's case, his three part-time doctors service 12,000 local patients. They have been doing it for three decades, in some cases treating three generations of the same family. They also provide medical care on request for local aged-care facilities.

Mr Chung sought an exemption under section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act to enable his practice to recruit an overseas trained doctor. This request had the full support of the Peninsula GP Network, which emphasised the 'desperate need of additional general practitioners' and confirmed Total Care Medical Centre as 'one of those practices that is severely impacted by local workforce issues'. Mr Chung's request has been declined. Had Mr Chung's GP practice been on the other side of the road, across the Karingal Hub car park his facility looks over, his practice would have been in a district of workforce shortage and would most likely have been granted approval to recruit a suitable overseas trained doctor. The fact that he clearly has urgent workforce challenges, services patients from the designated workforce shortage neighbourhoods he adjoins and has the strong support of his local GP Network simply was not enough.

I will help Mr Chung make another application, again pointing out these facts and the special circumstances he addresses in providing medical care to numerous local aged-care providers and for asylum seekers in community detention. Let's hope common sense prevails and this government does not put another obstacle in front of accessible and affordable health care for Dunkley residents.

**Banks Electorate: Hurstville City Council**

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (21:45): I recently met with representatives of Hurstville City Council, on site, to inspect works at the Hurstville golf course. Under its Water for the Future initiative, the government has invested $1.07 million towards a new project that will harvest, capture, treat and store stormwater in an outside bioretention and pond scheme at the golf course. The water will be used to irrigate tees, greens and fairways where, in the past, potable water has been used. When fully implemented, the project will save over 20 million litres of potable water annually.
Hurstville council commenced works in July this year, with a dam being constructed as the first step in the project. The dam is located to the west of the fourth hole and will become a water hazard as part of the course. As well as the bioretention system and storage pond, the scheme will include a small wetland in front of the third green. Patrons will be further challenged by a drainage swale between the third and 15th fairways.

This council initiative will have a positive impact on the course and on the local environment as well as water savings through the collection and reuse of stormwater running under Roberts Avenue and Lime Kiln Bay. This scheme will prevent sand, sediment and other unwanted substances from entering Lime Kiln Bay, as only treated water will run off into the bay.

In addition, council planning includes the planting of a large number of trees, plants and shrubs and will provide an important habitat for native animals. It will fully offset greenhouse emissions associated with the ongoing operation of the scheme. Apart from adding to the golf course's visual appeal, some of the key benefits include improving the course's playability and boosting the course's rating from par 69 to par 70.

I have been very pleased to work with Hurstville council staff and the retiring mayor, Councillor Steve McMahon, on this very worthwhile project. Councillor McMahon and long-term councillor Vince Badalati were with me to inspect the site. Councillor McMahon recently announced his intention to retire from council, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate him on the significant contribution he has made to Hurstville during his 11 years on council. He became mayor in September 2011. Steve commenced his time as mayor by getting rid of the mayoral vehicle and spending the proceeds on a children's playground at Ruby Wing Reserve in Mortdale. His time as mayor focused on getting back to basics, and his tenure has certainly reflected that focus. My congratulations to Hurstville council and its consultant team of engineers, landscape designers and irrigation specialists for their work on this innovative project.

I am particularly pleased that the project was chosen as one of nine national projects totalling over $42 million. Parliamentary Secretary Don Farrell noted that the nine successful projects all deliver innovative and sustainable stormwater harvesting and reuse projects to help secure water supplies in urban areas. Nationally, the projects will increase urban water supplies by providing an estimated 5.625 billion litres of treated stormwater a year.

This is a partnership between the Commonwealth government and Hurstville council, because Hurstville council funded the first part of the scheme. I think these partnership projects go very well in all communities around Australia. They give the local council ownership and, in a lot of instances, they could not proceed with the development if it were not for the contribution of the federal government. Projects like this in other areas have also been funded by the government. All of us in our own respective areas see these projects, in many respects, as the most invigorating in our local communities.

In the former part of my electorate, I managed to achieve some funding for Bankstown Oval, where Bankstown council and Bankstown cricket club, of which I am a patron, had funded earlier projects. The project will hopefully be opened early next year. It is a community area with many other facilities that can be used. Again, it is a
partnership. I commend this project and all other projects to the House.

State Emergency Service

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (21:50): I am proud to inform the federal parliament of the work of the Petrie SES. In communities across Australia, when natural disasters strike State Emergency Service volunteers are vital to our community's response. The SES provides search and rescue services in emergencies, protects people and property and helps communities prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters and similar events. As a former police officer, I am aware of how the SES operates not only independently but also in support of other emergency services. Many a police search or accident scene has benefited from the support of these fine volunteers.

In my electorate of Dickson, I have often witnessed the dedication of our local SES in their response to community needs and emergencies. I am sure that members collectively have observed the huge range of events the SES prepares for and responds to, such as storms, cyclones, floods, crime scenes, accidents, missing person searches and cliff rescues. In October 2011, Dickson suffered through a severe hailstorm which caused significant damage. In response, the Petrie SES completed over 630 tasks. A lot of the damage was concentrated in Strathpine, in Dixon Street, Graham Street, Mecklem Street and Bells Pocket Road. The SES responded within 30 minutes, working in the wet to erect temporary covers over more than 200 units. The hail and heavy rain not only damaged homes but left elderly residents very worried. Fortunately, the Petrie SES swung into action to prevent further damage and soothe worried residents.

On 23 July this year, I attended the ceremony for the NRMA Insurance storm heroes awards. I was proud to join with community members in celebrating the selfless actions of these fantastic volunteers, including the Petrie SES. The NRMA storm heroes awards recognise the excellent work of the SES and provide grants to support their work. I commend NRMA Insurance for their support of the SES. I also acknowledge the management and support functions that Emergency Management Queensland provides to the SES. The Petrie SES group won the 2012 NRMA Insurance storm heroes team award for their response to the severe hailstorm that hit Strathpine in October 2011. The unit has been awarded $2,000, which will go towards purchasing essential storm response equipment. I congratulate them again on that award.

I would like to name some of these storm heroes, these volunteers who have trained weekly and then swung into action to serve our community: Deputy Local Controller South Peter Sims OAM, Group Leader Stuart Bowhay, Monica Sims, Meg Dorrington, Ellen Ooi, Chantal Van Gent, Daniel Draper, Jeremy Sims, Damian Reid, Tim Moran, Lee Cochrane, Gavin Quinn, Graham Burgoyne, Wendy Webster, Kelly Nobelius, Jason Maher, Vaughan Heath and Gabriel Knauth. These fine locals have won the admiration of the Strathpine residents aided in the wake of the storm and the respect of the people of the greater Pine Rivers area. It is with pride in the Dickson electorate I name these men and women in this place to acknowledge their excellent community service.

I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of other units of the Moreton Bay Region SES which also responded to the October 2011 storms, both at Strathpine and in their local areas. These units include Arana Hills SES, the Bribie Island SES outside my electorate, Deception Bay SES, Caboolture SES and Redcliffe SES. It is important to recognise the work done by all the individuals of the Moreton Bay Region...
SES at so many other events under the leadership of Local Controller Henk van den Ende. I know that the Dickson electorate appreciates the dedication of the SES and I am sure that communities around our great nation have similar stories to tell of the volunteers that care when it really counts.

The final words I want to leave are by way of thanks to those family members and indeed those employers who support the SES workers, who in many cases have to spend days at a time on particular projects, often with very little or in some cases no notice. These are people who are able to support their loved ones, in many cases doing work that they love to do. It is a great impost on some small businesses, I understand, but the understanding of those small business employers, particularly in tough times, to see themselves clear to allow the SES workers of the Petrie SES to go to the aid of others in need in the local community is as much a credit to the SES workers as it is to the employers. Of course, the families who go without mum or dad on many a stormy night when their own families are suffering deserve equal praise.

Atkin, Ms Anne

Mr Byrne (Holt) (21:55): I rise tonight to pay tribute to a real community champion in my electorate, Anne Atkin, who has worked tirelessly and passionately both to promote awareness of Parkinson's in the broader community and to help those battling the disease. Anne's story is truly inspiring. Anne was initially, in her words, gobsmacked when she was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease at the age of 55. It took some time for Anne to come to terms with this news, but after a while she decided: 'I couldn't live my life being miserable, so I started looking on the bright side.'

Upon making this decision, Anne made it clear to her friends and family members that she was going to fight this disease, fight to have a life with Parkinson's. She decided to volunteer with Parkinson's Victoria and founded a group called Painting with Parkinson's, which is an art therapy group for people living with Parkinson's. Driven by her love of art, her own journey with Parkinson's and a rich professional career in teaching, Anne began her first Painting with Parkinson's group in 2006.

Committed to helping others experience the benefits of art, Anne now travels throughout Victoria to conduct art seminars for Parkinson's support groups which have been established in Berwick, Shepparton and Essendon. Anne primarily conducts her Painting with Parkinson's classes at the Old Cheese Factory in Berwick during school terms. The group has about 25 members and normally between 10 and 12 people turn up each week. According to Anne:

Art is beneficial for everyone. Parkinson's affects the brain and art and painting is good for the brain. After four sessions, people realise they are more relaxed and they can find their own level of creativity.

I am pleased to report to the House that the Australian government has supported Anne's inspirational endeavours through a $20,000 grant to Painting with Parkinson's last month under the federal government's Community Investment Program to provide art therapy for people with Parkinson's disease. According to Anne:

The funding will be used to establish five new Painting with Parkinson's' groups across the state this year in places such as Mount Martha, Ocean Grove, Warmnambool, Bentleigh and Doncaster.

By the end of the year, seven Painting with Parkinson's groups will have been set up across Victoria. The funding will also be used to organise a combined Painting with Parkinson's exhibition, which will take place on 11 April 2013, the anniversary of James Parkinson's birth.
As someone living with Parkinson's disease herself, Anne has witnessed the remedial benefits that artistic expression has had on her condition. She recently decided to expand her efforts by publishing a book called *Living and Laughing with Parkinson's*. I have mentioned this book in this place before, but I wish to point out again how this book provides a thorough and comprehensive review of the symptoms that are associated with Parkinson's and the frustrations that they present. Anne has drawn funny and at times provocative cartoons that complement each explanation of a symptom and embody the many challenges that she has personally encountered. I am pleased to report that Anne is currently working on a second book.

Anne's work never stops.

Anne's efforts have been recognised by the local community. She was awarded the 2009 City of Casey Volunteer Award and the Holt Australia Day Award. Anne has also received the 2012 Lindsay King Arts Initiative Award from Councillor Sam Aziz, Mayor of the City of Casey, at the annual Mayoral Arts Dinner at the Cranbourne Golf Club on 3 August this year. She received this award not only for her work at Painting with Parkinson's over the last six years but also for dedicating 35 years to the arts in Casey, including 29 years teaching arts in schools. Anne also actively contributes and collaborates with neurologists and neuropsychiatrists to broaden fields of academic research and to recognise the healing properties of artistic expression on Parkinson's and mental illness.

Operation Flinders

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (22:00): I would like to speak about Operation Flinders, a South Australian based charity. Earlier this month my wife Kate and I visited an exercise of Operation Flinders at Yankaninna Station. Previously, in 2004, I visited another exercise, which was held on Warraweena Station. I was also a member of the Operation Flinders property acquisition group, which had the objective of finding a permanent home for this worthy charity.

Operation Flinders runs a world-leading wilderness adventure program for young
offenders and young people at risk. It was set up back in 1991 by Pamela Murray-White, a teacher and former army officer. As a teacher Pam worked with students who had behavioural problems. Pam realised that some outdoor elements of army life would have a positive effect on these students. People often talk about boot camps, but I emphasise that Operation Flinders is conceptually different from a boot camp. It is not about hardening up these youths at risk. It is more about encouraging them to make positive changes in their lives.

Pam worked with local ADF personnel to set up the program, where the Army provided personnel, stores and logistics support. In 1991 she conducted one exercise with 35 participants and by 1993 this number had tripled. Today they run a number of courses each year.

Pamela passed away from cancer in 1995 but left a legacy to the youth of South Australia that still runs strong today.

I would like to thank Executive Director John Shepherd AM, Graham 'Spingo' Spinkston and Tony Moggridge for giving us an excellent overview of the work they do at Operation Flinders. Operation Flinders has been conducted at four sites: Moolooloo Station, Warraweena Station and Angepena Station and, only in the last year, they have now found a permanent home at Yankaninna Station. Operation Flinders takes people between the ages of 14 and 18 on an eight-day exercise in the far north of the Flinders Ranges. It is held on Yankaninna Station, which is 65 kilometres east of Leigh Creek, which lies west and north of the Gammon Ranges National Park and Arkaroola.

Teams trek 100 kilometres through the Flinders Ranges, covering somewhere between eight and 15 kilometres a day. The terrain is saltbush, native pine and mallee. The aim is to develop personal attitudes of self-esteem, leadership, motivation, teamwork and responsibility.

In their packs they are provided with everything they will need. The packs include only the basics: their sleeping bag, eating utensils, ground sheet, hootchie, wet weather gear, tent pegs, ropes and water. Each team member is allocated team duties each day, including team captain, cooking, digging latrines, building the fire, minding their teddy bear mascot and other normal campsite duties. During the eight days the team members are also taught basic bushcraft and navigation skills. They undertake a number of trust and team-building exercises, designed to build confidence and overcome their fears. In addition they are exposed to the local Adnyamathanha community, the traditional owners of that land. They partake in local Aboriginal culture, learn from the Adnyamathanha dreaming and prepare and consume traditional food.

