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SITTING DAYS—2013

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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD  

Governor-General  
Her Excellency the Hon. Quentin Bryce AC, CVO  

House of Representatives Office holders  
Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop MP  
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP  
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell  
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Mr Russell Evan Broadbent MP,  
Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Mrs Natasha Louise Griggs MP,  
Mr Craig Kelly MP, Hon. Charles Christian Porter MP, Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP,  
Mr Brett David Whiteley MP  

Leader of the House—Hon. Christopher Pyne MP  
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Luke Hartsuyker MP  
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Anthony Stephen Burke MP  
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC MP  

Party Leaders and Whips  
Liberal Party of Australia  
Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP  
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP  
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Philip Maxwell Ruddock MP  
Government Whips—Mr Scott Buchholz MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP  

The Nationals  
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP  
Deputy Leader—Hon. Barnaby Thomas Gerard Joyce MP  
Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP  
Deputy Whip—Mr George Robert Christensen MP  

Australian Labor Party  
Leader—Hon. William Richard Shorten MP  
Deputy Leader—Hon. Tanya Joan Plibersek MP  
Chief Opposition Whip—Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP  
Opposition Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Ms Joanne Catherine Ryan MP  

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<td>Watts, Mr Timothy Graham</td>
<td>Gellibrand, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whiteley, Mr Brett David</td>
<td>Braddon, TAS</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wicks, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth</td>
<td>Robertson, TAS</td>
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## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilkie, Mr Andrew Damien</td>
<td>Denison, TAS</td>
<td>IND.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams, Mr Matthew</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
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<td>Wilson, Mr Richard James</td>
<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood, Mr Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wyatt, Mr Kenneth George AM</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zappia, Mr Antonio</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals;
IND—Independent; NATSWA—The Nationals WA; CLP—Country Liberal Party;
AUS—Katters Australia Party; AG—Australian Greens; PUP—Palmer United Party

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Minister</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Indigenous Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<td><strong>Minister for Justice</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Small Business</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Bruce Bilson MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Arthur Sinodinos AO</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Agriculture</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Bob Baldwin MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Social Services</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Kevin Andrews MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Social Services</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Manager of Government Business in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Services</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Communications</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Paul Fletcher MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Health</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Sport</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Defence</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. David Johnston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Stuart Robert MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Darren Chester MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Environment</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Scott Morrison MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Finance</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael McCormack MP</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<th>Shadow Minister</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader of the Opposition</strong></td>
<td>Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader for Science</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader for Small Business</td>
<td>Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business</strong></td>
<td>Julie Owens MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon Michael Danby MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition</strong></td>
<td>Hon Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator Claire Moore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business (Senate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Don Farrell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Trade and Investment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Defence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Hon David Feeney MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Don Farrell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Gai Brodtmann MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</strong></td>
<td>Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Tourism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Local Government</td>
<td>Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Infrastructure</td>
<td>Stephen Jones MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>Hon Chris Bowen MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</td>
<td>Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon Ed Husic MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water</strong></td>
<td>Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Water</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Industry</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Attorney General</td>
<td>Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Early Childhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education</td>
<td>Julie Owens MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Health</td>
<td>Hon Catherine King MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Health</td>
<td>Hon Melissa Parke MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Mental Health</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Families and Payments</td>
<td>Hon Jenny Macklin MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Disability Reform</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Doug Cameron</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Human Services</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness</td>
<td>Senator Claire Moore</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Carers</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Communities</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Payments</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hon Shayne Neumann MP</td>
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<td>Senator Helen Polley</td>
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The SPEAKER (Hon. Bronwyn Bishop) took the chair at 12:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

**COMMITTEES**

**Membership**

The SPEAKER (12:01): I have received messages from the Senate informing the House of the appointment of senators to certain joint committees. As the messages are lengthy, I do not propose to read them to the House. Copies have been placed on the table and details will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

**Appointment**

The SPEAKER (12:01): I have received a message from the Senate concurring with the resolution of the House relating to the appointment of certain joint committees. As the message is lengthy, I do not propose to read it to the House. A copy has been placed on the table and details will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

**BILLS**

Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (12:02): I oppose the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Bill 2013. I acknowledge the fundamental role registered organisations play in Australia's workplace relations system. They are created and registered for the purpose of representing Australian employers and employees in workplaces across the nation. Registered organisations also represent their members before industrial tribunals and courts and work with government on policy matters ranging from employment issues to economic and social policy.

At the outset, let me be very clear that the opposition has no tolerance for corruption—none whatsoever—whether it be by union officials or officers of employer bodies. We support tough penalties for those who break the law. We support appropriate regulation for registered organisations, including a properly empowered regulator and consequences for those who do not follow the rules. After all, it was the Labor government that last year introduced increased penalties for misconduct and made unions and employer groups more accountable in the wake of serious allegations of misconduct and criminal behaviour within the Health Services Union. Indeed, we strengthened the laws that the then Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, now the Prime Minister, enacted in 2002.

As a result of the changes we brought about in this place last year, the regulation of trade unions and registered employer bodies in Australia has never been stronger, accountability has never been higher and the powers of the Fair Work Commission to investigate and prosecute for breaches have never been broader—and we tripled penalties, which means they have never been tougher. In light of these recent reforms, which arose out of genuine
consultation with peak employer and union bodies, it is for the government to explain where the current system is not working. The opposition is not convinced that the government has made their case for change.

As the Leader of the House said in his second reading speech:

The majority of registered organisations do the right thing and, in many cases, maintain higher standards than those currently required.

I concur. The Labor opposition is of the view that the vast majority of unions, employer groups and other registered organisations conduct themselves professionally and honestly. Given the government’s contention that the majority do the right thing, we must ask whether the bill is a proportionate response. The government also says it is clearly inconsistent with community expectations for registered organisations to operate to lower standards than those that apply to multimillion dollar, for-profit corporations. Yet it is important to note that there are provisions in this bill that require registered organisations to provide more information than multimillion dollar companies do pursuant to the Corporations Act 2001.

As the Australian Community Services Employer Association states:

A number of the provisions contained within the proposed Bill place a higher/more extreme onus than those prescribed under the Corporations Act 2001 for Company Directors. Furthermore, is it fair that all registered organisations are subject to these proposed new onerous obligations? Should unions and other registered organisations be regulated in the same way as corporations, noting that the nature of the rights and interests of employees are not the same as the economic interests shareholders have in companies? Corporations are designed to generate wealth and advance the financial interests of their shareholders. Organisations are established to represent the rights of their members, whether they be employees or employers.

The government has completely failed to recognise the difference between corporations and registered organisations. Unions are different from corporations which are different from charities and clubs. Australia rightly regulates each type of entity differently. As we know, many different entities in this country are covered by different regulatory regimes that are more appropriately suited to what they do and how they do it.

By playing politics and seeking to treat registered organisations as if they were for-profit corporations, the government is going far beyond what is customary in this area. Indeed, it is a radical departure from the regulation of such bodies and is not, as the Prime Minister has said, shifting the IR debate towards ‘the sensible centre’. Would these provisions, if enacted, mean that registered organisations, employer bodies and unions would have difficulty in persuading people, often in a voluntary capacity, to take on official responsibilities?

The Australian Industry Group certainly thinks it will. Let me refer to the Ai Group's submission in relation to the disclosure of material personal interest:

The provisions of this Bill in this area will operate very unfairly on registered employer organisations and their officers, and it is essential that the Bill is amended. The Bill would impose a far more onerous regime for officers of registered organisations than what applies to directors of public companies. The regime, if enacted, would undoubtedly deter persons from standing for office in employer organisations. In practice the provisions of the Bill would seriously impede many organisations from carrying on their daily business operations.
What about non-registered organisations? Is it any wonder that non-registered organisations seem more relaxed about this bill than those who are subject to it? Why is the government not seeking to impose these measures upon them? Will those organisations manage to avoid the strongarm tactics of this government if the change occurs? These questions I am posing, and it is not an exhaustive list, all require appropriate consideration.

The Leader of the House said in his contribution that the government consulted with a subcommittee of the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council, and admitted that some members suggested that consideration of the bill should at the very least be delayed. We had a spokesperson for Minister Abetz admit that concerns by employer groups had been raised with the government. Here are some of the concerns. We have had the Ai Group say the legislation has to be carefully considered. I have spoken with employer bodies who have admitted to me that they have not had time to digest the government's proposed changes and that their members have raised serious issues of compliance, particularly in relation to the resources available to many employer groups. Indeed, the Ai Group said when Labor was in government that our changes would not impose an unreasonable red tape burden on registered organisations.

It is not just the Ai Group that has concerns and does not support the change. The Pharmacy Guild of Australia says the proposed bill creates confusion and requires further clarification. Master Builders Australia has said it wants more time to consider the financial implications of the bill and wants the salary of appointed officers exempt from disclosure. Master Builders Australia is 'concerned that the full impact of the Bill on the Associations is not yet known.' Its submission goes on to say:

... of particular concern is the impact the Bill may have on smaller employer organisations as the relative cost associated with complying with the new obligations imposed by the Bill may have a much more drastic impact on these smaller organisations than it would on larger organisations. Master Builders therefore strongly submits the passage of this Bill be postponed ...

The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce is also concerned with the pace with which the bill is being progressed. Importantly it notes that it is still implementing Labor's changes. It is the view of the Timber Merchants Association that 'the establishment of an independent authority to monitor and regulate registered organisations is unnecessary.' Furthermore the TMA says that registered organisations have had to undertake significant changes in compliance requirements and, while a number of registered organisations are large enough to devote significant resources to compliance, many employer organisations are significantly smaller and simply do not have the resources to devote to complex compliance regulations. Here is what the Master Plumbers Association had to say on the proposed legislation:

We submit that due to the extremely limited timeframe and the limited resources of a small organisation, the Master Plumbers' has had insufficient time to properly consider the technical detail, implementation or impact. We urge the Committee to delay the progress of this Bill ...

The position of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry—the peak council for Australian business associations—is a little curious. ACCI has said, importantly, that 'within the time available, ACCI has attempted to review the Bill.' Clearly, from this admission, it has not had the chance to consult fully with its members, who are both registered and non-registered organisations. Yet on 8 February this year, when Senator Abetz, in opposition,
introduced the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment (Towards Transparency) Bill 2012, ACCI said:

ACCI does not support further changes to the RO Act at this stage.

With the coalition now in government, it seems ACCI supports the policy principles. What has changed? Surely not the merits of the argument. Interestingly, in the interests of their members even the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry notes that parts of this bill should be ameliorated and issues addressed, noting that it is particularly germane given that many registered organisations are, in good faith, attempting to be fully compliant with the requirements of the most recent changes. Is ACCI straddling the fence because it is trying to represent the interests of both its registered and nonregistered organisations at the same time?

As I alluded to earlier, it is no coincidence that you do not hear criticism of these proposed reforms by non-registered organisations like the Australian Mines and Metals Association. In fact, it is quite the opposite. I wonder whether that would change if the government were seeking to regulate non-registered organisations in the same manner as is proposed for registered organisations in this bill. There is an important distinction to be made between non-registered organisations that are not legally bound by measures such as those contained in the current bill and registered organisations that would be legally bound.

It begs the question then: why should non-registered organisations not be bound under law rather than simply being able to self-regulate? As always, we need to question the motivation of the government. Regardless, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has joined other employer groups I have referred to in criticising the government's proposed legislation. Unions have also raised quite legitimate concerns with me about the impact of the proposed laws. Indeed, the Australian Council of Trade Unions notes in its submission:

The timeline adopted by the Government for the development and proposed passage of this Bill is entirely unsatisfactory.

When the minister referred in his speech to consultation what he did not say was that the policy underlying the legislation was not open for discussion. Rather, the consultation was limited to technical expression of the stated policy.

Compare the difference when Labor made its changes to the Registered Organisations Act in 2012 to 'toughen Tony's laws' as it was then put. We did so with the genuine support of employer organisations and trade unions after real consultation. We consulted with peak employee bodies, including the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Master Builders Australia, Ai Group, the National Farmers' Federation, and the ACTU and its affiliates, through the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council. The communique issued by the participants on 25 May last year read:

…the changes proposed by the Minister will significantly improve the financial reporting framework, governance and accountability for registered organisations…

The opposition believes that the impact of this legislation needs to be carefully considered, not rammed through the parliament. That is why we have sought to refer this bill to the Senate references committee for proper and genuine examination.

The minister consistently referred to previous allegations, often inappropriately commenting upon matters currently before the courts, to justify the government's changes. But what the Liberals did not tell you is that the Registered Organisations Act already
prohibits members' money from being used to favour particular candidates in internal elections or campaigns. The Registered Organisations Act already allows for criminal proceedings being initiated where funds are stolen or are obtained by fraud. The Registered Organisations Act already ensures that the Fair Work Commission can share information with the police as appropriate, and the Registered Organisations Act already provides for statutory civil penalties where parties knowingly or recklessly contravene an order or direction made by the Federal Court or the Fair Work Commission under the Registered Organisations Act or the Fair Work Act. Under the Fair Work Act, officers of the registered organisations already have fiduciary duties akin to those of directors under the corporations law. The Registered Organisations Act already requires officers to disclose their personal interests. The same act already requires officers to disclose when payments are made to related parties, and the same act already requires officers to exercise care and diligence, act with good faith and not improperly use their position for political advantage. The Leader of the House will not tell you that the KPMG review into Fair Work Australia's investigations into the HSU that he referred to in his second reading speech, and which he relies upon to suggest there are shortcomings in the current system, did not recommend any legislative amendments—\textbf{not one.}

Our changes to the Registered Organisations Act addressed a number of concerns, including interaction between the Fair Work Commission and the police. That is a comprehensive suite of measures that are already dealing with alleged corruption inside registered organisations. The government say they want corporate law standards for registered organisations but you do not hear boo out of them, of course, when ASIC prosecute company directors. It is, therefore, not surprising that we should question the motives of this government and the reasons for the introduction of these proposed reforms. Is this just a political attack upon unions? Is this about law breaking and good governance, or is this just an ideological attack? After all, in his second reading speech on the Workplace Relations (Registration and Accountability of Organisations) Bill 2002, the then Workplace Relations Minister, the now Prime Minister, said:

\begin{quote}
Generally speaking, what the government has sought to do with these bills is to ensure that the same standards of conduct and behaviour which the law imposes on company directors and on corporations should be imposed and expected of registered organisations and the officers of those organisations.

So what you have here is a Prime Minister, who, back in 2002, presumably having given reasoned and appropriate thought to his legislation, believed he had addressed the issue. Back then he had satisfied himself that the conduct of officials in registered organisations would be sufficient if they complied with his legislation. And, as I have already outlined, we have improved on those laws, so why the change now?

Is the government using this, and the proposed reinstatement of the Australian Building and Construction Commission, to erode the capacity of unions before attacking workers' rights and conditions? We have, of course, reason not to trust the coalition when it comes to workplace relations. They have form. In 2004 they did not tell the Australian people about their plans to introduce Work Choices or Australian workplace agreements. In 2005 they told the Australian people their pay and conditions were protected—
\end{quote}

\textit{A government member interjecting—}
Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: I have the author of the Work Choices legislation across the table from me who wants to interject. He is very defensive because he is responsible, along with some others, for helping bring down a government in 2007—his own government. In 2005 they told the Australian people their pay and conditions were protected by law when they were not. In 2008 the now Prime Minister said Work Choices was:
... good for wages, it was good for jobs and it was good for workers. And let’s never forget that.
In the Prime Minister's own book, Battlelines, he said, 'WorkChoices wasn't all bad.'

The government continues to beat its chest about its deregulation agenda; yet it intends with this bill and the reinstatement of the Australian Building and Construction Commission to add more layers of bureaucracy. You need look no further than the Australian Industry Group's submission to the inquiry on this bill. There, the AIG says that the disclosure regime imposes 'a significant regulatory burden'.

Contrast the coalition's hypocrisy, secrecy, uncertainty and mendacity on industrial relations with Labor's positive policies and record when we were in government. During our term in government Labor created 960,000 jobs. Productivity was up, employment was up—as I say, almost 1,000,000 jobs were created—and, indeed, industrial disputes were down. All these factors lead to improved job security and job opportunities for Australians. This is all at risk with a coalition government, which has a track record of axing workers' rights, entitlements, pay and conditions—it is in the coalition's DNA.

This bill contains too many proposed changes which require proper examination. The opposition therefore shares the reservations of others, including employee and employer organisations, and will not support this bill. Usually, when industry bodies and unions—employers and employee organisations—line up on a unity ticket against a proposition, there is something very wrong with it. This case is no different.

The opposition will not support a politically motivated witch-hunt designed to kill off unions just because this government seeks to reward its friends in big business. We want, and the public deserves, time to appropriately consider the measures in the government's bill. It is for these reasons and other reasons I have already outlined that Labor opposes the bill.

Finally, I move as a second reading amendment the following proposition:

That all the words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:
"the House declines to give the bill a second reading because it would be ill advised to continue having regard to the:
(1) adverse impact of the creation of the Registered Organisations Commission on registered organisations, including unions, employer and employee groups; and
(2) fact that last year the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009 (the Act) was amended to improve disclosure requirements, transparency, accountability and amended to also triple civil penalties for breaches of the Act."

It is for these reasons that the opposition oppose this bill.

The SPEAKER: Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Thistlethwaite: I second the amendment.

The SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Gorton has moved an amendment that all words after 'that' be
deleted with a view to substituting other words. If it suits the House, I will state the question in the form that the amendment be agreed to. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (12:25): I rise to speak on the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Bill. It is vital for our country that we have accountable and honestly-run unions. Unlike the previous Labor government, the coalition will follow through on our election commitments. This bill does exactly that: it is one of the steps we are taking to fulfil our election promise to ensure better transparency and accountability of registered organisations.

I note that the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, when in opposition introduced a fair work (registered organisations) amendment bill similar to the one that we speak on today. Indeed there has been plenty of time to take into consideration all the issues raised. However, the then Labor government refused to put the ordinary working people of Australia first. On this side of the chamber we believe that it is about time we put the interests of workers ahead of the interests of union officials.

The coalition is acting to increase the confidence of the public and of members of registered organisations by requiring these organisations and their officers to observe broadly the same fiduciary and statutory duties as do companies and their directors, as set out in the Corporations Act. This bill will harmonise general rules, duties and obligations, including penalties for noncompliance. Financial reporting obligations will reflect the obligations in the Corporations Act.

Many of my constituents have voiced their concerns about the low standards currently set for registered organisations. Many of these constituents have campaigned against the ease with which registered organisations are able to misappropriate funds. They want greater transparency and accountability for these organisations. They want to know how and why their money is being spent. They ask to be given an assurance that their union is using their money in ways that benefit the members and not for other activities. The coalition is making a strong start in methodically and purposefully delivering on our election promises.

The best public argument for this bill was brought about by the charges and allegations against the former member for Dobell, Craig Thomson, and former ALP national president Michael Williamson in their capacity as officers of the Health Services Union. These charges were brought about because of their behaviour and actions, which were totally unacceptable. Members of unions—particularly those of the Health Services Union—were left asking how such a breach of trust could have occurred.

This bill will provide the required certainty and high standards of operation across the board. A more thorough compliance regime will deter wrongdoing and promote first-class governance of registered organisations. The HSU scandal showed that the laws governing the registration and behaviour of trade unions in Australia are completely inadequate. They fail to ensure that members are properly informed and that the conduct of officials is open to scrutiny. It appears that many trade unions have become personal playthings of long-serving officials who use the organisations to promote and fund various causes which are not necessarily aligned with the interests of their members.
Unions are protected by the so-called conveniently-belonging-to rule, which in effect prevents the registration of rival organisations. This law turns the existing trade union into an effective monopoly—with potentially damaging consequences.

To show how inept the union system is at regulating itself we only need to look a little closer at the Thomson scandal. For years the Australian Industrial Registry had written to Thomson, as the then national secretary, simply rapping him over the knuckles with a damp lettuce leaf for years of failure to meet the most basic regulatory requirements. Furthermore, instead of presenting the financial documents to a general meeting of the members, the documents were presented to the committee of management, where the documents were not lodged within 14 days of the meeting and some were left undated. This is truly a scene of inadequate financial controls and complete management incompetence. Accounts were provided to Fair Work Australia four years late. The lack of action taken by Fair Work Australia and their complete mishandling and disregard for the requirements by the union are deplorable. For years it was almost impossible to make head or tail of the union's financial statements.

While the HSU is not your average union and while other unions seem to be up to date with their filings and accounts, the fact that such an organisation, which should have been accountable to its members, was capable of getting so grossly out of hand clearly shows that action must be taken. If anything, Craig Thomson has done a favour to the community and to ordinary working Australians by highlighting the inadequacy of the current regulation of trade unions. Discussion on the need to increase unions' transparency, brought about by the Thomson scandal, has given light to this bill and will allow us to stand up for the rights of real workers. Members of the union and the community have called for a strong regulatory regime to be put in place to give them confidence in their registered organisations. The coalition promised and is now delivering a robust regulator with the appropriate powers and resources, together with meaningful sanctions that can be applied when wrongdoing is revealed.

This bill establishes an independent watchdog, the Registered Organisations Commission, to monitor and regulate registered organisations and provide it with enhanced investigation and information-gathering powers. The commissioner, appointed by the minister, will have stronger investigation and information-gathering powers than those currently in place. These new provisions, which will further enhance the ability of the commissioner to provide strong and efficient regulation of unions and employer associations, are based on those available to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. The commission will have the power to commence legal proceedings and refer possible criminal offences to the Director of Public Prosecutions or to law enforcement agencies.

This bill guards against efforts to hinder or mislead investigations and ensures that a person convicted of particular offences will not be eligible to be an officer of an organisation or to stand for election to office. Education, assistance and advice will all be provided to registered organisations and their members in relation to the new obligations by the commission to ensure that members are aware of their rights. The commission will be accountable to the people. The commissioner will be required to report to the Minister for Employment annually on its activities, and that report will be tabled in parliament. The commissioner will appear at Senate estimates, and, to ensure the appropriate level of transparency and public
accountability, the activities of the commission will also be subject to the same oversight by the Commonwealth Ombudsman as Commonwealth agencies.

It has been made clear that the minister will have no powers to give directions as to a particular matter or investigation. The minister, however, is able to give directions of a general nature to the commissioner and these directions must be in writing and are disallowable instruments. Several administrative tasks relating to registered organisations will continue to be the responsibility of the general manager of the Fair Work Commission. For this reason the bill provides for the Fair Work Commission and the Registered Organisations committee to engage in information sharing in order for both organisations to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently. To further this culture of cooperation between the two organisations, arrangements have been included in the bill to ensure that any ongoing matters being dealt with by the Fair Work Commission relating to registered organisations can be dealt with by the Registered Organisations Commission. Many registered organisations control assets with millions of dollars, and this means they are effectively dealing with a cash flow and investments similar to those of a large business.

Australians have every right to expect a high standard of financial reporting from our registered organisations, given the trust members place in their unions and employer associations to operate honestly. Funds derived from members should be used to represent the interests of the members, rather than for any other inappropriate purposes. Quite clearly, it is inconsistent with community expectations for registered organisations, with substantial economic, legal and political influence, to operate to lower standards than those that apply to corporations or other comparable bodies. Measures are included in this bill to prevent individuals from improperly benefiting from their role in the organisations. Directors will be required to disclose remuneration paid to their top five officers in the head office and any branches, and officers will be required to disclose their material, personal interests to all members. While directors are required by the Corporations Law to only disclose conflicts of interests to their fellow directors, the coalition government believes that officers of registered organisations should be required to disclose such matters to members, as they are elected by members to represent their interests. Members deserve to know who is in control of their money and where conflicts may arise. Unfortunately, as demonstrated by Mr Thomson and Mr Williamson, existing regulations do not sufficiently protect members' interests. In the face of behaviour by individuals who seek to take advantage of their positions, where standards of accountability and the risk of getting caught are low, a strong message must be sent to rebuild the confidence of members and the community.

This government knows that enhanced reporting and disclosure requirements and a strong and efficient regulator will have little impact if the penalties for wrongdoing are not high enough to act as a deterrent. The government is introducing significantly higher civil penalties, and a range of criminal penalties, for those registered organisations and officials doing the wrong thing. This bill brings penalties for registered organisations and officers into line with the same consequences faced by companies and directors for wrongdoing. Where an officer does not comply with the commissioner's new investigation powers, criminal sanctions will also apply. These sanctions align with the penalties that apply to noncompliance with an ASIC investigation and will ensure that officers of a registered organisation take their obligations seriously. These new laws target only those who are doing the wrong thing. Some
registered organisations have expressed concern that the new penalties will mean that they will have difficulty persuading people to take on official responsibilities. The coalition does not agree. These laws and the formation of the commission will comfort the majority of officers, who are already doing the right thing. The coalition government has the firm opinion that there should be no difference between the penalties levied against a company director who misuses shareholders' funds and a registered organisation's boss who misuses their members' money.

Based on the correspondence I have received from constituents in my electorate of Ryan, I recognise the broad community consensus for the amendments proposed in this bill. Mr Paul Howes of the Australian Workers' Union added his support for the amendments, in November 2012, when he told the ABC that he believes there is a higher responsibility for union officials, as guardians of workers' money, to protect that money and to act diligently and honestly. He then added that he did not have any issue with increasing the level of requirements and penalties on trade unions for breaching basic ethics like misappropriation of funds.

The government intends to see the Registered Organisations Commission begin operation from early 2014, with new disclosure and reporting obligations, higher civil penalties and new criminal sanctions coming into effect from 1 July 2014. There is no time to lose in implementing these important safeguards for the operation of registered organisations and their members. Anyone in this place who wishes to act in the best interest of the members of registered organisations and their finances will support this bill. It cannot be made clear enough: the only people who should fear these amendments are those who are engaging in misconduct. Anyone choosing not to support this bill—for greater accountability—is choosing to sanction the despicable behaviour we have seen from Mr Michael Williamson and Mr Craig Thomson. The current scheme is simply inadequate to deal with or discourage that kind of behaviour. Any suggestion otherwise is a delusion.

I have received countless inquiries from my constituents asking how it can be that unions are not made accountable in the same way as corporations. This bill responds to the legitimate concerns of members of registered organisations and the community as a result of the shocking behaviour of certain Health Services Union officials. Suitably high standards will be in place to ensure that registered organisations act in accordance with the interest of their members. The coalition is acting in the interest of members of registered organisations and the community. I call on the House to support this bill.

Mr GILES (Scullin) (12:39): I rise in opposition to the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Bill 2013. This bill, once again, demonstrates that the government's rhetorical commitment to deregulation is just that—rhetorical only—wherever it conflicts with their ideological aversion to unionism. This is fundamentally unnecessary legislation. Regulation of registered organisations has, as the member for Gorton has just informed the House, never been stronger. We have heard much sensationalism in this debate from members opposite, with very little grounding in the substance of the bill which is before us.

It was last year that this parliament considered the substantive issues the subject of this bill and enacted into law the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Act 2012. That act, I will go on to say, does all the work required to achieve the stated purposes of this bill—
or rather, it will do so; I note that several provisions are not yet operative. So it is proposed that we discard one regime before it has had a chance to do its work. In respect of those provisions that are now operative, I do note, as the member for Gorton has as well, that some registered organisations are still working to achieve full compliance.

That we are having this unnecessary debate speaks volumes both as to the depth of the antipathy on the part of members opposite to trade unionism and as to the poverty of this government's vision for Australia. All we get is reaction and deja vu all over again. The government is proceeding with this bill in undue haste to remedy a problem that it has been unable to properly articulate. Where is the evidence that these present arrangements have not worked? What specific aspect can the government point to that is not working? If there is something specific that is not working as best it can, then why not take the time to work with the existing system to ameliorate any perceived problems? Why not take the cooperative path to the sensible centre the Prime Minister has been talking about as his goal for industrial relations regulation? The government simply has not made the case. Indeed, the government has helped make the case against its own bill by conceding, quite properly, that most registered organisations do the right thing and 'in many cases maintain higher standards than those currently required'.

That registered organisations are fundamentally different from for-profit corporations seems lost on those opposite. Unions in particular are different in structure, ethos and purpose than for-profit companies. And the very nature of union members' rights and interests, which have been talked a little about by members opposite, is clearly distinct from the economic interests of shareholders. It is axiomatic but often lost on members opposite that regulation must be fit for purpose.

Whilst all organisations afforded legal privileges by the state require regulation and checks and balances, each exists for different purposes and is run and structured differently to match such purposes. The minister stated:

Many registered organisations control assets worth millions of dollars—they are effectively dealing with the cash flow and investments similar to those of large businesses.

This is a misleading and deceptive representation. Usually, the biggest asset that a trade union has is its premises, so to compare this to the investment of large business is, at best, disingenuous.

I also note that the proposed increased penalties are vastly disproportionate to the assets of most registered organisations, certainly in comparison to the multibillion-dollar businesses who are currently subject to ASIC's scrutiny. And do not just take my word for this. The concerns of a prominent employer organisation that is, at least presently, a registered organisation, the Australian Industry Group, are worth noting on this point: 'It is unfair to subject non-profit organisations to the same disclosure rules applying to listed company executives.' Much less, of course, more onerous obligations.

The Australian Industry Group has gone on to most effectively draw out what I hope is an unintended consequence of this bill as it is drafted—the potential for the bill to drive a democratic deficit in organisations representing the concerns of workers and employers. And so it is unhelpful for the minister to assert that 'the only people who have anything to fear by these amendments are those who are doing the wrong thing'. Such a statement is, of course, on its face, absurd—particularly from a supposed keen advocate of small government.
But it is also just plain wrong. It creates a real disincentive against office-holding and a powerful incentive for those registered organisations that can— that is, employer organisations—cease their registration. Surely, a relevant consideration here should be to encourage democratic participation in the governance of registered organisations, if we are sincere in our concern for their members. But instead we see a commitment—indeed, an 'unfair' commitment, in the words of those radicals at the AiG—to push members away from involvement in governance.

As the member for Gorton set out, the current regulatory regime for registered organisations already provides for obligations and duties very similar to those applying to corporate directors. In government, Labor legislated to improve financial disclosure and transparency rules for registered organisations and provided targeted training in financial management, which is currently improving the operation and accountability of registered organisations.

Labor legislated to require the rules of registered organisations to provide for the disclosure of remuneration, including board fees, of the five highest paid officials of organisation as well as the two highest paid in each branch, to the members of the organisation. This disclosure must be made at least every 12 months—for example, to align with the usual reporting periods for annual reports and the filing of financial returns.

Labor increased penalties, recognising the seriousness of complying with workplace laws, but importantly kept these penalties proportional to the distinct nature of registered organisations. Whilst Labor recognised there were areas for improvement, the changes made maintained the responsiveness to the unique character of registered organisations in the Australian system of industrial relations. It was fit-for-purpose regulation, made in response to circumstances and enacted following appropriate consultation with stakeholders across the whole spectrum—employers, employees, registered organisations and unregistered organisations. This was a stark contrast to this bill which is before the House.

I draw the attention of members to the consultative approach of the then Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, who consulted with the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council in its entirety, the peak representatives of this nation's employer and employee organisations. I take this opportunity to remind the House of the words of the then minister, who stated:

Fair Work Australia is an agency independent of the executive. It must retain its independence, particularly in the face of partisan politicking. These amendments are proposed by the government for the sole purpose of improving the operation of Fair Work Australia's investigative function. They are supported by the government and the members of the NWRCC.

The current laws governing registered organisations have the support of both employer and employee groups.

In contrast, this bill does not have the full support of the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council. Some members of the council have already suggested that this bill be delayed, which is understandable as this government tries to ram it through parliament. The opposition's position is simply that this matter needs to be referred to the Senate references committee, where it can receive more and appropriate scrutiny. The ACTU and employer groups—including the Ai Group, the ACCI, Master Builders and the Pharmacy Guild, to
name but a few—have raised concerns about the legislation in its present form and all would like to see it delayed or substantially amended.

But this legislation is not concerned with giving due consideration to the views of stakeholders or the Australian community at large. It is not concerned with putting in place an effective governance regime for registered organisations, which play such a fundamental role in Australia's industrial relations system. It is quite simply an attack on trade unionism masked with a feigned concern for the interests of union members. The matters that are the subject of this bill are, however, very important. They deserve due consideration and proper examination. So I oppose this bill and support the amendment moved by the member for Gorton.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright—Government Whip) (12:48): I rise to speak on the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Bill 2013. This is a good day. In the 43rd Parliament I brought before the House a private member's motion circulated in my name to achieve this very thing. Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful in getting the then Labor government's support for the bill. So this is a good day.

I want to pick up on a couple of points made by the opening speaker. He indicated that this bill is a political witch-hunt designed to kill off unions. It is not. The sincerity of this bill goes to the very heart of trying to improve union governance. No-one in this nation would be able to put their hand on their heart and say without any doubt whatsoever that every union is 100 per cent squeaky clean. There is too much bad press surrounding unions. You only need to look at the membership of unions over the last 25 years or 30 years. It has been a downward trajectory. Are people refusing to join unions because they believe they are corrupt? No. I am not suggesting that. Are they choosing not to join unions because it is no longer mandatory? Possibly. Mostly I believe they are choosing not to because they do not perceive that they get a benefit from being part of that association. If people are members of unions, I am interested to know how many of those union memberships are voluntary and how many are compulsory.

This bill does not intend to be a witch-hunt to kill off unions. I took comfort from the fact that the opposition indicated that they have no tolerance for bad behaviour—but, unfortunately, it is present. The bad behaviour of some unions is intolerable. I join with the opposition in suggesting that it needs to be tidied up. This bill goes towards doing that. The restructure of the Fair Work registered organisations in this bill seeks to predominantly shift us away from having one rule for the union mates and another rule for the business sector. The opposition spoke about the recent number of changes being as high as they have ever been. That is a correct statement. The regulations that were rushed through last year are as high as they have ever been but still fall way short of the penalties we inflict on the corporate sector and business sector. No-one yet in this debate has been able to argue the reasons for having two grades of penalty. The same crime should do the same time. No-one from the Labor ranks or from the union ranks has been able to come to this place and demonstrate why there should be inequity between the treatment of a union boss who commits a crime and a member of a business who commits the same crime.

Those opposite spoke about not having long to work on this bill; they say it has been rammed through. I will give you a little bit of history: the complaints they make go back beyond the Corporations Act. They should have raised those complaints in 2012, before they rushed the bill through parliament. Labor says this bill is expedited; their bill, introduced by
Bill Shorten, was referred to a Senate committee for just five days. When that bill came before the parliament last time the Senate had only five days with it. The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, which reported last night, made a number of recommendations to tidy up this bill. It is Shorten's rush job that has led to the problem that MPs in this place are complaining about. It is a bit rich to be saying that we have rushed this through.

Many of the amendments in this bill were drafted in response to the recent Health Services Union scandal, which involved nearly $1 million of members' funds—that is an awful amount of money—by its former president and a former member of this House. Members of the HSU were left asking how that gross breach of trust could have happened; members of other unions were asking whether or not it could happen to their organisation. The coalition believes that this bill will provide certainty of high standards, first-class governance, a robust compliance regime and increased accountability. Increased accountability is not a new benchmark; it is the same accountability that we ask the corporate sector to abide by.

The bill also seeks to improve the oversight of registered organisations. The bill aims to establish a dedicated independent watchdog, known as the Registered Organisations Commission. The commission will monitor and regulate registered organisations and will have enhanced investigation and information-gathering powers from those that currently apply. The commission will have similar investigation and information-gathering powers to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, which is a good thing. The commission will have the power to commence legal proceedings and refer possible criminal offences to the Director of Public Prosecutions and law enforcement agencies. This comes in response to the HSU debacle, with Fair Work Australia investigations into the HSU and legal proceedings taking far too long. They are still going. In addition, appropriate sanctions against efforts to hinder or mislead investigations are included in this bill to ensure that action on any complaint made about a registered organisation must comply with the requirements of the investigation.

Most importantly, the bill introduces financial and operational reporting disclosure requirements. Many organisations control financial assets worth millions of dollars and hold significant assets. They are effectively dealing with cash flows and investments similar to those of large businesses. The proposed financial and operational reporting requirements are aligned with those outlined in the Corporations Law to strengthen existing financial reporting disclosure and transparency obligations. It is entirely appropriate to expect a high standard of financial reporting from registered organisations, given the trust that members place in their unions and associated employees that funds diverted from membership fees will be used to represent members' interests rather than for alternative motives. It is clearly inconsistent with the community's expectations for such organisations to be able to operate at a lower standard than those that apply to corporations and other comparable bodies.

Under the proposed reporting and disclosure changes, registered organisations will need to disclose remuneration paid to their top five officers. That is a good thing. Officers will be required to disclose to all members their material and personal interests as well as any conflicts of interest. This measure is being put forward to prevent individuals from benefiting from their role in the organisation. Members deserve to know who is in control of their money and whether conflicts exist.
All of the proposed changes I have mentioned will have little or no effect if the penalties for wrongdoing are not high enough. I believe that, at the moment, they are not high enough. That is why we are looking to bring in some type of centralised penalty regime. Currently, registered organisations and their officers do not face the same consequences for wrongdoing as company directors do. For this reason, we propose significantly higher civil penalties and a range of criminal penalties for those registered organisations and officials who do the wrong thing. These penalties are in line with those facing companies and directors. Under the act, civil penalties apply to officers and employees of registered organisations who fail to exercise their powers or discharge their duties in good faith and for a proper purpose. Some organisations have expressed the opinion that these penalties are much too harsh and will deter employees from taking up official responsibilities. We disagree that it will be a disadvantage. The only people who will have anything to fear from taking up office will be those who break the law. There is no argument that the penalties will deter employees from taking up office. A rigorous structure and process will be in place for investigations and prosecutions of alleged wrongdoing. Officers who are operating within the law, which is the overwhelming majority of them, will have no reason to fear taking up official office. The overwhelming number of officers who are already doing the right thing should be comforted in knowing that unlawful behaviour will be dealt with, thus ensuring members' ongoing confidence in registered organisations. The coalition government believes that there should be no difference between the penalties levied against a company director who misuses shareholders funds and a registered organisation boss who misuses membership funds.

We heard from some speakers earlier that support from all this bill has come from a wide and varied range of sources. In 2012, prominent union boss Paul Howes, of the AWU, said:

I actually believe there is a higher responsibility for us as guardians of workers' money to protect that money and to act diligently and honestly ... The reality is I do not have any issue with increasing the level of requirements and penalties ...

That was said around the time the HSU scandal was at its height. He was trying to bring some credibility to the union movement by saying that he did not have a problem with what the coalition was trying to bring about.

Kathy Jackson also made some comments around the same time, which were published in an article in the Australian Financial Review. She said:

Reform brought in by a Coalition government and resisted by many unionists actually served for the better governance of unions.

As I start to wind up, I go back to my opening comments, which are of the same ilk as Kathy Jackson’s comments. This legislation seeks to return confidence and credibility to the union movement. It is not a political witch-hunt designed to kill off unions—it is not. It is about trying to raise the bar and to return credibility to the union movement. For too long the union movement has been susceptible to criticism because the bar has been set too low.

I understand why members on the other side need to come to this place and defend the position that there must not be transparency, because a lot of their political career relies on an association with the union. To see this, one only needs to look at when I put up my private member’s motion and who spoke against it. There was the member for Throsby. Let us have a look at his dossier: National Secretary, Community and Public Sector Union. The member for Chifley spoke against it. He was the National President and Divisional Secretary,
Communications Division, Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union. Every single person who spoke against the introduction of my private member’s motion had some relationship to a union—every single one of them. So they come in here to do the union’s bidding. I suggest that through this process we will see more members come into this place who are reliant on the unions in some way or the other—but if only they could see the good that we are trying to achieve through this bill! The good of this bill is about trying to return transparency, honesty and integrity, because there is a place on the Australian landscape for the union movement.

Long should the union movement prosper here in Australia, but it should do it within the same confines as those we ask of our business sector. There should not be one rule for them and a different one for others. If someone conducts a crime or misappropriates millions of dollars of funds, the penalty for someone doing it in the corporate sector must be the same as someone in the union. Unions will flourish and prosper—that might a bridge too far for the introduction of this bill!—but it is a good bill. It does speak to the return of credibility to the union movement. I support this bill.

Mr BROUGHT (Fisher) (13:03): Firstly, let me congratulate the member for Wright for having the strength of character to bring his private member’s bill forward in the last parliament. I was a little reluctant to speak on the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Bill 2013 because I did not want to bring my ideology into it. I am a strong supporter of the unions, and being such a strong supporter of the unions I see this bill as probably being the strongest tool that any union boss or rep could possibly have when going to a workplace. Mr Deputy Speaker, let me put it to you this way: you turn up to a workplace and say to a worker such as a nurse, a construction worker or a policeman, 'Listen, from now on, I would like to take $20, $30, $40, $50 out of your pay.' They say, 'Well, I'm not so sure that's a great idea. What about that Thomson affair? What about what happened with the HSU?' And you say, 'Let me just put it straight to you: anybody that plays around with your money is going to get whacked with a massive stick. They're going to be thrown in jail. They're going to be investigated and they're going to be investigated quickly.' And he or she says: 'Oh, that sounds a bit better. That's not the way it used to be.'

