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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, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order

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 Georgean 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

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<td>Vasta, Ross Xavier</td>
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<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
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<td>Wilkie, Andrew Damien</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
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<tr>
<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

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- 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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<tr>
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<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>
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<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jan McLucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon David Bradbury MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Industry and Innovation</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator Arthur Sinodinos</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Trade</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
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<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</strong> (Leader of The Nationals)</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport</strong></td>
<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>The Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon George Brandis SC</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</td>
<td>Senator Mathias Cormann</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform</strong> (Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee)</td>
<td>The Hon Tony Smith MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training</strong> (Manager of Opposition Business in the House)</td>
<td>The Hon Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>(Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee)</em></td>
<td>(Mr Jamie Briggs MP)</td>
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<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
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Thursday, 20 September 2012

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. AE Burke) took the chair at 09:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

BILLS

Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Bill 2012

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Roxon.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management) (09:01):

I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce legislation to rename the Federal Magistrates Court and change the title of Federal Magistrates to better reflect the court’s role in Australia’s judicial system and its extensive regional circuit work.

The Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Bill will rename the Federal Magistrates Court as the Federal Circuit Court of Australia. It will also change the titles of Chief Federal Magistrate to Chief Judge and Federal Magistrate to Judge.

This bill amends the Federal Magistrates Act 1999 and other legislation that directly affects entitlements of federal magistrates to implement the changes to name and titles and to ensure that the existing arrangements for the court, its judicial officers and personnel can continue to operate as they do currently.

Name to reflect court role

The current name of the Federal Magistrates Court does not adequately capture the vital work undertaken by that court.

When the Federal Magistrates Court commenced operation in 2000, its name reflected the objective that it would provide an affordable and quick avenue to resolve less complex matters as an alternative to litigation in the Federal and Family courts.

Over time the court has experienced an increasing case load and a greater diversity and complexity in the cases coming before it. In 2010-11 alone, the court finalised over 83,000 cases across matters as diverse as family law, migration, bankruptcy and consumer protection law.

From its early days, the court actively pursued ways to provide court services to communities that experienced difficulties in accessing justice—whether that be due to low socio-economic conditions, remoteness or lack of services and facilities.

Since then, the court has remained committed to improving access to court services for people living outside the larger metropolitan areas.

During the last financial year, the court circuited to 33 rural and regional locations and spent the equivalent of approximately 145 weeks (in judicial hours) hearing matters in these areas.

The Gillard Labor government is determined to ensure that the federal court system delivers accessible, equitable and understandable justice.

In this regard, the court continues to meet a clear need in the community for people to be able to access a court service near to where they live and work—in places like Broken Hill and Bundaberg, Mount Gambier and Burnie, not just Sydney and Melbourne.
As the only federal court with a program of regular court circuits, the Federal Circuit Court of Australia is a name particularly well-suited to highlight this important aspect of the court’s role.

Federal Magistrates are also clearly not magistrates in the traditional sense of the word. They are Chapter III judicial officers and their nomenclature is important to ensure the community understands and respects their role in the judicial system.

The new titles of Chief Judge and Judge better reflect Chapter III status and the increasingly complex and difficult work being undertaken by the Court.

**Wider court reform package**

This retitling of the court forms one part of this government’s wider federal courts reform package.

The Gillard government recently announced that it is putting the courts back on a firmer financial footing by directing an additional $38 million over four years to the Federal, Family, and soon-to-be Federal Circuit courts. This injection of new funds, derived from a change to fee structures, will ensure our courts can continue to deliver key services, including regional circuit work, which are vital for disadvantaged litigants and small businesses.

These fee changes also provide clear price signals to court users that courts should not always be their first port of call. Increases were weighted to major corporations, while reinstating exemptions and waivers for disadvantaged litigants.

The government has made it clear that our courts should cater to the small, one-off litigant as much as the major corporate player who uses the court as a regular part of business. In recognition that litigation can be costly and damaging for small businesses, businesses with fewer than 20 employees will be treated as individuals rather than corporations.

As the Commonwealth is one of the most frequent court users, government agencies will now also pay the corporations rate. The Commonwealth should be leading the way on these changes, so agencies will be encouraged to see if quicker and less formal methods of dispute resolution can be used.

Other important aspects of this package of reforms include:

- implementing a transparent complaints process against judicial officers—the legislative framework for which was passed by the House earlier this sitting period;
- expanding the diversity judicial appointments, to better reflect the Australian community; and
- establishing the Military Court of Australia so that independent justice is available to Australian Defence Force members.

**Other features of the bill**

In addition to renaming the court and providing for the new titles of Chief Judge and Judge, this bill will:

- maintain entitlements currently applying to Federal Magistrates;
- provide for styling of Federal Magistrates under their new title;
- change statutory position titles, such as the Chief Executive Officer, consequential to the new name of the Court; and
- provide for transitional and savings arrangements to ensure continuity of the Federal Magistrates Court and arrangements under which it operates.

The bill does not alter the remuneration or entitlements available to the court’s judicial officers. Salaries and allowances for judicial officers across all federal courts are
determined by the independent Remuneration Tribunal and are subject to annual review. In making this name and title change, it is not the government’s intent that the usual range of factors considered by the tribunal in making its determinations would be expanded. The newly titled judges will also remain on the current generous superannuation arrangements. The employer superannuation contribution increased from 13.1 per cent to 15.4 per cent in July last year.

While a name change might appear straightforward to implement, the Commonwealth statute book reflects the expanded jurisdiction of the Federal Magistrates Court and contains extensive references to the court and to federal magistrates.

Consequential amendments affecting these other pieces of Commonwealth legislation will be included in a separate bill to be introduced into the parliament at a later time.

It is then planned for commencement of the two bills to occur concurrently to ensure the changes are implemented consistently and effectively across all relevant legislation.

Consultation

The government has consulted with the federal courts and key legal organisations in selecting the new name for the court and titles for federal magistrates, and is grateful for the input provided by stakeholders, particularly the views and suggestions contributed by the Chief Federal Magistrate, John Pascoe, on behalf of his court.

Conclusion

Australia is indeed well served by a court that continues to provide affordable, accessible and streamlined pathways for people to resolve their disputes.

The unique character and broad reach of the court means it plays a vital part in the federal justice system, and is integral to assisting people in regional communities to access federal court services.

Through this bill, the new name for the court and titles for its judicial officers will serve to recognise and better reflect the court’s role in the Australian judicial system.

It also acts as a concrete demonstration of the government’s renewed constructive relationship with the court, which can only benefit the Australian community.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Water Amendment (Long-term Average Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment) Bill 2012

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Burke.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (09:09): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Water Amendment (Long-term Average Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment) Bill 2012

This bill amends the Water Act 2007 to facilitate adjustment of the long-term sustainable diversion limit (SDL) under the Basin Plan, within clearly set limits, and with a clearly defined process to provide transparency to this parliament and the community. This mechanism will allow jurisdictions to work together collectively to improve on the socioeconomic and environmental outcomes of the plan.
I am committed to making a Murray-Darling Basin Plan to be presented to the parliament that delivers a healthy river, strong communities and sustainable food production. The Basin Plan involves far reaching reform of water management so that the basin is managed as a single connected area and in the national interest. It is clear that there will be a continuing need to adapt management of the basin’s water resources over the next decade to respond to opportunities to obtain and enhance environmental outcomes, with, at least, no worse socioeconomic conditions and, similarly, no worse environmental conditions. It is my view, therefore, that the Basin Plan should include an SDL adjustment mechanism. The mechanism will allow the outcomes of work to improve river management rules, infrastructure upgrades and the removal of constraints on the delivery of environmental flows to be integrated into the Basin Plan.

The inclusion of an SDL adjustment mechanism in the Basin Plan, which will be facilitated by this amendment, has been sought by all basin governments. Stakeholders also raised the need for such a mechanism as part of the 20-week public consultation on the Basin Plan. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, in its July 2012 Report into certain matters relating to the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan, also recommended the Commonwealth develop a mechanism to adjust SDLs automatically.

This amendment will allow the adjustment mechanism in the Basin Plan to operate as effectively as possible.

It is not the purpose of the bill to create the legal possibility of a mechanism. This already exists under the section 23 of the current Water Act. However, all jurisdictions and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the authority) have now agreed that it is desirable for the Basin Plan to include an improved adjustment mechanism. The bill sets out the broad parameters for the mechanism and how it is intended to operate, and introduces transparency in the process, requiring any use of the mechanism to be reported formally and publicly to the parliament.

Under the Water Act, I am advised, the Basin Plan itself is a disallowable instrument, and parliament will have the opportunity by that means to consider the precise elements of the SDL adjustment mechanism that will be written into the Basin Plan.

The current version of the Basin Plan includes an adjustment mechanism in accordance with the current act. As the legislation currently stands parliament would not be notified of any adjustments, as well as these adjustments not being disallowable. This bill improves transparency while maintaining the position that amendments would not be disallowable.

The Water Act requires that the Basin Plan include an SDL for the water resources of the Murray-Darling Basin. This bill allows the authority to make adjustments to the SDL in accordance with the provisions of the plan. The adjusted SDL must continue to reflect an environmentally sustainable level of take, which is defined in the Water Act to include several elements.

It is envisaged that criteria to be specified in the Basin Plan will reflect the intention of all basin governments that the mechanism must operate on a no-detriment basis. The adjustments would then not be able to weaken the social, economic or environmental outcomes inherent in the Basin Plan.

Projects that enable environmental water to be used more efficiently, thereby reducing
the need to remove additional water from productive use, must achieve equivalent environmental outcomes to those in the Basin Plan. Projects to enable improved environmental outcomes, must maintain or improve the socioeconomic circumstances of basin communities compared with the Basin Plan.

Initiatives to recover more environmental water are likely to focus on things like improving the efficiency of on-farm irrigation or off-farm irrigation water delivery systems. The savings recovered by these initiatives will enable improved environmental outcomes to be achieved without impacting on irrigated production. These projects would be in addition to those already approved or planned to contribute at least 600 gigalitres towards the recovery of the proposed 2,750 gigalitres, through the current Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program.

It is envisaged that governments would consider new investment in additional projects—called efficiency measures—in conjunction with action to address particular constraints in the system, thereby enabling the best use of any additional water recovered for the environment. The government’s intention is that all ‘impact neutral’ water recovered under these efficiency measures can only be credited towards delivering environmental outcomes beyond those envisaged under a 2,750-gigalitre reduction.

The water savings identified through projects—called supply measures—to make environmental watering more efficient, will mean the proposed 2,750-gigalitre recovery volume can be reduced. These proposals will need to achieve equivalent environmental outcomes to those under the 2,750-gigalitre reduction proposed in the plan. An example of a supply project could be installing works on a significant floodplain site to deliver improved environmental outcomes at that site but by using less water.

Projects of the sort that could in the future deliver efficiency or supply measures are already underway in many communities throughout the basin. Some of these I have described above. However, there is always room for innovation. This bill allows for projects like those above that are familiar to communities and industry, as well as for innovative ideas, to be considered. As is standard practice, projects will be put forward by the community, stakeholders, industry and/or governments. Projects will be developed over time and in consultation with funding bodies, and will undergo thorough assessment in the business case stage and also due diligence checks. This means projects will be well understood by the time they are considered and assessed by the Basin Officials Committee and the authority.

The adjustment of the SDL will need to be based on the best available science, involving the use of models and assumptions generally accepted by professional hydrologists and other experts at the time the calculation of any adjustment is made.

The bill allows the authority to determine that criteria set out in the Basin Plan have been met for the purpose of adjusting the SDL after considering advice from the basin governments through the Basin Officials Committee.

This bill provides that an adjustment may be made within a specified variance threshold; a maximum of five per cent of the SDL of basin water resources as a whole, though the variance at individual water resource plan areas or parts of water resource plan areas may be more or less than this.

The bill will allow the Basin Plan to require the adjustments to be reflected in the
state water resource plans, including during the generally ten-year accreditation period of these plans. Having these plans include a mechanism to reflect the outcomes of projects to use less environmental water and recover more water for the environment without impacting on the local economy means that the outcomes of projects will be given effect in water resource plan. The precise mechanism for this would be included in the Basin Plan.

The bill requires minister to table in parliament the notice of adjustment and the amendment. The amendment will be a non-disallowable instrument reflecting its technical nature and the criteria for any adjustments will be included in the plan itself, which I have been advised is a disallowable instrument. In addition to the explanatory statement that accompanies all legislative instruments, the bill requires that a notice be tabled with any amendments. This notice must include detailed information on the changes to the SDL at the water resource plan area level and at the basin wide level, together with an outline of the material on which the authority based its decisions in determining that the criteria in the plan have been met in relation to whether to adjust the SDL and the amount of the adjustment.

In closing, these amendments to the Water Act 2007 will provide a simplified but certain and transparent process for making adjustments to the SDL within the Basin Plan, and enable the potential benefits of these far-reaching reforms to be fully realised.

Debate adjourned.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1)

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Health) (09:19): I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Dickson’s private Members’ business notice relating to the disallowance of the Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1), dated third of September 2012, made under subsection 3C (1) of the Health Insurance Act 1973, being called on immediately.

Question agreed to.

Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1),

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (09:20): I move:

That the Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1), dated third of September 2012, made under subsection 3C (1) of the Health Insurance Act 1973, be disallowed.

The coalition is committed to extra investment into dental services. Tony Abbott and I have taken the decision to move this disallowance motion because we want to stand up for people with chronic disease in this country who are in need of dental services but are being stopped by this government from receiving those dental services.

By way of background, the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme was authored by Tony Abbott, who was then health minister in 2007, because he sold a desperate need for Australian is living in pain to receive services that the states were not providing. The success of the scheme has resulted in 20 million services being provided since that time to over one million Australians. The
program has cost about $1 billion a year but that money has gone to help people who are in desperate circumstances. These are people who are living in significant pain, and they are not just adults; there are children as well. The government, by closing this scheme down and not commencing their own scheme until 2014, creates a gap of 19 months for people, where no services will be provided.

The minister will say to the Australian people that they have put extra money into public dental waiting lists administered by the state and territory governments around the country. But we know that 650,000 people languish on those lists as of today. And the suggestion that somehow people who have a chronic disease and are in need of dental services—people who can access services under the Abbott scheme today—could somehow turn up to the public hospital and receive equivalent services in the same time is a nonsense.

We have started to receive a flood of emails from people around the country who are captured by this government's mean spirited decision. These people include cancer patients who are part-way through dental treatment plans and have been told by their dentist that because of this change by the government their procedures will not continue, that their treatment plans are no longer funded and that they will live in abeyance and in pain until July 2014, when the government's own scheme commences.

It is important, also, to make the point that even when the government scheme commences it does not commence with the same generosity of the Abbott scheme. The Abbott scheme provided $4,250 to those eligible patients who had been referred by a GP to a dentist. Over a two-year period they could have that work performed up to that amount of money. For people who have contacted us this has been a life changer. I say, today, to the Prime Minister, the health minister and, most importantly, to the Independents, that they need to reassess their support of this crazy arrangement.

The government will say that the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme was somehow the playground of the rich because it was a universally accessible scheme—exactly the same way that Medicare operates. If somebody goes into a public hospital today with a heart attack, asthma or a broken leg, regardless of their earning capacity or their wealth they can receive treatment. The equivalent was provided under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. But when you break down the number of people who accessed the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme it becomes very apparent that this was not a scheme accessed to a large extent by people of means, in any case. In fact, 80 per cent of people who accessed the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme were on concession cards. It would have cost the government more to try and exclude the 20 per cent of people who did not hold concession cards than it would have been to provide the services for them under the scheme. So the government fails on that argument.

People will say, 'Well, why on earth would the government close a scheme down that is targeted at assisting those most in need: people with chronic disease—the most severely ill in many cases; people who are suffering severe dental pain?' There can only be one conclusion, because the government has resisted changes to this scheme over the course of the last five years despite saying that there were problems with the way in which some claims were being made. They refused to modify it. They refused to try and strengthen the system to try and exclude difficulties that they claimed were taking place, and now they seek to close it down altogether. I believe it is simply based on political motive.
It is based on political motive because this scheme was set up by Tony Abbott and they want to be able to trash the scheme and go to the Australian people claiming that they have a fantastic new scheme in 2014. But as is always the case with this government, their scheme, firstly, is poorly designed and, secondly, is unfunded. That is the hallmark of this Rudd-Gillard period of government: they cannot get the basics right. This government may have good intent in this space but they have not been able to deliver for those Australians who are most in need. I ask people who are suffering in significant pain, and parents who have children suffering in significant pain, please, to contact not just us—because we will continue the fight—but your local Labor member of parliament and Mr Windsor and Mr Oakeshott, who are facilitating this change today. Say to them that closing the scheme down and having nothing in its place for 19 months is bad policy. It is bad policy, and it is bad in terms of health outcomes. As part of the coalition's position, we do not hold the numbers in the lower house, so we have made approaches to the Independents, to Mr Wilkie, Mr Oakeshott, Mr Windsor and Mr Katter, to ask for their support for what we think is a reasonable position. We want to make sure that the 19-month gap is closed. That is all we are asking. If the government has an idea of wanting to restrict the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme but provide some support through it over the next 19 months, we would very happily to support that position. If the government has a reasonable compromise to put so that people would not live in pain over the next 19 months, put it on the table so that we can arrive at an arrangement that is in the nation's best interests.

But that is not what this government is proposing—and not for health reasons but for their own crass political purposes. When we contacted Mr Wilkie, he had the decency to say he had already made up his mind, that he was going to support the government. He was happy for people suffering from a chronic disease to go without those dental services during that 19-month gap. That is a decision for him. Mr Katter also had the decency to advise me that he intended to support the coalition's position because he did not want to see people suffering in pain over the course of that 19 months.

That of course leaves us with Mr Oakeshott, the member for Lyne, and Mr Windsor, the member for New England. Despite my office making contact with both Independents, they refused to get back to us, even to discuss a compromise position. If the Australian public wanted any demonstration of the way in which Mr Windsor and Mr Oakeshott slavishly follow every twist and turn and deviation of this government they need look no further than this bill before the House today.

This is bill is trying to address an anomaly created by bad government, and the Independents have the capacity to stop it. The Independents have the capacity to say to this government, 'Put in place some sort of interim measure which would allow dental services to continue for people most in need.' That is what we are asking for in this disallowance today. We want to make sure that this parliament provides some sort of relief for those who are most in need. Yet this government and the Independents complicit with them have a tin ear for those constituents, who no doubt are contacting them saying that they are partway through a treatment plan with their dentist and the work is now going to stop, or that because of chemotherapy they have had to delay the dental services that they are desperately in need of but now will not be entitled to because this government is closing the scheme.
Why will Mr Windsor and Mr Oakeshott not even entertain some sort of a compromise deal to provide relief to these people? It is because they are essentially tied to this government like no Independent has been to a government in our nation's history. I call on the two Independents to come into this House and explain. Explain, Member for Lyne and Member for New England, why you are facilitating this bad policy by this bad government? Why are you resisting those calls from needy people who are suffering from a chronic disease, and from parents who are in despair because they cannot afford services for their children unless they are provided under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme or some iteration of that scheme?

This minister says those people can have some relief on the public dental waiting list. That is a nonsense, Minister. There are 650,000 people on that waiting list, and some people are waiting five years under that scheme. It shows how dreadful the Labor governments have been at a state level over the last decade, ramping those numbers up because they waste money, as this government does, on health bureaucrats instead of on front-line services. That is the hallmark of Labor governments in the health space. They spend money on bureaucracies and on bureaucrats and not on doctors, nurses and patients.

Why does this minister say that over the next 19 months chronically diseased patients needing dental services can get relief on public waiting lists when they cannot? Why, Minister, are you offering that false hope and that false promise—

**Ms Plibersek:** You are lying.

**Mr Dutton:** to these people who are most desperate in our country? I would ask the minister to withdraw her unparliamentary language.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore):** I call on the minister the withdraw that remark.

**Ms Plibersek:** I withdraw the remark, but he should correct the record.

**Mr Dutton:** This minister will go down as one of the most incompetent—

**Mr Secker:** Madam Deputy Speaker, the minister should withdraw without exception—which she did not do then.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister will withdraw.

**Ms Plibersek:** For your benefit, Deputy Speaker, I certainly do.

**Mr Secker:** Not for anyone's benefit; for—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I am satisfied with that. The member for Barker will resume his seat and I give the call to the shadow minister.

**Mr Dutton:** Let me put on the record that—and this is certainly the department's and the public's view of this minister—incompetence reigns supreme in this minister's office. This minister may claim to sit around in Canberra cafes for most of her time when she is here in the ACT. But, Minister, I can tell you that when you talk to stakeholders, to dentists and to these cancer patients, you are condemned as incompetent. You are condemned because you will never preside over a scheme that provides support to patients, and to sick children whose parents are living in despair at the moment. You are condemned because you have never surrendered them, as have Mr Windsor and Mr Oakeshott, who are complicit in this dreadful policy.

I say to the parliament and to the Australian people, if you want a demonstration of the government's incompetence, if you want to look at the way
this government operates, you need look no further than their operation in the area of health. It is not just restricted to the area of pink batts, where they cannot get a policy right and they waste money; to school halls, where they have wasted billions of dollars; to the solar panels; or to the management of the carbon tax implementation. This is a government that cannot get the basic requirements right. The government's basic charge is to take care of its people. The government's basic charge is to protect its people. This government is hanging out to dry, for a period of 19 months, the most vulnerable people in our country. Cancer patients and people suffering from chronic diseases are being told by their GPs that, yes, under Tony Abbott's scheme for the last five years they had support and relief from the most severe pain that could be imagined but now, for crass political purposes, this government seeks to destroy the scheme, to hang these people out to dry for an extended period of time—not because their scheme is about to start tomorrow but because they want to drive Tony Abbott's scheme into the ground and discredit it, on unreliable grounds.

I ask this minister: what future is there for the 800,000 people who use this scheme? What future is there for people who have accessed this scheme, 80 per cent of whom have been on concession cards, and the most of the remainder of whom have been on relatively low incomes? What future is there for those people and people in like situations over the next 19 months?

If the minister refuses to answer, let me provide this understanding. The fact is that those people will not access services going forward. Even from 1 July 2014—in 19 months time—they will not be accessing $4,250 worth of dental services, as they have received under Tony Abbott's scheme. They will be receiving a maximum of $1,000—that is what is provided under the government's scheme. And they say that somehow that is superior to what the Abbott scheme provided.

This is a government dominated by spin, and drowning in its own spin. This is a government that does not have the capacity to look those people in the eye. The member for New England, who has come into the chamber now, needs to look his constituents in the eye and tell them why it was that he signed up to this plan, that he would not enter into negotiations, not enter into discussions, about some sort of compromise arrangement. It is incumbent on this minister, and these Independents, to say why they are supporting what is a failed process.

The minister can go over there and jest and laugh with the member for New England, but the member for New England should know that his constituents—those people who are suffering from chronic diseases in his electorate right now—are watching and listening to this debate and saying to the member for New England, 'Why are you not, Mr Windsor, standing up for us as your most worthy constituents?' The member for New England and the member for Lyne, why are you not prepared for your constituents?

The capacity now for this disallowance to proceed rests in the hands of Mr Windsor and Mr Oakeshott. If they want to do something for people who are going to be left high and dry for 19 months, they should come to some compromise, talk to us about a position whereby we could provide support to those most in need over the 19 months. If you want to provide support to the government's scheme for a start date of 1 July, that is an issue for you. If you are happy with the design and you think it is going to be an appropriate and efficient spend of money, then that is an issue for you,
and I am happy for you to make that decision.

But what about these people over the next 19 months who will not have the same access that they are getting under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme? And don't stand up here and say that they will receive assistance under the public scheme, because they will not; that is a falsehood. Those people who are able to receive treatment today, to turn up and go in and see their GP, would, under Tony Abbott's scheme, have been referred immediately to a dentist and received that $4,000 worth of treatment over a two-year period. That is not going to happen into the future under what the government is proposing and what the Independents are supporting in this arrangement, and that needs to be put on the record. And it needs to be addressed, because if these people are just going to blindly follow a bad government, then people are going to suffer in their constituencies.

This is an explanation that must be made by the Independents and by the government. They must say to those people who can get access under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme that they are not going to get access over the next 19 months—look them in the eye and say that. That is the failure that is before the House today, and it is up to the Independents to support this motion to stop bad policy. (Time expired)

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (09:40): I second the motion. I am very pleased to speak on this motion that is seeking to retain the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme on Medicare. The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme was introduced by the Leader of the Opposition when he was health minister in 2007. It involved several critical insights. The Leader of the Opposition, as health minister, understood, firstly, that it was access to restorative treatment, not cheques, that people needed, and, secondly, that you needed to unlock the very significant capacity of the private sector in dentistry. And he did that through Medicare.

It was no idle boast when the coalition used to say that we were the best friends Medicare ever had. While the Labor Party introduced Medicare in 1983—and it came into being in 1984—by the time we came to government in 1996 we were strong supporters of Medicare, and we improved on Medicare while in government. We introduced access to dental on Medicare. We introduced access to psychologists through better outcomes and better access to mental health. And we expanded the access for allied health professionals on to Medicare, going through their GPs, with team care arrangements or care plans.

The Labor Party, in the last election, made the spurious claim that the Leader of the Opposition had taken a billion dollars out of the health system. Well, this health minister has, with the stroke of a pen, ripped out $1 billion from Medicare. I find it extraordinary that a Labor minister for health is the first minister for health we have had since Medicare was introduced who had actually removed a whole class of people from Medicare for dental. We all wonder what our legacies might be when we leave this place, but this minister's legacy will be this: health minister; ripped a billion dollars a year out of Medicare.

The Labor Party and the Greens propose to close the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme on 30 November. Also, as a result of their announcement, no new treatments will begin after 7 September. Let us look at the impact of this. I have had one resident of South Australia contact me who had radiotherapy for throat cancer and was referred by the public hospital to a GP to get access to the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. He is not...
eligible to go on the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme as a result of this government's decision. He was referred instead back to the state dental service and was originally told that it would be a 14- to 18-month wait. That is the impact, on a personal level, of what you have done.

*Ms Plibersek interjecting—*

**Dr SOUTHCOTT:** Minister, there is now a 19-month gap for people with chronic disease, during which they will not have access to treatment. They have to fall on the state dental services, which we know have massive waiting lists. What the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme provided was $4,250 in Medicare dental benefits over two years for patients with a chronic health condition. They had to go through their GP and they had to be on a GP management plan or a multidisciplinary care plan—the same way we expanded access to allied health, the same way we provided improved pathways for people with mental health conditions. A chronic condition is one that has been or is likely to be present for at least six months or is terminal. This applies to patients with diabetes; who have had cancer and radiotherapy; who have suffered strokes; who have heart disease, especially valvular heart disease; who have chronic kidney disease; with osteoporosis; with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; and with arthritis. Those are the most common conditions suffered by people accessing this scheme. The scheme allowed for dental assessments, preventative services, the removal of teeth, and fillings and dentures.

If we take a step back and look at the dental situation in Australia. Essentially, half the population are covered by private health insurance and are able to access a private dentist using their insurance. The rest either have to pay to go and see a dentist or they fall on the state dental services. And, what has been very obvious, is that there is a gap in treatment in Australia, and it is largely because the state dental services have massive waiting lists. The waiting lists vary from 18 months to over two years, depending on the state. So, by using Medicare, we were able to come up with a scheme that saw over one million patients treated and over 20 million services provided.

We often hear that this scheme was 'not well targeted'. Well, it is like Medicare—the same principle applies: universal access. That is a fundamental principle of Medicare. While people can say anyone could receive treatment under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, 80 per cent of the people receiving the treatment were concession card holders. So what the Labor Party need to do is to explain to people who are on the aged-pension, who are receiving Newstart, who are on the disability support pension, who are receiving any sort of concessional card, why they have removed for them—and why the minister has removed for them, at the stroke of a pen—choice of dentist. Because, under our scheme, they had choice of dentist. Under the government's proposed scheme, which begins in 19 months time—there is a gap of 19 months—they will fall on the states' dental services and it is just a matter of 'join the queue; take what you get.'

Hans Zoellner, from the Centre for Oral Public Health, has described this scheme as 'fantastically successful'—in fact, he suggested that the government could have expanded the scheme to include people on low incomes; that instead of abolishing the scheme, and ripping it from Medicare, it could have been used as the foundation for an expansion of dental services.

As I have said already, 80 per cent of the services under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme were for concession card holders. As
a result of this government's decision, they will be forced to join the queues and waiting lists in the public system—and there are more than 650,000 on these public waiting lists; 400,000 of whom are adults. Whereas, under the Liberal's scheme, using Medicare and using private dentists, they had a choice of dentist; now, it is just take what you get, and you will have to wait as well.

The government have claimed that there have been massive cost blowouts. One point I would make is that the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme was always funded by the previous government. Department of Health and Ageing figures show that the average claim is only $1,716—so it is well short of the cap. Some estimates suggest that this has dropped further, to below $1,200. The coalition has reached across the table to the government and offered to work with them to improve the scheme, to refine the scheme; and this offer has been rejected.

One thing I would like to say to the Independents—to the member for Denison, the member for Lyne, the member for New England and the member for Kennedy: think very seriously about what you are doing here. What you are doing is, for the first time, removing access to Medicare for a whole class of people. What you need to do is be prepared to tell people with cancer, with diabetes, with heart disease, with arthritis, who have had a stroke or with osteoporosis, why you have decided to rip them from Medicare for their dental services and just leave them lost in the waiting lists of the state dental services—and you have to be prepared to look them in the face and explain why you are prepared to do that. What you have to do to those people, 80 per cent of whom are concession card holders, is explain to the aged-pensioners, to the people on disability support, to the people on Newstart why they will no longer be treated on Medicare for dental services but will have to rock up to their local dental hospital.

The shadow minister for health mentioned that there will now be a 19-month gap. This will be 19 months of pain for Australians with chronic disease. And for the children in our children's hospitals around Australia, who previously would have had access to Medicare under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, that access has now been closed. They will not have to wait 19 months—that is the good news; they will only have to wait 13 months. That scheme starts on 1 January 2014. After that 19 month freeze, when adults can go on the state public dental services, there is still a further waiting list of, depending on the state, 14 to 18 months to as long as 2½ years. So this involves pain for Australians, pain over the next 19 months, while their dental pain has been forgotten by this government. I find it extraordinary that the party of Neal Blewett, the party of Bob Hawke, the party that introduced Medicare and regarded it as one of its proudest social reforms has now decided to rip pensioners and concession card holders off Medicare for dental. It is an extraordinary thing. This minister is the first Minister for Health to take a whole group of people off Medicare for dental. How does it feel, Minister, to be the first Minister for Health to take concession card holders off Medicare—concession card holders who, for the last five years, have enjoyed a choice of dentists and access, the two things that they never had under the state dental schemes. You, as minister, with the stroke of a pen, by regulation, have now closed this scheme and ripped $1 billion from Medicare.

I urge the Independents to think very carefully about this motion. It is a serious motion. We think that the chronic disease dental scheme is a good scheme. We think it should be preserved. We think it is meeting a need for both adults and children with
chronic disease, those who are the sickest in our society, 80 per cent of whom have a concession card.

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

Dr SOUTHCOTT: Are you making fun of people with asthma? Are you saying people with asthma should not be getting access to Medicare on dental? That is a disgrace.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): Order! The member for Dickson.

Dr SOUTHCOTT: Asthma is a chronic disease, Minister, for your information. Dear oh dear!

Ms Plibersek: The member for Dickson claims that I said they are not sick. That is absolutely not true.

Mr Dutton: What did you say?

Ms Plibersek: I said there is a difference between asthma and cancer.

Dr SOUTHCOTT: She did not say that.

Mr Dutton: You did not say that.

Dr SOUTHCOTT: Anyway, here we have exhibit A—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The minister has the call.

Ms Plibersek: I ask that the member for Dickson withdraw that comment.

Mr Dutton: I withdraw.

Dr SOUTHCOTT: Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Health, ripped $1 billion from Medicare for dental—a proud achievement. It is an extraordinary day: a Labor Party minister, a minister from the party of Neal Blewett and Bob Hawke has been the first Minister for Health, since Medicare was introduced in 1983, to have actually slashed Medicare and removed a whole class of patients from Medicare. These are the sickest people in our society. They are the people who had been forgotten by the state dental services. They are the people who had new hope of being treated with a choice of dentist and through Medicare. It has now been lost. I encourage all members of the House, and the Independents, to support this disallowance motion.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (09:55): I would like to make a contribution to this. I did not interrupt the shadow minister when he was on his rather excited diatribe, but I appreciate the member for Boothby's calmer approach to this issue. Maybe there are some messages in terms of that and in terms of prosecuting a case.

The member for Dickson seemed to make an assumption on a number of things. One was that he knew how I was going to vote. The minister does not know how I am going to vote. I have been engaged in discussions on this issue with the minister.

Mr Laming: What about the shadow minister?

Mr WINDSOR: Hang on a bit. You will hear a bit about the shadow minister in a minute. It brings into question what the motives are of the shadow minister in coming in to this place, carrying on the way he has in relation to this issue, making statements that my office had not taken the time to contact his office.

Mr Dutton: Exactly right.

Mr WINDSOR: That is not right. You know that Peter.

Mr Dutton: I have logs of all the attempted contacts, Tony.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Dickson has had his opportunity and will sit there in silence.

Mr WINDSOR: You know that is not right. I have always had great respect for you. You also know, as has occurred on
previous occasions, that my door has always been open to you—always—if in fact you have ever wanted to speak to me about various issues. I am involved as we all are in an extraordinary number of meetings on a whole range of issues, and I am not saying this is the first time that you have mentioned it, but the first time I have heard that the shadow minister has an arrangement he would like to speak to the Independents about was when he was speaking this morning.

I have been in negotiations for some time with the minister and the minister's office about these issues, because they are substantive issues and there are some very real questions that a number of people have been trying to find answers to. But for the shadow minister to suddenly raise the compromise, knowing full well—as all members of the opposition would know, and many of them walked through that door—that if he was really interested in a compromise he could have come and discussed it with me. Given the respect I have had for him—and I still do—one has to question the motives. What is the point of raising these issues in a vitriolic fashion if you are trying to convince someone who has not made up their mind on this particular issue to support you? The reaction that I think most people would have is that you are more interested in the issue than the solution to it. If you were interested in the solution to it and there were a compromise, I would have thought that the shadow minister—and you have not been a precious person in the past, where position puts you on a pedestal where everybody has to come and bow down in front of you; you are not like that. What is the point of raising these issues in such a vitriolic fashion when you know full well that you do not know how I am going to vote? The minister has no idea how I am going to vote. But your contribution—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for New England needs to address his remarks through the chair.

Mr WINDSOR: The member for Dickson's contribution was almost an encouragement to vote against his disallowance motion, which leads me to think that the motive for this is to maintain this as an issue rather than solve it.

I have been more than happy to talk about compromises on this issue, and the minister would be aware of that. Meetings have been held as recently as this morning with various people about what this actually means, particularly to regional people, in terms of the changes that are contemplated. The member for Boothby, in his much more reasoned debate, raised some of those issues about the transitional arrangements, and those issues are still in discussion.

I think there is an issue there. If this particular arrangement is concluded there is an issue—not of the 19-month extent that is talked about—where the two schemes intersect. That is something that does need to be addressed. If the opposition truly have a compromise position that addresses that, I am more than happy to talk to them about that, because we have all expressed some degree of concern in relation to that particular point of intersection. But for the member for Dickson to come in here and make this—I do not know whether you think that that will gain leverage in the electorate of New England or whatever. I think the people of New England are a little bit smarter than that. Irrespective of that, I think it is disappointing that a shadow minister who has genuinely prosecuted a case in terms of the policy that they believe in has prosecuted it very poorly when it comes down to the absolute debate and what sorts of amendments or compromises may be obtained.
My staff were in touch with his office, I think as recently as yesterday afternoon, asking for more information about the disallowance.

**Mr Dutton:** It's not true, mate.

**Mr WINDSOR:** One of your staff did ring back—

**Mr Dutton interjecting—**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! This is not a conversation between the member for Dickson and the member for New England; the member for New England has the call.

**Mr WINDSOR:** I am disappointed about the member for Dickson's rather vitriolic attack both on me and on my office, but I say again to the member for Dickson: if there is some sort of compromise arrangement, I would have thought it might have been sent to my office. I would have thought that the member for Dickson might well, as he has in the past, have walked through the door and said, as many members of the opposition have done over the years: 'Listen, have you got five minutes? I need to talk to you.' I am more than happy to initiate discussions with them. I leave that where it is. If there is something that I need to know in terms of a compromise, the door is open. Please come and see me.

**Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (10:04):** Can I say at the outset how delighted I am that we are actually debating dental care. I say that because this is a very important issue for pensioners, for children and for people on low incomes, who have been struggling with this for many, many years. It is great to hear the opposition talking about dental care, because I can recall the times that they spoke about dental care when they were in government. I recall two times. The first was in 1996, when the first act of the Howard government was to get rid of the Commonwealth Dental Scheme. They spoke about it then. The second time it was ever raised was at a minute to midnight before the 2007 election, when they cobbled together a botched up policy for the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme.

In the period in between, it was raised on a number of occasions. Many of us on this side campaigned on it. I did, very strongly, in my 2004 campaign and in 2007 and 2010. I constantly saw constituents of mine who had been waiting for years to get dentures, people who were on a pension, who were on low incomes, people waiting to get their teeth fixed, waiting for fillings—a whole range of things. Every single time it was raised either as a question in question time or a private member's motion or as a debate on radio or in the media, the answer always came back exactly the same, and that was: 'It has nothing to do with the Commonwealth government.' Look up Hansard. I urge people to look up the Hansards, look at the questions and look at the debates, and you will see the same answer over and over: 'It has nothing to do with the Commonwealth government. Go to your state Labor mates and get it fixed.' Those are the responses that we were getting.

So I am really pleased—I am delighted—that the opposition is actually talking about dental care, because we have a plan in place that will look after low-income earners, pensioners, children and also people with chronic diseases.

**Dr Southcott interjecting—**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore):** Order! The member for Boothby has had his opportunity.

**Mr GEORGANAS:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I sat here from nine o'clock in silence. I did not intervene or interject at all, and I expect the same while I am speaking.

I am sure that the members opposite have a keen interest in dental care, but we have
seen the package that was botched together at a minute to midnight just before the 2007 election. We were told that it would cost around $90 million each year. You might think that $90 million per year is a fairly reasonable amount. It is actually costing us $1 billion each year, and it still leaves people waiting on the list. There are still pensioners who are waiting to get dentures. There are still children who are not getting the services.

Mr Laming: Half as many!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bowman will sit in silence.

Mr GEORGANAS: There are still people waiting on the list to get their teeth fixed. There are people who cannot afford private health insurance, who perhaps do not have a chronic illness but have worked all their lives, paid their taxes all their lives and are now on a low income or a pension and are still waiting on that list. The scheme that Abbott put up in 1997 does nothing for those people. Our scheme will ensure that they get the services that are required.

We raised this issue continually, over and over again, when we were in opposition and when I was a candidate, and the answers were always the same. It was always: 'No, no, no. We are not interested in dental care. It has nothing to do with us. Go to your mates in the state Labor governments. It's their responsibility. We wipe our hands of it.' In 2007, as the clock was ticking over towards the federal election, the coalition came up with a scheme that was cobbled together and was meant to cost $90 million a year. We see it now costing $1 billion a year, approximately $80 million per month, with people still on that waiting list. It is doing nothing for those people.

On this side of the House, we are very proud of this bill. This is something that we have all campaigned on. It was an election promise in 2007 and 2010, and it is now coming to fruition. It is very important that those opposite support it. We were elected on this platform in 2007 and 2010. We have a mandate. It is very clear. On two occasions when we have tried to progress dental reform because the coalition cut the Commonwealth dental scheme, and waiting lists went up to 750,000 people. People were waiting up to four years to get their teeth fixed.

As I said yesterday, I am always happy to take advice from anyone, but I am not sure whether any advice from the opposition should be taken seriously, with their record. Now they come into this House and talk to us about dental care and what should be done for people who have illnesses who are on low incomes et cetera. Where was this passion about dental care when they were in government and we would raise this constantly? There was a brick wall when we would raise it, for a whole decade. We all remember that. Every single one of us on this side remembers. I urge you to look at the Hansard, at the questions I asked and the questions that the member for Richmond and the member for Shortland asked. They were passionate about dental care. In opposition, there were lots of debates and lots of talk but there was constantly a brick wall put up, with the government saying: 'It has absolutely nothing to do with us. Go to your mates in the state Labor governments. It's their responsibility. We wipe our hands of it.' In 2007, as the clock was ticking over towards the federal election, the coalition came up with a scheme that was cobbled together and was meant to cost $90 million a year. We see it now costing $1 billion a year, approximately $80 million per month, with people still on that waiting list. It is doing nothing for those people.

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in this House, it has been blocked by those opposite—not once but twice. As I said, we have a clear mandate. It cannot be any clearer. We have the electoral authority to deliver this reform of the provision of dental services in this land. If you look at the Hansard from when we were in opposition, and from since we have been in government, you will see the commitments that we have made. We are delivering on those commitments. We want to deliver a dental scheme that is equitable for all in this nation. That is what this bill does.

I do not believe the opposition will support this bill, because that is all we have heard from them—a constant no, no, no, on every bit of reform that we try to put into this place. By opposing this bill, they are opposing the most vulnerable in our community—pensioners, children and low-income earners who have no other way of getting their teeth fixed and maintained. We have another fear campaign from those opposite, saying that we are cutting the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme and there will be no services for the people on that scheme. We are offering a service to people with chronic diseases and to people on low incomes. People on low incomes who have no other means to pay for dental care will get the services that they require. This is an Abbott scare campaign, just as we have seen with the carbon tax and a whole range of other things. It is a scare campaign trying to convince people that we are going to deprive them of dental services—when we have campaigned continually for 10 years on the fact that we believe in a dental system that assists pensioners and people on low incomes to receive the services that they require.

They are preaching now to us about dental care, but when they came in and axed the Commonwealth dental scheme people were required to wait up to two and three years. At one stage, the lists of people waiting to have their teeth fixed ballooned out to 750,000. Labor have promised, and we have been pursuing, something very different to those opposite, and that is to increase the availability of dental services. The poorly designed coalition scheme, which we have sought for years to replace, subsidised treatment of millionaires. Gina Rinehart could get access to that scheme, yet a pensioner in my electorate, in Plympton, who did not have a chronic disease but had worked all her life, paid her taxes and was now on an age pension, could not access it. You tell me where the equity and fairness is in that.

Mr Baldwin: That's a lie!

Mr GEORGANAS: Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask that the member withdraw that remark.

Mr Baldwin: I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mr GEORGANAS: As I said, it was a scheme that was poorly designed and that led to waste and dissatisfaction. I have seen many constituents who accessed the service only to find out that the money was gone within a couple of visits, they had not got what they wanted and they had not got the services they were paying for. I have seen many, many people. In fact, a couple of dentists have come to me to tell me that this is happening quite widely. Last year, we saw Medicare recover money—I cannot remember how much, but it was in the millions—where dental treatment had not been done properly but the money had been paid. That is taxpayers' money. I have heard many stories of treatments that have been of low value and poorly performed or that have remained inaccessible to those who need them the most. That is what our scheme is about: providing the services to those that need them the most. The system needs to
improve, but improvement is anathema to those opposite. They would prefer a culture of fear, to scare people, to say we are taking something away when in fact we are actually giving back bigger and better dental services. Those opposite have been crying out with false alarm this morning, saying that Labor plans to deprive people of dental services. That is not correct. As I said, the only people who have deprived the Australian public dental care are those opposite—they cut the Commonwealth dental scheme in 1996. That was their very first act, and the fear I have is that an Abbott led government would do the same thing again. They would repeat what they did in 1996; it would be history repeating.

This is one example of a continual string of ironies where the coalition says positive change is negative change; where an increase in services means a decrease in availability—we are increasing services; that is the reality. The Abbott coalition strive to convince the people to fear the very changes that will benefit them most. They are trying to put the fear into people that these changes are going to benefit the Australian public, particularly low income earners, pensioners and children. I am proud to speak in favour of this bill. We have a record of campaigning for and promising that we will deliver a dental scheme, and that is what this is.

As a result of this package, which was announced by the Minister for Health in late August, 3.4 million Australian children will be eligible for funded dental care through the expansion of the government's current child focused dental scheme. That means that we are putting preventative measures in place. When these children grow up to become teenagers and adults, they will have much healthier teeth and that means they will not have to access these services, costing us less in the long run.

Currently, under the bill children aged 12 to 18 will be able to access dental care. Almost 3½ million children aged two and over will be able to access the care they need. That will be a good start in dental hygiene, and will set the path for fewer problems in the future, costing governments less money. That is why this is a good bill—it also covers the preventative side of things. Funding will be provided to the states for around 1.4 million additional dental services for adults on low incomes such as age pensioners, concession card holders and people with disabilities and special needs.

When the Howard government cut the Commonwealth dental scheme in 1996, the waiting list went up to 750,000 people, with an average waiting time of 2.4 years. We are delivering 1.4 million services, which will wipe out the bulk of the waiting list. If those opposite were to form government at the next election—shock, horror!—one of the first things they would do is revisit what they did in 1996. We know that deep down in their hearts they do not believe in the dental scheme. We asked those questions and they were honest enough to tell us when they were in government that these services had nothing to do with a federal government. Further, outer metropolitan, rural and remote areas will receive additional capital and workforce to provide the services where they are needed.

This package relies on federal funding complementing state funding. Many things have to be negotiated between the Commonwealth and the states, and I envisage, for example, New South Wales and Queensland may try to sabotage the process, as we have seen with other negotiations that have taken place, and the poor people of Queensland and New South Wales will be the worse off for that. (Time expired)
Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (10:19): I support the motion by the shadow minister of health, the member for Dickson, that the Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1), dated 3 September 2012, made under subsection 3C(1) of the Health Insurance Act 1973, be disallowed. I support the shadow minister because I support those in my community. Yesterday in this House I highlighted but three of the cases brought to me by my constituents.

What I find most appalling in this argument by the Minister for Health is that she claims that the services are there to be driven for and supported by the millionaires in our community. I have to tell the minister that there are not too many millionaires living in my electorate. My electorate is made up largely of aged people, with 21 per cent of my population being over 65. I have a very high demographic of low-income earners throughout my electorate. That is reflected in the government's own figures, which show that 80 per cent of the people who have accessed the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme are concession card holders.

In discussions this morning with one of my GPs—people who obviously you do not trust to make informed decisions about chronic disease—he said to me that the cost of providing this service, as against doing nothing and the hospitalisation of those people because of their chronic condition, is a cheap fix. In fact, while there is $4,250 allowed over two years to address the dental condition of those suffering from these chronic diseases, the average cost claim is less than $1,800 over the two years. In fact, the around one million people that have been treated have had 20 million services. Today, Minister, in an article reporting your response to my story in the Maitland Mercury yesterday, you said—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): I ask the member for Paterson not to refer to 'you'.

Mr BALDWIN: I am sorry; in the article the minister said:

The MCDDS has been massively rorted with more than 1000 complaints from patients ripped off with dentures that didn't fit; work charged for that was never done and cosmetic and unnecessary dental work.

Minister, I put it to you this way. One thousand out of one million patients is 0.1 per cent. If you applied your argument to those receiving social security benefits who have rorted the system, you would be arguing to abolish social security because the fraud rate on that is far higher. I say to the minister, this is—to quote the old analogy—a very mean, tricky approach to dental care. This scheme takes care of those most urgently in need of dental repair work. It takes care of those predominantly who can least afford it. Your solution, Minister, is to put people on the queue, with 650,000 already waiting, who will take five years to process. These people will go to the back end of that queue and suffer all the time. I would like to point out comments from Mark Foster, Chief Executive, Hunter Urban Medicare Local, who is also a very well-respected GP. In responding to the arguments put forward on the abolition of this scheme, he said that chronic dental conditions:

... can affect nutrition, which is particularly important for patients with chronic disease;
chronic infections have a deleterious effect on general well-being and can ... have a significant impact on patients already unwell due to a chronic disease;
dental infections can spread throughout the bloodstream infecting ... which can have a significant impact on patients already unwell due to a chronic disease; and
surgery to have a prosthesis inserted will normally be delayed until a dental infection is resolved to avoid these complications. There can be significant delays in accessing this care through public clinics. Patients may suffer from severe joint pain and incapacity or face the risks associated with delays in cardiovascular surgery.

The reason I oppose this government and want to maintain this scheme is that I am standing up for my constituents in Paterson. I am standing up for those who cannot afford to get dental care. I am standing up for people like Josh, about whom you said: I read the story in the Mercury about Josh Oran, and concerned for him, as I would be for anyone suffering or recovering from cancer.

How can your concern be for someone who has had bone cancer in the jaw and whose dental work, if not completed by 30 November, will have to go on the back end of the public waiting list to get it addressed? What about his nutrition? What about his quality of life? You come in here, Minister, as a great champion of social causes, yet you are prepared to put those who require urgent treatment to have quality of life on the backburner.

I say to the member of the Lyne, the member for New England, the member for Denison and the member for Kennedy, when you vote on this motion, you need to consider your constituents' needs. As it was pointed out, 80 per cent of the people who have accessed this scheme are on concession cards. I know because the member for Lyne represents the seat to the north of me and the member for New England represents a seat relative to the north-west of me. I have been to Kennedy a number of times and I have also been down to Hobart. I do not see the streets there lined with many millionaires, with people so able to afford urgent dental treatment. I say to you, if you vote to remove this scheme, I want to see you go back to your electorates tomorrow morning, to get into the media and say, 'I proudly voted down this scheme. I want to put all of those suffering from a chronic condition on the back end of the 650,000 waiting list. I want to deny you this treatment all because this minister's justification is 0.1 per cent of all treatments, which led to a complaint.' In saying that, this minister is saying in essence that she does not trust the GPs to make the informed decision of a referral for private dental treatment covered by this Medicare scheme.

I disagree quite often with GPs on a range of issues but I would have thought that, when it comes to the health and wellbeing of our community, they understand more about the medical system and the treatment of their patients than any politician or any bureaucrat because they treat them on a daily basis. They take care of their patients' general health and wellbeing and Minister Plibersek wants to deny them access. Minister, I am going to go into my community and make sure they understand that you personally want to deny them access to urgent dental work.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): The member has to stop referring to 'you'. He should address his remarks through the chair.

Mr BALDWIN: The minister constantly refers to care and concern for those disadvantaged in our community but the minister, in pushing this motion to abolish this scheme—

Dr Southcott: With the stroke of a pen.

Mr BALDWIN: with the stroke of a pen, says, 'You can get on the back of the queue.' The member for Hindmarsh talked about an equitable approach. There is urgent and high-priority work which should go to those who need it most. Imagine someone who has had a coronary occlusion being caught on the back end of a waiting list at a hospital. There
is urgent work that needs to be addressed immediately and it is the same with chronic
dental conditions. If that work is not done
because, as the minister has made out in
some of the media statements, people are
seeking cosmetic work—for someone with
cancer in the jaw bone who has no way of
eating unless their dental condition is
controlled—

Ms Plibersek: They will be seen as a
priority patient.

Mr Baldwin: Oh rubbish! They will
be seen as a priority patient and be put on the
back end of the 650,000, and you know it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member
for Paterson will not respond to interjections.

Mr Baldwin: Well tell her to stop
interjecting, Deputy Speaker. That is your
role in this House.

Mr Garrett: Madam Deputy Speaker, I
rise on a point of order. On a number of
occasions, you have cautioned the member
for Paterson for his use of the term 'you',
which he knows is unparliamentary and
contradictory to the standing orders. I ask
you to bring him to order or he should sit
down.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the
minister and remind the member for Paterson
once again that he has to refrain from using
the word 'you'.

Ms Plibersek: Madam Deputy Speaker, I
rise on a point of order. The member for
Paterson was just extremely disrespectful to
you in telling you your job and I think he
should apologise to you for that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I appreciate
the minister's concerned but we will return to
the debate. The member for Paterson will be
heard in silence for the remainder of his
time.

Mr Baldwin: The Minister for Health
does not want to hear or understand the
communications of constituents. I look forward to
tomorrow when the member for Newcastle,
the member for Hunter, the member for
Shortland and the member for Charlton will
go to the media in the Hunter and say, 'I
proudly supported taking away access to the
Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. I was proud
to stand up and vote to make sure it was got
rid of.' Through the whole spectrum of the
Hunter we have a high number of people on
concession cards, people who normally do
not have access to public dental hospitals.
People in rural and regional areas who do not
have access to public dental hospitals were
able to be referred by their GP to their local
dentist to get work done. This minister is
now saying, 'Go on the back end of the
queue. Drive yourself from Forster to the
dental hospital in Sydney and sit there and
wait.' Minister, this is totally unacceptable
and cannot be supported.