An independent evaluation of the program back in 2001 reported that at the time the program was leading the world in its outcomes. It also found that the young people at high risk underwent a significant positive change as a result of their attendance.

Once the teams have completed their eight-day trek they are individually presented with a memento of their time and a set of dog tags that have a 24-hour-a-day telephone number they can ring for further support.

Operation Flinders is a worthwhile cause. I encourage everyone to check out their website, www.operationflinders.org.au, and get involved. In October they run a trailblazer challenge, which is their major fundraiser. Groups can walk or run distances between 18 kilometres and 100 kilometres. This is something that a lot of businesses get involved in.
South Australia's Governor, Kevin Scarce, has walked with one of these groups and has been a great supporter of this program. Poh Ling Yeow, in her third series of *Poh's Kitchen*, which will be screening in early October, walked with the group. I look forward to seeing that on the ABC. I encourage other states to look at Operation Flinders and what has been achieved there for youth at risk.

**Climate Change**

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (22:05): As some may know, North Carolina had recently intended to introduce laws to prohibit state agencies from acting on scientifically valid warnings of sea-level rises driven by global warming. Fortunately, national and international ridicule has caused that state's legislature to abandon plans to introduce such ill-informed regulations. Yet, in Australia, we still have the Leader of the Opposition continuing to ignore the reality of global warming and climate change, driven by carbon dioxide emissions.

I now digress for a moment to look at two examples of scientific ignorance in other countries in less enlightened times. Scientific ignorance as the basis of policies of political parties has a baleful history, perhaps nowhere more recently evident than in the actions of former president of South Africa Thabo Mbeki, who in the face of all evidence denied that HIV was the cause of AIDS, a position that is thought to have resulted in the death of over 300,000 people, according to a study conducted by Harvard University.

We also have the earlier unifying example of scientific ignorance in the practices of the eugenics movement, a philosophy that had its origins in the turbulence following the American Civil War. In the early decades of the 20th century, eugenics was based on a popular proposition that was motivated by the theories of social Darwinism, the idea that genetics rather than circumstances such as poverty largely determined success or failure in life. I raise these two examples to show that policies based on ill-informed or scientifically invalid theories can have serious consequences for individuals and indeed for nations.

I now return to our country at the present time. There is plenty of evidence that a dangerous scientific ignorance is well entrenched in the opposition. This ignorance has been frequently shown by the Leader of the Opposition, and here I will quote from the public record. In regard to a question about how carbon dioxide emissions are calculated, he said:

It's actually pretty hard to do this because carbon dioxide is invisible and it's weightless and you can't smell it.

On the John Laws show, he said:

See, one of the things that people haven't quite twigged to is that carbon dioxide is invisible, it's weightless and it's odourless.

Further, he said:

I mean, how are we going to police these emissions? This carbon cop is going to be an extraordinarily intrusive instrumentality, running around trying to make sure that all these businesses aren't actually emitting given that you can't actually see, smell or touch what's going on.

On another occasion, he said:

Whether carbon dioxide is quite the environmental villain that some people make it out to be is not yet proven.

And in an interview in 2009, despite all the evidence, he said:

The fact that we have had if anything cooling global temperatures over the last decade, not withstanding continued dramatic increases of carbon dioxide emissions, suggests the role of CO2 is not nearly as clear as the climate catastrophists suggest.
There is one word for the depth of ignorance exposed by these statements: extraordinary. It is extraordinary that in 2012 the leader of a major political party in a country that has a fine tradition of excellence in scientific research and education should be exposed as entirely ignorant of the science underlying one of the most important issues confronting humanity. And it is extraordinary that he should, on the basis of this proud ignorance, be prepared to attack any reasonable measures that would start to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, the pollutant that is without any significant doubt driving global warming, climate change and the acidification of the oceans. One has to ask: how much longer will the better-informed members of the opposition allow themselves to be seen as the compliant followers of a leader who plainly lacks any understanding of even the most basic details of this vital issue?

**Nation Building**

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (22:10): Earlier today I was fortunate to meet with His Excellency Mr Yuval Rotem, Ambassador of the State of Israel to Australia. The ambassador was proud to talk of his nation's transition to a position of world leader in innovation and technology, declaring that Apple are opening a technology park in Israel, their first outside of the United States. Similarly, my electorate of Bennelong incorporates Macquarie Park, known as the innovation capital of Australia, housing global giants in pharmaceuticals and technology. As we compared notes of our two countries' development, the ambassador regaled me with the story of how the Jewish homeland very nearly located in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. With the Jewish people being persecuted in Europe and searching for a safe haven, the barren north-west corner of Australia presented many opportunities for both parties, yet the idea was cut short by the outbreak of World War II.

It is a matter of history that over the next few years great atrocities were committed against the Jewish people, leading the United Nations to partition Palestine. In 1948, after much bloodshed, the state of Israel was born. There were two great obstacles for this young nation to overcome: the influx of refugees and the challenge of the desert. In response, Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, famously wrote that 'for those who make the desert bloom there is room for hundreds, thousands and even millions'. Devoid of the riches that oil provides for their neighbours, the people of Israel set about their task of building a nation. Their components were hard work, determination, imagination, innovation and applied intelligence. As more refugees arrived from other parts of the world, the values of communication and teamwork were harnessed.

We can only wonder how different things might have been if, back in 1939, the door to the Kimberleys was opened to these people. In today's Australia we have debates about asylum seekers, our capacity to take refugees, opportunities to water vast regions of Australia to feed the world, and infrastructure projects that will promote growth to unimaginable levels.

What can we learn from Israel's experience? Ben-Gurion's mantra led to communities being built throughout the desert, with transport, energy and water infrastructure linking people, towns and cities, creating jobs and boosting the economy. The human resources were found in the influx of refugees fleeing persecution with a determination to invest their blood, sweat and tears into the new home that had embraced them. In the current context, our migration debate has become mired in policy
failure. It is essential that the full suite of the Howard-era policies be implemented to stop the loss of life and allow us to initiate a broader productive conversation on building our nation. That conversation must include a way to make our own desert bloom, to take the pressure off our major cities and promote regions as world-class destinations for businesses and families.

High-speed rail between Sydney and Melbourne could allow a town like Goulburn, Yass or Shepparton to become a modern day Beersheba. Access to reliable water and energy infrastructure will assist those desert regions that we consider uninhabitable to flourish. And perhaps, just like we did with the Snowy hydro scheme 60 years ago, the crucial human capital to build these projects can come through properly processed humanitarian entrants who possess the skills and the determination to invest into their new home.

The alternative is our current reality. Our major cities are overcrowded. Sydney has the second highest property prices in the world, and the Melbourne-to-Sydney flight path is the third busiest worldwide. That patch of red dirt that so easily could have become the Jewish homeland is now mostly inhabited by fly-in fly-out workers who will soon be joined by temporary migrants on 457 visas. There must be a better way. With those same characteristics that our frontier pioneers brought to this nation 200 years ago, it is now our time to realise our full potential to invest in our land and our people and to make our desert bloom.

**Hindmarsh Electorate: Ethiopian Community**

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (22:14): It is a great privilege and honour for me to rise about an emerging community in my electorate, one that is growing at an enormous pace—and that is, the Ethiopian community. I have many members of the Ethiopian community who have decided to make their homes in the western suburbs of Adelaide, around the suburbs of Cowandilla, Richmond, Brooklyn Park, Torrensville, Mile End—and I think our area is better for it.

A few weeks ago I attended the annual church service of the Orthodox Ethiopian Church on Saint Urael Day, which is a very big day for the Ethiopian Orthodox community, and they celebrate one of the archangels, which is Saint Urael. I was very pleased to attend that day on 27 July. In attendance at the church service, and at the celebrations afterwards, was the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Jennifer Rankine and the member for Croydon, Michael Atkinson. The service was very colourful with lots of music. I have to say that the Orthodox Ethiopian church is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world. It has been in continuous reign for nearly 2,000 years, so a lot of that traditions, a lot of the ceremonies, go back thousands of years—the rituals, the traditions—and they have remained strong until this present day. So it was an absolute joy to be part of those ceremonies and part of the celebrations with the Ethiopian Orthodox church in my electorate to celebrate their annual feast day of Saint Urael.

I always feel very comfortable and welcome when I attend their services and their celebrations. As I said, there is lots of colour, music and singing, which is always followed by lots of great food and a special, very tasty home-made brew, which is similar to beer—which, after a couple of glasses, you wander off and are not sure whether you are walking in a straight line. But I was brave enough to have a couple of glasses and made sure someone drove me home that day.
The Ethiopian community is making the most of the opportunities that exist here in Australia. I have two Ethiopian restaurants in my electorate, which are both run by people who came here as refugees, sought permanent residency and are now running successful businesses in my electorate.

I would like to acknowledge Father Aba Fesha, who is the administrator of the church and the local priest of Saint Urael and Dr Tilahun Afrassa, who is the chairman of the board and the community leader as well. The Orthodox Ethiopian Church has been going for a number of years and, before they had their own building, they started meeting behind the Coptic Orthodox Church, in my electorate at Cowandilla, in their hall just behind the church. As they outgrew this, they then moved to the hall next door to the Anglican Church in Croydon. They have outgrown that church as well and have now bought their own building, through their own fundraising and through their own funds, at Ferryden Park, which is not in my electorate but services the majority of Ethiopians who live in my electorate. I wish them all the very best with this new building. It was a group of shops that has been converted into a church, and a lot of hard work and effort has been put into it by all the community to ensure that they are up and running and have their own building now and do not have to move from place to place, as they did in the past.

I would like to congratulate all of the community members who have worked, not for their own benefit but for the benefit of their community, through their church. I appreciate all the hard work that is done by so many in the Ethiopian community, in all sorts of ways. We see their volunteers who help their older citizens, volunteers who keep their church running and tidy, to make it look beautiful—especially on special days, like Saint Urael Day, when I was there, the volunteers who cook those wonderful meals—and, of course, the volunteers who made the homemade beer when I was there.

But I would like to thank all of them for the service that they give to the community. The last time I went there was when they had their opening of their brand new church. I know that they are very successful. They will be successful and I wish them all the very best. As I said, I am very honoured to represent the Ethiopian community in the electorate of Hindmarsh.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (22:20): I want to talk to the House on behalf of the people of Phillip Island in relation to four issues—two negative and two positive. In terms of the mistreatment of Phillip Islanders, there are two things that stand out. The first is that the 673 veterans of the Bass Coast Shire, who include amongst their numbers 194 war widows, had been poorly treated by the federal government. I do not think there is any other way of describing it, and I wish it were other than thus. But I have been contacted by Rod Gallagher, whom I know from the Bass Coast Veterans and Dependence Welfare Centre. He has informed me of a very worrying funding cut to the service.

The advice I have from Mr Gallagher is this: the service will be forced to close its doors, for good, in December, due to the rejection of its funding application under the Commonwealth's Building Excellence in Support and Training Program. This is known as the BEST program. The centre has relied on the funding under the BEST program for much of its last 14 years. This particular news is a terrible blow and is likely to be fatal to the Bass Coast Veterans and Dependence Welfare Centre—not good enough, Prime Minister, not acceptable, Minister for Veterans' Affairs. This is poor treatment of people who have served our
country. It is not as though numbers have dwindled, with a total of 673 in the veterans' community, including the 194 war widows. It is simply an insult to those who have served out country to be denying them the service that they need, particularly as that community ages.

The National Vietnam Veterans Museum is on Philip Island. It is an attraction to people associated with the veterans' community, and what we are seeing is that their memory, their work their service, has been shamelessly dishonoured.

So I would say this, because I am informed that there are no formal grounds for appeal. Firstly, minister, a properly funded office is vital to serve the needs of this critical and vulnerable group. Secondly, I have written to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs seeking an urgent personal review of this decision, even though the formal grounds are not there. It is simply not acceptable, and we will continue to campaign until the funding is reinstated.

This brings me to the issue of the health hub, the second negative issue. We all know that Warley Hospital was allowed to fail under the current government after having been given support under the previous government. A positive community proposal in terms of the health hub was put forward through Bass Coast community care. It is, in my view, an outstanding proposal. We, as an opposition, have offered funds if elected. But most significantly the government had a fully supported proposal which had state support, local support and community support and for which positive reviews had been given from within the health ministry. It has been knocked back by the Minister for Health. Again, that is unacceptable. I am going to write to the health minister to seek a review of this decision. We simply cannot have the federal government turning its back on Phillip Island.

Fortunately, the spirit on the island is strong. One of the most positive things is the community response to the tragedy faced by Beau Vernon. Beau was a Bass Coast community footballer. He was tragically injured two months ago in a local football match. He is now a quadriplegic, I am sorry to say. To date the community has organised two fundraisers in support of Beau and his family. Last Sunday was a community bring-and-buy auction held at the Phillip Island Adventure Resort. And next Monday, 27 August, there will be a sportsmen's night and auction at the San Remo Recreation Centre. All 450 tickets have been sold. Thirteen local businesses have contributed $1,000. Local organisations such as Lions and Rotary are making donations. Miley Cyrus and Liam Hemsworth, her boyfriend, have given support. So it is true community spirit in action, and I would commend everybody so far and urge additional support for Beau going forwards.