So you can give them confidence. You can give the workers of Australia confidence that when they take money out of their back pocket and put it into a union they can be assured it is not going to be misappropriated, misused, given to someone who does not deserve it or, worse still, knocked off. Surely, all of those who sit opposite who acquaint themselves with union delegates are pushing this argument on them every day, saying: 'Let's embrace this piece of legislation. Let's take it and build the union numbers.'

In this debate so far we have had a lot of talk about unions, so I took the opportunity to go back to Fair Work Australia and look at their registered organisations, because they are not just union organisations—far from it. We have the Australian Aircrew Officers Association, the Agribusiness Employers Federation, the Australian Education Union. That is just the 'A's for you. There is the Building Services Contractors Association, the Confederation of ACT Industry, Clubs Australia—the list goes on. It gives you a bit of a feel that there are unions but there are also employer associations.

As I have been listening to the debate, I have noted some of the issues that have been raised so far. Some people would say I need to be certified to listen to some of the debates in here,
but we come to this place to try and share ideas. I was hoping that the member for Melbourne would be speaking before me, as he was scheduled, because I listened to his contribution yesterday on another workplace relations bill, where he talked about human rights. I was hoping that he would repeat his statements today so that I could rebut him. You see, it is all well and good to talk about human rights and about making sure that the rule of law is being applied equally, but it seems that it only applies to one side of the ledger in the Greens' lexicon. My view is that we need to be evenly balanced and to give people confidence, because confidence is the imperative that we all need before we invest in anything or anyone. It is people that we are talking about here.

The member for Wright talked about being above reproach. When I go back to 1996 and the standards that applied in this place to the disclosure of your pecuniary interests, I can see that they have now changed markedly, because that has been the expectation of the public. By increasing the disclosure laws in this bill means that we are meeting the expectation of the public.

Now, because I was not in this place for the last six years—and because of that I spent more time with the public—I can tell you about the dismay that was there with this ongoing saga of the HSU. Let us be frank, there were comments made to me almost daily, such as: 'Surely, there's political interference here. Maybe that's what this is all about. Maybe they're stalling with all of this and using Fair Work Australia as a political pawn.' These were comments coming back from our fellow Australians who had lost confidence in Fair Work Australia and even in this parliament and the people who are involved with it.

This bill goes some way towards addressing those concerns that so many people had. I would challenge those opposite to tell me they did not hear the same thing, not only from non-union members but also from their own union bases and their membership. People were dismayed and they felt let down. They thought it was dirty, and they were right. It does not have to be that way. This bill is about, as the member for Wright said, lifting the high-jump bar. It is about putting in standards. When you set low standards and then fail to achieve them, you see what happens. Today, we have the consequences of that being played out in the courts.

As I said, this is not about unions; this is about all registered organisations. I took the opportunity today to ring one of the newest and smallest registered organisations to see whether they would have an issue with this. I did that because we are now hearing all the time that—and I will use these words—this will be 'a disincentive' to being involved, that this is an attack on trade unions, that this should go to more consultation, that this is an overreach and that people will not be involved. Let me tell this place that the private teachers' professional association in Queensland—which is a union by any other name and one of the smallest ones; it is just getting started—says, 'We fully embrace this.' It gives them another tool.

Mr Buchholz: Incredible.

Mr BROUGH: As the member for Wright says, it is incredible. These are teachers who need to be part of the union to have protection in case of litigation—in the same way that nurses and police often join unions for that one purpose. But I tell you what, it makes them awfully angry when they see what has occurred over the last two years, and they must wonder what is happening to their money. We just had the Sunshine Coast University Private Hospital open. I will be delighted to be able to go back to them and the Sunshine Coast Public
University Hospital, when it opens in 2016, and to say to them, 'You will be able to have confidence as health workers, because the legislation is in the parliament.' Mind you, there is only one thing standing in the way of giving them certainty and confidence. It is the Labor Party.

Why does the Labor Party come in here and say, 'We don't want to lift the high-jump bar, we do not want to improve and increase standards, and we do not want to occupy the realm the public expects of us.' What is it that those opposite are afraid of? What is it that they are protecting? It is simply not good enough to say that this is going to be too burdensome.

Let us just have a quick look at the bill at a glance. This bill provides for a registered organisations commissioner. It also provides for the organisation itself—I will get there in a moment. It requires increased disclosure. So think about this for a moment: what does that actually mean? You may be an employee of a registered organisation. Let us go through a few of those organisations again: the Australian and International Pilots Association, the Australian Meat Industry Council and the AMWU. There is a bit of variation for you. Take yourselves out of the parliament for a moment and put yourselves in the meatworks as a paid union employee. Isn't it reasonable that a worker can turn up to you—you have been paid through the worker's contributions, union fees or affiliation fees—and get to know whether there is some sort of a conflict between what you are doing in your paid job and the associations you have outside, or that the association that you are part of is giving money to a third entity, which is again a conflict? Is that not a reasonable thing for people to be able to do? I would say to you that if you are going to stand in this place and argue that it is not, then you are out of sync with community expectations today.

This is about a separate body. This bill provides for a supervised registered organisation to be a separate body. It explicitly did not consider registered organisations in the 2012 act under the previous parliament. You have got to ask yourself why. The final report of that review mentioned that it would be appropriate, however, to consider changes to the law to make clear separation between Fair Work Australia's functions as a tribunal and as an administrator overseeing registered organisations.

That is exactly what we are doing here. We are providing for additional penalties, an independent body, an independent commissioner and stronger disclosure laws. All of those should be tools that the union representatives and the associations of employers go out to their members and use as benefits and reasons you can have confidence to invest in them. Yet every speaker on the other side will get up here and say that this should not occur.

Let us go into the increased disclosure in a little bit more detail. First of all, the top executives' remuneration will have to be disclosed, as has recently been disclosed by the ABC. I do not think that did anybody any harm. I think the public were probably quite delighted to learn what some of the ABC personnel are earning. Maybe some of the union representatives, and the rank and file, will be interested to know what their representatives are earning. Surely there cannot be anything wrong with that.

So, the remuneration of an officer of an organisation has to be disclosed. Those nominated for a position on a board, branch or peak council must in addition also disclosure remuneration paid to them by related parties. There is an important one: the remuneration paid to them 'by related parties' will be disclosed. It is a bit like the NRL, really. You have
players and you have salary caps. They get their wages from the club, but there is a bit of a
backhand deal to try and sweeten the deal.

**Mr Buchholz:** Mum might be employed as a cleaner and pick up $100,000.

**Mr BROUGH:** There you go! Mum might be one of the highest paid cleaners and get
$100,000. Do we really want that? Do we want to lose the trust of workers? The union
movement has been in freefall and maybe it is because of the attitude of those sitting opposite.
Today, they could have come into this place and said, 'Look, we are going to disagree on
some of the finer points—we think you have properly gone too far—but we recognise that the
public's trust in many of our public institutions, and in particular our registered organisations,
have come to such a low that we need to raise the bar.' It is not that challenging, really. But
they do not seem to be too perturbed about it.

The last issue that I wish to raise here is about coercive investigative powers, and we raised
this yesterday in the debate on the building and construction industry bills. The reality is that
you want people who know about dishonest behaviour, fraudulent behaviour or behaviour
against the interests of workers to feel that they have the confidence to be able to deliver and
to know that they can be required to deliver that data, material or evidence. In doing so, they
are actually protecting the workers' interests, and we are supporting them in doing that. The
policy commitment was reaffirmed by the Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, when he
said:

The commission will have stronger investigation and information-gathering powers than those that
currently apply. These will be modelled on those available to the Australian Securities and Investments
Commission …

That is totally appropriate. We are setting the standards. We are pitching them against an
already existing body. It is about money; but, above all, it is about trust in people.

I say to those opposite: it is time to get on board. It is time to listen to your constituents, not
your union mates. Yes, there is a cost to this. We acknowledge that. But it is a cost worth
bearing to ensure that people can have faith in our institutions and, most importantly, that we
can have faith in the people who front up to us and ask us for our hard-
earned money to be
part of their association.

I commend the bill not only to the House but to the Labor Party—to have a rethink. This is
an opportunity lost to you. Take up that opportunity. Grab it with both hands. Perhaps the
member for Moreton, who is to speak next, will have had a change of heart after this
contribution and will stand before us today and say, 'I'm a changed man and I'm going back
up to the southern suburbs of Brisbane and I'm going to say, 'I never realised, but the member
for Fisher put me straight."

**Mr Perrett:** Hell will freeze over!

**Mr BROUGH:** And, when he has done that, I am sure that he will be a better man for it
and the parliament will be better for it. I now look forward to the contribution from the
member for Moreton!

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell):** I wouldn't hold your breath on that! The
question before the House is that the amendment be agreed to.

**Mr PERRETT** (Moreton) (13:16): That sort of introduction does put a bit of pressure on
me! It is a great opportunity to speak on this legislation, the Fair Work (Registered
Organisations) Amendment Bill 2013 and, particularly, to follow two Queensland speakers. I also acknowledge the contribution of the member for Wright, who is in the chamber, in the 43rd Parliament to this debate; I know that he feels strongly about it. I feel equally strongly. I spoke against his private member's motion then and I have not changed my views—not sorry to disappoint the member for Fisher! I do so again by giving first some broad information and then some empirical data.

First off, I have always seen the Labor Party, this side of the chamber, as being the political arm of the trade union movement. That is my position. In fact, just for the member for Wright's edification, if you stand for election in the Labor Party, it is actually a requirement that you be a member of your relevant union, or organisation if you are a business person. That is why it is no surprise to look through our CVs and see that we are members of unions and that many of us have worked for unions. It is actually a requirement.

I am a member of three unions. I used to work for the Independent Education Union, the union that looks after Catholic schools—Trinity Grammar and all sorts of private schools; little Christian schools; schools in my electorate like the Murri School, which focuses on Indigenous education; or Southside Education Centre, which has a creche because they mainly educate young girls who have babies, which certainly makes for an interesting year 12 graduation. So the Independent Education Union covers a range of schools, from the wealthiest to the poorest, in the non-government sector. I am also a member of two other unions, United Voice and the AMWU. So I do know a little bit about unions, and I did work for one for about four or five years.

I had a yarn, before I came in to speak today, with my former boss, Terry Burke, the Queensland general secretary of the Independent Education Union because, as the two Queensland members here know, Campbell Newman has brought in not dissimilar legislation in Queensland already. So I wanted to hear about the union's lived experience of such legislation—and they talk to employer groups, who have similar requirements—to find out just what this will mean.

I will tell you what it does mean. It means greater costs to individual union members and organisation members for a start. In fact, I can tell you how much it cost my union, the Independent Education Union: it meant a two per cent increase in fees to meet the compliance costs. I know, if you look at the Bills Digest or this legislation itself, there is a complete minimisation of the regulatory impost—but it will cost money. There will be more forms to fill out. Looking at the Independent Education Union, the people that make up the executive are teachers, cleaners and teacher aides, but primarily teachers, who work in non-government schools. They do not get remunerated for being on the executive. They go to seven meetings a year, and I think they get a cup of tea and a meal at that meeting. But, for that, they and their family members have to fill out a form that details all of their interests, all of their personal interests and related voting and decision-making rights—family members. So let us look at what that would mean under this legislation. If I were an executive member of the Independent Education Union, my eight-year-old son's Dollarmite account would have to go on the register of interests. My four-year-old son's Dollarmite account would have to go on the register of interests. If he opened another one, I would have to trot off and let them know that there had been a change. All the members of the Queensland Independent Education
Union's executive have had to fill out these forms—that is part of the onerous legislation before us—and all of those employer groups.

It is interesting to hear the language of those opposite, and both Queensland members who spoke before me were guilty of it. They talked about 'union bosses' and 'business leaders'. Now, I was an English teacher; I know how powerful language is. The fundamental philosophy of those opposite is that there is something wrong with unions. Why don't you give me a big, long list of all the outcomes for workers that have come from that side of the chamber or spontaneously from employers over the last 110 years? I can give you a list now, if you want. It will look like a blank sheet of paper. It will be a blank sheet of paper, because the reality is—

Mr Brough: Mr Deputy Speaker Mitchell, I seek to intervene and ask a question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell): Is the member for Moreton—

Mr PERRETT: I would rather keep going. This is a speech to be sent out to my people, not your people. No voters in Fisher that I need to worry about!

The reality is that this is unpacking the remuneration paid to officers and the material and personal interests of officers and their relatives. You can put up arguments for some of them but let us be realistic about this: most unions are completely different from BHP and other corporations. I know there are millions of corporations in Australia and that they are not all BHP, Xstrata or something similar; there are much smaller organisations. But those large corporations have a completely different focus. They say, 'We will take your money and we will comply with ASIC obligations, with Corporations Law.' It is completely different if you are listed on the stock exchange. The example I gave, the Independent Education Union, is a largish union but still the majority of the officials are effectively volunteers—they do not get paid; they do get a cup of tea and lunch at seven meetings throughout the year. For those officers to be potentially facing a $330,000 fine or—heaven forbid!—five years prison for not reading their documents as carefully as they should, is taking a sledgehammer to break a walnut. It is a completely wrong approach.

There is a unity ticket on both sides of the chamber in terms of stamping out any corruption in corporations, in registered organisations, whatever. But look at the submissions from the employer groups on this. They have indicated concern about the financial implications. And I believe that this will have ramifications for the quality of people who put their names forward for these employer or employee organisations. For a start, if you are an employer organisation and you are a stockbroker, every time you change your material interests—and that is not uncommon for stockbrokers who are in employer organisations—it will be like me going to the clerks every time I change my register of interests. You would need a procession of runners to let people know what you are doing. It is not realistic for employer organisations or employee organisations.

Let's be fair dinkum about this. For my union it meant a two per cent increase in compliance costs and now the federal government is going to put more red tape onto unions and other employer groups. I have no problem with oversight if it is going to achieve a purpose, but why should the good people of Australia know about the wife of a schoolteacher or the husband of a schoolteacher, what property they own, what shares they own or, heaven forbid, what their kids own? This is not a Coles or Woolies shareholder meeting; we are
talking about small organisations which do good things. Unions have a history of looking after their members' interests. They are voluntary organisations. I know the member for Wright suggested otherwise, but that is not the case.

Union membership has been going down since the 1970s, when it peaked at nearly 60 per cent. We are now not of that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven. That which we are, we are—that is the reality of modern Australia. There are many reasons people do not join unions but I can tell you this: for all the language used by officers talking about union bosses as if they are somehow doing something nefarious, the reality is unions turn up every day and save lives. Talk to someone in the construction industry, which is where the roots and the motivation for this legislation lie.

Why create an extra oversight body when you can look at the empirical data flowing out of the last six years? Labor was in power. We changed the Work Choices legislation. What happened? Did disputes increase? There was no mention, by the member for Sturt, of the fact that dispute days went down. What about productivity? Did productivity go down in the last six years in the building industry? Surely, with Labor in control, and bringing in this legislation, productivity went down. No, it increased. I am loath to make this connection but let us look at fatalities, the most horrible piece of empirical data in workplace relations. Did fatalities increase or decrease? They decreased under our legislation. So why bring in extra red tape and extra costs? It can only be because of a political agenda. This is 'union busting 101'—create red tape for unions. I do recognise that it also creates red tape for employer organisations, but they are a little bit more muzzled in terms of speaking up. Those opposite think the National Farmers Federation is like a union; it is not. There are a range of unions out there and a range of employer organisations.

We are passionate about the role of unions. I unashamedly support the role of unions in our society. They do good things. They are leaders in so many ways. They were involved in the environmental campaigns of the 1970s, which were a precursor to the green movement. They led the Labor Party into having a much stronger policy on the environment. This piece of legislation, with increased disclosure requirements, will be cloaked over and over in the HSU scandal. Let us be realistic about the HSU scandal. The prosecutions taking place now are taking place under current law. There are always provisions, both in the criminal code and in industrial legislation, when there is wrongdoing.

If you steal from members, if you steal from the lowest paid workers in Australia when they pay you your union money, you are the lowest of the low. It is bad when you steal from a multinational corporation, but when you steal from the lowest paid Australians who, on a voluntary basis, pay union fees, I think that is absolutely disgusting and that the full force of the law should come down on you.

But why is the Liberal Party—the party of small 'l' liberals, supposedly—now suggesting that we should have more red tape for organisations, more forms to be filled out? Reading these forms will not be like reading the member for Fairfax's disclosure statements. They will be boring. Members of these unions lead pretty simple, uncomplicated lives. They are simply people who are prepared to volunteer to help other people. The HSU example is an anomaly and, as I said at the start, the people involved should be stomped on, as should anyone who is stealing from union members.
This bill is rushed, unclear and onerous for the registered organisations. The main thing I emphasise is the lack of consultation. I understand that those opposite are not interested in talking to unions, but they should look at the submissions of the employer groups. That is the most telling comment of all on the legislation—that the employer groups are saying that they are unhappy with the penalties, that there needs to be more consultation and that the wording needs to be changed. When they are saying that and when they are worried about the quality of officers who will come forward in the future—because the level of disclosure required of office holders is too onerous—then you know that this legislation is wrong. It is part of a union-busting witch-hunt and should be reconsidered. Given the existing legislation and the existing criminal codes, it is hard to see any good reason why anyone would want to go down this road and bring in extra burdens—unless it is part of a political agenda.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (13:32): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Bill 2013. When people join registered organisations and pay their fees, there should be accountability. There should be openness and clarity about the purpose of the fees—what they will be used for—and accountability for where the money goes. That is why I absolutely support this bill. Things need to change. There is quite a deal of history behind this legislation, with many examples of why it is needed. I will go into some of those examples.

I will start by agreeing with the member for Moreton about something. He said that the Labor Party is the party of the trade unions. That is absolutely true. On other occasions I have heard people suggest that they are the party of the workers, but now we hear very clearly from the member for Moreton that they are the party of the trade unions. I will go into why that is the case. There is no doubt about it; it is very true.

In 2012, a former Leader of the Opposition, Mr Mark Latham, wrote:

Unions have become more like ‘virtual’ bodies, poor in membership numbers but rich in resources leveraged from super financing, training funds and contractor extortion.

Very clearly Mark Latham, a former Leader of the Labor Party, knew that these registered organisations, in so many cases, are not nickel-and-dime outfits. There is a lot of money involved with them. This is the point—there is money, there are resources and there is influence. That is what influences those on the other side and that is what it has always been about. I will go into more detail about that.

I support this bill because it involves higher penalties for breaches of current civil penalty provisions and even criminal penalties in some cases—and that is right. It involves stricter reporting and disclosure obligations to align with the Corporations Act of 2001. It also involves the establishment of a Registered Organisations Commission with a Registered Organisations Commissioner. That commissioner and that commission will have independent investigatory and enforcement capacity. There needs to be a cop on the beat. There needs to be someone looking over shoulders in order to look after the interests and the contributions of members of registered organisations, including trade unions.

I can understand why there is widespread opposition to this bill, to the accountability the government wants to put in place. Those on that side have received calls. There is no doubt about it. They have been told what they should be doing and to oppose this bill. As we know, and as Mark Latham said, the unions are highly influential. As was said by the member for Moreton: if you are going to be a Labor member of parliament, you need to be a member
of one of the unions—or, in his case, of three. If you want to stand for preselection for the Labor Party, you need to have friends. You need to get the cooperation of union bosses, union leaders, union secretaries—whatever you choose to call them, you need to have their cooperation. That does not of course come free, because there is no shortage of people on that side lining up for safe seats.

Once a person has received preselection, particularly for a safe Labor seat, they can expect the favours to be called in—that the friends who put them in that position will call on them to do certain things. It might be to vote against a bill like this. Once you are preselected, you also need some financial capacity, some financial backing. So if the union does not want to help with your election bid, obviously the preselection has only gone so far. In either case we know preselection is heavily determined by the union movement. Obviously favours will result from that, and the financial capital to run an election campaign will involve the calling in of favours in the future. There is no doubt that the Labor Party is the party of the trade unions, and that is where the influence is.

We also know that the Greens will oppose this legislation. It was widely reported that in the last election campaign, and I think in the campaign before that, the member for Melbourne was heavily supported by the unions. Again, we know where his bread is buttered and there is no doubt that he also will be against this bill. All the Greens in the Senate will also see benefit from opposing the legislation and doing the bidding of those who are not elected to this place. This bill seeks to impose accountability in the same way that those who serve on directorships of corporations are accountable. It is the same form of accountability, on behalf of the membership, for registered organisations, unions et cetera. All those on the other side, and the Greens, are opposed to that and this is the payback for the support I have mentioned.

The member for Moreton talked about one of the unions he was a part of and how it was a very small operation—as he said, a bit of a nickel-and-dime outfit, with meal money seven evenings a year and things like that. There are two articles about this issue—one from the Age and one from the Sydney Morning Herald. It is a change for someone on our side to be looking at articles from those two great newspapers. There is a reference to an internal election of the Queensland branch of the Transport Workers Union towards the end of 2010. The incumbent to the secretary's position was left-wing union organiser Hughie Williams. He had been the secretary of that union for over 20 years, and in that time he had put together a bit of an empire—assets of some $11 million. That $11 million was obviously used for certain purposes, and under Hughie Williams at that time it was a left-wing union. There was an orchestrated bid to unseat him and replace him with someone who was linked to the right of the Labor Party—the right of the union movement. It has been reported by Fairfax in the last week or so that $500,000 was put together by the federal leadership of the TWU in Sydney with the support of the Health Services Union leader at the time, Michael Williamson—a man with a reputation that has been tested in the courts—and a team of young ALP operatives, apparently including staffers from the offices of Labor senators David Feeney and Stephen Hutchins. So says Fairfax Media, anyway.

The member for Moreton said it was a nickel-and-dime outfit—a meal a month or something like that—and yet the reality is that it was so important that people were prepared to spend $500,000 to change the leadership, and to change the Queensland branch of the TWU from the left over to the right. We know who else is involved with the right of the
Labor Party. That is one example of what is taking place in registered organisations. These are big organisations, there are assets, and, in the case of the Queensland branch of the TWU, when that union moves from one faction to another faction it results in votes for preselections, seats in parliament and the other influence peddling that is all part of this.

The article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 30 November talked extensively about Mr Cesar Melhem, who was the union secretary of the AWU. Mr Melhem was apparently one of the directors of a fund called Industry 2020. It has been revealed through this article that Mr Melhem was in fact the only director of Industry 2020 and that basically he had run it over a number of years and his position as the union secretary of the Victorian branch of the AWU had never been challenged. He had accumulated quite an amount of money within this Industry 2020 fund. Now, the article describes Industry 2020 as one of myriad slush funds, training schemes and tricks for diverting union and parliamentary resources—it is quite interesting that part—that generate millions of dollars in 'funny money' currently sloshing around the Australian labour movement.

It certainly seems, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and, before that, the *Age*, that there is quite a bit of money involved. There is quite a bit of influence, and there are reasons for people to be involved with these sorts of organisations. The reality is that, through all this, no-one is benefiting at the lowest levels. This is all about people at the top. This is all about the influence on the other side. Sometimes it is about how many seats they get over there. Sometimes it is about assets and resources and funds, and some of them can be quite shady. So it is important that we do actually have bills like this which truly address the needs and the interests of the people at the grassroots of these registered organisations. I think it is outrageous that those that seek to oppose and get in the way of this, those who are obviously influenced by those who are the principal pre-selectors, should try to get in the way of what is in the best interests of the normal grassroots members of these sorts of registered organisations.

I think that there is no doubt that you do not need to look back too far, just to 2010, and more recently in the case of Industry 2020. These are big organisations. There is a lot of money involved. There is a lot of influence involved. It is really important that someone acts now in the best interests of the members of these registered organisations. I know it is not those at the top of the organisations that others might be trying to defend, but we have to act in this place on behalf of those at the grassroots, those that can barely afford their fees anyway. We should make sure that those fees go to the right places and for the right causes. So I commend this bill to the House.

**Ms CHESTERS** (Bendigo) (13:47): Today I wish to talk about two aspects that have been raised so far in this debate. The first is the outrageous and laughable claim that this government is the friend of hardworking people. This is just simply not true. The second aspect that I wish to raise in relation to this debate is that this bill is poorly conceived, badly motivated and entirely unnecessary because it was dealt with in the last government, the 43rd Parliament.

I may be a new member of this House, but I am already over members of the government claiming to be the friend of hardworking people. Their actions and previous words are simply not demonstrating that they are the friend of working people. When the Prime Minister was the workplace relations minister he displayed on regular occasions casual disregard for
workers and their rights and a lack of sympathy towards working Australians. In his own words on the Howard government's IR legacy, the Prime Minister, who was the former minister for workplace relations, said:

WorkChoices was a political mistake, but it may not have been an economic one.

This comes from Tony Abbott's *Battlelines*, published by Melbourne University Press in 2009. He went further, saying:

Let me begin my contribution to this debate by reminding members that workplace reform was one of the greatest achievements of the Howard government.

This is from *Hansard* of 13 August 2009 for the House of Representatives.

Let me take this opportunity to remind the House that Work Choices and the Howard government IR legacy was not kind to working people. Basic working conditions were eroded, basic conditions were cut, and working people were left worse off. Penalty rates were gone. Employers had the opportunity to impose on new employees individual contracts that saw penalty rates ripped out of them. And let's not forget the changes to unfair dismissal where you could turn up one day, say that your child was sick and that you had to go home and, rather than leniency from your employer, you could be sacked on the spot. You could be sacked without recourse to unfair dismissal. This is the legacy of Work Choices. This is the legacy of the former Howard government. This is not the words or actions of a government that claims to be the friend of working people.

Let me go further to highlight the claims from the government so far in this debate that they are the friend of working people. Let us also remember the Prime Minister's comments on paid maternity leave:

Compulsory paid maternity leave? Over this Government's dead body…

This is from a speech that was made to the Liberal Party conference on 22 July 2002 and quoted in the ABC's *7.30 Report*. Just because you say you are somebody's friend does not make it so. Let's also not forget some of the actions of this former government when it comes to low paid workers. We have seen it often repeatedly opposing the claims of unions, members and workers to increase the minimum wage. Commonwealth submissions for the three years when the Prime Minister was in charge of workplace relations would have left low paid workers up to $25 a week worse off compared to the actual outcomes of national wage decisions. Again, this is not friendly behaviour towards working people.

This bill, as I have already said, is poorly conceived, badly motivated and entirely unnecessary. It should be rejected in its entirety. This bill creates a large volume of new regulation without evidence that it is necessary. It also creates a new Commonwealth regulator where one already exists. This claims to be the government that is going to get rid of red tape, yet it is introducing more. This bill creates a large volume of new regulation that will not just be for registered union organisations to deal with but for registered employer organisations to deal with. The government is failing to acknowledge this as the casualty of this bill that is before us.

The opposition believes that this bill will ensure that registered organisations including unions will be regulated like corporations. I have a problem with the rhetoric of regulating unions in the same way as corporations are regulated. Unions and registered organisations are very different to corporations, and each of these is different to charities or clubs. In Australia
we have a tradition of regulating each of these different entities differently. But it appears that the government fails to understand the difference, so I will explain it. A corporation regulation is directed towards protecting the economic interests of investors and creditors—and, to that extent, consumers. It serves a different purpose to protecting the interests of union members or members of employer organisations.

Perhaps we need to remind the House what a union is. I will not use the words of the Australian Labor Party or the ACTU or any other labour organisation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines a trade union as an organisation made up of employees or workers:

… the principal activities of which include the negotiation of rates of pay and conditions of employment for its members.

Union members are united by their belief in the dignity of workers and their right to fair and just treatment at work. Such actions and beliefs are not the actions and beliefs of corporations. Therefore, it is not appropriate that registered organisations—whether they be unions or employee organisations or employer organisations—be regulated in the same way as corporations. The natural rights and interests that members have in their union and their activities is different to the economic interests of shareholders in companies. Further, the extra regulation in this bill will fall not just on the responsibilities of the full-time, salaried leadership of unions but also on those of the many rank-and-file delegates and elected representatives to governing bodies.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): The member for Hindmarsh is rising on an intervention?

Mr Williams: Yes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Will the member for Bendigo take an intervention?

Ms Chesters: Sure.

Mr Williams: I am just wondering if the member for Bendigo endorses the actions of Craig Thomson and the other union representatives which this bill is trying to address.

Ms CHESTERS: I address that question in the rest of my speech, and I will first go back to where I was in my speech to address the interjection that was just made. The burden of this extra regulation will fall not just on the full-time, salaried union leadership but also on the rank-and-file members who are elected to governing bodies. If criminal activity occurs in any organisation, it should be dealt with by the appropriate body, criminal code and criminal act. Nobody is excusing the behaviour of one or two individuals, but you cannot punish the entire institution of registered organisations for the actions of one or two individuals.

I go back to talking about the rank-and-file people I was discussing before. The government has wrongly claimed that the reforms in this bill will protect members' interests and give greater democracy to union members. However, this bill will actually achieve the opposite. Rank-and-file members will be reluctant to participate in governing bodies if they are exposed to the large fines proposed in this bill. Almost all unions at a branch and national level have large, democratic governing bodies and are not composed of the Craig Thomson types you refer to but of delegates who are rank-and-file members and who are directed to deal with the business of the union.

Who are these rank-and-file members? I will highlight two workers who are part of their union and who are rank-and-file delegates responsible for making sure that our unions are the
democratic structures they seek to be. There is the president of United Voice in Victoria, Marie Angrilli, who works for Spotless as a part-time school cleaner. She is not one of the union heavies that the other side would make her out to be; she is the proud president of an organisation and a volunteer, and the wage she draws is not from the union members' resources but from her paid job. She is not, as the government would suggest, one of the high-salaried union heavies who are trying to gobble up all the union's resources for their own purposes. She is not just a person cleaning on the shop floor; she is the president of an organisation, and her job will become harder under the rules in the bill. Another rank-and-file member in a leadership position in a union is the president of the rail operations division of the RTBU, Bob Bassett, who is a full-time conductor on V/Line. Both are hardworking, ordinary people being demonised by the government, which suggests that they are the ones who are sucking up all the resources of union members. These are the sort of people who are in charge of our unions. They are not the sort of people the government would claim they are.

It is not only the trade unions who are opposed to this bill; a number of employer organisations are also opposed not just to the contents of the bill but also to the speed with which it is being forced through. I note the submission of the Australian Industry Group to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee. I never thought that I would be on the same side as the Australian Industry Group on a matter of workplace relations debated in this House, but I am. Just as our union delegates come from the rank and file, the Australian Industry Group has 85 volunteer counsellors who are elected from their incorporated members in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. Like many of our union delegates who are responsible for running their unions, these officers are volunteers: they give up their own time with no payment for their role. This bill seeks to make their job harder. It imposes new regulations on the volunteers who make sure their organisation is run properly. At the AIG, volunteer officers are responsible for determining policies and for ensuring that high standards of financial management and accountability are maintained. Yet the government's bill would introduce new regulation which would make their voluntary job harder. This would mean that they would have to either spend less time in their business or give up their role as a volunteer in a registered organisation.

It is important that legislation governing registered organisations remains balanced and appropriate. I quote from the Australian Industry Group's submission to the to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry on this bill. It says: Unlawful conduct within one organisation must not be used as an excuse to impose unfair laws or an excessive compliance burden upon all registered organisations.

With this quote I have addressed the concerns raised by the member for Hindmarsh. I also note that AIG said Australia is a signatory to the ILO's Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948.

**The SPEAKER:** It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Education Funding**

**Mr SHORTEN** (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. The coalition went to the last election claiming to be on an absolute unity
ticket with Labor on school funding. Labor's plan would have delivered $14.65 billion in additional funding for schools to implement Labor's Gonski plan. Can the Prime Minister guarantee that an additional $14.65 billion will be invested in Australian schools under his panicked deal yesterday?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:00): These questions were no good yesterday, and they are even worse today. We were on a unity ticket with the Labor Party when the Labor Party was promising $2.8 billion over the forward estimates. What happened was that just a few weeks before election day the member opposite ripped $1.2 billion out. They ripped $1.2 billion out and now they are complaining because we are putting back the money they ripped out.

Mr Husic interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley will desist and withdraw his comment.

Mr Husic: I withdraw.

Mr ABBOTT: So, members opposite broke the unity ticket. They broke the unity ticket. They abandoned the dream team when they deceitfully and disingenuously ripped $1.2 billion out of school funding.

Economy

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (14:02): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on progress the government is making in delivering the plan it took to the election to build a strong and prosperous economy?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:02): I do thank the member for Tangney for his question. The member for Tangney is right: we went to the election with a clear plan to build a strong and prosperous economy for a safe and secure Australia. From day 1 we have been cleaning up Labor's mess and we have been keeping our commitments. On day one we saved the car industry from Labor's $1.8 billion fringe benefits tax hit. On day one we saved the tradies of Australia from Labor's tax hit on their self-education expenses. From week one we have had Operation Sovereign Borders in place and that has reduced illegal arrivals by boat by almost 90 per cent. Every day we have been tackling Labor's debt and deficit, stretching out as far as the eye can see, through many measures, including the Commission of Audit.

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta will desist.

Mr ABBOTT: This government has been implementing the plan that the people of Australia voted for. That is what we have been doing and yet there is one group of people who are very unhappy with the way the people of Australia voted and that is the team opposite, led by the leader of the Opposition. The people voted to scrap the carbon tax.

Government members: Hear, hear!

Mr ABBOTT: What we have seen is members opposite voting against a $550 Christmas present for the families and the households of Australia. The people voted to repeal the mining tax, and members opposite are voting in favour of this tax on jobs and investment. Above all else, the people of Australia voted to restore temporary protection visas. That is what the people of Australia voted for, and members opposite have voted with the people
smugglers. That is what they have done: they have voted to give the people smugglers' business model another go. Members opposite damaged our national interest in government and now they are seeking to perpetuate the damage from opposition. It does not matter what the Australian people voted for; members opposite are voting against it. It does not matter what the Leader of the Opposition says; when he votes he always votes for higher taxes and more illegal boats.

**Education Funding**

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): My question is to the Prime Minister. Before the election the coalition claimed there was no difference between Liberal and Labor on school funding. Under Labor's funding agreements states were required to arrive at index funding for schools at three per cent. Under the rushed and panicked deals announced yesterday, Prime Minister, what is the required state of state indexation in your deals?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:05): There was no difference between the coalition and the Labor Party until the Labor Party cut $1.2 billion out, and now there is a difference—a very big difference. They want the $1.2 billion out and we are putting the $1.2 billion back in.

**Asylum Seekers**

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (14:06): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Will the minister inform the House of the problems that were faced when temporary protection visas were removed in 2008? What lessons can the government learn from this change, and why is it so important for temporary protection visas to be reintroduced?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (14:06): I thank the member for his question and his interest in this issue. In August 2008 the former government made the worst decision that it made in government in abolishing temporary protection visas. And last night Labor and the Greens did it again. The definition of stupidity is doing the same thing twice and expecting a different result, and those opposite might wish to take that counsel.

The previous government, when they abolished temporary protection visas, gave the people smugglers a product to sell, and that product was permanent residence in Australia. Last night in the Senate they teamed up with the real opposition—the Greens, the ones who are directing the opposition in the Greens—and they decided that they were going to seal the deal, that they wanted to honour the deal that people smugglers had made. People smugglers had made promises to the 33,000 people who are here—the 33,000 people who arrived under their watch—and they wanted to seal the deal with a promise of permanent residency.

The result of that decision, as the member has asked about, was chaos, cost and tragedy. Over 50,000 people arrived—more than 8,300 children—after they abolished temporary protection visas, at a cost blow-out of $11.6 billion. The results were catastrophic. The lesson is that you have to stand for what you believe in when it comes to border protection, and no
self-respecting government would ever honour the promise of a people smuggler, but that is what the opposition did last night in the Senate with the Greens.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order. That is terrible reflection on the Howard government for transferring people to permanent visas.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The member will resume his seat. I would remind the Manager of Opposition Business that we do not have frivolous points of order. I call the minister.

Mr MORRISON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know the Manager of Opposition Business is very sensitive on this point as he has the worst record of any former immigration minister on illegal arrivals to Australia by boat. That is quite an achievement, because all the worst immigration ministers are still sitting on that side of the House. I will give them some advice in terms of the lessons—and it does not come from me; the advice comes from none other than former Senator Bob Carr, who said this: 'Not a bit of daylight should there be between the ALP and Tony Abbott on irregular migration.'

I have some advice for those opposite. This is the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott. This is what he looks like. This is the one you should be following because he has the strongest border protection measures that this country has ever seen. This is the Leader of the Greens. This is not the person you should be following.

The SPEAKER: The minister will desist from using props.

Mr MORRISON: This is the Prime Minister you should be following. The opposition should note that. Last night the Greens and Labor teamed up to repeat their failed history once again, but the government will not bow to people smugglers. We will not honour their promise.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the Leader of the Opposition, I would remind the House that we do not use props. I called the Leader of the Opposition.

Education Funding

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Prime Minister. Under Labor's school agreements, states are required to invest one extra dollar for every two extra federal dollars. What is the rate of co-contribution from the states under the panicked deals that your government announced yesterday?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister has the call, but I would remind those on my left that, having listened to the Leader of the Opposition's question, if you want to hear the answer then we need some quiet.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:11): I would remind the Leader of the Opposition that I am responsible for what the Commonwealth does; the states are responsible for what the states do.

Ms Macklin interjecting—

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Jagajaga and the member for Isaacs will cease.

Mr ABBOTT: I will also remind—
Ms Macklin interjecting—

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Jagajaga and the member for Lingiari are both warned!

Mr ABBOTT: I will also remind the Leader of the Opposition that the only state government that has ripped money out of school funding is the South Australian Labor state government, which has ripped $200 million out of school funding under the agreement that the Leader of the Opposition negotiated.

Mr Bowen interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for McMahon is warned!

Mr ABBOTT: The Leader of the Opposition just cannot help himself. He is constantly interjecting across the table. He should look at the Adelaide ABC interview from this morning, where the South Australian Labor education minister admitted that she is ripping $200 million out of school funding. I table the transcript of the ABC interview.

What we are doing is honouring our commitments to the Australian people at the election. I can understand why members opposite are so upset.

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta is warned!

Mr ABBOTT: You could not trust Labor, but you can trust this coalition.

Gambling

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:13): My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, your government wants to overturn the 43rd Parliament’s modest poker machine reforms, so I want to know how all the avowed Christians in the government care so little for Australia’s 95,000 poker machine problem gamblers and the people they affect—or do they just care a whole lot more about the hundreds of thousands of dollars the coalition has received from the poker machine industry?

The SPEAKER: Before I call the Prime Minister, I think the member should rephrase his question. I think to reflect on people’s faith in a question is unparliamentary, and I would ask you to rephrase your question.

Mr WILKIE: I think not only the members in this place but the broader Australian community would like to know how anyone could possibly disregard the welfare of Australia’s 95,000 poker machine problem gamblers and the many hundreds of thousands of people they affect, because that is what will be done if you overturn the 43rd Parliament’s modest poker machine reforms.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:14): I do thank the member for Denison for his question. It was good of the member for Denison, given the passion and the sincerity that he brings to this issue, to rephrase it in ways which are a little less aggressive towards members opposite.

The member for Denison knows what it is like to deal with people on this side of the parliament and he knows what it is like to deal with people on the other side of the parliament. The thing that you can be confident of with us is that we will keep our commitments, unlike members opposite, who broke their commitment to the member for
Denison. We will exactly keep the commitment that we made before the election when it comes to gambling. Firstly, we support voluntary precommitment. Secondly, we support more counselling for problem gamblers. Thirdly, we will implement stronger restrictions on online gambling.

Asylum Seekers

Ms PRICE (Durack) (14:15): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Can the minister confirm that the promise of permanent residence lured over 33,000 people on dangerous boat journeys to Australia? How is the government working to ensure people smugglers will not get what they were promised?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (14:16): I thank the member for Durack for her question. I remember being with the now member for Durack in Geraldton. Those opposite will remember Geraldton. That is where the illegal boat turned up, right in Geraldton harbour. They will remember that place very well, as I know everyone in Geraldton will remember that day. They took me to where they saw the boat and then they saw the rubber dinghy, which was the Border Protection Command under the previous government, go out.

I have been asked about those 33,000 people. That is the correct number: there are 33,000 people in Australia today in immigration detention, on bridging visas and in community detention. They are 33,000 of the more than 50,000 who turned up under the previous government. Fifteen thousand of them were given permanent visas by the previous government, delivering on the promise of the people smugglers. And the 33,000 others were waiting for that promise to be fulfilled if the previous government were re-elected. They were hoping that the former minister for immigration would be the now minister for immigration, because he promised to give them permanent visas if Labor were re-elected.

But this government took a different view. This government took the view that it does not matter if you turned up three days ago, three weeks ago, three months ago or three years ago; it is never right to illegally enter Australia and force those claims on this country and demand permanent residence. You either believe that or you do not. The people smugglers always knew that, whatever they did, the other side did not believe it. Those opposite always had to be dragged kicking and screaming.

To answer the member for Durack's question: to stop the boats and remove that incentive you have to have the right policies and you have to have them in the right hands. Before the last election the previous government had to be dragged kicking and screaming to put offshore processing back in place. They previously said it was not necessary. They previously said it had no role in stopping the boats under the Howard government. But they were forced, as the political winds blew hard against them—not out of conviction but out of political fear—to reintroduce offshore processing.