The other thing the Labor Party keeps
pushing is that the Howard government
abolished the Commonwealth Dental
Scheme. Well, that scheme was set up for
four years, and it was the previous Labor
government that made no allowance for it in
the forward estimates. What we get from this
government is rhetoric and very little action.
What concerns me most about their proposal,
as I said in my speech yesterday, is that this
package is unfunded. I want people to clearly
understand that they are abolishing this
scheme to put the money in the bank to
offset the $120 billion black hole. Those who
are suffering from a chronic dental condition
are now personally going to pay with their
health for the financial mismanagement of
this government because they are ripping this
scheme down.

I have just been informed that the member
for Kennedy will not be supporting the
government on this, and for that I commend
him. Obviously the member for Kennedy has
been out and about among his community
and understands the importance of this. He and I, like the majority of members in this place, represent rural and regional electorates and we do not have a public dental health hospital in our community. That means long distances to travel and those in regional areas incurring further cost to get down to the public dental hospitals in the capital cities.

This is poorly designed. All the minister is trying to do is rip money out of the system to prop up a failed financial package—and it is the people of Australia and, in particular, my constituents in Paterson who are going to suffer. Minister, you failed in your response in an article today in the *Maitland Mercury*. It was an appalling response. On one hand you said you care for people who suffer from these conditions and then you accused them of being millionaires who do not deserve the treatment. I say that is wrong.

I seek leave to table two documents. The first is page 1 of yesterday's *Maitland Mercury*, which contains an article that highlights the concerns of my constituents in relation to the abolition of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. The second is page 4 of today's *Maitland Mercury*, which contains the minister's responses to that article.

Leave not granted.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Health) (10:33): Listening to this debate you would think there is no choice to be made. But, in fact, we have a very important choice to be made. We have a choice between keeping open the rorted wasteful Chronic Disease Dental Scheme or opening a scheme that will look after the dental health of low-income Australians and 3.4 million Australian children. We have had very strong third-party endorsement for the path that we are taking as a government. Steve Hambleton, from the AMA, says:

This is a huge improvement on the existing dental scheme. There is less bureaucracy and red tape, and the program is better targeted at those with the greatest need.

Gordon Gregory, from the National Rural Health Alliance, says:

Being relieved of the financial responsibility for the oral health of 3.4 million children, the States and Territories will be able to reduce their public dental waiting lists rapidly and to a significant extent.

Shane Fryer, of the Australian Dental Association, might know what he is talking about, don't you think? He said:

The re-direction of federal funding to Australia's children and adults on low incomes or in rural areas will prove to be a sound investment. We know that if dental care can be provided to children then their long-term dental health will be significantly improved. Early intervention and preventive treatments are a proven and well-established method to prevent poor dental health in later life.

He goes on to say:

Currently around 65 per cent of Australians receive regular dental care. The ADA believes the new program will provide assistance to many Australian families previously unable to access regular care, as a sure way of helping them avoid a path where their dental health will deteriorate.

The ADA accepts that the CDDS funding model was flawed but the chronically ill have special needs and those who have not been able to access care through financial or geographic disadvantage must continue to receive assistance. Increasing the capacity of the public dental system will help meet this need.

So says the Australian Dental Association.

The CDDS is a poorly designed scheme. It treats millionaires the same as battlers. It treats cosmetic dental work the same as the vital work needed by patients suffering from disease. The CDDS has been massively rorted, with more than 1,000 complaints from patients being ripped off with dentures that did not fit, work being charged for that
was never done or cosmetic and unnecessary dental work. The government was billed for work on patients who did not exist. Some dentists charge twice for the same procedure and routinely overserviced. They swapped amalgam fillings for porcelain, inserted expensive crowns and performed unnecessary cosmetic work. In all, there were more than 1,000 complaints made.

Mr Laming: Out of one million treatments!

Ms Plibersek: The member for Bowman says it does not matter—1,000 complaints do not matter. In one case that was recently canvassed in the media a dentist has been ordered to repay more than $700,000. After an initial assessment of a sample of 20 patients, the dentist admitted billing for services that were never provided. After a subsequent audit began, the dentist admitted incorrectly billing patients 293 times. The dentist also said she had no record of 122 services provided to patients that she had billed to Medicare. After the audit began, the dentist voluntarily paid back $25,000 before being asked for a cent. In another case, in 2009, Medicare visited a dentist who was not providing treatment plans and quotes to patients.

Mr Laming: So what!

Ms Plibersek: The member at the table interjected again: 'So what!'

Mr Laming interjecting—

The Deputy Speaker (Mrs D'Ath): The member for Bowman is reminded that he already has a warning.

Ms Plibersek: Medicare visited a dentist in 2009 who was not providing treatment plans and quotes to patients nor copies of treatment plans to referring general practitioners. On a return visit in 2010 Medicare found the dentist had not rectified the issues. The dentist incorrectly claimed $1.9 million of taxpayers' money and the member for Bowman thinks that does not matter.

In another case, an audit of a dentist found he had incorrectly claimed $1.8 million. During the audit it was revealed that the dentist had repeatedly failed to inform referring GPs of the course of treatment he intended to carry out on their patients. The dental practitioner said it was because he did not use computers. That was $1.8 million of taxpayers' money ripped off under the scheme that Tony Abbott designed while health minister.

We have a choice: to keep this flawed wasteful scheme open or to provide dental services through the public system.

Mr Hartsuyker: You're providing nothing for two years!

Ms Plibersek: The member interjects: 'nothing for two years.' The money starts to flow from 1 January next year. As soon as the states and territories sign-on they will have half a billion dollars on the table.

Mr Hartsuyker interjecting—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Cowper is warned.

Ms Plibersek: The CDDS is flawed. It is not means tested. It has no restrictions on the type of work that can be performed. It has been complained about at an unbelievable rate. The amounts that have been overcharged are unbelievable. Why are those opposite defending such a flawed scheme? Because Tony Abbott introduced it when he was health minister. They need to defend the Abbott record. If they came into parliament and saw a scheme that was as badly abused as this they would never defend it. A scheme that was supposed to cost $90 million a year now costs $80 million a month. That is the design that Tony Abbott left us with.
Our scheme is going to be available from 1 January. We made available $515.3 million in the May budget for the states and territories from January. What do they need to do to get that money? All they need to do is agree to maintain their existing effort and show us what they are doing with the money. We are not even asking them to increase their own effort. We are just making sure that they at least maintain their existing effort. That effort is not clear in states like Queensland that are actually cutting dental services at the moment. The latest news out of Queensland is that dentists have been sacked at Brisbane hospital, dental services have been downsized at the Royal Children's Hospital and $1.4 million has been cut from the Metro North oral health budget. The member for Dickson, the shadow minister for health, has congratulated the Queensland health minister on that, saying that they are getting Queensland Health back on its feet and have done what Liberal National governments do. Yes, that is right, they have done what Liberal national governments do: they have cut services. Of course, we need to make sure that the states and territories at least maintain their current effort, but that money is available from 1 January, January this year, as soon as the states and territories sign up.

Those opposite have raised the issue of waiting lists. They talk about 650,000 people being on waiting lists. That is an exaggeration; there are around 400,000 people on waiting lists. But that proves that the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is a flawed scheme. How can you be spending $1 billion a year and still have 400,000 people on waiting lists for public dental care? Is this some sort of alternative universe where people can think it is okay to spend $1 billion a year and still have 400,000 people around Australia on dental waiting lists? By their own admission this is a flawed scheme.

I will return to the history. The Liberals closed down the Commonwealth Dental Health Program. For 10 years they did nothing on dental care until at two minutes to midnight they introduced the flawed Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. The Liberals and Nationals are in here defending the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, saying they will not close it down. They have also said that they want to support our children's dental scheme. I am glad they do. It is a massively popular move. We know that. The same people who come in here day after day saying: 'Where's the money coming from?', want to spend the $2.7 billion on kids and presumably on the other measures—the workforce measures and the public health measures—as well. So that is the $4.1 billion we announced in August plus, presumably, the half a billion dollars we announced in the May budget—that is a $4.6 billion investment by this government in dental health. I presume they are going to support the whole package. And they want to spend another $1 billion a year on the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. These are the same people who come in here all the time saying, 'Where's the money coming from?' Where is the money coming from to allow you to add $1 billion a year to the bill? Where is the money coming from? Is this a firm commitment? Will you take this commitment to the next election? How will you pay for it on top of your $70 billion black hole?

There is no question that the CDDS is a flawed scheme, but I remind the House once again that this is not just about closing the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme; this is about what we replace it with. We are replacing it with a better scheme. We replaced it with half a billion dollars in the May budget: $345.9 million over three years for a waiting-list blitz, $10½ million dollars for oral health promotion, $35.7 million for expanding the voluntary dental year graduate
program, $45.2 million for funding a graduate year program for oral health therapists, and rural and remote infrastructure and relocation grants for dentists. Those members who have rural and regional electorates should really think about this, because there are many places where you cannot see a dentist, even if you have money in your pocket, because there aren't dental services in those communities. We are proposing to do something about that. The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme does nothing about those workforce and infrastructure measures. And there will be $450,000 in the budget over three years for supporting the pro bono work that dentists do so well. What about what we announced in August? We announced $2.7 billion for 3.4 million Australian children who will be eligible for subsidised dental care. The member for Paterson said he is going to go back to his electorate and talk about the competing plans. He should tell the 18,060 children in his electorate and the member for Dickson should tell the 18,304 children in his electorate, who will be eligible for this free dental work, for whom it will be as easy to see a dentist as it is to see a GP now, how he is going to find the money to support both the rorted, wasteful Chronic Disease Dental Scheme and this new proposal that supports them, that gives them a firm basis for better oral health of their whole life. He should tell them what he is going to do to find that money.

What about the $1.3 billion extra for extra services for adults on low incomes including pensioners, concession card holders and those with special needs? All of them will have better access to public dental. We announced in August $225 million for dental capital and workforce measures that will make it easier to see a dentist in areas right across Australia where currently it is impossible or difficult to see a dentist. The member for Dickson made a range of completely unsubstantiated comments including this idea that there is a 19-month gap. In the budget measures we announced in May, the spending can start in January. Every single person in this place understands that there are people, like the cancer patients mentioned, that have a desperate need for care. And those people who have income eligibility and who have that need for care will be seen in the public system. These issues and concern for the transition have been raised with me by my Labor colleagues and have been raised with me by the Independents Tony Windsor, Rob Oakeshott and Andrew Wilkie. I have been able to reassure them that the objectives and the outcomes of our agreement with the states will provide additional services for approximately 400,000 patients on public dental waiting lists, with a particular focus on Indigenous patients, patients at high risk of major health problems and those in rural areas, and expand the capacity of the public dental system to provide those increased services.

There was no concern from the Liberals when there was a 10-year gap caused by Peter Costello's closing of the Commonwealth Dental Scheme. There was no concern from them at all when that happened. There was no concern from the member for Dickson when services in his own state, in Brisbane were cut so viciously by the Campbell Newman government.

I conclude by saying this is not just about the closure of the CDDS. This is a choice of two alternate visions. Do you keep open a rorted, untargeted, overblown scheme or do you focus on kids, generations of oral health and public patients who need this support the most?

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (10:48): I rise to support the disallowance motion
moved by the shadow minister for health and also to support the comments of the members for Boothby and Paterson. For those here in the gallery today, you might be confused about what this disallowance motion and this debate is actually about. It is not about two different schemes. It is about what happens in the transitional period between them.

Two weeks ago, if any of you sitting up there in the gallery, your son or daughter or your elderly parents came down with the chronic dental disease, you could go to your GP and get a referral to a private dentist through Medicare. Medicare would fund $4,250 worth of treatment spread over two years. That was open to every Australian two weeks ago. That scheme is now shut, closed. It has been replaced with nothing for 18 months. Your children will not be able to access Labor's new scheme until 1 January 2014. For adults it does not start until 1 July 2014—over a year and a half away, after the next election. And this new scheme is completely unfunded.

What this disallowance motion is all about is what happens in that transitional period. What the government is saying is that in the transitional period, after the scheme is cut, you will longer have that access. Put simply, if you are suffering dental pain, if you have an abscess on your tooth, if you have chronic dental disease then take an aspirin, go to a queue that is 650,000 people long at the public dental hospital, and wait in pain for a year and a half. This disallowance motion is about making sure that does not happen and to make sure that the Chronic Dental Disease Scheme continues until the start of this new scheme.

We heard from the minister about how great her new scheme is. If it is so great, why do you not start it straight away? Why are you waiting a year and a half until it starts—after the next election? If this new scheme is so great why does it not start today?

There is another issue with cutting off the scheme. We have to remember that many people are halfway through treatments on the existing scheme. That scheme closes down at the end of November, within 12 weeks. This shows a fundamental failure of understanding of how dental treatment works on behalf of this government. Many patients need treatment under the Chronic Dental Disease Scheme that goes on for many months. What this does is cut patients off in the middle of their treatment and they will be unable to continue or to finish that badly needed treatment. They will be left stranded, up the creek without a paddle.

The minister goes on about the rorts that need to be cut out, and says that that is why the scheme must finish almost immediately. That is fair enough. If there are rorts they should be wound down, but we need to put this 1,000 in context. The minister talks about 1,000 complaints but she fails to mention that the scheme has provided two million services of care—the 1,000 complaints represent less than one per cent. So for less than one per cent this minister is throwing the baby out with the bathwater and making 100,000, 200,000 or maybe 300,000 Australians suffer in pain for up to 18 months.

If the government say that it would cost $1 billion for this scheme to continue surely the government can find the savings. They come into this House and we ask them, ‘Where is the money coming from for the $120 billion-worth of promises you have made over the last several months?’ They give us the answer, ‘It will come from savings.’ Surely they could find savings of $1 billion to keep this scheme open so that Australians do not have to put up with pain and suffering for the next 18 months.
It is also important to note that the current dental scheme, which the government finds so objectionable, provides 80 per cent of its funding to those on concession cards. Those concession card holders are now being asked to wait—to go to the back of a queue of a public dental scheme and wait for 18 months. I do not think, in my short time in parliament, I have seen a disallowance motion of such importance, that can save such pain and suffering for so many hundreds of thousands of Australians.

I would like to think about the effect that the psychology of cutting the scheme will have on the economy. As we know, if any Australian came down with a chronic dental disease two weeks ago they could go to a GP, get a referral and go to a private dentist to have that fixed. For the next 18 months people cannot. They are left on their own. What is that going to do to the economy? Think of the millions of Australians who will now live in fear that if they suffer chronic dental disease they will not be covered by existing arrangements, because this government has taken it away.

We saw with the carbon tax and increasing electricity prices that people are frightened to spend money out in the retail shops because they do not know what their electricity bill will be. The same thing will happen with this, because consumers will be concerned that if they come down with chronic dental disease in the next 18 months this government will shaft them—they will take the existing Medicare benefits away from them and leave them with nothing. So this will have another detrimental effect on the economy: people will be frightened to spend because they do not know how they will be able to afford that dental care in the next 18 months if this government is ripping the existing scheme away from them.

This is an opportunity for those on the other side of the House to make a stand within their caucus. Those opposite should stand up in caucus even if they agree that their new dental scheme is great. I am sure all of those opposite do think it is great—and it is a legitimate debate to have about the two schemes—but they cannot leave hundreds of thousands of needy Australians shafted. Needy Australians will be posted up the creek without a paddle for a period of 18 months. Surely there are at least a few people on the other side of the chamber who are not prepared to see this happen to their constituents.

The Independents have a decision to make here. Hopefully they will realise that we need to do something in this transitional period and support this motion. We cannot allow a situation where hundreds of thousands of Australians will suffer acute dental pain for 18 months—where this government can say, 'Take an Aspro and go and wait at the back of a queue of over half a million people.'

If this government can find any savings let them find the savings to keep the existing Chronic Dental Disease Scheme going. Or they could just tweak it a little bit. Modify it, but do not take one scheme away and then leave a gap of 18 months until the next scheme starts. That is what this debate is about, and we hope that at least some on the other side, or the Independents, will support this motion that will stand up for the needy people in our community who will need dental treatment over the next 18 months.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (10:57): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this disallowance motion because it is a very important issue for the people of my electorate. It is a very important issue because it affects those people who can afford dental treatment the least. It is a very
important issue because it is going to deprive many people of services that are vital to their health and will leave them with little or no alternative.

Yesterday, in the debate on the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill, coalition speakers outlined the history of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme—a scheme which provided for the first time access for people who could least afford it to a Medicare funded dental scheme in Australia. The coalition supports good dental outcomes and assistance for those who need help to get those outcomes, but the coalition is concerned about the gap that this new bill will introduce. It is particularly of concern for low income earners and those most in need. There is a gap because the new scheme does not commence until January 2014 for children, a 13-month gap; and July 2014 for adults, a 19-month gap.

It is a gap that concerns constituents in my electorate. I have been receiving in my electorate office numerous phone calls from people concerned about what is going to happen to them in this intervening period, where the minister's legislation says there will be no treatment and there will be no alternative. The minister came into this place and said, 'Trust me; there'll be a few scraps on the table to look after you.' The reality is that my constituents know that they cannot trust this minister. They know that their own health is at risk. They know that they are going to be going to the end of a 650,000-person waiting list. They will wait 19 months for the new scheme to kick in. Then what will happen?—they will earn the right to go to the end of a waiting list that is 650,000 people long. That is hardly good policy. No wonder they are so concerned.

Children must wait 13 months to access the new scheme, and the cap has been reduced, from $4,250 over two years to $1,000 over two years. Whilst this will assist some children, for those with chronic dental problems, $1,000 over two years will simply not be enough. As I said, in my electorate there are a range of people who rely on the current scheme, and the removal of this scheme will put further pressure on the costs of living that they are currently experiencing.

I would like to recount two phone calls in particular that were received at my office. One person who called my office has Sjogren's syndrome, which attacks the glands that produce tears and saliva. This person requires ongoing preventative dental treatment. For them, the gap of 19 months is unconscionable. What is going to happen to them during that 19-month period? Are they going to take an Aspro, go home and do nothing, and see their health deteriorate? I was also contacted by a 68-year-old pensioner who was eligible under the current scheme. He requires continuous dental check-ups and denture upgrades. With no assistance, on his fixed income what is he going to do? This shows gross disregard by this government for people most in need. They claim to be the champion of the battlers. Unfortunately, they have proven by their conduct to be otherwise.

The minister also says the current scheme has been rorted and has to be closed down because of that. I say the minister should take action under the legislation to recover money from any people who have rorted the scheme. I would also say that there is rorting of other benefits in Medicare—is the minister proposing to close those down? There is rorting of the social security system—is the minister proposing to close down the social security system? Rorting is always an issue, and every member of this House abhors it. Having said that, it is not an excuse to close down a scheme that is providing much needed assistance with health to those most in need and is vital to
improve health outcomes. Placing someone on a 650,000-person waiting list after 19 months is no solution to improve dental health outcomes.

The Independents should consider in their deliberations the impact that this gap in service is going to have for their constituents. I know the member for Lyne's electorate has a very similar demographic to mine—many people on low incomes, many people on social security benefits, and many other people who are unable to afford the sorts of dental care that the current scheme provides. I would say to the member for Lyne that he should think carefully about the fact that, after that prolonged waiting period of 19 months, those people will still be faced with a waiting list of 650,000. The same goes for the member for New England. He would have many low-income earners and many people dependent on benefits in his electorate. He should also think carefully about the impact of withdrawing services from those people most in need. It is vital that the crossbenchers consider carefully their actions in this bill, because this is a very important disallowance motion before the House.

I commend the previous scheme as implemented by the coalition government. I certainly do not accept that rorting is a reason for taking away benefits from people most in need. As I have said, rorting is, unfortunately, a practice that occurs across a whole range of government benefits. It should be stamped out, absolutely. But the minister cannot use that as an excuse to close down a very important scheme. The crossbenchers should think carefully about maintaining the current level of services for their own people.

If the government were serious about improved dental outcomes it would be introducing a new scheme that moved seamlessly from the previous scheme rather than introducing a massive gap that is going to cause major problems to those people most in need and those who are benefiting from the current scheme.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D'Ath): Before I give to call to the member for Blair, I apologise to the member; he was on his feet seeking the call before.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11:04): I oppose the disallowance motion. In our scheme, 5.2 million will be covered; on the CDDS, 650,000 are covered. That is the reality. I would have more respect for those opposite if they had a strong, good, caring history when it comes to dental care in this country. But what they have done is consistently and continually opposed dental reform in this country.

The Keating government brought in, in 1994, assistance at a federal government level for low-income earners, people on pensions and the like—$100 million of federal government funding to assist them on the waiting lists. We brought it in. That was hailed as a great initiative, with the Commonwealth government taking up what the federal Labor government did with Medibank and then Medicare. The federal government was taking responsibility, in part if not wholly, for oral health in this country.

What the Howard coalition government did in 1996 was come in, rip that $100 million or more out of the system and then leave about 750,000 people on waiting lists. They said, 'It's all the states' fault; it's not our fault.' That is what they said from 1996 until 2007—'It's not our fault; it's their fault.' Now they say it is not the states' fault. When their mates in New South Wales, Queensland and
Victoria are in power, it is our fault. Where is the consistency?

When we have Campbell Newman in Queensland sacking dentists, closing down breast screening, taking pathology services and dental services out of the Royal Children’s Hospital and sacking people everywhere—over 4,000 front-line services in health and hospitals across the whole of Queensland, including hundreds of workers in my area, across the western corridor between Brisbane and Ipswich and beyond—what do they say about that?

Where was the member for Dickson, who came in here with such feigned outrage, when it came to protecting the oral health of people across the country? Where was he? He did not say a word about that—not a word. Their scheme, which they brought in on the eve of the 2007 election, which was going to cost the taxpayers of this country $90 million, by June 2008 had cost them—according to Lindsay Tanner, the then finance minister—$248 million. Having consistently, in this chamber and elsewhere, opposed reform to bring in a system that would help low-income earners and children in this country, those opposite wasted hundreds of millions of dollars—if not billions—in dental health reform in this country. And they have the temerity and the gall to say that we waste money. They wasted it by their opposition. It was money for those needy millionaires, who need the $4,250!

They are always opposing reform. We heard the outrage from those opposite when it came to the private health insurance rebate. We are seeing similar arguments today in relation to this. And guess what? I had a bit of a look at the figures on the private health insurance rebate. A record 132,366 people took out private health insurance in the June quarter—a 0.4 per cent increase on March and the largest quarterly increase since 2007. But that was all going to collapse—no-one would ever take out private health insurance; they would all go to the public system.

I wonder where those opposite were in May this year; maybe there were holograms opposite. But they were there when the Treasurer talked about the $515 million in funding—and we saw the minister for health talk about this in subsequent legislation—that we are providing to make an impact on the waiting lists and other health reform in terms of people's oral health around the country. There is no gap; that is a nonsense. They must not have been here and heard those speeches. They must not have voted on those appropriation bills. I do not know what happened. Maybe it is all an illusion—they are in some sort of twilight zone. I do not know what happened with them.

This is what we are doing, and this is what we did in the budget, and this is what is being rolled out across the country. We are currently seeing 400,000 people on waiting lists getting access to public dental care in public hospitals across the country. There is new spending to boost the dental workforce and improve facilities in regional and rural areas.

I wonder if those people opposite actually get around to their electorates and have a look at what is happening? Of course, those opposite—who were not here, ostensibly, for the budget and the bills that related to them—did not make all those appropriation speeches up in the Federation Chamber or down here. Those opposite, not here physically, are now mute when the governments of their persuasion—and now the states—start taking the axe to health services in New South Wales or in Queensland.

What we are doing here will make a big difference across electorates. In my
electorate there are nearly 25,000 children who will benefit from the reforms we are bringing in. There are 12,600 families who will benefit. The shadow minister talked about 'crazy arrangements'. In relation to those opposite, the crazy arrangement is the fact that they would support the non-means-testing of this dental assistance, which would waste billions of dollars—and they claim they are the champions of financial rectitude and prudence! What is their attitude going to be when the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill comes before this chamber? Are they going to vote for it? If you listen to the speeches from those opposite last night—and today as well, I guarantee—you will not be sure. I will be very interested in how they will cast their vote. Will they cast their vote for the 3.4 million children who will be eligible for funded dental care? Will they cast their vote for additional services for the 1.4 million adults on low incomes, including pensioners and concession card holders? Or will they vote for those needy millionaires? Is that their attitude?

Always, we have to do the heavy lifting when it comes to means testing. Always, those opposite support subsidies for the rich, the powerful and their vested-interest friends. Always, we have to do the hard yakka on this stuff. But if they come in, I guarantee you that they will never bring back the private health insurance rebate. And I would be very interested in see, if an Abbott-led government ever came on to this side of the chamber, whether they would bring back a Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. I tell you: they will not do it, because it is not good public policy, and they know it very well. They know it is not working for the hundreds of thousands of people on the waiting list.

With the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, not one person has actually been in a position where they can say, 'I'm off the waiting list.' Where are the examples on that today? Where were the examples last night? Where are the examples of people who got off the waiting list and used this scheme? They have not compromised for five years. They said they would compromise. We saw the shadow minister saying, 'Come to us!' There was this sort of conversion experience, and now they want to compromise. For five years we have seen nothing but truculence and obstinacy in this area. For five years we have seen financial profligacy from those opposite. For five years we have seen crazy arrangements in their mind and in their policy development on this issue, and all because they want to look after their precious Leader of the Opposition, because this was his baby. This was the little scheme he came up with in they dying days of the Howard government. This is the man who ripped a billion dollars out of the health system and came up with this scheme. This is the scheme they want to protect.

Mr Robert: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: Under section 90, it is inappropriate for the member to impute any motive upon any member of the House, let alone a Leader of the Opposition, and I ask that you ask him to withdraw that imputed motive.

Mr NEUMANN: There was no imputation in there.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D'Ath): The member for Blair has the call.

Mr NEUMANN: How many times have we seen those opposite defend this and talk about it in the context of the fact that it was the Leader of the Opposition's scheme when he was the health minister. By their own words I this chamber they are actually admitting what I said.

This scheme will have a big impact. Apart from the fact that we are introducing a scheme that will help 3.4 million Australian children, and provide 1.4 million additional
services, we will see another $225 million allocated for dental services—in capital and workforce—not just in the capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane but out in regional, rural and remote area.

In my area, the West Moreton-Oxley Medicare Local area, about 20 per cent of the population is under 14 years of age. As I said last night, Vicki Poxon, the CEO of the West Moreton-Oxley Medicare Local, supported what we say, supported this reform. She described it as being of 'the utmost importance to us', as 'ensuring our rural areas are given much-needed assistance in the more isolated locations, so we welcome this announcement as a step forward for those residents.

But it is not just Vicki Poxon who have backed what we are doing. Carol Bennett, of the Consumer Health Forum of Australia, in a press release dated 19 August, said:

Cost is the big barrier preventing a large section of the community from accessing preventative dental services, which in turn contributes to development of chronic conditions that place major demands on our health resources …

The statement went on to quote Ms Bennett further:

"By driving change through prevention in younger generations, there is increased likelihood that a whole generation will not need emergency treatment or hospital admission for chronic and preventable disease.

"By addressing the dental needs of seniors and pensioners before they develop other chronic conditions, it frees health resources for other areas of high need.

"This is a big win for the whole community. If you improve the health of those who can’t afford a decent standard of dental care, you raise the general health of the entire community.

She is absolutely right. And we saw Dr Cassandra Goldie, from ACOSS, in a press release on 29 August, saying similar things, welcoming the commitment to meet the oral health needs of adults experiencing poverty and inequality who have gone without dental care for too long'. She further makes the point:

By ensuring affordable appropriate and timely dental care for people on the aged or disability pension and all those with a health care card, this reform establishes the policies and funding mechanisms to reduce a major area of health inequality in Australia …

People like Dr Goldie and Carol Bennett would certainly know, from their work in these areas.

I think this package strikes a very important balance between improved health services for those on low incomes and it will make a big impact in terms of prevention. We have seen the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare give some pretty damning assessments of where we are in terms of the oral health needs of children. I did make this point when I spoke on the bill last night. The oral health of children has declined since the 1990s. Almost 20,000 kids under the age of 10 are hospitalised each year due to avoidable dental issues and, by age 15, six out of 10 kids have tooth decay. Over 45 per cent of 12-year-olds have decay in their permanent teeth. In 2007, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s child dental health survey discovered that just under half of children aged six years attending school dental services had a history of decay in their baby teeth. So there is much need for reform in this area, and we are seeing funding rolled out accordingly.

I made the point that the waiting-list budget money that we are getting across will make a big difference in terms of the waiting list in Queensland. We will see $67.3 million received by Queensland for public dental clinics from the budget and additional funding for public clinics for low-income adults of the sum of $249.4 million in Queensland under this new package.
These are important reforms. We should pursue them. The disallowance motion should be opposed and the feigned outrage from those opposite should be shown for what it is: simply another scare campaign from those who can say nothing positive about public policy in this country.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (11:19): The member for Blair was spinning so much—spinning, spinning, spinning—that I thought he was, sadly, going to fall over with dizziness there for a moment. But I can understand why he is spinning: because he knows that what this government is doing is not right. He knows that what this government is doing is going to leave the most vulnerable without access to dental services for 15 months for children and for 21 months for adults. This is a crime. Why is it happening?

When the member for Blair says, 'Let's have a look at motives', the reason why this is happening is that this government cannot manage its budget. This is the direct result of sending cheques to dead people. This is the result of putting Pink Batts in roofs and then having to remove them. This is the direct result of having a Building the Education Revolution in schools which provides schools with canteens which you cannot fit a pie-warming unit in. This is what this bill, sadly, is all about—because, when you cannot manage the books, in the end you have to find ways to try and save money.

So what is this government doing? Well, the Minister for Health has decided that she will put a halt on the provision of publicly provided dental services to the most needy for a period of 15 to 21 months. I must commend the shadow minister for health for the press release he put out on this. It was titled 'Let them eat cake'. I thought the headline hit it beautifully, although I did think he could maybe modernise it a little bit and use 'Let them sip lattes.' Perhaps that would have been a better headline, because that is what this is all about. It is about the fact that it will not matter if the poor and most needy in our society suffer as a result of this—this is the attitude of the Minister for Health towards these people, as epitomised by what they are trying to do by removing the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. It is a shame.

The Minister for Health was in here a little bit earlier saying, 'No, we can bring the scheme on a little bit earlier. We just need the states to come on board.' The hypocrisy. She will be in here today in question time, as she has in previous question times, criticising the state governments for taking money out of their health. Yet, what is this disallowance motion about? It is calling on the federal government to account for taking money out of dental health services.

I ask the Minister for Health: why don't you concentrate on what you are responsible for? Why don't you concentrate on the federal government rather than criticising the Queensland and New South Wales state governments, and whoever else you want to criticise? Why don't you focus on doing your job, because if you did your job properly we would not be in this situation here? We would not be taking from the most vulnerable and needy public dental services. We could be here saying 'Let this scheme continue.'

The Minister for Health has also raised the point that there has been some rorting of the scheme. Just because there has been some rorting does not mean that you close down a whole scheme and leave nothing in its place for 15 months. You could come in and say, 'Well, maybe we need to tighten the scheme in certain places,' and I am sure that we on this side would look at those proposals, because no-one wants to see any scheme...
rorted. But what we will not stand by and allow to happen is for you to close a scheme that is providing much needed services.

Let us look at the statistics on that. The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme has provided approximately 20 million services, including seven million last financial year alone. It is reported that 80 per cent of services under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme have been provided to concession card holders. So, those on the other side can mock the 'dental scheme for millionaires' and so on, and try to gloss over the facts, but nothing will hide the fact that 80 per cent of services under this scheme have been provided to concession card holders.

What I would like to see is the minister come in and tell us, 'Okay, so there might have been a little bit of rorting,' but what, Minister, do you have in place for the next 15 months for the 80 per cent of services that were provided to concession card holders? What now happens to those concession card holders? What is your plan? And, please, don't come in and say, 'Well, if the states sign up we will be able to provide services next year.' Come here and say, 'Well, I have agreement from the states because we have negotiated with them and we can get a program up and running on 1 January this year.' Instead, what I am sure we will hear is, 'Well, if the states did this and the states did that maybe we could …' Enough is enough. You cannot come in here in question time day after day and criticise the states for supposedly reducing their health services when you are just using that to try to disguise the fact that you are actually doing it.

It is going to be very interesting to see how the Labor Party back bench responds to this. It is going to be particularly interesting to see whether the member for Griffith has anything to say in this area. I think if the member for Griffith does have something to say in this area. Given the nervousness on the Labor Party back bench about closing this scheme and leaving nothing in its place, I think we might see the government react. That is a point that the Independents should take into account, because they could be left high and dry if they are not careful. They could be left as the ones holding the can for having supported the cutting of dental services to zilch for the next 15 months. The nervousness and the ability to react to anything that the member for Griffith might say could see a change come upon this place very quickly.

So, I call on the Independents to judge this disapproval motion on its merits. Look at the facts and the evidence and judge it on its merits. Look at the fact that if they do not support this disallowance motion people in rural and regional Australia will be left with minimal health provisions from the public purse, or perhaps none at all. That is very important, especially for constituents in rural and regional Australia. Those of us who live in rural and regional Australia know that getting access to a dentist is even harder than getting access to one in city areas. So the impact of the closure of this scheme, with it being replaced by nothing, will be harder in regional and rural areas. I ask the Independents to think long and hard about that fact before they decide which way they are going to vote on this measure.

This disallowance motion should be supported. What we are saying to the government is: stop, think and consider the consequences of your actions here. We understand that you have a budget black hole. We understand that it is $120 billion. We have seen it on the front page of the Australian Financial Review: a $120 billion black hole. The Australian public are fully aware of that black hole and the size of it. But why, when you want to tighten the belt, are you hitting the most needy and the most
vulnerable? Why would you hit the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, when you know that 80 per cent of the people who use it are on concession cards? Let them eat cake! Let them sip lattes! No, let us actually provide something for them that they need. This is a health service that is fundamental to the community. You should stop, think and ask yourselves: is this really the action of a government which professes to care about the most needy in society? It is not. We have offered a way forward for you, but you will not accept that way forward, and that is wrong.

That is why the shadow minister has moved this disallowance motion. I commend the shadow minister for health on the way he has gone about prosecuting this issue, because this has been an issue that the government have tried to slip through. This has been an issue where they have used the guise of attacking the Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian state governments for their supposed cutting of services. They have used that attack to try to disguise and hide what they are doing with this Chronic Disease Dental Scheme and the fact that they are replacing it with nothing for 15 months. But the shadow minister for health has not let this happen. He has prosecuted the case loud and clear. He has held the government to account. That is what this disallowance motion is all about. It is about holding the government to account, saying to the Minister for Health: we will not listen to you in question time go on about the states supposedly cutting services, when that is what you are doing here, and you are doing it because you have a $120 billion black hole.

In conclusion, Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this disallowance motion. It is a disallowance motion which should be supported. It is a disallowance motion which will enable services to those most needy in our community to continue, and therefore it is one which I would hope all members would support. But, if all members do not, I dearly hope that the Independent members in this place will support the opposition in making sure that this disallowance motion gets through.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (11:34): I rise to speak to this disallowance motion. I think that in listening to the debate you can see quite clearly what a cruel manoeuvre the government is engaged in. This disallowance motion would restore the ability of those people who are in desperate need of dental attention because they have a health need to have that attention for the next 13 months in the case of children or 19 months in the case of adults. Well we might ask: why the gap? The gap was very well described by the previous speaker, the member for Wannon, when he said that this is a cost-saving measure in order to find savings to find a way out of the $120 billion black hole in the government's current budgeting procedures.

If we look at exactly what this scheme, which the disallowance motion would allow to continue, has done, I think the statistics are very impressive indeed. One billion dollars a year has gone to people in desperate need of dental attention because they have a health need to have that attention for the next 13 months in the case of children or 19 months in the case of adults. Well we might ask: what sort of problem? When you note that 60,000 treatments have been for children, you see that they could be children who have heart disease. They cannot have an operation to cure that heart disease or that heart impediment until such time as they have dental treatment, because of the risk of infection. For those children who have already begun a process of treatment, it has now ceased. They may be part way through it, and they are obliged to wait another 13 months before it can be resumed. Is that fair?
Is that cruel? Is that putting the life of the child at risk?

One of the things that I always find fascinating about the way that the Labor Party present an argument—particularly the Minister for Health, because she is the one responsible—is that they do not like to deal in specifics: what impact it might have on the individual person. It is always the collectivist ideal. It is always: 'This is a big picture; never mind the individuals and how it impacts on them.' On this side of the House, we think about those individuals and what it means. Twenty million services have been provided, to over a million Australians, in the course of this program that was introduced by the current Leader of the Opposition, who was then the Minister for Health and Ageing. The Leader of the Opposition, as minister for health, was compassionate about the need for this program. To hear it denigrated by speakers on the other side saying that we support it because somehow, if we did not, it would reflect on the Leader of the Opposition is pathetic. The fact of the matter is that he introduced the program, got it through the cabinet process and had it enacted because he cared about the outcomes for individuals in need of assistance.

I listened to speakers on the other side again using the lines of class warfare. 'This is a program for millionaires,' said one member from Queensland. I would remind him that the whole of the Medicare system is based on universal access. There are no means tests in Medicare. It is a universal system which is available for all to use. That is how it was planned. That is how it remains. That is how it is implemented. And yet we had the member for Blair saying that this was a scheme for millionaires and it was up to the Labor Party to put in the hard work of having means testing for access to schemes. Is he telling us that the whole of Medicare is now going to be subject to means testing? Is that what he is suggesting? Is that the plan that is secretly behind the beginning of the cuts? Certainly that was the implication that he was leading to in his speech.

The average claim under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, according to the department, is not $4,250, which is the maximum amount available over a two-year period, but $1,716. Recent estimates suggest that this figure has fallen to $1,200. It is not a scheme that is being rorted. It is not a scheme that is being cancelled by the government because it is being rorted. It is a scheme that is being cancelled because they want savings, and there will be no replacement of it until 2014. Eighty per cent of people using the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme have a concession card, but we do not means-test it because it is part of Medicare and Medicare is not means-tested; it is universal. All this talk about having schemes for millionaires is nothing but classic class warfare, unless it is proposed by the Labor Party that they intend to means-test all of Medicare. We would be very interested to hear some rebuttal on that point. Perhaps the minister may have to speak to the member for Blair and tell him that he is right or wrong in his flagging of the intention to means-test Medicare.

Had the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme not been in place, 800,000 people who have accessed support under the scheme would have joined the 650,000 people who languish on waiting lists every day. Again and again I have heard complaints about and heard criticism of state governments, particularly Queensland, because of action that they have taken with regard to health. And yet, in this very action that the government are taking in scrapping this scheme, they are placing undue hardship on the state schemes, which were not coping in the first place, and taking $1 billion a year out of dental care. The
number of services to be provided over the full six years under Labor's recent proposal is only 20 per cent of what the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme provided last year alone. In other words, it is doing what it was set up to do. The 19 months with no treatment for adults and the 13 months with no treatment for children is harsh and it is cruel.

Just to outline it again: Labor and the Greens will close the scheme on 30 November, with no new services to be provided after 7 September. It is the only Medicare dental scheme that provides treatment for adults. It has provided $4,250 in Medicare dental benefits over two years for eligible patients with a chronic and ongoing health condition. I have spoken about the need for children who are waiting for heart surgery, perhaps, to have dental treatment, but of course a lot of the users of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, particularly adults, are people who have a cancer and it has resulted in a chronic health condition and they require dental treatment in order for that treatment to continue.

Labor has continually tried to close down the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, for political reasons as well as financial ones, but it has already booked the savings. The Prime Minister says that this will save money, but the savings have already been booked. So the problem arises for the government that its new scheme is unfunded and it has to find several billions of dollars for the scheme that it proposes, which will not start—with everybody included—for 19 months. The gap period is part of the savings, but the money still has to be found to provide for the scheme that the government is putting in place, even though it will curtail more serious dental treatment for those who have greater need. We do not have details of what the fee structure will be, we do not have details of how it will operate and we certainly have no details of where the money is coming from. We are particularly concerned that many of the patients receiving treatment under the current scheme will be forced to forgo their treatment, and that includes people who have already commenced it. The treatment will have to be discontinued for the period of the gap.

Let us go back to the 60,000 children who have received treatments under the chronic disease dental scheme. All the rhetoric from the other side seems to be that they are introducing a scheme that will provide services to children. They deny, by not mentioning those children who have benefited from the existing scheme, that our scheme covered children at all. Yet, for those 60,000 children who have had the benefit, it has been of enormously important—in many cases life-saving—significance.

I have asked how many individuals have come forward to members and said what the proposed changes will mean to them individually—and they are coming forward. Because of the personal nature of the disease that they have, they do not really want it to be made public. They are happy to talk about their condition in general but, as an individual being put under the spotlight in the media, the nature of their condition means that they do not really want to say 'this is what they are doing to me.' Who can blame them? These are people who are ill, who have a Medicare item which is now going to be withdrawn, together with, as I said earlier, $1 billion in funding.

The Labor Party has been keen to mislead the general public by saying that when Tony Abbott was health minister he withdrew money from the healthcare system. He did not. It does not matter how many times he puts forward the evidence, that allegation is repeated by the Labor Party. But here in black and white, here in budget documents, here in legislation, here in a regulation we
have the Minister for Health herself, personally, with the stroke of a pen, taking $1 billion out of the health system.

Mr Tudge: Shame!

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP: It is shameful for her to do that, and she is one who very much likes to preach that she is morally superior to others because she is caring and compassionate. Her action today belies her portrayal of herself. Care and compassion are not two words that go together with the withdrawing of services from people who desperately need them. In many ways politics can be very harsh, but in an area such as this, when we are continually hearing from the Labor Party that their scheme is going to cover X thousands of people or is going to do something or other for someone unknown, when it comes to the nitty-gritty of supporting an individual who has a desperate need they are always found wanting.

This disallowance motion now lies in the hands of Mr Oakeshott and Mr Windsor. Whether or not children and others can continue treatment they have begun, whether those in desperate need of a heart operation or have disease from cancer treatment can have access to the scheme for the next period of 13 to 19 months, according to whether you are a child or an adult, rests in the hands of Mr Windsor and Mr Oakeshott. We will see, when it comes to a vote, whether or not Mr Windsor's words in the chamber that he wished to be consulted and he was not unmoved by the arguments being put forth, ring true. I sincerely hope that they do; I certainly hope that Mr Oakeshott and Mr Windsor are as compassionate as they say they are and that they will vote with the opposition and disallow this regulation.

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (11:49): I also support the motion that Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1), dated 3 September 2012, made under subsection 3C(1) of the Health Insurance Act 1973, be disallowed. If this disallowance motion does not pass today and if the government's Dental Benefits Amendment Bill does pass today, three things are going to happen. The first is that the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme will end on 30 November, and no new patients will be able to access it. Second, it will ensure that people have no coverage at all until at least 14 July. Thirdly, it holds up hope that a replacement scheme might be put in place in 2014.

The first two things that I mentioned are certainties—they are facts. If this disallowance motion is not passed and if the government's package is passed, then those first two things will definitely occur. The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme will be scrapped and there will be nothing in its place until at least 2014. The third thing is just a hope, just an election promise, because there is no detail, it would be implemented after the next election and, most importantly and quite astoundingly, no money has been allocated to it.

So, together, the package the government has put forward is not a good one and we cannot support it. Worse, thousands of people will be left in the lurch over the next 19 months. For this reason we ask that the House support our disallowance motion today, which will at least have the effect of not cancelling the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, and we ask members to seriously consider how they vote on the government's package which will be put forward after we have voted on this disallowance motion.

What is the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme? This scheme was implemented in 2007 when Tony Abbott was health minister. It provides up to $4,250 in Medicare benefits over two years for eligible
patients with chronic health conditions. The intent of the scheme—and the intent has been delivered—was really to recognise that under the universal Medicare scheme we have public assistance for people to get their body fixed, but that Medicare never covered the teeth and the mouth. There is an inconsistency there because there is no great difference between a chronic health problem in one's mouth versus a health problem elsewhere. So Tony Abbott, as health minister, introduced this scheme to address that inconsistency. What it meant in practice was that, if you had a chronic teeth problem, you could go to your GP and, if the GP established that indeed you fitted the criteria, that you did have a chronic condition, you could immediately go to one of the 10,000 dentists in Australia and get your condition fixed.

Over the course of the scheme, this cost on average $2,220 per patient and for kids it cost on average $1,125. The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme slowly worked its way through Australia's sickest patients and treated an enormous number of them, fixing their teeth. So people who had never had good teeth, people who had chronic conditions but could not afford to see a dentist, all of a sudden had their teeth fixed and for the first time in their life had teeth they could be proud of. One million Australians benefitted from this scheme over the last few years, with 20 million consultations in total.

Why, given the success of this scheme, does the government want to close it down? The government has put forward three reasons to close down the scheme. Firstly, it says the costs are overblown. Indeed, it is the case that the scheme is more expensive than initially forecast, but the reason is that more patients access the scheme. It is a demand-driven program. So the more patients who are eligible to access the scheme, the more expensive it becomes. In this way, it is very different from most of the programs which the current government has introduced and managed which have been budget blowouts because the government have not managed the programs properly. The Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is not at all like that. We have seen the cost per patient drop over time from an average of $2,225 per patient to this year being an average of $1,117 per patient—per patient, it is becoming less costly. As I said, I distinguish this dental program—a demand-driven program where the cost per patient is becoming less over time but the overall cost to the taxpayer is growing purely because more patients are accessing it—from many of the government's programs, which have had true cost blowouts purely because of administrative incompetence.

You do not have to think for very long to recognise those programs. The pink batts program is the classic one. It cost $1 billion to put pink batts into people's roofs and then a further billion dollars to removed the pink batts from people's roofs. The NBN is another. Initially the NBN was going to cost $4.5 billion and now we are looking at $50 billion and growing, yet still only 50,000 residences have been covered. With school halls, we know from audited accounts that school halls were built for almost twice as much as they should have cost. That is a legitimate cost blowout. With the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, the additional expenses are due to more patients receiving coverage.

The second reason the government argue the program should be closed down is that they said the program is 'untargeted'—that is, that wealthy people are accessing the program. Let us look at the figures. The figures show that 80 per cent of the one million people who accessed this program were concession card holders. More
importantly, as the member for Mackellar pointed out, the fact that our dental scheme is not a means tested program is perfectly consistent with the universally accessed Medicare scheme. Every person in Australia is able to go to a doctor and be covered by Medicare. Every person in Australia is able to go to a public hospital and get free treatment through the Medicare scheme.

Medicare is a universal scheme and until at least this point Medicare has been supported on both sides of the House. As the member for Mackellar pointed out, what is the implication of the government's argument if, all of a sudden, they say that, if you are a wealthy person, you should not be able to access health care for your mouth through a dental scheme? Are the government also indicating today that they plan to means test the Medicare scheme, because that would be the logical conclusion? I think the Minister for Health should clarify this point because most Australians would be shocked if, indeed, the government were to make the Medicare system no longer a universal scheme. It seems that could be one of their plans and the Minister for Health should clarify that point.

The third argument for why the government plans to close the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is that they say it has been rorted. About one in 1,500 cases have had some irregularities. In any large-scale government scheme you will never be able to ensure that there are no irregularities. That is just the nature of things. Some people are going to be completely and utterly dishonest, and no amount of red tape, accounting or oversight is going to ensure that every single irregularity can be removed from the system. One in 1,500 is a similar figure to what we understand occurs through GPs and in the public health system. But the government have not been in here complaining about the Medicare system and saying we should be shutting down Medicare because there is an irregularity in one in 1,500 cases. So the three arguments they have put do not stack up.

The real reason they are planning to close this program down—and it will be closed down if this disallowance motion does not get up—is that Tony Abbott started it. Because Tony Abbott started it when he was health minister, the government does not want to continue it. And the second reason is that the government are desperate to find savings in the budget. They are willing to cut people's access to dental care in order to find savings because they have wasted so much money elsewhere.

The second certainty which arises from the government's package, and which will occur if this disallowance motion goes down, is that no scheme will replace it until July 2014 at the very earliest. What this means for the 650,000 people on the dental waiting lists is that the waiting lists will simply get longer. I would like to read out comments from Anya Filek, from Wantirna South in my electorate, a recipient of services under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. She says:

I suffer dental problems related to my chronic illness and must visit my dentist every 4 months and now that the dental scheme is gone I will no longer be able to afford it. I have rung my local public health centre and have been placed on a minimum 2 year waiting list but what do I do in 4 months time when my teeth begin to break and crumble as they will do? …

How does the Minister propose to 'extend' the public dental scheme by 2014 as promised? Will she magically triple the amount of dental chairs in all community health centres?

I would like the Minister for Health to come in here and address Anya's concerns and tell us what she is going to do about patients like Anya—and there are thousands of other patients in a similar condition.
I will summarise where we are at at the moment. We know for certain that, if this disallowance motion is not passed, the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme will disappear. We know for certain that, if this disallowance motion is not passed, nothing will be put in its place until at least July 2014. The third thing is that the government hopes—and it is just a hope—that it will be able to replace this scheme with something in the distant future, in 19 months time. But, as I pointed out earlier, this is a false promise because their proposal for this dental scheme's replacement, remarkably, does not begin until 2014—after the next election—and there is no money attached to the bill. So we should consider this as merely an election promise. That is all it is, and we would like to know where the money is coming from.

I plead with the Independents—Mr Oakeshott, Mr Windsor and Mr Katter—and the Greens to support this disallowance motion and keep the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme in place for at least 19 months so that Anya in my electorate and thousands of others like her across Australia can continue to receive the dental treatment they so desperately need.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (12:04): I am pleased to rise to speak on this disallowance motion in relation to the Health Insurance (Dental Services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1). Let us start by reminding ourselves what the effect of this motion is. The starting point is that in 2007, when the current Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health, the coalition introduced the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. The instrument which gave effect to that decision was the Health Insurance (Dental Services) Determination 2007.

If we then fast forward to August this year, we observed a phenomenon which we see quite frequently under the present government—a dual Labor-Greens press conference. At that press conference there was an announcement in relation to a new dental package. Buried deep in the press release was a statement that the new package would replace the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. You need to read the entirety of the media release if you want to satisfy yourself that it is silent as to the question of when the current government intended to bring the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme to an end. You will also find that the media release is entirely silent on when the new arrangements will be in place.

In any event, we had that announcement and subsequently, on 3 September 2012, the present Minister for Health made a determination the effect of which was that, if it took effect, the previous determination, the 2007 determination, would cease as at midnight on 30 November 2004. In other words, if the minister's determination takes effect then the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme will cease operation with effect from 30 November 2012. If you read the details of the determination, it also becomes evident that, if you were not already receiving treatment under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme as at 7 September 2012—that is, some days ago—it was no longer open to you to commence treatment under the scheme.

What we are therefore debating is the motion moved by this side of the House to disallow the minister's determination of 3 September. If the disallowance motion is successful then the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme will continue to operate in accordance with the 2007 determination. That brings us to the question: what is the thinking behind the coalition moving this disallowance motion?

As we have analysed this issue, it has been very difficult to avoid the conclusion
that this is yet another example of the Gillard Labor government saying one thing and doing another. It says that it is introducing a new service. It says that it is introducing new arrangements for dental care involving $4 billion of dental spend on children, low-income adults and the bush. What it is actually doing is quite different from what it says it is doing. What it is actually doing is suspending, with immediate effect, the existing Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. And there will be no new scheme in place until 1 July 2014 at the earliest.

The rationale for the decision to bring the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme to an end is stated to be, amongst other things, that there is a cost blow-out. Of course, the question of the cost of any social program is one that the coalition will always take seriously. We have indicated in the past, and our shadow minister and others have repeated, our willingness to engage with the government on the details of how the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme operates and some of the cost drivers. Our willingness to engage has so far been rebuffed, and we find ourselves in the position where the minister has moved ahead to bring to an immediate end the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme and, therefore, in many ways, the only practical alternative now available to the coalition is to move this motion.

In the time available to me, I want to make essentially three points about our thinking behind doing so. The first is that this is, once again, an example of the way in which the Gillard Labor government always seems to mess up the transition from one set of arrangements to another. Whenever there is a new package introduced, whenever there is new law introduced, whenever new arrangements need to be implemented, it always seems to be done in an extraordinarily messy and clumsy way, with very little thought given to the mechanics of transition and very little thought given to how citizens are expected to adapt themselves to the change. The second point I want to make is that what is driving this messy transition, a transition which leaves many of our least privileged citizens facing some very difficult choices, is a desperate desire to engage in some political window-dressing and to get a good announcement, and, of course, to shore up relations between the Labor Party and the Greens party. The third point I want to make is to acknowledge that, of course, there will always be opportunities to examine and refine the operations of any scheme of public administration—the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is no different—and that we are, of course, open to working with the government on that.