This brings me to the final positive development. It was a real thrill for me and my family to help in the opening of the extension of Pannys Amazing World of Chocolate. For my three-year-old and seven-year-old I think it was the highlight of my parliamentary career. Thank you to Panny. Congratulations to you and your family.

(Time expired)

Goods and Services Tax

Mr LYONS (Bass) (22:25): I rise today to talk about a very serious issue for my home state of Tasmania. There is a big threat heading to my electorate of Bass at the weekend. A big, dark cloud is coming, and it stems from the other side of this chamber. The Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, is headed to Tasmania this weekend to meet his party faithful for their state council.
While he is there, he needs to explain to the people of Tasmania why he is planning to rip hundreds of millions of dollars from the Tasmanian economy. He needs to explain to the Tasmanian people why he has now stated on two occasions that he feels the current GST distribution method is unfair and needs to be reviewed. He has advocating a per capita arrangement which will have a devastating effect on my state. He said he had 'long been sympathetic' to Premier Colin Barnett on this issue, who is one of the biggest proponents of a change. He went on to say:

This is the unified position of the Coalition premiers. I think it makes a lot of sense.

Well, it does not make one ounce of sense to me. The proposed change would boost revenues for the biggest states—Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland—but slash funding to Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

Let me tell you, there are many concerned teachers, nurses, police and doctors in my electorate who are worried about their jobs and worried about the future of our state. You cannot blame them. We have seen the devastating effects of a Liberal government on the public service jobs recently. Just look at Queensland. It is about time the Leader of the Opposition realised Australia is a nation and stopped pitting state against state. He has a different tune for every crowd. Our Federation has survived 111 years. The notion of a fair go is being put in danger by this Leader of the Opposition and his dangerous pandering to his Liberal mates in the rich resource states.

Joe Lyons, as conservative Prime Minister, introduced a fair go via the Grants Commission in 1933. He would be turning in his grave with this Leader of the Opposition. His $630 million cut to Tasmania's share of GST revenue would devastate my state's economy. The state government has already been forced to consider school closures and cuts to health services. Imagine what this Liberal attack on GST revenue would do to the smaller states. Our state's unemployment rate is also already higher than the national average, and his plan would put many more jobs in danger, not to mention the devastating flow-on effect to the community.

The Leader of the Opposition, like his state Tasmanian colleagues, talk our state down at every opportunity. They are blind to some of the great projects and innovations that are happening in Tasmania, which I have highlighted in this chamber on a regular basis. Australia's economy does have patchwork pressures and, though our economic fundamentals are strong, there are pressures on some industries and some regions. Throughout our history the fortunes of towns, cities and states have shifted with the economic winds of the day. But there is one constant: the benefits of a united Australia to ensure a fair go for all Australians.

What the people of Tasmania will soon realise is that the Liberal Party are a threat to Tasmanian jobs in health care, education and police. They are a threat to Tasmanian families, and it is a threat we cannot afford. Tasmanians should be extremely concerned about this Leader of the Opposition breezing in and failing to reassure Tasmanians that he would not rip $600 million each year out of our state's economy, and they will hold him to account. The fact is that he is happy to tell his West Australian Liberal colleagues what they want to hear only to ignore the real fears of Tasmanians. Where are the member for Warringah's allegiances?

It is now up to Tasmanian Liberals, like Mr Hodgman and Senator Abetz, to stand up for Tasmania and fight for horizontal fiscal equalisation. It is my understanding that the
member for Franklin has written to Senator Abetz on this issue, in July, and he did not even bother to respond. Michelle O'Byrne, the Tasmanian Minister for Health, has said the combined Liberal cuts would mean the combined loss of 800 doctors, 3,000 nurses, 500 allied health professionals and over 100 child protection staff in Tasmania. The member for Warringah has not had an in-depth interview for some years, protected by minders and lazy journalists or Tory-protecting editors. I wonder if they will get a chance this weekend—(Time expired)

House adjourned at 22:30

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Albanese to present a bill for an act to amend the law relating to Aviation, and for related purposes (Aviation Legislation Amendment (Liability and Insurance) Bill 2012).

Mr Wilkie to present a Bill for an Act to regulate the export of live animals for slaughter, and for related purposes. (Livestock Export (Animal Welfare Conditions) Bill 2012).

Mr Wilkie to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Banking Act 1959, and for related purposes. (Banking Amendment (Banking Code of Conduct) Bill 2012).

Mr Bandt to move—

That this House:

(1) resolves to establish a new Australian sovereign wealth fund; and

(2) requires the Treasurer to present to the House, no later than 29 March 2013, a report from the Productivity Commission detailing options as to:

(a) how the fund should be established;
(b) the fund's revenue and expenditure;
(c) the fund's objects and governance structures; and
(d) any other relevant matters.

Mr Hayes to move—

That this House:

(1) observes National Police Remembrance Day on 29 September;

(2) acknowledges the pivotal role police play in our community and the great deal of sacrifice and risk that come with the job;

(3) honours the lives and memories of the many fine men and women who have had their lives tragically cut short in the execution of their duties, in particular, Senior Constable David James Rixon, who was shot and killed in Tamworth on 2 March 2012;

(4) pays tribute to the families and friends of police officers that have been killed in the line of duty throughout our nation's history, and acknowledges the good work of Police Legacy, who look after the families of the fallen; and

(5) affirms its support for the nation's 56,000 police officers and praises them for their courage, commitment and dedication in protecting our community.

Ms Hall to move—

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Stroke Awareness Week is 10 to 16 September 2012; and

(b) the focus of National Stroke Week in 2012 is to encourage people to understand their stroke risk;

(2) notes with concern that:

(a) stroke remains the second biggest killer and a leading cause of disability in Australia;

(b) one in six people will suffer a stroke in their lifetime; and

(c) around 60,000 people will suffer new or recurrent strokes this year;

(3) recognises that:

(a) the risk of stroke is influenced by a number of factors beyond our control, including age, gender and family history;

(b) there are many lifestyle risk factors that are within our control and with this knowledge we can act to reduce our risk of stroke; and
(c) lifestyle risk factors which can be controlled include:

(i) high blood pressure;
(ii) high cholesterol;
(iii) smoking cigarettes;
(iv) poor diet and lack of exercise;
(v) being overweight; and
(vi) drinking too much alcohol;

(4) understands:

(a) that every Australian needs to know their stroke risk; and

(b) lifestyle changes can have a significant impact in reducing a person's risk of stroke;

(5) acknowledges the:

(a) important role of families and carers of stroke victims; and

(b) valuable work of the National Stroke Foundation; and

(6) asks all Members to raise awareness of stroke risk and the preventative actions that people can take to help reduce their risk of stroke.

**Mr Adams** to move—

That this House recognises that:

(1) the Australian Fisheries Management Authority is the best manager of wild fisheries in the world;

(2) Australia has not experienced the bad fishing practices of the North Atlantic and North Sea fisheries and fisheries in other parts of the world, nor suffered from no or poor regulations as experienced by African fisheries;

(3) Australian fisheries science continues to grow and improve;

(4) there is a need to continue to train marine scientists and provide research funds for universities to meet the future needs of Australian fisheries;

(5) fishing quotas and harvesting management regulations are best done by the present process which is at arm's length to Government;

(6) science needs to be at the base of all decision making processes;

(7) there is a need to consider recording the catch from recreational fisheries in Australian State and Commonwealth waters to add to the data of whole fishing catch in this country; and

(8) the Government has set up a citizen catch database, by which unknown species fished from local areas can be formally identified and added to knowledge of fisheries and the changing conditions, through such events as climate change or current movements.

**Mr Bandt** to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to competition and consumers, and for other purposes. (Competition and Consumer Amendment (Australian Food Labelling) Bill 2012).
Tuesday, 21 August 2012

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D’Ath) took the chair at 15:59.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Longman Electorate

WYATT ROY (Longman) (15:59): Today marks two years since the people of my community entrusted me to be their federal member of parliament. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the good people of my electorate for the faith they placed in me two years ago today. It has been a busy two years, and it has been an honour to serve the hardworking locals of my community.

I cannot think of a better way to celebrate this milestone with my community than to host local students in parliament today. Today I would like to officially welcome the grade 7 students from St Michaels College in Caboolture to Canberra and to the Australian parliament. This group of eager young minds have come on their annual school trip to experience firsthand what happens in our capital. Today I met with the students before their Parliamentary Education Office tour and was able to take them on an unofficial Longman tour of parliament with a visit to my parliamentary office. Students were able to inspect my office, sit at my desk and understand what it is like to be here in this place. I wish the students all the best for the rest of their trip in Canberra. I understand that they have been visiting some great places, including the Australian War Memorial, Questacon and the AIS.

The visit to parliament today follows my recent trip to St Michaels College to chat with students about democracy and parliament as part of their civics education in the school curriculum. Today, I got the chance to show them where it all happens. Not only did the students have the chance to learn about the function of parliament but they also visited the public galleries here and in the Senate. Today the students were able to stay and watch question time from the gallery, which I am sure they found very interesting.

I would also like to welcome students from Tullawong State School, who last week came down for a visit to Canberra. It was great to see Tullawong students representing Longman and looking their best in their school uniforms. There were some interesting characters in this group of students and, as can be expected, there were some great questions put to me. Students were curious to know where parliamentarians had lunch and what it means when the bells ring in parliament—questions which show that these young people were very interested in learning about our nation's great democratic tradition.

Our nation is one with a great history, one that should be celebrated and understood. It is very important that our young people have every opportunity to learn about what we have achieved as a country so that they can contribute to our future and uphold Australia’s great democratic tradition. It was great to see some local leaders from my community, representing what I think is a great community, here in Canberra. I look forward to getting back home to talk further with them about democracy.

Hunter Electorate: Coal Transport

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (16:02): I am eternally grateful to the government for providing the equity required to allow the Australian Rail Track Corporation to invest $1.2 billion in the upgrade of the coal chain going to Newcastle. It
means getting more coal to the Port of Newcastle more quickly and more efficiently. That is fantastic news for the Hunter's economy.

But with any of these big projects come problems. This means, of course, more trains going past more suburbs on a more regular basis—more noise, more vibration and, of course, more coal dust. I want to support those who are making calls to have those wagons covered so that dust does not emit from those wagons, polluting the environment, causing respiratory problems in the valley and making a mess of nearby homes, which regularly need to be washed down.

But, of course, during the construction phase there are other problems, and today I want to make another appeal to the ARTC to start doing the right thing by a number of residents in my electorate who are adversely affected by that construction: people in Station Lane in Lochinvar, people in Winders Lane in Lochinvar and—not so much with the construction—and people living in Elizabeth Street in Telarah, who live an arm's length from the railway track. I know they have been there a long time, but once upon a time they suffered a couple of transport trains a day and three or four coal trains and today it is coal train after coal train after coal train, and they last for up to eight minutes as they pass by, causing noise, dust and vibration problems.

These residents understand progress and they support this injection into our local economy; they just want a noise barrier. It would only be a few hundred thousand dollars. What does the ARTC say? They say they are not doing anything down south in Telarah; all the track work is further up the chain.

Of course that is nonsense, Madam Deputy Speaker. The trains are only becoming more numerous, more noisy. They are running on a more regular basis because the work further up the track is allowing more trains to be sent down through Telarah. I make a very strong appeal to the ARTC today to forget all the technical rules, to move in and to provide those often elderly people in the suburb of Telarah a noise barrier so they can live their lives in some comfort without having to put up with the noise and vibration coming from that nearby train track.

Regional Australia: Spatial Accounting

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (16:05): For some reason, some still refer to the members for Lyne and New England as Independents—joke! During the member for Lyne's painful speech, Mr Oakeshott boldly proclaimed: We believe in the sunshine test.

It is this hollow promise of transparency that I am most disappointed about.

In April this year I wrote to Mr Oakeshott to inquire about one of the agreements between the country Independents and the Labor government. I inquired about a promise to implement what is called 'spatial accounting', a tool that could be used to track Commonwealth expenditure in regional areas. The response received from Mr Oakeshott was to refer my letter to the Prime Minister. This palming-off of responsibility is made even more ridiculous by the fact that the 'spatial mapping pledge' is found in the agreement of the subsection titled 'accountability'. So much for that lofty ideal!

Among the feel-good platitudes and motherhood statements in Mr Oakeshott's agreement was a promise to 'turbo-charge regional Australia'. As it turns out, there were only two
regional electorates that were turbocharged—Lyne and New England. What a slap in the face for the voters living in the other regional electorates across Australia!

I recently did a comparison between the Commonwealth expenditure in my electorate of Canning and New England, and can I say that the results are startling. I actually published an article in the *West Australian* newspaper, called 'A funding tale of two cities'. As for the concept of detailing expenditure in regional areas, this is one promise that will clearly not be met as to do so would expose the blatant pork-barrelling that occurs to keep the so-called country Independents as pawns of this totally inept Labor administration.

This spatial accounting mechanism is something that I believe is certainly needed, because it would then expose the misdiagnosis of what is going on. We continually try to track what Commonwealth programs are being used and money spent in each electorate. Mr Oakeshott elevated himself to a household name during the agonisingly laborious 17-minute speech in September 2010. As Patrick Carlyon from the *Herald Sun* described it at the time:

Give him a beard and a snarl, and Oakeshott might have been Kyle Sandilands. Throw him a cravat and he might have been masquerading as Matt Preston.