At the last election, the people of Australia made a judgment. They said that they did not trust the Labor Party with border protection policies, even if some of those border protection policies were starting to head in the right direction. They wanted to trust people who believed in those policies and would follow through on those policies. What we saw last night was a very clear indication that the Australian people got it right. They knew that the Labor Party, if they got back into office, would revert to form, revert to the Greens, and seek to undermine
the border protection laws of this country. That is what they voted for last night. They ignored the mandate of the Australian people. They gave the two-fingered salute to the Australian people and said, 'We'd rather be with the Greens than with the Australian people.'

Education Funding

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (14:19): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the Minister for Education's claim today that the government would keep the student resource standard. Can the Prime Minister advise what this standard will be set at and when all states and territories will reach it under their panic deal?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:19): The student resource standard is well known.

Economy

Mr WILSON (O'Connor) (14:19): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline the budget and economic challenges facing the Australian economy over coming months? How will stability, consistency and honesty in economic policy help the constituents of O'Connor?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:20): I thank the member for O'Connor for his question. Our plan for a stronger economy is also well known. It has come through in some of the more recent data. We had some promising retail sales data come out today, which was above market expectations. Clearly there is hope out there that we are going to have a good Christmas for retail despite the best endeavours of Labor. We also had a pretty good Dun and Bradstreet business expectations survey—

Mr Champion interjecting—

Mr Husic interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The honourable member for Chifley and the honourable member for Wakefield will be silent.

Mr HOCKEY: come out today which indicates that twice as many businesses intend to hire staff in the new year compared to the last few months of this year.

We had a very clear plan going to the election. We said we wanted to abolish the carbon tax to stimulate economic growth. We wanted to get rid of the mining tax—

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield is warned.

Mr HOCKEY: with its associated expenditure to reduce government expenditure by $13 billion and reduce the debt. We said we were going to get rid of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to reduce government debt. We also said that we were going to make the decisions that needed to be made to fix up the budget and start to live within our means.

Of course, we were left with a legacy from Labor of a $370 billion forecast peak debt, with a $300 billion debt limit. That is the way Labor are. Labor always leave their problems to other people. They are always inconsistent. They say one thing before an election and something else afterwards. There is no better instance of this—

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY: Hang in there, China, I know you've only got three years to go!
Senator Kim Carr put out a press release saying that Labor was so committed to the education cuts before the election that they are going to oppose them after the election! Labor is going to oppose their own education cuts, which they took to the last election. You might say that that is pretty absurd, but before the election Labor said they were going to terminate the carbon tax. Now, after the election, they say that they are so going to terminate the carbon tax that they are going to block it! They are going to block the termination of the carbon tax. I thought to myself, 'Hang on, Labor is saying one thing before the election and then voting against it afterwards. Surely, Labor could not be inconsistent?' Then I picked up the new budget paper from the South Australian government. I looked at page 28, which says that the Labor government in South Australia is booking $32 million from the removal of the carbon tax. So Labor says one thing before the election and another thing afterwards. But don't worry, they will bank the money that does not exist.

Education Funding

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for Education. Under Labor's Gonski plan, New South Wales agreed to improve teacher standards to boost student outcomes and to improve school leadership in order to receive federal funds. Minister, will Queensland be held to the same standard?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (14:23): I am delighted finally to be asked a question by the opposition on an education issue. It is the first one in this parliament, in fact. I am very happy to answer it. The government announced yesterday that we will put back into school education the $1.2 billion that the previous minister for education, the now Leader of the Opposition, took out. For Queensland that means $794 million more over the next four years that they can spend on schools and on school students. I am very pleased to be able to say that John-Paul Langbroek, the Queensland minister for education, put out a statement yesterday saying that that money would be used for improving principal autonomy, discipline in schools and teacher quality, according entirely with this government's priorities and, most importantly, the priorities of parents and grandparents for their students in schools.

Parents and grandparents are not interested in the petty political games being played by the opposition on this issue. They are much more interested in results for their students—for their children and grandchildren. They are much more interested in quality and standards, which is what this government is interested in. We say to Queensland: 'We will treat you like an adult government. We're not going to have central command and control of your school systems from Canberra.' There is a very good reason for that. We do not own or operate any schools in Queensland. I know that will come as a shock to the shadow minister for education, who has only a passing interest in education, herself, personally—

Ms Rishworth interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingston is warned.

Mr PYNE: who has had only a rudimentary association with education. This will come as a shock to her—I am going to let her in on a secret—the Commonwealth does not own or operate any schools. I know it is a shock. The states operate schools. They own schools. They employ teachers. This is what the Commonwealth will do: we will do our bit. We will play our part. We will put Commonwealth resources into our priorities, the states' priorities and
territories' priorities to get the best results possible. But we will not have the red tape, the regulation, the school performance institute and the management plans by ministers from Canberra—Canberra central command and control. In closing, the Leader of the Opposition agreed with us. Before the election, in his deal with Victoria, he convinced Dennis NAPThine to sign up. Dennis NAPthine said:

At the last minute, very late, even as late as Saturday night, we had an agreement, finally, from the federal government that they were prepared to amend the Education Act to confirm the autonomy of Victorian government schools.

You are hung by your own words.

Carbon Pricing

Mr Coleman (Banks) (14:26): My question is to the Minister for the Environment. I remind the minister that dry cleaners are significant users of electricity and have been significantly disadvantaged by higher electricity prices. Is the minister aware that Clean Brite Dry Cleaners in Mortdale in my electorate is estimated to be paying carbon tax of more than $1,000 per year, with the additional cost 'killing the business' in the words of its owner. What obstacles stand in the way of removing the carbon tax?

Mr Bowen interjecting—

The Speaker: The member for McMahon will desist.

Mr Hunt (Flinders—Minister for the Environment) (14:27): I thank the member of Banks, who represents thousands of small businesses and who is right to raise their concerns in this House against the contempt shown by those on the other side for small businesses with legitimate concerns about cost pressures. That which the member for Banks raised has also been raised by the Australian Industry Group. The Australian Industry Group identified from its surveys a 14½ per cent electricity price impact on its members as a consequence of the carbon tax. Let me repeat that: there is a 14½ per cent increase in electricity prices for the Australian Industry Group's manufacturing and small and medium business base. But it is more than just that. It is also about gas prices, which we know will come down by seven per cent, on average, when the carbon tax is removed. It is also about refrigerant costs. In particular, we know that if the Leader of the Opposition is elected as Prime Minister we will see a new trucking tax for carbon.

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The Speaker: And the member for Isaacs is not addressing anybody.

Mr Hunt: The trucking tax is part of their policy. Here is a chance for the Leader of the Opposition or any other member to rule out once and for all what they took to the election. Do they stand by the new trucking tax, which will hurt small businesses and owner-operators, or will they rule it out? We know also when we look at the situation of Clean Brite, which has been affected by higher electricity prices, that it is part of a $4 billion hit on electricity prices around the country, according to the Clean Energy Regulator. Those electricity prices are felt by mums and dads, pensioners, seniors, small-business owners and large-business owners. That is why the Australian Industry Group, the Business Council, the Minerals Council and ACCI have all called for the removal of the carbon tax immediately.

So the question goes to whether or not there are any obstacles. At the moment in the Senate there is a filibuster going on. What we see is that the friends from the Labor Party are
debating the carbon tax bills by dividing them, by splitting them, by amending them, by seeking to have them run well beyond Christmas, so as to take away the removal of the electricity price benefit which would come when these carbon tax bills are gone. Right now, there is an obstacle to the carbon tax. It sits in front of us. It sits in the Senate. As the Treasurer set out, even the South Australian government is banking the savings for better health, better education and better police services by removing the carbon tax.

Education Funding

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (14:30): My question is to the Minister for Education. Yesterday, the government claimed to have reached a national agreement on school funding. Can the minister confirm for the House what the states are required to do in return for these Commonwealth funds?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (14:30): Thank you to the honourable member for her question. I am happy to answer it. What we announced yesterday was that we would put back the $1.2 billion into the school funding model that Labor took from it, including the Deputy Leader of the Labor Party, who was then a minister in the government, who signed up to ripping $1.2 billion from schools. We put that back yesterday, because we thought it was important for school students around Australia to have certainty, to have the resources necessary in every state and territory. We did not believe that there should be second-class students in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

After spending 11 weeks working with the ministers in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland, I was very pleased to be able to announce that we had reached a national agreement with those three jurisdictions to incorporate the $1.2 billion to ensure that every student—

Ms Kate Ellis: A point of order, Madam Speaker. The question was on what the states have to do in return for these funds. So far, the answer is nothing.

The SPEAKER: When the member rises on a point of order and wishes to raise relevance, it is necessary to say so. I call the honourable, the minister.

Mr PYNE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, what has happened since I reached a national agreement with Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory is that I have asked my officials and their officials to finalise the details of those agreements. But, broadly, what we will do is exactly what we promised before the election.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Those on my left will desist!

Mr PYNE: Before the election, we said that we would remove the command and control features from Canberra.

Ms King interjecting—

Ms Chesters interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Ballarat and Bendigo are warned!

Mr PYNE: I know they are terribly excited, Madam Speaker.

Mr Danby interjecting—
Mr PYNE: They are very excited, especially the member for Melbourne Ports. He rarely gets a go in question time, so we will mention him. We will put him in the Hansard. Madam Speaker, we said that we would dismantle the command and control features from Canberra, and we will. We said that we would remove the red tape and regulation, and we will. Importantly, we said that we would do that for all jurisdictions, but because these new jurisdictions that have signed up to the national agreement start from a clean slate that is exactly the kind of agreements we will put in place. And then next year we will return to the parliament, we will amend the Australian Education Act to do that for all the other jurisdictions that are signatory states. We will remove the red tape and regulation. We will remove the command and control from Canberra. We will ensure that our priorities align with the states and territories priorities, which is teacher quality, parental engagement, principal autonomy and a robust curriculum, because the most important outcome for students is quality and standards.

Ms Rishworth interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingston is warned!

Mr PYNE: The member for Kingston is terribly excited. Maybe that is because she was not mentioned in the Hansard, but now she is! So we will make sure that our priorities and their priorities will accord—

Ms Rishworth interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingston will remove herself under standing order 94(a).

The member for Kingston then left the chamber.

Mr PYNE: Hear, hear! We will treat states and territories like adults, because they are adult governments answerable to their voters in the same way that we are answerable to our voters at federal elections.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, in the minister's answer he referred a number a times to agreements. I wonder, if he has copies with him, would he be able to table them in parliament.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Herbert Electorate: Defence

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (14:34): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. I remind the Foreign Minister that Townsville is the home to 3rd Brigade, Australia's largest army base, as well as RAAF Base Townsville. I also note that the Foreign Minister has just returned from ministerial consultations with the United States. Foreign Minister, how is the government strengthening Australia's alliance with the United States and how will this benefit my electorate?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:35): I thank the member for Herbert for his question. I recognise the role that he plays in supporting his local defence community and for the strong advocacy that he demonstrates in pursuing their interests. I congratulate him for that work.

First, I would like to acknowledge the role that Queensland and Townsville play in defence planning and in supporting our alliance with the United States. The member has referred to the RAAF base in Townsville. That is the primary staging base for the deployment of the
ADF overseas and foreign units as well. The member also referred to Australian soldiers in 3rd Brigade, again based around Townsville. These soldiers are deployed all around the world, including alongside our American allies in Afghanistan. It is worth noting that Queensland and Townsville have also been host to the largest joint exercise that the US and Australia undertake—in fact, that the US undertakes—Talisman Saber, which involves about 28,000 personnel. The last joint exercise was conducted in July-August this year.

The coalition has made a very strong and early start in reaffirming our commitment to the US alliance. The Minister for Defence and I attended the AUSMIN conference, which is the highest level bilateral dialogue that we have with the United States. We were in Washington on 20 November. Senator Johnston and I met with our counterparts, Secretary of State Kerry and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel. We discussed a whole range of issues to enhance our joint cooperation in the area of defence and security. In particular, we affirmed our commitment to the joint force posture initiatives that were announced by President Obama in November 2011, on which there is bipartisan support—

Mr Perrett interjecting—

Ms JULIE BISHOP: If that rude member would just let me finish. We also took the opportunity to sign a statement of principles which underscores the arrangements that will see this joint vision come to fruition. The Minister for Defence also signed a memorandum of understanding for the relocation of a US space telescope to my state of Western Australia. So we get a look in, as well, member for Herbert.

Over the last few weeks since coming to government we have made sure that Australia's commitment to the US alliance, forged in the Second World War and formally signed under the Menzies government in 1951, remains the bedrock of our national defence and security.

Education Funding

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:38): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the government's failure to provide any detail today about indexation, co-contributions, the student resource standard and loadings for disadvantaged students. Prime Minister, isn't this panicked school deal just a con?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:38): The only con was Labor's pre-election con to take $1.2 billion out of school funding. That was the con, on top of the $3.8 billion it had earlier taken out of education funding and the $1.6 billion that it had earlier taken out of hospital funding. That is the con, but that is what we expect from members opposite after their great carbon tax con before the 2010 election.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, I quote a point of order which you made in the last term. On page 553 of the *House of Representatives Practice* it states, under the old paradigm, that it was irrelevant to compare policies of the opposition with those of the government. That is under the old paradigm. For it to be, under the new paradigm, a direct answer to the question—

The SPEAKER: I thank the Manager of Opposition Business.

Mr Burke: You were given more time, Madam Speaker.

The SPEAKER: If I did raise such a point of order, I am sure that I did it more accurately. There is no point of order. I call the Leader of the House.
Mr Pyne: Bad day, Tony! You are really missing Anthony Albanese!

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will resume his seat. Have you a second point of order?

Mr Burke: I do, on direct relevance.

The SPEAKER: That is the same point. You can only have it once.

Mr Burke: No, you ruled earlier that unless we say direct relevance, it is not. On this occasion, I am saying it.

The SPEAKER: I am sorry, you did refer to 'direct paradigms'.

Mr Shorten: Why don't you check the tapes, like you did yesterday?

Mr Burke: Yes, check the tapes, like yesterday.

The SPEAKER: Which I did do. We will deal with that later—and you. I call the Leader of the House.

Mr Pyne: I think the pressure is showing a bit on the opposition. Madam Speaker, I ask you to ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition—who used a most unparliamentarily word to describe the Prime Minister during his answer, which in the hubbub has been lost because of the exchanges since—to withdraw the statement she made, directed at the Prime Minister.

Ms Plibersek: I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

Mr ABBOTT: If I may conclude my answer: unlike members opposite, this government completely keeps its commitments.

Broadband

WYATT ROY (Longman) (14:41): My question is to the Minister for Communications. I refer the minister to an election advertisement displayed on a billboard in Stanley Street in Brisbane, which claimed that Labor's national broadband network was free. Can the minister explain the measures the government is taking to make the NBN more transparent and inform Australians of the true cost of the so-called free NBN?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (14:41): I thank the honourable member for his question. I say to the honourable member that the principal measure that we are undertaking to correct the misleading statements made by the previous government, and continued by the Labor Party about the NBN, is to set out the facts and expose the spin that they have been perpetuating about this project.

It did not just finish at the time the election; it did not just finish with the end of the Conrovian era. We saw it yesterday at the doors. The member for Blaxland, the shadow minister, was complaining about the coalition's approach to the NBN. An intrepid reporter said, 'But didn't you mess a few things up? Didn't you leave a few problems?' He brushed it off and he brushed it off, but finally—under incredible pressure—he said, 'Yes, there have been problems with the construction. They do need to be fixed, but don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.'

Really, he should not throw the metaphor out with the cliche, either! This is absolute parrot territory. Really, you can just imagine this process of denial! You can imagine how the member the Adelaide got on with the member the Grayndler, the former minister, when she complained. She said, 'There's no NBN happening in my electorate. There's nothing here.'
What did the member the Grayndler say? He said, 'Don't worry, it's not dead. It's just resting. The NBN is just resting.' He said, 'It's just tired! It's had a big squawk lately and it's having a rest!'

The honourable member asked me what we are doing, apart from exposing their misleading statements. This is what we are doing: we are spelling out every week the rollout statistics of the NBN. We are revealing a statistic that Labor concealed. Labor concealed the fact that one third of all of the brownfield premises they claimed to have passed with fibre could not be connected. There was a rather nice term for it. They were called 'service class zero', because there was zero chance of getting a service.

That statistic was concealed by the previous government to create the impression that more premises were being passed. They also had this bizarre Orwellian metric, 'premises where construction has commenced or been completed', and 'construction' in the small print was defined as beginning when the plans were first drawn up. This is all stopping. We will shortly be releasing a strategic review which will spell out the objective facts and the truth about this project for the first time in its history.

**Education Funding**

Ms **KATE ELLIS** (Adelaide) (14:44): My question is to the Minister for Education. Under Labor's Gonski plan, there are needs based loadings for students with disability, for Indigenous students, for small and remote schools, for students with low levels of English and for disadvantaged students. Can the minister guarantee that these needs based loadings will be delivered to schools under the panic deal that he announced yesterday?

Mr **PYNE** (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (14:45): I am very glad to have the question from the shadow minister for education. I was asked about Labor's Gonski plan. Can I simply point out that, under Labor's Gonski plan, $1.2 billion had been ripped out. I am very happy to table this graph that I hold: in 2013-14, under the coalition, schools will get $471 million; under Labor, they were going to get $355 million. In 2014-15, under the coalition, they will get $477 million; under Labor, they would have got $258 million. In 2015-16, they will get $736 million; under Labor, they would have got $388 million. And, in 2016-17, the total is $1,111,000,000—versus the $606 million that they would have got in the forward estimates—in terms of additional funding as a consequence of yesterday's announcement. I table that graph, which the shadow minister might find useful. Under the Gonski plan proposed by the Labor Party, states like South Australia could rip $230 million out of their funding model, and Jennifer Rankine confirmed it today.

Ms Plibersek: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: I refer to page 551 of the Practice, where, under the heading 'Answers to questions without notice', it says:

When a Minister is occasionally unable to provide an immediate substantive answer, he or she may either undertake to supply the Member with the requested information in writing at a later date …

Has the minister—

The SPEAKER: The member will resume her seat. I am perfectly familiar with the page. There is no point of order.

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr PYNE: You should not reflect on the chair. Madam Speaker, he should not reflect on the chair in the way that he does. It is quite outrageous how rude the Labor Party has become.
I was asked about the Labor Party’s school funding model. Under the Labor Party's school funding model, South Australia was able to take $230 million out of the funding that they had committed to over the next four years, and Jennifer Rankine said so today. The presenter asked: 'Is it correct, these figures about the $230 million?' Jennifer Rankine: '$230 million we have—that's over a four-year period.' Presenter:

No, no, no. No, Minister, figures can be very confusing for people listening … if we can just confirm … you are planning to cut $230 million from the education budget over four years?

JENNIFER RANKINE: We have efficiency dividends over … four years …

So she confirmed it herself. Under Labor's plan, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory got $1.2 billion less. Under Labor's plan, states like South Australia could remove $230 million. Under Labor's plan, there was a different indexation rate in every state and territory that had signed up. Under Labor's plan, there was a different percentage of the student resource standard required to be achieved by that state or territory in every state and territory—under Labor's plan. So, with all of this cant and hypocrisy from the Labor Party about their plan versus the new model, the reality is they were taking money—

Mr Abbott: The Pyne plan.

Mr PYNE: It is kind of you to call it the Pyne plan, Prime Minister, but I wouldn't rush to do so! It is more the Abbott plan, or the coalition plan. Under our plan: $1.2 billion more, states being allowed to run their state and territory schools, the Commonwealth delivering its responsibilities to provide support for our students.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:48): Before I call the member for Corangamite, I wish to note that we have visiting us, in the gallery, Mr Stuart Henry, the former member for Hasluck. We make him welcome.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Road Infrastructure

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (14:49): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. I remind the minister that, as part of the government's focus on building the roads of the 21st century, it committed to the upgrade of the Great Ocean Road and to duplicating the Princes Highway from Geelong to Colac. What impact will these upgrades have on local jobs and the local economy in Corangamite?

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (14:49): I thank the member for Corangamite, and it is great to have as a new member a champion of the Princes Highway and the Great Ocean Road—and the other parts of the highway network in Victoria. This is a championship which is absolutely essential if there is going to be an achievement of the government's objectives of building the roads of the 21st century, and building them right across the country. She will be very pleased to know that work on planning for the last section of the Princes Highway towards Colac is underway and construction is expected to begin next year. So she will see continuing progress on the upgrading of the Princes Highway.
There is a similar story in relation to the Great Ocean Road, where the coalition has committed $50 million, in partnership with the Victorian government, to upgrade this iconic road. This of course is one of the great driving experiences of the world, and it is appropriate that this highway continue to be upgraded so that it is safe for motorists and so that the international visitors who come from all over the world just to drive this highway can do so in safety. The member for Wannon will also be interested in this road upgrade, because one of the projects that is going to be constructed is the road close to the Warrnambool cheese factory, which is probably the most famous cheese factory in the world at the present time. This upgrading will benefit the dairy industry and others in that area.

This is a major construction and upgrading project which has very significant benefits for the local community, the tourism industry and all who want to visit those parts. But it is interesting to note that the Labor Party were not in favour of upgrading the Great Ocean Road. They were opposed to it, and the former member for Corangamite was accusing the coalition of just wanting to dynamite the coast road. We are upgrading it so tourists can enjoy it. But Labor does not want the roads of Australia to be upgraded. We will get on with building the roads of the 21st century and we will do it efficiently and well, in partnership with the state governments.

**Education Funding**

**Ms Collins** (Franklin) (14:52): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister guarantee that the needs based loadings under Labor's Gonski plan for every small and remote school will be delivered to those schools under his panic deal announced yesterday?

**Mr Abbott** (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:52): I can guarantee that we will be spending $1.2 billion more than members opposite were going to spend and I can guarantee that over the next four years the answer is yes.

**Diabetes**

**Mr Williams** (Hindmarsh) (14:53): My question is to the Minister for Health. What has the government done to provide support for families of children suffering from type 1 juvenile diabetes? What impediments have been preventing the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation from continuing with the Type 1 Diabetes Insulin Pump Program in 2013-14?

**Mr Dutton** (Dickson—Minister for Health and Minister for Sport) (14:53): I thank the member for Hindmarsh, a great local member. I did a health forum in his electorate just before the election. He showed a great deal of empathy for people who do it tough with their diseases. He provided a way forward for a lot of people. I think he did an excellent job.

There is a lot for us to argue about in this place, but one of the issues about which I thought there would be no disagreement between the government and the opposition is type 1 diabetes. The previous government announced earlier this year that they were going to provide funding for children who require insulin pumps, children who are suffering the most insidious disease, type 1 diabetes. The former health minister promised that they would be taken care of and provided with funding. After we won the election on 7 September, I thought there would be a lot for us to do in the Health portfolio and I thought the one issue which would have been settled was insulin pumps for those children. I was absolutely amazed and, frankly, disgusted to find that promises had been made to children and to their families earlier.
this year but a contract had not been signed, that uncertainty had been delivered on those families for all of those months.

Within five weeks I signed a contract with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation to provide certainty for families. I was absolutely disgusted that the former minister held out hope to families, yet for months and months was not able to put a deal to bed to provide certainty for the families. And it did not stop there, I am sorry to say. The previous government promised money for GP superclinics, which never opened.

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs is warned!

Mr DUTTON: They promised money for programs which never delivered patient outcomes. They promised money to causes and never delivered anything to patients but delivered great big bonuses to union bosses.

Ms King: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order—direct relevance. The minister was asked a specific question about insulin pumps; he was not asked about anything broader than that. Perhaps he could tell the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation when he is going to give them their $35 million. Where is their contract?

The SPEAKER: The point of order is complete. This is not a debate. The minister is referring his remarks to the question of insulin and type 1 diabetes.

Mr DUTTON: Exactly, right, Madam Speaker. I thank very much the shadow minister for her intervention. She mentions the $35 million that the coalition promised before the election but that Labor never promised. We will deliver that money. Why? Because we want to provide an outcome to those families. We did it in the first instance by providing money for the diabetes pumps, when Labor promised but never delivered. We promised $35 million because we are absolutely determined to have those clinical trials operating, to make sure that we can work towards a cure for those families who are suffering from type 1 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes has an impact not just on the patient but on the entire family.

Labor promises a lot but never delivers anything. They build up those great big new bureaucracies. We are taking money from them and putting it into clinical trials to make sure that we can get an outcome for Australian families.

Education Funding

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (14:57): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister guarantee that the needs based loadings in Labor’s Gonski plan for every student with a disability will be delivered to schools under his panic deal announced yesterday?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:57): It is terrific to get a question from the shadow minister for clawback! She was always on about that in the last parliament. We are not going to claw back the $1.2 billion that Labor clawed back before the election.

Ms Macklin: On this International Day of People with Disability, this question deserves a serious answer.

The SPEAKER: That was not a point of order. It was an abuse of the call.

Mr ABBOTT: Assuming the shadow minister is serious, let me say that we will fully deliver the National Disability Insurance Scheme because we want to do the right thing by the
people of Australia who have a disability. On schools, those loadings will be fully delivered over the coming four years.

**Employment**

Mr Wyatt (Hasluck) (14:59): My question is to the Assistant Minister for Employment. I remind the minister the Productivity Commission released its report today Geographic Labour Mobility. How is the government supporting long-term unemployed Australians, in particular young job seekers who want to move to take up a job?

Mr Hartsuyker (Cowper—Deputy Leader of the House, Assistant Minister for Employment) (14:59): I thank the member for his question. The draft Productivity Commission report made an interesting observation with regard to labour mobility in that it noted the contribution of labour mobility to productivity. The government is very focused on that. That is why we have committed to introduce a relocation assistance program to ensure that job seekers, particularly young job seekers, have the opportunity to move from an area of low labour market demand to an area of higher labour market demand. That makes total sense, to give job seekers, particularly young job seekers, every opportunity to get a job.

We propose providing a $3,000 bonus for young job seekers, and job seekers more generally, to relocate to a metropolitan area and $6,000 to relocate to a regional area. But for those job seekers with dependants there is an additional $3,000 payable. I would note, though, this is not just a cash payment; it is a payment that reflects the actual cost for the job seeker to move.

In addition, we have the job commitment bonus, to encourage young job seekers to get and keep a job. A young person, who is long-term unemployed and who gets a job and keeps it for 12 months, will get a $2,500 bonus. If they remain in employment for two years, they will get an additional $4,000 bonus. These are important programs that help young people to get into work, to enjoy the benefits of work and to spread those benefits of work to the entire community.

These job programs certainly have a place. But the most important thing that we can do to support job seekers right around the country is to grow the economy. A strong economy creates more jobs and more opportunities for all job seekers and all Australians more generally. That is why we are axing the carbon tax, we are axing the mining tax and we are getting rid of $1 billion worth of red tape. If members opposite were serious about supporting job seekers in need of opportunity, they would get on board with the government and assist us in passing this legislation so that we get these much-needed reforms through the parliament to create opportunities.

**Education Funding**

Mr Neumann (Blair) (15:02): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister guarantee that the needs-based funding loadings in Labor's Gonski plan for every Indigenous student will be delivered to schools under his panicked deal announced yesterday?

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:02): We are delivering the money that will enable the loading to be delivered, unlike members opposite who took the money away. They clawed it back—that is what they did. So the answer is yes.
BUSINESS

Leave of Absence

Mr PALMER (Fairfax) (15:03): On indulgence, Madam Speaker, I request leave from the House to be absent from tomorrow for the birth of my child next week.

The SPEAKER: I am sure the House wishes you every good wish and the successful arrival of a new Australian.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Question Time

The SPEAKER (15:03): Just before I call the Leader of the House, I did say yesterday that I would check the tape and the Hansard regarding the question of the Leader of the Opposition and his question that was originally out of order. I quote the Hansard. After the Leader of the Opposition had asked his question, I said:

That question is quite out of order and I ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the end of the question.

The Leader of the Opposition then said:

Sorry, did you give me the call?

I then said:

I said to withdraw the end of the question. It was unparliamentary.

The Leader of the Opposition was given the call to so withdraw. He did withdraw, but then he sought to continue. It was at that stage that I asked him to resume his seat because he would have required a second call to actually seek leave. That is a record of what transpired. I call the Leader of the House.

MOTIONS

National Apology for Forced Adoptions

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (15:04): by leave—I move:

That today, this Parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering.

We acknowledge the profound effects of these policies and practices on fathers.

And we recognise the hurt these actions caused to brothers and sisters, grandparents, partners and extended family members.

We deplore the shameful practices that denied you, the mothers, your fundamental rights and responsibilities to love and care for your children. You were not legally or socially acknowledged as their mothers. And you were yourselves deprived of care and support.

To you, the mothers who were betrayed by a system that gave you no choice and subjected you to manipulation, mistreatment and malpractice, we apologise.

We say sorry to you, the mothers who were denied knowledge of your rights, which meant you could not provide informed consent. You were given false assurances. You were forced to endure the coercion and brutality of practices that were unethical, dishonest and in many cases illegal.
We know you have suffered enduring effects from these practices forced upon you by others. For the loss, the grief, the disempowerment, the stigmatisation and the guilt, we say sorry.

To each of you who were adopted or removed, who were led to believe your mother had rejected you and who were denied the opportunity to grow up with your family and community of origin and to connect with your culture, we say sorry.

We apologise to the sons and daughters who grew up not knowing how much you were wanted and loved.

We acknowledge that many of you still experience a constant struggle with identity, uncertainty and loss, and feel a persistent tension between loyalty to one family and yearning for another.

To you, the fathers, who were excluded from the lives of your children and deprived of the dignity of recognition on your children's birth records, we say sorry. We acknowledge your loss and grief.

We recognise that the consequences of forced adoption practices continue to resonate through many, many lives. To you, the siblings, grandparents, partners and other family members who have shared in the pain and suffering of your loved ones or who were unable to share their lives, we say sorry.

Many are still grieving. Some families will be lost to one another forever. To those of you who face the difficulties of reconnecting with family and establishing on-going relationships, we say sorry.

We offer this apology in the hope that it will assist your healing and in order to shine a light on a dark period of our nation's history.

To those who have fought for the truth to be heard, we hear you now. We acknowledge that many of you have suffered in silence for far too long.

We are saddened that many others are no longer here to share this moment. In particular, we remember those affected by these practices who took their own lives. Our profound sympathies go to their families.

To redress the shameful mistakes of the past, we are committed to ensuring that all those affected get the help they need, including access to specialist counselling services and support, the ability to find the truth in freely available records and assistance in reconnecting with lost family.

We resolve, as a nation, to do all in our power to make sure these practices are never repeated. In facing future challenges, we will remember the lessons of family separation. Our focus will be on protecting the fundamental rights of children and on the importance of the child's right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

With profound sadness and remorse, we offer you all our unreserved apology.

Very briefly, this is an important motion to provide support for the national apology for forced adoption and removal policies and processes. It was moved in the House on 21 March 2013. It was debated in the House and in the Federation Chamber in the last parliament. Unfortunately, it was never returned to the House of Representatives. The Manager of Opposition Business and I have arranged to move this motion now to properly recognise the sentiments that were expressed in this chamber and in the Federation Chamber about what is a very serious issue.

The SPEAKER: For new members, there is a copy of that motion on the table so that everybody may see precisely what that apology was about. As a mark of respect, I ask all present to signify their approval by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

Question agreed to.
Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (15:06): Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Education Funding**

The SPEAKER (15:06): I have received a letter from the honourable member for Maribyrnong proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The Government’s failure to implement real education reform.

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

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

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (15:07): There are few questions which are more important in the national parliament than the future education of our young people. There can be few things more important than providing the best start in life for our young people. There are few things which are more important to parents than the quality education of their children. And there are few things more important when it comes to education than keeping your election promises.

We have seen a circus in the last few days and weeks. Before the last election the coalition promised that there would be no difference between Liberal and Labor policies, in a cynical attempt to gain votes at the election. Then we saw another development after the election. The then opposition, now the government, presented position No. 2: ‘Actually, we didn't say what you think we said before the election; we actually said something different.’ Then they went even further. They chose to deny that they ever made the promises they made in the first place. In fact, they said on the *Bolt Report*: 'There are promises that the coalition government will make. We will decide what those promises are. What other people think they are or what other people heard they are does not actually make them a government promise.' It is a case not of 'read my words' but of 'read my mind'.

In the last few days, after the legitimate uproar of an angry population saying, 'You lied to us before the election; you are lying to us now; we just want our promises honoured,' we had what I suspect was one of the more remarkable meetings that a cabinet of Australia has ever had. I would love to have been a fly on the wall at that cabinet meeting. You would have seen them all saying, 'What did we really say?' Oh, my goodness, there would have been head-slapping. 'Oh, that's right, we agreed with Labor because they had the best education policies. Do we have to still keep our word? No, no.' Apparently the Minister for Education said he had a good day yesterday. I would hate to see him have a bad day!

Anyway, the F Troop of education, those opposite, now have their latest position. You can just imagine the damage control experts in the bunker underneath Liberal Party headquarters saying: 'Do something. Just get this issue out of the newspapers.' The coalition government would have said, 'Let's just chuck some money at the problem.' Of course, if you are going to
chuck some money, $1 billion, at a problem, you have to have some detail. Today we have revealed there is no detail in their education plan, which is a point I will come to in a minute.

We asked the government, 'Are you going to do what Labor said'—because they said they would do what Labor said—'and ask the states to provide $1 for every $2 we put in?' It is a great offer: $2 of Commonwealth money so kids get greater individual support, so we can improve teacher standards and so we can help empower school communities—all of the good things that the Gonski report recommended. Did they ask the state governments who had not signed up before the election: 'Listen, we're under pressure; we're under friendly fire from Barry O'Farrell, who's giving us a flogging; we're under fire from everyone—what if we just give you some money? Is that okay with you?' I have never seen a federal government beg a state government, 'Can we just give you some money?' I am sure that the state education ministers when they got these panicked calls said: 'Oh, I know what's coming. The Commonwealth is going to ask us to contribute some money as well.' You can just imagine the dumbfounded silence at the other end of the phone when the state education ministers waited for the Commonwealth government to act like a Commonwealth government and say, 'This is taxpayer money; we'd like some accountability,' but nothing came.

Then we asked the Prime Minister today, 'How about the student resourcing standard?' In what has to be a new standard for a nonanswer, in response to the question, 'Are you right with the student resource standard—is that going to happen?' the Prime Minister said, 'It's well known.' I do not think it is, Tony Abbott. You have no clue what the student resource standard is. To be fair, he was probably saying, 'It's well known by everyone except me.'

The real issue here about education reform is the Gonski report. You do not need to read the Gonski report, which is fine because I am very sure most of those opposite have not read the Gonski report.

Mr Joyce: Have you?

Mr SHORTEN: I will tell you. For the sake of the 'minister for GrainCorp' over there, let me just say one sentence. If there is nothing else the 'minister for GrainCorp' ever learns in this place, he should learn this: personal and social circumstances should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. Getting a lecture from the National Party about whether I have read something is a little like saying, 'Have you burnt a book for literacy?'—it does not make sense. Barnaby, you are better off keeping quiet and leaving us in doubt as to how smart you are. The real issue in education reform is this: why should a child in Australia—

Mr McCormack: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask that you please ask the 'minister for pie shops' to call members by their correct titles.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr SHORTEN: What matters today is: what is going to be the best deal for schoolkids in Australia? There are two teams on the field. There is one team interested in education reform and then you have the clowns sitting opposite, who are just trying to patch things up and not be accused of breaking a promise. Today in this parliament, several key questions were asked but not answered. Have the government asked anything of the state governments they have given the money to? Have these people opposite written the ultimate in blank cheques? 'Here's some money. Rescue Christopher Pyne from the mess that he has made. Take the money; we won't ask anything back for it.' Have those opposite even met the Gonski panel? If
they do not like reading, perhaps they like talking. Sometimes learning could just come from sitting in a room with the Gonski panel. The government have set no standards for the states. When it comes to education, these people opposite have not gone after needs based funding. All they have done is given money to the states with a green light to cut their own state education budgets. That is all they have done.

Kathryn Greiner was on the reform panel, and today's Sydney Morning Herald states:

Ms Greiner said that it was no good for the government to blindly match money without adhering to the principles that underpinned the original proposals by the Gonski panel. This is not a government interested in education. This is not a government interested in reforming education. This is not a government interested in needs based funding. His whole sorry saga of the last 10 weeks reveals some basic truths. This is not the government Australians thought they were voting for on education. This is a government who have wanted to abandon education reform. They fell into a terrible argument with nearly everyone in education. The sum total of the last 10 weeks in education is that no-one trusts the Abbott government on education. What is more, no-one trusts the education minister on education reform. No-one takes the education minister seriously about education reform.

We asked today: ‘Were there any conditions put on the states?’ I have never in the history of state-Commonwealth relations seen an amount of money of this size handed to state governments with no strings attached. The real issue here is: what happens to kids in schools? At the moment, 60 per cent of unemployed people lack the literacy skills to meet global standards. At the moment, too many kids are falling behind because of their personal family circumstances. Why is it that in Australia poor kids are on average about three years lower in their academic results than children from rich circumstances? This is not right. This is a country that is interested in giving every kid a fair chance.

I know there are members opposite who are interested in seeing kids, no matter what their circumstances, get a fair deal. I understand that. I do not doubt that for a second. It is not enough, though, just to want to help; you have got to have a plan to help. The Gonski review was 20 months, 7,000 submissions and 3,000 pages. But some of these people opposite are too lazy to open the book, too lazy to look at the reforms. What we want in education and what was promised before the election is that this would be a government where there would be not a cigarette paper of difference between Labor and Liberal on education. They are the government who said there would be no surprises and no excuses. We have seen in the last 10 weeks every excuse and nasty surprises. What we see from those opposite is the ability to fundamentally distance themselves from everyone who has ever tried to do anything in education. It is very simple: this mob opposite cannot be trusted—(Time expired)

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Minister for Education) (15:17): That speech by the Leader of the Opposition was 24 hours out of date. The Leader of the Opposition is still trying to cling to the notion that the Labor Party was putting the same amount of money in as the coalition. Unfortunately for the Leader of the Opposition, in the last 24 hours, the coalition is putting $1.2 billion more into school education than Labor would have done had they been re-elected. In the Pre-Election Economic and Fiscal Outlook, Labor reduced the additional funds to schools from $2.8 billion over four years to $1.6 billion over four years. That speech by the Leader of the Opposition might have worked if it had not been for two important facts. Firstly, he was the one who ripped $1.2 billion out of schools—
Ms Kate Ellis interjecting—

Mr PYNE: You admitted it yourself in the media. It was a tragedy for you. On Meet the Press you admitted that you had ripped out $1.2 billion. That followed shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen admitting it on ABC 24 on Thursday. You say nobody believes it. But you believe it, because you admitted it on Sunday and Chris Bowen admitted it on Thursday. We know that you took the $1.2 billion and ran with it. The first fact is that you took the money. The second fact is that the coalition put it back in. Yesterday we put $1.2 billion back in. Rather than the Labor Party coming into the House and thanking the government for putting more money into school students over the next four years, we are in this ironic, ludicrous position where Labor is coming into the House and pretending that did not happen: 'Let's just pretend yesterday did not happen—2 December, just wipe it off. We were asleep—Rip Van Winkle. We have woken up and nothing really changed on Monday.' So Labor have kept their question pack from last week. They have kept their MPI speech from last week—and the Leader of the Opposition just gave it.

The ironic thing about the Leader of the Opposition's speech and all the questions that were asked today is that, if Labor had been re-elected, the loadings for children with disadvantage, the funding to achieve the student resource standard in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, would never have been delivered. We have had a conga line of questioners come up to the dispatch box today demanding that we put in the loadings for disadvantaged students—which we have done yesterday—which they took out in the Pre-Election Economic and Fiscal Outlook! If Labor had been elected, students with disadvantage in Queensland, WA and the Northern Territory would not have got the loadings, would not have got the extra support, would not have reached the student resource standard. It was because the coalition was elected, and because yesterday we put the $1.2 billion in, that they are getting the loadings, that they are getting the support to reach the student resource standard. We inherited a very serious mess and we are moving to fix it up.

The Leader of the Opposition, in his MPI speech, said it was all about trust. The lack of sincerity that Bill Shorten can bring to bear on the subject of trust is not worth writing about! Julia Gillard could not trust him. He said he was 100 per cent behind Julia Gillard. Bill Shorten did not go so far as the member for Lindsay, who said he would have a tattoo put on his forehead rather than not vote for Julia Gillard. But Bill Shorten said he was 100 per cent behind Julia Gillard—until he stabbed her in the back. He said he was 100 per cent behind Kevin Rudd—until he stabbed Kevin Rudd in the back. You know, the really sick thing about that night in 2010—I was in parliament and I heard the whole thing—was that Bill Shorten was bragging to people about how easy it was. He thought taking out a Prime Minister would be tough, he thought it would be hard. He was bragging to his right-wing factional mates in Sussex Street, 'It was much easier than I expected.' And this is the man that comes to the dispatch box to lecture us about trust! It is a remarkable audacity for the Leader of the Opposition.