Let me start with the first point: the way that this Gillard Labor government always seems to mess up transitions. We have seen with the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, as with so many other policy announcements by this government, something which is rushed in with very little notice and very little time for citizens to adapt themselves to the change and very little consideration of how a change might be introduced in a way which is least disruptive and difficult to manage. As many of my colleagues have pointed out, the way that this particular transition has been managed means that, amongst other things, those who are presently in the middle of dental treatment will have to cease it as at 30 November. It is hard to imagine a more disruptive and ill-thought-through way to implement a change of arrangements. These people include those who are suffering some very serious diseases indeed—diseases that, on any view, amply meet the description 'chronic diseases', including cancer, HIV and hepatitis; these are all diseases which are known to have, as a side effect, the causing of significant dental problems.
Unfortunately, the way the government has handled this issue is not very different from the chaotic mismanagement of the transition when the Home Insulation Program was suddenly announced to be terminated at very short notice, or the way the government introduced changes to the aged care funding arrangements earlier this year—and I have had many representations from aged care facility operators in my electorate about how difficult it is to adapt their operations to a change being announced at very short notice—or, indeed, from the introduction of the carbon tax, and, again, I have had many representations from industries which, even weeks before 1 July, were still uncertain as to how that particular legislative package was to operate. I am sorry to say that there is a pattern of this government messing up transitions, and that pattern is repeated in the case of the particular determination the disallowance of which the House is presently debating.

The second point I want to make is that good policy and good transition management has come a distant second to the government's political agenda, driven by two principal motivations: firstly, to keep the Greens party happy, and, secondly, to keep those aspiring to return to the position of prime minister at bay. It might be said, and often is said, as a general principle that an apple a day keeps the doctor and indeed the dentist away. It also might also be said as an explanatory principle of what is going on here that an unfunded policy announcement a day keeps Kevin away. Because that is, frankly, one of the principal motivations behind what is going on in this shambolic policy process, the disallowance of which the House is now debating.

Amongst other things, this new package announced by Minister Plibersek together with a Greens party senator is completely unfunded. It forms part of the $120-billion black hole of unfunded policy announcements from this government in recent months. That, amongst other things, is the reason why one of the truly significant components of what is happening here is to cut off the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme with almost immediate effect. That is driven by a desperate desire to try and claw back some money in an attempt to fund at least a small part of this massive, yawning and ever-expanding gap.

I cannot help noting that in the media release from the minister and in the transcript of her joint press conference with a senator from the Greens party, there was a very amusing spectacle of a journalist asking the questions as follows: 'what sort of time frame are you looking at for the scaling up?' and, 'how would you pay for it?' That produced, remarkably, a response from the Greens party senator. We all know the Greens are completely indifferent to the question of how anything is to be funded but I do think this is a particularly delicious example of the genre. The relevant Greens party senator had this to say, 'I think, like the minister, today is a day to celebrate the fact that people right across the country are now going to be able to access dental care in a way that they had previously not been able to. The cost is not going to be a barrier anymore for many people.' That was all the relevant Greens party senator had to say in answer to the questions: how would you pay for it? Where is the money coming from?

I cannot help reminding the chamber that responsible political parties keep a careful eye on how promises are to be funded. We have the extraordinary spectacle of the present government building up a roster of unfunded promises amounting to some $120 billion in an unfunded policy black hole, egged on by their good friends in the Greens party to whom the whole question of how
policy might be paid for is one that is so theoretical and irrelevant that they do not even deign to give it any consideration.

Let me turn briefly to the third point I want to address, which is the question of whether there are opportunities to review the way in which the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme works. We have heard from the minister at some length her bitter dislike of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, which, she argues, is poorly targeted. It is refreshing to see a minister in this government expressing even lip service to the question of careful targeting of government expenditure. On all the evidence, this is merely a convenient excuse for the government's political objective of getting a new announcement out there and desperately looking for some areas where it can find some funding to back up that announcement.

Let us be clear. No scheme of public administration is ever perfect. There will always be opportunities for improvement. There will always be opportunities to look for efficiencies. The coalition has consistently signalled that we stand ready to work with the government on the question of whether there are refinements necessary to the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. There may well be areas where we could work constructively together. Our shadow minister and others have repeatedly made that point.

It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that the government is simply looking for a convenient excuse to axe a particular policy which it does not like for a whole range of reasons. Let me conclude by saying this disallowance motion was moved because this is very bad policy to manage a transition in such a chaotic way. This is driven, as is so often by this government, by political considerations and not by good policy management.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (12:19): I rise to speak on the disallowance motion put by the member for Dickson, the shadow minister for health. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Bradfield and also the member for Aston and the member for Wannon who put such salient arguments before. I also heard the member for Blair speak and I will raise some of the issues he brought forward in his contribution. I think the contribution he made was based a lot on politics of envy. I heard him talking about the millionaire's scheme for a lot of his speech. As we know, 80 per cent of the users of the previous scheme were concession card holders.

The Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012 has been presented as part of the recent dental announcement by the health minister and the Greens. This is the first opportunity for the House to consider the government's announcement on 29 August. The number of speakers we have heard so far just on this disallowance motion reflects the many controversial elements of that package. Everyone in this chamber supports investment in dental health. Going to a dentist is a relatively expensive trip for most Australians and it is important that we do what we can in this place to make dental care accessible to the general public.

Earlier in the week in this chamber we saw what happens when the government has good intentions but fails on the drafting and on the implementation process. The Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Bill 2012, which had the express goal of easing regulation and making life easier for charities and not-for-profit's, a goal that was written into the preamble and announced by Minister Shorten in 2009 as the reason for being for the legislation, morphed into the most burdensome piece of legislation that the not-for-profit sector has seen in this country. The bill created uproar in the charitable
sector and the government made nine amendments to its own legislation. So the charities were not happy nor should they be. This demonstrates that you can have the best intentions but if you cannot implement your ideas in a practical way then you can end up doing more harm than good. It is in this respect that we in the coalition have two main issues with this legislation before the House today. The first issue is the provision to close the Medicare Chronic Dental Disease Scheme on 30 November. The second issue is if the government has the money to be able to deliver this package. The closure of the Chronic Dental Disease Scheme to be replaced by a scheme that does not start until 2014 seems to lack logical reasoning, as I said before. The existing scheme has been a good scheme. We have heard that it has had its faults. We know that no schemes implemented by governments work perfectly, but instead of canning schemes we can adjust them as we go along.

The present scheme has worked well and efficiently for the benefit of Australians. Over the last five years some 20 million services have been provided to over a million patients. It has not been rorted as some government schemes are. The average claim under the scheme was $1,716—well under the cap of $4,250. It is also worth noting that the scheme has been utilised by those who need it the most. As I said before, it is reported that 80 per cent of services under the CDDS have been provided to concession card holders.

I know, through my connection with the forgotten Australians that many of them are coming up to that age where a lot affected by chronic disease and they have taken advantage of this scheme implemented by the Leader of the Opposition when he was in government. I know those people will be disappointed. I have seen some of the forgotten Australians and I have seen the benefits they have had from sourcing this scheme. I am sure that many of the forgotten Australians who have chronic disease will be disappointed by the fact that this government has canned the scheme and that there will be nothing available for them until 2014. While the scheme was successfully implemented by the coalition this government has chosen to close the Medicare Chronic Dental Disease Scheme on 30 November.

The closure of the Chronic Dental Disease Scheme, to be replaced by a scheme that does not start until January 2014 seems to lack logical reasoning, as I said before. The existing scheme has been a good scheme. As I said, it delivered for some 20 million services. So, while Medicare is a universal scheme that all Australians pay for through the Medicare levy and the taxation system, the CDDS is a system that has been predominantly utilised by low income Australians. This is a key point: it is accessible to all.

Given that the scheme has been an enormous success by the standards of any government health program it is worth posing the question: why would any government in their right mind be proposing to end a program that has done so much good for Australia? The answer, as usual, has nothing to do with policy or principle. With the Labor Party it is all to do with personal and petty politics and achieving their desire—the sacred budget surplus.

Of course such a successful scheme could not have been implemented by this government. It was a scheme implemented by the coalition. As I said before, is was implemented by the Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott, when he was the health minister.

Labor are trying to close the scheme for political reasons, as we heard from the
member for Bradfield. We know that Labor has gone to great lengths to undermine the scheme because it is a coalition policy and had been such a success in improving access to treatment. The mechanics of what the government is doing here is to close the scheme altogether at the end of November with no new services to be provided after 7 September—a date which has now passed. There is then to be a 19-month gap before people will be able to access a scheme. This is a long period for Australians not to have access to a chronic disease dental scheme, and the coalition has legitimate concerns about the children who will lose access to treatment on 30 November with the closure of the CDDS and also about the children will not be able to complete current treatment by 30 November. Where are they going to go and what are they going to do? They will have to wait until January 2014.

The Dental Benefits Amendment Bill refers to children’s dental care or, more specifically, dental care for children between the ages of two and 17. So it is worth considering in particular the potential implications of the closure of the CDDS on children. The bill does not commence until 1 January 2014 and makes very minor amendments to the Dental Benefits Act 2008, changing the eligibility age of the current Medicare Teen Dental Plan from 12 to 17 years to two to 17 years. It makes other minor terminology changes to provide essentially for a change from the Medicare Teen Dental Plan to the Child Dental Benefits Schedule, although I would also note that the schedule of services and fees and their essential details are not yet available. As with most of the programs and schemes implemented by the Labor Party, we are still waiting on detail and clarity so that we can see was is actually going to be implemented.

As the shadow minister said, the minister has acknowledged that services for most children will cost less than the proposed $1,000 cap but there will be children on the Medicare Chronic Disease Scheme who will require more services and there is no provision to ensure they continue to receive adequate treatment, especially in the period before the bill commences.

We know from previous speakers that 60,000 services have been provided to children under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, and cutting off the scheme will provide a great degree of discontinuity to children in the middle of treatment, who will not be able to have their treatment completed any time soon. A 16-month gap in care is not an acceptable outcome and is a clear failure of the bill we are debating today.

So why the rush? Why the rush towards 30 November, when the replacement is not due to come into effect until 2014? One could be cynical and say it was about manufacturing the paper surplus for 2012-13, but we know that any surplus for this financial year is looking extremely unlikely. Also, it is legislation that will not even be implemented until after the next election. Instead, it looks as if the reason is more likely to be and attempt to satisfy the Greens and to fend off a challenge from the member for Griffith in the short term.

Madam Deputy Speaker, aside from the specific provisions in the package, we in the coalition are also concerned about its unfunded burden on the taxpayer. This program, which the government is estimating at $4.1 billion, is completely unfunded. And it is just one of a host of high-cost announcements over recent weeks that have created a black hole of up to $120 billion. I think I hear an interjection repeating that: $120 billion!
Do you remember Mr Deputy Speaker Mitchell, what was being discussed in this place in May? The government was announcing years of surpluses to come—a promise they had been repeating for years—starting in this financial year, 2012-13. They promised fiscal discipline. Just four months later, they have delivered $120 billion worth of unfunded promises. So, barring new taxes, there are going to be continued deficits under the Labor Party—no great surprise, as the last surplus they delivered was before the member for Longman was born, whom I am fortunate enough to sit next to in this place.

So what prompted the government to break a promise that they repeated time and again in the lead-up to the election? What has prompted them to turn their backs on fiscal discipline and break the very clear promise they were making before the last election? You have guessed it: the Greens. It was the Greens that forced the Prime Minister to introduce a carbon tax and it is the Greens that have again forced the Prime Minister and the Treasurer's hand here. No promise is so sacred, no commitment to the Australian people worthy enough, that it would prevent this government from breaking a pre-election promise to satisfy the Greens. But, as with all policies that the Greens design, there are problems.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme was announced as costing $10.6 billion a year when fully operational. As Joe Hockey said, there is no crueler hoax on people with disabilities than announcing a program that they cannot deliver. It is the same with this bill. This is a program that is unfunded, and I would be surprised if they can deliver it. There is also $2.1 billion for reopening Nauru and Manus Island. The increase in the refugee intake to 20,000 is going to cost $1.4 billion. The government has committed to 12 new submarines at $35 billion. There is $6½ billion for the Gonski review. This is all in the space of no more than a couple of weeks.

Furthermore, this spending spree is taking place in the most difficult of environments: there is global uncertainty in iron ore prices, a driver of our economy; there is slow growth and recession around the world; and industry in Australia is reeling from the carbon tax, the mining tax and other taxes. The resources minister has already declared the mining boom over, the budget is at an all-time high in terms of debt and we have had the four biggest deficits on record delivered by this Treasurer. Now is not the time to be going on a massive spending spree to satisfy the Greens. Before the spending spree, the Prime Minister stood up and said, 'Every time we announce something, we properly account for it and properly fund it.' Well, that is not what is happening with this bill. What is more disturbing is that the newspapers are reporting the spending binge as being about the Prime Minister warding off a Rudd challenge—$120 billion of unfunded spending designed only to keep the Prime Minister in her job. This is not what a dental scheme should be about. It should be about caring for those who need it.

So it is because of those two main concerns—firstly, the closure of the chronic disease dental scheme and its implications for Australians and children in particular; and, secondly, the unfunded nature of this commitment and the rushed way in which it is proceeding through the House—that we in the coalition have moved the disallowance motion, to disallow the closure of the scheme for the 18-month period in which people will not be able to access chronic disease dental assistance. Thank you.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (12:32): In the final hours of this debate, it is fairly obvious
that there is not going to be a reconciliation between the two sides of politics. As an opposition we have made it exceptionally clear now that there is a significant service gap for Australians who are trying to get dental care with the implementation of the government's plan to start funding dental care in 2013-14, leaving a 15- to 19-month gap in between. What you are seeing if you are witnessing or listening to this debate today is the age-old divide between Labor and the coalition. There is the current Labor government with its almost unshakeable faith in the public provision of services, and the coalition with its belief in a blended model—the belief that, by working a private and public health system together, we can have the best of both worlds.

The government's approach simply collapses when it comes to dental care, and it is probably because there are no dentists, doctors or medical specialists on that side. I do not think there is even anyone who has worked in the dental profession on the other side—but I am happy to be corrected. The problem with such a paucity of real experience in the dental sector is that you are then utterly reliant on advisers and bureaucrats to send up recommendations about how to save money, rather than actually knowing what happens in dental care as a service. The government does not understand how this sector works. Australia is a 95 per cent private dental system, and that means our public dental system, run by state governments as an mostly in dental hospitals, is extremely constrained in its supply of dentists. So the pure injection of some money by the other side does not fix the problem.

There are three typologies of people who need dental care. There are the young, who often need surveillance and early and quick intervention for usually small cavities; there are older people who have chronic disease and dental problems that can be either aggravated by or a part of it; and then there are extremely sick people for whom dental disease is extremely severe and who can really only be fully cared for as a hospital in-patient. So we have the young, the everyday adult disease and the severely sick.

What you need to understand is where this government is going. Saying, 'Here's a little bit more cash for state dental hospitals,' is to fundamentally misunderstand how those hospitals work. If anyone from this government had ever walked into a dental hospital, they would understand that a bit more money going into a system that does not have enough dentists does not achieve a great deal. It is quite correct—whether the waiting lists in state hospitals for dental care have been three-quarters of a million or half a million, the reality is that in those hospitals they are mostly dental students under supervision, getting final dental training before they go and work in the private sector. They are predominantly learning, working slowly and carefully under supervision. That is not the way to reduce a waiting list of half a million people. In a private dental system, the way to decrease the waiting list is to empower GPs and dentists in the private sector to fix the problem.

The very architects of Medicare do not understand the power of the system that they designed. But the evidence is there in front of them. Tony Abbott's chronic disease dental scheme, in addition to helping the sickest in the community—giving them the dental care they never could get from state dental hospitals—actually reduced those waiting lists. In New South Wales, the wait for a public dental appointment through their dental hospitals has decreased by 40 per cent, because for the first time people can go to their GP and say, 'Look, as part of my chronic disease and the linked dental
ailments, send me off to a private dentist and let me get the job done.'

This morning we saw one of the most disappointing displays by a health minister that I have seen in a decade. It was the current health minister first of all choosing in this debate to traduce dentists and imply that they were dishonest, unreliable and rorting the system; and then, in a fit of rage, suggesting that asthma is not a chronic disease. When the list of chronic diseases for which dental care is eligible was read out by the shadow parliamentary secretary for health, she scoffed at him and said, 'Asthma—you call that a chronic disease?' On the very day that this parliament is promoting a bipartisan event on 'When you can't breathe, not much else matters' and the importance of understanding lung disease, Australia's Minister for Health and Ageing was scoffing at asthmatics, suggesting that asthma is not a serious disease and does not deserve its place as a chronic disease. You would not have found her predecessor saying something so ill considered, nor the health minister before that, nor the one before that—all ministers I knew personally. But this narky, nasty aspect of the health minister's personality is very undesirable and very unsuited to the job.

For 10 years now we have been hearing the accusation from this government that we ripped a billion dollars out of the health system. But in one fell swoop, with this new policy, this government—because they need to try to get a surplus by July next year—are ripping a billion dollars out of Medicare. So they are guilty of exactly what they have been accusing us of for the last decade.

This health minister's argument against the Medicare Chronic Dental Disease Scheme set up by Tony Abbott has been that dentists abuse the system. But any public official can, potentially, abuse a system. That is why we have an audit process—to identify them and get them to pay the money back. That is how the law works. That is why we have an audit team in Medicare Australia. They should be allowed to do that job to get back any money falsely claimed. Dentists agree, the coalition agrees and the government agrees.

How disappointing it was today to hear the health minister—not a backbencher reading from notes carefully prepared by a staffer but the health minister—read out a list of all the violations committed by dentists under the chronic disease scheme. On average, only one out of every 1,500 cases led to a complaint which was investigated. Are you telling me that the character of dentists is not as good as that of doctors or nurses, that they are fundamentally different and more dishonest people, that they cannot be trusted with the dental health of Australians? That is patently ridiculous.

Medicare Australia's audit system should be respected and supported. Instead, this government chose—for political reasons—to let this wound fester, to let the program roll on, to not modify, correct or improve it. They did so simply because they wanted to be able to attack the opposition. Given every opportunity to tailor and refine that program, they passed them all up. There was every opportunity to save $330 million a year on this program by more appropriately targeting it as it became more popular. All of these opportunities were passed up just to make a political point.

I think it is worthwhile—because it is quite complex shifting from one chronic disease dental program to the government's alternative—to follow the path of some different patient types. I will talk about sick kids with a chronic disease, about well kids coming from families which are wealthy or which have a concession card, and then
about adults—adults with a chronic disease and adults who do not. Up until 9 September, if you were a sick child with dental problems, you would be covered through a GP and a private dentist. Now the sickest children in Australia are being told, 'Complete your treatment by 30 November or pay for it out of your own pocket.' These are young people with complex conditions, often unable to reliably get to a dentist. They may be disabled or have mobility problems. They may be mental health patients with anxiety disorders. For every possible permutation of health condition, you cannot be sure that all the needed treatment can be completed within this very short time frame. But the government will not budge by one day. This is dental treatment which just has to be done—there are no two ways about it.

This idea that you could simply turn up at a state funded dental hospital is bunkum. It is bunkum because state dental hospitals are there to train dentists. If they can reduce waiting lists a bit, that is well and good. But in effect they are there as a service—to train the dental profession. This is a government which has not trained more dental therapists. Dental therapy graduates have fallen by six per cent under this government. I concede there are more hygienists, but it is oral health graduates, technicians and therapists we need—they can treat the majority of disease in the young. The government's decision to cut young, sick Australians off from the current chronic disease program simply shifts them across to state dental hospitals. But the only people who can get treated in a state dental hospital are people whose dental disease is literally dripping out of their mouth. The most urgent cases get pushed up the list to get treated at the dental hospitals. Everyone else simply sits on a waiting list and never gets to the top.

In South Australia, the waiting list is 18 months to two years. In Queensland, it is two to 3½ years. Realistically, no-one with dental disease and a hope of having it cured would sit for that long on a waiting list. It is not a waiting list; it as a list you simply sit on until you go and get it done privately or you pass away. The people who get treated in dental hospitals are primarily the urgent cases—where they have an abscess or something requiring immediate treatment. That is predominantly what gets done in these hospitals.

The government's proposition—that, as of next year, they will start investing in these hospitals—is inadequate. The $212 million per year which has been committed is, when spread around the eight jurisdictions, only a negligible increase in what is already being spent. The Northern Territory and the ACT spend the most per capita. Then we have Queensland and South Australia. The lowest spending per capita is in Victoria and New South Wales. Even with all of the investment which has been promised by this government—we know of course that it is unfunded and simply adding to the debt and that, even as we have this debate, they do not know where this money will come from—the money provided to Victoria and New South Wales does not even get those states to the current level of South Australian or Queensland spending per capita. So if people in New South Wales want to know how they will be treated under this government's program, they should try to get an appointment in Queensland or South Australia—a two-year wait. That is what you will have after the government's program is implemented.

If you live in Queensland and South Australia and this additional money is added, the per capita spend will still be less than it is in the Northern Territory or the ACT. So go out right now and make a phone call to Darwin and see how long it takes to get your chronic disease treated in Darwin's publicly
funded system—over 12 months. We can use the states which already spend more to see exactly what the situation will be like, after you add the federal top-up, in the more poorly funded states. The problem with adding money to state dental services is that you never remove the waiting list—you can only ever hope to treat the most urgent cases on the waiting list.

The fundamental flaw in what this government is doing arises from their failure to understand how dentistry works in this country. The program for the young consumes $2.5 billion in treating children under the age of 18 through a cut-price dental program of up to $1,000; many of those children need far more. Try treating an Aboriginal child with a large hole who needs a stainless steel crown; you cannot even do that for a thousand dollars. The Child Dental Benefits Schedule proposed by this government explicitly excludes crowns, bridges and root canal work. We are getting this cut-price dental arrangement that actually does not serve the children who need it most. What is the point of having a universal dental scheme when you say to Aboriginal children with severe caries, 'Sorry, Julia Gillard bans a crown and a bridge—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member will refer to individuals by their appropriate title.

Mr LAMING: 'The Prime Minister bans that personally, so all you can have is an extraction. We'll just pull the tooth, because that is all that this government's plan will allow us to do.'

As I have said before, the fundamental flaw is that, predominantly, teen dental disease can be managed by therapists; it can be managed by oral health graduates. Don't tie up the dental profession in public health. They are the most highly trained specialists in the area. They should be dealing with complex and chronic disease. This is a government that has not activated the oral health routes yet, and therapist numbers are falling. That $2.5 billion spend, which has a capped amount of $1,000, is at risk of overspends and rorts; our chronic disease program was rorted by a very, very small number of people. So, in effect, the government's protestations about the former program will be the same ones that will vex the new program. There are DVA dental officials and advisers who can verify which chronic disease patients need further care and which do not. The government has the opportunity to continue the care for the people who need it most but it is electing not to.

This is a simple situation where it has been decided that the political pain of this federal government to find a surplus will trump the dental pain of our nation. Those opposite are more worried about their political future than about the dental future of Australians. This government is insistent on injecting more money into public dental systems which are not overly efficient and, at the same time, it is hobbling the 95 per cent of private dentists in this country who hold the key to reducing waiting lists. By doing what it is doing today, you will see more people going to their GP and being refused dental care, more GPs giving out antibiotics and trying to buy time, and more expenses to Medicare. All of those half a million people will be turning up to public hospitals and emergency waiting rooms seeking antibiotics and quick solutions. That was the old way and that is what Labor are bringing us back to. They should swallow some pride, understand how the dental sector works, agree to continue the Chronic Disease Dental Program and look after Australians' dental care.
Mr McCormack (Riverina) (12:48): There is nothing worse than a toothache. I am sure the minister at the table, the member for Lindsay, and the member for Wakefield would agree with me. When you have got a toothache it just takes over your whole system: it pains, it aches; it is debilitating.

We have just heard the shadow parliamentary secretary for regional health services and Indigenous health give a very impassioned speech about why this disallowance motion is so important. He would know; he is a doctor. He has actually practised at Gundagai in my Riverina electorate. As his portfolio includes Indigenous health, he knows how important oral health is to people of a low socioeconomic status and to people in regional areas.

I support this motion for disallowance of the Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1), made under the Health Insurance Act 1973, which has been brought to this parliament by the shadow minister for health, the member for Dickson. From the speakers list, government members would have noticed the number of members from this side of the House who were keen to speak on the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012. That is because members on this side of the House are very in tune with their electorates and what they are saying, certainly when it comes to the provision of health.

The minister for health, and her predecessor, would know that I have been praiseworthy of the government for its investment in health in the Riverina. Indeed, there has been money for the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital: $55.1 million. There has been money for the private-public partnership at Griffith, to the tune of $11.388 million, as well as $6 million to the Hillston multipurpose service redevelopment. They were all good contributions. Mind you, it was money being spent by a federal government after years of inaction by the state Labor government.

Whenever anything goes wrong nowadays with the federal government, their default position is to blame the state coalition governments. The immediate option is to press the button to blame, in New South Wales, Barry O'Farrell; in Queensland, Campbell Newman; and in Victoria, Ted Baillieu is getting the blame for anything and everything. Mind you, those three premiers are doing their utmost to repair their states as a result of the huge debt and deficit left to them—the legacy of too many years of Labor governments to remember.

With this government, the ripping away of oral health services has been brought about because we have got $246 billion worth of national debt and now we find we have $120 billion of black holes in Labor's spending. Labor is allocating money which it knows it will never have to roll out; hopefully, after the next election, there will be a coalition government in place.

Mr Hartsuyker: Hear, hear!
Mrs Griggs: Hear, hear!
Mr McCormack: I hear the member for Cowper and the member for Solomon say, 'Hear, hear!' because they know how important it is for rural and regional areas to get a coalition government in place. As I say, the federal Labor government is promising money almost cruelly, raising the expectations and hopes of people with a disability with the National Disability Insurance Scheme—money that the Productivity Commission says is a minuscule amount considering what is actually needed to properly fund such a scheme. And with the Gonski education overhaul, we see the minister for education promising all sorts of
things, but the government is very low on funding delivery.

There is nothing worse than a toothache—we all know that; we have all had one. In America at the moment—and this is relevant to this particular disallowance motion before the House, because at the moment we have a presidential election in America—one of the biggest stories going around is about a fellow by the name of Kyle Willis, a 24-year-old father who died from a condition which started as a toothache. I downloaded a story from the web which is very relevant to this motion. It speaks of the fact that Mr Willis is dead because he did not have health insurance; he is dead because he could not afford a simple antibiotic to kill the infection in his mouth. Yet there are still people in America who think the health-care issue is something that President Barack Obama made up to steal money from hardworking Americans' pay cheques.

The difference between America and Australia in many ways is that we have safeguards in place. We have safety nets in place. We are so privileged, we are so lucky, to have systems in place to help those who most need it. We now have a very good disallowance motion, which I support, before the House. The bill before the House is going to strip away people's dental health services, and we cannot afford that.

Poor Mr Willis was unemployed and he could not afford a visit to the dentist. He could not pay to have a wisdom tooth removed, which in the United States costs $400, based on national averages for extraction costs, because he did not have insurance. He was just another American guy. One in four Americans under the age of 65 do not have dental insurance, and that includes people who have regular health insurance. That bothersome wisdom tooth went beyond dentistry when his lack of money kept him from getting it taken care of. He went to the emergency room but he did not have health insurance. That is an average American story, and we do not want that to be an average Australian story. We do not want to have cruel stories, disastrous stories, of people saying that their friends and relatives suffered so greatly because this mean-spirited government took away money in a vital dental services system.

This is not about preserving rorts. This is about oral health in this country, particularly in regional areas such as Cowper, Port Macquarie and New England. I certainly trust that the regional Independents, who say they care about regional people and the constituents they serve, will come in and support us on this disallowance motion, because it is important. The coalition supports investment in dental health. The government has announced the closure of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, effective 30 November, and the replacement schemes are not due to commence until 2014. To anyone out there needing this assistance—and I hope they are listening to the audio from parliament—and to the people in the gallery, I say: 'If you've got a toothache, get it fixed now because after 30 November you will have to pay for it out of your own pocket because of this mean-spirited—'

Mr Laming: Appalling!

Mr McCormack: It is appalling—'bill before the House.' We have a disallowance motion, which I support, and I know that Dr Andrew Laming beside me also supports it, as does the member for Cowper, the member for Solomon and the member for Gilmore behind me. They all support it because they know how important it is. The coalition is extremely concerned that many patients receiving treatment under the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental
Scheme will be forced to forgo treatment during the gap period. The coalition will announce its dental health priorities prior to the next election, and they will be good policies. They will be policies which will provide a safety net for people most in need of good oral health.

On 29 August, the Minister for Health, with the Greens health spokesperson, announced an unfunded $4.1 billion dental program, which is not due to commence until 2014. There we have the rub again: Labor being dragged to the table, kicking and screaming, by the party to which they are beholden, the Greens. The government announced the closure of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, effective 30 November 2012, and no new patients were able to access services after 7 September. This means that the means-tested Family Tax Benefit Part A, or other specified government payment, entitlement for children aged two to 17 years—the young kids who obviously cannot afford it themselves, and many of their families cannot either; kids do not get a say, they just have to put up with a toothache—will not commence until January 2014. That is, 13 months after some children will lose access to the CDDS.

The proposal is to provide a $1,000 cap benefit over two years to eligible children. The government claims 3.4 million children will be eligible, but the unfunded cost is $2.7 billion. The proposal for adults will not commence until 1 July 2014—that is, 19 long months after the Medicare scheme closes. You would not want to get a toothache during that time. Funding will be provided to state governments for public dental services. Services will no longer be available for adults through private dentists under Medicare. The unfunded cost is $1.3 billion. That is a disgrace. Labor and the Greens are again co-opting, coercing and coordinating their activities to hurt the Australians who are most vulnerable, particularly in regional areas. As I said, you really would not want to get a toothache in that time.

As part of the Labor government’s changes to its dental policy, its bill will seek to amend the legislation of the Medicare Teen Dental Plan. It was a plan established by Labor in 2008. The government announced that it plans to change the existing Medicare Teen Dental Plan to the Child Dental Benefits Schedule, commencing a long time away, in January 2014. Under the current legislation, a $163.05 voucher is provided for eligible teenagers to receive an annual preventative dental check. We all know—Dr Laming beside me knows—how important it is to have preventative medicine and how important it is for kids to be able to go and get a check-up to make sure that their teeth and their oral health is good. The proposed legislation will change the age of eligibility to cover children from the age of two years old to less than 18 years old from the current bracket of 12 years old to 18 years old. The coalition supports investment in dental health because we know how important it is. If you have your oral health right, it makes such a difference to your overall health.

The government has not released a schedule of services fees and details on how the scheme will be funded and, despite the commencement date being more than 12 months away, is trying to push this through the parliament without these details which would allow the new scheme to be fully scrutinised. Haven't we heard that before? We heard it in the electronic health records debate earlier this year. We heard it on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. We have heard it in so many other areas. But it is just a cover because this government is in serious
financial strife. It is just a cover because this government is in serious leadership strife.

Here is a government which is doing everything it can to cut areas which are of vital importance to the nation. It has underfunded our boat people security measures. It has stripped $5.5 billion from our Defence budget. That is a disgrace. It has pushed our Defence spending as a proportion of gross domestic product to—wait for it—1938 levels. Here we have a government which says that it is prioritising Defence and yet we have a Defence budget which is at its lowest level since 1938. And everybody knows what happened in 1939.

Back to the dental legislation, the schedule of items to be covered under the cap of $1,000 over two calendar years will be made by future changes to the Dental Benefits Rules, and the government claims 3.4 million children will be eligible under this proposal. That is fine. However, for those kids and adults who are going to have to wait—in the adults' case, 19 months—it is far too long a gap period, particularly if they have a toothache. The Minister for Health has acknowledged that most services for children will cost less than the proposed $1,000 cap. However, there will be children on the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme who will require more services and there is no provision to ensure they will continue to receive adequate treatment, especially prior to the commencement date.

This disallowance motion needs support. It needs the support of the House. It certainly needs the support of the regional Independents, who say they care about regional people and say they stick up for their electorates. Here is the test. Come into this House and support the shadow health minister's disallowance motion because, as I say, oral health is so important to the people of this nation and particularly those in regional areas.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (13:03): I rise today to speak on the Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1). Like the other members of the coalition, I am a strong supporter of investment into dental health and I support this disallowance motion that is before the chair.

While I am always an avid advocate of investment into dental health, I am very concerned about the Labor government's decision to close the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme as of 30 November this year. Why is it that this Labor government is closing down this highly successful scheme? It appears to me that perhaps it is playing politics with the dental health of Australians. Could it be because it was the then health minister and now Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, who introduced the scheme that provided Medicare funded dental support to Australians?

Since its introduction in 2007, we have seen over $1.7 million in benefits spent in the Northern Territory, breaking down to over 15,000 services provided. That is a lot of services and it is a lot of money that Territorians have had invested in them, and I am very concerned that that is going to be taken away from them.

Across Australia, over one million Australians have benefited from the scheme—60,000 of these being children. I am very proud to be a part of that legacy. For me, this shows that this is a program that is working, and it is highly disappointing that it appears that this government has decided to take away the Medicare dental help for Australians purely because it was an initiative of the then health minister, Tony Abbott. I could understand if the scheme had
not been a success, but it has been. Over one million Australians have benefited from this scheme. Now, under Labor's six-year proposal, the predicted number of services is equivalent to 20 per cent of what the health minister's Chronic Disease Dental Scheme provided in the last year alone. It is really quite distressing that Labor and the Greens are stopping the only dental scheme available to adults across the country just so they can shut down this program that was introduced, as I said, by the now Leader of the Opposition.

The dental health of those in my electorate and across the country should not be used to the Labor government's political advantage. As of 7 September, the new services provided under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme have been stopped. From 30 November, the scheme will be closed altogether. The new scheme will not be introduced until 2014, which is after the next federal election. Can we trust this government to keep a promise after it has broken so many? It was this government that said at the last election that there would be no carbon tax under their government. But here we are in 2012 and we have a carbon tax under a Labor government.

I ask this Labor government to explain to Territorians why they will have a window of 19 months where there will be no Medicare dental scheme to provide dental treatment for adults in the Northern Territory. Not only does this bill not commence until 2014; it has not been funded. The government has announced a $4.1 billion scheme with no plans as to how it is going to pay for it. Quite frankly, this is not good enough. The people of the Territory and across Australia deserve better. This program has been demonstrated to have worked and it is really, really important for electorates like mine and that of the member for Riverina, who spoke earlier. Regional Australia needs programs like this. I ask again: how can we trust this government to fund its program? Where will it get the money from? I call on the government to explain to the people of the Territory the $120 billion black hole. This Labor government has not delivered for the people of the Territory. How can we believe that it will fund this scheme? Territorians have lost their faith in Labor, and that is why after the last Territory election we now have a Country Liberal government. People know they can trust a conservative government. Life is always better under a conservative government.

Between these schemes, education reforms, additional aged care funding and border protection cost blow-outs, where is this Labor government going to get the money to fund this new scheme? The Australian people are not an endless credit card that this government can keep spending against. They do deserve better. It is only further proof for the Australian people that this Labor government has lost its way and is heading for a huge budget blow-out.

I am proud to stand here today, standing up for chronic disease sufferers. I am ashamed that this Labor government and the Greens are taking away access to dental treatment that is urgently needed. The people of Australia and throughout my electorate will be worse off, as they always are under a Labor government. Labor has stripped many Australians of dental health treatment. These people will simply not be able to afford dental care anymore. Labor should be hanging their heads in shame. As the member for Riverina said a few minutes ago, anyone who has a toothache had better go and get it fixed now, before the government shuts down this program altogether, leaving them waiting for another 19 months before they can get anything done, and that is if the program is actually implemented.
I am sickened by the thought that the government and the Greens will now force children to wait 13 months until they can once again receive dental care. We know that preventative care is so important, but here we are having a system shut down, taking away the opportunity to have preventative care. The Labor government has claimed that 3.4 million children ranging from two to 18 years will be eligible for $1,000 worth of services, capped over two years, under the new scheme. Under the current scheme adults and children receive $4,250 over two years. While the scheme is capped at $4,250, according to the department the average claim for the scheme has been around $1,700, although recent estimates suggest that the figure may have fallen as low as $1,200 per patient.

As a mother myself, I find it offensive to see children suffering. As I said, it is important to have preventative care. I think that by closing down this program you are taking away that opportunity. We know that Labor has lied to parents. Those opposite have promised dental services to—

Mr Perrett: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I find that term offensive and I would ask that the member withdraw it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O'Neill): It would assist the House if the member would withdraw.

Mrs GRIGGS: I withdraw. Those opposite have misled parents. Those opposite have promised dental services to 3.4 million children, but this is to be paid by $2.7 billion worth of unfunded promises. As I said earlier, the Labor government has a $120 billion black hole and it is getting bigger.

Under this new scheme adults will be forced to suffer from untreated dental problems for an additional six months. My constituents are going to have to wait 19 months for a Medicare dental scheme. This is again to be paid for by an unfunded $1.3 billion program to be given to the state and territory governments to be spent through public dental services. No longer will adults be able to obtain dental services through private providers. The Labor government just does not understand. There are over 650,000 Australians on the public dental waiting list. It cannot handle this bad Labor policy.

Earlier in the week Minister Plibersek claimed that the new scheme would crack down on millionaires who benefit from the current Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. I am here to inform the minister that the National Advisory Council on Dental Health has reported that 80 per cent—yes, 80 per cent—of all services provided under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme have gone to those on concession cards, so hardly millionaires. It just goes to show how out of touch and ill thought out the minister's scheme is.

While Medicare is a universal scheme funded by all Australians through the Medicare levy, it is evident that the dental schemes have mostly been embraced by those on low incomes. These people on low incomes already struggle with huge cost-of-living pressures through the government's waste and mismanagement, its overspending and of course its carbon tax. Now they will have to forgo treatment or go onto the already exhaustive public dental waiting list. As I have already mentioned, with over 650,000 other Australians, it is a huge waiting list. I understand that currently in Darwin people on the public dental waiting list are generally waiting around 13 months for just a basic check-up—13 months.

The Labor government should be held accountable for their actions. The scrapping of the successful Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is going to put even further pressure
on the public dental waiting list. I ask that the Labor government and the Greens to explain to the people of my electorate of Solomon why they will be forced to wait even longer now for dental care. Those currently on the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme will be forced onto public dental waiting lists. I ask again: what are the real motives of this Labor government?

I am saddened to say that this reminds me of what I spoke about in the House earlier this week, how the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments had played politics with the lives of dementia patients and their families. They are doing exactly the same now with the dental health of thousands of Territorians and thousands of Australians. I understand this government has had many failures, like the Gillard government's Building the Education Revolution scheme and revoking highly successful policies like our border protection policies, but this has gone too far.

This government, these people opposite, are now playing with the health of the people of my electorate and, as I said, people all across Australia. Playing politics with the dental health of Australians, forcing Territorians to suffer for almost two years while they wait for this bill to commence, is reaching a new low, even for this government. This is only further proof that they are unfairly forcing Australians to wait 19 months for Medicare funded dental treatment; there is no assurance that at that time there will be adequate infrastructure or an adequate workforce to support the dental treatment Territorians and other Australians need.

Why is the Labor government shutting down a successful scheme that provides real dental assistance to Australians and replacing it with an unfunded and inadequately supported program? The government does have a lot to answer for. The lack of support Labor will provide to this scheme is another clear example of how completely out of touch they are with Territorians and the wider community. They have made another promise of money, $225 million, to develop infrastructure to support this unfunded scheme. Where is this money coming from?

I support the disallowance motion and I think that the government has done the wrong thing. We are calling on the Independents who represent regional areas to support this disallowance motion to make sure regional Australia has the appropriate dental services and to continue with a program that has proven to work.

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt—Chief Opposition Whip) (13:18): I welcome this opportunity to speak today on this motion for disallowance on the Health Insurance (Dental Services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1). While I am sure I am not alone in dreading a trip to the dentist, I am fully aware of the importance of good oral health. Being a neglecter of my teeth in my younger years, I have certainly learned to live to regret it.

You realise that good oral care not only means a person can eat, speak and socialise without pain or embarrassment but also contributes to their general wellbeing. At the other end of the scale, poor oral health not only results in infections, tooth loss, minor and major surgery but also contributes to cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, strokes and low birth weight.

It seriously concerns me that this government is proposing to shut down what has been a very effective program, the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. It has been incredibly successful up in my region. They are closing down the scheme, known as the CDDS, on 30 November this year. The cut-off date for any new services was 7
September, which, as we all know, has already passed.

The government claims that an additional 3.4 million children will become eligible for subsidised dental care under their proposed bill, and I certainly welcome any investment in dental health for young people. But there is very serious need for these services not only in our metropolitan areas but further out, in our regional areas and our Indigenous and remote communities—where there is an absolutely chronic need for these services. In Leichhardt, a high number of my constituents live in regional and very remote areas, where there are a range of barriers to achieving good dental health.

First of all, in regional areas it is very difficult to access regular dental treatment. There are fewer dental professionals in those areas, resulting in delays in receiving treatment and much higher consultation fees. Of course, if you do not drive and there is no public transport—as there is not in the overwhelming majority of my region—logistically it is very difficult to get to a clinic. Also, living far away from metropolitan centres, people find it difficult—and this is a real issue in remote communities—to find affordable fresh fruit and vegetables, and other healthy food options.

Transport costs boost prices by up to 30 per cent, and the length of time it takes to get the food to the stores means its quality is often be compromised. This means it is much easier and cheaper to buy processed and sugary foods. Many remote communities do not have access to fluoridated water. I know it is controversial, but it is a cost-effective way to reduce the rate of cavities in whole communities. Lastly, information about good oral health is harder to access. It is not just about the importance of brushing your teeth regularly but also about knowing which foods are bad for your teeth, and why it is so important to have regular check-ups and catch problems early. Many people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage live in my electorate. While they are subject to exactly the same barriers, they also have additional issues that they have to contend with. For a start, they may avoid going in to the dentist, because often dentists' clinics are not culturally sensitive, particularly when there is strict emphasis on appointment times and fees can be charged if people do not turn up. For people travelling down from remote communities, it really is a whole new experience, and sometimes very challenging. In addition, Indigenous Australians are more likely to smoke, have diabetes and sit lower on the socioeconomic scale, all of which contribute to them having much poorer oral health than other Australians.

Some of the statistics are quite sobering: 51 per cent of Indigenous children under the age of five have been hospitalised for dental treatment, compared with 34 per cent of non-Indigenous children; Indigenous people aged between 17 and 20 are 8.2 times more likely to have decayed teeth; and 49 per cent of Indigenous adults between the age of 35 and 54 avoid certain foods because of their oral health problems, compared with 17 per cent of other Australians.

It does not matter what your background is; delays in getting treatment mean that the condition worsens, and at the end of the day that means major surgery. Figures for 2009 show that in the Cairns and Hinterland health district, dental conditions were second only to diabetes complications as the most common cause of potentially avoidable hospitalisations. With a rate of 353 hospitalisations per 100,000 people, the Cairns and Hinterland rate is significantly higher than the wider Queensland rate of 267 incidents per 100,000 people.
This leads on to a number of concerns I have in relation to how the new proposal that has been put up by the government is going to be funded and implemented. For a start, age is no barrier to dental health issues. Good oral health for young people is vital, but it is no less important that people of all ages have access to effective dental care. The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme in its current form was established by the coalition in 2007. It allowed eligible patients of all ages with chronic health conditions to receive up to $4,250 in Medicare benefits over two years, and it was very successful. Despite that, we are well aware of Labor's attempt to shut down this scheme, and I am very glad that up until now they have failed, because the last thing anyone with an ongoing serious health condition needs is additional pressure on their finances. As I mentioned earlier, Labor's 29 August announcement outlined the closure of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, effective as of 30 November this year. Unfortunately, given that the new child dental scheme does not commence until 1 January 2014, this means that there will be a gap of some 13 months in treating the young people. It is certainly not rocket science to work out the impact this will have on families who struggle to afford dental treatment for their children. I fear for those children who may remain untreated and what impact that will have on their overall health.

In addition, Labor's proposal for adults will not commence until 1 July 2014, which is 19 months after the Medicare scheme closes. Until then, more than one million patients who have been eligible for the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme will lose access to timely dental treatment. Quite frankly, that is just not good enough.

Today I received an email from a lady in my electorate, who really puts a human face on this crisis. Lyn Blyth lives in Palm Cove. She is in her late fifties. I will read her email verbatim:

At age 58 in 2010 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. On advice pre chemotherapy I had a full dental health check up as the teeth could particularly be affected by the type of extremely toxic chemotherapy I required. My teeth and gums passed with flying colours and during the six rounds of chemotherapy I was ever vigilant with dental hygiene as well as rinsing my mouth at least six times a day with salt water.

However at the end of the sixth round and the day before I was to travel to Townsville to live for six weeks daily radiotherapy I developed a painful problem with a tooth. Unable to resolve the problem with my dentist I was referred to one specialist in Townsville and then to another. I endured much pain and many expensive treatments at nearly $1000 dollars each while having radiotherapy each day before another cancer patient told me about the dental scheme. I contacted my GP who authorised my Enhanced Primary Care form to help with these crippling costs.

I am still not finished my treatment for this exact problem due to slow healing times due to chemotherapy drugs. I would not have been able to have a reasonable outcome if not for the dental scheme and would not have undertaken the treatment which hopefully is almost at an end. Many patients could be in this situation and I think there should at least be a reasonable phase out time for people in this situation. I have just lost another tooth due to this ongoing problem and will lose more if it is not resolved satisfactorily compromising my nutritional intake and overall health.

Please ensure you give voice to my and other patients’ legitimate concerns to government during your time in Canberra representing your constituents!

Yours faithfully, Lynette Blyth

Unfortunately, there are a lot of Lyn Blyths out there in the community. I think Lyn's voice should be heard in this place when we are giving consideration to the changes that are being promoted by this government. With regard to the adult scheme, Labor plans
to give funding to the states and territories for public dental services. Commonwealth funded services will no longer be available for adults through private dentists under Medicare. There are a number of shortcomings with this plan. Firstly, cost-of-living pressures are already hitting residents of my electorate hard. The last thing they need is additional financial and personal stress in the form of not being able to afford to take themselves or their children to the dentist.

Secondly, around the country there are already some 650,000 people on public dental waiting lists. Labor has not provided any indication that the public system can actually provide for these extra patients. Waiting lists often make newspaper headlines, and Far North Queensland is no different. As an example of the desperate need in my electorate, I refer to an article in the Cairns Post of 17 February this year. The article is about the opening of a new $25 million student dental clinic at James Cook University. This facility, the only one of its kind in Australia, opened with a waiting list of more than 2,000 people. The 112 people who were lucky enough to score an appointment on the opening day for discounted treatment had waited four months for the privilege. One Clifton Beach resident, a mother of three, said she would not be able to afford dental care for her family if she did not have a Queensland health card that makes her children eligible for free examinations and treatment at the clinic.

I have to say, with a great deal of pride, that myself and a former colleague, the member for Herbert Peter Lindsay, and Senator Macdonald from the other place, were instrumental in getting the funding to establish this state-of-the-art facility, and it has certainly made a hell of a difference to the oral health of people living within our region. But that in itself does not solve the problem, which is the critical need to continue to maintain the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. It allows people to receive up to $4,250 over two years towards treatment, and I think that is very important.

The other concern I have here is in relation to how the government are going to pay for all of these changes they are making. They are closing down this very successful Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. Under the new one they will have, they say the proposed dental entitlement for children is going to cost $2.7 billion; for adults, another $1.3 billion; and the third entitlement, or Flexible Grants Program for Dental Infrastructure, is another $225 million. That is $4.225 billion dollars, totally unfunded. If you add that to the $120-odd billion that is out there for a whole range of other promises—only the other day $1.4 billion was announced for private childcare workers, and there is the $6.5 billion for the Gonski review—none are funded, I think it is even crazy to suggest that we continue to run up this bill when we have a perfectly functional scheme. If we shut it down today, there are going to be a lot of people, like Mrs Lyn Blyth and others, who are going to suffer very badly from the closure of this scheme.

For those reasons, I very strongly support this disallowance motion and I hope that we can get the support in this place to make sure that the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme remains in place. *(Time expired)*

**Mrs GASH** (Gilmore) (13:33): I rise to speak for the disallowance motion. The reason I do so is that I vividly remember why I welcomed an earlier bill, introduced some years ago by the former coalition government. In speaking for the disallowance motion, let me relate a story.

Some years ago, prior to the introduction of the Medicare Chronic Diseases Dental...
Scheme by the former coalition government, which the government now wants to terminate, I well remember talking to a constituent of mine from Kings Point, just outside Ulladulla. He was middle-aged and in great pain—physically, emotionally and mentally. He had no teeth, he could not eat properly, he was unemployed and he had lost his girlfriend. He effectively had no life, and readily admitted he was feeling suicidal. He grunted at me that he hated politicians, because they did nothing for him. I explained to him that the public dental services were provided by the states and that I had very limited influence over a state Labor government. He knew the waiting lists were horrendous and, even then, after a prolonged wait of many years, the treatment was rudimentary.

In rural and regional areas like Gilmore the situation was even worse, so I really felt for him and was concerned that he was entertaining the thought of suicide to end his torment. Anyway, I made a few phone calls, wrote a few letters and bent a few arms. I had no idea what may have transpired, or whether my efforts were effective, until about nine months later, when he came back and saw me at one of my village visits. He asked, 'Do you remember me? I honestly could not. I did not recognise him. His face was beaming, his cheeks had colour and there was certainly a spring in his step. He opened his mouth and showed me his teeth. He explained that, since he had had his teeth done, under our Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, he had gotten a job, now had another girlfriend and was basically enjoying life. Fundamentally, he had been given back the will to live. If nothing else, it is that man alone who showed me the importance and value of having a comprehensive public dental health scheme. And, I might add, it is one achievement I will never forget.

Yet here we are, taking away the scheme that was a lifeline to people in my electorate, an electorate with an above-average demographic of disadvantaged persons. The absence of things that many take for granted every day can have severe implications. The man I met on that day encapsulated the depths of despair many people faced each and every day. In a country as wealthy and privileged as Australia, it just should not be allowed to happen—and that is why I welcomed the introduction of the Coalition's Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, which this government now wants to close down. And that is why I am supporting this disallowance motion.

But not only will it be closed down in just a couple of months; there is nothing in the wings to replace it—except a concept for 2014, well after the next election. Who can say that this goal will not be pushed further and further back, beyond 2014, if this government cannot balance its books? And it is just a goal, a statement of intent, not backed up with anything and certainly without any guarantees, nor any details as to how it would work.

So what are people going to do in the meantime? Are we going to go back in time with many more cases like the man from Kings Point, thinking life was no longer worth living because he just could not stand the pain and isolation? If I said this government wants to put into place an inferior and cheap substitute, a superficial dental scheme, I would not be entirely correct in my description—because it presupposes that Labor will stick to their promise, and we all know their track record on promises. No, this is all about cutting costs and, because the coalition's scheme was so successful, the demand and therefore for costs of the scheme have gone up. In fact, on radio just this morning the minister herself admitted as much, so its not about delivering
a better product to the public, it is all about cutting costs. She also said that some dentists were rorting the system, but she failed to say the extent to which it justified the thrusting of 600,000 people into dental health limbo. Many of those will come from rural and regional areas, like Gilmore. I wonder whether the alleged rorting by dentists is as extensive as Labor's pink batts fiasco or their school building rorts, which cost the Australian taxpayer billions of dollars.

The reality is that Labor does not care about people in my electorate like my Kings Point man. They will cut costs to save themselves and put in a scheme that is just a tarted up smoke screen, hoping people are gullible enough to swallow their spin. It will only be a matter of time before the chorus of voices demanding urgent dental treatment will grow in pitch. What will Labor do then, assuming they are still around?

Their program will not start until 19 months after this scheme has closed down—maybe, and that is a big maybe. It is proposed that funding will be provided to state governments for public dental services. Commonwealth funded services will no longer be available for adults through Medicare. Those people are going to have to find money to pay for urgent dental treatment out of their own pockets. And how many will be able to do that? There are still 600,000 people on the public dental waiting lists, while many thousands have already been treated under our former scheme. How many of those will have their lives shortened as a result of this government's policy? Labor has not provided any assessment or guarantees that the public dental workforce is even able to meet the demand. They just do not know and clearly they do not care, so desperate are they to cut costs. The means tested Family Tax Benefit Part A, or other specified government payments, entitlement for children aged two to 17 years will not commence until January 2014, 13 months after some children will lose access to the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme.