Forget 15 minutes of fame. If the election result was a (belated) triumph of democracy, as we kept being told, it was also a celebration in shenanigans. So this rainbow coalition has just been an experiment and unless this government comes good on its spatial accounting for the regional areas we will not know what has been spent in each electorate, and it is subject itself to the pork-barrelling that is going on in those two electorates today.

**Lebanon**

**Cyprus**

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (16:08): I recently visited Lebanon and Cyprus, where I held meetings with senior government officials to discuss transport infrastructure and joint business opportunities, and to further improve what are very good bilateral relations between Australia and Lebanon and Cyprus.

My visit to Lebanon was the first by an Australian government minister since 2001 and followed the first-ever visit of a Lebanese President to Australia in April this year. Australia and Lebanon share a warm and productive bilateral relationship that is underpinned by strong community and people-to-people links. There are approximately 350,000 Australians of Lebanese descent that have made a significant contribution to Australian society in all walks of life.

In my meetings with President Michel Sleiman, Prime Minister Najib Miqati, and Speaker of the Parliament, Nabih Berri, I was given an update on the economic, social and political challenges facing the Lebanese people. In these meetings we discussed further strengthening two-way economic trade in cooperation between our nations. I also met and was hosted by the Lebanese Minister for Public Works, Mr Ghazi Aridi, who welcomed me on my arrival and hosted a lunch with other business community leaders, and the Minister of Energy and Water, Gebran Bassil, to discuss infrastructure issues. This is the second time this year that I have met with Minister Aridi and we committed to strengthening maritime search and rescue operations at the Port of Tripoli, with AMSA to provide their technical expertise.
Australia and Cyprus also share a close and longstanding relationship. There are over 80,000 Cypriot-born migrants and their families in Australia, making it the second largest Cypriot community outside Cyprus. My visit to Cyprus was the second by an Australian government minister since 2007 and is my second visit to Cyprus since I entered parliament.

Australian peacekeepers have been in Cyprus since 1964. I had the honour of meeting with the men and women of the Australian Federal Police who are part of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus. I was given a tour of the buffer zone by the commander of our force, Superintendent Peter Bond. Our presence in Cyprus is greatly appreciated, and our men and women are covering themselves with distinction. As a long-term advocate of justice for Cyprus, I believe it is important that Australia retain our presence as part of the UN peacekeeping efforts.

During my visit I also met with the Minister of Communications and Works, Efthemios Florentzou; the Secretary-General of AKEL, Andros Kyprianou; the Mayor of Limassol, Mr Andreas Christou; and the Mayor of Larnaca, Mr Andreas Louroutziatis. I also had the great honour of meeting His Beatitude Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus. Larnaca is one of the biggest cities in Cyprus and has been a sister city to Marrickville since 2005. I was pleased that my visit helped to extend the friendship between our two countries. (Time expired)

### Taxation

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (16:11): Last week I received a letter from a constituent, Mr Paul Korczak-Krzeczowski, on behalf of his 10-year-old son, Aaron. In this letter, which was sent to the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, and copied to me, Mr Korczak-Krzeczowski makes an impassioned plea for a fairer tax system: one that does not penalise savings and investment and does not abolish, as this government has done, the low-income tax offset for people under the age of 18 with eligible assessable income—namely, unearned income. Specifically, his son, Aaron, was introduced to the idea of share ownership, which saw him choose some blue-chip Australian companies to buy shares in: Origin, Woolworths, Telstra, ANZ, BHP and the Commonwealth Bank. As a result of his investment, in the year 2010-11 Aaron earned $692 in share dividends, bank investment and imputation credits. His parents filed a tax return for him and, as a consequence of the low-income tax offset, his tax payable was reduced. But in the 2011-12 financial year the situation was quite different. This time he was advised that, because Aaron was under the age of 18 and because of the government's legislative changes, he was no longer eligible for the low-income tax offset and has been left with a significant tax bill. Mr Korczak-Krzeczowski rightly says in his letter to Jenny Macklin:
The Australian government has introduced a quite severe disincentive for someone under the age of 18 years to save and invest.

I will tell you why the Gillard government have done this. It is to raise nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars over the forward estimates as part of the Taxation Laws Amendment Bill (No. 4) 2011. It is because they are running up huge amounts of debt based on spending that is out of control—$145 billion of government debt, the four biggest deficits in Australia's history. They are spending $100 billion more than in the last year of the Howard government. They are lifting the debt ceiling from $75 billion to $250 billion to $350 billion. Secondly, it is because in order to feed this spending spree it is increasing taxes—20 at last count, with the
mining tax and the carbon tax. It is a figment of their imagination that they will be able to reach a surplus next year. They cannot even balance the books when they have record terms of trade.

Finally, this government has no understanding of what drives our economy: entrepreneurship, small business and investment. At the end of the day, this young man Aaron has done everything right. He has saved and banked the money that he was given for Christmas by his grandparents. He wants to invest it. The Treasurer could learn a thing or two from this young 10-year-old constituent of mine.

Adelaide Electorate: Meals on Wheels

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Employment Participation and Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare) (16:14): We come to this parliament, no matter what electorate we represent, no matter where our constituency resides, knowing that we represent communities who are supported by thousands of volunteers who work away, day in and day out, often far from the limelight and often receiving very little credit or recognition for the work that they do. The electorate of Adelaide that I have come here to represent is no different: we are fortunate to have a number of different community organisations with thousands of volunteers working day in and day out to help support our great community. I would like to highlight one of those organisations today, that being Meals on Wheels, for the hard work that they do in the Adelaide area.

In the electorate of Adelaide, that I am lucky enough to represent, we have seven different Meals on Wheels branches—one at Unley, one at Prospect, one at Norwood, one at Northfield, one at Kent Town, one at Hindmarsh and one at Enfield. I am lucky enough to have visited these branches or at times delivered meals with these branches and seen firsthand the hard work that they do and just how critical they are to supporting the elderly and the vulnerable in our community.

I would like to share with the parliament today something that I was lucky enough to be a part of when I was privileged to be with the Enfield Meals on Wheels branch as they presented the one-millionth meal that they have delivered in the community. In celebrating this achievement we made the presentation to a very valued client and volunteer, Mrs Stella Donald. I will say a couple of words about Stella and why she got to be the one-millionth recipient of a meal through Meals on Wheels in Enfield. Stella had until recently been a very special volunteer with that branch and a very active member of our community. She is loved and cherished by many. She was chosen as the recipient of the one-millionth meal because of her commitment not just to Meals on Wheels at Enfield but to our local community as a whole. She started volunteering in December 1968 and continued volunteering with Enfield Meals on Wheels for over 30 years. It was only because of a broken hip through an unfortunate accident in 2009 that Stella was no longer able to help out in the kitchen and volunteer her time, but it was fitting that she then started receiving meals on wheels. I know that the volunteers at that branch were only too happy to repay some of the hard work which Stella had done over such a long period of time.

At all of the seven branches in the electorate of Adelaide and, more broadly, in all of the Meals on Wheels branches across Australia, there are amazing volunteers who are working in administration and in the kitchens, who are delivering meals and who are talking to and counselling some of the most vulnerable members of our community through their personal
contact as Meals on Wheels deliverers each and every day. I would like to thank them all.

(Time expired)

**Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**

Dr STONE (Murray) (16:17): I want to applaud the Attorney-General for her success in recently being able to implement a policy to put plain packaging on cigarettes. I do not think there are many thinking Australians who are not aware of the problems and costs of disease if you are a heavy smoker or, indeed, if you inhale secondary smoke. But there is another lawful drug which causes even greater health problems and has even more expensive impacts—whether you are talking about domestic violence, accidents at work or on the road or just the general diseases associated with its consumption—and that is alcohol. So I am asking this government to now turn its mind to the labelling of alcohol.

I am concerned in particular about the lack of understanding by many Australians about foetal alcohol spectrum disorder or foetal alcohol syndrome. This is characterised by a group of physical abnormalities of the face, reduced size of newborns and/or poor growth after birth, and problems of behaviour and cognition due to structural and/or functional abnormalities of the central nervous system which come when a child is born to mothers who consume quantities of alcohol during their pregnancy and at key times. We have this problem of FASD or FAS in our society. Unfortunately, as we know from the statistics, we have a number of women who are not informed or who are not aware that consuming alcohol when they are pregnant or when they are breastfeeding is a serious danger.

The majority of Australians—61 per cent, according to recent national data—believe that health information labels should be placed on alcohol products. This support for health information labels on alcohol has been stable between 2011 and 2012, with 61 per cent believing that labels should be placed on alcohol products, 24 per cent thinking they should not and another 14 per cent unsure. If I think the time has come when we have to say that, while we have given the alcohol industry time off and they do not have to have labelling mandated at this stage, we need to be moving very quickly towards a mandated stage, with a mandated symbol and text that is government regulated and applied consistently for all alcohol products. These should be applied to the front of the product, with specified sizing.

This should be implemented as part of a comprehensive public education campaign that elaborates on the messages and the symbol, so no-one in the future can say, 'My child was born permanently brain damaged, but I didn't know'; 'I wasn't aware'; 'I didn't understand that the binge drinking I did as a teenager was a problem'; 'I didn't know that, although I was an alcoholic'—a problem that we acknowledge is beyond the mother's ability to immediately change; or 'But I wasn't helped during my pregnancy to have my baby born unharmed.' We have to take more responsibility in our society. We do have a very strong drinking culture but we also have to be responsible for those as yet unborn and those born with this terrible disability.

**Taxation**

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Status of Women and Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development) (16:20): I want to talk today about GST. As many people in this place know, I am the member for Franklin and a very loyal Tasmanian indeed. Tasmanians are feeling a little bit under attack
from coalition state governments in relation to GST and, in particular, from comments made on the record over time by Premier Barnett in Western Australia and from other Liberal state premiers who continually attack Tasmania in terms of our GST and Tasmania's perceived reliance on GST.

It would appear that they have got a bit of support from Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey—the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer. In fact, Tony Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, has said that he thinks that the proposal put up by the Liberal states that GST revenue should be distributed in a per capita arrangement ought to be very seriously considered by the government. I want to put on the record what this would mean for my home state of Tasmania. The estimates are that it would mean a cut of between $600 million and $700 million from Tasmania's state budget each and every year under a coalition government, should they implement this policy. That is equivalent to a combined 800 doctors, 3,000 nurses, 500 allied health professionals and more than 100 child protection staff all put together. This is an outrageous attack on Tasmania from the Liberal states and from the Leader of the Opposition. The shadow Treasurer, Joe Hockey, has said that Premier Barnett's attempt to rob smaller states of GST revenue is 'reasonable'.

We know that Tasmania in the past has had some issues, but we have had a decade of growth. There are many opportunities in Tasmania. As a loyal Tasmanian, I am sick of people continually criticising the state of Tasmania and the people of Tasmania. Just last weekend, again, in South Australia the Leader of the Opposition said that South Australia had an opportunity to become like Western Australia or like Tasmania. Those are the two choices; they are at a crossroads. It appears that the opposition and the coalition have indeed given up on Tasmanians, and Tasmanians are very concerned about this. They are concerned about what their future might be under a coalition government should one ever actually be elected.

We do have a review into GST distribution in Australia at the moment, and what I would like to see is for people to commit to horizontal fiscal equalisation. That is about giving the smaller states which are weaker at any particular given point in time—as, of course, Western Australia were for most of the time that they have been a member of the Federation—the capacity to provide similar levels of services, no matter their infrastructure, to their citizens. It is the Australian ethos of a fair go that all Tasmanians are entitled to and deserve.

**Local Government**

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (16:23): I rise this afternoon to talk about the impact of the forced amalgamations of local councils which were forced on Queensland by the previous Labor government. I welcome a change of government—and not only a change of government but a sweeping change of government in Queensland. I think the Labor Party ended up with six seats out of an 89-seat parliament, which demonstrates just how overwhelming the need for change and the will of the people was expressed at the last state election.

Local councils were going through a process in Queensland called Size, Shape and Sustainability. They were voluntarily going through a process, looking at how they could be more sustainable, looking at the historic shape of some of the local councils. If you look at them today you would not have drawn the boundaries that way, but they were done over 100 years ago. But they were just forced in together. Many of these councils, so often not like with like, small communities with larger communities, and I have several of these in my electorate,
where the communities are now discussing as a result of the LNP policy, the option to de-amalgamate should their communities vote that way.

The LNP is giving these communities this opportunity to de-amalgamate. It will be a cost to them, but I know these communities—they are resilient, and they know what has happened to their communities since the forced amalgamation. They have lost services and they have lost the ability to have 'local' back in the local council area because all of those decisions have almost been taken right away, further away from where you need to be making those local decisions and providing the service in having access to local council services. Three of them are Boorina Shire, based on Mitchell, Waroo Shire, based on Surat and Aramac Shire, obviously based on Aramac up in the north-west of my electorate.

I got a report the other day from people in the Maranoa Regional Council, which includes the former Waroo and former Booringa councils. People out on the land now are telling me that they have not seen a council grader on their road—they are mainly dirt roads or formed-up gravel roads—since 2010. They are getting reports that livestock carriers will not go into these properties because of the state of the roads. I got a report from the council, and they said, 'It was 2010 we were out there the last time.' Well, under the old regime, under the councils of the past, they would have been there at least every 12 months, forming up the roads and keeping them in shape. But the fact of the matter is that this Maranoa Regional Council has 7,000 kilometres of roads. It is just an impossible task for them, and they have taken the local out of local government.