So we inherited a mess. We inherited a situation where there was $1.2 billion removed from school funding. We inherited a school funding model that was not national—that did not include Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory—and where every state and territory had a different indexation rate, and every state and territory needed to reach the
student resource standard at different percentages over different years. It was a complete
shambles—

Ms Kate Ellis interjecting—

Mr PYNE: And the member for Adelaide says, 'Scrap it all.' Unfortunately, she is still
trying to catch up. We have not scrapped anything. We have actually made a national
agreement. We have created the national agreement that you failed to create. I know it is hard
for Labor to accept, because they say: 'We're best at health and we're best at education. Yes,
you're better with the economy, and you're better at defence, and you're better at national
security, but we're better at education and health.' They always say it. How tragic for them to
have to show up to question time and admit that we are putting more money into schools than
they would have and that I, of all people, achieved the national agreement on school funding,
which they said I could never do! But quietly, methodically, calmly, behind the scenes for the
last 11 weeks I have been talking with Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern
Territory about bringing about a national agreement, and I achieved it.

I must admit I am very pleased that those extra funds are going to students around
Australia, because it allows us to move on to the real issues in education: to quality and
standards; to principal autonomy, which we on this side of the House are very attached to; to
quality teaching, which we think is the most important thing you can do to bring about good
outcomes for students; and to parental engagement—because, unlike the Labor Party, we are
not trying to push parents away from their children in schools. We want parents to be deeply
engaged in their children's education—to ask them when they get home from school: 'How
much homework do you have? What areas is it in? How long do you think it will take? Can I
help you to do it?' We want parents to be deeply engaged, and that is one of our three pillars.
And, finally, we want a robust curriculum. We want a strong, orthodox curriculum that
achieves the outcomes that we believe in in Australia for our students, because we want them
to have the best outcomes possible.

Mr Perrett: It's the Eureka Stockade anniversary today. Are you going to get rid of that
too?

Mr PYNE: I know it is hard to take, member for Moreton. It is hard to take that this side
of the House is delivering more money, delivering a national agreement—and actually,
incredibly, getting to implement its policies, because we won the election. You are the
government-change deniers on that side of the House! As far as you are concerned, every now
and then the Liberals win an election—we have governed for two-thirds of the last 60 years,
but we will put that aside for one moment. We are apparently allowed to win an election, but
woe betide us if we actually try to implement our policies! That is outrageous! We are not
allowed to do it on the carbon tax. We are not allowed to do it on the minerals resource rent
tax. We are not allowed to stabilise the economy through the debt ceiling. We are not allowed
to introduce temporary protection visas. We are not allowed to focus on quality and standards
for our students. We are not allowed to do these things—because we won the election, and we
were supposed to keep Labor's policies in place!

Ms MacTiernan interjecting—

Mr PYNE: Well I have some news for the member for Perth. I know it is not going to be
easy. I have some news for her: she is on the wrong side of the House to implement policies;
we won the election, and we will. We said we would keep the same level of funding as Labor. We have gone one better: we have put $1.2 billion in. We said that we would have a national scheme, and we have delivered it, unlike Bill Shorten when he was the minister for education. And we said that we would remove the command-and-control features from Canberra that were inherent in the model: that we would take away the red tape and the regulation, and that we would get rid of the School Performance Institute, the ministerial directions from Canberra about performance and implementation, and the federal inspectorate of schools—we said we would get rid of those and we will. So we will have a better model with more money. And it will be national.

So where to from here? We will have a four-year funding agreement as promised. In 2014, we will amend the Australian Education Act to deliver the policies that we took to the election, because we on this side of the House think it is really important to keep your election commitments. We will keep our election commitments, unlike Labor. In 2007 they made commitments; they broke them. In 2010 they made commitments; they broke them. They said there would not be a carbon tax; they introduced one. They have so traduced people's faith in the Australian parliament that we will make sure in this parliament that we restore people's faith in the government because we will keep our commitments, just like we are on schools and education.

Ms Kate Ellis (Adelaide) (15:27): What has become very clear in today's parliament is that this government's education policy is nothing more than a sham. The government have taken Gonski, which then they thought was 'Conski', which then they thought was Gonski again, and they have left absolutely nothing but one big con—one big con for the Australian parents, the Australian students, the voters who took them at their word when they said that they were on a 'unity ticket' with the Labor Party when it came to school funding. But what has become apparent is that they are on no such unity ticket whatsoever.

Whilst we have had the member for Sturt flipping and flopping and flipping like a fish on a jetty, they have got absolutely no closer to meeting their election promises. They have got absolutely no closer to being able to repeat the statement they made before the election that no school would be worse off under their government because they know that, under the arrangements they have put in place, absolutely every school will be worse off.

Nothing can disguise the fact that they are betraying every Australian child. They have shamelessly broken their commitment to reforming and lifting our schools. Nothing can disguise the fact that they have deceived every Australian parent, every Australian teacher, every Australian educator, because they told them what they wanted to hear in the lead-up to the election and now they have just tossed that all aside and left absolutely nothing but this sham of a policy. Nothing can disguise the fact that what the minister described as 'a good day in the office' is actually a shamefully bad day for every Australian child relying on us having a strong, healthy future education sector.

So let us be very clear about what it is that those opposite are offering. Those opposite are offering a tiny fraction of the $14.65 billion of additional funding which would be invested into Australian schools under our plan. And what came out in question time today is that those opposite are offering absolutely nothing of the overdue reform of our system which they pledged they would at the election.
So let us just have a look at the facts, because we know that this government are not the government that they said they would be if they were elected. But let us just have a look at what they said before the election and what they have now run an absolute million miles away from. On 29 August we had Christopher Pyne saying:

So Tony Abbott and I made a decision … matching Labor's funding model dollar for dollar.

Uh-uh, you have less than one-third of the dollars putting forward. You are ripping it out of the hands of every school principal, of every Australian parent and of every Australian child who is relying on improvement to our school community.

They also said:

You can vote Liberal or Labor and you will get exactly the same amount of funding for your school.

Well, isn't that interesting? Because now the Prime Minister says, 'Oh, no—we didn't say that. We didn't say "of your school". We said "schools"—plural.' No, you did not, Prime Minister, and no, you did not, government opposite. What you said was that no school will be worse off, and you cannot repeat that to the Australian parliament today because you know what we know, and that is that every single school across Australia will be worse off as a result of this government being elected.

The Prime Minister said, 'As far as I'm concerned and as far as Christopher Pyne is concerned, we are guaranteeing that no school will be worse off.' He said it on 2 August, but come December we cannot hear any of those words again from this Prime Minister. And he said, 'We have a clear commitment for all Australian schools; your funding is certain.' And if there is one thing we have seen in the last couple of days—if there is one thing that all the flips and flops and backflips have shown—it is that absolutely no funding is certain whatsoever because this government have not even made agreements. They have not even made any agreements whatsoever.

So, we had a plan that Labor put forward: $14.65 billion to reform our schools. They have put a commitment of just $2.8 billion and no guarantees that schools will not be worse off or that states will not just rip out that same funding. What we heard in question time today was: no indexation; no guarantees against state funding cuts; no co-contributions, which were an important part of our model; and no accountability mechanisms whatsoever. All they are doing is trying desperately to backflip and clean up the mess that the member for Sturt is making by throwing blank cheques around and asking absolutely nothing of the states in return.

This is a shameful betrayal of Australian students and their parents who took this government at their word when they said they were on a unity ticket—when they said that they would sign up for this model that they have now turfed aside—and when they said that no school would be worse off. (Time expired)

Mr TUDGE (Aston—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (15:32): There has been a lot of talk about unity tickets in relation to this school funding debate, but the real unity ticket we now know is the unity ticket between Mark Latham and Bill Shorten. Because the last Labor leader to rip funding from schools was none other than Mark Latham. And now Bill Shorten has become the second one, ripping $1.2 billion out of schools.

Mark Latham, to his credit, at least had the courage to be up-front and to say, 'I'm going to cut funding from lots of independent and Catholic schools,' whereas Bill Shorten did it very
sneakily. He did not announce it, he did not put out a press release—it was only through the
details of the financial outlook pre-election where it was revealed that $1.2 billion of school
funding was ripped out of public schools from Western Australia, from Queensland and from
the Northern Territory. There is a unity ticket, and it is between Mark Latham and Bill
Shorten. And perhaps we can add Jay Weatherill to that, the South Australian Premier, who
just yesterday confirmed that $220 million has been ripped out of public schools in South
Australia.

This is an extraordinary MPI that has been put forward by the Labor Party. Labor had six
years to do so much in education, but they did so little. And yet only after 2½ months of the
colaboration being in government, they have the audacity to criticise us for supposedly failing to
achieve real reform in education. I can tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that after just 2½ months
we have achieved more than what Labor did in six years. Let me go through just some of the
things that we have already done in this 2½ months.

Firstly, we reversed the disastrous decision in relation to capping self-education expenses.
Secondly, we found the $1.2 billion which the Labor Party ripped out of school funding and
put it back in. Thirdly, we negotiated a real national school reform agenda, something which
Labor could not do in their entire six years of office. And, fourthly, we are putting in place the
steps which are necessary to implement our election commitments. Four substantial things,
real reform that we have put in place in just 2½ months—so much more than what Labor did
after six years. And yet they have the audacity to come in here and lecture us about not
delivering on school reform.

Let us just go through what Labor did, though, in relation to education. They ripped $3.8
billion out in total, as the Prime Minister mentioned. They ripped a further $1 billion out of
the universities. They ripped $1.2 billion out of schools on the eve of the election. They added
volumes of red tape to the school funding reforms, which, had they been in power now, would
be tying up the education system. And they put in place reforms which have led to the
collapse of teacher entry standards for students going into teaching courses. Those are some
of the substantial things which they did in their six years of office. And now you can compare
that to what we have already achieved in our 2½ months.

What is real education reform? School funding is part of it, but it is not the only thing. We
know that because over the last decade we have had a 44 per cent increase in funding in real
terms in education in this country but we have actually had a decline in standards. So clearly
there is not a direct causal link between funding and outcomes. So what does matter? Yes,
funding is necessary but it is not sufficient. What does matter is giving school principals
autonomy so that they can make decisions for their own schools. What further matters is
teacher quality. Every single piece of research will tell you that teacher quality is what matters
and it starts at the education faculties of the universities. Thirdly, what matters is a rigorous
curriculum, because the standards are set by the minimum standards of the curriculum. Those
are the things that we are going to be concentrating on: teacher quality, school autonomy and
a rigorous curriculum. That is real school education reform. (Time expired)

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (15:37): I rise to speak today about a subject dear
to my heart and dear to the hearts of parents and teachers in the 53 schools within the
electorate of Lalor. I speak of education funding reform. I wish I could talk about the impact
of high expectations on student learning, on the impact of the meta analysis of Professor
Robert Marzano and Professor John Hattie. I wish I could talk about the impact that had on schools. I wish I could rise today to speak about this in a real and useful way. But, unfortunately, this vitally important issue has been reduced to a mere debacle by those opposite. There have been backflips, half-pikes and half-pikes with twists used to obfuscate this critical policy area during and since the election campaign. In the process, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Education have made and broken promises, leaving school leaders in every state and territory of our nation trying to read the words, read between the lines, infer and guess what the future will be for their schools.

Let me summarise. In the last three years, while the Gillard government conducted an exhaustive education review that attracted 7,000 submissions, in his capacity as shadow minister, the member for Sturt asked just three questions about education. On release of the Gonski report, the same member took just minutes to dismiss it as a con. When Better Schools proved critical to voters, they did a U-turn and promised a unity ticket, even though it was two years and many millions of dollars short. After taking government, we heard Minister Pyne talking about the curriculum, specifically the history curriculum—yes, that old chestnut. Predictably, this stole the headlines while the undoing of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, or ACARA, went unnoticed. Next he was backflipping on the now non-unity ticket and saying he needed to go back to the drawing board—the drawing board of the previous, Liberal government. Then we had the Prime Minister saying he did not promise anything, or maybe he did and we misheard him, or maybe we all just imagined it. Anyway, the Prime Minister would only keep the promise that he had not made, that we had imagined but that no-one had heard. And then yesterday he declared he would fulfil the misheard promise that maybe had been made after all. Now he is telling us he will go one better and find the money for the state governments who have shown their contempt for student learning by putting politics over progress. But it is still not unity. It is another new promise, this time to our state premiers that they do not need to spend money on education after all.

I am tired just trying to make sense of it all, but not trying to make sense of it is not a luxury that we can afford—not for the parents of our students or the committed educators; they need to know so they can plan and implement programs to give every child the best chance in life. The most damning thing of all in this circus charading as policy is what lies behind all the shenanigans. There are a couple of giveaways: the destruction of ACARA as an independent body working with states and territories and putting in place a critical data source to tell the story of our schools and of disparity amongst them. This and Minister Pyne's assertion that Australia does not have an equity issue are the keys to this protracted mess. It tells us much about this government's plans for education. They are not interested in addressing inequity; they are acting to enshrine it by hiding it and denying it. But the My School website and the ACARA data have been available for a long time and schools have been tracking their progress against national and state benchmarks for years.

Today I want to share the story of two schools I visited in my electorate last week. Both have made good use of national partnerships money and Victorian equity funding over the past four years. The first is Westgrove Primary School. The principal is Lila Gray. In 2009, Westgrove had an ICSEA—Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage—ranking of 989 and their grade 3 students performed below average in reading, writing and numeracy. By
2012 it had an ICSEA ranking of 956. The measure of disadvantage had in fact increased, and yet the grade 3 students performed above the state average in reading, writing and numeracy in 2013. The second is Iramoo Primary School. The principal is Moira Findlay. Four years ago, this school had an ICSEA ranking of 940 and grade 5 students performed 50 points below the state average in reading, writing and numeracy. In 2012 it had an ICSEA ranking of 928. (Time expired)

Dr STONE (Murray) (15:42): Probably one of the most appalling performances over the last period of Labor will be the way they trashed the education expectations and performances that are now typical of our country's schools, particularly in rural and regional Australia. No country would stand proudly when it looks at the rankings of Australia as they slip further below other countries, whether it is in reading, writing or numeracy. It is an appalling indictment on this government that today they have the cheek to bring into debate in this place the extraordinary failures of their government, trying to somehow justify their existence.

In 2007, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd promised Australia an education revolution. He was fond of revolutions. This was his education revolution. What did we get and what were we left with? We had the Building the Education Revolution. That was $16.5 billion worth of bricks and mortar and bits of wood and we were told it would somehow revolutionise the outcomes of education in the country. It imposed templates on schools around the country. I think of my poor little Nathalia Primary School. They wanted a toilet block. They begged the Commonwealth government for a toilet block. They got a classroom built over the town's sewerage easement. They did not get a toilet block. The cost of the classroom they built was way outside of any reasonable costing parameters. No locals were allowed to be engaged in the building; it was people brought from the capital city. Building the Education Revolution left school councils in despair and it left $16.5 billion less in the education budget, money which could have been spent on better outcomes for kids.

Then we had the Digital Education Revolution—the computers that were meant to magically show up on student desks across the country. They did not show up or, where they did, there were no funds for connecting them. It was a tragedy, a mockery of what the schools really needed. Some $2.4 billion went down the toilet as a result of the Digital Education Revolution.

Then we had the magical MySchool website. I can remember the then minister standing up and saying, 'This is a great success; we have had so many hits on this website.' What did the website do? It named and shamed schools whose kids did not achieve the country or state average on the NAPLAN tests. The trouble is that there were no funds to support those schools that were being shown to be unable to reach the national average. It was simply a name-and-shame outing exercise. What an appalling indictment!

What about student outcomes? After six years of Labor, how did the performance of our students in reading, maths and science compare internationally? We had slipped to 27th in the OECD in reading levels for year 4. In maths we were down to 18th and in science we were down to 27th—that is out of a group of about 30. We hang our heads in shame when we see developing countries way ahead of us and our kids struggling to read and write in year 12.

This is an indictment of Labor's period in government. They gave us a revolution in education all right—a revolution in how to appallingly mismanage a huge budget. Most of it ended up just supplying work for their mates in the building industry, I suspect. Then they
ripped $1 billion out of the universities and $1.2 billion out of the schools—after which they have the temerity to stand up in this place and ask what we have done.

We have been in government for only 11 weeks, but we have already said how it will be. We will improve teacher quality. Have you ever heard of that—teacher quality? There are people enrolling in teacher education who have barely passed year 12 and who need remedial maths and English. That is not good enough for our kids. We have to improve our year 12 outcomes so that our best and brightest want to become teachers and then we have to give them a strong and robust curriculum.

Let us get back to teaching history in this country—and to teaching geography and literacy. Let us help our multicultural communities understand how we came to be a free country. It did not happen by accident. Let us talk about parent engagement. Let us give our principals some autonomy so they can move on the underperformers they have inherited from the Labor regime.

We have added back the $1.2 billion that Labor ripped out just before the election. All up, we will deliver $2.8 billion over four years to all of the states and territories, not just the lucky ones who signed up before the election was called. In implementing real education reform—(Time expired)

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (15:48): Before I became a lawyer, I was a schoolteacher for 11 years. Even though I taught English, today I am going to do a little bit of history. I am going to run quickly through the history of school funding, just so people understand it. This is a very important topic. The history is troubled, particularly when you look at the Commonwealth's involvement.

Before the socioeconomic status, or SES, model the main focus of the way the states and Commonwealth organised the allocation of money was the average cost of educating a kid in a state school. Then the Howard model came in—the SES model. This model looked at data from each census collection district—about 200 households. Wherever a kid came from, the data for their CCD was looked at and that determined how much money should be handed out to their school. This was for non-government schools. State schools received their money under a different scheme.

The idea behind the SES model was to recognise where the money was. That is a pretty crude analysis of it. It may well have had the best of intentions behind it. On Lateline with Steve Cannane last week, the member for Sturt said that he thought the SES model was a needs based model. More than anything, this statement underscored for me that he was the laziest shadow education minister this nation has ever seen. He did not understand the basic premise of the SES model—that was a fundamental misunderstanding.

Irrespective of the reasoning behind it, the SES model did not deliver for a number of reasons. For a start, about 50 per cent of the schools were funding maintained. That means they would have lost money under the SES model except for the Howard government saying that no school would be worse off. So it was a flawed scheme in the first place. What were the results? We saw money flow to the wealthiest non-government schools. I think Mark Latham's spirit was invoked earlier and I have to say that, when I was a candidate in 2004, I was particularly troubled by our education policy—with all respect to those who formulated it in 2004.
Thankfully, we saw the development of the Gonski model, which came out of consultation with stakeholders—7,000 submissions and going out and talking to people—and out of bringing in the best minds, not just from education but from outside it. It came up with the idea of needs based funding. The idea was, ‘Let's calculate what you need to educate a kid’. It costs more to educate kids in a state school because state schools have to take a student. The Thallon State School must take the kids in Thallon—and it costs more to keep a kid at the Westmar State School than it does in the middle of Brisbane. I am talking here to the member for New England. He knows these schools. A private school can make a few decisions and normally people sending their kids to a private school are more prepared to put their hand in their pocket. That said, there are Aboriginal schools, some very poor Catholic schools, some very poor Christian schools and schools like the Southside Education Centre in my electorate, which caters for girls who have had babies. There are all sorts of private schools. They are not all Geelong Grammar.

The Gonski model said, 'Let's work out what it costs to educate a kid and then we will give loadings based on whether, for example, the kid has a disability.' It is based on the individual kid, irrespective of the sign above the gate—be it Catholic, independent or state, we do not care. It was a blind education policy in that we did not care what the sign above the gate was. It was brilliant and I commend the Gonski panel for coming up with it. Funding was based on disability, on whether kids were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, on school size and location—it is harder to run a small school like Westmar because of the challenges they face—on whether there are lots of kids with limited English and on whether there is low SES. They were part of the loading. It is not like the SES model that said the richest kid from St George who went to boarding school in Brisbane imported the data from their poor census collection district.

Why did we need to improve the system? Because the current model had been broken. We found that poor kids were up to three years below. As a cooperative federation we needed to come up with a better model. We do have to have some controls—and it is not command and control; it is about making sure that there is performance and implementation so we can lift the standards across all Australia, which is a good thing. (Time expired)

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (15:53): A disappointing aspect of this discussion so far is that the approach the opposition has taken has been so much focused on inputs and so little focused on outcomes. Secondly, they were in government for six years and generally you would think that in a 10-minute speech or a five-minute speech they could have given one minute to the record of the Rudd and Gillard governments in education. We heard no mention of that.

The topic of today's matter of public importance is the failure of the government to implement real education reform. It is not as if we have not had enough education reform in this country over the last six years. In fact, we have had education revolutions. There has been education revolution fatigue. Remember the Building the Education Revolution—$16½ billion? We never hear members opposite talking about that. Remember the Digital Education Revolution? There was going to be a laptop on the desk of every child. There was also the Productivity Places Program. Members opposite never talk about it. It was a disaster in the area of vocational education and training.
The OECD has a very interesting benchmarking publication entitled 'Strong performers and successful reformers in education.' I thought that we have had all these years of education revolution, so we should have a look at where Australia sits. In chapter 3 we had Ontario, Canada; chapter 4, Shanghai and Hong Kong; chapter 5, Finland; chapter 6, Japan; chapter 7, Singapore; chapter 8, Brazil; chapter 9, Germany. Australia did not get a mention. That is no surprise because, even more depressingly, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement found in its latest benchmarking in December 2012 that Australian year 4 students are ranked 18th in the world in maths, 25th in science and 27th in reading. They are a long way behind leading educational systems like those in Hong Kong, Russia, Finland, Singapore, Korea and Chinese Taipei. It is depressing that the opposition have focused so much on resources but they have no idea how to get a really good education system. It involves more than resources—it involves improving the curriculum, it is about better teachers, it is about having more local decision making and it is about having more parent engagement.

It seems the government is being criticised for finding an extra $1.2 billion for schools, and at the moment the only government in Australia pulling money out of education and out of schools is the government in my own state of South Australia. It is pulling $230 million out of its school system. One of the problems with the current argument is that under the previous government we saw increased funding not leading to improved effectiveness or student outcomes. I have not heard one member of the Labor Party talk about student outcomes under their reign. Their performance was abysmal. For the first time we saw Australia in some of the lowest international rankings, ranking 27th, 25th and 18th—well behind other countries that are spending less on their schools but have better education systems. We need to have a sophisticated debate about what sort of schools we want. As I said before, there is a lot more to this. We do want to see better teachers in our schools, we want to see parents more involved in the education of their children and we want to see local communities having responsibility rather than bureaucrats in a centralised education department.

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (15:58): I do want to talk about education outputs and I do want to talk about the inherent schizophrenia in the position adopted by the government. Outputs are incredibly important, but if the member for Boothby really understood that data he would know what is happening in Australia—the top 25 per cent of Australians are doing very well, the next 25 per cent are doing quite well but the bottom 50 per cent, those two lower quartiles, are doing very poorly. When you read that data, you need to understand how it is broken up and you need to understand that that is why we need Gonski; that is why we commenced the whole process of Gonski. It was to investigate forensically where we are going wrong in our education system and target the funding towards those people who need it.

Quite correctly those opposite say analysis shows that things have been going wrong in our education system—but that education system has largely been run by the states. Under Labor, federal Labor said, ‘We’ve got to get more involved. This is too important.’ Federal government has to get involved because, as the minister has himself said, this is essential and important to the productivity of this nation. So the federal government decided that it had to get more across the detail. It had to get more involved. That was the whole point of Gonski and the agreements that were subsequently entered into with the various states to deliver change, to deliver the money where we needed it, to deliver the resources where we needed
them. It is certainly true it is not about resources. There are other things that have to happen as well. But the resourcing is certainly part of it. There is inequity in our system. You have got to understand how that lack of educational opportunity is playing out and why we need to actively go in there and fix it.

There is a complete and absolute contradiction. You are saying you want to do all these things. You are going to insist on school autonomy. You are going to have better teaching. You are going to have that, but you are not having any agreements with the states. The states have presided over this regime and have been delivering the schools. You say, 'The states run the schools. We're going to let them continue to run the schools and we're not going to have any engagement with them. We'll give them the money no strings attached.' How are you going to do that? How are you going to make change by just giving more money to the people to continue on with business as usual? It does not make sense. You have to engage. You have to get into agreements. Now, we did have agreements with—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! I am reluctant to draw the member for Perth's attention to the use of the word 'you'. It is a common failing on both sides of the House, but it is not me that has to understand; it is someone else. I would just ask you to reflect your comments through the chair, not at the chair.

Ms MacTIERNAN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. It is absolutely essential that we understand that we do have to enter into agreements. If we want to forge a new pathway then we have to constructively engage the states, because, as you have identified, 'business as usual' is not working. How can we just say, 'We're just going to tip a bucket of money in, but we are not going to take any responsibility for what that outcome is'? It does not make sense. Let me just make one little comment too about Western Australia. It is quite interesting. The minister yesterday was claiming that Labor wanted to punish WA. We only offered them $170 million over the next four years for their schools, and we were punishing them because we did not like the school autonomy of the independent public school model that had been introduced. Former Prime Minister Julia Gillard twice came down to schools in what was then my state seat and absolutely promoted and embraced the principle of student autonomy. We offered $170 million. You have gone in now and offered only $120 million. It has gone from $178 million to $120 million. So you have actually cut by one-third the amount of funding that was on offer from Labor. (Time expired)

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence) (16:03): I do thank the House for the opportunity to address them and debate this matter of public importance. It is clear to anyone listening that a bit of calmness is needed in this debate. The Australian people voted for change on 7 September, and, after listening to those opposite in this matter of public importance, it is not hard to see why. I take up the comments from the member for Boothby, who is right when he said that he thought those opposite would actually talk about their own record in government. It is a reasonable thing to think that after six years in government they would talk about their record in government. But those opposite did not mention it once—not a word. Zilch! Zip! Nada! Nothing! Not a single reference! It is like they were just getting up to it. They were just getting there. After six years, if you had only given us one more term we would have done it, we would have delivered that education reform. You just have to trust us and give us one more chance.
Today we even had a lecture on trust by the member for Maribyrnong, the man who did not
tear down just one prime minister, he tore down two prime ministers. The same member who
stood up here day after day in the previous parliament and defended the previous government
on that great carbon tax deceit: 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.' We
have had lectures on trust and not a word from those opposite on their own record when it
comes to education reform. Having stripped $1.2 billion from its own funding package prior
to the election, members opposite now want to lecture us again. They stripped $1.2 billion
from their own funding package prior to the last election, and they have the audacity to come
in here and want to lecture us because the Minister for Education has had the audacity to
actually increase the funding. He has increased the funding and provided an opportunity for
having a genuine national approach.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr CHESTER: I know that the three new members opposite are a little bit embarrassed.
They should be a little bit embarrassed because the Leader of the Opposition, when he was in
the role of minister, stripped $1.2 billion, carved out Western Australia, carved out
Queensland and carved out Northern Territory. I know they are a little bit embarrassed about
that, as is the member for Perth. The three jurisdictions that were going to be adversely
affected by the Leader of the Opposition when he was Minister for Education are going to
benefit because the coalition government has come in and undertaken to provide $1.2 billion
and provide a real opportunity for some sort of national reform in relation to education
funding.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr CHESTER: All the ranting, all the raving, all the hooting, all the hollering over
there—keep it going, keep the hooting and hollering going—we love it. We love listening to
the new members. It is good to hear your voices, but it does not change that simple fact: you
carved $1.2 billion out of the forward estimates for education funding. We are putting it back
in, and those opposite have a problem with it. We are actually going to give Australian
schools the opportunity to participate in a truly national program. So we can have this faux
outrage. We can have all this confected anger. We are actually going to deliver more money.
This side of the House, the government, the coalition, the Liberals and Nationals in
government are going to deliver more money than you were able to provide when you had the
opportunity.

This is a better deal. It is a better result for students across Australia, particularly in those
jurisdictions that were financially penalised by the opposition leader when he was the
education minister.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr CHESTER: Oh! They are going again. The member for Perth is going again. It is not
hard to get her going, I must admit. She fires up very quickly. But I just urge the member for
Perth to recognise that the Leader of the Opposition— (Time expired)
GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed on the motion:
That the Address be agreed to.

The SPEAKER (16:08): Before I call the honourable member for Braddon, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's maiden speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Mr WHITELEY (Braddon) (16:08): I rise an honoured man—to an honour given me by the people of Braddon. I rise as a member of the Liberal Party and as their chosen and thankful candidate. I rise as a man humbled by the love and support of his wife and children, his wider family and his lifelong friends. I rise as the 1,130th elected member of parliament since Federation and as the 13th member for the seat of Darwin-Braddon.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election to the role. This is my second maiden speech in a parliament, as I had the privilege of delivering my first parliamentary speech in the Tasmanian House of Assembly in 2002—which, by the way, can be found www.parliament.tas.gov.au. That just gave me 6,000 more words!

I am 11 years older, hopefully wiser and delighted to be able to make my first speech in this place of national significance. I offer my congratulations to all elected members, especially the new members and friends of the parliament. I congratulate Prime Minister Tony Abbott and thank him for his disciplined leadership of our party. I take this opportunity to say thank you on behalf of my electorate to the former member for Braddon, Mr Sidebottom, who, notwithstanding our political differences, sacrificed much—as many of us do—over a 12-year period to be the elected representative.

From the mines of the west of Tasmania to the wind farms spinning in the far north-west and from the crystal clear waters of Boat Harbour Beach to the banks of the Mersey River through the pristine paddocks of King Island, which lie in some of the cleanest air on the planet, Braddon is right up there with the most unique and beautiful parts of our country. We are makers. We are makers of whiskey, underground mining equipment, magnificent cheese, truffles, leatherwood honey, the freshest and best of vegetables, the biggest and highest-jumping salmon, octopus, quality milk products sought by a growing Asian population—and the list goes on and on. Braddon charmingly punches well above its weight.

I do need to speak about the state of my state. There are many great things happening in Braddon: great people are still dreaming; innovators are still designing; farmers are still believing; and leaders are still inspiring. But we have some work to do. After 16 years of Labor in my state—for four of which they have been in the political bed with the Greens—the lack of confidence in government is palpable. It is time to change the state government. It is time for people to understand that strategic decisions will need to be made. It is time for us to herald to the rest of Australia that we need your help, that we appreciate your help but that our intention is to earn back your respect. I know that other states look on us with a degree of suspicion. As a small island state we are treated well through fiscal equalisation, and I know that this is accepted by the rest of the nation to a point.

But it does not help our cause or reputation when our state government makes unwise decisions that impede development, scare off investment and purposely set out to destroy
sustainable industries such as forestry and mining—and then continually has its hand out for even more assistance. We have allowed political minority groups such as the Greens to dictate our future; to use my state as a political, social and environmental experiment. To make matters worse, they commit economic treason: they travel the world peddling misleading information and threatening and intimidating global investors. To put it bluntly, 90 per cent of Tasmanians have had enough.

Sadly, as in life, the political mistakes of the past leave deep wounds—and in Tasmania they have. Unemployment is at record levels. Health and education outcomes are the worst in the nation despite record levels of expenditure, clearly indicating that solving problems is not necessarily about funding but is about better policy. Tasmania this year will have the biggest budget deficit in the state's history. Investment has dried up, our credit rating has been downgraded and hundreds of Tasmania's best are leaving my state. Ten thousand fewer Tasmanians are in full-time employment since Labor and the Greens sought ultimate power at the expense of ordinary mums and dads in Braddon.

I plead today with the people of Tasmania to give our island the last-gasp chance that it needs to rebuild its economy, hold onto our innovators and deliver the great potential we are capable of and to vote for a change for a brighter future with the Liberals under the leadership of Will Hodgman in March. It is great to see the leader of the Tasmanian opposition here in the gallery to support Braddon today.

We need governments at both the state and federal level to do what it takes to re-open Tasmania for business. We are and we must be much more than a national park. But I believe that I was elected because my electorate wants me—wants this government—to talk about tomorrow. It wants us to plan for tomorrow and to build an economy and the infrastructure we need for tomorrow.

So, for tomorrow, I have a vision of a better Braddon—a vision that includes the growth of the Cradle Coast Campus of the University of Tasmania. We cannot continue to see our university solely as a place of education; it is an economic driver. The University of Tasmania is a significant contributor to our economy. If Braddon can gain its fair share of the targeted increase in international students over the next five years at least $30 million will be injected into our local economy. I am committed to working with the university to deliver its tertiary health program to the north of the state, including Braddon.

I have a vision for a better Braddon, driven by small and family businesses, released from the handcuffs of regulation and workplace restraints. Imagine if even half of the 6,000 small businesses in my electorate were inspired and empowered to increase their workforce by just one person. Small and family businesses are under siege in Braddon. We talk a lot about endangered species in my electorate; small business is the real endangered species. Sadly, government has for too long taken small business for granted. I have a vision for a better Braddon and a better Australia, embraced by a new generation that rediscovers the Australia of old. That is a nation that can afford to make things—an Australian industry and manufacturing sector free from stifling costs and unrealistic union demands and reinvigorating our competitiveness in the global village.

I have a vision for a better Braddon that will have the opportunity to compete in the marketplace without the burden of an uneven playing field when it comes to the cost of freighting our goods and produce. I look forward very much to the recommendations of the
Productivity Commission's review of Tasmania's shipping, as it seeks to investigate the inconsistencies in the system and to ensure that Tasmania is not at any market disadvantage. I will continue to highlight what I see to be deficiencies in the system. I have a vision for a better Braddon and a better Tasmania that has a Bass Strait passenger service that understands the tourism challenges of regional Tasmania—a fast ferry model focused on affordable fares designed to fill the vessel with passengers all the year round, and not just through the summer months. I believe that the current business model is wrong and is costing the regions a significant and much-needed increase in visitors and, given that the federal government provides the current funding support, I feel it is more than appropriate to ensure that the best outcomes are being achieved.

I have a vision of a much closer relationship with Victorian commerce and industry. Imagine fast ferries from north-west Tasmania empowering our local innovators and contractors to do business in the greater Melbourne market. If we can get that transport infrastructure right I can see a day when Victorians could relocate portions of their business to north-west Tasmania, where it would be affordable to do so. Some may even choose to do business in Victoria, but have their family live the coast lifestyle of Braddon.

I have a vision for a better Braddon and a better Tasmania that embraces the opportunity of growing timber. We can grow timber in Tasmania; we do it well and we have some of the best forest brains in the country. In a carbon sensitive world, it is ludicrous for us to be moving away from a focus on forestry. This industry has been derailed all in the pursuit of political power. I note the words of Dr John Tanner who said this: 'Wood fibre is the new milk solids—there is a lot yet to be discovered within the timber industry—it's like the dairy industry of 30 years ago.' Madam Speaker, you would remember this: it was not so long ago that milk was just milk in a bottle. Now it forms the basis of a whole range of saleable and exportable products. This, too, can be the future, I believe, for a revitalised timber industry in Braddon. I do not support any more lockups and I unapologetically oppose the additional World Heritage listing recommended by the previous Labor federal government—no more, because nearly half of my state is locked up. Thousands of people have lost their jobs; regional communities have been devastated; and our economy is so much the poorer. Enough is enough.

I strongly support long-term regional forest agreements. These agreements need a 20-year rolling tenure with five-year reviews if we are to provide resource security and a stable investment environment. I hold onto hope that a world-class, environmentally-acceptable pulp mill will be built in Tasmania. Whilst the plan for construction is in the electorate of Bass, the flow-on impacts to Braddon of a $2.5 billion project would be enormous. The failure to build the approved pulp mill stands, in my view, as a symbol of Tasmania's economic failure. We must deliver the political security and the resource security that will help attract investors. The construction of a pulp mill would equally symbolise Tasmania's economic resurgence.

I have a vision for a better Braddon that can build on its Tasmanian brand by increasing dairy production by the targeted 40 per cent over the next five years. Reaching this target will require more cows—tens of thousands of them—more sustainable farms, new farms and, most importantly, hundreds of new jobs in the industry. I have a vision for a better Braddon, of an aquaculture industry that continues to lead the world in innovation and quality produce. Our half-a-billion-dollar Tasmanian salmon industry has developed harvest systems,
technology and animal welfare strategies. They are unique in the world and only now are they being utilised by the Norwegians and the Scots—the biggest fish farmers in the world. As an island state and island nation, water is a resource that we have aplenty. We have before us an opportunity not only to satisfy our domestic requirements but also to be a renowned world-class exporter of exceptional seafood. I intend to support this industry during the next three years.

I have a vision of a mining industry confident—finally confident—in the processes of approval that they undertake; confident that the process optimises environmental outcomes, but is efficient, fair and reasonable, dependable and free of opportunistic political intervention. Australian mines of the 21st century know well their environmental responsibilities, and it is high time we got off their backs and let them once again stimulate our economy. I have a vision for a better Braddon, a region renowned for its agricultural produce—carrots, potatoes, peas and beef, but also for olive oil, cider, beer and tulips.

Being an island state, we are not afraid to move produce across the water—be it to the big island to our north or to dining tables in New York, Tokyo or London. My vision for Braddon sees primary production reclaim its place in our local and national economy, supported by its natural advantages of reliable rainfall, fertile soils and its innovators. I have a vision for an exciting manufacturing future in Braddon. Despite the challenges faced by the sector, there is a resolute drive by business leaders to transform the industry from the traditional manufacturing of the past toward an advanced manufacturing future with a focus on specialised product that meets the unique needs of high-end clients. This process is already underway in Braddon. With the development of new markets, however, we need workers with a different skill set. And in order for us to exploit every economic opportunity, we must lure skilled Tasmanians back from the mainland and actively encourage young people to complete years 11 and 12 and continue in their education, attaining the highly specialised skills needed to drive this sector.

For tomorrow, I have a vision for a better Braddon and a better Australia, inspired by a new generation of leaders within our businesses and on our shop floors. We need leaders who understand that their employer is not their enemy but the lifeblood for their families. We need leaders at the coalface who understand that having a job is a great deal better than having no job. Winston Churchill got it right when he said, 'Some see private enterprise as a predatory tiger to be shot, others as a cow to be milked, but few are those who see it as a sturdy horse pulling the wagon.' We need leaders and workers who will lead by example and help the horse to pull the wagon. If we are to build a stronger Australia it is better that we help the horse rather than kill the horse.

I will be promoting Braddon, if not Tasmania, as a focus for the reigniting of mutual obligation—not just work for the dole but train and learn for the dole. The days of receiving taxpayer support for no practical return or personal development should be over. We need to get everyone involved in the task of building community capacity. It should not be for schools to provide breakfast for children so that their learning capacity is enhanced. I know we must, until things drastically change, but we simply must aspire to create a better future for our children. We must change the attitude of entitlement if we are to lead the next generation into a stronger Australia.
After contesting four Tasmanian state elections under the Hare-Clark voting system, I have to say I love the single member electorate alternative. Party members locked arms and committed to nothing less than winning the seat of Braddon and being represented in the next government of our nation. I humbly thank them and the hundreds of volunteers for their belief in me and their practical gifting of their time and talents.

To my campaign team, we built not only a campaign strategy but friendships; we forged not only plans but teamwork; and we created not only good political messages but memories. To my campaign manager, Kent Townsend: God surprised us both with your call to the role of leading the campaign team—thank you. A sincere thankyou to Laura Richardson, Leanne Holland, Leon Perry, Annette Overton, Ian Chalk, Rod Bramich, Paul Saward, Mary Duniam, Anthony Haneveer, Joshua Whiteley, Jackson Whiteley, Jeannie Murell and Eric Mobbs.

To state Liberal president, Geoff Page, and Sam McQuestin, our state director: your focus on winning was contagious. To Senator Richard Colbeck: your support of my campaign was first-class. To Senator Stephen Parry: your encouragement of me to make the shift to the federal level of politics was apparently well founded. To Senators Eric Abetz and David Bushby: thank you for your commitment.

It is timely to acknowledge the tremendous campaign efforts of Sally Chandler, Sara Courtney, Bernadette Black and Tanya Dennison—valiant women who fought the battle but were not successful.

The love and support of family and friends is a blessing on our lives. We are made to be loved and to give love. Let me commence by thanking my mother and my siblings, Lee and Amanda, and their families. The road travelled has indeed been an interesting one. My mother, Margaret, is here today, and I pay tribute to her capacity over the last 15 years to provide me with the love and support equal to both her and my late father, Daryl.

To my beautiful adult children, Joshua, Jackson and Jessica: you could not even begin to imagine the delight I find in your company. Today we come together to acknowledge the great honour given me by the people of Braddon—the place in which you grew up.

Where does one find the words, the sentences, to acknowledge the joy of a life shared for 29 years with the woman you love? To my wife, Sue, we have journeyed together in an attitude of 'what's best for each other is best for us'. Sue, your unwavering love and support, together with your wisdom and discernment—yes, wisdom and discernment—has helped to bring me here today.

I thank Sue's parents, Alan and Elsie Dyer, for their embrace of me as their son-in-law and now their local member. Life tests us from time to time, and during my campaign Alan and Elsie lost their son, and my wife lost her younger brother, John, when he died suddenly of a heart attack in his garden at the age of 49. Today I pay tribute to John Dyer for his friendship and for his fascination with my political career. I thank God for his positive influence in his local community, and we miss him.

In conclusion, members are entitled to ask what values and issues I feel passionately about. I value human potential. I have been on the receiving end of the contribution of caring and gifted people in my life, and it is my desire to draw the best out of others. Politics should be about maximising the great resource of human potential. I value human life, whether just
conceived or just about to leave this life. Human life is a gift from God and deserving of mutual human dignity. I will always seek to preserve the sanctity of human life.