The proposal is to provide a $1,000 capped benefit over two years to eligible children. The government claims that 3.4 million children will be eligible. The minister has acknowledged that services for most children will cost less than the proposed $1,000 cap. But there will be children on the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme who will require more services, and there is no provision to ensure they continue to receive adequate treatment, especially in the period before the bill commences. That is another reason I support this disallowance motion.

Available data suggests that well over 60,000 services have been provided to children under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. The closure of the scheme on 30 November will leave a 13-month gap for many children currently receiving treatment. There are children in the midst of treatment who will not be able to have their treatment completed by November 30. Those families will have nowhere to turn. That is why this disallowance motion is important. The minister and the Greens should explain why these children must suffer for 13 months with incomplete treatment and no certainty of the schedule of services that are to be provided, assuming the government actually delivers on its unfunded promise, in 2014.

We support investment in dental health. We know that the 600,000 people on the public waiting list deserve better. There has to be a better way. Again, that is why this disallowance motion must succeed. We have legitimate concerns about those who will lose access to treatment on 30 November with the closure of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. We do not know what will happen to those who are unfortunate enough
to be caught up in this period and are not able to complete current treatment by the final date. Nor do we know how the unfunded $2.7 billion cost of the measure will be met. Details are also missing from the schedule of services and fees, and other essential details, that this government wants to rush through the parliament. These are all vital and legitimate questions that the government has refused or failed to provide answers to.

We want to see this motion passed and I ask the Independents to support ongoing treatment for residents of my electorate of Gilmore. We are really concerned about the many patients who will be thrown on the waiting list scrap heap and held at the mercy of this government, a government with a well deserved reputation for waste, inefficiency and broken promises.

We also will move to disallow the closure of our Chronic Disease Dental Scheme in order to protect those in need. We are happy to work with the government for a productive outcome by refining what has proven to be a very successful and popular scheme. We want to review the process for providing certain high-cost items such as bridges and crowns. We understand that. But if the government thinks that the $50 billion spent on their NBN scheme is worthwhile, what does cutting back on dental spending say? It says that the government does not think there are any votes in improving the quality of life for our pensioners or senior citizens. Maybe they think the distraction of the NBN will do that.

I have been down this road before, and it looks like it is unfolding as a case of back to the future. The sad thing is that there is every likelihood that the authors of this plan may not be around to take the blame. Then the process will have to start all over again.

I urge all in the House to support the disallowance motion. I certainly do not want to see once again stories in my local newspaper showing photos of people using superglue to put their teeth back in place, because they could not afford the dental scheme, or pulling out their own teeth. This is Australia. This is not a Third World country. Having meals through straws is absolutely incomprehensible. It is difficult to justify no service for dental when this government has so many failed projects and can afford to waste so many millions of dollars.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (13:43): I rise to speak on this motion of disallowance. Perhaps I have softened, because I wish to quote a famed Communist back to Labor, but this is the first rule of effective communications: relate. It was Nikita Khrushchev who said:

Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge even where there is no river. And so it is with the dental benefits amendments bill to which we have moved this disallowance motion.

The facts, as stubborn as they are, are that under the current scheme, the coalition's scheme, 20 million services have provided cover to over one million patients since 2007. And 80 per cent of services under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme have been provided to concession card holders. The people of my electorate are indignant that Labor is playing politics with their health. The reality is that Labor has gone to great lengths to undermine the CDDS because it was established by Tony Abbott as Minister for Health and Ageing and has been a success in improving access to treatment. The alternative Prime Minister is a man tackling our roughest challenges with fidelity and diligence. Tony Abbott is a man who does not play politics with people's lives or
their children's lives. He is a firm and considered servant who does not make empty promises.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson): Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour, and the member for Tangney will have leave to continue when the debate is resumed.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Montrose Netball Club

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (13:45): Last Saturday evening I had the pleasure of attending the presentation night for the Montrose Netball Club. The Montrose Netball Club began back in 1974 and since then has been a highly successful club run by a dedicated group of parents and volunteers. They have always had a large number of teams who have competed in the Montrose and Yarra Valley area. This year 16 teams took part in the winter season, with nine teams making the finals and three teams going on to win premierships.

I want to pay tribute to all of the players, all of the parents and all of those who make the club the great success it is: the president, Mignon Harrington, who has been there since the very first day, unstoppable and dedicated; the secretary, Sue Reynolds; the assistant secretary, Julie McDonald; the treasurer, Brigitte Harrington; the coaches convenor, Melissa Allwell; and all of the other coaches who do so much for the club. All of us in this place in one way or another support local sporting groups, but I think we would all agree that female sport does not often get the recognition and support that it deserves.

Tango Netball Club

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (13:46): In 2010 the netball premier league in South Australia was reduced from 10 teams to six. As a result, the Tango Netball Club, based in the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide, lost its premier league status and was relegated to the premier league reserves. With its origins dating back to 1947, Tango is one of South Australia's oldest and most successful clubs. Over the years, thousands of netballers have played with the club, and hundreds continue to do so each year. Like good sports, Tango copped the relegation on the chin and set out to prove that it was worthy of reinstatement into the premier league.

It was not an easy challenge and there were setbacks along the way, but several weeks ago the club was notified that it had been reinstated into the premier league from 2013. The determined professional efforts of the committee, with the support of players and supporters, finally won through, and it is a credit to all concerned that the club did not give up or become demoralised. The club is now rightfully back in the league that it belongs in, and with new seniors coach Michelle den Dekker I know that it will prove itself worthy of its reinstatement. My best wishes to the club for the year 2013.

Southern Districts Rugby Union Club

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (13:48): I rise with a degree of reluctance following the final of the New South Wales rugby premiership, the Shute Shield, played last weekend. I was pleased to attend, along with my colleague the member for Cook, to cheer on Southern Districts as they put up a strong fight against University, especially after having lost their second rower Kane Douglas, who was called up to play for the Wallabies and received his first test cap against the Pumas.

The Southern Districts Rebels showed great heart, only to have the premiership snatched from them by a single point to their more favoured rivals. And, as the member for Cook noted on Monday, many questions
remain over a suspect pass. Nonetheless, as I am bound by contract to the member for North Sydney, I wish to note the high achievement of the Sydney University rugby club in winning the Sydney rugby union premiership for 2012—their seventh title in eight years.

In the time remaining, I would like to express how proud I am of the Southern Districts club. This was a club that was first formed in 1989 and played in its first grand final only this year. It was the merging of my old team, St George, with Port Hacking. What has stood out during that time has been its club spirit. It was absolutely fantastic to see on the weekend the eastern grandstand of Concord Oval full of Southern Districts supporters cheering on their team, who I am sure in years to come will get that title.

Rosh Hashana

Q&A

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (13:49): On Monday and Tuesday I had leave for Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year. I thank the whips and the parliament. For 120,000 Australians of similar background, even the most secular families, this is like Christmas, a time for the gathering of the clan.

Tony Jones, the host of *Q&A*, explained to that segment of Australia's population that *Q&A* focusing half of its program on Monday night on Israel was because he could not get his guest Mr Pappe other than on that night. Irving Wallach did a brave job on the program. But I question Mr Jones; the ABC managing director, Mark Scott; and indeed the new chairman, Jim Spigelman. This was a studied insult. Having an academically undistinguished extremist on Rosh Hashana is like having someone from Hizb ut-Tahrir advocate the abolition of Christianity in Australia on Christmas Eve.

Nearby to Israel, a prosperous, peaceful, democratic country, 25,000 Syrian civilians have been murdered by their own government. Come on, Tony Jones! When are you going to have a program of half an hour on the situation in Syria? Stop putting Uncle Toms like Ilan Pappe and Antony Loewenstein on your program. Let some people who speak for the mainstream, either Left or Right, both of which support peaceful evolution of the Middle East, appear on your program. *(Time expired)*

Dementia

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (13:51): The importance of diagnosing dementia early cannot be overstated, especially when the prevalence of dementia is expected to rise sharply. In Queensland, it is expected that the prevalence of dementia for each decade between 2011 and 2050 will increase faster than the Queensland population growth rate. On the Gold Coast alone, there are currently over 2,700 people with dementia, and this number is set to almost double by 2020 to over 4,400. In 2050, it is expected that there will be over 15,700 people on the Gold Coast who will suffer from dementia.

Dementia Awareness Week begins this Friday, 21 September and runs through to 28 September. This year's theme is brain health. I encourage people to maintain a healthy diet and take part in regular physical and social activities to help reduce their risk of developing dementia. I would like to acknowledge the work that Alzheimer's Australia is doing to raise awareness of dementia and raise much-needed funds for research. Alzheimer's Australia do a wonderful job, and I hope they will continue to do great work into the future. I would like to congratulate Victoria Beedle and the team at Alzheimer's Australia Queensland and thank them for their hard work and dedication to this very worthy cause.
Australian Rare Chromosome Awareness Network

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (13:52): I rise to mention the fantastic work of the Australian Rare Chromosome Awareness Network and the efforts of my constituent Patricia Jonas, who is the NSW ARCAN president. Since there is very little information for families with children or family members who have a rare chromosome disorder or rare disease, ARCAN was created by parents as a not-for-profit organisation to raise awareness of rare chromosome disorders and to help families find the services and support they need when they have a child with a rare chromosome disorder or disease. They do this by providing direct relief through online support and in social settings. They do a fantastic job in creating a place where individuals and families can all feel accepted and supported.

On 4 September, I met with Patricia and her beautiful daughter, Georgia, to learn about what it is like raising a child with a rare chromosome disorder. As Patricia has stated:

There are thousands of families who do not even know where to turn when they get a diagnosis of a rare condition and it is a very daunting time.

I walked that path when Georgia was diagnosed and I don't think any family should have to go through that.

What would you do if you have just found out that the child you thought was going to be perfectly healthy has a rare chromosome disorder and no one in the world knows what their future holds?

Patricia's story is sadly not uncommon in our society. It can be extremely difficult for families affected by these disorders. Georgia's chromosome 5 disorder was not diagnosed—and my understanding is that it would be impossible to diagnose—in the prenatal stage. All Patricia knew was that her baby bump seemed to be unusually large. I encourage anyone in the House or tuning into the broadcast who is interested in the work of the Australian Rare Chromosome Awareness Network to visit their website, arcan.org.au.

Child Obesity

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (13:54): I wish to touch on the issue of childhood obesity. A recent UniSA study found that youngsters' mobility is jeopardised by obesity, even with simple tasks. It is sad to think that young children are being put behind the eight ball, so to speak, so early in their lives. It is well known that childhood obesity has serious consequences, far more serious than lack of mobility. For example, childhood obesity can lead to adult obesity, cardiovascular disease, cancer, infertility, type 2 diabetes, joint problems, sleep apnoea, emotional and social problems such as bullying, low self-esteem and depression and other disorders. We really need to start treating the cause of these conditions rather than just the symptoms. I question whether it is time to review some of the long-held beliefs that we have had around the nutritional guidelines that have been in place for many years, which we keep rolling out but which never seem to get any results and the problems just seem to get worse. We need a plan that will improve the health outcomes for our future generations. A healthier nation will result in less strain on our health system and will give our children the best possible start in life.

Bass Electorate: Community Cabinet

Mr LYONS (Bass) (13:55): I rise today to mention an exciting event coming up in Tasmania. The Australian government community cabinet will be held in my electorate of Bass in early October. Community cabinet meetings are a fantastic chance for people to bring their concerns directly to the government and provide the
government with firsthand access to community perceptions and expectations. The Prime Minister and senior members of the federal cabinet will be in the state of Tasmania to discuss key local, state and national issues directly with affected Tasmanians. I encourage all residents to take part in the community cabinet, which is a great opportunity for the people of Launceston and northern Tasmania to raise the issues that matter to them. My ministerial colleagues will be there to discuss the government's plans, including tackling cost-of-living pressures through our Household Assistance Package, improving access to dental services and spreading the benefits of the resources boom to keep our economy strong. So far, more than 13,500 people have attended community cabinet meetings across the country. I am looking forward to this event and I am sure that the meeting in Launceston will be a productive and positive one.

Dairy Industry

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (13:56): I rise to raise an issue in my electorate which is quite pressing at the moment, and that is the demise of the dairy industry. Over a period of six weeks, I have lost six dairy farmers in my electorate. It is a shame to our nation. I choose not to reveal the names of the farmers, but some have been there for five or six generations and in the last couple of weeks they have lost their livelihoods. When we have a look at the economic conditions surrounding the dairy industry and the price-leading activities of retailers, it is unfathomable—and let me say to the House that it is un-Australian—that we have a product with the nourishment that milk can provide to a family that is now priced cheaper than water. It is absolutely unfathomable. Dairy farmers employ local people and buy supplies from local manufacturers—their tractors, their machinery. When they are gone from our society, we will be left with a product which is UHT. From a retail perspective, UHT, or long life, milk is a lot cheaper to retail because it does not need refrigeration and it does not need the labour component attached to rotating stock. Please, Australia, I beg of you, help me help my farmers. Help me reach out to the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation, which on Tuesday is having its annual conference. I ask them in their deliberations to encourage the campaign to buy branded milk.

Throsby Electorate: Jobs and Skills Expo

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (13:58): I am delighted to advise the House that the Australian government's Jobs and Skills Expo is coming to the Illawarra next Wednesday, 26 September, where we will be joined by the Minister for Employment Participation, Kate Ellis. I am looking forward to welcoming the member for Cunningham and the member for Gilmore to my electorate and want to put on the record my thanks for their personal support for the expo. More than 70 local, state and national businesses, employment services providers, private recruitment agencies and registered skill training organisations will be on hand to offer their guidance and advice to job seekers. There will be full-time and part-time jobs in retail, hospitality, financial services and aged care. There will be jobs for blue-collar workers and white-collar workers, the trades and the professions. There will be apprenticeships, traineeships, casual jobs and much, much more. There is lots of local interest in work opportunities in the booming Pilbara, and I would like to thank Gina Rinehart's Roy Hill company for their participation in next week's expo as well. My electorate of Throsby is the only electorate outside of Western Australia that will be hosting Roy Hill in their big recruitment
drive for workers needed to construct their significant resources project in the Pilbara. Not only are Roy Hill coming along next week and helping to transport locals from around the region to the expo but they are also running a special forum on mining jobs in the Pilbara at the government's Jobs and Skills Expo. I strongly encourage local job seekers to come along and to see the variety of opportunities available at the expo and to meet potential employers face to face.

National Family Business Day

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (13:59): Yesterday was National Family Business Day. To all those men and women operating family businesses across Australia, thank you for your contribution. We recognise your important role in the economy and we celebrated yesterday as National Family Business Day with you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members' statements has concluded.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Victims of Terrorism

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister consider making assistance available to the previous Australian victims of overseas terrorism as a way to suitably mark the forthcoming 10th anniversary of the Bali bombing?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:00): The Leader of the Opposition has raised this matter with me privately, and I acknowledge that. Our nation has seen a number of Australians affected by terrorist events, and there is nothing we can do as a government or as a parliament that brings back a lost loved one or ends people's suffering when they have been wounded in such grievous attacks. But as a nation we have cared for people who were caught in the Bali bombings, in 9/11, in Mumbai, in Jakarta and in the many events in which Australians have been hurt by the acts of terrorists. I think as a parliament, in a very bipartisan way, we should recognise that our nation has extended that support. That has included emergency financial assistance, the support of family liaison officers, travel back to Bali—and the government is extending a package of support so people can return for the 10th commemoration of the Bali bombings, lifetime health care, counselling, rehabilitation, money to cover out of pocket expenses and the like, and of course some people were also assisted to attend the trials of the Bali bombers.

We are working together in a bipartisan way to put this kind of ad hoc assistance on a more systematic basis for the future and so there will be a scheme established for Australians should any be hurt in the future by terrorist attacks. I am sure we would all be hoping that no-one ever gets hurt again, but understanding the world in which we live we must prepare for that possibility and in those circumstances an amount of up to $75,000 would be extended to Australians harmed in overseas terrorist acts or the families of those killed.

The Leader of the Opposition has raised with me the question of people who were the subject of the Bali bombings in the past. I indicate to the Leader of the Opposition that I am open to considering unmet needs for any of those individuals, and if the Leader of the Opposition wants to bring some material to me in any way that suits his convenience, or have me speak directly to family members involved, then I am open to that.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. I
thank the Prime Minister for her answer, but why should the victims of future terrorism be entitled to receive up to $75,000 in assistance but not the victims of past terrorism, given the pain and the trauma that they have suffered and continue to suffer?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:03): The Leader of the Opposition would no doubt recall Howard government decisions about how it would assist victims of terrorism—including 9/11 in 2001 and both of the Bali bombings. I do recall that the Leader of the Opposition was on the spot in Bali for the second round of Bali bombings and was personally there trying to assist some of the victims, so I do understand that this is a matter in which the Leader of the Opposition had direct and personal contact during the days that he was a minister in the Howard government. I presume he is familiar with the way in which the Howard government made its decisions about assistance. That approach was an approach of various categories of assistance. People have been provided with assistance under the Howard government approach. There is now a bipartisan will, I believe, to put that on a systematic basis for the future.

Given people have received ad hoc, if you like, assistance in the past that was not a denominated amount of money but was made up of various kinds of assistance, if the Leader of the Opposition believes that process of assistance, started understandably by the Howard government because the instances happened when Prime Minister Howard was in office, has led to unmet needs then I invite him to advise me and certainly I will consider them.

Multiculturalism

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (14:05): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the work of the Australian Multicultural Council that the government established last year, and why does mutual respect and tolerance form the foundation of Australian multiculturalism?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:05): I do very much thank the member for Chifley for raising this question. A number of us in this parliament had what was the very special privilege last night of attending a first ever Australian Multicultural Council lecture delivered by a very great Australian, Frank Lowy. I was in attendance, the Leader of the Opposition was in attendance, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship was in attendance, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs was there, Minister Ellis was there, the shadow parliamentary secretary was there and the former minister for immigration Mr Ruddock was there, amongst a large number of others. It was a special privilege to be there and to hear the remarkable life story of a truly great Australian who, as a very young boy, fled the horrors of the Holocaust and made such a remarkable success of his life in this country.

I was very pleased that when I spoke, when Mr Lowy spoke and when the Leader of the Opposition spoke we saw a bipartisan embrace of multiculturalism and what it truly means. Multiculturalism is the meeting place of rights and responsibilities—the right to bring to this nation as a migrant your heritage and your culture and your language and your religion; to bring all of that with you and pursue it freely. It is the meeting of those rights with the responsibilities that come from making your way in a new nation, including responsibilities to find work, to learn English, to uphold our rule of law, to be a full participant in our democracy and to recognise women as equals in our society. Each person who spoke last night—I, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Lowy, the chair of the Australian Multicultural Council—made the very important point that
what we saw in the streets of Sydney last weekend was not multiculturalism; it was extremism and it should be recognised as such.

I am very pleased that we will now see this lecture happen once every year. It will give us a tremendous opportunity to come together as a parliament and I believe, as it becomes more publicly noted, to come together as a nation to celebrate what multiculturalism has achieved for this country. We certainly made a flying start with the address last night from Mr Frank Lowy. I very much enjoyed it. I know his representative in this parliament, the member for Wentworth, enjoyed it. It was a truly great occasion for this parliament and I wanted this parliament to add its voice to the very wise words spoken by a great Australian last night on multiculturalism.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (14:08): I recognise in the gallery today the former Premier of Victoria, the Hon. Joan Kirner, and her husband Ron. I welcome them to the House.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Multiculturalism

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister of her comments last year in response to the riots on Christmas Island where 200 detainees confronted the Australian Federal Police that:

Violence is wrong whether it is happening on Christmas Island or … on the streets of Sydney. … the minister does have a discretion when it comes to giving visas to take into account character questions.

Given a year has passed since the Prime Minister made this statement, can she inform the House how many of these rioters had their visas denied on character grounds as a result of their actions?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:09): To the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I will have to make some inquiries about the number and, in the appropriate time, will provide the Deputy Leader of the Opposition with the information she seeks. As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition would know, the question of visa cancellations is the subject of legislation and is the subject of the rule of law—that is, it has to be done appropriately and, if it is not done appropriately, then you end up in very difficult circumstances. I would remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition of the difficulties encountered by the former Howard government in the cancellation of the visa of Mr Haneef. So you have to proceed on the basis of legislation and the rule of law. That is what the government always does.

I say to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition I do not believe that such a matter should be the subject of partisan divisions in this parliament. I would have thought, in line with what I just said about multiculturalism and the events of last night, that we could speak with one voice, that violence is always wrong—it is wrong if it happens on the streets of Sydney, it is wrong if it happens in a family home, it is wrong if it happens on Christmas Island. Violence is always wrong and the violence should be—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Chatter across the chamber—I am not going to have childish finger-pointing. I was going to say that chatter across the chamber like that is highly disrespectful and should desist. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: Violence is always wrong and perpetrators of violence should be dealt with appropriately according to law.
Ms Julie Bishop: On indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker: I ask through you whether the Prime Minister could return before the end of question time to provide the House with the information as to the number of rioters whose visas have been denied.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. She has placed her question.

Economy

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (14:11): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the response of global ratings agencies to the strong fundamentals of our economy? Why is it important to represent the facts about our economy accurately?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:12): I thank the member for Deakin for his question because I was asked about the strength of our economy and the fact that Standard & Poor's have reaffirmed our gold-plated AAA credit rating with a stable outlook. This is what Standard & Poor's had to say:
The AAA rating is underpinned by low public debt and strong fiscal discipline.

We are proud on this side of the House that we have that rating from the three major ratings agencies. Of course, we are one of seven countries in the world with that rating and a stable outlook. We have this because we have put in place a strong fiscal policy. Getting this rating from the three major agencies is like having the Brownlow, the Norm Smith and the flag all in the same season. I think it is something that everyone on this side of the House will be celebrating. But, of course, those on the other side of the House—the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Treasurer—raced into the House to trash the Australian economy yet again. They came in half cocked like a couple of rabid pit-bulls, ears pinned back, salivating, tongue hanging out. They raced into the House and all they wanted to do was to run down our economy because somehow they had a whiff that this was not quite right. They somehow had a whiff that it did not work. We saw from the Leader of the Opposition that he has no vision and is all venom. He will do anything to trash our economy at any time.

The shadow Treasurer then followed him. He did not go out and check the basic facts. He raced in resting here despite the S&P report and he had an incorrect report from ABC radio. He should have known how wrong it was. Very sloppy, Joe—very very sloppy. The fact is that they should do the honourable thing in this House today and apologise, stand up at the dispatch box and apologise for trashing the Australian economy. They should unreservedly apologise for the fact that they used incorrect information in this House to run down our economy. What we saw yesterday were the typical bully boy tactics of the Leader of the Opposition and the Treasurer running down our economy.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: how can it be in order for the Treasurer to stand up here and slag and bag the opposition while accusing us of bullyboy tactics? It is different to the handbag hit squad doing it but, by the same token, it is not in order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business should have learnt better from yesterday's effort. The Leader of the House has the call.

Mr Albanese: Madam Deputy Speaker, that point of order was clearly not a real point of order, just abuse from the Manager of Opposition Business. And, while I am here, the member for Indi should withdraw the same term that she uses every day and has just used again.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Indi will withdraw.

Mrs Mirabella: I withdraw. Madam Deputy Speaker——

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Indi will withdraw her seat. The member for Indi has a point of order?

Mrs Mirabella: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Treasurer made a comment that I find offensive and I ask you to direct him to withdraw.

Government members interjecting——

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The frontbench is not assisting. The member for Indi will resume her seat. I will not ask the Treasurer to withdraw. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr SWAN: The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer——

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: if the rules are to be applied fairly—and I know that you find yourself in the unhappy situation of sitting in the chair and having been mistreated for many years in this place by your own side——

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will get to the point or he will be thrown out!

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, if the rules are to be applied fairly the Treasurer should be required to withdraw 'pit bull terrier'.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Leader of the House will resume his seat. I had thought the member for Indi was referring to the word 'bullying', which I think we have allowed on more than one occasion. The member for Indi was asked to withdraw one of the only words that is recognised as unparliamentary in the Reps Practice—and every time someone uses it I am honour bound by the Reps Practice to ask that it be withdrawn. I will, however, ask the Treasurer to withdraw the instance about——

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: 'Rabid'.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mackellar, I will not go there because I think it just demeanes the parliament. But the Manager of Opposition Business is warned that, if he abuses a point of order again, he will not be joining us for the rest of question time. The Treasurer will withdraw.

Mr SWAN: I withdraw. I was asked about the misrepresentation of facts about the Australian economy. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer did that yesterday—they misrepresented the facts. We have had the Leader of the Opposition do it again today. He said the aim of the Liberal Party would be to return to growth. What does he think is happening in the Australian economy at the moment? The economy is 11 per cent bigger than it was four years ago. (Time expired)

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (14:18): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. The Treasurer has spoken about the importance of dealing with the facts about our economy. Why are the facts also important when it comes to responsible budgeting and costing of policies? How is the government making sure all members——

Mr Hockey interjecting——

Mr SYMON: including the member for North Sydney——have access to the facts and to independent advice about costings? (Time expired)

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: the standing orders require the supplementary question to have some connection to the answer that has just been given by the person who answered the original question. That supplementary
question is entirely specious and has nothing to do with the answer given by the Treasurer.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Treasurer has the call and the supplementary question is in order.

**Mr SWAN** (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:19): The fact is that we will return our budget to surplus consistent with our fiscal rules—fiscal rules that we outlined and which flow from the Charter of Budget Honesty which was put in place by the former Treasurer, Peter Costello. That demands that we bring down a budget update within around six months of the previous budget—and that is what the government is going to do, as we normally do. Those opposite have refused to participate honestly in the Charter of Budget Honesty. On breakfast television last year we saw the shadow Treasurer say there was a $70 billion crater in the Liberal Party's budget line.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Treasurer will desist with the prop!

**Mr SWAN:** And that was reaffirmed again yesterday by the shadow Treasurer on breakfast television. The fact is that if he has got all his policies costed, as he said on breakfast television yesterday, he can take a walk to the Parliamentary Budget Office and slip them through there and have them costed. And then we can see what your slash and burn agenda really looks like. It will look a lot like the Newman government in Queensland.

**Mr Hockey:** Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I would ask the Treasurer to table those great photos he was holding up.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Is the member for North Sydney seeking to have documents tabled?

**Mr Hockey:** Yes; the Treasurer was reading from them.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Even I would find it difficult to ask the Treasurer if he is reading from a photo—but the Treasurer is tabling them! The member for North Sydney has the call.

**Mining Tax**

**Mr HOCKEY** (North Sydney) (14:21): I refer the Prime Minister to reports that BHP Billiton has cancelled plans for its Red Hill mine that would have created work for 3½ thousand Australians. Given that the chairman of BHP and the chief executive of BHP have both been warning for months that higher taxes are making it difficult to invest in Australia, why does the Prime Minister keep asserting that her government's tax policies have no impact on the mining sector's investment when clearly that assertion is untrue?

**Ms GILLARD** (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:21): I thank the shadow Treasurer for his question and believe that the shadow Treasurer should take into account the facts about the Australian economy. Of course, individual businesses will make commercial decisions every day in the Australian economy. Of course we expect that to happen. But the shadow Treasurer should recognise, too, when he is talking about our resources sector in Australia, that there is currently a $270 billion pipeline of investment committed and $230 billion in planned capital.

**Mr Hockey interjecting**—

**Ms GILLARD:** The shadow Treasurer may want to bellow, but no amount of bellowing changes the facts, and they are the facts. The shadow Treasurer, too, if he is interested in this question, may want to pay some regard to the work of the bureau of resources, which has recently published some material, and even to the Reserve Bank
of Australia minutes—the shadow Treasurer might be interested in those. The data from the bureau of resources shows that we will see export earnings, in their calculation, in 2012-13 at $189 billion. They, of course, are replicating to the Australian community what we have said about the commodities boom, and that is: that we expected commodity prices to peak in 2011, but then we expected, beyond the peak of commodity prices, to see the continuation of production and the continuation of investment, and so we will. The Reserve Bank has made similar points about the Australian economy and its outlook.

The shadow Treasurer has determined that it is his job not to pursue Australia's national interest but to talk the Australian economy down. It ought to be incumbent on everyone in this House to be talking about the strength of the Australian economy and to be talking very clearly about the trends in the Australian economy. There are businesses under pressure as a result of the sustained high Australian dollar; there is no doubt about that. And that is why we have been working so strongly with manufacturing, why we will continue to work with tourism, and why we have worked hard with our universities on international education, because the high dollar matters to them as it matters to a large number of other businesses. But the shadow Treasurer should be out there telling the truth about the Australian economy—an economy that is growing, an economy that is offering Australians the benefits of work, an economy with low inflation, an economy with low interest rates. Of course we will not see the shadow Treasurer speaking about those truths, because he is following the Leader of the Opposition down a path of reckless and destructive negativity.
pretty simple: it is the facts. I know that might be hard for the shadow Treasurer to deal with, because it would require research and it would require the absorbing of information, but he should know, and he should not seek to misrepresent in this parliament, the strong growth that we have seen in investment. The shadow Treasurer, as part of the Leader of the Opposition's fear campaign, has been in this parliament in the past pretending that we will not see business investment, because of the carbon price, for example. But, actually, since we announced the carbon price, we have seen business investment grow and grow, by large amounts. Since the Minerals Resource Rent Tax was first announced by me and the Treasurer and the minister for resources, we have seen business investment grow in this country. What that means is: business people, informed by the facts rather than the blind negativity of the shadow Treasurer, knowing about carbon pricing and knowing about the Minerals Resource Rent Tax, have made the decisions to invest. The shadow Treasurer tosses his head, just as he seeks to toss the facts aside. You cannot toss the facts aside when talking about the Australian economy. We are seeing strong business investment, and a decent person would welcome it.

Gambling

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:28): Deputy—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! The member for Denison has the right to be heard in silence.

Mr WILKIE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, when will the government bring on its watered-down poker machine reforms? If you are unsure of parliamentary support, surely the best place to argue for it and to test it is right here in the parliament. After all, the window of opportunity is rapidly closing, and any reasonable person or party would be keen to support an unprecedented federal intervention in poker machine regulation.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:28): To the member for Denison: I share his concern about problem gambling and I share his concern about the impact that it has on family lives. I agree with him that reasonable people would want to see, through this parliament, laws that would assist people deal with the scourge of problem gambling. Reasonable people would want to see that. The government does want to see legislation—and it would be the biggest package of legislation to deal with problem gambling ever brought before a national parliament—which would require precommitment technology to be available on every one of Australia's 200,000 poker machines. We do want to see technology that would assist people on those machines to monitor and set limits on how much they are spending. We do want to see legislation that would require new electronic warnings on poker machines and that would limit cash withdrawals from ATMs in pokies venues to $250. We also want to see a large-scale trial of mandatory precommitment in the ACT and we have such a trial agreed in principle with the clubs in the ACT. I would want to see this parliament legislate on problem gambling in the terms I have just outlined but it does require people to make a decision in favour of the community's interest because the community is concerned about problem gambling. Unfortunately, every step of the way, as usual, we have seen the relentless negativity of the opposition.

 Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD: Even though many of them have interjected during the course of
this answer, not one of them intends to vote in order to assist people with problems with gambling. I also do note that there are others including the Australian Greens who have not committed to supporting this legislation. I believe this legislation is reasonable, I believe it is balanced, I believe it would do good and I believe people of good will should support this legislation.

Mr Wilkie: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order: relevance. When?

Mr Tehan interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Wannon is warned.

Ms GILLARD: The member for Wannon is someone who does not want to vote to assist problem gamblers. To the member for Denison, the answer is this:—

Mr Hawke interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mitchell is also warned.

Ms GILLARD: we will bring legislation to this parliament when we know it has the support of this parliament. In order to get the support of this parliament, the member of the Wannon, who has just been very vocal, could announce that he is going to vote for the legislation. That would be one step forward. The Leader of the Opposition could do the decent thing and acknowledge that all members of the coalition will vote for the legislation. The Leader of the Australian Greens, Ms Milne, could announce that the Australian Greens would support the legislation. The legislation will be brought to the parliament when people in this parliament, beyond those who have already indicated, say that they are prepared to act on problem gambling. (Time expired)

Dental Health

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (14:32): My question is to the Minister for Health. Will the minister update the House on the government's plans to invest in the oral health needs of children and low-income adults? How do these policies compare with other plans for oral health?

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Health) (14:32): I want to thank the member for Hindmarsh for his question. Since before he was a member of this parliament, he was campaigning for better oral health in the community he represents. I recently announced a $4.1-billion package to improve the dental health of Australians with $2.7 billion for 3.4 million children including 12,000 in the member for Hindmarsh's electorate to make it as easy for them to go and see a dentist as it now is to see a GP. There will be $1.3 billion to provide 1.4 million extra services for adults on low incomes in the public dental system and $225 million for dental capital and workforce measures. This comes on top of a half-a-billion-dollar announcement in the May budget.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member for Sturt to resume his seat. Ms PLIBERSEK: I have had a number of people—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Minister for Health will resume her seat. Could the member for Sturt resume his seat. I did ask twice.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You could not hear me over the noise you were making. You are blocking the camera and I think that is highly disorderly. The minister has the call.

Ms PLIBERSEK: I announced that that $515.3 million would be available from January. That is how long I imagine it would take to negotiate with the states and territories their signature on the piece of paper that will say that they will not reduce
their services—as Campbell Newman has already done in Queensland, cutting paediatric dental services. The member for New England has asked me, as have a number of Labor MPs and other Independents: could this money start to flow earlier? Today, I would like to say, yes, it can start to flow earlier. It can flow as soon as the states and territories sign on the dotted line saying that they will not reduce their services and that they will tell us who they are treating. There need be no gap between the closure of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme on 1 December and the half a billion dollars we committed in the May budget. All it requires is the states to come to the table and sign on the dotted line.

I think it is very important to note that this support for the boost to public dental services to treat the most disadvantaged people with the highest dental needs—

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Paterson is warned.

Ms PLIBERSEK: The proposal that we are supporting is not a unique proposal. In fact, it is a proposal that has been around for a little while. In 2006 there was an excellent report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing chaired by the member for Fairfax and included the member for Wentworth, the member for Leichhardt and the member for Bonner that recommended:

The Australian Government should supplement state and territory funding for public dental services so that reasonable access standards for appropriate services are maintained, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

It is an excellent report because it was chaired by a very sensible member. All I would like to see is those members opposite, instead of supporting the flawed, rorted Chronic Dental Disease Scheme, supporting their own report. (Time expired)

Carbon Pricing

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Before the member for Indi has the call, it would be rather nice if her colleagues heard her in silence.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (14:36): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister of the closure of the Clyde oil refinery, the statement by the Australian Institute of Petroleum that the carbon tax has placed Australian refiners at a commercial disadvantage and the statement of Shell CEO Ann Pickard that the carbon tax will 'break the camel's back on investment in Australia'. Why does the Prime Minister keep asserting that the government's tax policies have no impact on industry's investment decisions when that assertion is clearly untrue?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:36): I thank the member for Indi for her question. I thought at the end of yesterday maybe the opposition had moved on from carbon pricing, but clearly not. And there is the member for Indi, back, right on cue—despite knowing that the Leader of the Opposition is someone who has been in favour of carbon pricing, every living Liberal leader is in favour of carbon pricing; and, should the Leader of the Opposition ever be elected as Prime Minister, he will keep carbon pricing. But I am not surprised that the member for Indy is in this parliament, once again, misrepresenting what is happening with carbon pricing, because the Leader of the Opposition, though he is a supporter of it, is addicted to the fear campaign. But the fear campaign is always punctured by the facts. And the fact is this: we are seeing business investment, as a
percentage of GDP, at its highest point in 40 years—17.1 per cent. That is the fact.

The member for Indy might look like she is not interested in that but you cannot wish those kinds of statistics away. We are seeing business investment at record levels. And that is after we have announced carbon pricing and legislated for it, after we agreed the minerals resource rent tax and legislated for it. That is the performance of the Australian economy. Yes, of course, there are things in the Australian economy that are bringing pressures. Chief amongst them is the high Australian dollar, which is putting pressure on a range of businesses, but it is not true, as the opposition is trying to assert today, that we are seeing business investment at anything other than very strong levels in our economy.

If the member for Indy is truly interested in risks to this kind of business investment then she may want to inquire of the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer why they want to do things like put company tax up and why they have $70 billion that they need to slash out of services to families, with all of the implications that that would have for jobs and support in the Australian economy. Why is it that they are on such a reckless and destructive path when it comes to Australian businesses? Why is it that they spend all of their time scrapping about investments, with Senator Joyce allowed to say whatever he likes whenever he likes, jeopardising foreign investment and the future of the Australian economy? Why is it that they are bereft of any strategy other than aggressive and reckless negativity?

If the member for Indy has the slightest interest in the jobs and prospects of working Australians she should be seeking to get those questions answered, not to misrepresent the facts.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** The member for Sturt knows by now that standing in the aisles is inappropriate. He has been warned. He is on his last legs.

**Carbon Pricing**

**Mr MURPHY (Reid) (14:40):** My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and Minister for Industry and Innovation. Will the minister inform the House of the facts about international action to tackle climate change, including international carbon markets. Minister, why is it important to rely on the facts about climate change rather than the scare campaigns?

**Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (14:40):** I thank the member for Reid for his question. It is particularly pertinent because yesterday, on behalf of the government, I introduced legislation that will link Australia's carbon price mechanism to the European Union emissions trading scheme, which is the largest carbon market in the world and has been in place since 2005.

The fact of the matter is that by linking with the European Union Australia's carbon price will be the same as that which obtains in 30 other countries with a combined population of 530 million people. Little wonder that the Leader of the Opposition turns his back, because that is a message he does not want to hear. He has deceived people in this country about this issue. Thirty other countries will have the same carbon price, including the United Kingdom, Germany and France—and in combination those countries represent our second largest trading partner, and they will have the same carbon price. This gives the lie—

*Honourable members interjecting*
Mr COMBET: the lie to the campaign by the Leader of the Opposition that Australia is somehow going it alone.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! The minister will withdraw. I think I made it fairly clear to everybody that that word is not to be tolerated from anybody. The minister will withdraw.

Mr COMBET: I withdraw.

Mr Pyne: I rise on a point of order. Madam Deputy Speaker, with the greatest of deference, given that the member for Indy had already been asked to withdraw the word 'lie' and the minister has, moments later, come in and used it three times, surely he should warned for defying the chair.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am finding it difficult to think that people should not now by now that the use of the word 'lie' is totally inappropriate.

Mr COMBET: These mendacious claims have been made by the Leader of the Opposition numerous times. For example, he has claimed that there are no market measures developing within the economies that I referred to, just this week there were further details of emissions trading schemes in Guangdong Province—which, on its own, in China is our sixth largest trading partner—and also in Shenzhen. These are hugely significant developments.

The fact of the matter is that there have been no unimaginable price increases as forecast by the Leader of the Opposition. There has been no collapse of whole regions or industries. In fact, today, Arrium Mining announced 100 new jobs in Whyalla, that the opposition leader said would be wiped off the map. Jobs are growing. The economy is growing. This has been the most mendacious campaign we have seen against an important policy initiative and you are going to be held to account for everything you said. (Time expired)

Mr Ciobo interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Moncrieff is denying the member for Goldstein the call.

Carbon Pricing

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (14:45): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to yesterday's statement by the government's economist of choice, Ross Garnaut, that Australians are:

… going to have a very difficult time adapting to the decline in living standards that’s going to be a necessary part of the adjustment to the end … of the boom

Given that the Prime Minister misled the Australian people before the election about the carbon tax, does she expect Australians to now trust her that the carbon tax and the mining tax have had zero impact on the job- and wealth-creating mining industry?
Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:46): To the member for Goldstein, who may or may not have listened to the answer to the question for the member for Indi, there are things called facts. I know they are always inconvenient for the opposition, and I know that they never buttress the opposition's fear campaign. I know that therefore the opposition lives in denial of them, and I know therefore that the opposition criticises, hounds and seeks to destroy anybody who raises the facts and any expert who ventures an opposition. That is all part of their relentless, destructive, aggressive negativity, and we see it every day.

But people of reason know that there are things called facts, and the facts matter—like the facts on business investment in our nation. The member for Goldstein, who is seeking to be a senior economic spokesperson in a government, should acquaint himself with these facts. We have a growing economy. We have business investment as a percentage of GDP at a very high point—the highest point in 40 years. We have reached that with the government's policy settings, which have been about keeping the Australian economy strong, making sure we came out of the global financial crisis without a recession and with Australians in work, and, in this phase of economic change in our region, seeking to maximise the jobs and opportunities that come from this period of economic change.

And that does mean that we have to be ready for the future. That does mean that we need to have a cleaner energy economy, and that is why we have put a price on carbon. It does mean that we will need the infrastructure of the future, which is why infrastructure investments are at a record level, and we are rolling out the National Broadband Network. It does mean that we will need the skills of the future, which is why there is nothing more precious to us than what is happening in our education system—whether it is early childhood education, school skills or universities—and we are not done yet on making sure that Australians have got the best of future opportunities. It is about making sure, as our region grows and changes and is home to more middle-class people than any other part of the world, that we get the benefit of those opportunities: legal services, health services, education services and food industry services—and the list goes on. This is the economic future—

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister was asked about Ross Garnaut's comments about declining living standards in Australia under this government, and that is the question she needs to answer.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Prime Minister has the call and will return to the question before the chair.

Ms GILLARD: The Manager of Opposition Business has just misrepresented what Professor Garnaut said. Let's just mark that. The Manager of Opposition Business should note the facts about economic growth in this country. And the Manager of Opposition Business should also be honest enough to say that the opposition is wilfully misleading people about those facts as part of their negative campaign. (Time expired)

Age Pension

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (14:49): My question is to the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform. Will the minister update the House on how the government is supporting senior Australians after a lifetime of work? What challenges are there to this support?

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (14:49): I thank the member for Fremantle for her question. She understands that it is right that those older Australians who have contributed a lifetime of work deserve our support and of course, especially for those who are living on fixed incomes, we do understand how important it is that we as a government give them a helping hand.

That is why I can announce to the parliament today that from today Australia's 3.5 million pensioners will be receiving an increase. For single pensioners on the maximum rate, that will mean an extra $17.10 a fortnight, and pensioner couples on the maximum rate will receive an extra $25.80 a fortnight. Typically, those opposite show no interest whatsoever in what pensioners are going to receive—no interest whatsoever. Just turn your back like you did for 12 years in government. That is what pensioners got from those opposite.

We know that it took a Labor government to deliver these historic reforms to pensioners, and it is not only the increase to the pension; there were also the very significant improvements to the indexation arrangements to make sure that the pension would keep up with pensioners' costs of living. Of course, this government delivered that pension rise, fully funded, fully costed, and delivered it in a sustainable way. That was never done by those opposite, who refused to deliver to pensioners when they needed it most.

We delivered this significant increase to the pension, and we will continue to make sure that pensioners keep up with the cost of living. We know that at exactly the same time we have Liberals in Queensland and in New South Wales clawing back this increase from pensioners. Barry O'Farrell is putting the money in his pocket and Campbell Newman is putting the money in his pocket instead of helping pensioners. And we know that each and every one of you want to do exactly the same: take the money off pensioners to fill your $70 billion black hole.

**Carbon Pricing**

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (14:52): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to this power bill from Garry Gibson, who runs the Beau Monde hotel in Doncaster in my electorate. This bill clearly shows that the carbon tax has directly increased their off-peak electricity charges by 55 per cent, and they will be paying almost $10,000 a year more. Isn't it true, Prime Minister, that while Beau Monde cannot pass on their higher costs without losing customers, the government can simply pass the cost of its $120 billion of—

(Time expired)

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:53): Thank you very much to the member for Menzies. The member raises with me the circumstances of a hotel. The opposition has raised the circumstances of hotels and carbon pricing in this parliament before. They raised the Belair hotel, and at the time they completely misrepresented the position, because when you looked at the bill of the Belair hotel the carbon adjustment was less than 10 per cent of the overall electricity bill and not the increase of 45 per cent falsely claimed by the member for Boothby. So the member for Menzies is continuing this negative fear campaign—

Dr Southcott: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: it is important for ministers to tell the truth. In the question that the Prime Minister is referring to, I referred to a 45 per cent increase in the off-peak power rate, and that is—

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much to the member for Menzies. The member raises with me the circumstances of a hotel. The opposition has raised the circumstances of hotels and carbon pricing in this parliament before. They raised the Belair hotel, and at the time they completely misrepresented the position, because when you looked at the bill of the Belair hotel the carbon adjustment was less than 10 per cent of the overall electricity bill and not the increase of 45 per cent falsely claimed by the member for Boothby. So the member for Menzies is continuing this negative fear campaign—

Dr Southcott: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: it is important for ministers to tell the truth. In the question that the Prime Minister is referring to, I referred to a 45 per cent increase in the off-peak power rate, and that is—

Ms AE BURKE: The member for Boothby will resume his seat.
Ms GILLARD: I thank the member for Boothby for precisely proving my point. When you looked at the bill of the Belair hotel, what you saw was a carbon tax gain of less than 10 per cent. What you saw on that bill was, in action, what we said would always result from carbon pricing—that is, that people would see electricity price increases of up to 10 per cent. That was exactly what was always said by the government. Because of that, we have provided the household assistance that the minister has just gone through: pension increases and family payment increases. We have made sure people have tax cuts. All these things are jeopardised by the fact that the opposition now has to make $70 billion worth of cuts because of the reckless approach they have taken—

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

Ms GILLARD: —to making promises. I am sure the member for Menzies is engaged in exactly the same trick and maneuver as the member for Boothby. That is, on proper examination, when the hotel's bills are looked at the claims being made by the member for Menzies will not be found to be true. It also continues to amaze me that Liberal members who are here, now interjecting and carrying on, did not say one critical word when the Liberal government of Western Australia was responsible for electricity price hikes of more than 60 per cent, or when the Liberal government in New South Wales is there gouging dividends out of power companies and passing that extra cost through to consumers and small businesses. There was not one word of criticism of 50, 60, 70 per cent price rises.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: under the standing orders, apart from slandering members of the public who are simply having their issues raised, she is now not even attempting to answer the question she was asked; she is talking about other issues altogether—

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

Ms GILLARD: The fact that the Manager of Opposition Business would say that by way of interjection just proves how out of touch the opposition is. He thinks a 50, 60 or 70 per cent increase for an Australian family or a small business does not matter. Well, Australian families and small businesses think that they matter. The opposition might be running a protection racket for their Liberal mates in the states when these increases come through, but we are working on these electricity—

Ms Julie Bishop: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: after insulting people who want their issues raised here, the Prime Minister has insulted the coalition, and I ask her to withdraw that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think you will find that Reps Practice is quite clear about groups being misrepresented.

Mr Andrews: My constituent would like this document tabled. Therefore, I ask leave for that to occur.

Mr Albanese: Given the success of the last time the member for Boothby part-tabled a document, I will allow that to be tabled. What's more, whilst I am here I will table, from thetelegraph.com.au, 'Carbon tax not to blame for power price hikes'. I also table, consistent with the precedent asked for by the member for North Sydney, another photo of the member for North Sydney, so he can look at that as well.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order.

Government members interjecting—
Mr Robert interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mackellar has the right to be heard in silence, as does anyone else in this place.

Mrs Mirabella interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Indi is not assisting her colleague.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: Madam Deputy Speaker, in the Practice, you have power to rule out of order behaviour which is aimed at disrupting the orderliness of that parliament. The Leader of the House is continuing to do it with the tabling of matter which is not relevant, plus holding up props, which is not within the standing orders either, and I ask you to ask him to simply desist.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mackellar will resume her seat. The issue of the tabling of documents was dealt with by a statement from the Speaker the other day. On the other point, if I did as the member for Mackellar required, I think she would find a very empty chamber. The member for Corangamite has the call.

Budget

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (15:00): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer and the Minister Assisting for Deregulation. What is the government doing to manage the budget in a responsible way under difficult global economic circumstances? Why is it important to properly cost and account for policies? Is the minister aware of other approaches to managing the budget? What would be the impact of those other approaches?

Mr Robert interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Fadden will leave the chamber for one hour under 94(a).

The member for Fadden then left the chamber.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (15:00): I thank the member for Corangamite for his question. The member knows that, when the biggest global economic downturn since the Great Depression struck, this Labor government was ready to step in and to stimulate the economy and to support the jobs of hundreds of thousands of Australians. That was choice that we made because, as a Labor government, we believed it was important that we took that action to support jobs and to keep the doors of Australian businesses open.

But, of course, our government, like governments all around the world, have been hit with downgrades to our revenue. Notwithstanding this, we are returning the budget to surplus, and we are doing that by making responsible savings. But those opposite are still struggling to make their numbers add up. The Australian people will remember that, at the last election, the coalition took some costings to the election that were later exposed by the Treasury to have an $11 billion black hole in them. So dodgy were these costings that the Institute of Chartered Accountants had to reprimand and fine the accountants that were involved in this so-called audit. Now we know that they have a $70 billion black hole, and we know that because the member for North Sydney has confirmed it twice now, on breakfast television. Yesterday, he confirmed it once again when he said, 'Well, I said at the time, whatever the cost would be—50, 60, 70'. That is $70 billion. Further questioned, he went on to say, 'We will find the savings'—and, wait for it—'and we have found the savings'. Well, I will believe that when I see it.

I do not believe he has been able to fill his $70 billion black hole, but I do believe he has a secret plan. If you go to the member for
North Sydney's office, in his top draw he has this folder. And on the top of the folder it says, 'Secret: Commission of Audit Recommendations'. There it is, all ready to go—he just won't tell anyone about it until after the election!

The member for North Sydney should be honest with the Australian people and he should tell them that he has a plan to rip away services such as education and health, in the same way as his state Liberal Premier mates have been doing. He should be honest with the Australian people, he should go to his top drawer, he should take out that folder that has his policies, he should reveal them to the Australian people—as scary as that might be. And, when he has done that, he should take his policies, walk down to the Parliamentary Budget Office and this time get them properly costed.

**Australian Defence Force Cadets**

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (15:03): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to Army cadet units that will affect over 1,000 cadets at the three cadet units in my electorate of Bradfield, and to the statement of high-school student Jack Dalton, who wrote to me asking, 'Is there any way cadets would be able to avoid the budget cuts?' Why should the Australian people trust the government to deliver on its $120 billion of unfunded spending promises when it can't even provide enough funding to the Army Cadets?

*Mr Bowen interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** Order! The Prime Minister has the call. The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship will desist!

*Mr Hockey interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for North Sydney, a question has been asked. I thought you would like to hear the answer. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:04): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am very happy to answer the member's question. I think it is very important some facts are put on the table in relation to this. In that regard, I would refer the member to a press release from the relevant Parliamentary Secretary for Defence that lays it out in some detail. But to give the member some of the detail contained in that release that I think is important to understand in this issue: recent data shows that our Defence Force Cadets program has increased by over 1,000 cadets. Claims that the Australian Army Cadet supervision is being cut by 30 percent are untrue. Claims that Navy and Air Force Cadet units will be amalgamated and may be closed due to sweeping or widespread budget cuts are also untrue.

Experience shows that, from time to time, cadet units close. That happens as a result of cadets, volunteers or community support in a particular area. Experience also shows that new cadet units emerge because of community support and cadet interest, and indeed I have seen that in my own electorate—an organisation starting to run cadets that did not used to do so. So there is some change over time.

I would refer the member to all of the details that this release outlines in relation to ADF Cadets, and I want to assure him that the government is planning for an enhanced future for the Australian Defence Force Cadets, not a reduced one. We understand the importance of the cadets to the Australian community. We understand the importance of the cadets to the Australian psyche and we understand their importance to generating the next great generation of future leaders.
Workplace Relations

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (15:06): My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation. Will the minister explain the need for positive policies that support Australians to get a fair go at work and help them to balance time between work and family? Is the minister aware of any obstacles to this support?

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations) (15:06): I thank the member for Makin for his question. He knows that Labor stands for good jobs, he knows that Labor stands for a fair go all around and he knows that this Labor government stands for getting the work-life family balance right. He also knows that it is important that the people of Australia understand the position of the two major parties in terms of workplace relations.

Workplace relations is an appropriate matter for debate in the national parliament of Australia. Even if some opposite do not like what we stand for on workplace relations, people know what we stand for. We stand for fair laws to protect people against unfair dismissal. We stand for improving superannuation from nine to 12 per cent for people like the 46,000 voters in the member for Makin's electorate. People know that we stand for the recognition that there should be penalty rates for people who work family-unfriendly hours. People know that we stand for safer roads via Safe Roads for truck drivers. People know that Labor stands for better protection for outworkers.