The other one that they want to do is to move the Maranoa Retirement Village and all its people to Roma. That would have just gutted their aged care facility. (Time expired)

Wyndham, Mr Cyril

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (16:27): I rise to pay tribute to a distinguished former national secretary of the ALP, Mr Cyril Wyndham, who died recently aged 82. He died on 2 July this year, at Newcastle.

Cyril was born in London, where his father was a compositor and a staunch unionist. Cyril grew up steeped in the ideals of the Labour movement. At the age of 17, shortly after the close of the Second World War, he contacted the headquarters of the British Labour Party, and his earnest zeal must have impressed them, because they gave him a job. He continued working there for a decade until he was persuaded by Doc Evatt to come to Australia and work for our party, the Labor Party. Cyril became Evatt's press secretary, and later Arthur Calwell's press secretary. Cyril thought he might spend a couple of years in Australia before returning to England. In fact, he found he liked Australia, he met and married Nola and ended up staying here. In 1961 he became the secretary of the Victorian branch of the ALP, and his industry and effectiveness in that role had much to do with his appointment in 1963 as the Labor Party's first full-time paid national secretary. Previous occupants of the position had been concurrently secretary of a state branch.

Cyril was short, taut, intense and highly capable. He was known variously as the Cockney Sparrow, the Mighty Atom and the Cerebral Cyril. His dedication was exceptional. He had
minimal support staff. He had once said, 'The biggest problem in a job like this one is whether
one is doing enough, because there is so much to be done'.

In 1964 the ALP federal executive authorised Cyril to review the party's national structure,
and he produced an insightful, visionary report. The Wyndham plan recommended the
enlargement and reconstruction of both the federal conference and the federal executive, and
advocated various measures to improve the party's branch membership, internal coordination,
financial strength and appeal to younger Australians—a familiar story.

Regrettably, only some of these measures were implemented—again, a familiar story.
Wyndham's proposals to increase party democracy were not heeded. The ALP would be a
stronger party today if the Wyndham plan had been more fully implemented at that time.
Cyril ended his stint as federal secretary in 1969 after six gruelling, tumultuous years of Labor
opposition dominated by the Vietnam War, ALP leadership tensions, the faceless men, the
state aid for schools debate and numerous other controversies. In the end he felt,
understandably, ground down by it all and he decided to withdraw from active involvement in
politics. But he had been a bridge from the Labor of Evatt and Calwell to the hope of Labor
under Whitlam. In many ways, the Wyndham plan and Gough Whitlam's program sat
comfortably together.

Cyril spent his more recent years living quietly with Nola at Newcastle, where he followed
politics closely, but continued to stay out of the limelight, with very rare exceptions. I last
spoke to Cyril just a few months ago. He was bright, alert and keen to help a young student on
a PhD project on party organisation. Cyril Wyndham is not widely known
these days, but he
made a magnificent contribution to the Australian Labor Party, and through our party, to our
nation. I thank him, I salute him and I express my condolences to Nola. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D'Ath): Order! In accordance with standing order 193
the time for constituency statements has concluded.

BILLS

Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People
Trafficking) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (16:30): Continuing my speech from last night on this bill, the
Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking)
Bill 2012, I note that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court explicitly
recognises trafficking in persons as enslavement, which is considered a crime against
humanity. Sex trafficking is a modern form of slavery which, together with the related issues
surrounding abuse of migrant workers, is a form of oppression that is rampant throughout the
world, even here in Australia. As the 2010 US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons
Report notes:

Australia is a source and destination country for women subjected to trafficking in persons,
specifically exploitation in forced prostitution, and, to a lesser extent, women and men in forced labor
and children in commercial sexual exploitation.

FEDERATION CHAMBER
It is now well established that governments are not absolved of responsibility simply because acts violating human rights are committed by persons other than state officials. Australia has both the opportunity and responsibility to work against the global trafficking scourge through our cooperation with international intelligence and law enforcement agencies, through our aid programs and through our advocacy and support of effective international agreements.

Australia ratified the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime in 2004 and its supplementary protocol on trafficking in persons in 2005. Australia's anti-people-trafficking strategy was established in 2003, with initial funding of $20 million over four years. In the Labor government budget of 2007-08, a further $38.3 million was added over four years, with $26 million for new measures. Overall, Australia's anti-trafficking strategy addresses the full trafficking cycle from recruitment to reintegration, including the critical areas of prevention, detention, investigation, prosecution and victim support. Key measures include the creation of a new AFP unit called the Transnational Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Team; a national policing strategy to combat trafficking in women for sexual servitude; and senior migration officer compliance positions in Thailand, China and the Philippines to help prevent trafficking at its source.

Australia takes a collaborative approach to working with other countries through forums such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, which it co-chairs with Indonesia. Australia also supports a number of aid projects in the Asia region, including the Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking Project, which can be found on the AusAID website.

In 2009 the government implemented changes to the Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program and the People Trafficking Visa Framework to assist victims of trafficking through more flexible visa arrangements for suspected victims of trafficking and through the provision of significant victim support measures. It also released guidelines for NGOs working with trafficking victims. The Attorney-General's Department chairs an interdepartmental committee comprising a number of government agencies that are responsible for coordinating the government's efforts to combat people trafficking.

At the fourth National Roundtable on People Trafficking, held in November 2011, the government released the Anti-Human Trafficking Community Resource, a comprehensive reference guide to all government agencies, NGOs, unions and industry groups which have a role to play in the fight against trafficking. It was at that roundtable that the government released the draft form of the legislation that we are debating here today. Of course, it is through the government's recalibrated and expanded foreign aid program that we have also provided direct funding for the fight against trafficking, including through a further $1.2 million for the Red Cross's support for trafficked people program, announced in March.

These are just some of the laws and agreements and funding initiatives that the Australian government has put in place in the last five years to fight trafficking and to support the victims of trafficking. I pay tribute to the work of the minister and the government in this area, to the fantastic Australian Federal Police team working on this issue and to the NGOs who work tirelessly with and for trafficking victims, including ACRATH, Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, with whom I met today and who have been very diligent in raising awareness among parliamentarians and the community; Anti-Slavery Australia; the Red Cross; the Salvation Army; Project Respect; and Scarlet Alliance.
Australia was commended on many of the measures it has taken by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2010, but the committee also made a number of recommendations to Australia for further action on trafficking, including that it adopt a human rights framework in its revised action plan, that it improve coordination among relevant government agencies, that it undertake a formal review on the return and reintegration of trafficking victims and develop guidelines for police and others, and that it review the provision of accommodation for trafficked women in Australia and the provision of compensation for victims.

During her November 2011 mission to Australia, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Dr Ngozi Ezeilo, noted that Australia has demonstrated strong leadership in combating trafficking in persons regionally and domestically, but she also highlighted the need for Australia to offer support to victims as a human right rather than because of their willingness and ability to participate in the criminal justice processes. She urged that greater attention be given to victims' rights to housing and English language classes, that Australia ratify without delay the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the ILO convention 189 of 2011 concerning decent work for domestic families, and that a compensation scheme be established for victims of trafficking.

This bill will increase our capacity to better support and protect victims and we will improve the availability of reparation orders to individual victims of Commonwealth offences, including slavery and people trafficking. I am confident given our track record that the government is continuing to consider and progress our efforts as a nation on the matter of combating trafficking and assisting the victims of trafficking.

In the context of this legislation, I also want to draw attention to the fact that at the end of last year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, held in Perth, there was a resolution calling for a concerted effort from member countries to address the problem of forced marriage. I note that this bill is a key part of Australia's response in meeting the purpose and spirit of that resolution and note the minister's comments in her second reading speech on the bill:

As Australia's first female Attorney-General, I am proud to be introducing legislation which makes forcing someone into a marriage illegal.

The minister also noted:

While the majority of identified victims in Australia have been women trafficked for the purposes of exploitation in the sex industry, law enforcement agencies are increasingly identifying both men and women who have been subjected to exploitation in a range of other industry sectors and … environments.

Thus the bill covers issues of forced labour and it increases penalties for existing debt bondage offences.

The bill also creates a stand-alone offence of organ trafficking, a heinous crime that was going on when I worked in Kosovo for the UN but has only come to public awareness in this country relatively recently. I note that the Human Rights Subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, of which I am a member, is currently undertaking an inquiry into slavery, slavery-like conditions and people trafficking. I look
forward to the outcomes of that inquiry, which will, I am confident, inform the work of the
government in this vital area.

I will conclude by again saying that this is very welcome legislation. It continues the work
of this Labor government in steadily strengthening our domestic legal framework and our
regional cooperation efforts in line with best international practice.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management)
(16:38): I would like to thank the member for Fremantle and all of the speakers on this bill. It
is an important piece of legislation and I think it is a measure of the interest in the House and
in the community generally that across the political spectrum people have welcomed this
change.

As part of my summing-up of the debate, might I also provide an addendum to the
explanatory memorandum that I understand I should provide to the chamber at this point. By
way of summing up, I want to make sure that all members who have spoken are clear that the
government's commitment to doing everything it can to combat slavery and people trafficking
in all its forms is unwavering. Slavery, slavery-like practices and people trafficking are
insidious crimes that fundamentally violate the human rights and, indeed, the very dignity of
victims. These practices have no place in Australia, and that is why we have acted to ensure
that they cannot continue.

The government is committed to protecting the most vulnerable in our society, and, of
course, the victims of these unacceptable practices are amongst them. The government
introduced the new offences in this bill because we believe it is important to protect those
who are not always able to stand up for themselves.

The young woman forced into a marriage she does not want but is too afraid to resist for
fear of what might happen to her or her family; the men and women forced to work under
inexcusable conditions who have been deceived, threatened or coerced into thinking that they
have no other option; the people brought into this country to have their organs removed
without their consent—we want these people to know that crimes against them will not go
unpunished. This bill is both a statement that these practices are wrong and a tool to ensure
that those responsible cannot prey on the vulnerable with impunity.

While we are fortunate that the number of people identified as victims of slavery and
trafficking in Australia remains low, just one person affected is too many. It is important to
ensure that we have laws in place so that these offences can be investigated and prosecuted.
Since the introduction of the existing offences in the Criminal Code, the Commonwealth has
prosecuted a range of people-trafficking and slavery offences, but we need to make sure that
these offences are relevant and responsive to the changing nature of this sort of criminal
conduct. With this bill we are seeking to expand existing definitions to cover a broad
spectrum of exploitative conduct and to strengthen the current law to ensure that those who
commit these crimes cannot escape prosecution. While current offences focus on sexual
servitude, this bill recognises that people are being exploited in a number of industries and it
seeks to extend the protection of the law to those people as well.

We also want to, as far as possible, prevent these crimes from happening by putting in
place significant penalties that deter offenders and create a hostile environment in this country
for these practices. To this end, in addition to the new offences which have substantial
penalties attached, and which many members spoke of, we have also increased penalties for existing offences such as debt bondage.

Following the debate yesterday and today, as I said, I was pleased to see that there was broad support for this important bill. I want to address some of the specific comments made by honourable members briefly. The member for Stirling suggested in his speech that the offence of forced labour might be drafted too broadly. This offence, though, has been developed to ensure the widest range of these grave abuses of human rights is effectively criminalised. The forced labour offence does not apply in circumstances that arise from standard relationships between employees and employers, including industrial disputes. The new offence of forced labour targets abhorrent and serious exploitative practices that arise as a result of threatening, deceptive or coercive conduct—something that I am sure this House would want to support.

The members for Fowler, Macquarie, Greenway, Melbourne Ports and, indeed, Fremantle noted the key role played by non-government organisations in combating people-trafficking and assisting victims. I would like to echo these comments, and thank the large number of NGOs that have contributed to the developing of this bill. The comments and assistance provided by NGOs, particularly during the formal consultations on the legislation, have been invaluable. Indeed, some of their work is also reflected in the addendum that I tabled today in this chamber.

The members for Stirling, Hughes and Cowan noted that the government should consider the justification for using strict liability in the offence of being a party to a forced marriage. Strict liability only applies to one element of the offence of being a party to a forced marriage. That element is that the person charged with the offence was not themselves a victim of the forced marriage. This means the prosecution must prove that the person charged was the non-victim party but does not need to prove any fault element for this physical element of the offence. The prosecution would still be required to prove that the person charged intended to be a party to the marriage and was reckless about whether it was a forced marriage. It is a defence if that person charged has a reasonable excuse for being party to the forced marriage.

The government looks forward to the report of the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on this bill and will of course carefully consider any recommendations made by the committee. The Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 will ensure that our laws criminalising slavery, slavery-like practices and people-trafficking are as robust and effective as possible and in turn ensure that the government is doing all that it can to combat these crimes while protecting the victims.

Again I would like to thank all of the speakers who contributed passionately to this debate. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.
Mr HARTSUYSKER (Cowper) (16:45): I had the privilege to attend the official welcome home ceremony for our Olympians in Sydney on Wednesday morning. It was certainly a very proud moment to watch the Qantas jumbo jet pull into the hangar in Mascot, painted with a giant boxing kangaroo. Australia's team at the London games has done our nation proud.

Two-hundred and four nations sent more than 10,000 athletes to the 30th Olympic Games in London. The Olympics are truly a global phenomenon. Because of this, the Olympics are the pinnacle of sporting success. Winning an Olympic medal is the ultimate career achievement for an athlete. I recently hosted a visit from the Leader of the Opposition in Coffs Harbour whilst the games were in progress. During his visit, we had the opportunity to speak with John Monckton of Nambucca Heads. John won a silver medal in the 100-metre backstroke at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. As he showed his silver medal to the opposition leader, it was very clear that John is still immensely proud of what he achieved as an Olympian in Melbourne all those decades ago.