I value family and believe that it is the essence of the family unit that binds our nation. I believe in traditional marriage between one man and one woman and hold the view that, where possible, children are best served by the positive nurturing of both a mother and a father; but I have huge respect for those in our community who love and care for their children alone.

I do value faith in God. I believe that almost everyone looks for God—the high achievers who run out of rungs, the low achievers who run out of hope, the elderly who run out of time and the young who are running out of alternatives. Most seek the filling of a spiritual vacuum.

I ask ministers of this newly elected government to work with me and my lower house amigos to build a stronger Tasmania that is more confident in its own identity and potential. I would like to think that the people of Braddon voted for me, voted for this government, because they wanted their single, most precious vote to be rewarded with the improvement of circumstance, a stretch of potential, a wider spectacle of opportunity and a greater sense of hope. I thank the House.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the honourable member for Lyons, I remind honourable members that this is his maiden speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him. I have great pleasure in calling the honourable member for Lyons.

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (16:30): I rise to support the motion moved last month by my colleague the member for Bass. I also join the chorus, Madam Speaker, in formally recognising your appointment to such high office, and I thank you personally for the support you gave me during the 2010 election campaign in Lyons.

Madam Speaker, I would like to tell you a story about how I came to be in this place. I was born and bred in Tasmania. My late father, David, a Launceston GP for many years, came to Tasmania as a 'ten pound prisoner of mother England'. For years thereafter his mother back in the UK proudly told her friends that her David was living and working in Africa! My great-great-great-grandfather Richard Humphreys is an ancestor of some note. In 1788 he defeated the 'Bath Butcher' at Newmarket, in front of a crowd that included the Prince of Wales, to become the all-England boxing champion. He used the purse to purchase the Red Lion in York. He later trained and also defeated the great Mendoza. The artist of some note, John Hoppner, was commissioned to paint his portrait, which now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

My mother, Mary, along with my brother Philip, and my sisters, Rachel and Jane, are here today. My brother Richard passed away many years ago. Mum's family on both sides go back six generations in Tasmania. Joseph Cordell on my maternal grandfather's side was a pilot on the Tamar River after arriving in Tasmania prior to 1820. He was once held at gunpoint by Matthew Brady, the bushranger. Cordell Point is still marked on navigation charts of the river today.

Another ancestor was Alexander Gill, who purchased land near Scottsdale in north-eastern Tasmania. Gill married Susannah, a granddaughter of William Abel, who had arrived in Sydney Town in 1792 as a convict. He had been convicted of stealing children's clothing. He arrived in Elizabeth Town, now New Norfolk—via Norfolk Island—as a free man, and was
granted 34 acres of land on the banks of the Derwent River. He built the King's Head Inn, which was licensed in 1822 and remains as the oldest continually inhabited building in Australia on what is now Valleyfield.

I was educated at the Launceston Church Grammar School but, through no fault of my excellent teachers, was reasonably described as 'having potential but lacking application to the academic task'. Having spent a year working on a farming property near Ouse in southern Tasmania, I was encouraged to further my studies at the Gordon in Geelong—at the time the pre-eminent place to study wool and textile design in Australia. It is great to see Peter and Wendy McDonald—friends made during my time in Geelong—here today. From college, I accepted a position with a Japanese commodity trading business in Melbourne within its wool division.

The wool exporting and trading business was a wonderful place to gain a perspective of markets and to appreciate how hard it is to make a dollar buying and selling a volatile agricultural commodity. This role took me around Australia to wool sales, and overseas. Working with customers in Europe, Japan, China and Korea gave me a better appreciation of what a great country Australia really is. I first visited China in 1988, and the Shanghai I saw is unrecognisable today. More than 20 visits to Japan over 30 years has given me a good understanding of that country's culture, and I am proud to call many business colleagues good friends today.

The corporates have pretty well left the wool textile industry. With a few exceptions, it is medium and small Australian owned and operated businesses that fund the purchase and export of $3 billion worth of raw material annually. To quote the very quotable Minister for Small Business, Bruce Billson, I have 'maximum respect' for all they do every day to put money in the pockets of Australian wool growers. Companies like AME, Techwool, Fox and Lillie, Williams Wool and Lempriere are the unsung heroes of the Australian wool trade.

I first sought pre-selection for the Liberal Party to contest the federal seat of Lyons at the 2010 election. This was done after a conversation with Peter Homann, my general manager at the time in Hobart, who when asked what he would think if I were considering standing for parliament responded, 'I can't think of any reason why you would want to, but if you feel you must we will back you.' To Roberts and Ruralco Holdings, for whom I worked for 16 years, I say thank you for the opportunity and flexibility you provided me during the past five years.

Soon after that pre-selection, I had a discussion with former member for Lyons Mr Max Burr. Max won the seat of Wilmot in 1975. Wilmot was renamed Lyons in 1984 in honour of both former Prime Minister Joseph Lyons and his wife Dame Enid Lyons, a senator for Tasmania and notably the first female to take on a cabinet role in the Menzies government. Joe Lyons was the first person—and is still the only person—to have been both a state premier and Prime Minister. Lyons is truly the seat of equality in this sense. Max Burr held the seat for 18 years until his retirement in 1993. He defeated the Reverend Gil Duthie who had held the seat since 1946, when he had defeated the sitting member, a former Labor man, turned United Party, turned Liberal, Mr Allan Guy, at the federal election of September 1946.

I recall Max saying, 'It will take you 18 months to touch Lyons.' With the benefit of hindsight—and just for the record—can I suggest that Max was about half right. It took three years of repeat visits to the many small communities around the electorate, and to start seeing
people for a second or third occasion, until they realised I was serious about being their representative.

The 7 September election saw the defeat of Mr Dick Adams, who had held the seat for 20 years since 1993. I formally recognise the contributions Dick Adams made on behalf of the people of Lyons during his time as the member for this large and diverse electorate.

Lyons is a conglomeration of small and very small communities in an electorate that encompasses almost 50 per cent of the island state. The electorate includes the communities of Exeter, Beaconsfield and Greens Beach north of Launceston along the West Tamar. It touches the north coast at Port Sorell and includes the highly productive red soil agricultural regions around Moriarty and Sassafras in the north west. West is the township of Sheffield, well known for not only the annual mural festival but also the stunning views of Mount Roland. Further west, via Wilmot, is the iconic Cradle Mountain. The Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair area was formally reserved in 1922 after considerable efforts over many years by residents Gustav and Kate Weindorfer. The reserve became a national park in 1971 and then became part of Tasmania's large World Heritage estate in 1982.

Further south, the township of New Norfolk in the Derwent Valley is a service town for the agricultural and remaining forestry activity in the surrounding area. New Norfolk has a deep soul, and many locals still have close and personal connections to the historically significant Willow Court, which was for many years Tasmania's institutional psychiatric asylum. The buildings, which pre-date Port Arthur, are some of the oldest in the nation. It is a national disgrace that such significant architectural and social history is being neglected.

Heading south-east, the electorate takes in Hobart's northern suburb of Bridgewater, the towns of Brighton and Campania in the southern Midlands, and Midway Point and Sorell east of Hobart. It is worth noting that a trip at midnight from Sorell to central Hobart takes 15 minutes, but heading into the city in the morning or returning home can take 90 minutes due to traffic congestion on the Pittwater causeway. You can well understand the frustration and concern of local residents. Poor access as a result of inadequate road infrastructure is limiting the ability for council to release more affordable land for residential development.

South of Sorell is the dramatically beautiful Tasman Peninsula, home of the iconic Port Arthur historic site. Along with Woolmers Estate in the northern Midlands, Port Arthur is a man-made World Heritage listed site in the electorate.

The peninsula town of Dunalley and surrounding communities were devastated in the January bushfires earlier this year. It was at this time and in adversity that the generosity of so many Tasmanians was once again evident for all to see. To the firefighters, police and other emergency volunteers: I am honoured to have this opportunity today to acknowledge the selfless acts of bravery and commitment shown at this time. I also thank the now Prime Minister for taking the time to visit the region so soon after the fires and listen to the local community. The discussions with local business operators and a subsequent announcement to support not only those physically impacted by natural disasters but also small businesses economically stressed as a result of such events were indeed welcomed.

There is so much on offer throughout the electorate of Lyons. Natural beauty abounds, with the fine east coast examples of Maria Island, the Freycinet Peninsula and the Bay of Fires. Tourism is a vital industry in this part of the electorate, but its seasonal nature presents
challenges for local communities to retain young people. Too many young people are leaving Tasmania.

The fishing, forestry and rural service town of St Helens is the largest community on the east coast, and I look forward to working with the local council to address air, sea and road access issues for this remote part of Tasmania during my time in this parliament.

Heading west over the Ben Lomond National Park and along the Fingal Valley, and we are back in the heart of the Tasmanian Midlands. The communities of Campbell Town, Ross and Oatlands have been supported in no small part by the wool industry for nearly 200 years. The Australian merino sheep flock can trace much of its heritage back to the Winton property, the No. 1 registered stud in Australia. Personally, it has been a real pleasure since returning to Tasmania in 1997 to have worked closely with many of the farming families in this part of the world over many years buying, selling and value-adding their amazing product.

The northern Midlands towns of Evandale, Perth and Longford are important service communities for the many and varied agricultural businesses in this productive part of Tasmania. Further north is the beautiful Meander valley with a proud history in forestry and agriculture supporting the communities of Westbury and Deloraine. The important Tasmanian alkaloids poppy-processing facility is located at Westbury. The electorate touches Launceston at Youngtown and Riverside before I arrive back where I started this tour, in the Tamar valley at Rosevears.

Tasmania is indeed diverse. The lakes of the central highlands provide the island state with abundant hydro-generated electricity and some of the world's best trout fishing. Thirteen per cent of Australia's rain falls on the one per cent of landmass that is our island state. In addition to hydropower generation, the highland lakes are also increasingly a source of secure irrigation water for agriculture. Delivering reliable water by underground pipes, with minimal pumping, generating energy along the journey, to the driest parts of the state is simply smart. It will transform the agricultural diversity and productive capacity of traditional grazing land. With bipartisan political support in this instance and significant private contributions, Tasmania has been quietly transforming one of the important economic drivers in the state, agriculture.

I stand in this place today because the people of regional Tasmania, in particular, wanted change. My new colleagues the amigos from Bass and Braddon join me in wanting never to take for granted the responsibility and trust placed in us. For the sake of posterity I want to reflect on why the seat of Lyons swung so heavily—by almost 14 per cent—at the election. The people of Lyons choose carefully; my election is only the third time since World War II that they have changed their federal representative. It is certainly not because the candidate twice preselected by the Liberal Party was an intellectual giant or an orator of compelling attraction—far from it in fact.

Tasmanians want to get back on the economic bus after too many years of being left waiting by a Labor Party that no longer stand for anything other than holding on to power, whatever the cost. Their partners, the Greens, are pulling the strings, hell bent on seeing Tasmania de-industrialised, further locked up in some misguided notion of utopia. In reality we are creating the potential for an inferno of colossal proportions. Lyons is the engine room of the greatest state in the greatest nation on earth. There are simply too many clever and innovative people that live in our amazing state to contemplate continuing on the current
course. We are truly the Eden of the lucky country, and we are all committed to restarting the engine in this amazing part of Australia.

Today I am offering what some might call insider trading but I am calling sound advice: get on board! Take another look at Tasmania as a place to invest, a place to live, a place to achieve, because we are on the cusp of something big. Where else in the world do you have abundant water, productive soils and a climate that allows the commercial production of such a variety of agricultural products, including dairy, cherries, apples, apricots, pears, vegetables, hops, nuts, wasabi, buckwheat, canola, lettuce, lamb, pork, beef, poultry, poppies and the best merino wool in the world?

The very best sparkling wines produced in Australia all source their grapes from regional Tasmania, and we are fast becoming the global benchmark for pinot noir. While everyone in this place has heard of Boags and Cascade, let me suggest it will not be too long before breweries such as Moo Brew, Two Metre Tall, Seven Sheds, Ironhouse and Van Dieman become just as familiar. Our clean water is also being used to produce whisky that is catching the eye of the Scots. Names such as Lark, Nant and Hellyer will be recognised globally in years to come.

Off the coast and in the clean water of the rivers and streams, aquaculture is starting to boom. The highest quality salmon and perhaps the world's very best ocean trout are reared in Lyons and grown out in my friend and colleague the member for Braddon's electorate, as he pointed out. We grow oysters, mussels and abalone in Lyons.

The announcement during the election of a $38 million commitment to upgrade the Hobart airport will put the 'international' back into its title. The $16 million worth of support for the Cadbury factory to start supplying a new chocolate product to be exported into China, with milk produced in Tasmania, will be a boost for both local manufacturing and tourism.

We have, in Australia, the very best managed wild fisheries in the world, and I pay tribute to the dedicated and committed scientists that research and help manage quotas in Australian waters. To see these talented men and women having to defend their lifetime’s work against attacks from sectional, so-called experts fuelled by an often ill-informed media was tragic, matched only by the way in which the former government dealt with our friends and neighbours in Indonesia in banning live cattle exports.

And forestry—oh yes, forestry. Guess what, Madam Speaker? We are really good at growing trees in Tasmania. There is not enough time allocated in this debate to fully address the subject. Suffice to say that, like all agricultural crops, it must be managed! Tasmanian Aborigines managed the land with fire. Yet, with Labor under a Green thumb, we are going down a path of putting more and more of Tasmania into reserves. True conservationists in Europe and North America are watching with amazement at what is going on in Tasmania.

In the past six months, we have added more forests to the World Heritage estate—apparently a ‘minor boundary adjustment’—but with no local consultation and against the advice of their own advisory bodies. These forests have been working forests for over 160 years, forests that have been harvested and regrown in some cases three times—not pristine wilderness as the Greens would have you believe. But, in the cruellest of twists, these forests are now considered suitable for locking up and the key being thrown away, never again to
generate wealth in the many small communities that were built around this renewable and respected resource.

Tasmanians are tired of being used as the environmental conscience for inner city Sydney and Melbourne Greens. For the benefit of my city based colleagues: Tasmania is blessed with a magnificent reserve system—something, as Australians, we should all be rightly proud of. In fact, nearly 50 per cent of Tasmania is in national park, World Heritage or formal reserves. We are doing our bit! I should know, as I have been a keen bushwalker all my life. My first introduction to the places that make my state so special was thanks to my father, David, and this interest continued through school. I still enjoy the annual trip to new places off the beaten track, with mates from school—good mates, who have been friends since school. Some of them are here today. Richard Gardner, Michael Hirst, Tim Gunn, Richard Gibson and I have stood on top of the Western Arthurs, Eldon Bluff, Mt Geryon, High Dome, Perrins Bluff and the much maligned and rarely climbed Mt Nereus. I am not a man of strong faith, but it is in these places that I feel I can better understand in a spiritual sense the joy of what it means to be human—but I digress. The point is that Tasmania has sold off or, more correctly, given away so much of the farm that we can no longer pay the bills. Enough, quite frankly, is enough.

About 30 per cent of Tasmanians depend on some form of government payment. It is right to support those least able to support themselves in a wealthy country like ours, but, with an ageing population, this is only going to increase. Another 45 per cent are employed directly by state or federal agencies or are in businesses entirely dependent on government contracts. With the retail and service sector accounting for another 15 per cent, less than 10 per cent of Tasmanians work in industries that make products or grow food or fibre to generate wealth. Government lives off taxes from what others earn, but too many Tasmanians have incomes and lifestyles that are decoupled from whether or not the Tasmanian economy is doing well or contracting. As things stand, we are unable to pay our way—and it simply must change. I intend to do my very best to help make this happen.

The opportunity for Tasmania and, no doubt, other regions dependent on agriculture is to retain a greater share of the value of their product locally. We have capacity in the innovative and productive human capital we always have had, as we have needed to be innovative on an island. We have the climate and water to grow far more agricultural produce than we can ever consume locally with such a small population. But, importantly, we are truly blessed with an energy resource that is renewable, is world class and can be grown and diversified.

Heavy industry such as Bell Bay Aluminium, Nyrstar and Norske Skog set up in Tasmania because we had, as was advertised in the 1930s, 'abundant and cheap electricity'. But it was mutually beneficial, because to invest in such a major hydroelectric generation scheme we needed a baseload user of power. These are really important industries to Tasmania in a diverse economy.

We should always be prepared to consider rationally any investment proposal, be it big or small. Tasmania cannot afford to keep saying no. The future for Tasmania lies with its innovative and resilient people. It is about diversifying and growing the economy, not transitioning, as our Premier and her Green cabinet ministers like to suggest. It is about growing the Tasmanian economy in the areas where we have natural competitive advantages. With abundant water, it is food and fibre production. It is energy from both our hydro
resource and bio-energy—the solid sunlight that is stored in the renewable and productive forests all around Tasmania. It means smarter investments in education. It means getting the settings right in a national curriculum, investing in teacher quality. It means more principal autonomy. And it means greater involvement from parents and community in our most important of institutions for our most important assets, our children. Finally, it is about using our smartest and brightest people at the University of Tasmania to build on the smarter investments in schools and to encourage more Tasmanians to consider taking a course at UTAS. Peer acknowledged UTAS is the best teaching university in Australia; it is also in the top nine research universities in the country. How many young Tasmanians know this, I wonder?

To do research requires fee-paying students from other countries. This is a good thing and is a boost to the local economy of $400 million annually. Offering the right courses and the right accommodation options is the key to attracting these students, which then allows more disadvantaged local students to have supported places.

UTAS offers a massive online open course—a MOOC—in dementia that has had 9,500 enrolments, with a 47 per cent completion rate of any such MOOC in the world. As a result, 370 students have then gone on to complete the online fee-paying Bachelor of Dementia Care course.

A personal challenge for me is the unacceptable prevalence of children being raised in families where, for two or more generations, no one has experienced or understood the importance of paid employment. Governments of all persuasions have failed these children for too long and we need to find a way to break this insidious cycle of dependency. In no way am I judging these people, least of all the children of these families. Rather, it is an indictment on all of us in this wealthy country that we allow this to continue.

Next year is the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta. For many, the words on this ancient document may seem strange in our modern world. This 'secular miracle'—as described so eloquently by Daniel Hannon, a conservative member of the European parliament—in essence describes the freedom of all people in our system of government under 'the law of the land', so that we as free men can be judged only by our peers, and that the people stand above the government.

As I mentioned to the students of the Mole Creek Primary School when they visited this place, Parliament House sits in the hill not on the hill. We are the servants of the people who put us here. Freedom, however, comes with responsibility. I welcome the commitment, given during the election campaign, to review the competition laws in Australia, particularly in respect of secondary boycott provisions and how they apply differently to ENGOs compared to unions and businesses under section 45 of the act.

Madam Speaker, I know I have had a lot to talk about—enough already, I hear them cry!—but, sincerely, there is a lot to talk about as the new government works to reset the course of our great nation, and this new member stands up for the aspirations of Tasmania. The people of Lyons have put their trust in me. I say thank you to the good people of this great electorate, that is in the greatest state of the best country on earth, for giving me a chance. It is a chance that I will grab with both hands. With all my ability, I will serve your best interests always.
I would not be here without support given to me from so many people throughout the past five years. At the risk of leaving people out, my sincere thanks go to: members of the Tasmanian division of the Liberal Party of Australia, our state director Sam McQuestin, state president Geoff Page and state parliamentary leader Will Hodgman. I thank you for your continued support.

To my campaign committees for both the 2010 and 2013 campaigns: Jane Wardlaw, Roslyn Burr, Richard Chugg, Guy Barnett, Sarah Courtney, David Houghton, Steve Henty and Denise Fletcher, I say thank you. I say thank you to my Tasmanian Senate colleagues: Eric Abetz, Stephen Parry, Richard Colbeck and David Bushby. They are all passionate Tasmanians.

To the now ministers and colleagues that made their way into the far-flung corners of Tasmania to support me in what must have seemed like a forlorn endeavour, I say thank you. In particular, I acknowledge Greg Hunt for his regular support and encouragement. To my staff—Denise, Sharna, Alison, Bonnie and Matt—thank you for what you have already done and for joining me on this journey.

I say thank you to my wife Amanda and my two fantastic boys David and John, who are here today. I love you all dearly. Amanda runs a small business. She employees four staff in a regional community. She is a wonderful mum. She is the glue that binds—the rock. She is the centre of our family. Many times I have endured the glances of disbelief when introducing my wife to strangers for the first time. I have endured the 'Gosh, he is punching above his weight,' or 'How on heaven's earth did he …?' You get the picture. I am indeed a very lucky man.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence and I support the motion before the House.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES
Membership

The SPEAKER (16:57): I have received a message from the Senate informing the House of the appointment of Senators to certain joint committees:

Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples—Senator Siewert.
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters—Senator Rhiannon.
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade—Senator Whish-Wilson.
Joint Standing Committee on Migration—Senator Hanson-Young.
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories—Senator Hanson-Young.
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights—Senator Wright.

BILLS
Higher Education Support Amendment (Savings and Other Measures) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (16:57): The bill before the House is in fact a second-rate deal for students. Labor will not support the coalition's cynical move to go ahead with the $2.3
billion in savings from higher education when they have abandoned the plan that they were designed specifically to fund. The original purpose of this funding was to contribute to the $11.5 billion in funding that would make a once-in-a-lifetime change to schools and students through the Better Schools Plan. It was a difficult decision but it was clearly in the context of the funding of the Better Schools package.

Indeed, I would refer the House to the official statement put out by the then Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research on 13 April 2013. The very first paragraph of the statement says:

Today the Government announced savings in the higher education portfolio that will contribute to the funding of school education reforms designed to ensure that all Australian school children get a flying start in life.

These are cuts that the coalition disparaged while in opposition but have embraced in government. Their hypocrisy on this is truly breathtaking. Indeed, in introducing this bill, the Minister for Education repeatedly stated it was a bad bill for universities. I can take members to the exact words of the minister’s speech. He said:

These are Labor's cuts. These cuts of April came on top of repeated attacks by Labor on support for universities, for students, and for research. These cuts show just how damaging to the university sector the previous government was. They show clearly that Labor is no friend to universities. They show that Labor is no friend of students or higher education.

On the basis of that, the minister then proposed to implement those very same cuts. He repeatedly said that they were bad for universities, and in the only explanation he provided for introducing the bill he blamed the previous, Labor government—indeed, he made the extraordinary claim that he had no choice but to introduce it. He is the minister, they are the government; this is their call and their bill, and these are their cuts.

The proposal that Labor put forward at the time was to put together a funding package for our Better Schools commitment. This was a six-year, $11.5 billion plan, and it was the result of the most comprehensive review of school education ever conducted. The Prime Minister at the time, previously the Minister for Education, had identified a serious issue in this nation—inequity in access to education. We had a long tale of disadvantage that we were not addressing in our school system and, as a result, we had Mr Gonski and his panel undertake extensive consultation and a review to produce the report that is now known as the Gonski proposal.

It was designed to see, for the first time, a student-centred model of funding, additional funding for students with additional needs—what we described as needs based funding—and better teacher training, a national curriculum, and individual school improvement plans in a locally led, national model. Perhaps most importantly, there was a guarantee that states would increase their funding for schools so that all schools would be better off. To me as a former teacher and to many of us in this place, it was a truly historic point, where we had moved beyond the old divides between systems and between students, and said that we wanted a system of funding that ensured that all our young people had access to high-quality education, regardless of their circumstances in life—where they lived, whether they were in a small country school, where they were born, whether their family was from a low SES background, whether they had a disadvantage, such as a disability or a particular learning difficulty. It did not matter what their circumstances were, we as a nation, federal and state governments
together, were committed to addressing that disadvantage by all putting additional funding into the system and implementing a range of reforms. That was the heart of the Gonski proposal.

The government, on the other hand, have been entirely cynical on this issue—entirely cynical. They have walked away from the Better Schools Plan and what they have actually done is gut it. Yesterday's political stunt changed nothing. Who would seriously trust this government to maintain and deliver any commitment they make on schools? The absolute debacle we have witnessed this week shows that, above all else, the Abbott government cannot be trusted on these matters. They cannot, they would not, guarantee that no school would be worse off. The Minister for Education has refused to repeat his pre-election pledge that no school would be worse off because of the changes. The minister and the Prime Minister spoke directly to schools and their families before the election. Their clear intention was to assure those families and those schools that nothing, not a single aspect, would be any different for their school if an Abbott government were elected. They had gone from saying that they did not support the Gonski proposal to saying that they were absolutely in lockstep with the then Labor government on the Gonski proposal. They did that with purpose and they did it with words such as 'unity ticket' which were designed to present a clear political message that we now know could not be trusted—and they still cannot be trusted. The Prime Minister tried to get around the issue with weasel words. He said:

As you would know the states in the end apply the model, but what the Commonwealth is doing means that no school, state or territory, can be worse off because of the Commonwealth's actions.

That was on 2 December 2013. However, Senator Abetz—helpfully, no doubt, to those opposite!—revealed the truth yesterday, the same day, in the Senate, when he said:

... you might actually find that some schools are worse off, courtesy of various state government decisions.

The Abbott government have no guarantee that the states will not continue to do as they have in the past and cut funding from schools. In fact, they are subsidising state budgets with this money that they are proposing, with no guarantee of benefits to students in return. Unlike under Labor's plan, the coalition's hasty, last-minute, rushed deal puts no obligations on the Queensland, Western Australian or Northern Territory governments to maintain, let alone increase, school funding.

The Abbott government has in fact rewarded the WA, Queensland and Northern Territory governments for not putting additional money into their schools. What's to say they won't just take the money and then cut funding to schools as they have done before? It is very clear that the reason that Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory governments did not sign up to Gonski originally was that they are planning more cuts to education in their own jurisdictions.

In July last year, the Queensland government cut $23 million from its education budget. Queensland's commission of audit or, more accurately, 'commission of cuts', proposed closing 55 schools. The Queensland education minister announced that six schools would close on 17 September 2013. In this year's budget, the Western Australia government cut 500 teaching jobs and capped teacher numbers for 2014 at present levels. They cut the student support program resource allocation, which tackles behavioural issues, and literacy and numeracy, by 30 per cent. Extra time allowances were cut. An additional levy on schools was introduced.
and a 1.5 per cent efficiency dividend was imposed. At the end of October, it was revealed that the Northern Territory government is cutting 71 jobs in schools. They have not committed to the six-year plan; they have adopted, and this government has signed off on, a no-strings-attached model. They talk about it as if it is some great benefit. In fact, it just provides no details as to where money would go.

It is important to acknowledge that, while we made a tough decision in government, along the lines of the efficiency cuts which are the subject of this bill, we did it in a context of utilising that money in order to fund a full reform of the school funding system. We also did it in the context of having significantly invested in the higher education system over the period we were in government.

We have a proven track record of growth in support for higher education. Labor increased spending on universities from just $8.1 billion in 2007 to $14 billion in 2013. We introduced the demand-driven system of higher education funding, getting rid of the archaic system—if you want to talk about the archaic centralised system of allocating places—that the coalition had had in place prior to us coming to government. I know that those opposite have reflected in question time their great abhorrence of central control of anything, but they were still centrally controlling what universities had to offer.

Ms Collins: That is right.

Mr Ian Macfarlane interjecting—

Ms BIRD: I am sure the minister at the table, the Minister for Industry, would absolutely be opposed to that sort of centralisation of decision making. So Labor removed those prohibitions on universities and put in place a demand-driven system. That actually means that a lot more students are attending university now—190,000 more than when we came to power.

It is also important to identify that Commonwealth funded places increased by 35 per cent under Labor. With this there was an increase in the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as the shadow minister indicated, attending universities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. When I was the Minister for Higher Education and Schools, one of my great joys was to go to many of our universities and meet first-in-family people who were attending university. These students were the first in their families to be able to do attend universities, and increasing numbers of them had an Indigenous background. So it was a really important task to undertake. Perhaps most importantly for the sector we introduced fair indexation for the first time, helping prevent university funding from falling behind year on year, as it had under the decade of coalition neglect of this matter. For students themselves, we made sure that support payments went to those who needed them most by improving access to student support. This meant that 220,000 young people received the maximum rate, a higher rate or a payment for the first time.

We introduced the relocation scholarship, a payment to remove financial barriers for low SES students who must relocate to study, particularly those from regional and remote areas and Indigenous students. And we introduced the student start-up scholarship, which helped students with up-front costs of studying such as textbooks and specialised equipment. We have a proud record in higher education.
If we compare this to the opposition, we see a fairly appalling record on higher education from those opposite. I remind the House that, when the coalition was elected to government in 1996, one of the very first things they did was to cut a massive five per cent from the higher education budget. That massive cut was also not announced before the election. There was no warning for universities; there was no warning for students. Student fees skyrocketed. Commonwealth supported places slumped and billions of dollars were stripped out of the system in the decade of neglect that followed. All of this took place, I would point out, while the now Prime Minister was a senior voice in the cabinet. Much of it was orchestrated under the stewardship of his deputy leader, Julie Bishop.

Let us not forget the $103 million those opposite plan to rip out of the Australian Research Council. And in the past week, while announcing his three different policies on school funding, the Minister for Education announced that he had found another $1.43 billion of cuts, with the Prime Minister confirming that this is over and above the savings that they identified before the election. There were $235 million on Tuesday and another $1.2 billion yesterday. Those opposite have form when it comes to massive cuts to higher education. They are at best indifferent to the knowledge economy, which Labor believes is vital to this country's future. Their neglect of the knowledge economy is again demonstrated by their failure to appoint a minister for science—

Mr Ian Macfarlane: That is simply not true.

Ms BIRD: And, again, by their cuts to jobs at CSIRO.

Mr Ian Macfarlane: CSIRO are very happy.

Ms BIRD: I hope the minister is going to protest against these cuts to CSIRO, as well. The Abbott government's cynical and desperate bid to proceed with these savings, despite opposing them just weeks earlier, will amount to $2.73 billion worth of cuts from education. The announcement of the additional savings the coalition is making shows beyond doubt that the policy intent of this bill has disappeared. They will not use the money to fund better schools; they will not use it to fund education. What will Tony Abbott do with these savings? Where is the money going? When in opposition, they cried foul of these measures and now they want to take the money from education altogether. Not only are they ripping off our school-aged children; now they are ripping off our university students. Labor is not going to support these cuts because this is a second-rate deal for students at all levels of the education system.

The purpose behind Labor's focus on education was to increase opportunities for all young people. This can be seen right through from our interventions in child care, aimed at making sure there were quality childcare services providing good educational experiences for our very youngest children, to our reforms in the schooling system. Our reforms under the Better Schools program were aimed at helping those who experience the most disadvantage and at ensuring that young people come out of our school system best positioned to take up the opportunities on offer—not only in our university sector but, more broadly, in our vocational education sector and in the world of work. That means giving them the 21st century skills they will need to succeed. That was the package we put together.

It is true that, in that context, we asked the university sector to make a contribution—to have a slower rate of increased investment than they had been expecting. But we did that
specifically because it was part of a broader education task—to produce an outcome for young people that made better opportunities available to them.

That is not what this bill does. This bill cynically attempts to pocket the money after the government has had so many positions on the Better Schools program that no-one would have any confidence at all that their last position, as announced yesterday, will even last until next week. Indeed, if it lasted until next week, it would be one of the longest lasting commitments they have made on Gonski.

There was some suggestion in question time today that there were more conversations to be had. Heaven knows what will come out of those! If you valued the investment in education that was originally proposed, you would not, after this absolutely shambolic process, have any confidence that the outcome of those conversations will be any better for schools, students and their parents. The number of positions the coalition have held since before the election, through the election and up until now has been extraordinary. Having recognised before the election that the community wanted to see the Gonski reforms put in place, the now government presented to the public that they were no different to Labor on these issues. They did so in order to quell a problem for them with the electorate during an election campaign period. Almost immediately after winning government, they completely walked away from that. They said: 'We are going to have a whole new review. We did not like Gonski at all.' It was a shambles, a terrible proposal, they told us. 'No government with any sense would support Gonski,' they said. They said they were going to get rid of it, only grudgingly giving one year of funding because there had to be some indication of the money schools were going to get next year. Otherwise, they said, the Gonski model was such an appalling proposal that they were going to have nothing to do with it.

Clearly the Minister for Education has no authority, because yesterday, despite how adamant he was about the Gonski proposal being unacceptable on educational grounds, a political solution was put in place to try and avoid some pain in this place over the next two weeks. It would not surprise anybody that, in that context, I am pretty cynical about how long even this half-baked agreement will last. Beyond that, the bill before the House now reflects an attack on the university sector—one that is not being pursued for the greater good of the education system. There is absolutely no way we will be supporting it.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (17:19): Make no mistake—the measures in the Higher Education Support Amendment (Savings and Other Measures) Bill 2013 are Labor's cuts, the culmination of a period of chaotic thought-bubble decision making and thoughtless chopping and changing. For the last five years, Labor has had the university sector on a rollercoaster ride, uncertain what would come next. This occurred in the context of Labor's complete mismanagement of the federal budget—their irresponsible spendathon, as the minister called it. This shambolic time came to a head in April this year when, on top of earlier cuts, Labor announced several measures to hit students and hit universities.

I note the press release by the shadow higher education minister issued earlier today. Surprise, surprise! Now cowering behind the safety of the opposition benches, Labor is performing a spectacular backflip and opposing their own measures. They are doing so even though the cuts to higher education were included in Labor's own Pre-election Fiscal Outlook just a few months ago.
The worst of Labor's cuts was their decision to put a cap on the tax deductibility of self-education expenses. It should have been obvious that this would adversely impact our ability to maintain the skills of front-line staff in areas such as health and education. Indeed, contrary to Labor's propaganda, the vast bulk of claims come from those earning less than $80,000 per annum. Thousands of nurses, teachers and doctors were affected—our front-line staff and those struggling to maintain and improve their skills. Although they deferred it for one year, Labor were not prepared to say they were wrong and abandon this policy. Heaven forbid—that could have actually enabled universities and students to plan for the future! Instead, Labor announced a review and allowed the uncertainty to continue, leaving the sector on tenterhooks and adding further to the fiscal mess they were leaving for the next government. Under a coalition government, with the reversal of this measure, we will restore the stability the higher education sector needs and create an environment that will enable universities and students to drive the research outcomes, innovation and productivity needed for Australia to enjoy a prosperous future.

However, the measures I am speaking about today are among the last of Labor's higher education cuts—the last remnants of those years of Labor's on again, off again funding chaos. Although it is not our preferred policy, given the fiscal disaster we have inherited from Labor, the coalition is unfortunately left with no choice but to proceed with the efficiency dividend. Many of my constituents are students at the University of Queensland and have expressed their apprehension about Labor's cuts and their refusal to provide certainty to Australian universities and their students. We want a strong, high-quality university sector that is sustainable into the long term, which is why we must fix the budget. Similarly, it is not our preference to proceed with Labor's changes to remove HECS-HELP upfront discounts and voluntary repayment bonuses. This will not affect funding for universities but it does remove the incentives for students to pay upfront or to repay their HECS-HELP debt early. Again, given the utter budget disaster the coalition has inherited, we have no option other than to implement Labor's cuts.

There was a much larger group of students who stood to benefit from continued access to tax deductions for self-education, which had been put in direct jeopardy by the Labor measure to cap these tax deductions at unrealistically low levels. The coalition government abolished the cap, along with a raft of other inefficient and productivity-reducing taxes, and this was great news both for workers wanting to upgrade their qualifications and for universities. The coalition is delivering more funding for schools after Labor cut $1.2 billion from schools funding.

When it comes to hypocrisy, we can rely on Labor to be a star performer. It is nothing less than blatant, shameful hypocrisy for Labor to now backflip on their own cuts to higher education. It is a despicable act to leave the nation's accounts in such chaos that there is no responsible option other than to implement such cuts, and yet Labor now in a cowardly manner turn their back when their mess needs to be cleaned up. This is nothing new from Labor—indeed it is what we have come to expect of them. Unfortunately we cannot afford to reverse all of these Labor cuts. The fiscal mess—the national credit card debt—that Labor left does not allow a responsible government to do that. The coalition has removed the worst measure—the cap on tax deductibility. The rest, unfortunately, must proceed to help fix the record budget deficit and rebuild a sustainable economy for a stable higher education sector.
The University of Queensland students with whom I have spoken, while concerned about Labor's changes, do understand the need to repair the nation's financial position—and they understand that it is necessary to improve the budget now in order to build a better future.

The measures in this bill do not in any way diminish the coalition's commitment to quality. That commitment is evident in steps the minister has already taken. The government is committed to doing all it can to ensure Australia's higher education system focuses more on quality and less on red tape, and is effective in providing the graduates and research outcomes needed to sustain our economy and culture. These measures are necessary to help us unshackle the chains of poor and reckless financial management inflicted on our nation's budget by an irresponsible Labor government and apply ourselves to the task of working with the higher education sector to develop, maintain, and improve quality and sustainable higher education for the decades to come.

The member for Cunningham and many members of the opposition enjoy making mendacious comments about the Queensland government and the Premier of Queensland, Campbell Newman. I assume they are just jealous of the success he has had in Queensland. I would like to correct the record. It was Labor state governments that closed 139 schools across Queensland. They closed, on average, seven schools each year for around 20 years. The LNP government in Queensland has not cut the education budget—it has increased it. It has spent more money on education. It is looking at closing only six schools, but it is looking at building another 28. So, once again, we have hypocrisy and false information from the other side of the chamber. It is the Liberal Party which has, since our foundation under Sir Robert Menzies, been committed to high-quality higher education and to creating opportunities for students, and we remain firmly committed to those goals today.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (17:27): My grandfather—my dad's dad—spent his life working in the post office, when he was not serving during the war. My grandmother—his wife—spent her life in unpaid labour, as many women of that generation did, keeping the family together. My dad—their son—then went on to do something quite unusual for the family. He went to university. He went to university in part because he was not serving during the war. My grandmother—his wife—spent her life in unpaid labour, as many women of that generation did, keeping the family together. My dad—their son—then went on to do something quite unusual for the family. He went to university. He went to university in part because he could, because it was affordable. He did not have to go into significant debt to do it, because universities at that time were funded well enough to take people like him and give him, and my mum who was there at the same time, scholarships. My mum was a teacher and she met my dad at uni. They understood, between them, the importance of a good education and they understood the importance of Australia being the kind of place where everyone, from whatever background they came from, could go to university and not be turned away at the door because of their income.

They were then able to send me off to university, and that meant that I could live quite a different life than my grandfather did. You would think, with that excellent pedigree and with a good head on your shoulders, that your parents had set you up to make good decisions but when I was at high school I made one that could have set me on a very different trajectory. In the folly of youth I made one of the silliest decisions of my life—I joined the Labor Party. I was less than half the age I am now, and people do silly things when they are young. It only took a couple of years for me to realise the error of my ways. I first started getting involved in politics when I was at university. It became apparent to me that the then federal Labor government was putting people in such debt, keeping the level of student income support so low and slowly winding back university funding so much that it was potentially going to
create a situation where people like my dad would never be able to go to university. So my first involvement in campaigns and in politics was in those campaigns to stop the ratcheting up of loans and debt on students, to argue for a living income for students—and, of course, we know that so many of our students at the moment do not have a living income, and I will talk a bit more about that in a moment—and to argue and campaign for better funding for universities.

During the 1990s we saw universities continuing to be run down despite growing enrolments. Then during the Howard years we saw a continuation of those attacks. We saw fees go up, we saw students go into more debt, and we saw universities even less supported. It was no surprise that, after the legacy of the previous Labor years and then, especially, the Howard years, when independent experts were brought in to review the university sector, they said it was a sector that was in trouble and it needed a boost to its base funding. So we had the Bradley review, for example, that said we needed an urgent 10 per cent increase in base funding just to enable universities to continue to do what they had been doing, let alone expand.

This all comes at a time and in a context where Australia has to decide what it wants to do as a society and an economy when the rest of the world tells us to stop digging. Because the thing about booms is that they bust, and the mining boom, at some point, will be no different. We have to make sure that we do not wake up in five or 10 years time to find that we are a hollowed out, uneducated quarry with nothing to sell to the rest of the world. The way that we are going to ensure that we are in a great position in the 21st century is through education, and especially through universities. That is why people right across the sector, whether you talk about students, whether you talk about the staff who work in universities or whether you talk about the people who run them, have been saying it is time for a funding boost.

It is eminently affordable, with the right priorities. At the moment, if anyone goes to a petrol station to fill up their car they will pay 38c a litre in excise on their petrol. If a wealthy miner or resource company in Western Australia or Queensland goes to put diesel into their trucks, they pay the tax and then they get 32c of it back in the form of a rebate. Every year between $1 billion and $2 billion is going out the door from taxpayers so that Gina Rinehart and the like can buy cheap petrol. Meanwhile our universities go underfunded. So it is a question of priorities. As people would have seen going into the last election, the Greens spelt out exactly how we could resource a caring society in this country and fund universities to give them that 10 per cent boost. We could get it done within four years and lift students in their income support. We could do all of that and still balance the budget. It is a question, ultimately, of priorities.