What people do not know is the opposition's workplace relations policy. This is an obstacle. It renders a disservice to the people of Australia. Whatever people think about the merits of competing policies, they do have a right to expect that the so-called alternative government of Australia will front up on industrial relations and tell us their policies. But not all is lost.

First of all we have the Leader of the Opposition, who uses cliches as a substitute for thinking. The opposition leader always says, 'We will be in the sensible centre.' The opposition's policies could not fill out a full tweet. But what we also do have is the actions of the state governments, because if we cannot find what goes on at the national level it is legitimate for this parliament to debate the actions of their fraternal political party, at the state level. And we know what the opposition stands for through their state brothers and sisters. They stand for job cuts, for terrible processes in the way they implement job cuts, for not guaranteeing the transfer of people's entitlements if they are outsourced.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney is warned.

Mr SHORTEN: But all is not lost. Not only can we see what state governments do to represent their opposition policy, but we have the rise of a couple of IR hawks. I congratulate Senator Sinodinos and the member for Mayo. Whilst I do not agree with what they stand for in industrial relations, at least we know they stand for something. Although it does raise an interesting question: In September last year the member for Mayo said we should bring back individual statutory contracts. Is this the sort of freelancing that the opposition leader will require him not to say, now that he has received a promotion.

The reality is that it is not fair on the Australian people that the opposition hide their policies. Cowardice is no substitute for national political debate. Being a small target
and negative is no substitute for talking about workplace relations. You can run but you cannot hide over the next year. We will have a workplace relations debate. *(Time expired)*

**Mr Zappia** (Makin) *(15:10)*: Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. Why is fairness central to industrial relations policy.

**Mr Shorten** (Maribyrnong—Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations) *(15:10)*: I thank the member for Makin for this question. There is no doubt that you must have in the Australian workplace a fair go all around. Every day 11½ million people go to work every day. There is a proposition running amok in certain conservative ranks that somehow the current laws should be overturned as we have gone too far on the pendulum to fairness. We are a government that will always fight for the rights of people not to be unfairly dismissed. We are a government that will always fight for the right of people to have penalty rates. We are a government that will always fight for the right of long-distance truck drivers to come home safely.

**Mrs Mirabella:** And why was Kevin treated so unfairly.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The member for Indi is warned.

**Mr Shorten:** We are a government that will fight for the rights of migrant outworkers not to be exploited. We know where we stand and the Australian people know where we stand. But there are serious questions, not just about the past but also in the present, about what the coalition will do on workplace relations if elected to power.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The minister will resume his seat. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

**Ms Julie Bishop:** How can it be relevant to talk about unfair processes when he will not address the unfair dismissal from his job?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will leave the chamber under 94(a). That is a complete abuse of the processes.

*The member for Curtin then left the chamber.*

**Mr Shorten:** It comes as no surprise to anyone in this House or anyone listening that those in the opposition would never speak up in favour of protections on unfair dismissal laws in Australia. It comes as no surprise.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order—the member for Dickson!

**Mr Shorten:** If the opposition is fair dinkum about protecting people from unfair dismissal will they offer us their policy? I think not. There are another 12 months where this parliament will chase the Liberals until we get their IR policy. *(Time expired)*

**Ms Gillard:** I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.

**Statements**

**Minister for Infrastructure and Transport**

**Mr Swan** (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) *(15:12)*: I just want the House to note that the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport has been named Infrastructure Minister of the Year by *Infrastructure Investor*. I would like to give him our congratulations—and also for winning the parliamentary snooker championship.

**Personal Explanations**

**Mr Abbott** (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) *(15:12)*: I congratulate the
Minister Albanese. Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr ABBOTT: Most grievously.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please proceed.

Mr ABBOTT: The Prime Minister claimed in question time today that if the coalition won the election we would keep the carbon tax. Madam Deputy Speaker, when I say there will be no carbon tax under the government I lead I am telling the truth. In addition, the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs claimed that the coalition wanted to stop pension increases. The only person in this parliament who is against pension increases is the Prime Minister, and we have a former Prime Minister's authority for that.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (15:14): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr DUTTON: Yes, I do.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please proceed.

Mr DUTTON: In parliament earlier today the member for New England referred to an exchange of conversations between his office and mine about the disallowance of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, which is the subject of debate in this House today. I want to correct the record by saying and reconfirming my position that my office had contacted the office of the member for New England. I understand that there is some debate about this issue within his office as well, and I respect the fact that we have been able to have a civil discussion since that point, but I want to reconfirm the fact that my office had contacted, several times, the member for New England's office and there had been no response to that request for us—

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Dickson had demonstrated where he had been misrepresented.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions in Writing

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (15:15): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask whether you will ask the Speaker to write to ministers to follow up questions which are more than—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Mayo has the call!

Mr BRIGGS: Question No. 781, which is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, has been on the notice paper for 301 days—301 days, Albo.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: Question 781—301 days!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, the member for Mayo has a long list. Let us get through them.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: It is a good question; you should answer it. There is question No. 841, to the Prime Minister; 842, to the Treasurer; 843, to the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research; 844, to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy; 845, to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government; 846, to the Minister for the Arts; 847, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs; 848, to the Minister for Defence; 849, to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship; 850, to the infrastructure minister; again; 851, to the Attorney-General; 852, to the Minister for
Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; 853, to the Minister for Disability Reform; 854, to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities; 856, to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth; 857, to the Minister for Emergency Management; 858, to the Minister for Housing; 859, to the Minister for Homelessness; 860, to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; 861, to the Minister for Resources and Energy; 862, to the Minister for Tourism; 863, to the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness; 864, to the Minister for Industry and Innovation; 865, to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency—I am getting there, Madam Deputy Speaker; 866, to the Minister for Health; 867, to the Treasurer; 868, to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; 869, to the Minister for Social Inclusion; and 870, to the Minister for Health. They have all been on the Notice Paper for 217 days, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Question No. 920, to the Minister for Emergency Management, has been on there for 184 days. There is also question No. 1079 to the minister for broadband; No. 1080, to the minister for broadband—I think you represent the broadband minister in here, Albo; you have done it again.

Mr Albanese: That's me. What is it?

Mr BRIGGS: There are so many of them. I cannot go through so many of them for you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mayo will continue or he will run out of time.

Mr BRIGGS: There is question No. 1083, to the Treasurer; 1086, to the minister for regional Australia; 1097, to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation; 1104, to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency; and, finally, 1106, to the Treasurer. Madam Deputy Speaker, if you could write and ask those ministers for the answers to those questions, that would be much appreciated. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Ms BURKE (Chisholm—Deputy Speaker) (15:17): I will ensure that the questions of the hardworking member for Mayo are followed up.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (15:17): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to give a personal explanation.

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

Mr WINDSOR: Most grievously—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please proceed.

Mr WINDSOR: twice today and just a moment ago by the member for Dickson. For those who were not aware, the member for Dickson said this morning, and repeated again, that he had not been contacted by my office. That is not the case. In fact, on my invitation, since that dispute this morning, the member for Dickson did enter my door and did come and have a cordial discussion, and I thank him for that, but he did say that he had a log in terms of his office, and he did say that on that log was a call from Mr Graham Nuttall, from my office. That call was asking for information about the disallowance motion.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

Report No. 4 of 2012-13

Annual Report 2011-12

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:19): I present the following Auditor-General's reports: Audit report No. 4 of 2012-2013, entitled Performance audit: confidentiality in government contracts.
Senate order for departmental and agency contracts (calendar year 2011 compliance), and a report on the operation of the Australian National Audit Office for the year to 30 June 2012.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee

Report
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:19): I present report No. 66 of the Selection Committee relating to private members’ business and the referral of bills to committees. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to private Members’ business and the consideration of bills introduced 17 to 20 September 2012
1. The committee met in private session on 19 and 20 September 2012.
2. The committee determined that the following referrals of bills to committees be made—

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services:
- Personal Liability for Corporate Fault Reform Bill 2012.


- Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Further MySuper and Transparency Measures) Bill 2012.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL/PRINCIPAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION: Complex and important changes to superannuation law. Key industry stakeholders have expressed serious concerns as to the workability and practicality of the bill. The provisions of the bill need to be carefully considered for possible amendment.

Standing Committee on Economics:
- Clean Energy Amendment (International Emissions Trading and Other Measures) Bill 2012;
- Excise Tariff Amendment (Per-tonne Carbon Price Equivalent) Bill 2012;
- Clean Energy (Charges—Excise) Amendment Bill 2012;
- Clean Energy (Charges—Customs) Amendment Bill 2012;
- Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Manufacture Levy) Amendment (Per-tonne Carbon Price Equivalent) Bill 2012;
- Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) Amendment (Per tonne Carbon Price Equivalent) Bill 2012; and
- Clean Energy (Unit Issue Charge—Auctions) Amendment Bill 2012.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL/PRINCIPAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION: The domestic economic implications of abolishing the floor price and linking the emissions trading scheme to the EU scheme.

- Competition and Consumer Amendment (Australian Food Labelling) Bill 2012.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL/PRINCIPAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION: Seek comment from key stakeholders and consumer law experts on how the objectives of the legislation can be served by this particular private member’s bill.

Standing Committee on Regional Australia:
- Water Amendment (Long-term Average Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment) Bill 2012.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL/PRINCIPAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION: This bill gives the Murray-Darling Basin Authority authority to make adjustments to the Basin Plan without ministerial or parliamentary approval.

Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs:
- Law Enforcement Integrity Legislation Amendment Bill 2012.
REASONS FOR REFERRAL/PRINCIPAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION: Extensive proposed changes to integrity testing regime and increased powers need to be thoroughly examined by the committee.

3. The committee recommends that the following items of private Members’ business listed on the notice paper be voted on:

Orders of the Day—
Mitochondrial disease (Mr Morrison)
Surf lifesaving (Mr Chester)

Economics Committee
Treaties Committee

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:20): I have received advice from the Chief Government Whip nominating members to be members of certain committees.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:20): by leave—I move:

That:
(1) Mr Fitzgibbon be appointed a member of the Standing Committee on Economics; and
(2) Mr L. D. T. Ferguson be discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties and that, in his place, Mr McClelland be appointed a member of the committee.

Question agreed to.

Economics Committee
Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:20): I have received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip nominating a member to be a supplementary member of the Standing Committee on Economics for the purpose of the committee's inquiry into the review of the Reserve Bank of Australia's annual report 2012.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:21): by leave—I move:

That Mr A. D. H. Smith be appointed a supplementary member of the Standing Committee on Economics for the purpose of its review of the Reserve Bank of Australia’s annual report for 2012.

Question agreed to.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:21): Documents are presented in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:
Ministerial statements—Investment in nuclear medicine and treatment—Mr Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, 19 September 2012.

Debate adjourned.

BILLS

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Declared Commercial Fishing Activities) Bill 2012

Assent

Message from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the bill.
Judges and Governors-General Legislation Amendment (Family Law) Bill 2012
Returned from Senate
Message received from the Senate returning the bill without amendment or request.

COMMITTEES
Electoral Matters Committee
Report
Mr MELHAM (Banks) (15:22): I ask leave to present a report of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.
Mr Pyne: Leave is not granted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Leave is not granted. Are you going to knock off your own member behind you who wants the call as well?

Appropriations and Administration Committee
Report
Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (15:22): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration, I present the committee's report No. 4, Annual report 2011-12.
In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER
Granting of Leave
Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (15:22): I have a question for the chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you, over the coming weeks, get clarification for the House on the game that has been played this week over leave? There is a backlog of, I think, at least 13 private members' votes waiting to happen, yet I understand leave is not being granted to the House for them to occur. What we have just seen here, where there is discretionary leave given for some members on some sides of the House and not for others, needs some clarity for procedures to move forward.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:23): I thank the member for Lyne. I will ask the Speaker to look into the issue.

COMMITTEES
Publications Committee
Report
Mr HAYES (Fowler) (15:23): I present the report from the Publications Committee sitting in conference with the Publications Committee of the Senate. Copies of the report are being placed on the table. I seek leave to move that the report be agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Is leave granted?
Mr Pyne: He did not seek leave. He said he was tabling a report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: He asked for leave at the end.
Mr Pyne: Is he going to give a speech to it? This has not even been raised with us.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is on the notice. Leave has been granted. The member for Fowler has the call.
Mr Pyne: Are you giving a speech?
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That is not for you to determine. The member for Fowler has the call.
Mr HAYES: I move:
That the report be agreed to.
Question agreed to.

Human Rights Committee
Report
Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (15:24): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, I present the committee's fourth report of 2012, entitled Examination of legislation in accordance with the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011:
Interim report—Social Security Legislation Amendment (Fair Incentives to Work) Bill 2012. I will not be seeking leave to make a statement. I will have to ask a Senate member of the committee to do so in the Senate.

In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Committee Reports

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:25): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to raise the issue of committee reports. It is now the case that the report from the member for Banks is—

Mr Pyne: On what basis is this being raised?

Mr ALBANESE: I am seeking indulgence.

Mr Pyne: You can't just seek indulgence to slag the opposition.

Mr ALBANESE: You're not in the chair!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Leader of the House, on indulgence, is seeking advice. I will allow it, and then the Manager of Opposition Business can debate the issue when I have actually heard what the Leader of the House is about to say.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order, under standing order 98.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I know it is about procedure.

Mr Pyne: I am waiting.

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

Mr Pyne: I am asking for a point of order under standing order 98.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. I need to hear from the Leader of the House as to what he is seeking before I can progress.

Mr ALBANESE: I think that the House might want to—

Mr Pyne: 86.

Mr Combet: He got the wrong standing order!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House has the call. The minister is not assisting.

Mr ALBANESE: It is a serious point. If a report that is to be tabled in both houses—the House of Representatives and the Senate—is not tabled here in the House but is just tabled in the Senate, we are giving up our position as the prime house of the parliament. I would have thought the Manager of Opposition Business would support that. It is on the blue that this report was coming. I ask the Manager of Opposition Business to have a little bit of common sense and allow the report to be tabled.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:27): Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek the call to comment on the Leader of the House's statement. He says that the opposition should have common sense in relation to the tabling of this report. If the Leader of the House believed in common sense in relation to this House, he would have granted leave when the opposition asked to table electricity bills and documents on 12 September, three times; on 13 September, twice; on 17 September, three times; and on 18 September, twice. Each time, the Leader of the House thinks it is terribly funny—but of
course it is quite puerile—to deny the opposition the right to table documents that they have referred to in their questions. On the other hand, we have not been given any notice that the Chairman of JSCEM wanted to give a speech today on his report. It is now the time when the opposition should be given the opportunity to debate matters of public importance. If the Leader of the House wants to table these documents, he should get his scheduling right. It is not up to the opposition to fix his problems.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: In respect of this matter, leave needed to be given in this instance. It was not given. We will progress to the matter of public importance.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Carbon Pricing

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (14:07): I have received a letter from the honourable member for Flinders proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The adverse impact of the carbon tax and its implementation on the Australian economy and households.

I call upon those 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—

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (15:29): Eight weeks ago, less than five days into the period of the carbon tax, as the government's floor price and the government's plans collapsed, the Minister for Climate Change and Energy told the Australian newspaper, when asked whether or not they were about to drop the floor price, that they were committed to the package as a whole. This was when the story of what he was about to do was leaked, and he said to the paper something that was transparently, clearly, untrue—they were committed to the package as a whole. In eight weeks we have seen eight major changes to this carbon tax. What was meant to be eternal, what was meant to last a thousand years, what was meant to be the system for the ages, has not even lasted eight weeks. What we have seen so far is chaos and costs and damage, and it is the Australian public that are paying the price of the carbon tax and the government's uncertainty through job losses, investment losses and electricity price rises.

Let me start with what this tax is all about, and that is electricity price rises. The government has been through this period of pretence that electricity prices are somehow not being affected, so let us go to the facts about electricity. In New South Wales we have seen an 18 per cent price rise, and the carbon tax alone has contributed 8.9 per cent. The government seems to dismiss this massive increase on top of what was already a high price as unimportant. It gets better. In Queensland, there have been power price rises of 11 per cent—with the carbon tax on average representing 13 per cent but in some cases representing 80 to 100 per cent of the power price rises. Why? Because the Newman government froze prices on many tariffs and in most cases the carbon tax makes up at least 80 per cent and in many 100 per cent of the power price rises. In Western Australia, 70 per cent of the power price rise comes from the carbon tax. In the Northern Territory it is 70 per cent; in the ACT, more than 75 per cent of the power price rise comes from the carbon tax. They are not our figures—that is the regulator, that is the independent modelling and that is the lived reality of every small business, every family and every pensioner who is paying the price of this carbon tax at this minute. In
Victoria we have seen an average increase of about 11 per cent, which is sometimes 15 per cent and sometimes less in terms of electricity price rises.

So what is the message? It is that the carbon tax is in chaos and Australians are paying the price. What was meant to be a system to provide certainty has become the definition of uncertainty—eight major changes so far. We had the bailout on the eve of the carbon tax of Alcoa and of Energy Brix, following on from payments of $250 million in the weeks before the carbon tax to each of the Loy Yang, Hazelwood and Yallourn power stations. To put that in context, they had to give no-strings-attached cash payments—potentially some of the biggest cash payments ever in Australian history—of $250 million to each of three power stations in Victoria.

The second thing we have had is a decrease in the share of funding for small businesses under the government's Clean Technology Investment Program grants. That was announced just weeks into the carbon tax. The third thing is that more companies were added to the hit list for the carbon tax within weeks of the carbon tax being introduced. The 'certain' list changes almost by the week—names coming off, names going on; companies and councils unable to plan. That list is in permanent flux.

The fourth thing we have had is changes to regulations governing the scheme, including a sell-out of landfills which were promised that they would be included in the scheme, so much so that potentially 40 per cent of current landfills will not be covered, including the one where they announced the scheme. They went to Clayton, they announced the scheme and it turns out it was a clayton's promise—that scheme, that landfill, ain't in; it does not qualify. Talk about a hoax and a lack of transparency—going to a landfill, announcing it is in and it turns out it is not. Unsurprisingly, the owners are a little upset. This means that councils end up having to pay higher prices.

Then we get to the fact that they are abandoning the Contract for Closure program. That was a brilliant success—a triumph of administration! This was the minister's baby—he was going to deliver contracts for closures. It is not surprising that this did not work. The geniuses on the other side created two schemes—they created a $2 billion Contract for Closure scheme which was meant to close power stations, and they also created a $5½ billion Energy Security Fund which was meant to pay the same power stations, the same companies, to stay open. So what we are seeing is a fund to close power stations and a fund to keep open power stations. If you ever wanted the definition of a government which had no idea what they were doing, it is the fact that they have allocated $7½ billion, $2 billion to keep them open and $5½ billion for them to close. That is evidence of a bunch of people who make it up as they go along. They do not care how much public money they spend; they do not care how much public money they waste—but they do care whether or not there is a pretence of action. It is all about the pretence of action.

Then we go to the scrapping of the floor price. On 5 July the minister said that they were committed to the package as a whole. The story had been leaked from within his own department to the Australian that they were going to drop the floor price. He denied it—flatly, clearly, absolutely. But he denied it knowing that he was in negotiations to drop the price. A level of honesty is required to be a member of parliament but there does not seem to be a lot of that on the other side. This minister went to the newspaper and flatly denied something which was known to them, known to us, known to the parties and
revealed publicly, and he could not face the fact that, five days in, the carbon tax was in chaos and one of the pillars of their own scheme was collapsing. The minister said:

Well we've put in a floor price at a price cap to provide some confidence over the first few years about the potential variability of the price.

He said the ceiling 'would avoid sharp price spikes or plunges'. There are numerous other quotes, from 11 occasions on the floor of the parliament or the public domain, from the Prime Minister, the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, the minister and the Minister for Finance who have all said that this floor price was vital, that it was essential, that it was critical. The thing about this government is that every day is year zero; every day they draw a line under the page and what they said yesterday is a relevant—it means nothing. That is the fundamental problem. There is no commitment to consistency; there is no sense of sovereign risk; there is no sense of duty or of obligation. Everything has a shelf life of 24 hours. How could you make that statement, knowing that it was untrue? Both the minister and the parliamentary secretary know that what was said was untrue, that the minister deceived the Australian people—knowingly, openly, publicly—and he did it again on 21 August on national television. At the very time he was preparing to announce the dismantling of the floor price he was denying it on national television. There was no escape clause; there was no hedging; there was no recognition of a possible future change. It was an express, clear and absolute denial of a process which had begun months before. And they say this is all about certainty. Well, it is not.

That then leads me to the fact that they had linked the scheme to Europe—so they say. We could always buy European credits, but for those members who represent rural constituencies, your constituents will be surprised that we have done a deal to give Europe a virtual monopoly seller status to Australia. In return, what would you expect Australians would get? Virtual monopoly seller status to Europe perhaps? No. The ability to sell to Europe immediately? No. The ability to sell to Europe in 2015? No. Australia would get the ability to sell to Europe finally in 2018. In other words, their great deal locked out Australian farmers and Australian firms from having any engagement in Europe, while giving Europe that shining beacon of economic reform at this current moment—a virtual monopoly seller status to Australia. They have done something extraordinary. They have given effective control over Australian taxation and electricity rates to a sovereign state.

Mr Combet interjecting—

Mr HUNT: If you do not understand that the carbon tax sets electricity prices, then you should not be in the job because that is precisely what it does. The carbon tax sets electricity prices. It is an electricity tax. It is intended to be an electricity tax and it is an electricity tax. And on every statement the minister has made in the past 24 hours we hear that they have transferred—by their own words—control over Australia's system to Europe. But you would wonder whether this is going to mean lower prices.

Let us unpack what they are doing. They have tried to imply that it might mean lower electricity prices in Australia. They have hinted, they have nudge, they have winked, but their own modelling, reaffirmed by the minister, says that the carbon tax price in 2016 will still be $29 a tonne. It will still be $37 a tonne in 2020.

So what does all this mean in real terms. It means that the price of electricity will still be high and all of this talk is a hoax. Their own modelling is still of $29 a tonne. If it is not
then their budget will fall apart. Either electricity prices will continue to soar or their budget falls apart. They have given the nation a Hobson's choice because the system they have designed is not robust. It does not deal with any inconsistencies, any changes, and they know it. They know that electricity prices are going to continue to soar because they have told us. $29 a tonne is still the modelling and, if it is not the modelling, this is the opportunity for the minister to tell us. I would invite the minister, during his 15 minutes, to tell us if his modelling still stands because, if it does, electricity prices will continue to soar. If it does not, you have the slight matter of a massive budget crater.

This government have made massive changes with massive consequences on a carbon tax at a time when we see skyrocketing electricity prices. We also see a massive problem for industrial production and therefore jobs and therefore investment in Australia—Olympic Dam, changes to the outer harbour at Port Hedland, changes to Fortescue Investments, the Gregory mine in terms of coal and today the Red Hill coalmine. This is just weeks after Marius Kloppers specifically said that the carbon tax would have a huge impact on eastern seaboard coalmines. And what is this government's approach? It squanders the boom. It says, 'It's all a coincidence, everything's fine, no problem, nothing happening, it's all an accident, don't worry everybody.' It is not an accident; it is about making a bad situation worse.

With a high dollar, low metals prices and low coal prices, we are seeing an act of economic self-harm on a monumental scale. And it is an act of individual harm. Whether it is the motel, whether or it is the butcher who has to update his or her refrigeration, whether it is the pensioner, whether it is the family, these people are paying the price of the government's carbon tax uncertainty. The government will tell us, 'We've got a billion dollars in clean technology investment grants. We've got a billion dollars for small businesses.' The only problem is—and this brings me to the eighth change—they froze it. They told us what a great job they were going to do for all the small businesses, but they froze their own program, which was meant to save the people they were hurting. So their budget is in chaos, their carbon tax is in chaos and electricity prices are skyrocketing, and they do not think any of it is a problem—but it is.

At the end of the day, the grand irony is that emissions go up, not down. The Australian public is right onto this, by the way—emissions go up, not down. So over the period from 2010 to 2020 Australia's emissions go up by 43 million tonnes. That is not our work—yours. At the end of the day, it is hurting the economy, it is hurting families and it does not do the job. (Time expired)

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (15:44): That really was like being whipped with a piece of wet lettuce. One is reminded of Tony Abbott's promise that there would be a people's revolt, and this is what it culminates in—a pathetic address from the shadow minister. They have nothing left. They have tried every piece of fearmongering they can find. They have misrepresented every fact they possibly can. This is nothing but a desperate, failing fear campaign.

I spent many, many years representing working people and I never, ever stood before them and deceived them or tried to create fear to garner their support in the way the coalition has. It is a disgrace what the coalition has done. The mendacity of the
opposition leader is unparalleled in a campaign against a very important public policy initiative. It is pathetic and it has come to nothing. And people are finding you out. You are wondering what is going on in the community; you make assertions. They are finding out exactly how they are being misled by the coalition.

Let us just take a look at the electricity bill submitted by the member for Menzies during question time. Just a cursory glance indicates that, in the previous billing period, the total of the bill was approximately $9,500. In the billing period subsequent to the introduction of the carbon price, the bill has actually fallen by 36 per cent in quantum to $5,970. This is the level of complexity that they cannot come to grips with; the bill actually fell by 36 per cent. The member for Menzies claimed, I think, that it had gone up 45 per cent due to carbon pricing. The mendacity of these people to keep coming forth and making these claims!

The shadow minister and the opposition leader repeatedly try and attribute all electricity price increases to carbon pricing. Let us have a few facts. They said in their argument that a 10 per cent increase in electricity prices attributable to carbon pricing—across the country it is an average of $3.30 per household—is the end of the world, the end of the economy. They said regions and industry will be smashed and destroyed. The Latrobe Valley, which the member opposite represents, was going to be destroyed. It would be the end of it. They would all be gone. And, of course, it was all rubbish.

What did they say over the last three years as electricity prices across the country in fact went up by 50 per cent on average and it was nothing whatsoever to do with carbon pricing? There was not a word out of them. What did they do when Colin Barnett's government in Western Australia increased electricity prices by 57 per cent in the last two years? They said that is fine, no problem whatsoever. But when you add $2.50 to the average household bill in regional Australia they say it is the end of the world, it is the end of the mining industry, it is the end of the Western Australian economy! They are a farce. What they have been putting is a complete joke. And now they have come to this: the shadow minister waving around a piece of wet lettuce in an attempt to make an argument. I mean, how pathetic!

Let us just go back to some of the basics of what we are doing here. We are responding to scientific advice that the coalition say they respect too. Who knows? The opposition leader has called it absolute crap from time to time. This government respects the scientific advice, the overwhelming scientific consensus, that tells us increasing greenhouse gas emissions are contributing to climate change. This government has responded in an economically efficient manner, in a manner that will be environmentally effective and, importantly, in a manner that is socially fair. On electricity bills, I mentioned that the average household impact across the country is $3.30 a week. That is what it is, that is what was modelled, that is what has been determined by regulators and that is the outcome. And we did not mislead anyone. What did we do? We provided an average of $10.10 per week per household to people across the country to assist them with that cost increase. Because we are a Labor government, we are using the majority of revenue from the carbon price to assist households. Nine out of 10 households will receive some assistance. Millions of households are better off as we have introduced a carbon price in a socially fair and equitable manner.
I mentioned the science and the fact that the carbon price mechanism is responsive to the advice of scientists, academies and science internationally. There was news just this week about the increasing melting of Arctic Sea ice in the Northern Hemisphere. The scientific evidence is overwhelming that governments have a public policy responsibility to deal with this issue. It is important to deal with it in the most economically efficient manner, the way that is the lowest cost to Australian businesses and lowest cost to Australian households. That is precisely what the government is doing. And we are not acting alone in that endeavour.

I have the privilege of representing this country in international climate change negotiations. It is a tremendous honour. I sit there with all the other members of the United Nations. Not one country rejects the science, and every country is working hard towards an international solution to deal with this issue. And, given that we are the 15th largest emitter of greenhouse gases internationally amongst all members of the United Nations and that we are the highest emitter of greenhouse gases among the advances economies on a per capita basis, our colleagues internationally expect this country to do our fair share of the work in tackling greenhouse gas emissions. And that is exactly what we are doing.

We are working with the international community to achieve reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. We have implemented the policy of the Howard government in many respects. The Shergold report of 2006-07, which was a policy position adopted by the Howard government and taken to the 2007 election, is essentially what this government has worked from to implement the carbon pricing mechanism. It is in fact an emissions trading scheme that starts with a three-year fixed-price period and transitions to a fully flexible emissions trading scheme from 1 July 2015. From 1 July 2015 our carbon price mechanism will be linked with the European Union emissions trading scheme. That will mean we will have a carbon price that is effectively the same as 30 other countries covering 530 million people. We will have a carbon price that will be common to the efforts of 30 other economies—and, taken in aggregate, those economies represent our second largest trading partner after China. So much for the argument from the coalition that somehow Australia is going it alone—that somehow we are out of step with the rest of the world. All that we are doing is in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, negotiations with countries under that convention, and work on a bilateral basis, including with the European Union. We are working internationally to tackle this issue and to ensure that Australia does no more than its fair share in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Leader of the Opposition runs around all the time misleading people, deceiving people by saying nothing is going on internationally in relation to this issue. I indicated in question time how he had just remarked last month that there was nothing going on in the Asia-Pacific region. I had the opportunity of visiting China earlier this year to discuss with Chinese authorities the development of market mechanisms similar to our own. We have working groups working with China. Guangdong province, which is our sixth-largest trading partner, is developing an emissions trading scheme. Cross to the other side of the Asia-Pacific, to the United States: the US state of California, which is the eighth-largest economy in the world, has introduced an emissions trading scheme. It has carbon pricing. It is a larger economy than our own. The Korean
government has legislated an emissions trading scheme to start in 2015. They are our fourth-largest trading partner. We are working with all of these countries, all of these provinces, all of these states, to develop a response that is effective and market based in dealing with climate change issues.

The mechanism that we have introduced is a market mechanism, and it is simple. It provides a price signal for the major greenhouse gas emitters in our economy, which number approximately 350 in this current compliance period. It is an incentive for them to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. They will make the decisions about how best to achieve that. They will be obliged, under the legislation, to purchase a permit for every tonne of greenhouse gas that they emit. It creates a powerful incentive to reduce emissions.

It was the policy, once, of the coalition. It was the policy of the Howard government. It was an agreement that was reached with the coalition in opposition under the leadership of Malcolm Turnbull. It is a policy proposition that has been supported and is supported by every living Liberal leader, including the current opposition leader.

It is economic common sense that we apply an incentive in this way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and it is exactly what is happening. The entire conversation with the business community has changed as a consequence of carbon pricing coming into place. Businesses are looking to see how they can improve their energy efficiency—produce the same output for fewer greenhouse gas emissions. They are looking to improve the efficiency of their operations, to reduce their emissions intensity. Landfills are applying mechanisms to cut their methane emissions and utilise them to generate electricity. I spoke at the meat industry conference just two weeks ago in Adelaide where it is feasible for abattoirs that have a carbon price liability to capture the methane emissions that are produced from the decomposition of the biomass that is produced in an abattoir, convert them into electricity, be self-reliant on their electricity generation, sell the electricity into the grid, create fertiliser and have new revenue streams, and remove themselves from carbon price liability. That is exactly what the carbon price mechanism is intended to achieve. We have done this in a careful consultation with the business community across many, many industries over a considerable period of time, and it will be effective in reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

The entire case brought against it by the coalition is fallacious. The price impacts, that were said to be unimaginable by the opposition leader, are, of course, bang on what the Treasury estimates indicated they would be. In fact, the Reserve Bank had this to say about it in the minutes just recently:

There was no evidence that the carbon price had raised medium-term inflation expectations. And they indicated that:

… the introduction of the carbon price had not yet had a significant effect on downstream price pressures, with only isolated examples of suppliers attributing price increases to the carbon price.

The Treasury modelling indicated price impacts would be just 0.7 per cent on the CPI in financial year 2012-13. They are coming in underneath that on all indicators. We are using the majority of the carbon price revenue to help households and particularly to help pensioners—to help the households that need help the most. The business community is adjusting. In fact, there was a survey of many of the liable entities under the carbon price mechanism, and there are not many of them that want it repealed,
because the fact of the matter is: they know that a carbon price is the most effective way for us to create this incentive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the emissions intensity of our economy.

There is a simple fact that is becoming clear to the Australian community, and it is not only that there has been a mendacious and deceitful fear campaign conducted by the opposition against this policy initiative; it is also the knowledge and the realisation and the common sense of the Australian people that the carbon price cannot and will not be repealed. It cannot and it will not be repealed. It is a fact of the matter that it will not be repealed.

The Leader of the Opposition stood there this afternoon, full of hubris. They reckon they have got the next election in their pocket. Well, I tell them what: they are in for a fight. We are fighters on this side, and we are going to fight you, and we are going to win this issue. We will win it because it is the right thing to do. It is the right thing for the country. It is right for our economic future. It is right environmentally. It is socially fair. And we are going to argue it out and argue it out, right up to election day, and we will win it. You will not be the wrecker that you want to be. I do not know how you can sit there and retain any integrity, given your background, and adopt the policy position that has been taken by the coalition on this. David Marr nailed the character of the opposition leader in that essay, and he knows it. The carbon tax is a bad tax. It is not based on the truth and we will repeal it. We can repeal it, we will repeal it and we look forward to the day we get the opportunity to do so.

No one has forgotten about the fundamental breach of trust of this Prime Minister and it goes to the core of every little piece of anger in the community relating to the carbon tax. What was it that the Prime Minister told the Australian people before the last election? 'I rule out a carbon tax. There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.' The Treasurer was also complicit in that deceit. He said that claims about the plans for a carbon tax were 'hysterical'. Well, they are not as hysterical as the claims from the Treasurer that they are going to have a budget surplus this year. They are not as hysterical as that because, quite frankly, that will never happen.

I am prepared to bet that the Treasurer will never deliver a surplus. In fact, I have invited the Treasurer to put his money where his mouth is. I have offered him a $1,000 bet. In October last year I offered the Treasurer a genuine wager. He will not bet with me. But if he so confident why would he not? I said, 'Here is a chance to win 1,000 bucks for your favourite charity, Treasurer.' I told him in this chamber if he delivers that...
budget surplus this financial year I would donate $1,000 to his favourite charity. But if he does not deliver the surplus he will donate $1,000 to my favourite charity, which happens to be my local surf lifesaving club. This is a Treasurer who has presided over four budget deficits in a row. Like the rest of Australia, I simply do not believe he will ever achieve a surplus. I am prepared to put my money where my mouth is. I am not sure while why the Treasurer will not do the same.

All Australians, just like me, want to know where the money is going to come from. This government has no credibility on economic issues. At a time when the economy is slowing, no one has faith in this Treasurer or this Prime Minister to get the big calls right, which goes to the very heart of this matter of public importance. I am disappointed the Prime Minister is not here. At a time when the manufacturing sector is struggling and the mining industry is giving indications that times are getting tough and when the agricultural sector is going through hard times to compete on world markets, why would any government elected to govern in the national interest make it harder? Why would you make it harder for the manufacturing sector, for the mining sector and for the agricultural sector? Why would you make it harder for any Australian industry to compete with the imposition of the world's biggest carbon tax?

What we are seeing, as this Treasurer tries to prop up this artificial surplus he keeps talking about, is a freeze on spending by the government on programs like the Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance Package, which was meant to assist regions adversely affected by the carbon tax. Members who are not from regional electorates may not have heard of this package before but it is a $200-million package and not a cent of that package has been delivered. In fact, the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government admitted during the budget consideration in detail stage that the guidelines of the $200-million package had not even been prepared.

Regional communities were promised in the lead up to the introduction of the carbon tax that they would be helped through the adjustment phase, that there would be structural adjustment funding. I am sure the minister at the table knows that. This is what the minister for regional development, the Minister for Climate Change and the Prime Minister repeated during visits to my electorate in the Latrobe Valley. This is what the minister for regional development said during the budget consideration in detail:

The guidelines for the Structural Adjustment Fund for the regions most affected by the carbon pricing initiative are still being considered and, in any event, they were always going to be contingent upon impact, once we knew where the ‘contracts for closure’ were going to occur. Those who were not listening at that time may not have picked up the get-out-of-jail card hidden in the minister's weasel words: ‘...they were always going to be contingent upon impact, once we knew where the contracts for closure were going to occur.' But the problem is the contracts-for-closure process has now been abandoned. Are we to assume that the $200 million is gone? The $200 million that was meant to be given to regional Australia is gone because, according to the minister, it was always going to be contingent upon contracts for closure. Those opposite might say that is fair enough. The contracts for closure are gone and the $200 million package is gone. Except that is not true. That is not what the government promised.

I have here a fact sheet that I printed out this morning on the Clean Energy Future website. Let me read the section on the
Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance Package.

The $200 million Regional Structural Assistance Package will be set aside for structural adjustment assistance for regions and communities, and if required there will be other initiatives which assist strongly affected areas and sectors.

The Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government will monitor the impacts of the carbon price on regions to determine areas where structural adjustment assistance may be required...

Funding will support regional communities on a case-by-case basis. Examples of programs that may be supported include support for displaced workers and their families, support for affected small businesses, community development programs and economic diversification programs.

It is interesting the minister, who is due to speak next, has run from the House. I am assuming he is going to try and find this little fact sheet and try and find what the writing instructions are going to be about contracts for closure and the $200 million. The reason I wanted record that in Hansard is, I imagine, that website may be adjusted in the very near future. I imagine the fact sheet may be pulled from the website because in this fact sheet there is not one mention of contracts for closure. The package was put together because the government supposedly understood that some regions and communities will face more significant impacts than others from reforms like the carbon price.

On 11 July this year Minister Crean put out a press release with the heading: Clean Energy Opportunity for Regional Australia. Mr Crean said:

… the Government recognised the reality that some regions and communities would face more significant impacts than others.

Labor's major economic reforms of the past have been underpinned by structural adjustment assistance, to ease the transition for affected regions and communities.

We will build on our legacy with a $200 million Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance Package.

We will closely monitor the impact of the carbon price and ensure affected communities have access to the employment and training opportunities needed to underpin community development and economic diversification.

There was no mention again about the $200 million and the fund being contingent upon the contracts for closure program. Where is the $200 million?

Mr McCormack: It is in the dispatch box.

Mr CHESTER: No, I am not going to search in the dispatch box. I fear the good people of the Latrobe Valley and regional Australia have been conned again by the Gillard government. We were promised 'no carbon tax under a government I lead' and now we have that tax—thanks to a grubby little deal with the Greens and the Independents. We were promised a Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance Package to help secure jobs and protect our future and we have received nothing, zero, nought, zilch, nada. It is a saving. I will be interested to see if the minister has been able to find the answer in the last couple of minutes. We have been conned. There is no structural adjustment package funding, and if the Prime Minister was honest with the Australian people she would walk in here and explain it herself. She would confirm that the package has been abandoned.

Mr McCormack: How mendacious!

Mr CHESTER: The member for Riverina says it is mendacious. I just said that so it would get on the record.
The Prime Minister would confirm that $200 million has been covered up by the Treasurer, who is desperately trying to cling to his claim of a surplus in this financial year. Make no mistake: the cuts are coming, and this program is on the chopping block because this government has given up on Australia's blue-collar workers.

The other great con about the carbon tax that this government likes to perpetrate in the community is that only the so-called biggest polluters will pay that carbon tax. That is as misleading as the Prime Minister's promise that there will be no carbon tax under a government she leads, because everyone pays the carbon tax through energy prices—through our local football and netball clubs, with their lights; our local aged care facilities; our hospitals and our surf clubs. The Lakes Entrance fishing industry wrote to me the other day. They have a $24,000 a year estimated increase in their power bills. And the carbon tax will affect local dairy farmers. The member for Forrest has dairy farmers in her electorate as well. They are going to be hit with a $5,000 extra cost to their energy bills on an annual basis. Everyone pays a carbon tax every day of the week.

But what does the Prime Minister say when asked about these increased costs? The Prime Minister repeatedly comes in here and says that businesses can pass those costs through. So the Prime Minister is quite happy for the cost of living to increase. In fact, she is suggesting that businesses pass the cost through and make life more difficult for their customers.

What concerns me most of all in relation to the carbon tax is the crisis of confidence it has caused in regional communities. It is directly linked to the uncertainty this government has created through its reckless decision to legislate the world's biggest carbon tax. As long as this carbon tax hangs over the heads of regional Australians and their businesses and families it is hard to see that confidence being restored.

If the members opposite really think the anti-carbon tax campaign has run out of steam—if they really think we have hit a brick wall with this campaign—then let's have an election. Let's let the people of Australia decide. (Time expired)

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Cabinet Secretary, Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation) (16:09): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on this matter, because the state of the Australian economy, our prosperity, fairness and equity are of the greatest importance to the Gillard Labor government.

What we have heard today so far from the coalition—from the member for Flinders and the member for Gippsland—is yet more of the campaign of negativity that we have heard from the Leader of the Opposition and more of the backward views that we have come to expect from the coalition, more of their shameless deceit and more of the false claims that they have repeatedly made since we announced the carbon price package in July last year. And it is a campaign which is running out of puff.

We have an opposition which continues to talk down our economy. We have an opposition which continues to misrepresent the state of our economy. We have a coalition that pretends that it cares about climate change while fighting against real action.

It is important that members opposite realise a few facts about the actual state of the Australian economy. Under our government the Australian economy continues to out-perform other advanced
economies. As the Treasurer said in question time today, the economy has grown by 11 per cent since the start of 2008—that is, since Labor has been in government. And that is despite the global financial crisis that our country and the rest of the world has been enduring. The reason that the Australian economy continues to outperform other advanced economies is Labor's investments in skills, infrastructure, education and research—all of which support economic growth in the long term. And the economy has continued to grow because we acted to stimulate the economy at the right time.

Of course too many Australians are finding it hard to make ends meet, but that is why we—Labor—continue to manage the economy in the interests of working people. That is why we cut taxes for low income earners by raising the tax-free threshold. That is why we invest in better health care. That is why we invest in dental reform. That is why we invest in education and training.

Let's remember: the opposition leader claimed that price rises would be unimaginable. Over and over again we were told, over the last year, that price rises would be unimaginable. We were told that the carbon price would be a wrecking ball through the Australian economy. We were told by the Leader of the Opposition, by the member for Flinders, by the member for Indy and so many of those opposite that it would destroy jobs. And none of those claims is true.

Those opposite like to say that we are acting ahead of the world. This is another thing that we need to be clear about. The world is acting. Ninety countries, representing 90 per cent of the global economy, have committed to reduce their carbon pollution and have policies in place already to achieve those reductions. And many of those countries are relying on a market based mechanism.

I know that those opposite do not like to hear this but those countries which are relying on a market based mechanism know, as our government knows, that a carbon price is the most effective way to reduce emissions—and more efficient than other, direct subsidy policies. That is why by next year 850 million people will be living in countries, states or cities with emissions trading systems. That includes countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Sweden, Norway, New Zealand and Switzerland.

Carbon trading is already operating at a subnational level in the United States, at a subnational level in Canada and at a subnational level in Brazil. And there is growing momentum to introduce carbon trading around the world. California will commence emissions trading next year. China is developing pilot emissions trading schemes in seven cities and provinces, which will also commence next year. And Korea's emissions trading scheme—a legislated emissions trading scheme—will commence in 2015.

The delusional approach taken by those opposite—they have nailed their colours to the mast here—is that nothing is happening in the rest of the world. That means that every time a new country acts—or a place like California legislates to commence an emissions trading scheme on 1 January next year, or Korea legislates to commence its emissions trading scheme in 2015—we get denial from those opposite. They do not want to own up to what is happening in the world. They do not want to approach this.

Mr Tudge interjecting—

Mr DREYFUS: I would have expected better from the member for Aston because he has some economics training. I would have
expected him to be able to read what the OECD and the IMF say about this, and what all countries that have already introduced the emissions trading scheme are saying—they know that it is the least cost, most efficient means of reducing carbon pollution. Countries like Turkey, South Africa, Thailand and Chile are also working to develop carbon pricing schemes, and in fact 94 per cent of OECD countries—

Mr Hunt interjecting—

Mr Tudge interjecting—

Mr DREYFUS: I know this is hard for those opposite to grapple with—94 per cent of OECD members have, or are implementing, emissions trading at the national or sub-national level.

It is not surprising that those opposite disregard these facts, as they so often do. The Leader of the Opposition who thinks that climate change is crap. He likes to pay lip-service—

Mr Tudge: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. That was unparliamentary language that the minister just used, and I ask him to withdraw it.

Mr DREYFUS: I will not withdraw it because I was directly quoting from the Leader of the Opposition, who said—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Rishworth): I am going to call the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency.

Mr DREYFUS: Those opposite know what the Leader of the Opposition said. They are embarrassed by it. They should be embarrassed by it. It is still the case that, despite his attitudes, the Leader of the Opposition is paying lip-service to taking action on climate change. We have got him paying lip-service to quite a few things, but we know what he really thinks.

The other deceitful claims that they continue to make we heard again today from the member for Flinders and from the member for Gippsland. We only have to look at the most recent Reserve Bank of Australia minutes, released this week, to see that the Leader of the Opposition's campaign of negativity on prices is baseless. I am going to quote directly—just as I was quoting directly from the Leader of the Opposition—from the RBA minutes. They said:

… the introduction of the carbon price had not yet had a significant effect on downstream price pressures, with only isolated examples of suppliers attributing price increases to the carbon price. There was no evidence—

I will repeat that: 'there was no evidence'—that the carbon price had raised medium-term inflation expectations.

That was the Reserve Bank of Australia on the price impacts.

On jobs, this is something that those opposite like to point to. What hypocrisy from this opposition, an opposition which has remained mute, struck dumb, by the massive cuts that have been occurring in the state of Queensland. It is good that there are members opposite from Queensland here to listen to this. Australians now know that the biggest risk to their jobs is the election of a Liberal government, as the Queensland state Liberals have shown. How those opposite can bring themselves to pretend that they care about jobs when they welcome the destructive cuts that we have seen in the state of Queensland, the destructive cuts they have seen from their Liberal colleagues, is beyond me.

The Leader of the Opposition's Mini-Me, Queensland Premier Campbell Newman, told Australians before his budget that he had discussed with the Leader of the Opposition the details of the cuts he was proposing to make and that the Leader of the Opposition
enthusiastically supported him on those cuts. Of course, he has gone ahead and made those cuts, so we know, and all other Australians know, exactly what we are going to get if there is ever—perish the thought—a Liberal federal government. Just like the cuts that we have seen from Premier Newman in sacking nurses, sacking teachers and sacking police, a federal Liberal government would sack public servants in vast numbers, gutting services and communities. We know they would do it and they would relish it, because that is what Liberal governments do. They would like nothing more than to get back into government and get right into cutting the pay and conditions of Australian working people. \(\text{(Time expired)}\)

**Mr Tudge:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Under section 92(a)(ii) of the standing orders, it says:

The Speaker can intervene:

... ...

(ii) when a Member’s conduct is considered offensive ...

Some of the remarks, that the parliamentary secretary thinks that we would take great joy and pride in sacking people, I do think are offensive.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Other Deputy Speakers in this place have made the point that when referring to groups there is a broader shoulder to rely on. I call the member for Wright.

**Mr BUCHHOLZ** (Wright) (16:20): How extraordinary that in the segue into my speech that we would talk about quotes, because there is no more telling quote when it comes to the carbon tax of this nation than that made by the Prime Minister four days before the last election: 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.' That is your Achilles heel in this campaign.

Earlier the minister indicated that he wanted to bring on a fight. Let me advise you, when it comes to the next election: do not bring a knife to a gunfight. The next election will be a bloodbath. If you had any guts you would muscle up and bring on an election right now because the Australian people have had it up to here with the deception this government has practised on the impact of the carbon tax.

Just in case anybody was thinking that the Prime Minister might have been misquoted or that she might have been out there on her own, I draw the attention of the House to a quote from the Treasurer. He said it was absolutely:

... hysterical ... that somehow we are moving towards a carbon tax.

What is hysterical is that we are standing here in the Australian parliament still debating the carbon tax. Since this carbon tax was introduced into the House it has had no less than eight changes to it. This is a moving feast. My colleague earlier today raised and highlighted those eight issues.

**Mr Hunt:** Quite eloquently.

**Mr BUCHHOLZ:** Elocuently, of course. But let me just bring some of them to your attention. One of the fundamentals of the introduction of the carbon price that Labor introduced was that it would be connected to a floor price. That was fundamental to the introduction. And we have had enough quotes for the day, but, to quote the Prime Minister, it was to 'give business stability', to give 'certainty' so that we could 'get used to the transition'. Well, that is gone. So, again, I just reiterate the point that this is a government that, on a daily basis, will say one thing and, in the blink of an eye, do another thing—continually. Nearly daily we
are seeing this transition of paranoia on policy, jumping all over the place. There was also the halting of support for the industry via the clean technology investment grants. I can hardly keep up with the changes, given that there have been eight more recently. This carbon tax is nothing more than a tax on electricity. We are told continuously that mums and dads will not pay the carbon tax.

An opposition member: Rubbish.

Mr BUCHHOLZ: Exactly. It is rubbish. It will go into the pockets of every mum and dad. This government will put its hands into the pockets of every business and everyone who relies on a fridge, on a toaster or on a kettle. You will not be able to escape the carbon tax. It is purely a tax on electricity.

The previous speaker spoke about our colleagues in Queensland, with reference to the cuts they are having to make to the budget up there. Of course Queensland will not be able to escape the tentacles of the carbon tax. But let me remind Australia, and let me remind this parliament, why, as a result of the Labor government's capacity to run an economy, these dreadful cuts up there are having to be undertaken at the moment. We had a government in Queensland—we just got rid of them—that was simply unable to take money out of one account and stick it into another account to pay our hardworking doctors and nurses in Queensland. For years and years, that task was beyond them. When it comes to introducing a system like the carbon tax, we do not need to go any further than the insulation program. I think 200 homes were burnt to the ground, with a horrible loss of life.

But don't just take my word on how much this carbon tax is affecting the economy. The growth in GDP of 0.06 per cent in the June quarter was due to government spending. The government comes in here daily and tells you how strong the economy is. Yes, there are some strong indicators in our economy. But I can assure you that the strong indicators in our economy are not due to fiscal management; they are due to supply and demand, push-and-pull factors on the government. Basically, that just means we are very good at digging red and black rocks and selling them to our trading partners. When it comes to internal fiscal management, the government sector directly contributed 0.05 per cent growth in GDP through its consumption and investment. On top of this, the June quarter results included the effects of the government's sugar hit of the schoolkids bonus and carbon tax compensation package totalling $2.8 billion. This in turn boosted household disposable income and spending for that quarter.

When we look at the engine room of the economy—our small business sector and our corporate sector—company profitability continued to deteriorate, and the corporate gross operating surplus declined for the third consecutive quarter. Company profitability will be further impacted by rising input costs in coming quarters, such as rising electricity costs and transportation costs.

Further, I refer you to the Australian Industry Group/Commonwealth Bank performance indexes of August 2012. Now, these are not the coalition's words. So when you hear the government say that we come in here and scaremonger, note that I am quoting word for word from industry groups about their concerns about the carbon tax. The latest seasonally adjusted Australian Industry Group/Commonwealth Bank Australian Performance of Services Index, which is known as the Australian PSI, fell by 4.1 points in August to 42.4. This marks the seventh consecutive month that activity has contracted in those services sectors.
An opposition member: Shame!

Mr BUCHHOLZ: It is a shame. In fact, no services subsector—not one—reported growth in sales or new orders this month. The only one that did was the finance and insurance subsector, which recorded a reading of above 50 points. The reasons business identified as contributing to the poor performance included weak consumer demand, which is built on the back of lack of business confidence. And why do people lack business confidence? It is because of increasing taxes. ANZ job advertisements declined by 0.08 per cent in July and by 2.3 per cent in August. And that is not coalition scaremongering; that is from the ANZ Job Advertisement Index.

The Deloitte CFO Survey for the second quarter of 2012 showed that business uncertainty had hit its highest level in over a year, with 87 per cent of company finance officers saying it was above normal; 84 per cent of CFOs said that uncertainty over Australian government policy negatively affected optimism, which was up from 79 per cent in the third quarter of 2011. Moreover, 36 per cent of CFOs said that political uncertainty significantly affected optimism, which was higher than the other factor.