Unfortunately, the nature of Olympic competition is such that not every athlete at the games can win a medal. But in my view, simply being selected for the Australian Olympic team is an extraordinary achievement and, indeed, ranks you as a champion. The founder of the modern Olympic movement, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, was not so much interested in results as he was in participation. His view of sport is expressed through the Olympic creed:

The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.

Australians know how much work and determination is required to reach the Olympics and to win a gold medal. As a result, gold medallists from past Olympics are still recognised and respected for their victories. Athletes like Marjorie Jackson, Dawn Fraser and the late Murray Rose were instantly turned into household names thanks to their Olympic gold medals. Australian gold medallists from the London Olympics will be no different. A month ago, Tom Slingsby could have walked down the main street of any town without being recognised. Today, he is recognised as one of Australia's great performers from the London Olympics. His win in the sailing Laser class was dominant and consistent. His colleagues in the 49er class, Iain Jensen and Nathan Outteridge, were also dominant; so dominant in fact that they only needed to finish the final race in the series to win gold. And, of course, who could forget Mathew Belcher and Malcolm Page in the 470 class, who held off the British team in the final race to claim gold. For Malcolm Page, it was his second successive gold medal in the 470 class. He retires at the age of 40 as a legend in Olympic sailing.

Australia's sailing team won three gold medals in London, our best performance at an Olympic regatta. Perhaps the most dramatic moment of the sailing campaign was provided by our silver medal-winning women's match-racing team in the Elliott 6 class. Sailors Olivia Price, Nina Curtis and Lucinda Whitty sailed an outstanding gold medal match, only to be denied the gold medal by a broach in heavy conditions, when Olivia was thrown out of the
boat. Some say that watching sailing is like watching grass grow, but they clearly had not seen the performance of our sailors at the Olympics.

I would also like to mention the efforts of our swimmers, who were racing in the most fiercely contested competition in many years. The swimming competition in London produced medallists from North America, South America, Asia, Australia, Africa and Europe. The Australian women's 4 x 100 relay team were the standout performers in the Australian swim team. Alicia Coutts, who was a member of the relay team, was undoubtedly our foremost individual performer, arriving home with five medals.

At the velodrome, Australia's cycling team toiled against a very strong British opposition, finishing second on the medal count. Of course, the highlight of the track cycling campaign was Anna Meares's victory over arch rival, Victoria Pendleton, in the women's sprint.

Apart from the gold medals the Olympics are about memorable moments, and London delivered memorable moments by the dozen. James Magnusson's second-place finish in the 100-metre freestyle was as dramatic as any Hollywood movie, and scarcely more believable. The single hundredth of a second between Magnusson and victory illustrates how difficult it is to win Olympic gold.

Australians will remember for many years the agonising few seconds between the end of the 100-metres hurdles and the official confirmation that Sally Pearson had won the gold medal. (Quorum formed) It took an Olympic record, but Pearson has earned herself a place amongst the great Australian track and field athletes. Our other athletic medal winners also deserve a mention, with Michael Watt earning a silver in the long jump and Jarrod Tallent winning a silver in the gruelling 50-kilometre men's walk. Unfortunately, time does not permit me to mention every medallist or to highlight every personal best achieved at the Olympics.

Very briefly I would like to mention the people who did not appear in front of the camera. I am talking about the support staff, coaches, doctors, masseurs, physiotherapists and of course the parents and families who do so much to support our athletes and the volunteers who make the Olympic Games possible. Without these people no-one would succeed at the Olympics. In this group I would include Coffs Harbour vet, David Johnson, who travelled to London to look after the equestrian team's horses. David is a well-respected vet in Coffs Harbour, well-known for his skills, and I have no doubt he made a substantial contribution to the performance of our equestrian team.

I want to congratulate everyone involved in our Olympic efforts. Though not every athlete came home with the medals they fought for, as Pierre de Courbertin decreed, they did Australia proud; they fought well. I encourage all Australians to now get behind our Paralympians as they prepare to compete in just a few days time.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (16:54): I have the honour today of commending our Australian athletes and celebrating their great achievements at the London Olympics—and what a great set of achievements they are. There is no greater unifying force, it would seem—as we talked about it so much over the last few weeks—than that of the Australian participation in the Olympic Games. It lifts our spirit. We know that it did that in 2000 at the Sydney Olympics, and we know how fantastically it has lifted the spirit of this nation in recent times. It has been a celebration of strength, speed, endurance and human spirit—10,800
of the world's greatest athletes at the peak of physical and mental fitness, with years of training, hard work and sacrifice, and all of these fine attributes culminating in one final show of skill for the ultimate reward in this, the Olympic year.

Something often foreshadowed by the sporting prowess but important in its own right is the activities of the Cultural Olympiad that take place in concert with the major games. Under the Olympic Charter, host cities are required to run a series of cultural events as a celebration of the soul of the host city by recognising their artistic and literary backgrounds. More than 500 events made up this year's Cultural Olympiad, the largest ever, with 16 million Britons and tourists taking part in the exhibitions, performances and workshops. No wonder, elevated by such cultural enhancement, they attended the games with incredible spirit. We can only imagine what the atmosphere must have been like there in London this year as they cheered their own team home to such incredible feats. I look forward to the day when people flock to the Cultural Olympiad as they do to the Olympics and the Paralympics. I am sure it is not too far away.

I also want to put on the record today that I am very proud of the support that this government has provided to our elite athletes and Olympians, committing over $382 million in funding over the four years leading to the games. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate in particular our Coastie gold medallist, sailor Tom Slingsby. Getting that first gold seemed to open up the floodgates of incredible success at the gold level by our athletes. But I in no way want to diminish the incredible achievements of every single member of that Olympic team, who competed at the highest level to get themselves a place on that team and represent us so ably and with such honour and dignity in the London Olympiad.

Tom Slingsby, who grew up on the Central Coast, went to St Edward's Christian Brothers' College, a school at which I was formerly a teacher and a school which my own son now attends. I was not fortunate enough to teach Tom, but I heard from a few of his former teachers that he had a lot of energy in the classroom and that he decided to spend that on sailing at, I think, about the time he was still at school. So his journey commenced while he was a young school student in our local area. Tom now lives in Point Frederick; my understanding is that he lives with his family. He is the reigning world champion in the Laser class of boat, known for their speedy performance and their simplicity. I am not surprised that, living at Point Frederick, sailing is the thing that engaged him most, because just down the road is the Gosford Sailing Club, which is a great social hub for the community. We have our sparkling Brisbane Water, and it is very hard to drive by there every day and not see the invitation to get on one of those yachts or, indeed, to get on a Laser and get out there and enjoy the beauty of the nature that surrounds us in my seat. I report to my constituents regularly that in this place I claim that I represent the most beautiful seat in the whole country. I know that other people might want to contest that, but I invite you to come and see it, and I am sure that you will want to return again and again and again, because it is an incredibly beautiful place.

Access to the water is something that is amazingly common for many of my constituents, and for somebody like Tom obviously that provided the watery playing field for him to explore his gifts and talents. I am sure that Tom, just like many before him, was inspired by the athletes that he grew up watching at previous Olympics. The 2000 Olympics proved to be just the beginning of his love of sailing, and now, just 12 years later, Tom himself is inspiring
a new generation of young Australians to get up from the television and get involved. Tom showed us that the Central Coast is absolutely a great place to grow up. It is a place to dream big and then to work like crazy to achieve your dreams. You made us all so proud, Tom Slingsby.

I used the inspiration of Tom's success to try and engage with and encourage some local young people who were attending a preparation for trade training day up at Youth Central in Somersby in my electorate. I expressed to those young men and women that, just like them, Tom lived and breathed the air on the Central Coast. I said to my son when I dropped him off on the morning after Tom had won: 'Today you could be sitting in a seat that Tom Slingsby sat in.' These amazing heroes are not extraordinary people who live outside of our society. They are with us, they are a part of our society and they genuinely inspire us to dare to dream and then to work to achieve those dreams, wherever we might be.

I also extend my congratulations to Iain Jensen, Nathan Outteridge, Mathew Belcher and Malcolm Page for their gold in sailing; to Cate Campbell, Alicia Coutts, Brittany Elmslie and Melanie Schlanger for their swimming achievements; to Jacob Clear, Dave Smith, Tate Smith and Murray Stewart for their win in the one-kilometre kayak; to Anna Meares for cycling; and to Sally Pearson for athletics.

While medals are the goals to aspire to when competing, all our athletes should be heartened to know that their work was shared by all of us and delighted in by all of us over the last fortnight. They have indeed inspired young Australians across the nation to develop a passion for sport and to be the best that they can be. The Australian team should be very proud of all they have accomplished and the Australian people should be very proud of the athletes that represented our great country on the world stage. We have much to look forward to with the Paralympics on the horizon, and I offer my very best wishes to that team as well. I congratulate our Olympic team on their success.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (17:01): I join with colleagues on both sides of this House in paying tribute to the members of the Australian Olympic team which participated so successfully in the London Olympic Games 2012.

Australia is a proud nation with an equally proud Olympic record. In fact, Australia has competed in every summer Olympics since 1896. In that time we have won 449 Olympic medals. That includes 135 gold medals, 144 silver medals and 170 bronze medals. Australia's very first Olympian was Edwin Flack, who won two gold medals in athletics.

The most recent Australian Olympic team has continued this fine tradition. In 2012 we sent a team of 410 athletes and 319 officials, the fifth largest Australian team in history behind the teams we sent to Sydney, Athens, Beijing and Atlanta. Australia was one of 204 nations that sent teams comprised of more than 10,000 athletes to participate in the London games. Australia competed in 23 of the 26 sports and we finished 10th in the medal tally, with 35 medals—seven gold, 16 silver and 12 bronze.

I take this opportunity to congratulate our seven gold medal winners: in swimming, the women's team in the four-by-100 freestyle relay; in sailing, Tom Slingsby in the Laser class; in cycling, Anna Meares in the women's sprint; in athletics, Sally Pearson in the women's 100-metre hurdles—and what a sight that was; in sailing, Iain Jensen and Nathan Outteridge
in the 49er class; in canoeing, Jacob Clear, David Smith, Tate Smith and Murray Stewart in the K4 1,000 metres; and in sailing, Malcolm Page and Mathew Belcher in the 470 class.

In particular, I would like to pay tribute to those proud Australian Olympians who come from my electorate, the seat of Kooyong. On the water polo team we had two members. One was Rowie Webster, who received a bronze medal. This was her first Olympics and she attended Belle Vue Primary School in my electorate. Also on the water polo team was Sam McGregor. He had previously competed in the 2004 and the 2008 Olympics, and he has been the captain of the Australian team since 2010. The Australian men's water polo team finished seventh, which was the team's best result in 20 years. London was Sam's final Olympics, and he will be retiring. I wish him and Rowie well.

In swimming, Kooyong was represented by Matt Targett, who won a bronze medal in the 4x100 metres medley. He competed in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and won a bronze medal in his first-ever Olympic event, the 4x100 metres freestyle relay. Matt attended Scotch College for both primary and secondary school, and he has a very, very impressive swimming record. On behalf of the people of Kooyong, I take my hat off to Matt Targett.

In rowing, Kooyong was particularly well represented. I do not know if it is because we have the Yarra River or because we have a number of schools with strong rowing programs. A good friend of mine is David Crawshay and he was the captain of the men's rowing team. He participated in the double sculls. In fact, in Athens in 2004 and in Beijing in 2008, he was a proud participant. We all remember him winning gold at Beijing in the men's double sculls alongside Scott Brennan. This time he did not win gold but he was very successful, finishing eighth in the double sculls. He is a proud constituent of Kooyong, having attended Deepdene Primary School.

Josh Booth was in the men's eight. This was the first Olympics for the 21-year-old. He finished sixth in the men's eight. He attended Deepdene Primary and Scotch College and we know he has a big career in rowing ahead of him.

Will Lockwood won a silver medal in the men's four. This was Will's first Olympics. He is also a young man of 24 years of age. He won silver in the men's four alongside teammates James Chapman, Drew Ginn and Joshua Dunkley-Smith. Will attended Scotch College for both primary and secondary schools.

Elizabeth Patrick, another resident of the electorate of Kooyong, was a member of the women's eight; she was the cox. She competed in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and carried the Olympic torch as the crew rowed across Lake Burley Griffin as part of the 2008 Beijing torch relay. She is 27 years of age and she attended Canterbury Primary School and MLC.

Australia can be very proud of its Olympic record going well into the last century and before that. That spirit has continued at the London Olympic Games, which were a marvellous success and a tribute to the thousands and thousands of volunteers, to the organisers, to Lord Coe and, of course, to the spectators who helped make the event so special. It is also a tribute to the more than 10,000 athletes who participated. I am very proud of the contributions that Australian athletes have made—men and women. Their commitment to their sport, their commitment to each other in the team events and the character that they personify is something for all of us to behold. I personally believe that the taxpayer gets enormous benefit from investing in sport, because those young people who go on to...
participate in the greatest event on Earth in terms of the Olympics have as their role models
the athletes who participate and, of course, the athletes who win medals.