Knowing it is so eminently achievable made it all the worse when, earlier this year, Labor decided to cut $2.3 billion out of the sector and put students further into debt. At the time, Universities Australia said that these multibillion dollar university cuts were the biggest budget hit since the 1990s. That Labor this year was prepared to cut universities to a level that was the biggest hit they had seen since the mid-1990s is something that sent a shiver down the spine of many people in this country and made many people worry what kind of future we are setting ourselves up for. Who is going to be able to go to university in this country in the future? I have to say that this was in an environment where, as we were heading into an election year, university staff, students and the universities themselves actually hoped they
might have been able to campaign for an increase to university funding. They prepared a multimillion dollar advertising campaign to try to get Labor and the coalition to boost university funding. Instead, what we found was that the only unity ticket going into the last election, as far as higher education was concerned, was the decision to rip $2.3 billion out of the sector and put students further into debt.

The Greens stood firm at the time. We said we would oppose these cuts and we would oppose putting students further into debt. We were the only party in parliament to do that. The Greens worked with the academics and the general staff from the universities, with the students and with the universities themselves to say there is a better way of balancing the budget than attacking universities and students that are so desperately in need of greater support. There was leafleting, there were postcards, and there were rallies conducted right across the country. There was widespread support from people who had not got involved in anything political for a very long time saying, 'We want a strong and vibrant university sector in this country, and we want to make sure that everyone is able to get into a university, no matter how much they earn.' We campaigned—and we campaigned hard—because we knew that universities were hurting already and could not afford these so-called efficiency dividends, and we knew that students were in debt and that they were hurting.

When I was at university it cost me about half of my student income per week to rent one bedroom in a three-bedroom flat near to where we lived. I only had to work one shift a week in order to make ends meet, and I could devote the rest of my time to study. But students now are not in that situation. Students now are working 15, 20, 30 or 35 hours just to make ends meet. The cost of rent is skyrocketing, and they are going into debt. As Universities Australia have said, they have seen personal debt levels for students go up from $28,861 in 2006 to $37,217 in 2012. That is in addition to the debt that for many is the size of a small mortgage when they leave. So it is no wonder that students are being turned away and that Australian education is becoming more inequitable; it is no wonder that people took to the streets; and it is no wonder that we saw a very big community campaign during the course of this year.

Today I am absolutely thrilled—and I commend Labor for this—that Labor has listened to the community campaign and said that there are better places to find money than by putting students further into debt or by breaking the back of our universities. This shows that community campaigning, together with strong representatives in parliament who will not bend, can change the decisions of a government—including a government such as this one, which is intent on implementing a very brutal agenda for this country.

The National Tertiary Education Union, the National Union of Students and the universities should be incredibly proud of what they have managed to achieve by working together with their allies in parliament, because, provided that Labor's commitment extends not just to this bill but also to the start-up scholarships debt mechanism—which will come in, I understand, in other legislation—very soon students and universities across this country will be able breathe a huge sigh of relief. These unions, the universities and their parliamentary allies will then know that everything they did during the course of this year made a massive difference and that it changed the direction of higher education in this country.

Their achievement would give an enormous boost to everyone who watches what goes on in parliament and thinks there is nothing they can do which will make a difference—because they absolutely can make a difference. When you join with your fellow community members
and your representatives in parliament to campaign, you can absolutely stop a bad government from doing bad things. That is the message that we will continue to put out over the next three years, because this government will want to do a lot of bad things. Until now we, the Greens, have often been the only ones in parliament speaking up against such things. But we are learning that the position of other parties can be changed when the arguments are put in front of them and when the community campaign is strong enough. I am very pleased that, as we head towards Christmas, universities and students are going to be getting an unexpected Christmas present in the form of the knowledge that they will not be asked to bear the brunt of balancing the books in this country.

It might be time now for us to focus on where the money for education can come from and how we will resource a caring society. Rather than hitting universities, maybe the government should reconsider scrapping the mining tax and instead fix it. If we kept the mining tax and fixed it, we would not be in the position of debating education funding in the first place. We would be able to create the kind of higher education sector in this country that everyone could be proud of, and we could know that everyone sitting in this parliament had made sure that every future Australian citizen would—like my dad—be able to go to university no matter how much they earn.

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (17:41): Tertiary education matters. But I do not believe that it is clear to the current government that tertiary education matters. It matters for many reasons. It matters, perhaps first and foremost, because of the inherent value of education: the inherent value of learning about things and increasing our wisdom. Education makes for a better world, a better community and a better country. There is an inherent value in the pursuit of learning, and we should fund it properly. It matters also because it is crucial that we keep up with other countries in the world and in our region—in particular with our trading partners. If we want to compete in the current and future economy, we need to be smarter than our competitors. We need to do better research than our competitors. Such things will be the underpinning of a successful Australian economy in the global marketplace in the future.

Education will not just allow us to compete with other countries but also allow us to be an attractive destination for students from other countries. The fact is that education has already become a major industry in Australia. A great many students from other countries choose to come to Australia's very fine universities—including the very fine university, the University of Tasmania, in my own electorate—but, if we do not invest in our universities, we run the real risk of being left behind. In the global education marketplace, students from just about any country can choose to study in just about any country. So, although our universities have made a very fine start and are at the moment global leaders in supplying education to foreign, fee-paying students, we run the real risk of being left behind if we do not continue to fund our universities properly. We need not just to avoid cuts to investment in our universities but also to find the money to spend even more on our universities. As good as our universities are currently, they could be so much better—and they will have to be so much better if they are to be seen by foreign, fee-paying students as institutions of excellence to which they will choose to travel from their country to come and study at.

There is also the fact of the inherent value of education to students and what it brings to them. It is not just a case of learning new skills and becoming qualified to be a doctor, an architect, an engineer, a teacher, a nurse or anything else. Education also has a very important
social value. Education is the great leveller, particularly for people who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and who are looking to get a leg up to better themselves and get a decent job. Perhaps they will be the first person in their family for a generation or two to have a good job.

With education, with a job and with new skills comes a better standard of living and better health outcomes. That is something that we do not focus on enough—the importance of education in this country as a leveller—and something that particularly helps disadvantaged students get ahead and have a good future for themselves and their families. Tertiary education is also a very important economic driver. Locally, I think of my home state of Tasmania, where the University of Tasmania—a very fine university—is one of the biggest employers. It is also a barometer: when our university prospers, it seems that our economy does well, when our university is under pressure, our economy also seems not to do so well. The University of Tasmania right now faces the very real prospect of cutting something like 150 staff and that is a lot of people in a state of only 500,000 people.

There are many reasons that universities matter and reasons that we must not cut funding. Rather, we must find extra money to make sure they can be everything that they can be. We live in one of the richest, most clever, most fortunate country in the world. There is no reason we cannot have the very best universities in the world—not just now, but into the future. As the member for Melbourne quite rightly said, 'It is all about priorities'. Despite the fact that we have good universities with bright futures—everything else being equal—regrettably tertiary education is under very serious attack. In the last two years alone, over $4 billion has been cut from the tertiary sector in Australia—over four thousand million dollars. In other words—despite their importance, despite their promise, despite all the reasons we should invest in them—Australian universities are currently underfunded by some $1 billion a year. I make the point again that the knock-on effect at the local level in my home town of Hobart is that the University of Tasmania is looking to shed 150 jobs at a time when the economy is so soft and at a time when government should be investing in all the community's institutions, including universities. It would be not only a way of making richer and better communities, but also a way of employing people.

This bill is another attack on the tertiary sector. If it becomes law, this bill will result in a cut of more than $900 million from the tertiary sector over the next four years in the form of so-called efficiency dividends. What sort of political gobbledegook is an efficiency dividend? Why do not we call it for what it is? It is a cut to your budget—suck it up and live with it. Some of the few ways universities can save money include cutting courses, cutting staff or cutting facilities. They can also cut campuses, which is a real issue for some of the small satellite campuses, such as the Burnie and Launceston campuses of the University of Tasmania. So, let's cut all the political gobbledegook about efficiency dividends. If this bill becomes law, $900 million will be gutted from the Australian tertiary sector over the next four years. That will mean a cut of something like $30 million over the next four years from the University of Tasmania. That will hurt the university, and the university will have to consider cutting courses and cutting staff. It will hurt students because, ultimately, as the university has fewer resources there will be fewer resources for students. It will hurt the Tasmanian economy, and the unemployment rate at the moment in my state is way over eight
per cent—the highest of any state in the land. We cannot afford this sort of cut to federal investment, particularly when the economy is under so much pressure.

Crucially, the bill would also reduce the discount for the early payment of HECS and HELP, which will save the government something like $300 million over four years. Again, it is political gobbledygook to say that it will save the government $300 million. We should instead be saying that it is going to cost the tertiary sector $300 million over four years in one way or another. Any talk about savings measures for the government is merely a consequence. Sure, there are all sorts of people who can afford to pay their HECS or HELP debt off early. There are students from very advantaged backgrounds where perhaps mum and dad can afford to pay their HECS, but there are also many students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are busting their boilers after hours to scrape together the money to try and pay off their debt, just as there are some very disadvantaged families who are busting their boilers—mum and dad both working two jobs to pay off that debt so that their son or daughter does not carry that debt into their working life. Let's not kid ourselves: getting rid of the discount on the early payment of HECS or HELP will be of little consequence for some students and their families, but it will be a very big consequence for other students and to their families.

We should not look at this bill in isolation, because we have another bill coming down the driveway—the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. When we are discussing the bill before us today, we should also be cross-referencing it with that other bill, which we may be deciding this week in this place. The Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will impose another savage cut on the tertiary sector and, most worryingly, on those students who can least afford. That bill will abolish start-up scholarships and impose HECS or HELP-type fees or loans on students.

Let us put this into perspective. The only students who were getting those start-up scholarships were the most disadvantaged students in the land, the people who could barely afford to get to university, for many of whom the scholarship was the very difference between getting to uni or not. Yet this government sees fit to get rid of those scholarships. This government sees fit to slap onto some of the most disadvantaged students in Australia a debt that they will have to carry into their working life—a debt that, at the end of the day, could be some $10,000.

Can I come back to one of the first points I made about education as the great leveller. Education is what helps so many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to get ahead, to catch up, to get a decent job, to get a decent income, to buy a house, to bring up a family and to provide for their children the sorts of things that those children deserve. It is the great leveller. Yet, completely at odds with the idea of education being a great leveller, this government sees fit to get rid of those scholarships. This government sees fit to slap onto some of the most disadvantaged students in Australia a debt that they will have to carry into their working life—a debt that, at the end of the day, could be some $10,000.

Let me talk a bit more broadly for a moment. It is pretty tough out there. You cannot live on youth allowance. The average Australian university undergraduate works something like 20 hours a week. How on earth can you study and achieve to your very best when you are working half a job? You cannot. The student gets a less than perfect outcome, which means that our community gets a less than perfect outcome. Now we are going to axe the start-up
scholarships. And all of this in one of the richest, most clever and most fortunate countries in the world.

I again echo the member for Melbourne and the very good point he made. It is all about priorities. The income for the government this financial year is forecast to be about $380,000 million. Surely that is enough, with the right priorities, to have the world's best universities, the world's best resourced university teachers, the world's best resourced university researchers, and a fair deal, a fair go, for the students who attend those universities. While we are at it, surely $380,000 million a year is enough to have not only the best universities in the world but the best colleges in the world, the best high schools in the world, the best primary schools in the world and the best early childhood education centres in the world, including a fair wage for a fair day's work for the early childhood educators who populate those centres. It is all about priorities.

I do lament the fact that, when it comes to tertiary education, this government has its priorities all out of whack. The previous government did too, but I will acknowledge and applaud the Labor Party for deciding to oppose this bill. That is the right thing to do. I am pleased to stand next to—but not be part of—the Labor Party and the Greens in opposing this bill, just as I will also oppose the associated Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, if only because of the way it attacks our universities.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (17:55): I rise to speak on the Higher Education Support Amendment (Savings and Other Measures) Bill. Along with my Labor colleagues, I will be voting against this legislation. The coalition announced that it would introduce this legislation and it did so on 21 November this year. For the sake of the record, it forms part of a package with other legislation—the Social Services Amendment and Other Legislation Amendment Bill—which contains a proposal to convert student start-up scholarships to income contingent loans. Aspects of the current legislation before the chamber include a two per cent efficiency dividend on the higher education sector in 2014, a 1.25 per cent efficiency dividend on the sector in 2015 and a removal of the 10 per cent discount for paying university fees up-front, as well as a five per cent discount received for voluntary repayment of HELP debts.

Members opposite who went to university must have had a pretty sad experience when they were there. Every time they speak on this type of legislation they reveal their ideological bent. After the Howard coalition government came to power they set about attacking the university sector and gutting funding for it. When they had the opportunity to bring in Work Choices, they linked university funding to protocols in relation to the imposition of agreements—not collective agreements but individual contracts for university staff. There was the most pernicious and punishing impact on universities that we have ever seen in this country.

They came to power saying that they were on a unity ticket with us in relation to the Gonski reforms, with assistance given to people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, to schools with high rates of Indigenous students, to schools with students with disability, and to remote and regional schools. But within a short period of time they backflipped not only on primary and secondary education but also on tertiary education. Within a very short period of time, the Minister for Education, the member for Sturt, Christopher Pyne, was talking about quality and whether they would revert to a capped system rather than a demand driven one for
university placements. That was ostensibly on the back of the idea of the need for quality education.

To raise concern even further, they decided to announce a review of the current uncapped system of university places. Then they decided to get that great champion of the university sector, former Liberal education minister David Kemp, to be one of the reviewing officers. It is interesting that coalition governments like to do this. I am from the state of Queensland, where there is great opportunity for employment for former members of the coalition who served in the cabinet and the ministry, because those opposite keep recycling them into positions to examine reviews. Former Treasurer Peter Costello's commission of audit in Queensland resulted in tens of thousands of jobs being lost in my home state.

Here we have another recycled minister from the former coalition government being given the opportunity to look at the current uncapped system of university places which has seen such an increase in people from low-socioeconomic backgrounds at university. We put a massive amount of funding into this region, increasing our funding from about $8.1 billion to $14 billion over the cycle of our government. We saw a massive increase in the number of students attending university.

It is very important to note that Australian university graduates contribute $170 billion a year in wages to the economy. Graduates comprise about one-quarter of the population of Australia and generate about a third of the wages of Australia. So we are talking about a very important sector in the economy. Universities contribute about $22 billion to our GDP every year.

But those opposite think that the first thing you should do when you get to power, like the Howard coalition government did, is attack the university sector. So we saw them raise the idea that they might abolish the assistance we provided through student amenities charges. They raised that until the National Party put their hands up and said, 'We don't want to agree to that,' and then they dropped that like a suck of spuds. On this particular occasion we have a backflip from them in relation to other higher education assistance.

In relation to this particular savings measure, we said we would do this in the context of full implementation of the Better Schools plan—a six-year agreement with the states and territories, contributing about $9.4 billion to make a huge difference to the primary and secondary sector of education in this country, making sure that there is teacher training, and literacy and numeracy training for students, and effectively extending the national partnership type of assistance to schools, which I have seen make such a huge difference in my electorate. Those opposite have said, 'No, we don't support that,' having said they were a unity ticket.

I have to say that I debated not just the candidate who was running against me but another candidate during the last election. It seemed to me quite clear that there was a certain line that they were being fed—that is, that they were going to support Labor's Gonski plan. In the many debates I had with those candidates, whether it was at chambers of commerce or other types of venues, or on family radio in Brisbane the Sunday night before the election, the Liberal candidates said, 'We are going to support Labor's plan in full. There is no difference. You can vote for us; you'll get the same plan whether it is primary education, secondary education or even tertiary education.' But in a very short period of time we have seen changes initiated by those opposite.
We are not going to support this bill, because we want to make sure that we guarantee all students go to schools, universities and TAFEs, which are cathedrals of learning and research and development. Those institutions help contribute to our productivity, give good economic outcomes and give good opportunities for young people to achieve their potential. We are not going to adopt the coalition's policy.

In relation to these types of things, I have to say that the coalition really has baulked at doing the right thing. We have seen many positions from them on education. They have been flip-flopping. In fact, today in question time we saw a lack of commitment from those opposite to the Gonski plan. They are saying that they will only put in just over $2 billion. Then, when the shadow minister, Jenny Macklin, the member for Jagajaga, asked a question of the Prime Minister he said he would give loadings in relation to disability. When I asked him a question in relation to guaranteeing funding for every Indigenous student, he said he would do that. But we have heard the Minister for Education in this place saying that the states are sovereign governments—that is interesting because they were all colonies before Federation—and adult governments and so will make their own decisions. How can they guarantee funding for our high schools and primary schools if they put no conditions on it? This mob opposite remind me of someone who says, 'I want to buy a house and I'll give you some money. Here's the money. I won't sign the contract and I won't take the house, but I will give you the money.' It was a stupid thing for the minister to do. He should have followed through completely on Gonski, as he said he would do.

We made a massive difference to university education. I want to talk about my electorate. We made a massive difference there.

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

Mr NEUMANN: I will give an illustration for the member opposite me. Since 2007, an additional 364 people from Ipswich and Somerset in my electorate have been given the opportunity to pursue a university education—an increase of over 14 per cent. Between 2007 and 2011, we gave more than 300 students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds in my electorate the opportunity to get a university education—an increase of 15 per cent. That is what we did. This year we have over 1,280 students in my electorate receiving the youth allowance. There was a 73 per cent increase in university funding. What is the first piece of legislation in relation to university funding initiated by this government? They are talking about a $2.3 billion cut to the sector. That is their attitude in relation to the university sector.

I will give a further illustration so the member for Kooyong will know more. A great example is the University of Southern Queensland in Springfield in my electorate. Between 2007 and 2011 the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students grew by 29.1 per cent, with more than 173 Indigenous students commencing in 2011. We also invested $48.9 million into their Education Gateways Building, which supports:

… digitally connected learning environments, including simulated learning and laboratory spaces, enabling new offerings in Allied Health and Nursing, Engineering and Construction and Education.

In contrast, just like their colleagues and comrades in Queensland and Victoria, the government is gutting funding to the tertiary sector. We have seen it in Queensland and Victoria in relation to the TAFE sector. We have seen TAFE teachers lose their jobs, campuses closed and the future of local young people left in doubt. That will happen if this legislation passes.
The tertiary sector is a very important part of closing the gap for the Indigenous community. There is a growing Indigenous population in this country. Much of that population, according to the ANU's most recent demographic report, which was released in the last couple of weeks, lives around the capital cities and around regional towns and cities such as Ipswich, Logan, Rockhampton, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast in Queensland; up and down the Central Coast, around Newcastle and around the Illawarra in New South Wales; and in the southern part of Western Australia. It is a growing population. Indeed, in South-East Queensland the population of Indigenous people will double in the next 20 years, way more than the increase in the Northern Territory. Indigenous people are attending university in increasing numbers, but there are not enough. Only about one per cent of the university student population identify themselves as Indigenous, but about 3.5 per cent of our population is Indigenous. So we have a problem. We have to close the gap. Universities offer that opportunity. That opportunity is necessary because many Indigenous students are the first people in their family to go to university.

Earlier, I gave the example of the University of Southern Queensland. I have met the CEO of Springfield campus, Doug Fraser, many times. He has talked about what that university campus means. Under this legislation students in my electorate will suffer. We will see a reduction in the number of students of Indigenous background and from poorer areas—suburbs such as Leichhardt, One Mile, Redbank Plains, Riverview, Collingwood Park and, indeed, Springfield in my electorate—attending university. That is the tragedy and shame of those opposite. The first piece of legislation they have introduced is not a piece of legislation that will enhance university development opportunity but—like the legislation of the Howard coalition government—legislation that will implement cuts. Like their colleagues in Queensland, it is cuts, cuts and further cuts.

**Ms CHESTERS** (Bendigo) (18:10): I rise today to make a few points about how the bill before the House, the Higher Education Support Amendment (Savings and Other Measures) Bill 2013, will affect the people of my electorate of Bendigo. I remind the House that I was not a member in the last parliament, but I was a candidate for the 12 months before I was elected. Funding cuts were a hot issue in the electorate and there were several rallies and protests about funding cuts to the university sector. Being a good, diligent candidate, I made sure that I got out there to listen to the people in my electorate and find out what exactly their concerns were about funding.

At the rally I attended, there was a strong sense of confusion among students. Whilst everyone agreed that there should be funding for schools and they supported Gonski, there was some concern about the funding cuts to universities. As we know, the cost of education continues to increase, and students were concerned that if their university had less funding they would have to pay more. There were about 200 students at the rally I attended. Unlike my opponent from the Liberal Party and my opponent from the National Party I did front up and I talked genuinely to the students about their views on higher education. I was there to face the music before I had been elected. Apart from the fact that they were worried about class sizes—were there going to be larger classes—they were worried about the quality of their resources, and they were worried about whether they could continue to have tutorials. Being the good candidate and then representative that I am, I listened and took on board those comments, because delivering higher education to regional areas is a priority for Labor.
has a strong track record in delivering higher education in the regions and, in particular, to Bendigo, whereas those in the government have not.

It is no secret and it is no surprise that in Bendigo the TAFE has been gutted by the Liberal-National state government. We have seen the effects of these cuts just this week and last week, with 47 more redundancies being announced by the TAFE and key vocational trades courses being cut—including in the school of mines. There has been a school of mines on this site in Bendigo since mining started in Bendigo over 150 years ago. Losing the school of mines is a disaster not only for the students but for our region. Cabinetmaking also has been cut. In a growth area, where we continue to build houses, it is astounding that the TAFE has been forced to close down its cabinetmaking apprenticeship course and training. But that is what happens when the Liberals get into government—they cut funding from higher education—and that is what this bill we are debating seeks to do. The 47 redundancies that were announced in the last fortnight are on top of 100 redundancies that were announced last year. The pain for BRIT TAFE, the pain for higher education, will continue.

Mr Frydenberg: Mr Deputy Speaker, I have a question for the speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Craig Kelly): Will the member for Bendigo take a question?

Ms CHESTERS: No, I will not.

Mr Frydenberg: Why not?

Ms CHESTERS: I took one earlier. I will not take one today. Why do I raise the funding cuts to TAFE? Because it goes to the record of the Liberal-National Party when they get into government and make funding cuts, particularly in relation to regional areas. As I said, it is not just the jobs but also the courses that will be lost with these cuts. Courses and skills will be lost. What it will mean for these students is that they will have to travel long distances to get their vocational training. This is our concern about what will happen with the proposed funding cuts in this bill.

I go back to why Labor is opposing the bill before us. The proposed savings measures were to fund the Better Schools Plan. Whilst I have my own reservations about the plan—I was not in the House at the time the measures were introduced—it was a decision by the government of the day, which was that we needed to spread the education dollars across the sector. However, given that the coalition have walked away from the Better Schools Plan—they have walked away from funding schools to the level that Labor proposed—there is no need to proceed with these cuts. The government are planning to cut an extra $1.3 billion from education. This, again, just speaks to what they do when they get back into government. The coalition are making sure that, whilst they are cutting the funding to higher education, they are not putting it into the primary schools, the secondary schools or even the early years education.

Labor are committed to ensuring that Australians get the best education throughout all stages of our lives. Again, I remind the House that we still do not know where we are with the Early Years Quality Fund. Today, we have seen the flip-flop, back-flop, who-knows-what-to-call-it on Gonski funding. We do not know what the government's commitments are on learning. We do not know if the schools in Bendigo will get their extra funding when it comes to the regions. We do not know if they will get it in terms of a loading for disability. We do
not know if they will get it in terms of being low-socioeconomic schools. So there are cuts and cutbacks all over the education board. When we were in government, our position was quite clear: it was to spread the funding across the board, not to cut it from everywhere—which is exactly what we see this government trying to do today.

I also want to highlight what the former Labor government did in terms of university funding. Real funding to universities increased during the six years that Labor were in government. It increased for regional campuses by about 56 per cent, and for my own campus at Bendigo-La Trobe by 47 per cent. This meant that more students were studying at La Trobe University. This funding included the building of the Rural Health School. It included new accommodation spaces and also a number of other facilities which the campus was in desperate need of. I believe that the funding at this campus needs to continue.

We also saw the previous government's commitment to regions, with the number of university places increasing from roughly 62,000 in 2007 to 81,000 in 2013. That is a 30 per cent increase. That is what we experienced at the Bendigo campus, La Trobe University. I mentioned that the funding increased significantly when Labor were in government. We also saw an increase in the number of students in the regions who qualified for youth allowance. It may come as a surprise to some in this House that Bendigo, with its surrounding areas, is actually quite a poor electorate, with over 30 per cent of families on a household income of less than $600 a week. So the move to allow more students to get youth allowance was an important step. Again, it is recognition that Labor actually stood up for the regions and provided a good deal. So there has been an increase in the number students receiving youth allowance. There has been an increase in the number of students attending regional campuses, particularly at La Trobe University. There has been an increase in the number of students from low-socioeconomic areas going to university. And there has been an increase in funding facilities that these campuses need. Again, this speaks to Labor's record on higher education.

I am one of the youngest—but not the youngest—members of this House and in 1996, when the coalition came to government, I can remember being a young student almost ready to enrol at university and seeing the beginning of those first savage cuts to higher education. In 1996 I can remember what this meant: the tripling of HECS fees overnight. When I finally did go to university in 1999, in my first year at the University of Queensland, students and academics held rallies over the courses that were being cut. The last time the coalition took government, universities had to seek funding from major corporations to keep courses afloat. We have seen what happened to universities over the many years of the Howard government. Key faculties were lost, such as the history department at the University of Melbourne. Universities told departments that they had to turn a profit and break even. This is what happens when governments cut funding to higher education, as we saw under the coalition government when they were last in government from 1996 and beyond.

In the time that I have remaining today, I want to reiterate a couple of points that people raised in my electorate during the campaign. An issue that is very dear to a number of people in Bendigo is that they want Bendigo to be a university city. They seek to have a strong higher education sector, whether it be the university or the TAFE. Bendigo seeks to be an area that is able to service the region—so, it will attract students not just from Bendigo but from around the area. This would give people the opportunity to receive a quality education in their area and not have to go to Melbourne for one. But if the funding cuts continue, if the funding
envelope for the whole of education continues to be whittled away, then it will affect the universities, as we have highlighted today, and all students will suffer.

In conclusion, you cannot have it both ways. You cannot cut funding from universities and not put it into the schools; you cannot cut funding from the schools and not restore it to universities. There is funding that is required for education to ensure that every student receives a quality education. Labor, in government, ensured that that funding was spread across the board, but all we have seen since the election of the National-Liberal government is funding cuts across the board in every sector.

This is something that we need to take a stand against and say: 'You have to increase the funding. You have to restore the funding across the board, whether it be early childhood education; primary and second schools, through the Better Schools Plan; our TAFE sector or our university sector.' It is time we saw some real action from the government on higher education to ensure that everybody gets a decent opportunity.

Mr Frydenberg: Deputy Speaker, I seek to intervene. Is the member for Bendigo willing to take question about Labor's $2.8 billion of—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the member the Bendigo willing to give way?

Ms CHESTERS: No, I am not. I believe I have addressed that question already through my speech.

That was going to be my final word, but, given that I was interrupted, I will reiterate Labor's position on education. That position is, purely and simply, that we believe everybody—regardless of where they live, their income or their background—deserves a quality education from the earliest years in early childhood education through to their primary school and secondary school years, and into TAFE or university.

We need a well funded higher education sector, just as we need a well funded schools sector through the Gonski plan and a well funded early childhood education sector through the Early Years Quality Fund. On this side of the House, we will always stand up to make sure that more funding flows into schools, and not less.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (18:24): I thought a great hallmark of the Whitlam government—it was also a hallmark of the Gillard government—was the concept that education would provide a way forward for poor people. Once upon a time the poor were called 'working class people'. The working class in Queensland are not poor anymore; it is probably just the opposite. God bless the coalmining boom! There is this concept that if we get an education all will be well and it will be wonderful. Well, it might be for you individually, but in this place we have to look at the overall, bigger picture.

I stagger at the cost of government. When we left government in Queensland in 1990, our outlay was $8,000 million. It is quite unbelievable to me that when Anna Bligh's government in Queensland fell, they were spending $45,000 million. I suppose that it should not surprise me that the Liberals have only been there for 18 months and we are already up to $51,000 million.

I always like the Liberals claiming they are a small-spending government! You want to have a look at your record for the 12 years you were there; you doubled taxation and trebled the national debt. I hardly think that you people inspire us all. You ran an election campaign about the $315,000 million of debt that these useless people on the opposition benches had
rolled up. I could not agree with you more about that, but then you asked permission to run up another $150,000 million. And you have only been in government for eight weeks!

I had the responsibility, with Bill Gunn in Queensland, of running the government when Bjelke-Petersen was going to the federal parliament. We were spending $8,000 million. You could take a survey in Queensland and ask, 'Are your dental services, health services and roads better now than in the year 1990 when the government fell?' I think that you would find, almost universally, that the answer to those questions are: no, no and no. Yet the Liberal government in Queensland is spending $51,000 million a year.

**Mr Frydenberg:** We paid back the debt, Bob.

**Mr KATTER:** Never mind about paying back the debt. They are not running a surplus. Well, there is a surplus but you need a magnifying glass to see it! The government in Queensland can say to their constituency, 'We are wonderful people because we are running a surplus.'

I do not have the time to do the sort of research that I really love to do, but I would like to know where the massive increases have come in government. There are similar figures for the federal government: Keating was spending $92,000 million and Costello, when he went out, was spending $200,000 million. This mob, the ALP, have bumped that up, getting close to $400,000 million. But now the Liberal Party seems to be wanting to break their record of rolling up massive spending and massive debt.

Here is one of the questions we need to ask ourselves if everyone is getting an education. I will quote from a meeting of the Country Party—100 years ago, when I was in the Young Country Party! A bloke was saying, 'We need cheaper education and education support.' Someone said, 'Whilst everyone is getting this education, who the hell is growing the food?' I think that is basically what we are saying here: if everyone is getting an education, who the hell is growing the food? I am not going to say they will be in the motorcar industry, because our minister has already said that we are not going to have a motor vehicle industry in Australia. He should be called the minister for non-industry—shouldn't he?—not the Minister for Industry!

In my day, I had a choice. I do not say this with great pride, but I was president of my faculty, president of my college and president of the combined colleges council at the sandstone University of Queensland. I served on the students union for a number of years. I suppose I had a fairly prominent role in the university of those days. But I just thought, 'I don't want to be any of these things; what the hell am I doing here?' And I left. So what did young people do in those days? If you had ambition and you really wanted to do something, in those days you went into mining, and that is of course what I did. And this is very relevant to the education system. I was able to go home and take up 20 leases at $40 each. Within three months, I was mining one of those leases, the Flora Dora Mine. I was producing copper. So a kid who was just out of his teens could go out there and become a mining magnate overnight. That was the sort of world that we lived in.

I want to re-peg some of those leases now. I have found out that it takes you two years of exploration and then it takes you seven years to get a permit to mine. What took me three months to do—and to make a living out of producing copper—now takes seven years. And the cost of the environmental studies and the other reports that you have to put in on what you
are going to do and how you are going to mine is in the vicinity of $100,000. So it is not open to a young person anymore to go out and make his fortune in mining. That is only for big corporations.

I also went into cattle. There was a 50 per cent return on capital vested in cattle in those days. There is minus two per cent today, so I do not think it is a good idea to go into cattle! I went into selling. There were 16 of us who had AMP agencies in north-west Queensland; now there is one.

Every single opportunity that young people had then to get off their backsides and produce something for the people of Australia has been cut off to them. So they have to go to university. Who is picking up the bill? The taxpayers of Australia are picking up the bill, of course. And, quite frankly, I can say on behalf of the university students of my day that we had great fun. I really appreciate the taxpayers giving me all that money to go through university! In those days you had to have a Commonwealth scholarship. Not everybody could get into university; you had to have a certain pass level to get into university. It was possible to do it the hard way. In fact, although I said thank you to the taxpayers, I did not need the taxpayers because, every single vacation, I would work in the mining industry and make a heap of money which would carry me for the rest of the year. Now the opportunity to do that has been cut out. The Labor government brought in 125,000 section-457 workers. I would not want to be a young bloke trying to get a job in the mines today. And, to my horror, the Liberal Party attacked Labor because they were not bringing in enough! But there are only an extra 180,000 jobs created each year in Australia. When 125,000 workers come in in one year, I do not think it leaves many jobs for the Australians, and that is before you get to the 100,000 illegals—mostly university visa people—and the 200,000 migrants. So don't go looking for a job in mining if you are a young person.

If you cannot get a job in mining and we are giving that money to people who are taking it back overseas—section 457 workers—then who has to pick up the bill for these young people who cannot get a job? We do. It is not the dole bill we are picking up; they are going to university. As far as I am concerned, I had a great time at university but I do not think what I learnt was of any great assistance to society. In fact, I would say what I learnt at university was definitely of no assistance to society; I think a lot of it was counterproductive to the interests of society. I did economics and I did law, neither of which I completed.

There is a lady called Doreen Mortimer. She is a very hard working lady, she does not have a lot of wealth and she is very active in our little political party. Doreen has very passionate feelings about HECS, and when someone feels very, very strongly about something you know there is a serious problem with it. I see, lurking in a lot of young people, stress. Every night I see that ad—and God bless the government responsible—for a debt helpline, 'If you're in debt and you're struggling, please ring this number,' whatever it is called. But there are young people struggling everywhere with the issue of debt, and one of the great burdens on their back, particularly in their head, is their HECS debt. Our young people are setting out on their pathways to life carrying a handicap of $50,000 in debt, not including their credit card debt, which on average rolls up another $10,000 in the first year, which should not be permitted either.

Let us look at when the world was good. When the world was good, you had to study to reach a certain level to get admitted to university, which cut out a hell of a lot of people from
going to university. You could do it the hard way—go out and work for two years and save up money, or work during the holidays to take you through university for the rest of the year. But those options have been cut off. And the cost now is crippling. The cost of tertiary education is absolutely crippling the nation. The cost is bringing us all down. And there is the cost of losing all of those bright and brilliant young people who could produce so much for their country. They could be out there doing those things, but they are locked up, pretty uselessly, learning stuff that will be a very limited asset to them for the rest of their days.

When I went home and I was in mining up to my eyeballs, I took all the university books on geology home with me, and everyone assumed that I had done geology—an assumption I was not going to disabuse them of, because there is a lot of bluff in the mining game. I let everybody think that I was a great expert in geology and mining, engineering and all those sorts of fields. But in fact you could very rapidly get the information you needed to be an expert in those fields.

Very proudly today, Fortescue is led by Neville Power from my home town of Cloncurry. He is a fitter who did his trade in Mount Isa. Is he a competent mining engineer? Yes. Is he a competent geologist? Yes. He learnt those things in the university of hard knocks, in the school of reality. I think one of the best mining men in this country was Nathan Tinkler. He came unstuck, there is no doubt about that, but Nathan is as good as anyone I have run into in the mining industry. He has an immense knowledge and capacity to understand ore bodies, how they formed and where the coal reserves should be.

These men show young people that they can be unleashed from what I see are the shackles of university and the idea that you have to have a university degree to be important or to advance in life and to climb the ladder of success. We should return those abilities to the ordinary people and take away the restrictions. When you take up a mining lease now, you have to find $100,000 and kiss goodbye to seven years of your life. Let us go back to a period where within three months you could do that.

Talking about the environment, I live in a town where a quarter of the entire surface area of the City of Charters Towers was cyanide heaps, the most deadly of poisons. That dreadful human demon Adolph Hitler used cyanide to kill many people in Europe. So do not talk to me about environment. I had two mining holes in my backyard. They were good—they were a tourist attraction. There were a lot of interesting things about them. I am saying to you that society has overprotected itself.

I conclude on this note. Malcolm Muggeridge was a great commentator who said that the modern education system is like the giant armadillo: with every successive wave of evolution it clothed itself in more and more armour plate until it was impervious to attack from any other animal on earth. He said that it then could not forage for food and rapidly became extinct. God bless Doreen Mortimer for bringing this problem to the people of Australia. (Time expired)

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (18:39): I appreciate the opportunity to thank members who spoke on the Higher Education Support Amendment (Savings and Other Measures) Bill 2013. I was particularly pleased to be in the chamber when the member for Kennedy was speaking. While he ranged widely from the subject, his speech was elucidating for all of us in the House and will read well in the Hansard.
The bill before the House amends the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to implement savings measures announced by the previous government on 13 April and confirmed in the 2013-14 budget. The bill abolishes the 10 per cent HECS-HELP up-front discount and the five per cent HELP voluntary repayment bonus. Currently students receive a discount of 10 per cent on their student contribution by paying the amount up front. Students also currently receive a bonus of five per cent when they make a voluntary repayment of $500 or more towards their HELP debt.

The bill applies an efficiency dividend of two per cent in 2014 and 1.25 per cent in 2015 to Commonwealth contribution amounts under the Commonwealth Grant Scheme. The efficiency dividend will not affect student contribution amounts, but it will have an effect on university revenue in 2014-15 and in the years following. These changes and their impact on universities and students are Labor's legacy; they are Labor's cuts. They would be unnecessary but for Labor's rampant financial mismanagement and wastefulness throughout their years in office. This mismanagement has severely damaged the health of our economy.

The government has been left to deal with a budget in a state of massive deficit, which means that the government has no responsible choice but to proceed with these cuts, which are Labor's legacy. The measures in the bill do not diminish our commitment to a strong, high-quality university sector. We are committed to doing a better job of developing Australia's higher education than the now opposition did during their six years of government. We looked at what we could do. We have, fortunately, been able to reverse the annual cap of $2,000 on tax deductibility for self-education expenses. This will be of great assistance to universities and to the thousands of people who are considering upgrading their skills and qualifications. It was bad policy developed by the previous government; it was ill thought through. I believe it was offered up to treasurers for many years and, finally, the former Treasurer accepted it. I am happy to say, having led a campaign to scrap the cap, that the Treasurer and the Prime Minister agreed and we have been able to do that in this new government.

This is one of the many measures the government have already taken to assist our universities and our other higher education providers since we took office. We are promoting international education, reducing regulation, funding research, recognising teacher excellence and commissioning a sensible stocktake of the demand-driven system by Andrew Norton and David Kemp—with whom you would be well familiar, Mr Deputy Speaker Broadbent, as they are Victorians—and we have done more than that as well. We are working to fix the budget for the long term, to ensure that Australia's higher education system focuses more on quality and less on red tape and to properly resource universities so that they can provide quality outcomes in the future. This government will make sure that we have fiscal stability so that we can continue to properly resource high-quality teaching and learning, can produce world-class research and can be a leader in international education.

We are in the remarkable position tonight where Labor have announced today that they are going to vote against this bill in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. So not content with opposing the new government's program—whether it is the carbon tax, the minerals resource rent tax or the debt ceiling limit bill—not content with opposing policies this government took to the election and on which we were elected, the opposition are now in the ludicrous position of opposing their own government's policies from when they were in
power. They announced these cuts and now in opposition they are opposing them. It is rank hypocrisy. It does not surprise me because the opposition is rudderless and leaderless, unfortunately for the parliament.

Mr Frydenberg: They are short on courage.

Mr PYNE: They are very short on courage and they will vote against this bill. In so doing, they will send a message to the Australian public that not only are they trying to oppose the government's measures but also they are the government change deniers of the parliament. They have now put themselves in the position where they are opposing their own program from when they were in government.

I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): The question is that the bill be now read a second time. There being more than one voice calling for a division, in accordance with standing order 133(b) the division is deferred until after 8 pm.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent) (18:45): The Speaker has received a message from the Senate acquainting the House of the appointment of Senator Siewert to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

BILLS

Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (18:46): Several members on this side of the House are particularly keen to contribute to the debate on the Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill 2013, so I will make only a few brief comments. The bill arose out of an announcement in September this year that the government would recommend to the Governor-General that the Australian Agency for International Development, AusAID, be integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This is a matter of some significance to those of us on this side of the House. I will leave my remarks there and allow my colleagues to put our views.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (18:47): The opposition will not be opposing the Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill 2013, but I do want to use the opportunity afforded by this second reading debate to make a few points. The government's abolition of AusAID means that certain pieces of legislation need to be updated to substitute references to DFAT for references to AusAID. This legislation is simply an effort to ensure that employees of the Australian Civilian Corps remain properly employed. This bill transfers their Commonwealth engagement from the abolished AusAID to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
The Australian Civilian Corps was a Labor initiative of the last parliament. We want to ensure that the Australian Civilian Corps operates under the certainty it needs, so we will not oppose this legislation. The ACC is a group of experienced civilian specialists who provide stabilisation and recovery assistance to fragile states and countries experiencing, or emerging from, conflict or natural disaster. The ACC was formed in 2011 and is designed to provide a flexible and timely Australian response that bridges the gap between humanitarian and emergency relief and long-term development programs. The ACC is well established, with more than 489 registered specialists as at October 2013 with extensive field experience and deep subject matter expertise across 14 specialty areas, such as electoral assistance, health, financial management, engineering and the law. Recently ACC specialists assisted with the 2013 PNG elections and with recovery efforts in Samoa following Cyclone Evan.

The ACC is a worthy and successful Labor initiative. While the opposition opposes the government's $4½ billion of cuts to Australia's foreign aid budget and has deep concerns about what this will mean for the loss of specialist experience in the delivery of foreign aid, these amendments are merely seeking to ensure the ACC is now operating under the direction of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. So, as I said, we will not be opposing the legislation.

But I do want to say a few words about why this legislation is necessary. The legislation would not have been necessary had the government not abolished AusAID. The integration of AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was executed suddenly and very poorly. Staff are going into this Christmas period with no certainty about their future and we do not know just how much expertise in international development policy is going to be lost as a result of AusAID's abolition.