They are domestic quotes, but let us go international—because all these other nations are supposed to be coming on board with an economy-wide carbon tax. Listen very carefully to members on the other side: when they talk about other nations' involvement in carbon tax, they will very carefully leave out the word 'economy-wide'. We have an economy-wide one; others have just bits and pieces. There is no other nation in the world that has an economy-wide carbon tax. In the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report, in 2007-08 Australia was ranked 10th in terms of wastefulness of government spending. In 2012-2013 we had slumped to 48th. That is, Australia was ranked as far more wasteful under the Rudd-Gillard government than when Howard left office. In 2007-08 Australia was ranked 68th in terms of burden of government regulation. In 2012-2013 we are ranked 96th. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, can I leave you with one last comment before I go. It is in reference to a comment made by Mike Young, the Managing Director of BC Iron. Mike made the truthful comment: 'I know guys in New York who will not invest in Australia until this government is gone.' If you want to come into this place and talk quotes, that is a quote. Believe me, if this fight wants to have a fight on carbon tax—

Debate interrupted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (16:30): Order! It being 4.30pm I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT
Carbon Pricing

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (16:30): Two years on and the carbon tax is a major breach of faith, when we were promised we would never have to pay. We all remember five days before the last election when Prime Minister Julia Gillard said 'there will be no carbon tax under a government I lead'. Well, we all know that now, in 2012, we have a carbon tax, a tax that is hurting all Australians. It is no scare campaign; it is absolute fact. All Australians, and indeed Territorians, are experiencing higher electricity prices, higher freight costs and higher refrigerant costs. All these costs are being passed on to consumers or being absorbed by the business operators themselves.
Businesses have told me of their increased operating costs, which the Prime Minister said they should just pass onto their consumers. My local business operators tell me that they cannot pass on all the costs to the consumers. These small business operators are not the big polluters. The Darwin City Council is not a big polluter, but it has had to increase its rates as a direct result of the carbon tax—more costs passed onto my constituents. This is on top of increased electricity prices, which were also passed on because of the carbon tax.

Those on the other side say that this is a scare campaign. Well, quite frankly, that is insulting to the people of Darwin and Palmerston who are bearing the costs of this carbon tax. As I have said, the carbon tax is affecting all Territorians, especially small-business operators—the backbone of the Territory. It is also community groups, the tourism sector, mining and pastoral industries what are starting to feel the pain of this toxic carbon tax. No big polluters on that list!

At the beginning of the carbon tax debate my colleague Senator Scullion and I both raised the issue of remoteness in the Territory and how the carbon tax would significantly impact us all because of the increased freight costs. The carbon tax, we say, is a tax on remoteness. It is a tax on Territorians; It is a tax on those who rely on freight for delivery of items. Freight companies have started to pass on extra costs, which have to be passed onto consumers. That means, if the companies do not absorb the increased costs, like the Prime Minister said they should, it will mean increased costs for Territorian consumers, not just the Territory business operators. There just does not seem to be any logic here.

In the past I have raised in this place practical and real examples of impacts to businesses in Darwin of the carbon tax. Examples included the cost of refrigeration gas, automotive air-conditioning re-gassing; local frozen water or ice producers and increases in gas costs and electricity costs. Fish NT cited the potential for five price increases for produce from the point of catch to the point of sale; a local business with several separate entities, including a croc farm, and the increase of costs derived from hikes in electricity and freight across all areas.

Then there are local business operator Top North Auto Air-conditioning, a small local business in Winnellie that confirmed with me today that their purchase price for auto gas has gone up 276 per cent since the start of the carbon tax. A 276 per cent increase in there operating costs which has to be absorbed, or passed onto Territorians as the Prime Minister said.

What does this mean for Territorians? It means the cost of re-gassing your car in the Territory has just gone through the roof as a result of the carbon tax. Everyone knows that you cannot drive around Darwin and Palmerston in a non-air-conditioned car—well, you can, but it would be very uncomfortable! So there are more increased costs.

Failed Labor government policies have also made it very expensive to live in Darwin, and the carbon tax is making it worse. But Territorians decided a few weeks ago that they did not trust Labor, so they voted them out. At least now Territorians know that they have a Country Liberal government and a coalition opposition here that are absolutely opposed to the carbon tax and we will do everything they can to repeal the carbon tax should we elected in the next
Sydney Protests

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (16:34): I want to make some comments about the events in Sydney on the past weekend that saw a demonstration against a video insulting the prophet Mohammad degenerate into a violent rampage that not only led to damage of property and the breaking of the law but also bought into question once again—from some—the value of multiculturalism to the Australian community.

Let me reaffirm my condemnation of those who showed no respect for law and order. I deplore their behaviour and, in particular, want to make the point that this behaviour does a great disservice to their community, who often have to bear the brunt of the consequences of this aggression.

Multiculturalism is a term we have used for decades to essentially describe the culturally diverse nature of the Australian community, a community that has been built on generations of migration from across the world. Multiculturalism has worked in this country, despite the experience of other countries. Australian multiculturalism is unique and it has been successful, in spite of some and despite the events in Sydney last Saturday.

Last night I attended the inaugural Australian Multicultural Council Lecture delivered by Mr Frank Lowy, an eminent Australian and a migrant success story, I agree with Mr Lowy that multiculturalism is indeed a work in progress that needs to be taken to the next level, but is an inherently successfully piece of work. I also agreed with the Prime Minister when she said that multiculturalism is about a balance between rights and responsibilities—and I am heartened to hear the opposition leader reflect on the value of multiculturalism and voice his support for the valuable contribution it has made to the Australian community.

It is all too easy for critics of multiculturalism to cite events of last Saturday as evidence for why we should abandon multiculturalism or indeed as examples of how it divides Australians and causes ghettos, or as examples of the failure of Muslims, in this instance, to integrate. I have in the past rejected these assertions and will continue to do so, because the empirical evidence of the past decades points to a successful coherent Australian community, not perfect, but overwhelmingly successful. I am not one of those people who, as Senator Cory Bernadi suggests, naively:

... cling to the romantic idealisation of the generations of migrants who have successfully settled in Australia, thinking things will continue just as they have in the past.

Leadership is important on this issue and I want to refer to the wise and admirable leadership shown by members of my community in Melbourne this week. I refer to the leadership shown by La Trobe University's Professor Joseph Camilleri, who is the Director of the Centre for Dialogue, who convened a press conference on Tuesday at which there were present religious leaders of the Islamic and Coptic Christian communities, who came together to denounce the weekend violence and to denounce the film, which denigrates the Prophet Mohammed, which indeed led to those actions.

I want to pay particular tribute and express my gratitude to His Grace Bishop Suriel of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions who cares deeply for and advocates strongly for the plight of Coptic Christians and works tirelessly for the Coptic Christian community here in Australia. His leadership in joining with leaders of the Muslim community is to
be commended. The community leaders from Melbourne's Muslim community also need to be commended for the work they do in promoting inter-faith dialogue. I want to mention Sheik Riad Galil, OAM, Imam of the West Heidelberg Mosque, Mr Mohamed Elmasri, Islamic community liaison officer, and my very good friend Mr Nail Aykan, who is the general manager of the Islamic Council of Victoria. I also want to commend the Egyptian Consul-General, Mr Khaled Rizk, who was also present at the press conference on Tuesday.

The leaders of both communities were at one in denouncing the video, in rejecting any attempt at vilification aimed against any religion and in upholding the right of people to engage in peaceful protest and express their views, as long as this is done without verbal or physical violence aimed at authorities or people of other faiths.

The Egyptian Muslim and Coptic communities have for some time been in consultation with the Centre for Dialogue, exploring the prospects of coming together to discuss issues of common concern. Last weekend's events have strengthened their resolve to do so. I want to commend their work and I want this parliament to recognise their work and encourage the very good work they do. (Time expired)

**Sturt Electorate: Druze Community**

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (16:40): It is a pleasure to be speaking on the adjournment rather than in the full flight of question time, which is not always as easy and pleasant as speaking on the adjournment. But, tonight, unfortunately, I have to talk about the terrible tragedy that occurred for the Druze community in my electorate. The community has its community hall in my electorate and on 4 July it was deliberately burnt to the ground.

The Druze community in Sturt has a very long history, not since the Second World War or even the First World War, but going right back to the 19th century, when the Druze began arriving in South Australia, as they did throughout the Western World, leaving the part of the world in which they live—in Syria, Lebanon and Israel. They have made a great contribution to the state of South Australia over a long period of time.

Unfortunately, on 4 July, foolish, mindless vandals burnt to the ground their community hall, which they had built with their own sweat, tears and cash. Religious artefacts were destroyed, equipment was destroyed and in fact the entire hall was razed to the ground. All the memories that had been invested in their community hall went with the flames of that unfortunate arson attack. It was the place where the Druze community felt safest, where they conducted their funerals, their weddings and their community events, their real interest in education for their young people and it is where they kept their culture and the Arabic language alive for their own community.

They are now trying to get their community back on its legs again, and they will, with a lot of support from the community throughout the eastern and north-eastern suburbs. In fact, within hours and days of the arson attack, other community groups were offering their halls, their school halls and their local council halls for the Druze community. Paynham Hall and Olympic Hall, one of them a local council hall and the other a hall for the Greek community, were offered to the Druze community to conduct their weddings, their funerals and their education, and that has been the case since that time.

Sadly, as is the case with many community organisations, their insurance, while they were covered, was not adequate
enough. When many community groups take out insurance on things like community halls they insure them for the value they believe they are worth, but when it comes to rebuilding after a tragedy like this they find they do not have nearly enough funds. So, many of us—members of parliament, local councillors and community leaders—have banded together to ask the state and federal governments, and others, for emergency funding, for infrastructure funding, from whatever pots of money are available through local, state and federal governments to help the Druze community get back on their feet. They are waiting to hear about their tax deductibility status for grants and for contributions made by individuals and businesses in the community as this will encourage people to provide for the Druze community so that they can rebuild the hall.

They have my full support, as I am sure they will have from all members of this House. The Druze community have had a great struggle for hundreds of years because of their great uniqueness, living in the mountains. As the member for Eden-Monaro would know, having been in the Middle East as a soldier, the Druze community have existed in a very fractious part of the world under Israeli control, Lebanese control and Syrian control. They are a very proud and, some would say, feisty people. They have survived. They have often been left alone by all of the different empires that have passed through because of their reputation for being great family people, village people and supporters of each other.

I hope and pray that they will be able to resolve the issues surrounding the refinancing of their Druze community hall as soon as possible. They have been great supporters of mine, as I have been of theirs, over the 19 years that I have been the member for Sturt. I know that the Jewish community, Christian communities and non-religious communities all want to work together to ensure that the Druze community can rebuild as soon as possible. I seek leave to table the letter of support that I wrote to them on 10 August this year to help them with any applications they might be making for grants and support to rebuild their community.

Leave granted.

Norfolk Island

Taxation

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:45): I rise to talk about Norfolk Island, which is part of the electoral division of Canberra. In particular, I want to talk about the benefits that Norfolk Islanders are missing out on by not being part of the Australian taxation system. For the record, Norfolk Island is part of the Commonwealth of Australia, but it is a self-governing external territory.

The issue of Norfolk Island's status and its decision to remain outside the Australian tax system, I believe, deprives the residents of this beautiful and historic island from many benefits that other Australians enjoy. There is an assembly in Norfolk Island that oversees the island's affairs, but the 1,500 or so residents who live there do not pay Australian income tax. This is a historical legacy, but the Norfolk Island government has passed a motion showing its willingness to engage in changing this. Understandably, the Norfolk Island community wants help. I understand its issues, as I have been there many times now since I was elected to be the member for Canberra—I think it is six or seven times—and I am staunchly supportive of ways to help Norfolk Islanders.

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, of which I am a member, is well aware that the Norfolk Island economy has declined between 2006 and this year. Economic activity was down 24 per cent on the
previous year. About 40 per cent of shops on the island have closed. There has been a
decrease in the population of about nine per
cent. Mike King, the ALP member of the
assembly, has described the situation on the
island as one of ‘uncertainty’. There is
uncertainty because Norfolk Island has
reached something of crossroads.

The Minister for Regional Australia,
Regional Development and Local
Government, Simon Crean, and I visited
Norfolk Island together, and we talked with
the residents there about what they need.
But, as Minister Crean has said about the
demands of Norfolk Islanders for Medicare
services and access to the PBS:

They should have thought about that some years
ago when they were resisting joining the tax
system. These things can't be switched on and off
overnight. They've always known that their own
health system is unsustainable. I am prepared to
work with them, but … It has to be part of a
comprehensive package.

As part of our commitment to Norfolk
Island, the Labor government have already
provided $14.1 million in assistance. This
includes $2.9 million in emergency
assistance to support public health and
welfare and energy supply and $11.2 million
to terminate the contract with Air Nauru.

In the May budget, the Labor government
focused on key areas of economic
development, public sector governance,
community wellbeing and environmental
management. We provided funding for many
initiatives, including measures to assist with
a review of hospital services, the
development of a strategic plan, funds to
improve tourism, and measures to address
pest and disease control.

I am actively involved in working with
Norfolk Island to find solutions. I see a
willingness and acceptance by most residents
that steps need to be taken to help the island
while it is experiencing difficulties. I see
evidence that islanders want to work with the
Labor government to address some of their
historic problems. The federal Department of
Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts
and Sport has already been working for some
time on governance and taxation models for
Norfolk Island, and earlier this year a
representative from the Australian Taxation
Office was on the island to discuss various
governance models.

I know that many islanders are concerned
about preserving their cultural heritage while
finding ways to keep the population stable
and economically viable. There is, however,
a group of Norfolk Islanders who say they
will find solutions to their own problems.
They do not want the Commonwealth to help
them out and deliver the services that all
other Australians can access. But, as
Minister Crean has rightly said, a solution
cannot be based on the islanders simply
demanding that the Commonwealth gives
them every benefit and service without
Norfolk Islanders contributing to our tax
system.

Most Norfolk Islanders do have an
appetite for reform and an appetite to
participate in systems that deliver net
benefits to their community. I see on Norfolk
a genuine desire to improve their health
and mental health services. Currently there is no
resident psychiatrist on Norfolk, and there
are no other proper services to treat people
affected by mental illness. This is why many
islanders are saying that they want a health
system and they want access to Medicare and
the PBS. They want access to the new
initiatives in mental health care and dental
care, such as the $2.2 billion mental health
care package. Norfolk Islanders also want
access to aged-care provisions and the other
health services that our government has
created to assist Australians in need. We
have also delivered a range of programs for
families.
In terms of the situation on Norfolk Island, I am committed to working through the issues and finding ways to assist the local residents of this island, but the fact is that, to access the health system and other components of government services, Norfolk Island needs to be part of the Australian tax system. I look forward to continuing to work with the people of Norfolk Island to help them overcome historic and current issues.

**Aged-Care Funding**

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (16:50): Over the months, I have been meeting with aged-care service providers in O'Connor and Western Australia generally. This has included various meetings and correspondence with Julie Christensen, CEO of Narrogin Cottage Homes and Karinya residential care; Stephen Kobelke, CEO of Aged and Community Services, Western Australia; and Susan Harris and Jillian Nalder on behalf of the board of Waratah Lodge in Wagin.

I feel their frustration with this government's handling of aged-care policy, particularly with respect to the claw-back of the Aged Care Funding Instrument. However, I have also noted that, as yet, they have not been fully assured that an alternative government would address their concerns, particularly with respect to the rural and regional services in WA. To this end, I have invited the shadow minister to my electorate of O'Connor to engage directly with these stakeholders to address these concerns.

The aged-care industry have raised a number of issues with me, but I rise today to specifically speak about the government's changes to the Aged Care Funding Instrument, ACFI, and the decision not to apply indexation. The ACFI is the instrument that allocates the government subsidies to residential aged-care providers. The government has decided to achieve more than $430 million of savings through ACFI changes, as well as millions of additional dollars through its refusal to apply indexation to the ACFI.

There are a number of critical government failures in relation to this decision. I will address each in turn. The first and fundamental failure relates to the government's refusal to acknowledge that the ACFI changes are a funding cut. No cute words by government about 'adjustments to trends' and no amount of sidestepping referring to apparent funding boosts in other areas will escape the truth. The government's sidestepping of the fact that this is a cut is entirely unhelpful for many service providers who are suffering under its decision. The second failure in relation to ACFI is the government's failure to advise or engage with the industry before making the decision. In fact, industry representatives have advised me that they found out about the cuts just seven days before they were implemented.

The third failure in relation to ACFI is that a blanket decision not to apply indexation to the instrument fails to acknowledge the huge cost pressures in Western Australia. In WA, the mining boom is resulting in skills shortages, upward wage pressures and increased operational costs, including soaring accommodation and utility costs. To not apply indexation in this environment is entirely untenable.

The government claims these cuts are required because of overclaiming by certain aged-care providers. The final failure is that these cuts do not address this problem. As the board of Waratah Lodge in my electorate has rightly pointed out, if the government's concern is really with overclaiming, why wouldn't the government sanction or punish
those facilities rather than implementing a whole-of-industry subsidy cut?

The effect of these failures in WA, especially in regional areas, is significant and in urgent need of redress. Many service providers in my electorate operate on a very thin, or even no, profit margin. For example, Waratah Lodge is an 18-bed low-care facility in Wagin. It has been open since 1985 and has become an integral part of the community. Waratah Lodge's current-year budget is for a net profit of zero. It simply cannot afford to shoulder the burden of the ACFI cuts this financial year. A similar story exists at Narrogin Cottage Homes, an aged-care facility that was started in 1978 and has 35 ageing-in-place beds. This facility operated at a loss in July and can simply not sustain the cuts to its subsidy.

The reality is: aged-care service providers face unique cost pressures in WA as compared to other states. Additionally, service providers in rural and regional Australia face unique cost challenges as compared to their city counterparts. Despite these differentials, subsidies are pegged at the same level across the country, and it adds insult to injury to then introduce blanket cuts to the subsidies without notice.

I call on the government and the opposition to urgently provide assistance to WA regional, rural and remote service providers and consider calls for a proper cost-of-care study which would unveil the real costs of delivering care services in the regions. I also call on the government to immediately reverse its ACFI funding cuts decision.

Before I sit down, I think it is important to reflect on what this debate is really about. It is about caring for older Australians. It is a debate about our parents, our grandparents, our community leaders and, in many cases, the pioneers of our regional and rural communities. In this place, we have a responsibility to ensure proper care for these older Australians, without defaulting to political point-scoring. I am passionate about supporting the aged-care sector in regional and rural Australia. Older Australians should be able to access proper care and support in their regional towns, where they have played such an integral role for so many years. (Time expired)

Building the Education Revolution Program: Laburnum Primary School

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (16:55): This afternoon I would like to talk about yet another great local delivery of a new school building under the federal government's Building the Education Revolution program. This one was at a very large primary school in my electorate, Laburnum Primary School, a school with around 820 students. Unlike many other schools, it is full and bursting at the seams. Somewhat differently for my electorate, it does not have a lot of space to put buildings on. It has already grown a fair deal in the years since it was established in 1964. When the program was announced and the Victorian state government offered schools various template buildings, this was a school where a template was not going to fit. After quite some period of time and a bit of toing and froing between the state government, me, the school and the parents, the school got itself an individual design, and it is something that will certainly stand the test of time. It already had a very large and quite new school hall to fit all its students in, so the school looked internally as to what it could do. The result is a new library, a community and staff centre and refurbishment of classrooms. Like so many schools closer in to the city, it had to build up to do that. Like very few schools in my electorate, it now has a two-storey building that covers part of its grounds.
The results speak for themselves, because even the entry to the school, which once used to be the typical poky little corridor that so many of us would know with our local primary schools, is now a great open space. It is really a grand statement for a school and it shows off the school from the very first step when you get inside the door. Upstairs is the staff and community centre, which the students especially love to use because it is a great open space that can be adapted across many different configurations. For instance, if all the grade 6 students—and there are very many of them at a school so large—want to have a meeting, they can use that space upstairs.

The old library was just far too small. When I was there on 4 September for the official opening, the school captains, Kate, Zoe, Angus and Jack, took me through the library. The school was holding a book fair that week, which the school does every week. They have a particular affinity for reading at Laburnum Primary, and a lot of that is driven by the acting principal, Jean Denning, who started the first 10 years of her teaching career as a teacher librarian. This year they had enough space to display everything and give children and parents the opportunity to purchase their favourite books. That is a really wonderful thing to be able to do with a new space. Previously there had to pretty much close off part of the library to enable the book fair to happen. From this year forwards, they can do it with no extra effort and no doubling-up of space.

At the opening ceremony, I was ably assisted by the school council president, Liz Brentnal; the acting assistant principal, Jo Blannon; the school captains; and, very importantly, the former school principal, Gavin Gamble, who was there when I first went to the school in 2008 and was again there in 2009 when we spoke about what could be done with the money under the BER program that would be best for the school. Gavin was a very popular principal at the school, and he got a great reception when he came back to the school assembly. I would like to think that some of us, some day—many years or a year after we have left what we are doing—will get a reception like that!

It was, I think, the 34th BER project that I have opened in the electorate. They are certainly adding up. It has been a great result all round. At every single school that I go to, I talk to the teachers and the parents and the students about what they have got out of the BER, and I am always met with an overwhelmingly positive response. In Laburnum's case, the buildings were from 1964, nearly 48 years old. They have now got something brand new that will keep both the school and the students of the future going for many, many years to come.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! It being 5 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 17:00

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Bandt to move:

That this House:

(1) affirms that science is central to our economy and prosperity and that government investment in research is central to maintaining and growing Australia’s scientific capacity;

(2) notes the:

(a) growing concern amongst the science and research community about the security of funding; and

(b) risks to jobs and the economy if funding is not secured, especially in Victoria where much of Australia’s health and medical research is conducted; and

(3) calls on the Treasurer to:
Ms Rishworth to move:

That this House:
(1) notes the significant impact of the United Kingdom Government’s refusal to index pensions allocated to British expatriates living in Australia under the United Kingdom’s National Insurance Fund;
(2) recognises that:
(a) affected British pensioners have made contributions to this scheme;
(b) British pensions for expatriates continue to be indexed in numerous other countries including the United States of America and within the European Union, but are frozen in mostly former Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa; and
(c) the United Kingdom Government’s:
(i) current policy discriminates in its treatment of its expatriate pensioners depending on their country of residence; and
(ii) unfair and discriminatory policy has resulted in the erosion of the purchasing power of British pensions for more than 250,000 British pensioners living in Australia;
(3) acknowledges:
(a) that through the Australian pension system, the Australian Government provides more than $100 million each year to recipients of a British pension living in Australia, which helps supplement the shortfall created by the United Kingdom Government’s frozen pension policy; and
(b) the ongoing efforts of the Australian Government in making repeated representations to the United Kingdom Government, calling on it to address the issue of frozen pensions for British expatriates living in Australia;
(4) commends the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for her continued efforts in raising the issue with the United Kingdom Government, most recently during her meeting with the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Work and Pensions; and
(5) calls on the United Kingdom Government to treat recipients of a British pension equitably by fairly indexing entitlements regardless of where they choose to retire, so that British pensioners can receive the full benefits they deserve.

Mr Abbott to move:

That this House:
(1) notes that:
(a) since the devastating terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, over 100 Australians have died and many others have suffered injury as a result of terrorist attacks overseas;
(b) the victims of ‘September 11’, the two Bali bombings, the London and Jakarta bombings and the Mumbai terrorist attacks, were targeted because they were citizens of countries where people could choose how they lived and what faith they might follow; and
(c) 12 October 2012 will mark the tenth anniversary of the 2002 Bali bombings;
(2) recognises that:
(a) many Australian families continue to suffer as a result of their loss and injury from overseas terrorist acts;
(b) victims of overseas terrorism have not been entitled to compensation such as that received by domestic victims of crime under the various State and Territory victims of crime schemes; and
(c) the Government did not support amendments to the Social Security Amendment (Supporting Australian Victims of Terrorism Overseas) Bill 2012 which would have provided assistance for any action after 10 September 2001; and
(3) supports the Coalition’s request that the Minister make the appropriate retrospective declarations so that all of the Australian victims of overseas terrorism acts since 10 September 2001, or their next of kin, can receive this important, but modest, help.
Mr Oakeshott to present a bill for an act to continue the National Electricity Law as a Commonwealth law, and for other purposes.
Thursday, 20 September 2012

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Bruce Scott) took the chair at 09:29.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Micah Challenge

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (09:30): This week, I was again delighted to show my support for Micah Challenge. Micah Challenge is a global campaign of Christians speaking out against poverty and injustice. It is currently working towards achieving the Millennium Development goals established in September 2000, in particular, to halve poverty and to improve human wellbeing by 2015.

As many of my colleagues are aware, I have been a strong advocate for this fantastic program throughout my time in parliament. This Tuesday, I was delighted to see this support grow as I was joined by my colleagues on the front lawn of Parliament House to place their photographs as part of a puzzle and to reinforce the parliament's commitment to contributing to the Micah Challenge goals.

During the Micah Challenge events, which ran all throughout Monday and Tuesday, I was pleased to meet with members from my community who are also strong advocates for this initiative. During this meeting I was advised by Sophie, Rachel and Caitlin—Year 10 student of Wycliffe Christian School in my electorate—that since 2000, great progress has been made. I would like to bring this to the attention of the House: more children than ever before are surviving to their fifth birthday and child mortality reduced since 1990; more women are receiving skilled care during pregnancy and childbirth, with maternal mortality reduced by 47 per cent since 1990; an additional 110 million children around the world are now in school; and finally, the target on safe drinking water has been largely achieved—although there is still more work to be done—with 89 per cent of the world's population drinking from an approved water source.

While these achievements are important, there is indeed a lot more work to be done. These students reminded me of this. I am greatly encouraged by the support of my colleagues, my family and also the local community that together are working to achieve an improvement in poverty across our globe, and indeed our region. To achieve this, more people fighting for and more people understanding the issue is critical. That is part of what Micah does. They encourage an awareness of the challenges the developing world faces in their local communities. Fundamental amenities we take for granted—clean water, clean toilet facilities and universal access to education—are not always available in the developing world. I wish to congratulate Micah Challenge for the work that they have been doing and for their ongoing advocacy.

St Mina and St Marina Coptic Orthodox Church

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (09:33): Thankyou. I rise today to express how proud I was to attend the official opening of the new St Mina and St Marina Coptic Orthodox Church in Hallam last Saturday with my federal parliamentary colleague Alan Tudge, member for Aston, and other state colleagues, including the member for Narre Warren North, Luke Donnellan. In particular, I would like to congratulate His Grace Bishop Suriel, the Bishop of Melbourne,
Canberra, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and New Zealand, and the current clergy serving at this parish, including, in particular, Father Abanoub Attalla.

This church is a landmark building in every sense of the word. I am certainly proud to say that this church will be utilised by over 700 Coptic families. It is great to see a thriving Coptic community in the local area that I represent.

This church has a unique history, initially being on a property containing nothing other than a small cattle shed in Hallam in 1993. This church, as with the Coptic community, has blossomed and grown. I am now proud to say that the St Mina and St Marina Coptic Orthodox Church in Hallam has a new church, a spectacular church, that the entire community can enjoy.

I was raised, and still am, a Catholic. Certainly, in my view, there are certain benchmarks of what I perceive to be a great church. For example, a great church should be able to inspire the community—sometimes with its beauty and its location, but it should also be a focal point, a centre. A great church is a refuge and a sanctuary; a place of solitude when you need it. A great church allows you to hear the voice of God, but also to be heard by God. A great church offers you faith, hope and renewal. A great church has strong companionate leaders who reach out to the community. A great church reaches out to all people, regardless of faith and ideals. In a sense it becomes a community hub—sometimes a spiritual community hub. On all those benchmark criteria I have to say that St Mina and St Marina is a great church. It is a church that you can see at night, driving home on the Princes Highway, a church that you can see in Hallam when it is lit at night. It is a place, even by its very visage, that offers hope, comfort, solace and support. It says a lot about the people who literally built this church with their own hands: members of the Coptic community.

As I said, the Coptic community is a great community and we have a mayor—Mayor Sam Aziz—who is a member of that community. The Coptic community is contributing to our community and to our area. If you ever wanted a symbol of the contribution that this community has made in my area, that church is it.

It was an honour to be there to share a very special moment, particularly with His Grace Bishop Suriel. I congratulate the Coptic community on that church and on the contribution they make to our community in making our community and our country a stronger place.

**Dawson Electorate: Sugar Industry**

*Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (09:35): It is no secret that I am a passionate supporter of the sugar industry, given that my electorate is the biggest sugar-growing electorate in the nation. We should all be passionate supporters of the sugar industry in this place, because Australia is the third largest exporter of sugar. More than 4,000 cane farms along Australia’s eastern seaboard are mostly owned by farming families. The industry underpins 50,000 jobs in this nation. Sugar production is the social and economic fabric that has woven itself through the development of many coastal Queensland towns. Despite its critics, sugar is a natural part of life. In moderation, it plays an important role in providing the energy necessary for human bodies to function properly. The Australian Diabetes Council states that no single nutrient, including sugar, is responsible for weight gain or loss. The Dieticians Association of Australia believes it is simplistic and unhelpful to blame sugar alone for rising rates of obesity*
and other health related problems. Despite this, the sugar industry has enemies who are trying to destroy sugar's reputation.

Earlier this year three US academics made a string of outlandish claims about sugar—for instance, calling it 'toxic', saying it was linked to the rise of non-communicable diseases and that its effects were akin to that of alcohol. They advocated for the severe regulation of sugar and pushed for a tax based on the sugar content of a food product. These are things that I utterly reject. I note that we now have diet books on the market disparaging sugar as a 'sweet poison'. Well, there are enemies of sugar out there and there are also enemies within government, unfortunately. The current National Health and Medical Research Council's Australian Dietary Guidelines on sugar are this:

Consume only moderate amounts of sugar and foods containing added sugars.

That is great, but the draft guidelines that are out now change that to say:
Limit intake of food and drinks containing added sugar. In particular, limit sugar-sweetened drinks.

The reality, though, is that the systemic literature review of all the papers submitted to the NHMRC advocating for a change in sugar's status from 'moderate' to 'limit' as a means to combat obesity were found to be weak. There is no clear scientific justification for it. What is more, the facts are that, while sugar consumption in Australia has dropped 23 per cent since 1980, obesity rates have doubled and diabetes has tripled. If the Dietary Guidelines are changed from 'moderate' to 'limit' intake of sugar this will end up in the lap of Food Standards Australia New Zealand and a purge will begin on added sugar in food products, replacing it with fat and artificial sweeteners, each with their own dietary issues.

The same situation occurred in the UK recently were authorities regulated the amount of salt in a product, changing the taste of their iconic HP Sauce. What will the iconic Australian Tim Tam taste like if its sugar content is halved? This is nanny state madness. I call on the Minister for Health and on this government to tell the NHMRC to stick to the facts when determining the new Australian dietary guidelines. And the facts they have found is that there are only weak arguments to change the sugar intake from 'moderate' to 'limit'. (Time expired)

Tasmania: Public Health System

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Status of Women and Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development) (09:39): I have spoken many times in this place previously about the Tasmanian health system. I particularly want to talk about it again today, because just last week Ms Plibersek, the Minister for Health, announced that they had reached an agreement with the state government to start the Commonwealth investment in elective surgery. Late last financial year—in late June—the Commonwealth announced an additional package of more than $300 million for Tasmania's health system in recognition of Tasmania's unique circumstances. When it comes to health issues, there is a higher incidence of chronic disease, a higher incidence of people with a disability—a higher incidence of a whole range of unfortunate risk factors in terms of the health outcomes for Tasmanians. So it was great to see Minister Plibersek announce last week that there is an agreement with the state government for the elective surgery money to flow. That will commence very, very quickly. Hopefully by the end of this month we will start to see some of those surgeries. That will be an additional 2,600 elective surgeries over four years and more than $30 million for elective surgery. Of course, this comes on top of the
more than $20 million for walk-in centres in Hobart and Launceston, which will be open seven days a week, 16 hours a day, we hope to also see that up and running.

I was also really pleased to be able to tour a facility in my own electorate recently, the Cygnet Medical Centre, which received a grant of $1.2 million from the federal government and further assistance from the Huon Valley Council. This facility is a great facility. It is wonderful to see the federal government working with local government on rural and regional health services. It will have four consulting rooms and a treatment room, and case-conferencing and teaching sessions are able to be accommodated there, plus there will be separate access for emergency vehicles. The facility is allowing the Huon Valley Council to attract more doctors to the area. Having doctors in the Huon Valley has been an issue for some time, and seeing the run-down facility was what convinced me to advocate on behalf of the local community for that additional $1.2 million. It is great to see that the building is almost complete. We hope to have it opened officially early next year, but it will open its doors in December for the local community. It is really good to see that in my local community, on top of the investment in the state wide health services.

This comes on top of the government's previous investments in health in my electorate: the Geeveston Medical Centre, with an investment of more than $400,000; the Huon Doctors Surgery, with more than $200,000; and of course, my GP Super Clinic at Clarence, which was $5.5 million. That GP Super Clinic is now going very successfully. I understand that they now have around nine doctors and are open seven days a week. It is great to see that federal government investment, both in my electorate and in southern Tasmania, to improve the health of local Tasmanians.

Casey Electorate: Warburton CFA Station

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (09:42): A few weeks back I had the pleasure of attending the official opening of the Warburton CFA station, which has a very rich history. It was great to see all the volunteers who work so hard for the Warburton community through the Warburton CFA. It was a day to celebrate the history of the CFA and a day to look forward to its strong future. At the opening we heard of the rich history of the CFA, which was founded back in January 1915, when the brigade purchased a hand reel with 600 feet of hose, one hydrant and two branches. The equipment was kept under the band rotunda in the main street of Warburton. Of course, since those early days the Warburton CFA has grown. It has done so much for the local community. In fact, it was the only brigade in the Upper Yarra Valley for a long period of time.

The day of the official opening was a time to recognise some of those who had volunteered so much to the Warburton CFA. Tony van Meurs, the brigade captain, presided with John Peberdy; Barry Marshall, the Warburton CFA president and ex captain; Don Tompkins, the operations and Yarra Valley catchment officer; and Hazel Clothier, the MC for the event. National medals were presented to Warren Unthank, John De Boer and, posthumously, to Laura Sutherland on behalf of her late husband, Peter Sutherland, who passed away earlier in the year. Service medals were also presented. A 60-year service medal was presented to Warren Borgas; a 55-year medal to Barry Marshall; a 30-year medal to Peter Reidy, a 25-year medal to Michael Lazarus and Warren Unthank, 10-year medals to Michael Priest; and five-year medals to Hazel Clothier, Valissa Enever, Toby Harty, Brendan Smith, Leila Smith,
Emma Van Meurs and Michael Walden. I pay tribute to all of those at the Warburton CFA for the work that they do for the Warburton community.

**Australian Public Service**

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (09:45): The Public Service is once again under attack by the Liberals. The Liberals are proudly talking up the slashing of 20,000 Public Service positions in the APS. This contrasts with Labor's approach, which is to find savings through efficiencies, not to slash jobs. We have been very clear that efficiency dividends and efficiency measures do not target jobs. Labor has a proven record of finding savings through tightening rules on travel, through better use of teleconferencing, through smarter technology, and through identifying areas where efficiency and better management can reduce overheads. But the Liberals are driven by ideology and a complete disdain for the Public Service. They show no understanding of how the APS operates, or what the APS does.

The truth is that the public sector provides an incredibly diverse and invaluable range of services. There are over 250,000 people employed by the federal government in departments, agencies, statutory authorities, and government business entities. These public services help every Australian right from their birth through until the end of their life. It is public servants who deliver babies in public hospitals. They provide pre- and postnatal assistance to families. They immunise our children. They educate our children and assist those who have learning or other difficulties. They train us and teach us and educate us. They house us and oversee rental and even mortgage management, as well as building codes and environmental standards. They provide the police who protect us and the military who fight against threats from terrorism. It is the public servants who are there after natural disasters wreak havoc. They deliver payments to people in need, such as drought assistance or payments to those left destitute from cyclones or bushfires. They care for those with disabilities. They care for those with mental health needs. They care for the aged.

These are the people who the coalition, the Liberals, want to sack. The Liberals pedal a myth that the public sector is too big and massive and indiscriminate job cuts are needed. In fact, according to research by the Centre for Policy Development, the proportion of Australia's GDP spent on the public sector is 35 per cent, much less than is spent in France, Denmark, Germany, the UK, Canada and even New Zealand. But these facts are not what the Liberals want to hear. Randomly slashing public sector jobs will impact on all Australians either directly through loss of services or indirectly by destabilising the institutions that help every Australian.

**Tourism**

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (09:47): I rise to encourage all members in this place to support World Tourism Day on 27 September. This is an industry that employs one million people throughout the tourism and hospitality sector. 27 September coincides with the next publication of job vacancies in Australia by the ABS, once more drawing attention to Labor's failure to fix tourism's 36,000-worker shortage. Labor's small-scale guest worker scheme neither fills the gap nor helps provide quality service. More needs to be done to help the tourism industry.

When Joe Hockey produced the tourism white paper some 10 years ago, he identified the need to achieve a standard of 'platinum plus' in our tourism industry. Other countries deliver
superior service through the practice of tipping and a cultural respect for hospitality as a vocation. The same challenges exist today in addition to our currency disadvantage. There will be a billion tourists who travel internationally this year, and Australia now contributes a record eight million of those. An article one week ago in the online travel press, e-Travel Blackboard, paints a clear picture. It is titled 'Aussies pot of gold for Ireland tourism'. The article highlights that Ireland has experienced a 5.7 per cent increase in Australian visitors for the year, making us the strongest growing market in the country. So, whilst our population is one-third of one per cent of all humanity, living as far from Ireland as you can get, we have become Ireland's seventh largest market overall.

The tragedy of Australian tourism is that the minister has made several attempts to deliver competition. He is constantly let down by his colleagues. For instance, at the Tourism and Transport Forum leaders summit in 2007, Minister Ferguson warned:

"Australia relies almost exclusively on air travel … That is why I implore the industry to take hold of the debate before the debate takes hold of you and you are left dealing with the added expense of a carbon tax …"

We all know the rest. Further, on 2 March he assured the tourism industry that the government would not put up the passenger movement charge. Now, thanks to 'Wasteful Wayne', Australia has the largest passenger movement charge in the developed world for short-haul flights. Thirdly, Minister Ferguson launched a prospectus to find investors for between 50,000 and 70,000 new beds by 2020. Six days later in the budget, the Treasurer doubled the withholding tax for managed investment trusts, a most common structure for accommodation investments.

In the time remaining, I would like to encourage Minister Ferguson to keep trying. He must not let his team continue to trash our sector. He should start by educating the Treasurer that, taking 18 months to appoint a business to start Cyclone Yasi's tourism infrastructure repairs is far too long. I am sure delegates at tomorrow's United Nations World Tourism Organization conference on emergency management and tourism would agree. Our tourism industry is too important to ignore and neglect. Those one million people who work in the tourism and hospitality sector deserve a better deal from this government.

**Dairy Industry**

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (09:51): Good morning, colleagues. It gives me great pleasure as a parliamentary secretary with special responsibility for dairy to mention two dairy enterprises in my region which, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be pleased about, in relation to growth. Tasmania's own dairy processor, Tasmanian Dairy Products, will celebrate the delivery of its first milk tanker on Tuesday next week in Smithton, in Circular Head, on the north-west coast. I will be there very much to celebrate. The tanker will be the first delivery of the annual intake of around 200,000 litres of milk. The milk will be dried to be sold as a powdered product to Asia and the Middle East. This is the culmination of a $70 million investment by Murray Goulburn Cooperative, Mitsubishi and our own group of farmers best described as the 'Greater Bradley Watson Group', who kick-started the idea and drove it to this fantastic outcome.

The factory is set to employ 70 people and has already provided construction jobs for around 150 over the 12-month build. The factory is built on the site of the former Gunns Timber mill, which goes to show that sometimes the closure of one business can provide an
opportunity for another. The site is huge and there is the potential to expand production even further into the future.

I do not know whether you are aware, colleagues, that there is a company called the Van Diemen's Land Company in the far north-west of Tassie, at a property called Woolnorth. It was established around 1824-25 and is the largest dairy property in Australia. It is now part of—as I just mentioned regarding Tasmanian Dairy Products—the most quickly expanding dairy production region in Australia. In 1992, Woolnorth focused its enterprises on dairying. For example, it now has 25,000 dairy cows, 24 dairy sheds, 6,500 beef cattle and 2,000 sheep; it employs around 160 people and 19,000 hectares of land is devoted to it. Its annual milk solids production for 2011-12 was 5.76 million kilograms. It is now proposing to double that production, to double the conversion from beef production to dairying and to double its employment capacity from 160 to 320. In the process, it is offsetting land in terms of formal reserves, covenant reserves and voluntary reserves in order to offset the land that is going to be used for the conversion. It is a very environmentally conscious company. I am really looking forward to working with it and developing this most important area, along with Tasmanian Dairy Products next Tuesday.

Wright Electorate: Beaudesert Rotary Club

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (09:54): I rise to speak about the tremendous work being done in my electorate by the Beaudesert Rotary Club. Recently, I attended the club's weekly meeting as a guest speaker and shared my experience of a recent trip aboard HMAS Anzac, as part of the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program in August this year. I spent five days with the Royal Australian Navy's ship, patrolling the waters around Somalia and learning how the sailors are tasked with protecting ships from pirates, preventing the trafficking of weapons and drugs, and stopping the trade of people. I was able to show photos of the trip and explain how it helped me to gain a greater appreciation for the work of the men and women who serve in the Australian Defence Force. I also explained that, through immersing myself in the everyday life of sailors, I gained a better understanding of the Navy's mission in the Middle or East and the cooperation of the coalition forces. The speech was also an opportunity to talk about Clive Nevelle, former constituent of Wright, who is now a sailor on board HMAS Anzac. It was quite a surprise to meet someone from my home town out in the middle of the Indian Ocean aboard an Australian vessel. Mr Nevelle, who originally was from Boonah, went to school at Aratula and later at the Boonah State High School. An article about Mr Nevelle was recently featured in the Fassifern Valley newspaper, a copy of which I sent to him out on the vessel. The speech was also an opportunity for the Rotary members to ask questions about the Defence Force role in the region, of which they were very interested to know more about.

This week, to reciprocate the hospitality of the ADF, I have the honour of hosting Lieutenant Scott Macpherson from the Royal Australian Navy, who escorted our recent parliamentary program participants into the Middle East operations area. Lieutenant Macpherson is here for four days to experience life as a parliamentarian. As I am sure many who have participated in the program previously would agree, this program offers an unprecedented awareness of the day-to-day life of those men and women who are consistently sent into harm's way and, likewise, for those men and women to see how we work here in the parliament and make the decisions that we do. I would like to thank the ADF Parliamentary...
Program and those who make it a success, both from this parliament and the ADF, for the opportunity to participate in this very worthwhile experience.

In closing, I also take this opportunity to say thank you to the members of the Beaudesert Rotary Club for allowing me to spend part of the evening with them and to take the opportunity to share my experiences with them, in particular, the President, Kevin Marsden, Chairman, Doug Larvers-McBain and guest Sergeant-at-Arms, Susie Gaarstead. Recently we had the Beaudesert Show, another community event where Beaudesert Rotary Club was involved in flipping burgers, along with the Jimboomba Rotary Club, who manned the gate. Rotary International is a formidable organisation which should be encouraged.

Chifley Electorate: St Michael's Primary School

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (09:57): Last Friday I had the opportunity to attend a special event where friends, family and teachers, past and present, gathered at the Blacktown Workers Club to celebrate a special event that took place in 1962—the first time the doors were opened at St Michael's Primary School. There was a room at the Blacktown Workers Club full of good memories and great humour. St Michael's has been such a valued member of our local community in Blacktown for so many years, and so many people have benefited from the dedication, care and commitment administered by those with the care of students at that school.

I was especially pleased to see so many former students step forward and share their memories on the night about growing up—the best years of their lives, as they said, being spent in the care of St Michael's Primary. It reflected the truly special place in the hearts and minds of locals. I just want to use my time today to thank Principal John Laffan, along with Parents and Friends Association President, Jennifer Warn and Secretary, Natasha Scanlon, for their warm invitation to the dinner. Because these things do take time to organise, prepare and coordinate, I also want to thank everyone associated with the evening for putting on a great night. I am sure it was even more special to celebrate that 50-year anniversary on a night that had been so well organised.

It has been a real highlight of my first term to build such a productive and engaged working relationship with the wonderful Catholic schools in the Chifley electorate, and I would like them to know that I very much appreciated sincerely their welcoming approach. It has been and remains my firm intention to support them in any way I possibly can. So many of us feel excited about the future of education, particularly those in the Catholic and independent sector, because of the realisation that we will fundamentally alter the nation's approach to the way that we invest in education in this country. That is why I am deeply disappointed to see the New South Wales government's $1.7 billion cut to education. Teachers and parents in the Catholic and independent sector know that a freeze to their funding is as bad as a cut, and it is the message that resonated yesterday in a meeting held between the Prime Minister and the Catholic and independent schools. That delegation comprised of senior representatives, including Bishop Anthony Fisher and also Dr John Collier, from St Andrew's Cathedral School, to name a few, there to echo the deep and serious concerns of educators, staff, parents and students about what is being proposed. I certainly call on the New South Wales government to reverse this surprise decision for the sake of quality education in New South Wales.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

London Olympic Games

Mr IRONS (Swan) (10:00): We are a nation of sports fans. We can see it at the local level and we can see where sport divides us, but at state and national level sport unites us. Naturally, Australians revel in the opportunity every four years to support our nation's athletes as they represent Australia at the greatest sporting event on earth. The Olympic Games provide the global audience with the highest sporting drama, and these games of London 2012 certainly did not disappoint and our athletes certainly played their part in what was a fantastic Olympics.

We were fortunate enough to have a representative for the electorate of Swan in Jayde Taylor, who competed for the Hockeyroos. Jayde played in each of the five preliminary games, including for 45 minutes in the one-nil loss to New Zealand, 40 minutes in the three-one victory over Germany and the one-nil triumph over the USA, 37 minutes in the one-nil victory over South Africa and 42 minutes in the nil-nil draw, with the eventual group winners and silver medallists, Argentina. Jayde and the girls did a commendable job, and we were very unlucky not to qualify for the semifinals, finishing level on points with Argentina and New Zealand at the top of group B, but third after the results and goal differences were taken into consideration. The Hockeyroos went on to beat China in the fifth and sixth classifications, and we are proud of their performance. Jayde is only 27 and we hope that she will still be on the team come Rio to have another crack at an Olympic title. In the meantime, we welcome her back to Australia and to Swan and wish her well in her continuing studies at Curtin University in interior architecture.

London provided a memorable setting and it was clear, from Danny Boyle's spectacular opening ceremony in the Olympic stadium, that it was going to be a memorable three weeks. The big stars did not disappoint and lit up the Olympic Park in Stratford, with Usain Bolt, Michael Phelps and Mo Farah making the headlines.

But the Olympics is not just about the winner; it is about the spirit of the sport. It was notable how, initially, sceptical Londoners got behind the games and how it built a sense of national pride for the poms that other policies would not have been able to achieve. As Sebastian Coe said at the closing ceremony of the Paralympics, the success of the games felt like closure after the 7-7 terrorist bombings of London, the day after London was officially awarded the games in 2005.

Let us never forget the power of sport to transform lives, transform places and transform countries. Let us resolve in this parliament to treat sports policy and the sports portfolio with a greater importance than has traditionally been the case. As well as uniting cities and participating countries behind their athletes, the Olympic Games aims to unite the world, if only for a short period. The tradition of the Olympic Truce dates back to the ninth century BC in Ancient Greece as a period during which war and conflict were halted to allow for safe travel to and from the ancient Olympic Games. Today the Olympic Truce represents the IOC's aim to inspire peace through sport and uses sport to forge friendship among athletes, young people and communities. I note it is traditional for the host country to present a resolution to
the United Nations formally calling for the truce. During the London Olympics, for the first time all 193 UN member states united to co-sponsor the Olympic Truce resolution for the games.

Each Olympics, new Australian heroes arise to inspire young athletes back home and strengthen the pride that many Australians feel for our success. As I stated in my recent speech about Australian's own silver medallist at the 1968 Mexico Olympics, Peter Norman, I was inspired as a 10-year-old by his great effort at those Olympics. The Olympics is a great showcase for human accomplishment. It is a showcase of the extraordinary achievements that can be had by athletes, guided by grit and determination and after putting in years of effort to develop the physical and mental discipline needed to rise to the pinnacle of their sport. The Australian athletes who won 35 medals in London deserve our congratulations, admiration and gratitude for their hard work and achievement. So do all athletes who competed for Australia and wore the green and gold with pride. There are many others who also deserve our congratulations, admiration and gratitude for their hard work and achievement. They are the many others involved that make these results happen—the coaches, the parents, the volunteers and also the fellow competitors who do not get selected but contribute to their sports and enable the strong sporting culture that is part of Australia's ongoing success at the Games. Those unsuccessful athletes dreamt of representing their country and did the same work. Their blood and sweat and tears helped to push those who ultimately had the honour of representing their country at the greatest games on earth.

Let us not forget where they come from—local communities like each of the 150 electorates represented by members in this place. There are many keen sportsmen and women in my electorate of Swan. I note that the state government has chosen Burswood Peninsula as the site for Perth's new premier sports stadium. With my interest in junior sport development, I have had a particular focus on sports infrastructure in the electorate of Swan. As I mentioned, we have been working on a local campaign for a new artistic gymnastic centre to be established in Queens Park as part of a sports hub for young athletes in the district. We need to provide access to sport for all by providing the right local sports infrastructure. It is something I have a particular focus on in Swan.

The Olympics are a celebration of human success and cooperation between nations. I am delighted to see the Australian team return home after yet another successful Games. There are many who were quick to criticise or say that Australia was not achieving the success that it should. How do you measure success? Do you measure it by the gold medals or do you measure it through participation or the amount of success with friendships made between nations?

The Games provided some thrilling moments for viewers back home. I join with my colleagues to recognise the contribution of our Olympians and wish those who are already focussed on Rio in 2016 all the best as they plan the next four years of preparation. I would also like to recognise the organisers in London for providing a great venue for the world to enjoy. London is a spectacular city and its residents can be proud of the efforts of organisers who showcased the city's rich history as well as its modern sophistication to the world, as Australia and Sydney did in 2000.

The families of the athletes and the parents of the athletes are the ones who have to spend time apart from them while they train and while they travel overseas to compete. We have
many instances of that happening in Australia though such elite sports as AFL and the National Rugby League as well.

I notice that the new shadow parliamentary secretary for families is in the chamber. I congratulate him on his new position. I know that as a family man, and particularly as a South Australian, he and his wife, Esteé, have got a growing and burgeoning family. He will probably want to join with me. What I would like to do is indulge and wish my son, who turned 20 today, a happy birthday.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr IRONS: He resides in Adelaide, in South Australia. I am sure that the member for Mayo will join with me and extend our condolences to the parents and the families of John McCarthy, whose funeral is today in Melbourne. To John's parents, Shane and Cath, his brother, Matt, his sisters, Frances, Elizabeth and Jane, his girlfriend, Dani, and his extended family and network of friends, on behalf of the parliament I extend our condolences. My son is attending John's funeral in Melbourne today. I would like to pass on the message to the parliament that it was a tragic end to a young man's life. He was one of Australia's sporting heroes. Thank you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I call the newly-appointed shadow parliamentary secretary and member for Mayo on this statement on indulgence on the London Olympics.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (10:09): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for those warm congratulations. It means a lot coming from such a long-serving and respected member of this place. It is great to follow my good friend, the member for Swan, in talking about sport and the Olympics, and so forth. He forgot to mention that he was an outstanding sportsman himself and his son is following in those footsteps. It is just a pity that his son chooses the wrong football teams to play for! There is a far better team for him to be playing for in South Australia, and that is Sturt. He should do it, and we should get him across there as soon as we can. That is another matter, of course. While I am also on my feet and the member for Chifley is in the chamber, and we are talking about families, I should congratulate the member for Chifley on his recent addition—his first child. It is a big step in a young man's life and a big change for your life. A huge change for your life. I congratulate you very much. I am sure everything is going well. Well done!

While we are in this friendly and jovial spirit it is a great opportunity to speak on the efforts of Olympians. As the member for Swan so rightly pointed out, people do not get to the Olympics by chance. It is always terrific to watch the best of anything at the highest level. We will see it in a couple of weeks time with the AFL grand final. It is a great day because you see the best athletes at the highest level under the most pressure. It is an extraordinary thing for Olympians: all the work that goes in over four years to get to that spot, to get that opportunity, and having to execute their skills at the highest level under the highest pressure. They are extraordinary individuals, each of them. The way they carry themselves does us very proud. I know there was some criticism, I thought unfairly, of the swimmers during the Olympics. Ultimately, they are competing with the world's best. Sure, we would have been happier had we won some more gold medals, however, I know each of them put their best into the Olympics. You could tell quite obviously the disappointment on some of their faces when they did not achieve what they had spent so much time trying to achieve. I think some people were overly critical of the way that that was handled. Expecting them to give the best
media appearance straight after a massive disappointment is, I think, expecting far too much. That is particularly the case coming from us, a bunch of politicians who do not always get our media right, even though we practice and prepare for it. I think it is wrong to judge someone who has just jumped out of a swimming pool and been confronted with TV cameras when they are feeling pretty low about what has just occurred. I think it is unfortunate that that commentary went on. But we should not delve too much into that; we should celebrate the achievements of those—particularly those from our electorates—who got the opportunity to represent Australia.