I would like to pay particular tribute to Rowie Webster, Sam McGregor, Matt Targett, David Crawshay, Josh Booth, Will Lockwood and Elizabeth Patrick. On behalf of many, many thousands of people in our electorate of Kooyong: thank you for your commitment to your sport, and congratulations on your participation and your success in the London Olympic Games. Your success is Australia's success and we wish you all the very best for your futures.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (17:09): I would like to join with my colleagues today and take the opportunity to congratulate the athletes who proudly represented Australia at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Our nation finished in the top 10 on the medal count, with seven gold medals, 16 silver and 12 bronze. That is 35 medals in all, which is a very good effort for a country our size, up against the world's best competition. I would also like to say with respect to the chair of the London organising committee, Lord Coe, and the committee that they should be very proud—they ran a fantastic competition. I, like many others around here, lost a lot of sleep in following the competition. It was a first-class presentation, and credit should obviously going to the organising committee on producing a sensational Olympic Games.

We are, as Australians, immensely proud of all the sportsmen and sportswomen who wore the green and gold, did their personal best and contributed to Australia's great result at this Olympics. Personally—and I know the member for Macarthur is here, so I do not want to steal too much of his thunder—I am particularly proud of a local girl from Campbelltown, Erin Densham, who won the bronze medal in what is possibly the toughest Olympic event, the triathlon. The triathlon is a multistage competition involving three sequential endurance events: swimming, cycling and running. The Olympic distances are a 1.5-kilometre swim, a 40-kilometre bike ride and a 10-kilometre run. Erin completed the Olympic triathlon course in less than two hours, coming very close behind Nicole Spirig of Switzerland and only two seconds behind Sweden's Lisa Norden.

Erin is someone that I have known since she attended primary school. She grew up in Ruse, very close to my family. She attended the John Therry Catholic school in Ambarvale. Her mother, Jan, is a very close friend of my wife, Bernadette, hence the family connection. During her school years, Erin competed in swimming and cross-country, up to state level, and when she was around 16 she decided to combine her respective strengths and take up the triathlon. She announced herself on the world triathlon scene in 2006 when she won the under-23 world championship in Switzerland.

Erin Densham's highly successful triathlon career began at the local Macarthur Triathlon Club. On many occasions I have spoken about this particular club, but I recall speaking about it when 12 of its members were selected to represent Australia in the age-group championships in 2009. As I said, this is the club that Erin was a member of for many years, a club that certainly understood that developing young athletes in regular competition is a platform for providing Olympic athletes. The achievements of the Macarthur Triathlon Club, including those of Erin Densham, are testament to the hard work and commitment of the local sports club's president, Glenn Schwarzel, who does a wonderful job, not only competing himself but laying the platform for the development of young sportsmen and sportswomen through that triathlon club.
Australia has won a medal in every Olympic triathlon competition in every games since women's triathlon was admitted to the program in 2000 for the Olympics in Sydney. The commitment and dedication of our triathlon women is a truly remarkable and inspiring thing for all of us.

At the age of 27, Erin has already overcome a great number of obstacles and continues to not only compete but also win major world-class championships and tournaments. Only three years ago she was fighting for her life after a rare heart condition was detected following her collapse during an event in Iowa. After her recovery, Erin came first in the 2012 triathlon world championship series in Sydney and in the Mooloolaba World Cup, and she finished second in the triathlon world championships in San Diego and third in the Oceanic Championships in Devonport. The Olympic medal is certainly an incredible addition to Erin's long list of achievements. I would like to personally congratulate Erin on her courage and determination and her phenomenal career so far—of which she probably has a long way yet to go. Behind every young athlete are very steadfast parents, and I also congratulate Jan and Jim on being part of Erin's remarkable success at the London Olympics.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (17:16): Australia has a proud history as a sporting nation. Some of us are active participants in sports and others are more passive participants in sport and prefer to be spectators and enjoy that immensely. Whether you are a football, soccer, netball, athletics or swimming fan, or a supporter of the many other sports in which Australians participate, you cannot help but feel a sense of pride when you see an Australian athlete competing on the world stage. For the two weeks of the Olympic Games, Australians from across the country came together to cheer on their fellow countrymen and women competing in London. Throughout the games our athletes showed courage and humility whilst inspiring many Australians with their outstanding performances.

The road to the Olympic Games is a long one, with each of our athletes having trained for many years and having dedicated their heart and their soul to their passion. To be selected to represent their country at the world's premier sporting event will be for many, irrespective of whether they walked away with a medal or not, an experience they will never forget. Our Olympic team has defended Australia's title as one of the most talented sporting nations, with the team finishing in the top 10 of the medal count. This means that Australia finished 10th out of more than 200 nations, which is a massive achievement in itself.

An enormous amount of stress and pressure is placed upon each of our athletes to perform in what may be one of the most daunting experiences of their lives. Millions of people from all over the world watch them with anticipation to see whether they will win or lose by a fraction of a second. No matter what their individual result was, all of our Olympic athletes are true Olympians, as they have performed to their best and done their friends, family, communities and country proud. I hope that many of them will now be able to have a well-deserved break before moving on to the next chapter of their lives.

I would, however, like to make particular mention of one group of athletes today—those from the Gold Coast. Out of the 35 medals won by Australians at the games, 11 were won by Gold Coast athletes as individuals or as part of a team, which is nearly a third of our total medal count. Of the seven gold medals Australia won at the games, four were won by Gold Coasters. The Gold Coasters who flew the Australian flag at the Olympics include Sally Pearson, Tate Smith, Adam Gibson, Mark Worthington, Ken Wallace, Lyndsie Fogarty,

In particular, I would like to acknowledge today three Olympians who have close ties to my electorate of McPherson: Jacob Clear, who was part of the K4 100-metre kayaking team that won gold and who is also a member of the Burleigh Heads Mowbray Park Surf Life Saving Club; Mathew Belcher, who won gold in the 470-class sailing event and who is also a former student of Bond University; and Brittany Broben, who won silver in the 10-metre platform dive and who is a student of Marymount College. Congratulations to each of you for your great performances. I wish you all well in your future endeavours.

I must say that Gold Coast athletes were significant achievers at the Olympic Games and I am so terribly proud of them. Sport is an integral part of life for many of us on the Gold Coast, with a number of community organisations that participate in a variety of sports such as soccer, AFL, rugby, basketball, netball, baseball, track events, martial arts, swimming, diving and rowing—to name just a few. Not only are sports available in the community for both school aged children and adults; many of our schools have dedicated teams that compete at school, regional, state and national levels. There is also the opportunity for any students who excel in track and field and swimming events at sporting community carnivals to compete at various carnivals and beyond.

The Olympics have highlighted how much sporting talent there is within our community and the potential of our future athletes. We need to continue to foster our sporting community locally and nationally whilst helping those future generations of athletes to be the very best that they can. I again wish all of our athletes the very best for the future. I congratulate them on what they have done so far and what I know they will do in the future.

Ms King (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (17:22): I too rise in support of the Prime Minister’s statement on the Olympic Games. Whilst I am of course going to mention my own community, I suspect there are going to be lots of people traipsing to the Gold Coast to see just what you have done right in that district! I congratulate the member for McPherson on raising it.

There has been a lot said about the London Olympics. There will be lots of analysis and lots of investigations and determinations around what happened in each sport and so on, but I think it is actually really important that we celebrate the incredible achievements of our Olympians. As a community, it is important that we remember that the Olympics reflect a particular time and place in history and culture. You look back on newsreels from past Olympics and there are things that you remember about who you were and what you were doing at that time. They are very, very important elements of our cultural identity. I think it is important that we celebrate those achievements—learn lessons if we need to but really celebrate those achievements. They mark milestones in our own lives. They come every four years, except when there have been terrible tragedies of war. They are one of the certainties of our international community and they certainly mark milestones in our own lives. I spent a lot
of time watching the Beijing Olympics because they took place in the year in which my son was born, so I was spending more time at home than I do now. So I remember those times.

In London our athletes absolutely did us proud. Through their achievements they have once again shown just how remarkable they are, but they have also shown us what we all wish at some point to aspire to: to achieve the very best in the fields of endeavour that we choose. All of those who have competed should be extremely proud of themselves. A total of 35 medals were brought home and, whilst we focus on the medals—it is good to do so; they are very remarkable achievements—it means that of the total of 204 nations competing we came 10th, which is again extraordinary for a country of this size and population in particular. Even those who are not huge sports fanatics spent a night or two huddled around the television set at home cheering on the Aussies.

Many came from my own district and I want to mention those in particular. Kathryn Mitchell, who had her debut at these Olympics, participated in the javelin throw where she came ninth. James Marburg, in the rowing men's pair, came fifth. He was in Beijing in 2008 and got a silver medal, and I know he has a lot of rowing ahead of him. Collis Birmingham was a runner in the men's 5,000 metres and this was his second Olympic Games, coming 35th. Tamsin Hinchley, who plays beach volleyball, was born in the tiny community of Napoleons. She certainly worked incredibly hard in her third Olympics. Russell Mark, in the shooting double trap, was born in Ballarat and we still claim him well and truly as our own. In the London result he came 20th—again, remarkable for Russell in his six Olympic games.

Anthony Edwards, a member of my own rowing club, was in the rowing lightweight four. He was born in Ballarat and trained substantially in Ballarat for much of his early life. He came fourth and received two silver medals as well as some bronzes in many previous Olympics. Jared Tallent, our Newland boy, undertook the road walk and did an amazing effort—50 kilometres at that odd, strange walking pace, winning silver, having also done such a fantastic effort in Beijing. Every Olympic Games of course has those moments that are particularly memorable. For me, it was watching all of our Olympians from our region participating but particularly watching Jared at that amazing walk and seeing his terrific determination. He is a sight around our region at times. Newland is a potato-growing district. He has been a real champion from that area and I know his family are incredibly proud of him, as is his whole community.

Now all of our eyes are going to look towards the Paralympics that will be starting in eight days time. I am particularly keeping a lookout for Greg Smith who is from Ballarat. Greg is on his fifth Olympic Games and has formerly won three gold medals—at the 2000 games in the 800 metres, the 1,500 metres and the 5,000 metres. He is an extremely talented man and has now had a slight career change. This year he will be competing in the wheelchair rugby. He is a Buninyong boy and we are certainly looking forward to seeing him compete and wish him all the best in the lead-up to the games and certainly in his participation.

This motion of support also provides me with the opportunity to talk a little bit about the Local Sporting Champions program. Many of these elite athletes started their careers as very young children. They started by competing against fellow classmates in schools, attending Little Athletics, local athletics comps, swimming and sporting competitions and being involved with the many local sporting clubs that exist throughout our communities. The government proudly funds the Local Sporting Champions program. The program aims to help
our junior sports stars to meet the costs of participation in sporting competitions. The program offers grants of some $500 for individuals and $3,000 for teams. Applications for the next round close on 31 October. I certainly want to encourage young athletes and teams across my electorate to apply for funding. The program has already supported many athletes across my community—I think there were some 87 grants, six teams and 81 individuals, and a total cost of $58,500 has gone into Local Sporting Champions in my own electorate alone. I know that story is repeated right the way across. We are very fortunate in my electorate that we also have a not-for-profit organisation, the Ballarat Sports Foundation, which for a long period of time has been doing similar things. I am delighted that the government has equally stepped up and supported young athletes.

Every one of those young athletes funded through the Local Sporting Champions program may be someone we see at an Olympics in the future. It is incredibly important that we support those young people, whether they go on to be Olympians or not. The fact that they are participating at such a high level within their sports, within their own communities, statewide, nationally and in some cases internationally, is very important. The government has certainly committed record funding to elite athletes and to Olympians. In the four years to 2012, $382 million was committed to national sporting organisations. It is a remarkable commitment from which we will continue to see results for years to come.

Again, I want to congratulate those athletes from my own community who have participated, and those who are yet to participate in the Paralympics, for their terrific achievements. As I said, watching the Olympics themselves is a terrific thing to be able to do. They provide important cultural and historic milestones for each of us, and I know many of us will remember moments from the London Olympics, as we remember moments from Sydney, Beijing and the many, many Olympics for the rest of our lives. So, to all of those athletes from Australia who have participated, thank you for the memories.

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (17:30): They say that competing for your country is the ultimate reward for any athlete. After so many years of dedication, hard work and sacrifice, to make the Australian Olympic team is an amazing achievement that all our athletes should be very proud of. I congratulate the Australian Olympic team as a whole on their success in London.

I am also honoured to rise in this place today to congratulate the athletes from my electorate who represented Australia at the 2012 London Olympic Games. They were not only representing Australia; they were representing all of the young aspiring athletes in Macarthur and the family members and friends who helped them along the way. From Macarthur, Emily Hurtz was part of the women's Hockeyroos team. The girls came in fifth in London, their only loss being a one-nil score against New Zealand. Their wins over Germany, the US and South Africa unfortunately did not count for much when a draw against Argentina cost the Hockeyroos a place in the semifinal. Currans Hill shooter Warren Potent competed in the 50-metre men's prone rifle event. Warren was a bronze medallist in Beijing but did not make the finals in London. He said it just was not his day.

Bradbury swimmer 20-year-old Daniel Tranter competed in the 200-metre and 400-metre individual medley. It was his first Olympic Games, and he made the semifinals in his 200-metre swim, a fantastic achievement. Daniel started swimming when he was seven years old to help with his asthma. He trained and competed in swimming clubs and pools across
Macarthur until July 2011, when he joined the Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre's high performance program. He was an outsider to qualify for London but smashed his personal best times at the Australian titles to claim a place on the Aussie team, a great effort by this young swimmer, who I am sure has his eyes set on the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio. We also had Jeff Hunt, who grew up in Minto and who put up a great effort in the men's marathon, and the Campbelltown boxer Jai Opetaia, who was the youngest Australian boxer to ever make the Olympic team. He put up a great fight in his events and only lost by one point to the world No. 1, heavyweight champion Teymur Mammadov.