We have seen the reports about how next year's graduate program has been scrapped—after two or three dozen new graduates had been given employment offers. We heard in Senate estimates a fortnight ago that this could leave the government open to legal action. It also means that we lose a generation of the best and brightest—idealist young women and men who had performed outstandingly academically and who had chosen a career in overseas development as a way of representing their country and contributing to the world. The way the merger has been carried out, coupled with the huge $4½ billion cuts to the aid program, raises serious questions about how Australia's international development program will continue to be delivered.

What will be the impact on the delivery of foreign aid when a specialist international development agency is subsumed into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade? The government have been saying that the abolition of AusAID is because they want to see a better alignment between our aid programs and our trade programs and our diplomatic programs. I would be delighted if anyone could point to one example of where our aid programs and diplomatic programs and trade programs were in conflict. This is an absolutely spurious argument for the abolition of AusAID.

Mr Frydenberg: Just throwing money around to secure that Security Council seat.

Ms PLIBERSEK: I hear the member for Kooyong talking about the Security Council bid, which of course the current government initially opposed but is now happy to be part of. The Prime Minister has said that he does not want 'our diplomacy going in one direction and our aid program going in another direction'. Again I would say to the government that if they
could point to a single instance where aid and diplomacy have been in conflict I would like to see it.

Mr Frydenberg: What about that statue at the UN in New York—$150,000?

Ms PLIBERSEK: I acknowledge the interjection so that it is on the record. I think the criticism is about establishing new missions in Africa, is that correct?

Mr Frydenberg: Payment for the statue—over $150,000, in New York.

Ms PLIBERSEK: No, the member opposite spoke about Africa.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): Order! Do you accept an intervention?

Ms PLIBERSEK: I do. I would like to hear what he has to say about Africa.

Mr Frydenberg: Can you please explain Australia's interest in paying $150,000 for a statue at the UN.

Mr Feeney: Concerning the end of slavery.

Mr Frydenberg: Concerning the end of slavery.

Ms PLIBERSEK: The member opposite is critical of our relationship with Africa now.

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! You have had your intervention.

Ms PLIBERSEK: As I said in October, our responsibility to our near neighbours is more acute and demanding than our responsibility to more distant friends, but our aid policy already reflected that. The aid versus diplomacy argument is a false dichotomy. Aid versus trade is an equally false dichotomy. Helping our neighbours develop strong economies means better markets for goods. Helping our neighbours improve their health systems means fewer health threats, like the development we have seen on our doorstep of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis and indeed malaria. Increasing the number of children in our region going to school reduces the opportunity for indoctrination in place of education. The success of our neighbours is good for us. The danger of losing AusAID is of course the danger of losing dedicated staff with specialist expertise and contacts in developing countries.

Mr Frydenberg: You've bloated the aid budget.

Ms PLIBERSEK: You have cut the aid budget by $4½ billion, which will hurt the most vulnerable members in communities around our region and around the world. Today I want to reiterate the opposition's commitment to international development. As I said, this legislation is necessary only because the government has abolished AusAID, so it is important to reiterate our aims for international development. We have two goals for the quantum of our international development effort. The first is to increase our overseas development assistance to 0.5 per cent of GNI, and beyond that we believe in working towards a target of 0.7 per cent of GNI. Under the previous Labor government, Australia's contribution to overseas development assistance grew with every budget.

Mr Frydenberg: Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek to intervene.

Ms PLIBERSEK: No, sit down.

Mr Frydenberg: I am not asking you, I am asking the Deputy Speaker whether I am entitled to intervene.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You can ask whether the shadow minister will accept the intervention.

Mr Frydenberg: Would she answer a question about the aid budget?

Ms PLIBERSEK: No. Sit down.

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is enough. The member for Kooyong is not assisting the debate.

Ms PLIBERSEK: A $4½ billion cut and he wants to justify it in this place! What nonsense. Under the previous Labor government, our contribution to overseas development assistance grew with every budget. In 2006-07 we gave $2.9 billion through AusAID, and by 2013-14 that had grown to $5.66 billion. During our time in government we almost doubled overseas development assistance, and now we find that our proportion of aid to GNI is back to 2000-01 levels under this government. As I said at the end of October in a speech to the Australian Council for International Development, the government's decision to slash $4½ billion from Australia's aid budget, announced at a minute to midnight in the dying days of the election campaign, is a severe disappointment to millions of Australians who agree that we have an ethical responsibility to help. It is a betrayal of the poorest of the poor in our region and around the globe and we are committed to holding this government to account.

In Washington DC right now governments from around the world will be asked to make commitments to replenish the Global Fund, which fights HIV, tuberculosis and malaria in the developing world. Australia is already strongly engaged in the Global Fund. I met with Global Fund director Mark Dybul recently to hear of their work, and he expressed his gratitude for Australia's past efforts and the Global Fund's desire for an ongoing commitment from Australia. Since 2002 the fund has approved programs worth more than US$22.4 billion in 150 countries, has saved an estimated 8.7 million lives by providing antiretroviral treatment for people living with HIV and provided tuberculosis treatment for 9.7 million people. The fund supports the strengthening of health systems, invests in training and aims to improve service delivery in hard to reach places and at-risk populations.

With Australia's help, the Global Fund has done some amazing work in the Asia Pacific region. Around 21 per cent of the Global Fund's grants are directed to Asia and the Pacific. These grants have resulted in more than 500,000 people being on life-saving HIV treatment, 46 million insecticide treated bed nets being distributed and the treatment of 6.6 million cases of tuberculosis. There have been other results in Asia and the Pacific. Over the past ten years, Cambodia has documented important declines in TB prevalence, incidence and mortality. Preliminary surveys found a 43 per cent decline in the prevalence of TB cases between 2002 and 2011. This represents an average decline of 4.7 per cent per year. In Papua New Guinea, malaria prevention has also been strong, with 3.6 million insecticide treated nets distributed. In Timor Leste, over 3,500 people received HIV testing and counselling in 2011, and over 450,000 condoms were distributed to prevent the spread of HIV. In Indonesia, 23,000 people are currently receiving HIV treatment, and the Global Fund finances 50 per cent of the national HIV program.

Labor's last budget confirmed Australia's payment of $100 million this year. This is the largest single-year contribution ever made by Australia. Over the last term of the
government, Labor contributed over $200 million. Over the four years from 2013 to 2016, the Global Fund aims to save a further ten million lives and prevent up to 180 million new infections from the three diseases. This is work that Australia must make a contribution to. Australia has been called on to contribute $375 million to the Global Fund for the years 2014 to 2016. Remembering that in our last year of funding Australia contributed a historic high of $100 million, what has the government announced today? They have announced a cut to our funding for the Global Fund to around $67 million for the next year, and the year after that, and the year after that. From $100 million this year to $200 million over the next three years. This is well short of the $375 million expected by the Global Fund and by the international community, by non-government organisations in Australia and, most importantly, by citizens around our region who are relying on Australia's contribution to the Global Fund.

The opposition will not oppose this legislation. But we bear in mind why this legislation is necessary. The government has abolished AusAID. They have made significant cuts to our aid program, and they are in the process of making significant changes to how our international development policy is delivered. Serious questions are raised, and we are yet to see adequate explanations from the government. Remember that the Global Fund has been successful in our region. It has been successful internationally. Yet we see the $375 million expected of Australia become instead $200 million, just over half of what was expected. We see the $100 million that we have contributed this year become a paltry $67 million next year. This is at a time when need around the world is as great as it has ever been. It is at a time when the Global Fund says that if we do not invest now we will pay forever because if we see backsliding now, if we see a reduction in effort today, on tuberculosis or malaria or HIV we will never catch up again. When it comes to the development of multidrug-resistant strains of tuberculosis, the threat is on our doorstep right now, and this cheapjack, cut-price effort with the Global Fund is something that we will pay for—and our neighbours will pay for—for generations to come.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (19:04): On 18 September 2013, the Prime Minister announced that he would recommend to the Governor-General that the Australian Agency for International Development—AusAID—be integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade—DFAT. The abolition of AusAID as an executive agency on 1 November 2013 marked a very significant milestone for Australia's international engagement and a new era in diplomacy. DFAT is now responsible for development policy and the delivery of Australia's aid program. This major change will see the alignment of Australia's foreign, trade and development policies and programs. The integration of AusAID with DFAT will promote Australia's national interests by contributing to international economic growth and poverty reduction, and it will support Australia's foreign and trade policy.

The bill addresses the resultant machinery of government changes required to update certain legislation by substituting references to AusAID and specific positions in AusAID with references to DFAT and positions in DFAT. The Australian Civilian Corps Act 2011, and the regulations and legislative instruments made pursuant to that act, are examples of such legislation. The Australian Civilian Corps Act 2011 established the Australian Civilian Corps and set out the legal framework for the employment and management of Australian Civilian Corps employees. The Director-General of AusAID was responsible for the management of the Australian Civilian Corps and the Director-General of AusAID had a
specific range of functions and powers under the act including, on behalf of the Commonwealth, all the rights, duties and powers in respect of the Australian Civilian Corps employees.

The bill amends the act in two main ways. First, it transfers the powers and functions of the Director-General of AusAID under the act to the Secretary of DFAT. Second, it substitutes other references to AusAID and the Director-General of AusAID with DFAT and the Secretary of DFAT, respectively. The bill also makes consequential amendments to the Australian Civilian Corps Regulations 2011, the Prime Minister’s Australian Civilian Corps Directions 2012 and the Director-General’s Australian Civilian Corps Directions 2011.

As I stated at the outset, the bill is a significant milestone in Australia’s international engagement and marks a new era in diplomacy. DFAT is now responsible for development policy and the delivery of Australia’s aid program. This major change will see the alignment of Australia’s foreign trade and development policies and program. It is also necessary step in getting Australia’s foreign aid program back on track after six years of Labor’s waste and mismanagement. On 12 May 2011, the Daily Telegraph reported the leaked concerns of a Labor insider that Australian taxpayers would be footing an extra $2 billion in foreign aid bills because Labor was fearful of upsetting the then Foreign Minister, Kevin Rudd. It was also reported at the time that the ballooning aid spending in various regions, including Africa and the Caribbean—where Mr Rudd was chasing votes for a seat on the 15-member UN Security Council—was causing alarm within the government. There were significant concerns that the government was signing tax treaties with small islands in the Caribbean, again in its chase for a coveted UN position. But it is absolutely typical of the chaos and the dysfunction of this last six years of the Labor government that Labor MPs so feared that asking Mr Rudd to trim his expanding budget would cause an internal fight that they had to go and find savings which hurt families.

At the time I raised concerns that the Labor government, under the ever-egotistical guidance of the former member for Griffith, was chasing votes in Africa at the expense of sending more aid dollars to places in our region such as Papua New Guinea. We have seen in recent years outbreaks of extreme-resistance TB—and even, in this day and age, cholera outbreaks—in our nearest neighbour. I specifically stated that the coalition was really concerned about the large amount of funding going to the Middle East and Africa and any resultant waste in supporting votes for the UN Security Council at the expense of supporting priority foreign aid needs in our region—the Pacific—whose countries have some of the highest HIV-AIDS rates in the world and the highest rates of infant mortality. Sure enough my own fears and the coalition’s concerns were borne out months later, when it was revealed that the Labor Party’s complicity in allowing one man to pursue his own legacy skewed the foreign aid budget to the tune of about $3 billion.

On 19 October 2012 Australia secured what has been rightly described as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fill a temporary seat on the United Nations Security Council. The coalition welcomed this outcome, and we paid tribute particularly to the very hard work of all the diplomatic officials and staff in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for making the opportunity a reality. The coalition also paid proper respect to and acknowledged the efforts of the former member for Griffith for setting such an aspirational goal. You would think that the uniqueness of the opportunity would have meant that the former Labor
government had a well-developed plan and a well-developed strategy. But, regrettably, the briefing notes obtained under the Freedom of Information Act and prepared by DFAT for the incoming Foreign Minister, Bob Carr, revealed that this was not the case.

Minister Carr became Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade on 13 March 2012. The briefing notes for Minister Carr as the incoming Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade do include a specific reference to the UN Security Council campaign. In particular I note that, on page 18 of one of those briefing notes, DFAT referred to the commencement of the development of a strategy including objectives, priorities and resourcing. That is right—the commencement of the development of a strategy. You could be forgiven for wondering why there was not a strategy in place already when Minister Carr came in. Page 19 of the same briefing note makes reference to commencing development of a strategy for how Australia would use its membership and how we would resource our membership.

These statements support the view that the whole UN Security Council campaign was not well planned, not strategic in its development and very much done at the very last minute. This may well have been due to the fact that it was predicated on buying votes, as was demonstrated by the skewing of the foreign aid budget, which I and others highlighted to this House on many occasions. It is concerning from the information revealed in the briefing notes that even at a late stage—that is, at the time of the briefing which Minister Carr as the incoming Foreign Minister received in March last year—DFAT still did not know what the government's strategy was and how it would use its membership. This is not such a great example of how Australia could use its once-in-a-generation opportunity.

Mr Husic: At some point just get to the legislation—feel free.

Ms GAMBARO: I see that the member interjects—and he should interject. This kind of poorly-thought-out policy chaos characterised the six years that the former Labor government—

Mr Husic interjecting—

Ms GAMBARO: I note that the member interjects. This is about integrating AusAID into DFAT, and I am just going through the AusAID history here. The Labor government were in power, and they do not like these facts. They do not like talking about this. It hurts, doesn't it? When they were in power, their very loose grasp of any notion of responsibility in the management of—

Mr Husic interjecting—

Ms GAMBARO: This is about taxpayer dollars: managing taxpayer dollars and managing and administering the foreign aid budget in a more effective way. While much has been said about the secret costs of the UN Security Council bid beyond the $25 million that the former Labor government very loosely admitted to—

Mr Husic: A point of order on the issue of relevance, Deputy Speaker: I would invite the government speaker to speak at some point to the legislation before the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): There is no point of order.

Ms GAMBARO: They do not want to hear this. They do not want to hear it, because it hurts. What is clear from the analysis of the budget, ministerial and portfolio budget statements going back to 2007-08 is that an incredible level of changed expenditure on
foreign aid occurred—$2.9 billion, in fact—and that the change was happening, coincidently, around the time of the United Nations Security Council bid.

As with any kind of expenditure, Australian taxpayers have a right to know whether they are getting value for money. A critical question for Australian taxpayers was: how were Australia's foreign aid objectives and priorities being advanced? For example, how were the aid priorities being advanced by a statue, costing $150,000, to commemorate anti slavery in the Caribbean and Africa, to be built in the UN Plaza in New York?

The coalition was concerned that the foreign aid budget should be spent at the coalface and the coalface is where people need it the most. Between 2008 and 2010 the sum of $270,000 was provided for reviewing agriculture and fisheries management in Eritrea. I wonder how the Australian seafood industry felt about that one after former Minister Burke’s announcement that he was going to lock away more of Australia’s fishing grounds.

Mr Husic interjecting—

Ms GAMBARO: The member opposite keeps interjecting because he does not like to hear this. Also, $65 million was spent on a giant telescope project in Chile’s desert.

When we look at that $3 billion—and I will talk about foreign aid spending in Africa, the Caribbean, South-East Asia and the Pacific—we see that an enormous amount of money was skewed. Between 2007 and 2008, there was also a 251 per cent increase in spending in Africa, from $111 million to $354 million. There were also other areas where the aid budget was skewed. There was a large growth in foreign aid expenditure far exceeding AusAID’s capacity to administer the money and that was where the difficulties arose.

An alarming feature of AusAID’s workplace culture during the six years when Labor was in government was intimidation. The department was racked with cases of intimidation and bullying. During estimates earlier this year the coalition was able to expose that AusAID’s Comcare premiums had increased by a staggering 855 per cent in the last six years.

Mr Husic interjecting—

Ms GAMBARO: I know why the member for Chifley interjects. These are very disturbing figures and the way in which AusAID was administered is absolutely disturbing. In Senate estimates in June this year it was revealed that 80 per cent of the bullying and harassment cases within AusAID were made against senior management. AusAID did not have a culture of care. It was extremely difficult for staff to be productive when management was breaching the very standards that they are meant to uphold. And that sort of culture permeated from the top down.

It has long been said that Australia’s foreign aid priorities should be in our own region. It is the part of the world where we can have the most influence and where we have the opportunity to deliver the most effective outcomes in the delivery of foreign aid to our neighbours.

The Abbott government announced Australia’s commitment to fight HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, with funding of $200 million over three years to support The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The national prevalence of HIV-AIDS in Australia is lower than in many comparable nations; however, it is estimated that around five million people in our region are living with HIV-AIDS. It is the leading cause of death globally for women and girls aged between 15 and 44. Australia has spent $1 billion
combatting HIV-AIDS in our region over the last decade. The global fund is the largest multilateral funder of health programs in developing countries. It invests around a third of its funds, around US$6.8 billion, in the Indo-Pacific region where it has delivered HIV treatment to over 700,000 people, treated seven million cases of tuberculosis and distributed 51 million bed nets. A particular focus of Australia’s cooperation with the global fund is the elimination of drug-resistant strains of malaria in the Mekong subregions and tuberculosis in Papua New Guinea.

In July 2014, Australia will host the 20th International AIDS Conference in Melbourne. Around 18,000 delegates from almost 200 countries are expected to attend this biennial conference, which is the premier gathering for policymakers, those working in the field of HIV and people living with HIV.

The coalition will ensure that Australia’s aid program is effective and delivers real outcomes. This bill is a necessary step in achieving those goals and I commend the bill to the House.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (19:19): I have to be frank: I was listening to the member for Brisbane’s contribution with my mouth open. I have the greatest respect for her but, in listening to her speech, I thought the deep suspicion of multilateralism and the deep political interpretation of what is happening here was absolutely outrageous. Those opposite say that this machinery-of-government change is designed to better align our diplomatic, assistance and trade functions by bringing them all under one roof, under DFAT, by abolishing an agency and integrating it into DFAT.

We actually found out the truth as to why this abolition is happening; it is driven purely by political vindictiveness. As I said, I have the greatest respect for the member for Brisbane, but that is what has been highlighted in comments made by both the member for Kooyong and the member for Brisbane.

Just for the record, our UN Security Council bid has been seen as being so successful, particularly by countries in the region, that they are actually seeking our advice on how they can go about bidding in the future. They see it as so stunning that they are seeking our advice. And here we see complete disdain and political vindictiveness for what was a stunning achievement and for which DFAT should be applauded. It highlights the disdain for the Public Service, public servants, my constituents and Canberra.

The Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill 2013 relates to a specific function of AusAID—not the rant that we heard before—the Australian Civilian Corps. The Australian Civilian Corps is a group of experienced civilian specialists who provide stabilisation and recovery assistance to fragile states and countries experiencing or emerging from conflict or natural disaster.

The corps was established by the previous government and it is a legacy of which Labor is incredibly proud. Of course, we want to ensure it operates under an appropriate legal framework and so we support this amending legislation. However, while not denying the bill a second reading it is important that the House notes the context in which it has come about.

On 18 September, the very day he was sworn in, the Prime Minister announced that he would recommend to the Governor-General that the Australian Agency for International Development, AusAID, be abolished and its functions integrated into the Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade, or DFAT. This announcement came as a total shock to AusAID, DFAT and Canberrans; to the international development sector in Australia; and to our partner organisations overseas. In his rather brief second reading speech, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer said:

This machinery of government change means that certain legislation will need to be updated to substitute references to AusAID and specific positions in AusAID with references to DFAT and positions in DFAT.

'Machinery of government' is a misleading phrase. In fact, it might have you believe that there is no human involvement whatsoever. In fact, the opposite is true. Machinery-of-government changes are entirely about people. They are about people's lives, people's jobs, people's livelihoods and people's security. They change the shape of the Public Service, which is often the primary interface between a government and its people.

In my first speech in this place I repeated this saying, often credited to George Orwell: 'We sleep soundly in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm.' It is a tribute to those public servants called soldiers. But we also sleep soundly in our beds because invisible heroes ensure our national interests are protected abroad. Others protect our borders. Some make sure our cities and towns are safe. Others make sure our food is clean and keep our lights on. Others make sure the sick, the aged, the disadvantaged and the disabled. Others ensure our children's toys are safe and our story is kept alive.

The public servants affected by this machinery-of-government change represent Australia internationally. They develop and implement Australia's foreign, trade and development policies, they negotiate international agreements, they support Australians traveling overseas and they provide assistance to those who need it most—the impoverished, victims of warfare and dispute, residents of disaster stricken regions.

When an athlete represents Australia overseas in their chosen sport, we often say it is their ultimate achievement; the pinnacle of their career; their greatest honour. I believe we should say the same of our public servants. The employees of AusAID and DFAT deserve our utmost respect, and I do not believe that appropriate respect has been shown to them by the Abbott government to date—and we just saw it from the member for Brisbane. Many AusAID and DFAT employees are my constituents and, since the Prime Minister's 18 September announcement, they have been in contact with me regularly to express their concerns about how this process has been handled. The issues they have raised with me have been many and varied; however, a key theme among them is the lack of transparency in the process of abolishing AusAID and integrating its functions into DFAT. AusAID and DFAT employees would like to know: what, if any, external professional change-management advice is being provided to support this process; why there are no women on the steering committee appointed to oversee this process; how many jobs are going to be lost in this process, when and from what areas; if a position or function is deemed to be duplicated, what will be the process for determining which staff member will maintain that position or responsibility for that function; will any AusAID or DFAT staff be moved to a different location and, if so, to where and when?

I wrote to the Minister for Foreign Affairs on 8 November asking for answers to these questions but am yet to receive a response. Perhaps the government consider these details to
be only a minor aspect of their machinery-of-government changes and that is why they are not providing answers. They may be 'minor details' for the government, but for the staff affected by these changes these details are fundamental to their job security.

Many constituents who have contacted me have expressed their disappointment at the 24 October all-staff meeting held at DFAT. Staff had hoped this meeting would provide answers to their questions and staff with a level of clarity; however, this did not occur. The sentiment of those who contacted me after this meeting was that it had left them with more questions than answers. Their most urgent question, of course, is about job security: how many jobs are going to be lost in the integration, when and from what areas?

It is clear that there is a duplication of some functions across AusAID and DFAT—for example, corporate services, human resources and IT. What is not clear is how this duplication will be managed. AusAID staff have expressed to me their fears that, when there is a duplicated function or responsibility, the role will automatically be given to the DFAT staff member and the AusAID staff member's position will be redundant. At this stage, these fears are based on anecdote and speculation alone, but, given the government has not provided any advice to the contrary and has not released any information about how duplications will be managed, there is little wonder AusAID employees are jumping to their own conclusions.

We heard recently in Senate estimates that the department is currently putting in place an interim staffing structure and that the final staffing structure will be in place by the middle of next year. Are we to believe, therefore, that staff will not learn if their jobs are secure until the middle of next year? If this is the case, it certainly is not good enough. How are staff supposed to function with such a cloud hanging over their heads and their jobs? How are they supposed to make any kind of serious financial decision under such uncertainty, like buying or renovating a house, planning a holiday or enrolling kids in school? What will the ramifications of this uncertainty be for the economy of Canberra, where most of the AusAID and DFAT staff are based? What will be the impact on local engaged staff, like the ones I work with in India?

While discussing job losses, it is important that we do not consider the abolition of AusAID in isolation. The announcement of the abolition of AusAID followed closely the announcements that the Abbott government would increase the Public Service efficiency dividend by 0.25 per cent and cut 12,000 Public Service jobs in addition to the efficiency dividend, and that the new Abbott government would cut Australia's overseas aid budget by an enormous $4.5 billion.

There can be absolutely no doubt that there will be job losses in this department resulting from this series of Abbott government announcements, yet the staff of the department have not been told as much—they have just been kept in the dark. They deserve to know how many jobs will be lost, in what areas and by what means. We know that the attrition rate in both AusAID and DFAT has historically been below the Public Service average. In fact, in the last financial year it was less than 4.6 per cent, so there is no question that these losses can be met by natural attrition alone.

We also know that voluntary redundancies have already been offered, although we do not know how many and in what areas. We do not know if there will be forced redundancies and, if so, how many and in what areas, although at the recent Senate estimates the department was
unable to rule out forced redundancies. We also do not know what this government is doing to ensure that we do not lose the vital specialist experience in the delivery of foreign aid that currently exists within AusAID. I am sure that the 132 non-ongoing staff at DFAT and the 81 non-ongoing staff at AusAID also want to know what will happen to their positions—but we do not know that yet either. Frankly, 76 days after the abolition of AusAID was announced, there is still far too much that we do not know. I am asking the government to come clean and provide AusAID and DFAT employees with the certainty they deserve.

One aspect of the integration that I have been particularly disappointed and concerned about was the decision to cancel the 2014 AusAID graduate program. Anyone who has been involved in APS graduate programs or who has known anyone who has applied for these programs knows that they are incredibly competitive. The process is designed to ensure that the successful candidates are the best possible candidates to become future leaders of our Public Service, our foreign service and our foreign aid service. This year, 35 of these future leaders were delighted when they beat thousands of other applicants to secure a position in the AusAID graduate program. They turned down other job offers. They moved from interstate and, in some cases, from overseas—and their partners came with them—to set themselves up in Canberra to begin their career with AusAID. However, last month each of the 35 received a letter letting them know there was no longer a position for them: 'Thanks, but no thanks. Thanks for participating in a six-month recruitment process, thanks for giving up other job opportunities and relocating to Canberra, but you don't have a job after all.' This is a lost opportunity, I think, to engage 35 of our best and brightest Australians in public policy in Australia, to have these 35 bright young Australians working for our national interest. I cannot imagine how disappointed they must be—although I do have a pretty good understanding—and I am certain that this decision reflects incredibly poorly on this government.

It is difficult to interpret the current situation as anything other than a significant tipping point in Australia's foreign aid program. Not only have we seen a $4.5 billion cut to our aid budget—the biggest we have ever seen—but the agency that has been responsible for successfully delivering Australia's aid program for nearly 40 years has been abolished. This government now faces the enormous challenge of maintaining the high standard of our aid program; preserving the expertise that we have within our aid program in the form of experienced, dedicated staff; and successfully integrating two diverse entities while implementing massive job cuts. The Abbott government has created an enormous challenge for itself, and I cannot help but think this is not exactly the best start to government.

I have the utmost respect for the staff at both AusAID and DFAT. I have had the great privilege of working at both places. Prior to my election to parliament some of the highlights of my career included representing Australia in India, when I was working for DFAT, and working on Australia's post-conflict development program in East Timor when I was working at AusAID. I know that the public servants who work at AusAID and DFAT are intelligent, hardworking and dedicated. In fact, they are some of the hardest-working and smartest people I have ever met. They are not people who are easily fazed; they do not make mountains out of mole hills. They have contacted me with their concerns because their concerns are legitimate.

For departmental employees the implications of the abolition of AusAID are immense. I strongly urge the government to provide these employees with some certainty as a matter of
urgency; I urge the government to be more transparent in its machinery-of-government changes; and, most importantly, I urge the government to remember that machinery-of-government changes affect hardworking, dedicated people who have chosen to spend their lives working for a better Australia and a better world. These are people who deserve our respect.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (19:34): I rise to speak on the Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill 2013. I believe that in this chamber, across both sides, are people with a genuine commitment to and understanding of the importance of foreign aid. Listening to the maiden speeches here has made me reflect on the maiden speech that I delivered in this place almost four years ago, in which I talked about the importance of foreign aid. I said that Australia, as a strong and prosperous nation, has a responsibility to provide foreign aid, particularly in our region, for those who are less fortunate than us. I also said it is in our national interest to provide foreign aid to have in our region stable, prosperous nations that are economically secure. But aid is only one element that helps lift people out of poverty and change lives. We know, of course, that economic transformation is the key thing that transforms lives and provides strong and prosperous communities. We know that trade liberalisation and open markets have been critical to lifting more than 400 million people in China out of poverty over the last two decades.

The bill before us tonight does a couple of things. Firstly, and critically, it integrates AusAID into DFAT. It also transforms the powers and functions of the Director-General of AusAID under the act to the Secretary of DFAT and it substitutes other references to AusAID and the Director-General of AusAID with DFAT and the Secretary of DFAT respectively. Finally, it makes a number of consequential amendments to the Australian Civilian Corps Regulations 2011, the Prime Minister's Australian Civilian Corps Directions 2012 and the Director-General's Australian Civilian Corps Directions 2011. Before I go into more detail about this I want to state that it was only in July 2010 that AusAID became an independent statutory authority.

What we have said, consistently, before and after the election, is that we want to make sure that Australia's aid is both effective and efficient, that it delivers for people on the ground and that it is aligned to our foreign trade and development goals. We want to make sure that we are spending our aid dollar not on bigger bureaucracies but instead on not only helping lift people directly out of poverty but also being able to provide the appropriate medical care and infrastructure to people in communities that desperately need them, to also help them engage and strengthen their economic independence.

We have a strong and proud tradition in Australia when it comes to foreign aid. We are some of the most generous people in the world, per capita, when it comes to being aid donors, and there is nothing in this legislation that will change that fact. We will continue to deliver aid worth around $5 billion every year, and this will mean that Australia is likely to be the eighth largest donor in the world—and that is knowing that we are, of course, one of the 12th or 13 largest economies. I think that this is a record we can be proud of.

We have seen an example very recently of how our aid has been used very effectively on the ground in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan. The foreign affairs minister approved a $10 million package of humanitarian assistance. It was assistance that saw the urgent deployment
of an Australian medical assistance team, at a cost of around $1 million; $3 million deployed through Australian non-government organisations; $4 million given to the United Nations flash appeal, and $1 million given for additional food items and also non-food items such as mosquito nets, water containers, tarpaulins and the like; and finally $1 million given to the Red Cross to assist in their disaster response efforts. So I think that in Australia we have a strong commitment to foreign aid and, despite what those opposite have said in trying to create a fear campaign around our commitment to foreign aid, we are very much committed to foreign aid and very much committed to our region in particular and to improving the economic circumstances for people within our region.

I want to make some comments regarding the bureaucracy of AusAID, because I think it is important to note that those opposite saw a very serious growth in the size of the bureaucracy, and one of my colleagues has done some work on this. Teresa Gambaro, who is a parliamentary secretary in our government, said in April of this year that AusAID now spends almost seven per cent of Australia’s foreign aid budget on administration, a figure well above the 2010 OECD-DAC average for administration costs of 5.2 per cent. It is imperative that any increase in our foreign aid finds its way to those for whom the aid is intended. We do not want to see our aid chewed up in administration costs.

That is not a reflection on the worth of those who work in our aid community in Australia and overseas. This is not some slight, as the member opposite said in her previous speech. It is simply a recognition that we need to make sure, as a government, that every single taxpayer dollar is used effectively and efficiently. We take our responsibility in that regard incredibly seriously—so much so that, not only before the last election but before the election before that, it was our policy to have a review into aid effectiveness, and we were delighted when the then, Labor, government did in fact conduct that review. What concerned us, though, was that they did not adopt all of the recommendations of that review. They did not, for instance, adopt the recommendation that before you can increase aid you need to make sure that you are strengthening performance measures and have rigorous benchmarking, which of course means that you are using aid effectively. We have said that that is a recommendation that we will adopt and it is very important to put that in place.

We have recommitted and said on many occasions, and I will say again, that we will commit to the goal of increasing foreign aid to 0.5 per cent of gross national income. But we will also make sure that there is a primary focus on the effectiveness of how we spend our aid dollar—that there is quality to that spend and an overall economic impact in that spend. We also want to leverage partnerships: one of the points of integrating AusAID within DFAT is that we can leverage up the relationships with private institutions and private funds that are being spent in our region so that we are getting the biggest bang for our buck and it is being used responsibly and effectively.

I commend this bill to the House because I believe that it is our responsibility to make sure we have a strong and robust foreign aid program and that we continue to develop our region and integrate our trade and foreign affairs and aid programs together so that our aid program is more comprehensive and effective and therefore delivering better outcomes on the ground. I commend the bill to the House and thank the House for the opportunity to speak this evening.
Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (19:44): As my colleague the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, this legislation, the Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill 2013, is essentially part of the administrative machinery designed to allow Australia's international development agency, AusAID, to be subsumed within the structure of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It is a bill of no great complexity, but one that nevertheless enables a profound change.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has spoken about the aspects of the bill that deliver consequential amendments in relation to the Australian Civilian Corps—a Labor government initiative—and I support those remarks. I do want to make some observations in relation to the larger change being affected with respect to AusAID, some key aspects of which are also dealt with in this bill. As with the eloquent remarks just now from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the member for Canberra, I also want to take this opportunity to say some things about the work of AusAID the agency and about AusAID the people and the culture—points which I believe should be made on the occasion of its dissolution as a stand-alone agency.

The name 'AusAID' dates from 1995 but the agency itself came into being as the Office of the Australian Development Assistance Agency in December 1973, and I regret that we are not this month in a position to celebrate the agency's 40th birthday. But above all else I believe that it is important we recognise that there is a distinct Australian international development cause and project and that it is simply not possible for that cause and project to be wholly directed by, or even wholly consonant with, the legitimate but separate interests and purposes of Australian diplomacy and Australian trade.

The suggestion that through the work of AusAID Australia's international development assistance has somehow not been delivered in keeping with our national interest is wrong. The suggestion that Australian aid has not been focused appropriately in our region is wrong. Any suggestion that Australian aid has not been delivered with world-leading efficiency and effectiveness is wrong. Australia's development assistance has always been pursued in keeping with the national interest, primarily because making a real difference to the lives of people suffering from poverty and disadvantage, violent conflict and disease is an extension of our national character and of our national ethos. That is who we are. That is what we do.

It was some 64 years ago that Prime Minister Ben Chifley said:

We have a great objective—the light on the hill—which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand.

The idea, therefore, that there is some stronger alignment that can be achieved, in the abstract, between Australia's aid program and our national interest is in my view a complete furphy.

Our international development assistance has been provided, first and foremost, to save lives and reduce poverty. In so doing it improves health and education outcomes, it builds economic capacity, it underwrites regional peace and security and it forges deep and lasting personal and cultural connections between Australia and the people of other nations, especially those in our region. Let there be no doubt that well-targeted and delivered foreign aid makes a life-saving and nation-changing difference. Through the provision of development assistance, six million fewer children died in 2012 than in 1990. Through the provision of development assistance the international community is on track to halve the number of people living in poverty by 2015.
As I have said before, the contrast between Labor and the coalition when it comes to foreign aid is clear: it is clear in the numbers, in the language, in the values and, most importantly, in the outcomes. Under the Howard government aid funding was low and unpredictable, averaging 0.25 per cent of GNI. The provision of aid was less well targeted in terms of addressing the sharpest needs and there was no appetite for reform.

Under the former Labor government, Australia's contribution to international development grew every year, increasing by 80 per cent since 2007, and reaching 0.37 per cent of GNI in 2013-14. It would have continued to grow a further 60 per cent to reach 0.5 per cent of GNI by 2017-18. On the coalition's current path we now face a backwards slide to 0.3 per cent of GNI over the next four years, which includes the cutting of $700 million—or one in every $8 of aid—in this financial year alone. The coalition's shift in emphasis towards a kind of 'aid for trade' approach risks undermining the current targeted focus on education, health, water and sanitation, gender equality, infrastructure and governance.

Of course Labor supports appropriate private sector development and recognises the huge potential to reach development goals in partnership with the private sector—as demonstrated in the business engagement strategy released by the former foreign minister Bob Carr last year. Our Mining for Development Initiative is helping to leverage sustainable development outcomes from resource extraction in many African countries. There are genuine synergies between Australia and many countries of Africa when it comes to mining and agriculture, and it is appropriate that Australian expertise and skills be targeted to areas where we can make a real difference, for instance, in agricultural research, dry-land farming, transboundary water management and mining governance, as well as in areas where the MDGs are lagging, such as in water and sanitation, and maternal and child health.

Assisting the development of a continent of nearly one billion people is not only the right thing to do but clearly in our own economic, strategic, security and national interests. Yet the government has signalled the likely withdrawal of support from a number of regions, potentially including much of Africa, and has not indicated whether it supports Australian membership of the African Development Bank, a measure recommended by the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness.

The action that this bill in part enables—namely, the cessation of AusAID's independent existence—goes hand-in-hand with the government's massive cut to Australia's foreign aid and gives effect to the government's view that international development is a low priority. I would like to quote from a piece published at the end of October by Robin Davies, currently the Associate Director of the Development Policy Centre and a person who worked for AusAID from 1993 to 2012. He writes:

Now the borders around AusAID are being comprehensively breached and dismantled, probably beyond any possibility of easy reconstruction. While this is in the end just a ‘machinery of government’ change, it is inevitably experienced as an affront, a personal loss, to the people who have invested their working lives, or their hopes for a working life, in the organisation. The affront might have been lessened if there were a perception that this unheralded merger were not in reality a hostile takeover, if DFAT as agent were thought to be acting only in line with the objectives of the government as principal, and if the objectives of the merger had been convincingly stated. But, as it is, there is a sense that one organisation is being consumed by another whose objectives might not exactly coincide with those of the government. The government wants a focused, high-quality aid program that strengthens
Australia’s bilateral relationships. It can’t be easy for anybody inside AusAID to see how its disintegration could serve that end.

With the change that this bill facilitates, the government is dissolving an agency and structure whose programs, operations and outcomes were in May this year praised by an independent OECD peer review as efficient, transparent and effective; an agency that was recommended as a model for other countries to follow, especially in the areas of disability-inclusive development, the provision of aid to fragile states, and organisational reform. Of course, along with the dissolution of the agency goes $4.5 billion in critical funding for lifesaving programs to help some of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people.

It was a great and humbling privilege to hold the position as Minister for International Development, albeit very briefly, and to be the minister responsible for AusAID. In that role, I saw firsthand the life-changing assistance that AusAID provides. In Timor-Leste, which shares the unfortunate distinction with Burundi of having the worst child malnutrition rates in the world, AusAID and ACIAR, through the Seeds of Life project, have worked with the government of Timor-Leste to provide 33,500 Timorese farmers with higher yielding seed varieties, already enabling them to grow more and better quality food and to sell some of the seeds. While visiting the Solomon Islands for the 10th anniversary of RAMSI, I announced funding for 8,000 sight-restoring operations to be performed in the Pacific over the next three years through organisations like the Pacific Eye Institute and the Fred Hollows Foundation. Last year the Australian aid program vaccinated more than 2.7 million children, enrolled one million additional children in school, constructed or maintained more than 4,400 kilometres of road, provided access to safe water for an additional 2.2 million people and assisted more than 300,000 additional births to be attended by a skilled birth attendant, in addition to providing lifesaving assistance to 11.8 million people in conflict or crisis situations.

Under Labor, Australia entered into long-term partnerships with trusted Australian NGOs and we broke new ground in recognising aid programs are most effective when people with disability are included. Australia's Ambassador for Disability-Inclusive Development—the first in the world—will play a key role in advocating for increased resources and attention to disability-inclusive development. I sincerely hope this ambassadorial position will not also be dismantled. We also recognised gender inequality is a key obstacle to overcoming poverty. We had a 10-year plan to work together with women in the region to catalyse the generational change needed to boost women’s equality and rights in the Pacific. Under Labor's aid program, 86 per cent of country-specific aid in 2013-14 was targeted to the Asia-Pacific, because we should rightly be paying most attention to partnerships in our own region—a part of the world with a high concentration of fragile and underdeveloped states.

I want to pay tribute to the work AusAID staff here in Canberra and on post around the world performed as a stand-alone agency for nearly 40 years and to the expertise, energy and commitment of all the many staff members who have contributed to AusAID’s critical achievements. When as minister I first addressed the AusAID staff here in Canberra, and on post around the world through the marvels of modern technology, I said: Development assistance is one of the most important aspects of Australia’s national policy. And I believe many Australians understand and value our aid program. Yet I’d also say that the range and the variety of assistance provided; the severity and complexity of the disadvantage alleviated; and the profound difference that is made to the lives of millions of people, in millions of ways is perhaps not fully appreciated. I would like to ensure that it is appreciated to a greater degree.
Australians naturally want to know that their taxpayers' dollars being spent through the aid program are making a real difference on the ground; a lasting difference; a transformative difference; and that those resources are not being wasted.

That is an entirely reasonable expectation and AusAID is delivering on that expectation, as found by the OECD peer review in May this year …

... ... ...

All of us in this room and this Agency know from experience the incredible difference that development assistance can make—that it saves lives; changes nations; and builds cooperation between societies, and that, dollar-for-dollar, well-targeted foreign aid contributes to stability and security at least as well as any government initiative, and I intend to make it part of my role to communicate that as much as possible to the Australian community.

I would also like to ensure that Australians understand that the need for development assistance is particularly acute in our part of the world. Of Australia's 24 closest neighbours, 22 of them are developing countries. Our interests and our prospects are deeply interwoven with the prospects of all the countries and all the people with whom we share this part of the planet and we have a responsibility to advocate for the development needs in our region, not only in relation to health, education and governance, but also in relation to infrastructure, gender-equality, disability-inclusion, human rights and climate change.

This imperative is made keener by the multilateral leadership opportunities before us in the next few years.