We had a couple of exceptional people—all of them were exceptional—but we had the first brother and sister Australian Olympic track cyclists, Annette and Alexander Edmondson from Stirling. They did so well. In fact, they achieved a bronze medal. We congratulate them very much on their unbelievable achievement. Chris Morgan of Greenhill in the rowing also achieved a bronze medal. That is two bronze medals for the Adelaide Hills, which is terrific. Harrison Peacock, who came from Mt Barker originally—where I live—but now lives in Adelaide, is pursuing his volleyball, which has such a strong history at Heathfield High School. I particularly congratulate Harrison on representing Australia at the Olympics in the Australian volleyball team. Volleyball is not a sport I ever had much of an opportunity to play, given that I am not anywhere near tall enough to play that sport.

Also, we had the Paralympics quickly following the Olympics. Again, we had Michael Roeger from Langhorne Creek who, I think, has been to the Paralympics before. Michael has a terribly unfortunate story. He got food poisoning on the day of his run and was not able to compete in the end, which was really disappointing for him. In fact, he ended up in hospital afterwards. He was quite unwell. He is a terrific young guy and a fine young athlete. I know the Langhorne Creek footy club, which plays in its own grand final this Saturday—I wish them well against Yankalilla—and organised people to do down to the footy club to watch Michael. It was very unfortunate for Michael, but he has had a great deal of support from his community. They are very proud of Michael and his efforts. We are very proud of Michael and his efforts. We are proud of all of them for how well they represented our country in London and for the effort that they all have put in over such a long period of time.

We should not forget that many of them would now be beginning their preparations for Brazil in four years time. It is an extraordinary effort and an extraordinary commitment that these young people make. We congratulate them on it and look forward to Brazil in four years time. I think both the member for Chifley and I will be greyer and older, but we look forward very much to standing in this place in four years time and hopefully celebrating even more gold medals, but certainly celebrating their effort and achievement and their desire to do the best that they can and represent our great country on the international stage.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (10:14): Thank you very much. I would also like to add my congratulations to the member for Mayo's recent elevation and wish him well in his future role. I would also like to congratulate the Member for Chifley—congratulations all round—on the new addition to your family. I am sure that you will have great joy brought into your lives.

It is wonderful to be here to make a statement on the Olympic Games and the return of the Australian team. Australians are enormously proud of our Olympic team and the wonderful efforts that were put into the London Olympics. Just watching our athletes wearing the green and gold on television, watching the coverage in the magnificent city of London, seeing all
the historic monuments and buildings as the athletes made their way around the various sporting activities, made us immensely proud of the fact that Australia was represented by such a wonderful group of young men and women. They did do us proud.

To be an elite athlete requires a huge amount of discipline and commitment, and the financial expense to get to elite sport is absolutely massive. We should be very proud of every single one of our athletes, whether or not they collected a medal. It is an enormous privilege just to be chosen to go to the Olympic Games and compete at that level, let alone win a medal. We are enormously proud of the standard of excellence and acknowledge collectively the great effort put in by the Australian team.

I want to make mention of a few people. There were some particular highlights, and there were different highlights for different people. But, for me, I would like to make special mention of Lauren Jackson, our champion basketball player and captain of the Opals. At London, Lauren became the first female athlete chosen to carry the Australian flag during the opening ceremony at the Olympics, and it was a remarkable sight to watch Lauren leading out the Australian contingent. I would like to offer very special congratulations to her.

We saw some remarkable achievements at these wonderful games. We saw Sally Pearson—and I was very privileged to meet Sally Pearson at the Olympic parade in Brisbane when I welcomed the Olympians, along with the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Councillor Quirk; and the Premier, Campbell Newman. It was great to see someone like Sally Pearson elevate herself to absolutely legend status with that fantastic win in the 100 metres hurdles, and we all remember the agonising moments as we waited for the results to confirm that our girl had won the new Olympic record. Of course, we also experienced the heartache. Members have previously spoken about the heartache of an illness which, at the last minute, causes an athlete to withdraw or of the heartbreak we saw of James Magnussen missing out in the pool by one-hundredth of a second. You cannot even imagine how tiny a hundredth of a second is. It was not meant to be.

Time does not permit me to delve into all the memorable occasions of these games as there were so many of them. But also for me the women's 4 x 100-metre freestyle relay was a very exciting moment. I have to put a plug in for Queensland, as I think we do provide a large number of our elite swimmers. When I was the member for Petrie, a number of our elite swimmers got their start in the Redcliffe area, particularly under coach Woods. Many of them had their start there, swimming as young schoolgirl regional athletes and progressing to the elite levels that we saw. That particular freestyle event was just an awesome moment for me. We were always the underdogs going in, but our four young Australian girls really swam their hearts out and they won the first gold for Australia. I want to acknowledge Alicia Coutts, Cate Campbell, Brittany Elmslie and Melanie Schlanger. They really deserve to take a bow for their wonderful effort. I want to read some of the names of the athletes from my electorate who represented Australia at London: Julian Wruck, athletics; James Connor, diving; Anabelle Smith, diving; Nicholas D'Arcy, swimming; Brittany Elmslie, swimming; Edward McKendry, swimming; Stephanie Rice, swimming; Eloise Amberger, synchronised swimming; Andrew Grant, volleyball; Bronwen Knox, water polo; Jane Moran, water polo; and Sophie Smith, water polo. These are absolutely remarkable and incredible Australians and they make the electorate of Brisbane and Australia very, very proud. As I said, it was great to welcome them. I felt very humbled welcoming them and being part of that 'welcome back'
ceremony in the CBD of Brisbane. To meet them in person was an incredible experience. The crowd was absolutely euphoric. It is fantastic to see them.

It reminds of a more low-key event that I had in my electorate recently with the Australian Sports Commission, where I awarded junior athletes—who will be the future Olympians of tomorrow—some sports awards at the Wilston Grange breakfast. I was very pleased to meet our future athletes of tomorrow. The Olympic spirit is well and truly alive and well.

I congratulate the magnificent city of London. There were certainly detractors who were very quick to criticise the organisation, the logistics and everything else in the beginning, but London and the Lord Mayor of London and its people should be congratulated, particularly for the magnificent way that they organised the games and the security and all of the logistics that they put in place. They hosted a truly magnificent games. As I mentioned earlier, bringing the modern in with the historical buildings like Westminster and Buckingham Palace and including them as part of the program really added to the great success of that fantastic city. I want to congratulate London for a great games that we witnessed.

I know that some of my athletes back in Brisbane have had a few weeks rest. I think they have had a few weeks off and now the fun begins: preparing for the next games in Rio. I wish them all the very best in their preparation for the next magnificent games, which will be held in Rio in 2016. I look forward again to watching our magnificent athletes represent our country and do us proud.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (10:22): Many fine words have rightly been said about the London Olympic Games at the general level and in particular terms about the performance of the Australian team. I want to focus exclusively on the Paralympians. I want to do so by beginning with the way my seven-year-old looked at the Paralympics. My seven-year-old, Poppy, really got the Olympics for the first time. She was captivated by the general Olympics but then was completely engaged by the Paralympics. It worked in two ways. Firstly, it was a recognition that disability was a challenge, not an impediment. For her to see people with differing degrees of disability—it could well have been Down syndrome or it could have been a condition such as cerebral palsy or the loss of limbs for the swimmers and the runners—was quite an eye-opener. We talked about it a lot. That same conversation would have gone on in families right around Australia and around the world where it was televised. So the impact on people from outside the disabilities community, in my judgement, was more profound on a quantum scale than from any other Paralympic Games. It was just a moment where the Paralympics graduated to mainstream appreciation. I think that was an extraordinary step forward for disability communities right around the world.

I am particularly delighted that China won the medal tally. You might wonder why. It is because what it says is that, in a developing country, extraordinary resources are being put into the care, the maintenance, the development and the fulfilment of those with disabilities. I think that that is a very important message and an extremely important development. So that was a very heartening thing.

I want to acknowledge two people from my own community, from my own electorate of Flinders, one of whom competed at this games and one of whom had competed at a previous games. Luke Cain of Boneo is 32. As a 19-year-old he had a tragic football accident which gave him a form of quadriplegia. He was playing AFL football for Rosebud against Hastings when he was sandwiched between two other players and developed quadriplegia, which was a
completely life-changing event. It could have been a life destroying event, but he chose for it not to be. What an act of courage. He is a cousin of Travis Cloke, so he could well have had a
great football career ahead of him. Instead, he picked himself up in the best way possible. He of
course has had hard times—no question. He competed in the shooting. This is a young guy
who has overcome the most profound of personal hardships and tragedies and has remade his
life. To see him competing in the shooting at the Paralympics is a testimony to the human
spirit at its absolute finest. In that respect, it acknowledges for me what these Paralympic
Games were all about.

One of the people in the electorate to whom I have become very close is Mandy Drennan. Mandy is a young woman who was born without her right leg. She held an AIS Paralympic
swimming scholarship in 2003-04. While she was not at these games, she was at the 2004
Athens Games and won a bronze medal as part of the 4 x 100-metre freestyle. She is an
absolutely delightful young woman, completely positive in nature, who last year did a 66-
kilometre swim around Phillip Island—there are some very rough waters to the south of the
island—to raise money for Warley Hospital. I was invited to join her for part of that swim. I swam for a kilometre on the north side of the island. My only complaint is that she had a
shark cage and everyone decided that I should swim behind the shark cage. I am not sure what
the message was, but that was the fastest I can remember swimming in a long while. She claims that it was primarily so that I could get the benefit of the drag which would reduce the
pressure on me whilst I was swimming. I am not so sure. She has a great sense of humour.
She is a fantastic human being. She is a marathon swimmer and she is also the embodiment of
what the Paralympics are about.

When you look at our performance, what a national performance: 161 athletes, 85 medals,
32 gold. Jacqui Freney won eight gold—the most gold medals of any individual at the
games—and she is my seven-year-old daughter's hero. What an outcome; what a great thing! Similarly, Matthew Cowdrey, the swimmer, won five gold, two silver and a bronze. He is
now our greatest ever Paralympian, with 13 gold medals.

These games were about the graduation of disability sports into the mainstream. They made a huge difference in how these people with disabilities and challenges are perceived
worldwide and are a point of incredible inspiration for anybody who suffers these challenges.
At the end of the day, the message to the broader community and to those who have
disabilities is: these are challenges, not impediments. For that we should be thankful.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (10:28): Australia sent 410 athletes to compete in 23
sports at the 2012 London Olympic Games held from 27 July to 12 August. Our medal haul
was 35—seven gold, 16 silver and 12 bronze—below what we expected, yet impressive
nonetheless. Australia's sailors excelled, grabbing three gold and four medals in total. The flag
bearer for the opening ceremony was basketballer Lauren Jackson from Albury, just down the
Olympic Highway from Wagga Wagga. Pentathlete Edward Fernon, 24, grew up in Sydney
but spent every school holidays at a friend's Yerong Creek farm and maintained strong
ties to Wagga Wagga through uncles Paul and Vince Fernon and their families. Edward took part in

The Olympic motto of 'Faster, higher, stronger', first suggested by a Dominican priest in
the 19th century, was introduced in 1924 at the Paris games. At those games, Anthony
William 'Nick' Winter from Marrar won a gold medal in hop, step and jump—his leap of 51 feet 1½ inches set a new world record. Born at Brocklesby in 1895, Winter came to Marrar at an early age with his parents, Andy and Sal, who played a prominent part in the early history of the village near where I spent my first four years of life. Winter was a daredevil, pulling off many crazy stunts in his youth before serving in the Australian Imperial Force in the Great War, later becoming a fireman and then an Olympic champion. He heads the pantheon of sporting greats who have called the Riverina home. For them the rolling hills and wattle trees of south-west New South Wales hold as much appeal as a sporting stadium filled with adoring fans.

The Riverina had sporting heroes before Nick Winter and has had many more since his day of glory in the French capital. Three such stars did the region proud at the recent London games. Adam Commens and Jade Close were coach and player respectively in the Australian women's hockey team, while Brad Kahlefeldt overcame a bout of bronchitis to run a creditable race in the triathlon. It was a gutsy effort from Brad, who is a superb competitor and a fine ambassador for his family, sport and country. The 33-year-old has obviously inherited some of his great attitude from his grandfather Brian Kahlefeldt, whose 2004 book 90 Minutes to Success is one of the best manuals to a good life I have ever read.

I have known Adam Commens for many years and vividly recall his entry into A-grade hockey on the grassed fields at Jubilee Park, Wagga Wagga, in 1989. Small in stature, he would have been all of 12 turning 13 at the time. Adam ran out for Junee alongside his father, Russell, who was the team's fearless full-back. My team, Harlequins, was doing our pre-game warm-up and listening to our captain Ross Martin talk about tactics. The next thing you know, Russell entered our huddle and asked if we would mind going easy in the skirmishes involving his young son. He ought to have known the other teams did not label us hackers for nothing. Harlequins had the reputation for toughness, for getting first use of the ball, whatever it took. Our team's enforcer, Greg White, angelically inquired of Russell, 'Which one is he?' Not that identification was necessary. Adam's youth made him a standout. 'That's him,' Russell responded, pointing to the diminutive lad dribbling the ball around as if it were connected to the end of his stick. Russell trotted off content that we would look after his offspring, and Adam simply brushed himself off, got up and played on. It was a baptism of fire but it showed the kid had courage and it was not long into the game that Adam demonstrated the wonderful stick work and ability which would later see him on the world stage. From memory, he scored three terrific goals from open play that day—a dashing debut—and finished full of running, relatively unscathed, despite competing against bigger, older opponents, and having survived
his encounter with my good mate Greg. Adam won the admiration of all his opponents that afternoon—especially Greg White—and we all watched with close interest as his career developed and blossomed. His talent was mercurial and he was a regular in the top grade for Junee, which had not long reformed and which immediately became the dominant club, winning premiership after premiership in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While Junee, with Harold Norris, Brian Smith and others proving a class above, gave Harlequins, Lake Albert and Mustangs the run-around, Adam set his sights on higher honours. He made his goal the international arena and with commitment, determination and passion, as well as support from his parents Russell and Kerrie, Adam made the big time. In all Adam played 143 games for Australia scoring 20 goals with his finest achievements being a bronze medal at the Sydney 2000 Olympics and gold at the 1999 Champions Trophy in Brisbane. On 4 July 2007, he was named head coach of the Belgian national field hockey team and he guided that country to ninth place in the 2000 Beijing Olympics—that nation's first entry into the Olympic hockey tournament since 1976. Now 36, Adam took over as coach of the Australian women’s team at the start of 2011 and immediately instilled his strict discipline and fitness regimes into the Hockeyroos players. Unfortunately, Australia narrowly missed making the semifinals at the London Games on goal difference—a solitary goal—with New Zealand sneaking in ahead of us. The Netherlands won the women's tournament and the gold medal, beating Argentina 2-0 in the final.

Wagga Wagga born Jade Close played her part, netting two goals for the Hockeyroos, the first in our 4 August 1-0 win against South Africa and the other in the 2-0 victory against China on 10 August, the win which gave Australia fifth place overall. It was great to have two locals involved in the hockey program and this has provided tremendous inspiration to all the boys and girls running around Wagga Wagga's Jubilee Park. Adam and Jade showed that anyone, even someone from a regional area, with natural talent mixed with perspiration and determination can accomplish anything. Given Adam's experience and Jade's youth—she is 24—there will be more in store from this wonderful Riverina duo. On behalf of the people of the electorate, I wish them both all the very best in their future endeavours.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (10:36): I rise to welcome home the Australian Olympic and Paralympic teams and to congratulate them on their success at the 2012 London Olympics. I will begin with a few words on the London Olympics. Very few cities have as many venues as spectacular and historic as London. To watch beach volleyball in Horse Guards Parade, to watch the equestrian at Greenwich Park, to see the marathon and triathlon finishing in The Mall, to see archery at Lords—it really was a spectacular Olympics. And the opening and closing ceremonies were a real reflection of what it is to be British. As good as Sydney was, I think London—in terms of the whole spectacle—was at least its equal. I am sure many Australians across the country spent many a late night sitting up to watch their favourite sports and favourite competitors.

We can be very proud that, of 204 competing nations, we ranked 10th in the medal tally at the Olympics. Australia finished the games with seven gold, 16 silver and 12 bronze medals. While we may not have been as successful in the pool as we had originally hoped, there were a number of Australian success stories which, as a nation, we should be proud of. Our Australian sailors produced fantastic results, with gold in the men's 470, gold in the men's 49ers, gold in the men's Laser and silver in the women's match race.
South Australian physio Jessica Trengrove finished the women's marathon in a time of two hours, 31 minutes and 17 seconds, giving her 39th place in what was only her second ever marathon. The men's K4 1,000-metre crew rewrote their 2008 Beijing result by winning gold at Eton Dorney. Sally Pearson edged out Dawn Harper by two-hundredths of a second in the women's hurdles. Finally, Anna Meares battled long-term arch rival Victoria Pendleton to take the gold in the women's sprint. Focusing on some other athletes—who can forget Usain Bolt in the men's 100-metre, 200-metre and 4 x 100-metre relay events? He is truly the most amazing sprinter I have ever seen.

On a South Australian note, there are a number of Olympians I would like to congratulate. There were 36 South Australians among Australia's 410-strong team in London. The South Australian medallists included Anna Meares, who won gold in the women's sprint and bronze in the team sprint; Sam Willoughby from Hallett Cove, who won silver in the BMX; Jack Borbidge and Rohan Dennis, who won silver in the team pursuit; and Emily Seebohm—although she is from Queensland, she spent her early years in Brighton and we do claim her; her father played over 300 games for the Glenelg Football Club in the SANFL—who won two silver medals.

Abby Bishop and Laura Hodges won bronze in basketball; Annette Edmondson won bronze in the omnium; and James McRae and Chris Morgan—one of whom is a member of the Adelaide University Boat Club, my rowing club—won bronze in the quad sculls. Hayden Stoeckel won bronze in the men's 4 x 100-metre medley relay.

In addition, a number of Olympians spent their formative years attending schools in my electorate. Nathan Roberts and Greg Sukachev both attended Brighton Secondary School—a government school that has a special interest in volleyball. They competed in the men's volleyball with the Volleyroos who finished fifth. It is my understanding that Brighton Secondary will now name a volleyball court after their old scholars. Brad Newley and Joe Ingles both attended Pasadena High School and competed in the men's basketball with the Boomers and finished seventh overall. We are very proud of them; and Pasadena High School had signs on the board outside the school really celebrating their journey with the Boomers. Renee Chatterton, who attended St John's Grammar Belair as well as Highgate Primary and Concordia, rowed in the women's eight in London, the self-styled Motley Crew.

We also must congratulate our Paralympians, who have returned from London. Australia had over 300 Paralympics competitors, competing in 13 of the 20 available sports. We ranked fifth in the medal tally at the London Paralympics. I know that I sat up cheering on our Australian Paralympians in the same way I did our Olympians. The strength, determination and courage that our Paralympians show should make us all proud to be Australian. I would especially like to congratulate Matthew Cowdrey, a proud South Australian and now our most successful Paralympian ever. It has been my privilege to meet Matthew on several occasions. He was a very early and very strong advocate for the state aquatic centre in Adelaide, in Marion, in my electorate. We were very pleased to see that aquatic centre hosting the trials in March for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. I saw Matthew Cowdrey win his events at those Paralympics trials and he made the point then how great it was to be able to race in his home state—which was something that had not been available for a long time. At only 23 years old, Matt has 23 medals to his name—13 of which are gold. I think he is also a lawyer and he is interested a career in foreign affairs. I certainly wish him all the best. In London,
Matt received five gold, two silver and a bronze to become our most successful Paralympian ever. It was also the final Paralympics for Libby Kosmala, who has been a veteran of Paralympics. Libby has decided that this would be her last one. I wish her all the best. She has made a tremendous contribution over a long time for the Australian Paralympic team.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (10:43): About six months ago I was at a meeting and the guest speaker was speaking about the Olympic Games. His opening comments resonated. He said that if we use history as a tool with reference to the good and bad things that happen in our world, religion has the potential to divide us as a nation and a planet; but sport has the capacity to unite us. Sport has an inherent ability to bring together people with different interests, backgrounds and beliefs, people from different cultures from every sector of the globe and put them in an arena where they can all strive, equally, to provide their best—to achieve, to try and to strive to do their best for the nation that they represent. As a result of that, I stand here to acknowledge our Olympians that travelled on behalf of Australia, to London. I congratulate the Australian Olympic team on their achievements during the games recently held in London. Australia was tenth in the medal tally and we achieved seven gold, 16 silver and 12 bronze. I know we focus, as a nation, on the gold but, it is equally important and not a bad second best to have silvers and bronzes sitting in your cupboards. With that goes an enormous amount of commitment and an enormous amount of training. It is not sexy. It is not television-worthy to watch people training, swimming laps of pools or running ultimately for hundreds of kilometres to get themselves in peak conditions from these events. I also acknowledge those commitments by athletes behind the scenes to get them to the Olympics. In my electorate, Greg Lindores, who owns and runs a large turf farm, must be a very proud father. His son, Bryce, who was blinded as a teenager, won a silver medal at the Para cycling events at the recent Paralympic Games in London. Bryce has been competing at an international level for the last six years. Being a local boy, I congratulate him on bringing home some silverware for the local community.

I encourage parents all around Australia to make sure that they give the opportunity to their children to participate in some form of sport or outdoor activity. Their health and social wellbeing can only prosper as a result of being involved in sport. Sadly, an estimated 37 per cent—one million—of our children do not participate in any organised sport. I am sure there are many reasons for this, but as a nation we need to provide an opportunity where children can participate in affordable sport and an active lifestyle. An estimated 1.7 million—67 per cent—of children participate in at least organised sport outside school hours. That was in the 12 months of 2009 when the last ABS stats were available. Participating in organised sport was highest amongst the nine- to eleven-year-olds at 68 per cent, compared to 58 per cent for the five- to eight-year-olds and 65 per cent for 12- to 14-year-olds.

Within the electorate of Wright, we have a vast number of sporting activities that are available for children to participate in. The Lockyer Valley Sports Club offers a variety of sports in the Grantham, Murphy's Creek and Gatton area, an area which was devastated by floods. With the reconstruction money, we have been able to get those sporting fields back together. Equestrian events, dressage and jumping—which I will come to later, which I have a personal interest in—is an event a little bit more costly, but a very worthwhile sport. There is the Jimboomba Little Athletics Centre with tomorrow's stars, running around our backyards in the electorate. Hopefully, we will see them on the Olympic trail. Beaudesert sporting clay
shooters club get out there every weekend and just punch the metal through targets. They have a great time. That is an Olympic sport that is well participated in in my electorate. The Lockyer Valley Netball Association also has over 500 members. Gatton Hockey Club trains as the US Gatton campus. It is very generous to be able use the fields there because their fields were destroyed. The hockey club is able to continue the training regime. And the Mudgeeraba Aquatic Centre has Australia's future swimmers. The Tamborine Mountain Sports Association with its brand new tennis facility will hopefully bring through the next layer of Olympians.

But on indulgence, I would like to stray from my electorate and talk about my baby girl, who I believe is a future Olympian. When we come to this place, we spend a lot of time away from our families. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the enormous amount of support that I have as a father in not being there to see my daughter compete, and relying on other fathers to set up jumps and train horses and on the grooms, vets, dentists, farriers and everyone who is part of our team which allows my daughter to compete at a senior level. My daughter is 16. She is in grade 11 at a boarding school. She has the opportunity to take her horse to school with her where she can compete in the three-day event. For those of you who may not be aware, this is an Olympic sport which involves a combination of dressage, show-jumping and cross-country on the same horse, and an amalgamated point system. Grace has been competing at the three-day event for some five years. She came up through the pony club ranks. Her recent achievements have been significant. She won the champion at the last south-east Queensland event. She won the supreme rider for the whole tournament, which was a result of her winning the champion dressage, the champion equitation and champion showman, and coming second in the high jump. Before that, she had recently won an international event in New South Wales, followed by winning an event at Scone in New South Wales, which had 414 riders present. She was in good company. She struggles along okay. But she would not have been able to make those achievements without the past experience of previous Olympians who assisted her in her campaign. I would like to acknowledge Guy Creighton, a past Australian Olympian who competed at the 1976 Montreal Olympics and the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Guy was a champion showjumper and in Grace's early days was her specialised showjumping coach. I would also like to thank Heath Ryan. We recently bought a warmblood stallion off Heath and that horse is producing some wonderful results for Grace at the moment. Heath competed at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and has competed on the world stage in grand prix dressage since 1990. Heath's experience in personal coaching with Grace is invaluable, as every time they are able to be reunited Heath shows Grace new buttons on this horse and new and wonderful places that this horse can take her.

I would also like to acknowledge Chris Burton, a current Olympian who competed in the eventing team for Australia. Chris is a personal friend of our family and Chris's mother, Ruth, was Grace's first introduction to the three-day event. For countless hours we have trained on Chris Burton's family property, getting Grace ready for her next transition.

In addition to those wonderful skills that she has picked up, I would like to acknowledge two other Olympians in the three-day event: Megan Jones and Shane Rose. Whenever Grace is at a competition and there are riders of that calibre at the events, the kindness, compassion and encouragement that they give junior riders is so rewarding. When a child comes out of an

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arena and you have a current Olympian standing there at the gate, patting your daughter on the leg as she walks out, saying, 'Great ride—keep it up. We'll see you in Brazil,' that lifts a child beyond all comprehension.

In addition to Grace's contributions in the equestrian arena, she was also the age champion in the pool at her college for the last two years. In addition to that she was the athletics track all-age champion for the last two years. Two days ago she was competing at the regional titles for the 100 metres sprint in Brisbane, which she won on a personal best time, and she came second in the shot-put. The week before that she had been part of a participating team which won the touch football grand finals. In addition to all of that, she got an A in accounting.

Can I say I am a very proud father. In Australia we have enormous opportunity to promote our youth and build future Olympians. If my daughter does not choose to be an Olympian, that is fine, because what she is doing at the moment costs me a fortune.

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth) (10:52): We are honouring today the achievements of the Australian Olympic team at the London Olympics and Paralympics. I want to make note today of the achievements of some of the current and former residents of my electorate of Wentworth, which is a very sporting electorate because it is on the peninsula of the eastern suburbs of Sydney, with the ocean on one side and the harbour on the other. So it is not surprising that we have some very strong performances on the water, and none stronger than that of the men's K4 1,000-metre canoe sprint team, which won a gold medal at Eton Dorney.

Murray Stewart is a former Scots College student, and the other three of the four are Dave Smith, Jacob Clear and Tate Smith. They were part of that great team, and Tate is a member of North Bondi surf club. That is my own surf club. I regret to say I have not been even remotely as distinguished as him at any time, in or out of the water. But it was a good Wentworth contribution there.

They went into the final as the fastest qualifiers and they kept a cracking pace right through the final, leading the whole race. It was our sixth gold medal for the Olympics and the team, as we remember, clinched victory ahead of Hungary and the Czech Republic. Tate's grandmother Lorraine Smith, who has been proud to call herself a Bondi resident for more than 40 years—and, as we all know, you can take the girl out of Bondi but you cannot take the Bondi out of the girl—said: 'I did not stop screaming. I rode that boat all the way home.' Murray Stewart, the former Scots College student, is obviously a keen kayaker but he has also represented his school in water polo, swimming and cross-country running. He has been an outstanding role model for the other students, whether it is in the sports field or in the classroom, and he is regarded by all who know him as a very modest young man. He is someone who will go a long way and set a great example to young men and women in our community.

Staying in the water, I also offer our congratulations to another Australian Olympian who began her life in Wentworth. This is Olivia Price, who was born in Darlinghurst and attended St Catherine's School in Waverley. Olivia skippered the Australian sailing team, progressing to the semifinal of the women's Elliott six-metre class event and going on to win silver. This was a gripping final against the Spanish, with both teams fighting hard for gold and with rough conditions and wind speeds of more than 25 knots. The Spanish managed to stave off an ambitious attack from the Australian team when Olivia fell overboard after being hit by a wave. But, in race three of the best of five final, her crewmates—Lucinda Whitty and Nina
Curtis—had to circle around to get her back on board. Despite the score being level at two all, the Australia team won silver after receiving a penalty, sadly, in the deciding race.

While the Elliott six-metre event will not be in the next Olympics, Olivia Price is hoping to represent Australia again as skipper of the Australian team in the new women's 49er class. That is a spectacular sailing class, as we know. We see the 49ers on Sydney Harbour and she will do very well there, I am sure. She has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to her sport, that is typical of our Olympians. In 2009 she made the decision to complete her HSC through distance education so that she could travel to all the various regattas. She attended the distance education high school in Woooloomooloo so she is a graduate of both St Catherine's in Waverley and the distance education high school in Woooloomooloo, both in the electorate of Wentworth.

I will just say a little bit about the distance education high school in Woooloomooloo. It is a public school. It is committed to excellence and equity in distance education. They provide courses and education for those students, like Olivia, who are not able to attend a regular school on a full time basis. The flexible learning arrangements of the school allow people like Olivia to pursue their sporting careers without having to sacrifice their education. They do great work.

St Catherine's is also very proud to have had three members of their staff attend the Olympics and to have a St Catherine's old girl win silver in the Paralympics. Old girl Sarah Stewart claimed a silver medal in the women's basketball grand final against Germany. The Gliders hoped to improve on their Beijing bronze medal and return with gold, although they lost to Germany in a nail-bitng final. Stewart contributed two points to the 58-44 score, in front of a crowd of nearly 13,000. St Catherine's coaches Joel Dennerley and Richie Campbell also represented Australia, competing in the men's water polo, and coach Andrew Tanitsas provided valuable support to the team as the men's water polo science coordinator and coach. The Australian men's water polo team, the Sharks, finished seventh after defeating the United States 10-9. It was Dennerley's debut appearance at the Olympics, while Campbell has previously represented Australia in Beijing.

Emerging from the water, we are all so proud of the achievements of Steven Solomon. I am sure that everyone who was watching the Olympics closely will be aware of the young Steve Solomon, the 19-year-old from Vaucluse who ran in the 400-metre final. While he finished eighth in the final race, it was his personal best and it is, as his father Dr Michael Solomon says—and it is a comment we can share—the feelgood story of the Olympics. Steven was a former student of Cranbrook and, as I said, he ran successive personal bests in both the heat and semifinals and broke the 45-second barrier for the first time. The boys at Cranbrook closely follow Steven's career and, on the day, 100 students packed out the school hall at 6.30 in the morning to cheer on their old boy in the 400-metre men's final. Steven has come a long way since running his first 400-metre sprint event only 2½ years ago at the under 16 National Championships. He then went on to win a bronze medal at the World Junior Athletics Championships in Barcelona in July, also running a personal best. Like many athletes, Steven is naturally gifted, having already excelled in soccer, rugby and other athletic events. He captained the Australian Junior Football side at the 2009 Maccabiah Games, and is well known in the Jewish community for his sporting achievements, having been named the Maccabi NSW Junior Sportsman of the Year. He has only recently turned his attention to the...
400-metre race and his accomplishments have been very well deserved. He gained very valuable experience at the London games. He is a very young man, and we were all very excited to witness his progress and look forward to witnessing his progress at Rio. As another athletic star, David Culbert, tweeted, Steven is pretty fly for a white guy—very high praise. Not shy of taking on a challenge, he is planning to follow in the footsteps of his father and go on to study medicine at Stanford University.

I want to congratulate all of the athletes from every electorate who took part in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, especially those from my own electorate—and I have identified a number of them. I would also like to say that I was fortunate enough, with my wife, Lucy, to be at the Olympics for the first five or six days, and I want to pay my respects and offer my congratulations to the organisers of the London games and to the London Mayor, Boris Johnson, surely the funniest political speaker I have ever heard in my life. All of us try to be amusing but Boris Johnson is a nonpareil in terms of his charisma and good humour. It was a very well organised games. Mitt Romney came over and made some criticisms a week or so before the London Olympics, which was not a very smart thing to do. I remember David Cameron, in referring to Romney's experience in organising the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, saying that there is a big difference between organising the Olympics in a global city as opposed to organising an Olympic Games in a city in the middle of nowhere, which was probably a bit tough on Salt Lake City. But the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom made a good point there in reminding everyone that London is a gigantic city, a much bigger city than Sydney, obviously, where our Olympic Games, I think, are still the benchmark against which all subsequent games are measured. I could never suggest—as the former Lady Mayoress of Sydney—that Sydney's Olympic Games were anything other than the very best, but London came very, very close; it was extraordinarily well organised. The public transport system worked brilliantly. The Jubilee line, which is the main subway line that connects the two big sporting events—Wembley at one end and Stratford at the other—was running around 33 trains an hour, so they were running at less than two-minute intervals. The sheer efficiency of public transport was a great reminder, actually, for all of us as we consider the problems of congestion in our cities—that there is really no way to ease congestion in big cities other than by investing in mass transit, and it worked so well in London.

I never would have imagined that beach volleyball could ever be more entertaining than it was on Bondi Beach in the Sydney Games, but to have the beach volleyball courts set up on Horse Guards Parade with all of the great buildings of the British Empire, Whitehall and Downing Street surrounding it—the venue itself, regardless of what was happening on the court was absolutely hilarious and a really good spirit embraced it. I think the British did a remarkable job with the games. They have lifted the British spirit. That country is struggling with a very severe economic recession and the games lifted their spirit and showed them and the world that they could carry off an enormous logistical challenge, and do so with very good humour. I will tell one story: the mayor gave a speech where I was present. As you know there have been some issues with Barclays Bank and the rigging libor. The bank has been, in fact, a part of fixing the libor rate, together with some other banks. It is not very edifying. The 'Boris bikes'—the public bikes—are sponsored by Barclays. Johnson gave this deadpan speech about how the people of London were much more honest than the people of Paris because only a handful of the Boris bikes had been stolen whereas in Paris thousands had
been stolen. And then, still deadpan, he said, 'Of course, that just indicates the very deep respect the people of this city have for Barclays Bank'. He was really brilliant—absolutely brilliant.

I will just make one final comment about the London Games and that is the incredible contribution made by Westfield. A Westfield shopping centre—the largest in Europe—is at Stratford, and was committed to prior to London winning the games. This is in what was a very, very run-down—desolate, really—part of East London; old railway yards and so forth. They had committed to this enormous shopping centre and it became effectively the portal through which most of the people who attended the games at the main venue went. It is a great tribute to Frank Lowy, who we heard speak so well yesterday. His contribution to so many cities has been formidable, and none more so than in London. That shopping centre, with all of its facilities, was a really big part of the success of the games. So that was a great Australian contribution.

I must say that it is reminder of something we did not get right with the Sydney Games. I just note this because the great criticism of Homebush has always been that after an event there was nothing there, and all you could do was file off to the railway station and go back home. The great thing that that Westfield centre and Lowy have done for the London Olympic precinct, is that when it is used after any event in the future there is life: there will be restaurants, bars and shops, and things for people to do. They are not going to walk out into a huge concrete void with nothing to look forward to other than a long ride home. I will concede that that is one respect where the British undoubtedly did a better job, but with Australian assistance. On that note, I am proud of our Australian athletes and our Australian entrepreneurs and I am really delighted to speak about the Olympics.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (11:08): The London Olympic Games finished on 12 August this year. Over the weeks since, homecoming celebrations have been held in each of our capital cities. This is my homecoming oration to them all. I would like to congratulate our Australian athletes; not just those who have won medals but everyone who has represented our country. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and large amount of effort put in by the athletes who represented our nation at the Paralympics, those who participate in the Special Olympics and our true young champions. However, I cannot ignore those who have represented my electorate and surrounding towns, and the importance that sport has played on these athletes in bringing our communities closer together.

Sport is an important part of life. It is an essence of our social fabric and it is an important part of the great Australian history. It allows for identities to be built and for role models to be created. Nothing less could be said for our athletes. Role models are what they are. They are the true meaning of inspiration. They all deserve to be welcomed home, and to those yet to compete, they deserve our best wishes. Role models and the influences of sporting heroes, from the likes of Sir Donald Bradman to Cathy Freeman, will always be remembered and looked up to by many. But events such as the Olympics series give the opportunities for new heroes to emerge. The Olympics, Paralympics and Special Olympics are all symbols of peace, trust and unity, bringing the world and the local communities together into one big family. Sport fosters team building, trust, honesty and the chance to help each other to achieve the best results. It is these factors that create and mould Australia's sporting identity. Local heroes are an imperative part of a town or city. To the local residents they provide the
encouragement which inspires the actions to achieve success. The Hunter reflects the Australian sporting identity, fostering its own league of sporting legends that represent themselves, their home town and their country at the prestigious Olympic Games.

The Olympic Games, of course, commenced in ancient Greece in Olympia. All wars were stopped for the games to go ahead—peace was particularly important. The Olympic Games were celebrated in honour of the gods. At Olympia, Zeus, the king of mythical gods, was honoured. Winners were recognised with the olive leaf crown and a red woollen ribbon and they held a palm frond. The Olympic organisation articulates that ‘Olympic champions became important figures in their town or city’, and when they returned home they received a welcoming ceremony. This movement has endured thousands of years, and yet this extensive progression through time has not altered the importance of our athletes.

There are several Olympians whom I would like to individually congratulate: firstly, Simon Orchard, now based in Perth, however his parents reside in my electorate. This young 26-year-old man made his Olympic debut and achieved a bronze medal for the men’s hockey team, the Hockeyroos. What can only be described as one of the goals of the tournament, Simon contributed to his team's defeat of England on their home turf. From my surrounding suburbs, Nathan Outteridge, from Lake Macquarie, achieved an outstanding result, winning a gold medal in the 49er skiff class with teammate Ian Jensen. I would also like to congratulate Angie Bainbridge, from Merewether, who secured a silver medal in the 4x200 freestyle relay, and Thomas Fraser-Holmes and Richie Campbell for their efforts in the pool. I extend my congratulations to Suzy Batkovic and Jenni Screen for their success with bronze medals in the Opals basketball team. Josh Ross of the Australian 4x100-metre relay team, who in 2005 was named Maitland Sportsperson of the Year; and to Kristy and Lyndal Oatley, participating in equestrian dressage events representing the Hunter region. To Thomas Benn Harradine, Brendan Sexton and Daniel Repacholi, I also applaud you. But still the success does not stop there.

The athletes do more than just compete in competition. The Olympic organisation involves schools across Australia to participate in interactive afternoons with Australian athletes in London. I understand that live interactive television was installed at Edgeworth primary school and allowed students to communicate with the athletes. I am thrilled that the Olympic notion adheres to what it was historically shaped by—unity engaging the world. Outlined by the Olympic organisation, the Olympic movement encompasses five aspects deemed to be what the Olympic Games are all about: sport for all; development through sport; education through sport; women and sport; and sport and the environment. This movement includes everyone, connecting them through sport and celebration at all stages of life. The aim was to include and rehabilitate those who fought and were injured in World War II. The first archery competition for wheelchair athletes commenced at the same time as the opening ceremony of the London 1948 Olympic Games.

Dr Ludwig Guttmann was the forefather of what now stands as one of the most recognised sporting events throughout the world, the Paralympic Games. These games were held annually in England, however, it was not until the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome that the Paralympics earned its title and it was held annually alongside the Olympic Games. Since Ludwig Guttmann found that the Paralympic Games in England in the forties, the event and its athletes have had to overcome the feeling of living in the shadows of the giant-like...
Olympics, and feeling like they were a 'second' or 'afterthought' as quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. However, as the 2012 Games were held in London, it was perceived that the Paralympic Games went home and a rebirth of the event was developed to ensure the greatest respect and equality for both the athletes and the volunteers. The games did not disappoint. Compared to the 400 athletes that competed in the 1960 games, the 2012 games saw 4,200 athletes compete from 165 countries. These games have developed over time and have fostered the motivation that stems from what these athletes give to the Australian population. Among Australia's past and present Paralympic athletes, I am proud to have some of these participants representing my electorate and the Hunter region broadly. Heath Francis of Boolah was born and raised in my electorate. Due to a farming accident at a young age, Heath had his right arm amputated. Having not let his accident impede his future, Heath overcame various obstacles to become an Olympic champion. After an excellent athletic career, Heath retired in 2010 as the Paralympic champion of the 100-, 200- and 400-metre track events. He is still an outstanding ambassador for Paralympic sports and the Australian Paralympic Committee. He is truly an inspiration to all of us.

The second athlete I would like to draw upon has accomplished many great things that most of us will never get to do. Kurt Fearnley was born without the lower half of his spine, known as lumbosacral agenesis. He now resides in Newcastle, and to date holds 28 national marathon victories, three gold medals, five silver medals and one bronze medal across three Paralympics. In 2009, Kurt crawled the Kokoda track in Papua New Guinea over a duration of 10 days. That is 96 kilometres of harsh terrain and unpleasant weather. He has crawled the Great Wall of China. He has won five world championships and conquered more than 20 marathons around the world. He is also a qualified teacher. This three-time Paralympian and six-time world champion has previously been the Commonwealth Athlete of the Year With a Disability, and in 2009 was the New South Wales Young Athlete of the Year. What immense accomplishments.

Great sporting achievements also inspire and expand through to our younger generations. Taylor Corry secured a silver medal in the 100-metre backstroke S14 event this year. This 18 year old was the first athlete from my electorate to secure a medal at the Paralympic Games. Taylor Corry and her older brother, Kieran, are equally exceptional swimmers. Both siblings have been recognised as finalists in the Paterson Young Sportsperson of the Year award. Kieran in 2010 and, more recently, Taylor earlier this year. Taylor has also been a recipient of our local sporting champions program grant in 2009 and 2011. I had the privilege of honouring this achievement in both years.

The Hunter region's Maddie Elliott has had many highlights in her athletic career, being Australia's youngest medal winner at 13 years of age and having previously been ranked No. 1 in the world for the 50-metre backstroke S8 event. Maddie scored a bronze medal in the 400-metre freestyle, beating her personal best time, and a gold medal as part of the 4 x 100-metre freestyle relay team, serving to smash the world record. In addition, her teammates Ellie Cole, Katherine Downie and Jacqueline Freney also had outstanding swims. Here we see the importance and teamwork and what it is that these results can accomplish. I cannot express how proud and encouraged I am by these exceptional athletes. They have overcome and endured life-altering circumstances, and have emerged on the other side stronger than
they have ever been. I would also like to congratulate Christie Dawes of Merewether and Georgia Beikoff of Valentine on their outstanding performances at this year's Paralympics.

2012 has been a monster year for the sporting industry. We have just participated in the Olympics and the Paralympics, and later this year we will see through the Junior National Games. The Special Olympics organisation runs many different events on local, national and international levels. In December this year, Newcastle will play host to the third Junior National Games. I am proud of the Hunter region's dedication to hosting such a prestigious event. I know Newcastle and Hunter residents would share in these feelings upon this occasion. This is the very first time that the Hunter has held the Junior National Games, joining with Canberra and Launceston as host cities.

The Special Olympics not only has the Junior National Games every four years, but in late 2013 Newcastle will also host the Special Olympics Asia-Pacific Regional Games, in which 24 countries will be involved. Various sport facilities throughout Newcastle and the Hunter will be used to accommodate the relative sports. These athletes, aged between eight and 15 years, provide motivation, and are an inspiration to others. Performing what we see grown adults doing, these youngsters are absolutely mind blowing. By taking part in this affair, the Special Olympians can now take part in something that provides acceptance, courage, friendship and, most of all, fun.

Special Olympic ambassador and athlete Steve Robson resides on the Central Coast. However, he has been quoted as saying that he is glad the Asia-Pacific games are going to be a local event for him. He said, 'This is awesome.' Steve is also an achieved accomplished athlete with many sporting highlights, being awarded the Life Without Barriers Sportsperson with a Disability Award in 2010, winning a gold medal in golf in Athens at the 2011 summer games, and was a record holder for the Special Olympics. As quoted by the Special Olympic Organisation, 'The Special Olympics are the largest sport and humanitarian event in the world.' However, it is not as well known to the general public compared to both the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games. Similar support that was seen with both large-scale games has been crucial for the event to be highly regarded by the athletes around the world. Nonetheless, everything has a small beginning. Looking back to the very beginning of the Paralympics, a doctor used sport as a rehabilitation method through including his patients turned something personalised into a major event of world renown. The Special Olympics has been no different.

On an even smaller scale, I have recently had the pleasure of presenting several local sporting championships grants in a diversity of sporting fields. As the next four years builds up to the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, I am excited to think that these fine young sports men and women will be competing in this tournament. I look forward to hearing of their future accomplishments in representing my electorate, the Hunter region and the nation. I am already impressed by their efforts.

Early on in the Olympics it did seem that some of the supporters were hard to please. At the beginning of the Games, I am sure we can all recall the harsh words and absurdly high expectations the media placed on our athletes. I am grateful that this soon dissipated and the media chose to focus on recognising our athletes' hard work and achievements. To me, no matter what place our athletes finished, no matter how few medals were accomplished, to
make the Australian team and to be competing against 200-odd nations at the Olympics, Paralympics and Special Olympics is a fantastic achievement in itself.

As previously mentioned, the traditional Olympics were never about winning medals, but in honour of Zeus. Our athletes should be recognised for what they have achieved both physically and mentally and be honoured accordingly. The athletes have described how much they appreciated the support from the nation and from their local communities. I cannot think of many other people more deserving than our Australian athletes of being role models and figures who can inspire others. I admire them all and I am glad that our youth have these people to look up to, these three teams of athletes and our local young champions representing our homes and our nation. They have set a perfect example of what it is to be an Australian athlete. They have done us all proud.

On this positive note, I would like to welcome our Australian Olympians, Paralympians and the volunteers who worked behind the scene to aid our athletes' home in London. I would like to say thank you and congratulations on representing our nation and themselves. I would like to acknowledge their achievements and to them I say, 'Great job, well done.' In particular I would like to recognise the contribution of the parents and the broader families in making these champions great. The sacrifices of time and finances being placed into these young people should not go unrecognised. I would also like to give my best wishes and good luck to the athletes of the Special Olympics and the local champions. It is these people who make us proud to be Australian.

Debate adjourned.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11:23):** I move:

That the Federation Chamber do now adjourn.

**Maranoa Electorate: Blackbutt-Benarkin Postal Region**

**Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (11:23):** I rise to speak on a simple mathematical equation which, depending if you believe in unlucky 13, is a shock to logic. Postcode 4306—four, plus three, plus zero, plus six—equals 13 and is one of the most unlucky postcodes in this state. I will explain why in my adjournment speech. For inexplicable reasons the Blackbutt-Benarkin region was allocated the same postcode as the Ipswich-Amberley region, some two hours distance and a totally unrelated region. They are two totally distinct regions separated by distance. They do not share a boundary. There are 57 localities that share the same postcode as Ipswich. Australia Post maintains that postcodes are for mail-sorting purposes only and it has no control over how postcode data is applied by other agencies, including other government agencies. Due to the fact that Ipswich-Amberley 4306 is described as a metropolitan region and Blackbutt-Benarkin region is rural, the erroneous allocation has resulted in a diverse and significant range of detrimental outcomes for the Blackbutt-Benarkin region in the South Burnett in my electorate.

For instance, Centrelink considers Blackbutt to be a suburb of Ipswich and requires residents to travel 130 kilometres to transact Centrelink business in lieu of a 60-kilometre trip to Kingaroy. Farming enterprises in the Blackbutt-Benarkin region employ backpackers that are a very important part of their seasonal workforce. If these enterprises want backpackers to
extend their 12-month visas, they are unable to effect this because the region is considered metropolitan instead of rural, due to its having the duplicated Ipswich postcode.

Another example is insurance for home contents and motor vehicle insurance, which are based on postcodes. This greatly disadvantages Blackbutt and Benarkin residents. Premium quote requests for neighbouring towns using the same property conditions attract quotes of at least $150 less each time. The Blackbutt-Benarkin region does not have the perceived threat risk on many levels associated with the Ipswich region—and that is not to take away from Ipswich as a community.

In efforts to obtain a better deal for the Blackbutt-Benarkin residents and after consulting Australia Post, I wrote to the Financial Ombudsman Service, the Insurance Council of Australia, and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, all of whom advised of their powerlessness to influence insurance companies or to effect change. Blackbutt was reported to have the highest drug related problem in the greater area. Again, this was based on postcodes and with Blackbutt having the same postcode as Ipswich the Blackbutt region was unfairly maligned.

There have been a number of complaints from people across the electorate of Maranoa about issues relating to shared postcodes. The Bedourie community in the Diamantina shire in the far west of my electorate shares a postcode with Boulia which is some 200 kilometres away. I was preparing my annual newsletter drop and was told by Australia Post that no-one lives in Bedourie as there are no service points there—wrong again, although they do not have a postcode. I can tell you there are people living in Bedourie. We have the same situation in Yaraka which is some five hours drive from Rockhampton and yet they share a postcode. I could go on.

The shared postcodes are also impacting on the length of time taken to receive mail. Constituents in the Blackbutt-Benarkin in the east of Maranoa share a postcode with Ipswich. The shared postcode is having a significant effect on the insurance premiums for those living in the Blackbutt area. Some of those postcodes were allocated and gazetted localities some 30 years ago. Much has changed since then, and many communities are seeing population growth.

My proposed fix is to change the Blackbutt postcode from 4306 to 4616, because 4616 is unallocated. It is a logical choice, because the adjoining postcodes are Nanango 4615 and Yarraman 4614. I believe there needs to be a postcode review to allocate unique postcodes to towns with a licensed Australia Post office or postal agency which currently share a postcode with a geographically separate region. I have been active in raising awareness of this issue for two years. Not supporting a change of postcode for the Blackbutt-Benarkin area from 4306 to 4616 is abetting many federal, state and other department agencies to disadvantage citizens of this region. (Time expired)

**Education Funding**

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11:28): I strongly condemn the New South Wales Liberal government's decisions to cut education funding by $1.7 billion and jeopardise the future of our kids. While on one hand the federal Labor government has doubled the investment in education since 2007 and continues to work towards building a world-class education system, the New South Wales government has seen this as a green light to slash funding for public,
Catholic and independent schools. And the New South Wales government has completely undermined the role of TAFE. The Gonski review made it clear we need to invest more to support our students and provide them with opportunities. Labor embraces this. We are determined to do what is necessary to build a world-class education system for our kids and their future.

My electorate of Fowler happens to be the most culturally diverse in the land, yet it is also, unfortunately, one of the most disadvantaged electorates in the country. People in my electorate understand the value of education. They know that education is the thing that makes a difference for their kids and for their futures. Labor cares about this, and therefore we invest in education. Local people appreciate the investment that we have made in education. Two trade training centres—one at Bonnyrigg High School and the other at Miller Technology High School—will give students access to industry-standard equipment and vocational education, providing quality pathways into trade and helping to improve high school retention rates. This will help address skill shortages in our traditional trades. 8,500 computers have been installed in my local schools. Thanks to this investment, every high school student from years 9 to 12 will have access to the technologies they need for the future. Every local primary school has received the buildings and resources that they so desperately need: $108 million has been spent investing in 115 projects, benefiting 46 schools under the BER program in my electorate alone.

Just as it seems that education is finally receiving the attention and support it deserves, the New South Wales Liberal government has turned around and betrayed the responsibility it has to the children of New South Wales and their future. There could be no more clear contrast between the approach that the Gillard government takes to education and that of Barry O'Farrell and the state Liberals. The New South Wales government has turned its back on the fundamental importance that education has in our nation's future. Investing in education is a direct investment into the future workforce and our ability to be internationally competitive. Less funding will mean job cuts, fewer teachers, larger class size and fewer learning opportunities for our young people to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to have a successful future. It will have an immediate effect on fees, the curriculum and extracurricular activities that apply to all students.

Education, next to health, is the single most important area of investment that truly impacts on people's lives. It is certainly not an area that should be sacrificed simply to meet the Liberal party's election pledge to build the North West Rail Link. I have personally spoken to every school principal in my electorate, and they are absolutely appalled by this development and this demeaning attitude taken to education. They have already prepared their budgets for the next school year based on the funding increases provided by the federal government, and now they are being forced to find ways to address this monstrous funding cut forced on them by the state Liberal government. This shameful move by the New South Wales Liberals is particularly painful for Western Sydney, where we have lesser educational outcomes being achieved. We need more investment in education, not less.