As the member for Fowler has mentioned, he has close family ties to Ruse triathlete Erin Densham, who brought home a bronze medal in the women's triathlon. I joined many Macarthur residents who watched Erin's gutsy effort to bring home the bronze. It was a very exciting race, with Erin leading nearly all the way in the final leg, the 10-kilometre run. In the 50-metre sprint to the finish line, she was pipped by Switzerland's Nicola Spirig and Sweden's Lisa Norden. The amazing thing about Erin is that she was diagnosed with a rare heart condition four years ago. She had life-saving surgery in 2009 to correct the condition, which made her heart race dangerously out of control. So you can imagine why her friends, family and home town were so excited to see Erin take out the bronze medal. More than 100 of her friends and local supporters gathered at the Campbelltown Catholic Club to watch the race, as did 50 members of the Macarthur Triathlon Club, who gathered at Wests Leagues Club in Leumeah to watch Erin and cheer her across the finish line.

Her good friend Michelle Smyth told a local newspaper that Erin was an inspiration to everyone who had struggled in life. She said that those who had suffered with any illness were right behind Erin because she stands for all their struggles. She said her friend was such a fighter. For me, this is what the Olympic Games are all about. Erin has overcome all obstacles, and her hard work and dedication have definitely paid off. To see her photo splashed over the front page of our local newspapers with headlines like 'Our girl' shows that the entire community was behind her. Erin carried the hopes and dreams of her country and her community in London, and she did us all proud. Today I congratulate her and thank her for being such an inspiration to young athletes in the Macarthur region.

Another medallist from Macarthur is Kaarle McCulloch from Wilton, who won the bronze in the women's cycling team sprint event. It was Kaarle's Olympic debut and a great achievement by a young athlete who has put a huge amount of hard work and training into her sport. Kaarle and her teammate Anna Meares were cheered on by friends and family across Macarthur to win cycling's first medal of the games. It was another gutsy race, and many residents stayed up late to watch Kaarle and Anna beating the Ukrainian team for the bronze medal.

As I watched all Macarthur's athletes compete at the games, I felt overwhelmed by their achievements. Most of them have been part of the local sporting clubs and teams since they were young juniors. To have so many athletes in my electorate competing at the games was a great tribute to their families and all of Macarthur's sporting clubs and coaches who support our young athletes week in and week out. Whether they won a medal, made the finals or just gave of their best, it was great to see that all the hard work and commitment that these athletes have to put in gained them a place on the Australian Olympic team. I would like to thank each of our Olympians for being such great models for all our young athletes in my electorate.
They should all be very proud of their achievements. They have made their friends, families and everyone in Macarthur very proud of them.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (17:35): I too take the opportunity to speak on this motion in congratulating our Australian Olympic athletes. I do congratulate them because I believe they did our country proud. They literally flew the flag for Australia on the world stage and they did us proud by their performances. Regardless of whether they won a medal or not, I believe their collective performance is something that indeed we can all be proud of. In saying that I extend the same respect and acknowledgement to every athlete who competed in the Olympics as I have little doubt that just as Australians want to see Australian athletes do well, so too do the people of the respective countries which each athlete represents.

The Olympics is indeed a contest of the best of the best in terms of athletic performance. The pressure on athletes to do well has never been greater; firstly, because with today's media coverage most of the world is looking on and, secondly, because of the national expectations which arise from governments investing substantial funds into Olympic preparations. To be selected for the Australian team is an outstanding achievement. To then win a medal is extraordinary; even more so considering the comparative investment in preparing athletes that is made by many other countries, the very fine line between winning performances in so many events, the reality that some competitors are assisted by performance-enhancing drugs, knowing that peak performance must coincide with the time of your event and knowing that every athlete has good and bad days—and also knowing that there is no second chance.

Disappointingly, the games are being used by some for both political supremacy and political opportunism, with claims that some athletes face political consequences if they fail to win while others, as we saw again in London, using the games to flee from their own country. The killing of the Israeli athletes in Munich in 1972 has left an irremovable stain on the games. None of this is what the Olympic Games, or sports more broadly, is meant to be about. Yet by elevating the games to the level that we have, and putting the global spotlight on them as the world has done over the years, we have equally made them a prime target for international displays of political dissent or political opportunism.

In keeping with the Olympic spirit, it was wonderful to see so many primary schools around the country organising their own mini Olympics and, in so doing, providing opportunities for so many children to have a go at Olympic-type sports events. In my own electorate I visited and formally opened the mini Olympic Games at Keller Road Primary School at Salisbury East where the children imitated every aspect of the opening ceremony, from carrying the Olympic torch and lighting the cauldron to parading the teams, with each team flying their respective flag prior to the games commencement. The games then began, and each athlete was given the opportunity to participate in a wide range of events. It was terrific to see the children embrace the Olympic spirit with their colours and their costumes.

I commend Susan Podger, the principal of the school, and all of the staff, students, parents and grandparents who organised and supported the children's events on the day. It was not only fantastic to see the kids' excitement in being part of their own Olympics but also great to see them trying events that they would probably never, ever get another opportunity to do. And in getting into that Olympic spirit perhaps one day they might pursue a particular event they had tried on the day and maybe represent our country at the real Olympics in the future.
Last Friday week I was invited to Prescott North Primary School, where Telstra had organised a 30-minute live cross to London. Two of Australia's gold-medal winners, Libby Trickett and Melanie Schlanger, had made themselves available to have a direct talk about the Olympics to the school students. Using today's technology and a huge outdoor screen so that everyone present could watch, students were able to have a face-to-face discussion with Libby and Melanie, hear about their experiences and ask them questions about competing in the Olympics in London. The clear message from Libby and Melanie was to stay true to your dreams, give it your best, make sacrifices and never give up.

Students were also able to meet and speak with past gold and silver medallist, Brooke Hanson, who attended on the day as a Telstra Olympic ambassador. Speaking and hearing from Brooke, Libby, and Melanie must have been an incredibly inspiring and motivating opportunity for the children, and I commend Telstra for the effort that they went to to organise the direct link-up with Libby and Melanie from London to have literally a face-to-face opportunity for the children to speak to them. Again, I hope that it might just have given to the students that extra inspiration that they might have been looking for to persevere and continue with their own sports involvement. Hopefully, they too might one day represent Australia in the Olympics. I also commend all of the staff, parents and organisers who made that day possible for the students at the Prescott North Primary School.

There has been some disappointing public commentary from some sectors that has been critical of Australia's medal performance. Such commentary is neither warranted nor helpful, and usually made through ignorance. Nevertheless, there have been calls to increase funding levels for elite Australian athletes so that we can fare better on the world stage in the future. My own view has always been that the early years are just as important as the latter years, and that if more support is required then the priority should be more support for the local community facilities which do all of the preparation in the junior years.

Secondly, the athletes most admired, and who reflect all of the qualities which epitomise sport, are those who made it through long-term sacrifice, tortuous work and unswerving commitment. In essence, it is those athletes who do it because of their own desire, hard work and determination who I personally admire the most. Good facilities and good coaching are important; but I am not convinced that current support for elite athletes is inadequate, nor do I want to see gold medals won that should be more appropriately awarded to training institutions than to athletes. In my view there are more important priorities for the expenditure of public funds. The understandable joy that we can bring to a relatively few number of people by investing millions of dollars more each year into elite athletes pales into insignificance when compared with the joy that can be brought to so many more people by directing those same funds into medical research and medical services.

I take this opportunity to make some other observations about the games. The Olympics have become a major international commercial opportunity, so much so that the costs involved and the expectation that each Olympics will be bigger and better than the last makes today's Olympics in total cost across the world a multibillion-dollar event. At some point the realism must set in that we cannot continue raising the standard without serious consequences. If there is huge money at stake there is also the increased likelihood of corruption, and there has also been some allegations related to that. A separate concern about the cost and commercialisation of the games is that poorer countries will continue to miss out on hosting...
the games—they simply cannot raise the funds or meet the expectations of what is required for a modern-day Olympic Games. None of this is in keeping with the Olympic spirit or sportsmanship.

I conclude by again congratulating the Australian athletes for winning their 35 medals. They did themselves, their coaches, their families and their country proud. To those that will compete again in future events, I wish them the best for the future. I also congratulate the USA on once again leading the world in the medal count. And I congratulate the UK and the city of London for hosting such a wonderful spectacle. Lastly, I extend my best wishes to the paralympians who commence their games in the next week or so. I have no doubt that they too will do Australia proud.

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (17:45): I associate myself with the comments of the earlier speakers who have been most eloquent and have captured the essence of what the Olympic Games are all about, and Australia’s contribution to them. The essence of the Olympic Games and the Olympic spirit is sporting achievement and striving to succeed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas): Order! I ask the member to resume his seat. There being no presence to my right, I will adjourn the chamber until a quorum is re-established.

Sitting suspended from 17:46 to 17:54

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: A quorum has not been re-established.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 17:54.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Centrelink
(Question No. 1073)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 19 June 2012:

(1) In (a) 2006-07, (b) 2007-08, (c) 2008-09, (d) 2009-10, (e) 2010-11, and (f) 2011-12, what number of frontline staff were employed in the (i) Sutherland Centrelink office, and (ii) Caringbah Centrelink office.

(2) In (a) 2006-07, (b) 2007-08, (c) 2008-09, (d) 2009-10, (e) 2010-11, and (f) 2011-12, what number of staff were seconded to work temporarily in other Centrelink offices or sites from the (i) Sutherland Centrelink office, and (ii) Caringbah Centrelink office.

(3) For (a) 2012-13, and (b) 2013-14, how many frontline staff are predicted to be employed in the (i) Sutherland Centrelink office, and (ii) Caringbah Centrelink office, and how does this compare with the previous program year.

(4) What is the average length of employment at the (i) Sutherland Centrelink office, and (ii) Caringbah Centrelink office.

(5) In (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010, (d) 2011, and (e) 2012, how many staff left their employment from the (i) Sutherland Centrelink office, and (ii) Caringbah Centrelink office.

(6) For each case in part (5), how many staff left due to, (a) transfer, (b) redundancy, and (c) dismissal.

(7) In (a) 2006-07, (b) 2007-08, (c) 2008-09, (d) 2009-11, (e) 2010-11, and (f) 2011-12, what number of cases were handled by the (i) Sutherland Centrelink office, and (ii) Caringbah Centrelink office.

(8) For (a) 2012-13, and (b) 2013-14, what number of cases are predicted to be handled through the (i) Sutherland Centrelink office, and (ii) Caringbah Centrelink office, and how does this compare with the previous program years.

Mr Brendan O’Connor: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The number of frontline staff (FTE) employed in the Sutherland and Caringbah Centrelink offices in each financial year between 2006-07 and 2011-12 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Centrelink</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caringbah Centrelink</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) The number of staff seconded to work temporarily in other Centrelink offices or sites from the Sutherland and Caringbah Centrelink offices in each financial year between 2006-07 and 2011-12 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Centrelink</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caringbah Centrelink</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(3) Based on current information, the number of frontline staff employed in the Sutherland and Caringbah Centrelink offices in the 2012-13 and 2013-14 financial years is not predicted to change from the number employed in the 2011-12 financial year, as per the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frontline staff</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>Predicted 2012-13</th>
<th>Predicted 2013-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Centrelink</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caringbah Centrelink</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) (i) The average length of employment at the Sutherland Centrelink office is 12.8 years as at 31 May 2012.

(4) (ii) The average length of employment at the Caringbah Centrelink office is 14.8 years as at 31 May 2012.

(5) The number of staff that left their employment from the Sutherland and Caringbah Centrelink offices in each year from 2008 to 2012 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Centrelink</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caringbah Centrelink</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(6) For each case in part (5), the number of staff from the Sutherland and Caringbah Centrelink offices that left due to (a) transfer, (b) redundancy, and (c) dismissal was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Leaving—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transfer to another APS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Leaving—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Leaving—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Leaving—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Leaving—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transfer to another APS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Leaving—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Leaving—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
House of Representatives

Tuesday, 21 August 2012

Caringbah Centrelink

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1 Jan 2008 to 31 Dec 2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Centrelink</td>
<td>19,248</td>
<td>24,837</td>
<td>26,341</td>
<td>20,670</td>
<td>29,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caringbah Centrelink</td>
<td>13,499</td>
<td>14,825</td>
<td>20,174</td>
<td>17,374</td>
<td>20,676</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures provided in the above table are indicative and do not capture all customer demand. These figures represent those customers that had a more complex interaction with a customer service officer. It should be noted that over this period the sites queuing strategies and recording practices have changed several times.

(8) The number of cases forecast to be handled through the Sutherland and Caringbah Centrelink offices in 2012-13 and 2013-14 is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sit Down Services</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>2012-13</th>
<th>2013-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Centrelink</td>
<td>45,406</td>
<td>45,900</td>
<td>45,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caringbah Centrelink</td>
<td>29,901</td>
<td>30,200</td>
<td>30,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of cases in 2012-13 is expected to increase slightly from the 2011-12 financial year, but remain steady in the 2013-14 financial year.

Note: The forecasted figures in the above table are also subject to the same limitations explained in the note against question 7 (above).