I think the principal of the Sacred Heart Primary School in Cabramatta, Mrs Margaret Hogan, summed it up best when she said:

These funding cuts will particularly impact the support programs in literacy and numeracy for our students.
In respect of Catholic education, she goes on to say:

There is no capacity for these parents to pay more school fees, they struggle as it is.

I cannot express enough how strongly and passionately I am opposed to these ruthless cuts. Together with my Labor colleagues I will be fighting tooth and nail to force the New South Wales government to rethink this disgraceful decision.

Burma

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (11:33): The recent developments in Burma—or Myanmar—with Aung San Suu Kyi being released from 21 years of house arrest, being democratically elected to the Burmese parliament and finally accepting her Nobel Peace Prize in person and also travelling to the United States are moments that I feel compelled to acknowledge through this House—not so much for myself but for my close friend, mentor and confidant the late Colin McPhedran. Colin passed away a couple of years ago, and because I know how passionate he was about Burma I want to make this statement on his behalf in honour of his memory, for I know that, were alive today, the news of Aung San Suu Kyi's release and the resumption of democratic parliamentary debate in the country of his birth would have been welcomed with joy and thankfulness.

I have previously spoken in the House about Colin McPhedran and his interest in Burma. He was born of a Burmese mother and a Scottish father who prior to World War II was an executive of Burmah Oil. When the Japanese invaded Burma, Colin's father abandoned his family, who were forced to fend for themselves. The mother gathered his brother and sister and attempted to flee to India. During the course of their escape, both his mother and his sister died on the trek. Colin detailed those harrowing experiences in his book White Butterflies. It is a moving book, and for those who may not have read it I thoroughly recommend it. Colin was a vehement Burmese nationalist and a Buddhist. He took a great interest in events occurring in his birth country. He despaired of what he saw and longed for the day that the Burmese people would finally be freed of the dictatorship they have suffered under for so many years. That day has finally dawned.

The Burmese are fundamentally a placid, peace-loving people. Being ruled by a despotic military regime is inconsistent with their natural identity. Buddhists are not inclined to violence and so they were vulnerable to the draconian hand of the Burmese military. The only realistic prospect for freedom for these oppressed people lay with Aung San Suu Kyi and her peaceful protest, as protracted as it was. Buddhists subscribe to the view that patience is a virtue, and this was the case of Aung San Suu Kyi's passive resistance. Like Nelson Mandela's in South Africa, Aung San Suu Kyi's persistence and peaceful protest has finally been rewarded, although at many times there were moments of grave concern. By no means is Burma out of the woods, but it is a significant step, and one to celebrate. In doing so the world can show its approval and signal to the warlords that their day is over. But freedom is a fragile petal, and the Burmese need to guard against future attacks on their emerging democracy.

Colin was inherently a pacifist, and never accepted the eye-for-an-eye or fight-fire-with-fire approach as a meaningful solution. He always advocated patience, tolerance and understanding instead of confrontation. If Colin's attitude is generally reflective of the Burmese psyche then a coup d'etat was never on the cards as an option to overwhelm the military regime.
Colin's very good friend and close friend of mine is Mac Cott. Mac is a former editor of the Southern Highlands News, and at Colin's passing wrote a touching report from which I offer the following quote:

Mr McPhedran, who died in Perth last Thursday night, will be accorded a memorial service at St Jude's Anglican Church, Bowral, today at 11am. This will be followed by a mid-afternoon Buddhist ceremony at Sunnataram Forest Monastery, Teudt's Road, Bundanoon, when his ashes will be spread on the land dedicated to his late mother, Daw Ni, who died alone on the family's horror trek fleeing from their native Burma on foot to India in 1942.

It was Colin's dying wish to his children to have a Christian service in St Jude's Bowral, dedicated to his mother, a devout Burmese Christian who has no known grave, and that he later would have a Buddhist ceremony at the monastery of which he was a founding father.

Colin never lived to see the transitioning of his beloved Burma from military rule to the dawning of a new democracy but, given his firm beliefs that he would be reincarnated in a new life, perhaps his soul is now amongst us in a new form, quizzically casting an eye on the lot of Aung San Suu Kyi.

I intend to forward the Hansard copy of my statement today to Aung San Suu Kyi as a gesture to Colin McPhedran. Colin would be assured to know that his memory is held dear by many who knew him and that he remains as respected now as he was while he was with us. It was a pleasure today to have breakfast with the Myanmar parliamentary delegation that is here in parliament today—another big step forward for Burmese democracy.

Deakin Electorate: AG Lavis Pavilion

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (11:37): Last year on 19 November I attended the official opening of the AG Lavis Pavilion in the suburb of Heathmont in the electorate of Deakin that I am privileged to represent. As I noted in this place on 16 February this year the opening of a new pavilion was a great turnaround for the sporting clubs that have been using the grounds and facilities. The AG Lavis Pavilion is used by both the Heathmont Baseball Club and the Heathmont Baptist Cricket Club. The baseball club uses the facilities in winter and the cricket club uses them in summer.

I was first contacted by Mark Le Grew from the Heathmont Baseball Club in August 2009 with a request to inspect the state of the facilities. At a meeting that September and during subsequent visits I learnt more about the Heathmont baseball club and saw first-hand the run-down and dilapidated facilities that were on offer. With the valued assistance of Maroondah City councillor Paul McDonald and the support of Shaun Leane MLC for Eastern Metropolitan in Melbourne we were able to put up a case for funding of a new building with Maroondah Council. No substantive work had been done on the building since at least 1981 or maybe even before—it was so long ago that many people could not remember anything happening there—and it certainly showed.

We were able to get an RLCIP funding grant of $246,000 from the federal Labor government towards which the Maroondah City Council put $687,000 to produce a great result that saw the delivery of a brand new facility for the clubs that is a model for future developments of sporting facilities in both Maroondah and other local government areas. With a deck out the front and with huge bifold doors it is a great viewing area, whereas the old playing field viewing area was pretty much a piece of tin over the top of a small brick and concrete building. The new building is also air-conditioned, which is a must for hot summer
and cold winter days. On 12 April this year I was invited to throw the first pitch for the season and to mark the first in-season use of the new clubrooms and facilities. I am happy to report that I did get the pitch on line, though it was not very fast. Last weekend, on Saturday, 15 September, the Heathmont Baseball Club won the premiership of the A-grade competition of the Melbourne Winter Baseball League against Research Baseball Club with a score of 10-0. The D2-grade team unfortunately lost by one run, with a score of 6-7, in extra innings to Footscray in their grand final. Overall, though, the club had four of its six senior teams in the finals along with two of its three junior teams, an amazing effort and I think worthy of applause from afar here in Canberra.

The success of the various teams in the finals is a source of great local pride which can only be stoked by the selection of two players, John Kennedy and Matt Wilson, for the Australian under-18 side and the signing of Matt for a March 2013 start with the Baltimore Orioles in the US. In addition, James Brooks was signed to the Washington Nationals in July this year and has successfully completed their minor league season following on from four years in college. Josh Hendricks is another Heathmont player who has found success in a bigger league and who is now in his second year of a contract with Minnesota. Both players, James Brooks and Josh Hendricks, started playing for Heathmont Baseball Club as 13- or 14-year-old players and their success has been a great example to the many young players that are coming through the club now. Over the years, Heathmont Baseball Club has produced many Olympic representatives and 25 Australian representatives and, in addition, has produced Australia's highest profile baseball player, Atlanta Braves pitcher Peter Moylan, who signed professionally while he was still playing at the club in Heathmont.

I am certain that the success of the club did not come about just by having a new building; it came about through hard work and persistence on the part of the players, coaches, administrators, supporters, parents and all the other people that make a great local club. They deserve all of the recognition that success as the number one winter baseball club in Victoria brings. That they now have brand-new facilities that they are very proud to show off to visiting teams and spectators is merely the icing on the cake. Congratulations to the A-grade team at Heathmont Baseball Club on winning this year's grand final and congratulations to all the other Heathmont teams that made the finals. I am sure that there are many more to come in the coming years and long may the club's success continue.

**Longman Electorate: Small Businesses**

**WYATT ROY** (Longman) (11:42): I have some great small businesses in my electorate, owned and managed by some very passionate and hardworking people. Last week I went to visit some of these people and their businesses. I visited Specsavers, Nextra, Subway, Australian Country Living, LensPro, Hairhouse Warehouse and Price Attack, all in the Morayfield Shopping Centre. Earlier this year, these businesses were nominated for the Longman Small Business Achievement Award for the hard work they had been putting in to build their business and the business community. All of these businesses deserve to be congratulated for their outstanding efforts.

When I am out speaking to local businesses, people ask me about how a coalition government would ease pressure and kick-start the local economy. Unlike this Labor government, the coalition believes in small business. We believe that small business is the engine room of the economy and that we as policy makers need to be doing everything
possible to ensure that small business can prosper. We understand that in order to prosper, small businesses need certainty—that is why we have a clear plan to help small business. The coalition will alleviate the pressure on small business by cutting unnecessary taxes. We have made it very clear that we will abolish the carbon tax. This is a bad tax that is hurting small business through electricity costs, refrigerant costs, transportation costs and rising overheads, and the list goes on. We will also cut $1 billion of red tape by restoring a bit of common sense and practicality, something that has long been missing from this Labor government. A coalition government will also conduct a root-and-branch review of competition law to ensure federal legislation and policy settings promote competition rather than penalise small business. We want to help small business get ahead. We want to make it easier for them to get on with the job of running their business. That is why the coalition will protect the rights of independent contractors and the self-employed by recognising and preserving the PSI tax treatment. We will also institute a policy that ensures government departments pay their bills to small businesses on time—and, if they do not, they will be forced to pay interest.

The coalition will ensure that small business has a strong voice with the key decision makers of this country. We will establish a small business ombudsman to advocate for small business and champion their concerns. This will also exist as a gateway for government support and services. Small businesses will receive stronger, more effective representation on regulatory bodies, and small business policy will be a priority of a coalition government, with a federal small business minister appointed to cabinet to ensure that small business concerns are of the utmost priority in policy decisions.

It is my strong belief that, as policymakers, we need to listen to what our small businesses are experiencing. They are at the coalface and only they can tell us what can be done to assist them in getting on with the job of running their businesses. It is for this reason that I created the Longman Executive Business Branch earlier this year. The Longman Executive Business Branch provides local small businesspeople with a platform to speak directly with the key decision makers and to share with them the challenges facing business.

Earlier this year the Longman Executive Business Branch was launched, with a breakfast featuring the shadow minister for communications and broadband, Malcolm Turnbull, as guest speaker. This was a great event, and there was a lot of enthusiasm for the opportunity to speak to a policymaker about how communications infrastructure and policy affect local businesses. Next week, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the shadow minister for foreign affairs and trade, Julie Bishop will be a guest at the breakfast of the Longman Executive Business Branch, sharing her insights gained from her role in business as the shadow minister for trade. Next month, I will be hosting the shadow minister for small business, Bruce Billson, at another function for the Longman Executive Business Branch. Small businesses from my electorate will have the opportunity to put questions about the coalition's initiatives to help small businesses get ahead and relieve the pressure they are facing.

Should the coalition be re-elected, we will once again see a government that will scrap unnecessary taxes. It will cut wasteful spending and reduce the tax burden on business. We will see higher productivity, higher job growth, sustainable development and a modern enterprise economy that eradicates barriers to opportunity and engagement.
Ms BURKE (Chisholm—Deputy Speaker) (11:47): I rise to speak about the achievements of seven inspiring academic and teaching professionals at Monash and Deakin universities in my electorate of Chisholm who this week received the prestigious citation award from the Gillard government for their contributions to enriching student learning. We are fortunate in Australia to be home to some of the world's leading universities. In my own electorate I am proud to represent the Melbourne campus of Deakin University, located in Burwood, and the central campus of Monash University in Clayton. These are very large facilities and are fantastic institutions.

These universities are fantastic institutions which not only provide an exceptionally high standard of education for tens of thousands of students each year but engage in world-leading research and innovation that is vital to the future of our economy. Education is the key to unlocking the potential of young Australians as more and more Australians take up university education. The Gillard government is ensuring that the quality of student learning remains high and that every student's experience is rewarding.

A university education is about more than textbooks and exams. It is an opportunity to engage in a holistic learning experience, which is driven by dedicated and passionate professionals and has the power to inspire a lifelong love of learning and inquiry. The 2012 citation awards have recognised 152 academics in 38 universities across the country who are at the forefront of developing innovative programs and new teaching models which are improving students' experience and learning. It is a wonderful thing that we are actually recognising teaching within universities and not just how many publications an academic has, so these citations are a wonderful thing.

From Monash University, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate Associate Professor Cristina Varasavsky, School of Mathematical Sciences, Faculty of Science, whose sustained leadership has driven change at the faculty and institutional levels in the pursuit of a quality learning and teaching environment. I also congratulate experienced observational astronomer Dr Kevin Pimbblet, of the School of Physics, for risking active learning approaches in a content heavy discipline to achieve interested and engaged learners, resulting in more students pursuing physics. That is a really important thing.

Also, senior lecturer Dr Kellie Tuck for inspiring her students to a lifelong passion for chemistry through the use of innovative teaching practices. And while they are located at the Malaysia campus of Monash, I would also like to recognise Dr Arkendu Sen and Associate Professor Lakshmi Selvaratnam, at the Malaysia School of Medicine and Health Sciences, for their work translating Aristotle's philosophy that 'teaching is the highest form of understanding' into practice through novel, technology-enhanced collaborative learning and peer-teaching strategies in anatomy.

And at Deakin University it is an honour to congratulate Dr Tess Knight, Senior Lecturer, School of Psychology, for empowering self-reflective and independent learning, informing perspectival appreciation on ageing and future counselling roles. We know that ageing is a very important thing, particularly in electorates like mine with a high ageing population.
I congratulate School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences Senior Lecturer, Dr Lynn Riddell, for leadership that has made a sustained positive contribution to developing professional competencies and advancing career outcomes for students in food and nutrition. Congratulations to Associate Professor Julie Considine, of the School of Nursing and Midwifery for her commitment to a teaching-evidence-practice nexus in specialist and advanced nursing courses to develop clinical excellence, enhanced quality and safety of health care.

And congratulations to Dr Jaclyn Broadbent, of the School of Psychology, for the sustained creation of motivation inspiring learning environments for over 1,600 students in a compulsory multimodal subject. All of these individuals are fantastic. I am immensely proud of all these professionals and the contribution they are each making to the lives of students.

I would also like to acknowledge the fact that they are joined by other colleagues from their prospective institutions working on campuses outside my electorate. They will each receive their hard-earned citations, worth $10,000 in front of families, friends and peers at a special ceremony in Melbourne on 2 October. We all know from our time at school, university or TAFE what a difference a good and inspiring teacher makes. Their influence lasts a lifetime. The benefit of their commitment to teaching and enhanced learning extend far beyond the individual student, as each of these students goes on to achieve and contribute more, benefiting everyone around them.

It is also with a great sense of pride that I stand here as a member of a Labor government which has proven its commitment to higher education ensuring that every Australian, no matter where they live or their background, should be able to go to university if they have the ability. Since coming to government, Labor has funded undergraduate places at public universities based on student demand, providing an additional $4.5 billion in demand driven places from 2012 to 2015 and over $3 billion in indexation changes from 2012 to 2015. I can certainly assure you that at both of the campuses in my electorate, at Deakin and at Monash, this has been greatly welcomed. I, again, congratulate all these individuals.

Hughes Electorate: Intermodal Freight Terminal

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (11:52): I, along with many of the constituents in my area, rise to express my concerns about the supposed solution for Sydney's intermodal transport needs. I am very glad that the member for Fowler is here in the chamber today because this issue also affects many constituents in his electorate.

The government proposes to build a freight intermodal terminal in Moorebank on the site where the School of Military Engineering is currently located. I have five major concerns about it. My first concern is the cost. We are talking about spending $900 million—almost $1 billion—simply to relocate the School of Military Engineering. To relocate it, to take the existing facilities and move them five kilometres away, to clear the land will cost the Australian taxpayer close to $1 billion. So before we have even turned a single sod on the intermodal project we are close to $1 billion worth of cost. My second concern is that the intermodal at Moorebank is built on a completely false premise that it will take trucks off the road, particularly off the M5. A recent independent analysis has been done by Paul van den Bos, who is an expert in this area, and he has confirmed that it is simply a fallacy that the intermodal will take trucks off the M5. My third concern is that it will create traffic nightmares in our local area. Already where we live—which is part of my electorate and...
overlaps with the member for Fowler's electorate—has traffic problems. A report a few weeks ago in the Daily Telegraph said that the Hume Highway in Liverpool has been named as Sydney's most notorious black spot with at least 183 crashes reported in the last 12 months, to June 2012. That is 183 crashes in 12 months on one short strip of road on the Hume Highway in Liverpool. The proposal is to put several thousand trucks—several thousand B-doubles and B-triples—on that road, adding to the congestion on that road. This is completely unacceptable for the people of Liverpool and for the people who use the Hume Highway.

Another concern with the traffic is that our other local roads, such as Nuwarra, Moorebank and Heathcote roads, simply are not designed to handle the increased number of B-doubles that will be using it and moving container trucks. There is also a concern with the crossing at the Georges River on the M5. Currently, the proposal has only a 350-metre gap for trucks to merge and move lanes. So we will have a major expressway where cars are going 100 kilometres an hour, and the trucks will have to go basically from a standing start, cross into that traffic and merge across three lanes in the space of 350 metres. The traffic experts tell us that this is a disaster waiting to happen.

The fourth reason why the Moorebank intermodal is a bad proposal—not only for the local residents but for all of Sydney—is that it is simply not in the right location. If you look at a map of where the containers in Sydney actually need to go, the majority of containers that will be sent from the Moorebank intermodal will go to north-west Sydney. So we are actually not reducing traffic movements at all. Instead of those trucks starting from Port Botany, they will be starting their journey from Moorebank and going to the north-western parts of Sydney.

The fifth reason is the pollution. Liverpool already has one of the highest levels of airborne pollution of all of Sydney, and all of Australia. In fact, if you look at the current levels of asthma, in almost every age bracket Liverpool has a much higher level of asthma. There is a better solution. This is not about 'not in my backyard.' Eastern Creek has already been recommended by many studies as the best location for Sydney. In fact, the report titled Railing Port Botany's containers: proposals to ease Sydney's pressure on roads concludes that in order to provide a large intermodal for western Sydney, it is recommended that Eastern Creek be confirmed as the preferred site. Further, a 2007 review by the Infrastructure Implementation Group has also recommended that Eastern Creek be the preferred location for Sydney's intermodal. I hope that the government will have a look at this. Moorebank is not the right location for this. (Time expired)

Chifley Electorate: Achievements

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (11:58): Today I want to celebrate some special achievements in the Chifley electorate by people who have made significant contributions to our community. First, I want to acknowledge the recent retirement of well-respected local surgeon, Associate Professor Mac Wylie OAM. Professor Wylie—Head of Surgery at Mount Druitt Hospital before his retirement—had been part of the hospital's fabric since before Her Majesty the Queen opened the hospital in 1982. At 72, Professor Wylie is gearing up for a much more relaxed phase of his life, and all the best wishes to him. He is currently enjoying a well-earned break before embarking on a new role with Western Sydney Local Health District as a clinical consultant. In this role, he will continue his 30-year involvement with Mount Druitt Hospital for one day a week. He recently told the St Marys-Mount Druitt Star that his only regret is that there has not been as much service to our local
community as he and other staff would like since emergency surgery moved to Blacktown Hospital in 2009. He said that there is a capacity to increase the scope of the hospital and hopefully the new administration will move the hospital forward.

That brings me to the next local institution—Mount Druitt Hospital, which next month marks its 30th anniversary of the official opening by Queen Elizabeth II. The hospital was designed in 1980 by renowned architect Professor Lawrence Nield, who these days is the head of the Heritage Council of New South Wales. The building's futuristic urban design made the hospital a landmark from the time it was built and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects awarded Mount Druitt Hospital the New South Wales Merit Award in 1993. Today, the hospital is joined with Blacktown Hospital, sharing the same management. Only three of its four operating theatres are in use today, which is a bone of contention amongst many in the Mount Druitt community. There are 120 beds for general medical and surgical use, 62 for paediatrics and 13 day-only observation beds. With the loss of emergency surgery to Blacktown, Mount Druitt hopes to become the centre of excellence in medical imaging.

Last week I presented almost 4,000 petitions to the Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, the member for Sydney, which I have collected from local residents wanting an MRI licence for the hospital. Only then can Mount Druitt Hospital truly be a centre of excellence in medical imaging.

Next door to the hospital is the iconic Rooty Hill RSL club. Rooty Hill RSL is the largest RSL in Australia. It is a club that ranks in the top 10 of all registered clubs of any format. From humble beginnings in 1964, with a membership of 127, the club now boasts more than 48,000 members and covers nine hectares. It is constantly looking for ways to expand and improve services. Two years ago, the RSL was the first club in Australia to install an environmentally friendly trigeneration power plant in an effort to future proof its growing power requirements in the greenest, most efficient way possible. It was a visionary investment of $4.5 million. It captures waste heat from electricity production and uses heat to cool buildings. It improves energy efficiency, reduces greenhouse emissions and it is said to have reduced carbon emissions by 2,400 tonnes in the first full year of the plant's operation, making savings of more than $600,000 a year. All credit to the club and its vision for investing in this important equipment.

Last but by no means least, I also want to recognise Featherdale Wildlife Park in nearby Doonside. Featherdale in recent years has become the zoo of choice for many international visitors to Sydney. These have included celebrity visitors such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Cruise, Gwen Stefani, Kristen Stewart, Taylor Lautner, Robert De Niro, Matt Damon, Dave Grohl and Smokey Robinson—all hanging out in Doonside. Recently, Featherdale Wildlife Park—and the member for Kooyong would be welcome there if he ever visited Western Sydney—celebrated its 40th birthday. It continues to be one of Sydney's premier tourist attractions. It has twice been awarded best major tourist attraction, in 2005 and 2009. Besides providing Australian and international visitors with a wonderful experience, I must commend the remarkable conservation work that Featherdale does, particularly with koalas. The Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke, has visited Featherdale on a number of occasions and has commended the park for its great work.
My community is much richer for all these wonderful efforts. I am delighted to have the opportunity to put on record acknowledging each of them. Again, I would welcome the member for Kooyong should he visit Western Sydney to see some of these great things. The member for Kooyong is a patron of Melbourne Heart. He would be welcome to come and see the Western Sydney Wanderers, who have just entered the A-League. We are looking forward to celebrating success on our turf at your expense.

**St Joseph's Cathedral, Rockhampton**

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (12:02): Rockhampton is a city of considerable charm. Its public buildings reflect the history of Central Queensland and Rockhampton as its administrative centre. There are magnificent sandstone and colonial buildings such as the Customs House, the Supreme Court, Criterion Hotel and a stunning post office—probably the best in Australia. There are also two beautiful cathedrals, St Paul's and St Joseph's. It is St Joseph's I want to talk about today.

This glorious sandstone edifice with its twin steeples was built from 1894 and opened in 1899 by Cardinal Moran of Sydney. It is the only sandstone Gothic cathedral in the northern half of Australia. As such, it is a religious, cultural and architectural icon. Why my interest? The seats of Dawson, Capricornia, Flynn, Maranoa and Hinkler are all parts of the Rockhampton diocese. The cathedral is the mother church for Central Queensland Catholics and the administrative and religious headquarters for the diocese. The cathedral is also a cultural adornment for the city of Rockhampton. As with many buildings like this, the ravages of time and weather have taken their toll and the sandstone is desperately in need of restoration. The church was built in the late 1890s, as I said, on a clay pan and there have been movements of up to 150 millimetres over the years. In 1918, there was a magnitude 6 earthquake, and in 1949 there was a cyclone. The Second World War saw the temporary removal of the stained glass windows, which were up for cleaning and re-leading in England in the late 1980s.

As part of this latest restoration, the mullions have to be repaired, and the metal screens replaced by protective hardened glass to keep the hoons away. The top three metres of each of the spires have to be rebuilt and the northern tower needed extensive work. A comprehensive engineer-designed drainage scheme was put in place, more downpipes connected, and a complete reflashing covered out over the roofing areas—in some cases with lead. Stonework was repaired, and almost the entire building was repointed. There was 60 kilometres of masking tape required—just imagine how much work that involved. The grounds were re-landscaped and new cobblestone was laid, creating a very professional finish.

All this came at a price, and a price that cannot be avoided. If you do these jobs, you do them properly. It took $6.2 million to do this job and about half of that is in hand. The diocese is large in area, 414 square kilometres, but relatively small in population—400,000 people, of whom 25 per cent are Catholics. It is a monumental challenge which comes on top of running 38 schools, five Mater hospitals, several nursing homes, 31 parishes and 81 mass centres. It is a big job to run a diocese like that and an even bigger job to take on these extra works. The responsibility has been taken by Bishop Brian Heenan, who has shown exemplary faith and leadership, along with his vicar-general, Father John Grace, and the two coordinators at various times, Father John Daly and Father Don White.
The church is working constructively with the government in seeking some Commonwealth assistance with its very important heritage building. I support the application strongly. I urge the minister to give the diocese’s application for funding generous consideration. My wife, Margaret, and I were privileged to be guests at the restoration thanksgiving ceremonies—a climactic event of faith, optimism and progress. There was a sacred concert on Saturday night, while nine bishops from across Australia joined Bishop Heenan and the priests of his diocese at a thanksgiving mass on the Sunday morning.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I call the member for Shortland, and in doing so I support the comments of the member for Hinkler.

Micah Challenge

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (12:08): Thank you. On Tuesday this week I, like many other members of this parliament, met with young people from the Micah Challenge. I found it so invigorating and refreshing to meet with young people who are not only looking at improving lives of people within their own city, region and country but they are looking outside Australia and have a much more global perspective on the need to address issues such as poverty, clean water, child and maternal health, and many of the other Millennium Development Goals. These are young people that spend their life and put all their energy towards improving the lives of people in developing countries.

Since 1990, around the world, two billion people have been lifted out of absolute poverty and the proportion living below absolute poverty has been halved. The percentage of children suffering from poor nutrition has dropped from 40 per cent to 27 per cent of all children, with an additional 110 million in school, and over 90 per cent of all children at primary level are now enrolled. In almost all countries, girls now have the same chance as boys to complete primary school education. Rates of childhood death have been cut by 37 per cent. Paternal death has been cut by 47 per cent. Rates of new infections and deaths from the very most deadliest infectious diseases—HIV, TB and malaria—are all dropping. Access for people to improved water sources has risen from 76 to 89 per cent and access to improved sanitation has risen from 49 to 63 per cent. These are the figures that the young people from Micah 10 gave me when they visited.

I have recently returned from Pakistan, where I learnt about how some of these issues are still prevalent. We learnt about areas where stunted growth from poor nutrition is still commonplace. There is a need for the Millennium Development Goals associated with child death and maternal death to be significantly improved. I visited PNG and the Solomon Islands a couple of years ago with the health and ageing committee, and particularly in PNG I learnt about the prevalence of TB and malaria, and the impact the multi-resistant TB was having on the lives of people living in that country. The visits to these countries and talking to people working on the ground brought home to me very graphically the reason that we as a country should continue to invest in aid. We have made a commitment of 0.5 and to work towards 0.7. Every time I meet with these young people and see their zeal for really helping other people, it gives me faith in the younger generation. It shows me that young people do care and young people are prepared to put other people in front of themselves. I do not think it is the exception; I think that generally speaking young people believe in promoting a positive future.
The unfinished business as far as Micah 10 is concerned is halving the proportion of people who do not have access to clean drinking water—and we all know how important clean drinking water is for health; reducing child mortality rate by two-thirds; reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters; and halving the proportion of people without access to an improved toilet. These are all very important goals. It is our global responsibility to support achieving these goals and to provide assistance to those developing countries. If young people like those in Micah 10 can make this sort of commitment, I think as a parliament we can do the same.

Biosecurity

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (12:13): Of particular concern to Australia's agriculture, particularly for potato growers, is a zebra chip disease caused by the bacteria Candidatus Liberibacter. The disease first appeared in Central America in the early 1990s before spreading to Texas in 1999. It has been reported in all states west of the Mississippi River except Utah. According to Biosecurity Australia, it was first detected in New Zealand in 2006. The problem in New Zealand is so severe for the production of French fries in the North Island that the industry is described as being on a knife's edge.

The coalition are highly concerned about the catastrophic damage—and I am not exaggerating—to the Australian potato industry that the proposed import of fresh New Zealand potatoes poses. We have heard this before in the case of apples and now it is the case with potatoes. It is particularly concerning, as Biosecurity Australia is understood to have conceded that infected potatoes will inevitably be imported into Australia if New Zealand is given import rights, but it does believe there are adequate means through quarantine facilities to control the risk and any potatoes found to have the disease would be destroyed, as they should be, either by incineration or deep burial under strict quarantine controls. Fresh, whole potatoes from New Zealand will not be available for retail sale and will be provided only for further processing into hot chips. However, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry believe there will still be about 30 per cent waste from the imported potatoes. We believe the importation of potatoes from countries that have the disease is premature and before importation is considered we need proper science to give us a much better understanding of the issue and the biosecurity systems which can manage and eradicate outbreaks.

In my electorate of Riverina, the Hillston district is a large potato growing area with the golden delight potato originating in this district. There is a mechanical harvest biannually, one from June to September and the other from October to January. There is a significant concern among growers about the impact zebra chip will have on their crops should it spread to this area. The thing about Hillston potatoes is that they are absolutely fresh and they are amazingly good. I can remember going to the Northern Riverina Football League preliminary final at Hillston last year and the young lad at the gate said to me, 'Sir, would you like to buy a bag of potatoes?' Being a local member, I said: 'Yeah, sure, why not. Pass it through the window.' He said, 'Hardly' and then this burly fellow came out with this huge sack of potatoes. It was more than you could possibly eat in six months. My wife Catherine thought they were the best that she has ever eaten. We go back to Hillston whenever we can and always make sure we buy a sack of potatoes. That is why they should be protected.
Mr Lyons: Not as good as Tasmanian, mate.

Mr McCormack: Better than Tasmania, those in the Riverina, but they should be protected. There is concern shared by growers across Australia. AUSVEG, the national peak industry body that represents the best interests of potato growers, believes the assessment of risk on the import of fresh potatoes for processing is seriously flawed and should be rejected.

Also of vital importance to Riverina's agriculture is a sensible Murray-Darling Basin Plan. The plan will come before parliament soon. This morning, the water minister introduced amendments in the House to the Water Act. Of the $5.8 billion set aside under the Water Act for works and measures—water savings infrastructure, which if spent properly will retain more than enough water for the environment—$3.3 billion was allocated to the states. Part of New South Wales's share is yet to be apportioned. A former member of the New South Wales Legislative Council, Rick Bull, is coordinating the delivery of the Water for Rivers program, an excellent initiative. He was in parliament today. I spoke to him as did the shadow water minister, Senator Barnaby Joyce. Water for Rivers is working in partnership with State Water and the New South Wales Department of Water and Energy to establish the Murrumbidgee River as the world's most efficiently managed and operated working river system. The group says it will save, retrieve, keep, maintain—call it what you like—as much as 500 megalitres which will go into the sustainable diversion limit box. That has to be a good measure. It would form part of the money set aside. It would not be taking productive water out of the system. The Murrumbidgee River is the lifeblood for those wonderful farmers of the Riverina district. I commend the Water for Rivers program to the minister for water and I commend it to the House. I hope that Tony Burke takes this in good faith and implements what Rick Bull is trying to do.

Hodgetts, Mr Todd

Mr Lyons (Bass) (12:18): I rise to congratulate a sporting champion from my electorate of Bass, Paralympian gold medallist, Todd Hodgetts. Todd recently won a gold medal in the F20 division of the shot put, the intellectual disability division, with a massive 16.29-metre effort. Todd, who has been a victim of bullying in his life, described the win as the best day of his life, 'Just like being in a Hollywood movie.' Nicknamed the 'Incredible Hulk', Todd battled inflammation in his elbow to beat his own world record not once but twice to claim the gold. Todd is an inspiration to all young athletes, especially those who have suffered from hardships and especially from bullying. Todd's father said that he is sure that Todd would do anything he could to stop bullying, especially in the schoolyard, as the issue is so close to his heart. It goes to show that hard work, dedication and perseverance pay off and in Todd's case, his 14-year-old boyhood dream has now come true. Todd's family first knew he was going to be champion at an early age. One of Todd's elder brothers, Heath, brought a shot-put home from school and told Todd that, if he could hit the farm fence many yards away, he could go to the Paralympics. And Todd hit the fence. Since the age of 14, Todd has been training three times a day and has had some great coaches assisting him to reach the high level that he has today. Todd's dad, Kevin, believes that Todd's greatest asset is his three older brothers. They have helped him to integrate and have always had faith and confidence in him. Kevin also describes Todd as a lovable character who has battled all the way along but who has never given up and has always remained strong and dedicated to his training and his sport.
Todd's Mum and Dad are extremely proud of their Paralympian gold medallist son. But Todd did not need to win a gold medal to be a champion in his Dad's eyes, with Kevin saying that Todd did not have to win a medal to be someone special, because he has always been special in their eyes. I am sure that the love and support of Todd's Mum and Dad and his brothers have gone a long way to helping him get to where he is today. Todd's family has always believed that he could win a Paralympic gold medal, with Kevin telling me some months ago that Todd would go to the Paralympics and that he would bring home a gold medal. And he was right. Todd, a Tasmanian Institute of Sports scholarship holder and former weight lifter, has declared that he will be going to defend his title at Rio.

Todd's Dad believes that there must be many more Paralympians out there—they just do not know it yet. As Kevin said, 'If Todd can do it, anyone can do it.' This is a fantastic message for any budding athlete out there. Do not be afraid to take a risk. Do not be afraid to take a chance. You will never know if you do not have a go. Congratulations to Todd; it was a fantastic effort and an extremely well-deserved gold medal. I am sure that we will be seeing you again to defend your title in Rio and I look forward to that. I would like to encourage all Tasmanians to get behind our Paralympic superstar when he returns home and let him know that we are extremely proud of his efforts and his achievements. Well done, Todd. We look forward to seeing you in Rio.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (12:22): I rise to commend the great people of the northern Gold Coast in the electorate of Fadden to nominate the wonderful volunteers in their organisation of the annual Fadden Volunteer Awards. Every year around October and November we put on an awards ceremony that highlights those great unsung heroes of our community: those who volunteer their time, their resources, their efforts and who serve their local communities through a range of groups from amputee services through to Lions to Rotary; those who go overseas to support regional development goals; those who work in local schools; those who teach RE in schools; those who work with kids with disadvantage, like Riding for the Disabled; those who work with the Red Cross; and those who work with St. John Ambulance. The list of volunteer organisations goes on and on.

The Fadden Volunteer Awards are simply saying to those people: 'We value your contribution to community. We value the fact that not only do you save the purse of the state an enormous amount of money in the state not having to provide those services but you stand up proudly and say, "You know what? We do not want the state involved. We believe in community. We believe in small government. We believe that community should be able to solve communities' problems." And I applaud that. I applaud those people who serve and work tirelessly. Many of them will get no recognition. They will not see their names in the paper or be on the seven o'clock news. They will not have their highlights and the activities they do and the successes they have applauded in the public space. So the Fadden Volunteer Awards is all about saying to you: 'Whilst the greater media do not see what you do, I see what you do. Your community sees what you do. The organisation you work with sees what you do. We are not blind to the impact you have on everyday lives.' When it comes down to the issue of service, if we are not impacting and improving lives for the better, then we have missed the heart of what service truly is.
I encourage all of the volunteer organisations within the northern Gold Coast, within Fadden, to put forward your nominations for the Fadden Volunteer Awards. Put forward those men and women who work tirelessly in your organisation and deserve to be recognized, who deserve to have their name in lights for that one brief period of time and who deserve for the community to highlight them, to see them and to applaud them for what they have done. Nominations are open now and are open for the next month. The nomination form is available on my website at robert.com.au. Fill it out—it is not difficult—send it through to us and we look forward to working with our varied community groups in identifying, lifting up and acknowledging those unsung heroes who do so very much for the lives of the people on the northern Gold Coast.

G20

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (12:25): Today I want to speak about the global challenge of poverty. This week Oxfam Australia brought Steve Price-Thomas, Oxfam's international adviser on the G20, to parliament. I had the opportunity to meet with him, as I know some other members in this place did also. It provided a timely opportunity, as Australia prepares to join the G20 troika, to discuss the role of the most powerful and influential body on the globe in addressing the truly global challenge of eradicating poverty. Many in this place may be aware that the G20 members account for more than 80 per cent of global GDP. Yet some may be surprised to learn that more than half of the world's poor, more than 750 million people, live within G20 nations. Poor people in India, China and Indonesia make up the great majority of this population living on under US$1.25 a day, with smaller numbers in South Africa and Brazil as well.

What does this mean for our efforts to eradicate poverty? Well, it is definitely a thought-provoking question. Quite clearly it is not just a problem of capital, as the nations in which the majority of the world's poor reside have both large and growing economies. So how do we in Australia and those of us in this place that care about lifting people out of poverty help those who need it? The message from Oxfam this week was to focus now on what we can do when Australia hosts the G20 in 2014. Oxfam points out that the more equal a society is, the greater the impact economic growth has in reducing the numbers of people living in poverty. If we can, through the G20, make the powerful economic growth in these countries really work for the poor, we will see millions in our region lifted out of poverty. If we can focus the G20 on the myriad challenges in the area of food security, we will see less hunger in our region and around the world. Reducing poverty and hunger in our region is in our national interest and it is also the right thing to do. I know that many in this place share this sentiment.

Oxfam notes that the G20 has no mandate and no secretariat. This gives the president considerable power to shape the agenda. Australia, when we take up the G20 presidency at the end of 2013, will be able to set the agenda for the G20 Leaders Summit in Brisbane on 15 and 16 November 2014. On top of that, Australia will have considerable influence over the direction of the G20 for three years as a member of the troika of the past, current and future president members. We join the troika with Mexico and Russia at the end of this year. This is a fantastic opportunity for Australia to influence global affairs and I think it is right that we are cognisant of the opportunity we are presented with to make big gains for the development agenda within this forum.
Development is rightly already on the agenda of the G20 as outlined by its commitment to the important principles and pillars of the Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth. But it is fair to say that development issues like food security, like dealing with tax havens, have not been given the attention they deserve. The G20 cannot alone resolve all of the world's problems. Sure, it has had some successes—most notably dealing reasonably well with the 2008 Global Financial Crisis—but outside of crisis the forum has failed to deliver on many counts.

Its unwillingness to deal with biofuels mandates and subsidies, which continue to exacerbate food price volatility around the world, is one source of frustration for many, including Oxfam. After this year’s Los Cabos summit Oxfam noted that food security was supposed to have been a priority for the summit but the G20 failed to come up with a plan to secure food for the one billion people worldwide who go hungry every day. Another issue has been the G20's reluctance to finish the job on dealing with tax havens. Developing nations are losing out on billions of dollars of tax revenue through international tax evasion and other illicit activities. This revenue should remain in the countries where it rightfully belongs and potentially be put toward health and education services.

But despite the failures and frustrations, Australia over multiple governments has rightly invested in the G20. It gives us a seat at the table with the powerhouses of the global economy. We should continue to work to see that this forum functions as well as it can and delivers real outcomes in line with its mission to deliver strong, sustainable and balanced growth. This means addressing the macroeconomic issues of the moment, but it also means making poverty, inequality and food security a focus of our efforts.

Research and Development

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (12:29): Australia has an important pedigree in medical and health research. Our researchers are some of the best in the world, and Australia is a centre of excellence for medical research. We have a history of important medical research achievements such as the application of penicillin, developed by Howard Florey; the cochlear implant, invented by a team led by Professor Graeme Clark; and spray-on skins, developed by Dr Fiona Wood, just to name a few. We have exported our excellence to the world to improve people's lives and we have shared our achievements. There is little doubt our medical and health research is valued and recognised internationally, but we can do better. We can do more to create a less inhibitive and obstructive regulatory environment for our researchers, so they can actually get on with research. We can do better at attracting and retaining the right people with the right skills and experience.

I have had the good fortune to meet with medical researchers and discuss the great work that they do at some of Australia's pre-eminent research centres, predominantly those located in my state of Victoria. These include eminent researchers like Professor Geoffrey Donnan AO of the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health at the Melbourne Brain Research Centre and Professor Brendan Crabb at the Burnet Institute, right on the border of my electorate of Higgins, who are undertaking critical work that will have application not only in Australia but around the world. We also have the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Cabrini Health, Baker IDI Institute and so many others. I also had the good fortune to meet with many female researchers when I launched, along with my colleague opposite Amanda...
Rishworth, the Parliamentary Friends of Women in Maths, Science and Engineering in June this year.

One of the greatest threats to medical research in this country is the current government. Labor's apparent cuts that we again see raised in the press threaten growth in this important research area. And the Labor government has form. In 2011, the then Minister for Health and Ageing and now Attorney-General threatened to cut funding for medical and health research by $400 million before she was forced to retreat on that by an overwhelming backlash. Again, Labor is threatening the important work in medical health and research, with the Treasurer refusing to rule out funding cuts to fill Labor's $120 billion black hole. In question time on 13 September the shadow minister for health and ageing demanded the Treasurer rule out cuts to health and medical research grants—yet the Treasurer refused to do so.

On Tuesday, the member for Melbourne also raised the issue of funding cuts with the Treasurer during question time. The Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research at the University of Melbourne, Jim McCluskey, wrote to the member detailing the university's concerns about the security of research funding. The member asked:

Treasurer, can you guarantee that science funding will be protected in this financial year? … can you rule out any deferral, freezing or pausing of ARC, NHMRC or other science grants in an attempt to get the budget to surplus?

But the Treasurer did not. The University of Melbourne, one of our nation's most successful research institutions, is rightly concerned about the intentions of Labor, whose priorities are all wrong. So why is medical and health research in Labor's sights? To pay for the waste and mismanagement Labor has forced upon this country in the past five years. Labor threatens to hurt important medical research programs because of its economic incompetence. The next generation of vaccines, treatments and, critically, researchers may be lost all because of Labor's fiscal ineptitude.

This is in clear contrast to the previous coalition government. From 1996 through to the end of the Howard government there was a fivefold increase in the Commonwealth government's investment in health and medical research. Every dollar spent on health and medical research is estimated to generate $5 in long-term economic benefit. In the past decade alone, Australia's health and medical research sector has produced three Nobel Prize winners and five Australians of the year. The coalition recognises the barriers to health and medical research, and the government's funding cuts is only one such barrier. The overregulation of the medical research industry is another critical barrier. When Labor formed government in 2007 it professed a one-in one-out approach to regulation, yet this has not occurred. The Labor government has introduced more than 18,000 new regulations and removed fewer than 100.

It is clear that there is much more work to be done in this area. This overregulation of the medical industry is also threatening our medical health and research improvements and contributions that can be made, as has been told to me by so many researchers. There is a better way, and the better way is to elect a coalition government which will restore hope, reward and opportunity for all Australians.
Parramatta Electorate: TAD Disability Services NSW

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (12:35): Hidden away in Northmead in my electorate is one of our best kept secrets: an organisation known as TAD. It is a secret to just about everyone in the world but, to those who know TAD well, it is a lifesaver. TAD is the only charity in New South Wales which designs and builds custom equipment to enable people with disabilities to lead more independent lives. TAD quietly gets on with the job, but it does that job well enough to have been declared the winner of the Innovation in Independent Living Award at the NSW Disability Industry Innovation Awards 2012, just a couple of weeks ago.

TAD started back in 1975 when a small group of engineers, led by George Winston AM, decided to use their skills to profoundly change the lives of people with disabilities. Together they formed Technical Aid to the Disabled—TAD. Today, TAD Disability Services has 230 volunteers who design and custom build over 1,000 diverse items every year. In their 37-year history they have developed over 30,000 devices that have assisted people with disabilities from all age groups. None of it would have been possible without the TAD volunteers who come from a broad range of backgrounds and experience—from engineers to carpenters, from handymen to electricians—and they give their own time and skills, many in their own workshops, to make equipment for people with disabilities. The volunteers work with therapists to help solve problems and design equipment to enable people to live more independently. TAD assists in all aspects of everyday living, including with equipment to assist the development of young children, tools and services for education, work, recreation, daily living and personal care, and equipment to assist older people to remain mobile and independent.

I am speaking about TAD today because of a project that they have which is close to my heart. It is called TAD’s Freedom Wheels and it provides bicycles to enable children with disabilities to ride bicycles for the first time. Many of these children cannot walk but they can ride, if there are people prepared to give their time and expertise to modify a bicycle especially for them—perhaps attach a new seat with a postural support for the back, hips or head and neck; fix foot cups on pedals; attach hand mitts for riders with poor upper limb and hand control and strength; and attach outriggers for stability. It is quite a job to modify one of these bikes, but they are done specifically for each child and they enable children to get some exercise and therapy that they might not otherwise get. Perhaps most importantly of all, they provide another way for a child to spend quality time with their family doing something that most of us take for granted as part of growing up—that is, going for a bike ride with their brother or sister or their mum and dad. It is good for the child and it is good for their families. Watching a child ride with their brothers and sisters or their mum and dad for the first time is a joy for the observer, but it is nowhere near as much joy as it is for the families. These bikes mean a great deal and TAD provides them to around 300 children each year.

This year, TAD Disability Services is a Gold Pedal Charity of the annual City of Sydney Spring Cycle. The Spring Cycle is in its 29th year and it will bring together over 10,000 people to fill the streets of Sydney with bicycles, including quite a number of the TAD kids. I encourage cyclists of all ages and abilities as they enjoy the day out on 21 October to ride for TAD’s bikes for kids with disabilities to raise awareness and funds for these special bikes. I am riding for TAD on 21 October but I am not going to suggest that anyone sponsor me. I am going to suggest that people consider sponsoring a very special young man called Curtis.
Curtis is five years old and he cannot walk independently, but it turns out that, thanks to a TAD Freedom Wheels bike, he can actually ride a bike, and on 21 October he is going to ride his TAD bike across the Harbour Bridge with his mum and dad, a very special day for a young man and a very special day for TAD. Quite frankly, I think we should all sponsor him. I think we should all go online to www.everydayhero.com.au/curtis_ride and sponsor this young man and support the work he is doing to provide assistance for the many other children who would love to be able to ride a bike and currently cannot.

For those of you out there who ride bikes, if you have forgotten just how good it feels to ride a bike, it is worth going to the TAD website and having a look at some of the YouTube videos of the TAD kids riding for the first time. The expression on their faces will remind you exactly how good it feels to ride a bike. I suggest we all sponsor Curtis and help a few more kids enjoy that feeling.

Boothby Electorate: Repatriation General Hospital

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (12:39): I rise to speak about a very important issue in my electorate, and that relates to the Daw Park Repatriation General Hospital. For over 70 years the Daw Park Repatriation General Hospital has been specialising in the care of veterans. It is a hospital which my grandfather turned to as a returned prisoner of war and where he underwent his rehabilitation before rejoining the workforce. It is a hospital which I know you visited as Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, and we very much welcomed that. There have been a number of excellent new rehab and psychiatric facilities opened at the hospital in recent times.

The hospital was transferred from the Commonwealth government to the state government in 1995, and the expectation always was that state governments would maintain an acute care hospital at this site. Disturbingly, there are state government plans to close the acute referral unit at the Repatriation General Hospital in my electorate. This is not the first time there has been a cloud over the repat. A couple of years ago there was a wish list for Treasurer Kevin Foley which included closing the whole hospital, something which would have been very much in breach of the Commonwealth-state agreement. The South Australian Labor government have so grossly mismanaged their budgets that they will risk patient safety by attempting to close this important unit. This will save them the princely sum of $1.5 million per year. This comes on the back of the government's previous decision to close the acute referral unit on weekends, saving the government $340,000.

This sort of penny pinching is almost as despicable as their previous decisions to pull funding from regional hospitals in South Australia—Keith, Moonta and Ardrossan—at a saving of $750,000, which forced the House of Representatives and the Senate to take the unprecedented step of passing motions which condemned these actions. The closure of the repat acute referral unit is part of a broader proposal to cut 308 full-time positions and 111 beds from the South Australian public hospital system as part of the KPMG and Deloitte reports into our hospital system. Jackie Howard, the Repatriation General Hospital’s general manager, has already resigned ahead of these proposed closures. The proposed closure will force more than 7,000 presentations per year to be redirected from the repat to the already overstretched emergency department at Flinders Medical Centre. I have previously spoken in this place on the ramping issues that have plagued the FMC emergency department.
This proposed closure will risk patient safety. We need only look at the story of Trevor Verner from Ascot Park. Trevor has emphysema and has been rushed to the repat five times in the past seven years, where he has been given immediate admission and rushed to critical care. The repat is the closest hospital to his home. Had he been rushed to the Flinders Medical Centre, who knows what might have happened. I call on the South Australian Minister for Health and Ageing to come clean on the state government's plans for the Repatriation General Hospital and to rule out any further cuts to the invaluable services that they offer.

**Multiculturalism**

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (12:43): It is with great pride that I rise to salute a great Australian, Mr Frank Lowy, who last night delivered the inaugural Australian Multicultural Council Lecture in the main committee room in parliament.

Immigration has made Australia the nation that we know today. It has made us a stronger Australia, and community confidence in immigration provides the foundation for social harmony and the continued success of our immigration program. In the words of Judge Rauf Soulio in his opening address to the lecture last night, 'Multicultural Australia transcends the usual division of politics, and the diversity is the defining strength of Australia.'

Since World War II immigration has transformed Australia from a nation of some seven million to one of more than 22 million, with more than 260 different diverse cultural backgrounds. In that time, immigration has seen more than seven million people settle here, including 750,000 refugees. As a Jewish immigrant from Czechoslovakia, Frank Lowy spoke about fleeing from the Nazis in World War II, and he is a testament to the opportunities that Australia has provided to people from many different backgrounds.

I am very proud to say that I share in this heritage as I was born to Italian immigrant parents who owned and operated the local corner store. They worked hard to develop their business, which employed hundreds of people and contributed to the Australian economy. They supported their family and also contributed greatly to community life, particularly to those who were disadvantaged. I have the honour of having been elected to the federal parliament not once but twice, and it is indeed a very, very humbling honour and one that has been afforded to only about 26 people in 100 years. I am delighted to be here for the second time.

Australia is arguably the world's most successful immigration nation and, as Frank Lowy reminded us last night, we should resist the temptation to view Australia's multicultural experience through rose-coloured glasses. Our success is not something we should take for granted and nor should we be misguided about the reasons for our success. That is why the universal condemnation across our great nation in response to the violence in Sydney is a tribute to us all.

Extremism has no place in Australia. Extremism is not part of the fabric of Australian society; it is not part of our cultural diversity. To those who would seek to hurt their country with their prejudices and their hatred, I say this: you have no place here. If you sought to weaken our resolve against racial and religious prejudice, you have failed. If you sought to divide us, you have failed. We stand united against you. Australians come from nations and ethnic cultures right across the world and have the right to express cultural identities and beliefs in a very tolerant society, but that special privilege comes with the rights and
obligations of being an Australian citizen and respecting the rule of law. We must jealously protect and maintain our national unity and social cohesion as an immigration nation. We have policies that decry racism, that reject discrimination and that recognise our diverse backgrounds. We should continue to be conscious of removing barriers to participation in the Australian community. In fact, we should be more insistent about that participation.

To achieve this, we need to focus policy on appreciating the things that we have in common rather than just celebrating the things that are different or the things that divide us. But we must also insist on a 'one rule for all' approach, and we must build a culture that is based on participation, on shared responsibilities and on shared obligations rather than just on equal entitlements.

Australia is the land of the fair go. Australia is an enormously wonderful country that has been good to many migrants like my parents and future generations of migrants. But opportunities will be realised only by those who have a go. Our most successful immigrants have always understood, appreciated and celebrated what is great about Australia. We are a nation that is rich in ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, and Australia is a great nation that has been built by migration.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 12:48
QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Finance and Deregulation: Vehicle Leasing
(Question Nos 841-854 and 856-870)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister representing the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, in writing, on 16 February 2012:

(1) How many motor vehicles does the Minister’s department currently (a) own, and (b) lease.
(2) What is the breakdown of these vehicles by manufacturer and model.
(3) For (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, and (c) 2010-11, what was the total cost to the Minister’s department of all cars (i) owned, and (ii) leased, and what sum was spent on (iii) fuel, and (iv) maintenance.

Mr Swan: The Minister for Finance and Deregulation has supplied the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

An answer to the Honourable Member’s question can be found within the response provided to Parliamentary Question in Writing 855, received in the Table Office and published in Hansard on Monday, 10 September 2012.