Australia has just assumed the presidency of the G20 and we have already taken our place on the Security Council. These are positions of great significance and influence and they bring with them great responsibility. We owe it to ourselves and to our region to take these opportunities and to make a difference.

We are moving into a critical period in terms of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and to the formation of a strong post-MDG approach that will need to resolve and harmonise the twin streams of poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Australia has always been a leader and contributor when it comes to the most pressing and difficult global and multilateral challenges and it is widely recognised that as a nation we go above and beyond in making those contributions and showing that leadership. Unfortunately this government's approach, inside its first hundred days, is to retreat into self-interest and passivity; to undermine the world-leading achievements of Australia's foreign aid work in the service of our national character, ethos, and interest; and to pinch pennies from the poor. I am really sorry that that is the case.

I know that the spirit of AusAID lives on, not least in the many good people who will continue to give their all in providing Australian aid. I am confident that the vast majority of Australians share Labor's position that helping our fellow men and women escape from suffering and deprivation is a stand-alone imperative, deserving of a stand-alone agency armed in its good work with a contribution of 0.5 per cent of our strong and stable GNI, increasing ultimately to the 0.7 per cent target that Australia under the Howard government signed up to in the 2000 UN Millennium Declaration. This effort is core to our national ethos. The creation of safety, peace, wellbeing and self-sufficiency, especially in our region, is central to the Australian project.

**Mr LAURIE FERGUSON** (Werriwa) (19:59): As previous speakers have indicated, this measure is essentially one of government management, transferring the Australian Civilian
Corps—a Labor initiative with about 480 registered specialists—to a new organisation. So far as that element goes, the opposition is supportive of it. We are constantly encountering the realities of foreign aid. Today, a number of us attended the Disability Inclusive Development Forum in this parliament. The ADDC is a body which looks at getting together a collective voice for awareness-raising and lobbying on disability-inclusive programs in developing countries and ensuring disability is integrated into mainstream Australian foreign aid and development activities, among other things. It was pleasing to hear the parliamentary secretary, Senator Mason, announce that the government will integrate into the foreign aid program over the next few years an emphasis on disabled people. The reality is that one billion people live with disability worldwide and 80 per cent of people with disability live in developing countries. Over 20 per cent of the world’s poorest people in developing countries are also people with a disability. That was pleasing; however, the broader context of what the government is doing on foreign aid is not very pleasing.

That is in contrast to a government which in 2014 would have hit $5.7 billion in foreign aid, an increase of $500 million over the previous year—or 9½ per cent over 2012-13, giving us the highest percentage of GNI as foreign aid in 25 years—when the OECD pattern was a four per cent reduction. The contrast with this government now is indeed very stark. Over past periods of Liberal administration, it never reached more 0.3 per cent of GNI and was normally around 0.25 per cent. In reality by the end of the Labor administration, it had reached 0.37 per cent and was on target by 2017-18 to reach five per cent of GNI. We see the coalition, however, ripping out $4.5 billion out of the international aid budget. I heard the member for Higgins and her rhetoric about bureaucracy and effectiveness—code words to excuse this massive reduction in our foreign aid program. She said they were not a slight on the public servants involved; it is just an attack upon them. She quoted from some OECD study that administrative costs in Australia consume about seven per cent, compared to 5.5 per cent in other OECD countries without any explanation of the possible reasons—whether it is a question of distance in our part of the world, for example. It was just a bland attack on the reality.

I believe very strongly in our foreign aid program. If we look at one country, Indonesia, which is the largest Islamic country in the world. It is a country that is combating extremist elements and terrorism; a nation which, along with Bangladesh and Turkey, stands out as the best example of the marriage of democracy and Islam in the world. It sets a pattern for the Middle East and North Africa, and Indonesia is seeking to ensure that pattern is understood in those regions. It is a country we depend upon for countering smuggling. If we look at Australia’s program in Indonesia, we are connecting 600,000 people to safe water and more than 300,000 to basic sanitation. We also ensured that an additional 34,000 births were assisted by a skilled birth attendant. We increased the number of syringes distributed through health services and civil society organisations from 650,000 to 1.3 million in 2012. We are supporting open-source software to produce realistic natural-hazard scenarios and new earthquake hazard maps for seven provinces. These are very real contributions to Indonesia, and they are appreciated.

How do I know they are appreciated? I had the opportunity, along with the member for Berowra and four others from this parliament, to visit some of our projects in Indonesia. We visited the Hibah water project in Dekok Kluangan village of the Bangkalan district in east
Java. There we faced the reality of what this country is trying to do in a nation where only 12 per cent of rural households have water connected and less one third of the urban population has a water connection. Some 56,000 people in that region of east Java now have pipe water connections to their houses. We formed local government partnerships with that region. Similarly, the delegation went to a madrasah in Separah village, again in east Java. This is one of over 500 madrasahs built under the Australian-Indonesian basic education program and one of 144 in east Java. The delegation witnessed the huge and positive support for this country through what we are doing there. We also saw we were providing engineering support, school furniture and supplementary reading materials, as well as training in school management for the principal and the school committee. The benefits of foreign aid cannot be bought.

Before returning to parliament, I visited Samoa and Tonga, whose diaspora is significant in my electorate. I again saw the reality of foreign aid. I saw why this government should not be penny pinching in this sector with massive reductions in foreign aid. I saw programs such as an attempt to combat obesity in Tonga, where Netball Australia is encouraging women to take up sport very effectively. I met our volunteers who were integrated into government departments. In one case, they were learning to consider environmental matters in planning decisions, especially coastline protection. I came across another public servant working in a government department to make sure there was transparency in the government. I witnessed the reality of this country constructing a school in Tonga, and once again found jubilation and friendship towards Australia among the school population. Those schools were in a dreadful state of disrepair. Kids are now returning to school who had been outside the system because of the state of their school. We provided a childcare centre in that school. I also witnessed the construction of police stations in Tonga, ensuring that people reporting crimes did not have to face people being charged. We saw the effect on the morale of the police force, which now has proper hiring procedures.

More particularly, as mentioned by Sophie Plumridge at the meeting today about integrating disability into foreign aid, I went to SENESE in Samoa. An Australian expatriate went to Samoa as a volunteer, married a Samoan and, assisted by this country, now runs an NGO with 70-odd employees. What do they do? They can repair hearing aids on-site. They can construct glasses, and they do not have to pay thousands of dollars to have them made in Australia. They are training people with new machines that are an advance on braille. They are producing booklets. They are making sure that teachers in the school system understand the problems of sight and hearing impairments. They are making sure that children are integrated into the system. They are helping Samoa, which has just signed the international covenant on disability, and making sure it measures up.

In Samoa I saw coastline-strengthening procedures that are being put in place because of climate change. I visited AFP officers who are working on transnational crime and with respect to our boat patrols. These are very real measures. A government of common sense would think for more than five seconds about strenuously reducing our foreign aid budget.

As the previous speaker stressed, we live in a region where there is significant deprivation and there are many difficulties in meeting Millennium Development Goals. In this region of such need there will be a large knock-on effect from the government's reduction in foreign aid. I am very proud of the previous government. For all of the criticism that some of the assistance that went towards refugees was counted as foreign aid, the government was
manifestly moving in the right direction, moving to where it should be in the world. In contrast with this government, their soul brother on many fronts, David Cameron, has made forthright decisions in the last few years in support of a strong foreign aid program.

We criticise this government for massive reductions in foreign aid. The reality is that there is one psychiatrist for every two million people in low-income countries compared to 170 psychiatrists for every two million people in rich countries. In 70 low- and middle-income countries the availability of selected generic medicines was 42 per cent in the public sector and 64 per cent in the private sector. A lack of medicines in the public sector forces patients to purchase them privately at prices that are on average 610 per cent more than their international reference price. In 2011, half of all the deaths of children under five occurred in just five impoverished countries. People at the bottom suffer disproportionately. More unequal countries show higher levels of obesity. Gender inequality can also relate to obesity. Women in Qatar and Saudi Arabia have obesity rates of 45 per cent and 44 per cent respectively, according to New Internationalist.

Whilst the purpose of the measure in the legislation before us is to rearrange the employment situation of volunteers, who have performed very well, in the broader context it is excused by attacks on the Public Service, by rhetoric about bureaucracy and by claims that the government is going to make sure aid is delivered more effectively. In reality, it is an attack upon the needs of significant parts of the world. It endangers our relationships, already fraught by this government's actions with Indonesia. It puts us up as a poor global citizen when we were so recently elected to the Security Council.

There are very concrete, positive outcomes in foreign aid that are recognised by all who follow this policy sector. This government's penny-pinching will be to the detriment of this country. It might pander to certain parts of the electorate. In the short term it might appeal to that sense of nationalism that characterises aspects of this debate. But is in stark contrast to what was happening under the previous government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Griggs): I took the view that the deferred division should not be proceeded with until the member who was speaking at 8 pm had completed his speech, so I did not interrupt the member. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for a later hour.

Higher Education Support Amendment (Savings and Other Measures) Bill 2013 Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Griggs) (20:12): In accordance with standing order 133(b), I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion moved earlier by the Minister for Education on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with standing orders. No further debate is allowed.
The House divided. [20:16]
(The Deputy Speaker—Mrs Griggs)

Ayes ..................... 84
Noes ..................... 52
Majority ............... 32

### AYES

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### NOES

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Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (20:24): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill 2013
Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (20:25): I am speaking in respect of the Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill 2013. As the shadow minister pointed out, the opposition will not oppose this legislation, which is a machinery of government bill that facilitates the transfer of employees of the Australian Civilian Corps from the abolished AusAID to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Australian Civilian Corps is a Labor initiative of the last parliament. The ACC has around 489 registered specialists who assist our friends and neighbours in other countries with a range of specialty projects ranging from legal, electoral and governance matters to health,
financial management and engineering guidance. The ACC was formed in 2011 and is designed to provide a flexible and timely Australian response that bridges the gap between humanitarian and emergency relief and long-term development programs. ACC personnel are a group of experienced experts who provide stabilisation and recovery assistance to fragile states and countries experiencing or emerging from conflict or natural disaster. The personnel have been deployed to 11 countries across the Pacific, Asia, Africa and Latin America. The ACC is one of the few Australian overseas aid programs that are governed by specialist legislation. The ACC makes a lasting contribution to the recovery of countries that have been struck by natural disaster and conflict. It is a commendable organisation that provides a vital service to countless people.

We are pleased to see that the ACC will continue, but of course the opposition firmly opposes the $4.5 billion worth of cuts to Australia's foreign aid budget. We firmly oppose the government's veil of secrecy surrounding these cuts, which will make it much more difficult, particularly for NGOs and aid organisations, to predict what the cuts will mean in areas of Australian interest and for the future of the ACC as an operational body. Will the cuts mean fewer vaccinations and immunisations for Australia's Pacific neighbours? Will they result in the loss of experienced and capable people in the field of foreign aid delivery? It is hard to tell just how much expertise in international development policy will be lost as a result of the government's heinous policy decisions on foreign aid.

There are a number of important foreign policy and overseas development aid programs currently operating in the Pacific, including the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, which is an initiative that was introduced by the former Gillard government to combat domestic violence in the Pacific, to provide opportunities for women to undertake increased educational opportunities and to improve participation by women in democracy and within government organisations. There are shocking—absolutely appalling—rates of domestic violence against women in the Pacific: in the highlands of Papua New Guinea and other areas, rates of domestic violence are close to 85 per cent. The Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program is aimed at ensuring that Australia as a nation works bilaterally through organisations such as the Pacific Islands Forum to combat and eventually bring down the rate of domestic violence in the Pacific. A big question mark hangs over that particular program and the great work that has been performed by many NGOs and aid organisations in working with AusAID and the Australian government and governments of our Pacific neighbours to bring down the rate of domestic violence, in particular, in such countries.

The Climate Change Adaptation Program is, again, an initiative of the Gillard Labor government to work with Pacific neighbours in fighting and combating the effects of climate change. Anyone who believes that climate change is not real need look no further than the Pacific. Climate change is not an imminent threat in the Pacific; it is occurring as we speak. One need only look at a nation such as the Marshall Islands, where, over the course of the last 12 months, there has been very little rainfall. The crops are drying up. The nation is in drought. Australia has been involved in providing close to $600,000 worth of emergency relief to the northern atolls of the Marshall Islands in the form of food drops and emergency water supplies to ensure that there is sustainability of populations in those areas.

The issue of climate change in the Pacific is only going to get worse. The scientists tell us that one of the areas most susceptible and vulnerable to climate change is in our backyard—
the Pacific. It is incumbent upon Australia as a wealthy nation, as a nation with high living standards, to work with our Pacific neighbours to ensure that we are doing our bit to maintain civilisations—populations—in the Pacific that are going to be affected dramatically by climate change. And, of course, there is a big question mark over the Climate Change Adaptation Program because of this government's commitment to cut $4.5 billion worth of the foreign aid budget.

Development for All is an appropriate program to be mentioning this evening, given that today is the 21st birthday of the UN International Day of People with a Disability. Development for All was a program introduced by the former Labor government in 2009, which specifically recognised and focused our aid budget on relieving and assisting those living with disabilities throughout the Pacific, in particular. The focus of that program was to ensure that those living with a disability were not forgotten when it came to the allocation of aid funding throughout the area.

So, make no mistake, this bill is necessary solely because of the government's abolition of AusAID. We oppose this government's cuts to overseas development aid to the tune of $4.5 billion. We are particularly concerned about AusAID and its being subsumed into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. AusAID has worked for and partnered with some of the world's poorest nations to alleviate poverty, educate children and eliminate disease. It has a very effective record. In June of this year, I was fortunate to travel to the Western Province of Papua New Guinea as the Parliamentary Secretary for the Pacific Islands Affairs, to open a state-of-the-art tuberculosis clinic in Daru. It is a $35-million investment by the former Labor government in providing state-of-the-art facilities to combat the difficult and serious problem of the spread of tuberculosis in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea. That funding was administered through AusAID. That program was delivered by AusAID—very effectively, I might add—in the Western Province. It was not just about providing the facilities in that hospital. There was also a medical boat supplied to the Western Province, to Daru, to travel up and down the Fly River. It transports patients who do not have access to roads, or who do not have access to other means of transportation, from remote areas and down the Fly River to this state-of-the-art facility. It has been an effective investment by the former Labor government in combating and eradicating tuberculosis for one of our very important neighbours. Again, these sorts of programs are up in the air due to the intended budget cuts.

The countries that AusAID has provided assistance to depend on us, not just for aid but for our expertise. Many Australians with that expertise are employees of AusAID. As the shadow minister has explained, the integration of AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was executed suddenly and clumsily. It is because of this policy that staff will head into the Christmas period with some uncertainty regarding their employment going into 2014.

Labor has a clear and concise commitment to overseas international development. We will increase our spend on overseas development assistance to 0.5 per cent of GNI, and we have a goal of reaching the target of 0.7 per cent of GNI. Our record on foreign aid and overseas development aid speaks for itself. Labor grew our nation's development assistance every year. In 2006-07 we gave $2.95 billion through AusAID and by 2013-14 that had grown to $5.66 billion. That was clear indication of Labor's commitment to working—particularly within our
region, in the Asia Pacific—on overseas development to boost the living standards of our most important partners.

**Mr CIOBO** (Moncrieff—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (20:36): It has been interesting to note the debate that has been taking place in the chamber and to listen to the contributions from a number of members in relation to the Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs recently noted, Australia will continue to provide development assistance worth around $5 billion every year. At that level of funding, Australia is likely to be the eighth largest donor in the world. I repeat: Australia is likely to be the eighth largest donor in the world.

The government's decision to increase the aid budget in line with inflation over the forward estimates will provide certainty for Australia's aid program and the NGO community, after years of broken promises by Labor. Having promised to increase overseas aid spending to 0.5 per cent of gross national income by 2015-16, the Labor Party broke this commitment not once, but twice, pushing this time frame out to 2017-18. Having diverted millions of dollars in aid funding to support its effort for a seat on the United Nations Security Council, the Labor Party felt free to break the very promise that was central to its campaign. That, of course, was: Australia, we do what we say. That was the central tenet of Labor's campaign for the security council. When it comes to the Labor Party and overseas development assistance, recent history has shown that that is not the case and Labor does not do what they say.

I have listened to various contributions from members opposite, and it is fair to say that in broad terms there is a strong level of bipartisanship with respect to the benefit that flows from aid. But the reality is that there has unfortunately been a number of instances where Labor members opposite have attempted to take the opportunity to portray themselves as in some way being morally superior or more outwardly focused with respect to Australia's aid program. The truth is that they simply could not be trusted to do what they said they were going to do. We saw to some extent—and this perhaps may be an expression that is a little too harsh—the 'perversion of our aid priorities' as a consequence of the short-term foreign policy goals of the Australian Labor Party vis-a-vis the Security Council.

Having taken the opportunity to thank all of those members who have contributed to this debate on the Australian Civilian Corps Amendment Bill, I would like to go on to say that the bill amends the Australian Civilian Corps Act 2011, and the regulations and legislative instruments made pursuant to that act, to give effect to the Prime Minister's announcement on 18 September 2013 that the Australian Agency for International Development—AusAID—would be integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT.

The integration of AusAID with DFAT on 1 November 2013 marked a significant milestone for Australia's international engagement. DFAT is now responsible for the development of policy and the delivery of Australia's aid program. The outcome of this change will be a department with the capabilities to align and implement Australia's foreign, trade and development policies—and programs as well—in a coherent, effective and efficient way that will serve Australia's national interest.

Australia has a quality aid program, which is well-regarded internationally and valued by our development partners. Integration of AusAID into DFAT will enable us to build an even
more effective aid program, which promotes international economic growth and poverty reduction and supports Australia's foreign and trade policy. It will strengthen economic diplomacy as the centre of Australia's international engagement, drawing together our foreign, trade and development policies and diplomatic resources to deliver greater prosperity for Australia and our partners in the region and globally.

The bill will update the Australian Civilian Corps Act 2011, and the regulations and legislative instruments made pursuant to that act, to reflect this machinery of government change. The Australian Civilian Corps Act 2011 establishes the Australian Civilian Corps and sets out the legal framework for the employment and management of Australian Civilian Corps employees.

The Director General of AusAID was responsible for the management of the Australian Civilian Corps and had—on behalf of the Commonwealth—all the rights, duties and powers in respect of Australian Civilian Corps employees. The amendments will transfer the powers and functions of the Director General of AusAID under the act to the Secretary of DFAT and will substitute references to AusAID and the Director General of AusAID with references to DFAT and the Secretary of DFAT, respectively.

The bill also makes consequential amendments to the Australian Civilian Corps Regulations 2011, the Prime Minister's Australian Civilian Corps Directions 2012 and the Director General's Australian Civilian Corps Directions 2011. For these reasons, I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (20:41): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Import Processing Charges Amendment Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (20:42): We support this bill. Australia has strong ties with the rest of the world. Our location has allowed us to develop and enjoy particularly close links with other markets in the Asia-Pacific region. Regulating the flows of goods in and out of our country is a responsibility that Australia takes very seriously. A maintained focus on encouraging and assisting Australian businesses involved in international trade and protecting consumers, domestic industries and the environment from harmful and dangerous goods is vital to the future of our nation.

Imports in Australia reached $27.9 billion in August 2013, up from $27.7 billion in July. It is important to get the balance right when it comes to charging on incoming goods. The
The purpose of this bill is to amend the Import Processing Charges Act to increase the import processing charge levied on air, sea and post consignments with a value of $10,000 or more. Under the current legislation, an import processing charge is levied on consignments that have a customs value greater than $1,000. Consignments that are valued at $1,000 or less are currently exempt from import processing charges. The current rates of import processing charges will continue to apply to consignments above $1,000 and up to the value of $10,000, but it is for above that $10,000 threshold that there will be an increase.

It is estimated that 3.3 million import declarations will be lodged, and that 99 per cent of these import declarations are lodged electronically. There will be 3.3 million declarations in 2013-14 and 55 per cent of those relate to consignments valued at greater than $10,000. The bill provides a legislative authority for changing the structure of the charges that will be levied on air, sea and post consignments, which will be reflected in the amended Import Processing Charges Act.

Customs control imports of goods into Australia and, in particular, they manage prohibited or restricted items and the interception of illegal and potentially harmful goods, such as drugs, weapons and computer games. The current import processing charges recover only the commercial aspects of cargo and trade related activity. This bill will broaden the cost base of the import processing charges so that all of the Customs and Border Protection Service costs associated with cargo and trade related activity, including community protection costs, are recovered.

Import processing charges have not been increased since 2005-06. The former, Labor government recognised the importance of bridging this gap in cost recovery and seeing the industry contribute to a greater degree to the costs associated with the delivery of goods into Australia. It is anticipated that implementing the previous government's revenue measures will generate an estimated $674.3 million across the forward estimates. A delay in introducing this legislation will have a financial impact of approximately $15 million per month and, on that basis, we commend the bill to the House.

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (20:45): I am pleased to sum up the debate on the Import Processing Charges Amendment Bill 2013 and I thank the member for Kingsford Smith for his contribution—the sole contribution—to this debate. The changes that are to be introduced under this bill to the import processing charges were first announced by the previous government as part of the 2013-14 budget, and they implement both the broadening of the cost base on which charges are based and the increase in the charges for consignments valued at $10,000 or more. I am surprised that there were not more speakers from the other side of the House on this bill, because it was their idea; it was their budget measure.

I must say the government is somewhat reluctant to introduce this bill. It is a further increase in charges. While there are matters that are addressed in this bill which will add in some way to the integrity of how these moneys are raised, the government introduces this bill reluctantly because it is one of the many revenue measures that the previous government announced but did not legislate. They were not prepared to bring it in here and legislate it before the election. This government has had to follow up and introduce those measures. It is one of the things that we said we would have to do in order to address the significant fiscal mess that we have inherited but that we were not keen to do—but we must do it to get the
books balanced for the national budget. So I am not surprised that the opposition would be supporting this rather significant increase in charges, because it was their proposal; it was their idea. And, in order to get our budget in a more reparable state, it is important that these matters now proceed.

This is the first time that charges have been increased since 2005-06. The increased charges will only apply to air, post and sea consignments with a value of $10,000 or more. There will be no change to the exemption that currently applies to consignments valued at $1,000 or less in this bill. Broadening the cost base of the charges and increasing the charges levied on air, sea and post consignments valued at $10,000 or more will also see industry make a greater contribution to the full costs of delivering effective border management and the end-to-end costs of trade in goods delivered into Australia. It is estimated—and this is the reason why this bill is before the House—that implementing the changes to the charges as proposed in this bill will generate additional revenue of $674.3 million across the forward estimates, and that failing to introduce this bill into the House and take it through both places before the end of this year would have a very significant impact on the budget and the forward estimates, into which that revenue had been factored by the previous government. They had factored it in but failed to legislate it in this place before the election. And so the government has picked up this measure and brought it into this place to see that it is implemented. It will provide that added support to the budget. We will continue to monitor the impact of these charges on industry.

It is very important that the Customs and Border Protection Service acts as a facilitator of trade, as a facilitator of commerce, not as a ticket clipper. That is the sort of service we want to run on our borders—one that is funded to do the job of protecting our borders. It is of great concern to me that the savings and cuts that were applied to Australian Customs and Border Protection Service by the previous government over their term in office were in excess of $750 million. That is an enormous cut to the budget of the Customs and Border Protection Service. The organisation had 5,700 officers and staff when the previous government came to office; there are 5,000 now; and, on the current forward estimates, they will go to a figure, we estimate, of 4,400. The previous government cut this agency and cut this agency and cut this agency. All they seemed to want to do with this agency was use it to raise revenue, and that is why they came forward with this measure.

But we will set about fixing up this mess. We will set about fixing up the mess of the budget. We will set about fixing up the mess on the borders. We will set about fixing up the mess in terms of the significant cuts that were made to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, with a strong business case that will take the agency forward in a way that will enable it to do its job. The people who work for the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service are very good Australians. They are people who put on a uniform and, in many cases—particularly in the case of those who serve at sea, but also more broadly than that—put themselves at risk. They believe in the integrity of our borders, and we believe in the job they are seeking to do. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.
Third Reading

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (20:51): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Submarine Cable Protection) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (20:52): I rise to speak on the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Submarine Cable Protection) Bill 2013. The Labor Party developed this legislation in government and will support it in opposition. Australia's international communication links are critically important to our economy and to our society. When Australia was first connected to Europe by telegraph cable over 140 years ago, the impact on our economy was immediate. Our primary industries now had real-time information on the current prices of their commodities in our primary markets. Today, fibre optic submarine cables are how Australia's economy is fully integrated into the global marketplace. While physical goods travel by ship or by plane, contracts are negotiated and payments are made by electronic communication.

Large and small businesses as well as individual consumers depend on these links. There are 14 mainstream fibre pairs out of Australia. Each carries between 1,000 and 2,000 gigabits per second of active traffic. Each of these fibres is laid across the ocean floor where they can be damaged, especially by anchors of ships. To protect these critical links, schedule 3A of the Telecommunications Act creates a power for the creation of protection zones that restrict activities which could result in cable damage. The Labor government reviewed the operation of this scheme and identified five ways in which it can be improved. The bill implements these reforms.

Under this legislation, the Australian Communications and Media Authority will have the power to set standard conditions that could apply to protection zone limits. It will also have the power to set standard conditions that would apply to non-protection zone permits. ACMA will also be allowed to only publish a summary of proposals to declare, vary or revoke a protection zone. Protection zones can be provided around other cables of national significance that are wholly within Australian waters, and inconsistencies will be removed between the legislation and Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

I know that Liberal Party talk a lot about reducing regulation but schemes like this remind us of why regulation is often so important. We support this important legislation. Without denying this bill being read a second time, I move:

That all the words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading the House notes that:"
(1) in his Second Reading Speech, the Minister acknowledged:

(a) the importance of communications infrastructure to our economy; and

(b) the unforeseen evolution of technology and services that could be facilitated using submarine communications cables when Australia's links were first developed in the nineteenth century;

(2) it is critical for policy makers to adopt a forward-looking view of our nation's communications and infrastructure requirements; and

(3) the assertion that broadband speeds of 25Mbps will continue to be sufficient for the needs of Australian households in future is inconsistent with items (1) and (2)."

In his second reading speech, the minister reminded us of the 1990s boom in international capacity and noted that, over time, demand has caught up with the extraordinary increase in capacity. He spoke approvingly of the way investment in international communications infrastructure has been developed to meet future traffic needs and he said:

Modern submarine cables typically provide multiple terabits per second of capacity when deployed and can be further upgraded, positioning them to meet future traffic demands.

The minister did not constrain his remarks to submarine cables in his second reading speech. He spoke at length about the National Broadband Network—and this is where the debate gets interesting. The government has praised the rollout of international undersea fibre optic cable for being forward-looking but is not adopting the same approach to the rollout of fibre optic cable on land here at home. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Prime Minister's statement, when he was opposition leader a few months ago, when he said that he is:

… absolutely confident that 25 megabits per second is going to be enough—more than enough—for the average household.

I suspect that in the years ahead we will look back on these words in the same way that we look back on other memorably short-sighted predictions, like those of the president of IBM who, in 1943 said that the world market for computers might be five, or Ken Olsen's statement in 1977 that, 'There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in his home.'

The minister criticised the NBN at length in this debate. Allow me to respond. The National Broadband Network is the biggest and most important infrastructure project in Australia and it is important that it is done right. We think that means using fibre, not copper which we will have to replace with fibre down the track. The government has a different view. They are proposing to use fibre to a node or a box in the street and then use the old copper network to homes and businesses. It begs the obvious question: who is right?

In the short time I have been in this shadow portfolio, every expert I have spoken to has told me the same thing—that is, that fibre is the end game, and that is where we have to get to. The minister has said much the same thing and the new chairman of NBN Co., Dr Ziggy Switkowski, has also said this. A few years ago he said that an all-fibre network is desirable end point. The question then is not whether we need fibre to our homes and businesses; it is whether we build this in one stage or in two. Labor's argument is, if fibre is the end game, if we are going to need it, then just like the submarine fibre cables which are the focus of this legislation, we should plan for the future and build it now. Japan, South Korea and Singapore are all investing in fibre to the premises. So is New Zealand and so should we. Otherwise, we are putting ourselves at a disadvantage—left behind with a second-class, second-rate broadband network. There have been problems with the construction of the NBN. That is not good enough and needs to be fixed but we should not stop building it.
Building a fibre optic network to homes and businesses is the right policy and we should be speeding up its construction, not throwing it out.

The government has promised a faster and a cheaper NBN, but they are not off to a good start. Since the election, construction has slowed down and they have broken their promise to honour all existing contracts, leaving half a million Australians in limbo, not sure whether they will get fibre to the premises or fibre to the node.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

*The SPEAKER (21:00):* It being 9 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Rural Clinical Schools**

*Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (21:00):* Tonight I am going to speak about the rural doctor shortage crisis and the solutions that can be offered by rural clinical schools—and I will highlight the achievements of some of those schools. In my electorate there are two rural clinical schools, one run in Port Macquarie by the University of New South Wales and another in the town of Taree run jointly by the University of Newcastle and the University of New England. The University of New South Wales Rural Clinical School has been operating since 2008 and educates many doctors. Over 33 per cent of their current graduating class have spent at least one year in a rural clinical school, either in Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour or one of the Greater Murray schools in Albury and Wagga. This far exceeds the remit given to them by the Commonwealth when the rural clinical schools were established.

The benefit to the communities where these rural clinical schools have been established is substantial. The aim of providing rural clinical school experience to medical students was to generate medical graduates who end up in some form of rural clinical practice. There is a long gestation before you get a qualified medical practitioner. For five or six years after your undergraduate degree, you have to do postgraduate medical training. The Rural Clinical School program is delivering doctors into a potential rural pathway. In fact, in a survey of students at the University of New South Wales Rural Clinical School, 72 per cent said they wanted to work in a rural location. In a similar survey run at the University of Sydney, 80 per cent expressed a preference for working in a rural location upon graduation.

But there is a great disconnect between medical undergraduate training and the postgraduate training experience. Many of our undergraduates are getting experience in the rural situation, but it is their postgraduate medical training that is the missing piece in the puzzle. One only has to look at the graduates from a similar program run out of Dubbo, where the University of Sydney has been successfully training undergraduates. In the Dubbo region and in Orange, there are currently 36 doctors working either as local GPs or as local hospital doctors who had their first experience in the School of Rural Health. Of all the graduates from that program, 38 per cent are working in rural areas as rural interns.

Many members of the House are aware of the doubling of medical graduates over the last couple of years and that there is an increasing wave of medical students who will require completion of their training in a hospital setting and then in GP training places. That is where the missing piece of the puzzle is. To get the full benefit of these rural clinical schools, we need to support more postgraduate training places for interns, residents and registrars.
Otherwise, all this investment the Commonwealth has made will not achieve the outcome we are after.

All the communities where the rural clinical schools exist get huge benefits. Many existing practitioners in these rural centres stay on because of the rural clinical school. They get to be an educator rather than having to work on the front line, in the trenches—seeing patient after patient in their practice or in their hospital. All these rural clinical schools are embraced by their local communities. They are an income generator for the town because it changes the nature of the town. Many practitioners stay on for many more years in clinical practice because they get to be involved in a more academic teaching environment. So the associated benefits of having a rural clinical school are well beyond the number of graduates who end up in rural clinical placements. *(Time expired)*

**Lalor Electorate: Housing**

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (21:05): I welcome the opportunity this evening to talk about a housing forum I recently hosted in my electorate. The forum brought together many from our community, including representatives from local aid agencies, Victoria Police and the Department of Human Services, as well as our local councillors and state members of parliament. On the table for discussion were homelessness, tenancy eviction and mortgage stress.

These are issues of huge importance to my local community. A recent report from the Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal shows that 263 eviction warrants were executed in 2012-13. Between 2010-11 and 2012-13, a total of 684 evictions were executed. Let me repeat that, because it is a shocking figure—684 households within the Wyndham local government area have been evicted over the past three years. This represents the highest number for any LGA within the state—and this is only tenancy eviction. It does not include the number of local residents who are homeless, those who are desperately waiting for public housing, those at risk of foreclosure on their mortgages or those for whom meeting the rent is a week to week proposition.

Over the election campaign, while at train stations and street stalls, numerous local residents approached me about these issues, not just for themselves but out of concern for a friend, a neighbour or the wider community. I think it is because the concept of home is one we all hold very dear. Indeed, at the end of a parliamentary sitting week, I am particularly reminded of just how important it is. When these people are at risk of tenancy eviction or not being able to meet their housing payments, we know their employment, their education and the future of their family are also at risk.

Clearly, this is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed and so, following my election as member for Lalor, I wanted to take immediate action. I knew a forum would be the best way to bring together people from across our community—to talk about the local experiences of housing and homelessness, to discover what we have and what is missing and, ultimately, to help find a solution. The causes surrounding and affecting housing stress in our community are probably not a surprise. They range from being afraid to ask for help, to domestic violence, family breakdown and drugs and alcohol. They are the same issues that to some degree affect every community in Australia. But in a growing community like ours, where infrastructure and services can sometimes struggle to keep up, they are exacerbated. Too often
residents, whatever their problem may be, do not know where to go for help and so we lose our best chance for success—early intervention.

In discussing the factors that are worsening the issue, we also spoke about how much the cuts currently being proposed by the Abbott government would hurt. The abolition of the SchoolKids Bonus and the end of the low income support bonus will only punish the most vulnerable in our community. Already constituents are contacting me afraid of what Abbott's axe will mean for their ability to meet their rent or mortgage payments, put food on the table and send their kids to school.

I have also been contacted about the ATO's draft ruling in relation to charging GST on moveable home estates. I know that Bob, a local Werribee resident, is concerned that should the changes go ahead, many—particularly seniors—may not be able to stay in their homes. Even more troubling, one of the first things Tony Abbott did as Prime Minister was to abolish the Council on Homelessness, and that was followed soon after by the axing of the National Housing Supply Council. This hardly signals a commitment to tackling housing stress.

More recently, the government has refused to commit to the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. Under the Affordable Housing Agreement, more than $6 billion worth of assistance was supplied to low- and middle-income Australians in its first five years. Locally, under the Social Housing Initiative, we saw a helping hand extended with thirteen homes built for Wyndham families. The Partnership Agreement on Homelessness also provided funding to help those in our community at risk. There was long-term accommodation, emergency assistance and outreach for those particularly vulnerable—our young people, seniors, those with mental health concerns. And now we hear that the government is unwilling to confirm future performance reporting for the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

This is of grave concern to everyone in our community, because a home is more than four walls. I call on the coalition to affirm their commitment to tackling housing stress and homelessness, and to continue the important work undertaken by previous Labor governments.

**Small Business**

**Mr WILLIAMS** (Hindmarsh) (21:10): Tonight I want to address the issue of small businesses and the challenges they face. They are doing it tough, and we all hear that from the small businesses we speak to. As we go around our electorates, the hospitality trade, the retailers and the family businesses are all struggling with higher costs and their lack of confidence in the economy. It is an issue we need to address.

The coalition has come up with a number of initiatives on a number of fronts, and we need to give due credit to the path we are taking. Those initiatives range from removing the carbon tax and so reducing input costs for electricity—hopefully those on the other side of the House will help us do that—to deregulation. The Minister for Small Business, Bruce Billson, has been supported by our Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, in driving the Shop Small initiative, which I think is a great campaign for us to get behind. On the deregulation front, Josh Frydenberg is leading the charge. In addition to $1 billion a year in costs being reduced for businesses, we will have two repeal days—every minister will be asked to set up an advisory committee to help them in the area of deregulation. There will be changes in the department.
that will help us as well. I got behind the Shop Small campaign recently when I returned to an old place of work during my university days—HMS Buffalo at Glenelg, a great icon in the Glenelg area. It is a family restaurant that is finding things challenging, as many in the hospitality area are.

In saying that, many businesses are using their capacity and using the strengths of family businesses to thrive. It is the balance we try to achieve, and we see it in small businesses like Caruso's at Glenelg, Estia at Henley Square, Manuele Engineers and Rossiter's boots—they are succeeding in their own little way but they are finding conditions very tough and we need to give them all the support we can. The coalition's policy of removing taxes, lowering input costs and promoting campaigns like Shop Small should be encouraged in whatever way they can be. Some businesses are taking it upon themselves to encourage us to buy local. Drake Supermarkets, for example, is one of those businesses that are encouraging shoppers to buy Australian products. When consumers shop they need to look for South Australian products, in my state, and for Australian products.

We have a growing opportunity in Asia and we need to continue to look for opportunities to increase our food distribution and support our food companies. There is the opportunity to shop small but also think large in Asia. I encourage everyone, as consumers, to support the initiative of Mr Billson and the coalition. He came to Hindmarsh; we had some great forums on small business. He was at one, and we had another small business forum as well.

Hindmarsh is a small business electorate, as many electorates are in the Australian economy, and we need to continue to support small businesses. The coalition is providing that support.

Werriwa Electorate: Education

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (21:05): The electorate of Werriwa has a significant number of important government school institutions such as Campbell House which, with a very high teacher to student ratio, cares for students who have difficulties going into conventional schools, and Hurlstone Agricultural High School, one of Sydney's prestige government schools, where a former member for Werriwa, Mark Latham, is the president of the parents and citizens group. Another school is the coeducational Macquarie Fields High School, which is another selective high school.

On 15 November I felt very privileged to attend an event there with my state parliamentary colleague Dr Andrew McDonald and Murat Dizdar, the Executive Director of Public Schools NSW. This was for the continuation of a future teachers club. The event commenced with a very impressive address by the school principal Jan Dolstra. She told of her own life trip from Blacktown Girls High School. She was the first person from her family to go to university, having had the benefit of the then existing teachers scholarships. She had an experience that many of us do not have these days. We go to university with many people from the same high school, but she was amongst a very small group from her school to go to university. I think the figure she gave was 37 out of 120 of the first-year students actually completed high school. It is that kind of attitude and thankfulness for public education that drives her agenda.

This group, led by Perry Celestino, an American teacher who has been here for 40 years since the year of the Opera House opening, was created for future teachers. He is another person who is the first from his family in the United States to go to university. From recollection, he is the son of a plumber. What happens there is that students who are interested in going into the profession of teaching undertake class instruction. It was interesting to notice
that Yanco Agricultural College from the Riverina came on the day to see what is occurring. Students teach a class, have the experience of teaching, get to know some of the problems, see the interaction of students and teachers, gain a knowledge of subjects and, at the end of the day, look at what they failed and what they would improve on.

It was accompanied by a video where the main star was Dylan Scarborough. I fondly recall when I met him at another students event a few years ago—probably with the member for Macarthur—I asked, as I do of many students, what he wanted to do in life. He said, 'Sit in a big chair in an office like yours in the near future.' So my colleague the member for Macquarie Fields described him as the future local MP for the area. That video showed students actually teaching and practising. But, most importantly, it showed them responding to what had occurred, seeing some of the challenges, understanding how they could improve lessons, and being queried by Dylan about what they thought was wrong with their performance.

Mr Celestino, on the day, received an award for 40 years of teaching, and Gai Lees and Judy Butler received awards for 30 years. The responses of various students were interesting. Sherridan Lown from year 10 said that the process gave her an insight into education to see what it is like as a teacher. Ishan Gupta enjoyed the opportunity to explore teaching as a future profession. Lisa Hannah undertook a maths class, and Katherine Livanis taught a year 9 history. We had the performances on screen and it was indeed impressive. The state executive director of education, Murat Dizdar, is, once again, a person who has had an interesting trip towards education. After studying law he became a teacher. For him, teaching is an occupation that provides an opportunity for everyone to have a fair go in life. He quoted the words of Malala Yousafzai, the young girl shot in Pakistan for her love of education, that education is not just a right but an obligation. I reiterate the impression that this created. This program should not only be in the Werriwa region. It should be a state model to encourage people to go into education and not—as some people have said—to see it as the last option after you do not get into other courses but to see it as a first choice because of the real commitment that it can make to the betterment of society.

Banks Electorate: Community Organisations

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (21:05): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I take this opportunity to formally congratulate you on your election to the speakership. I rise today to raise with the House the success of a couple of important community organisations in my electorate of Banks. Banks is very rich in community spirit, with a very diverse range of community organisations working from Carlton in the east right across to Revesby in the west. I wanted to highlight the work of a couple of those organisations this evening. One is the Pole Depot Community Centre based in Penshurst. The Pole Depot provides a very diverse range of social support services to more than 500 people every single week in the St George district. Its vision is for a healthy, supported, active and involved community, and it has many different programs that help to fulfil that vision. The Pole Depot runs programs for carers, kids, members of the local Chinese-Australian community, people with disabilities, seniors and young people as well. It also has a popular community cafe. It truly is a one stop shop for community services in Banks.

Last week I was fortunate to be able to visit the Hurstville YouthZone, which is operated by the Pole Depot, and to meet with Edgee Ribeiro and his team. Edgee has been managing
the youth centre there for more than 10 years, which is a real testament to his dedication and to the ongoing success of the YouthZone centre. Importantly, the centre really focuses on encouraging young people and teenagers to play a constructive and active role in the community, to not stay at home and watch video games, but to get out there and really contribute to the community. There is an anti-graffiti program which they run, which has been very successful, and a number of different preventative workshops designed to teach study skills, job-hunting skills and to give people broader experiences so that they are able to move confidently into the world of work. It is a really tremendous organisation, and I was very pleased during the election campaign to have the member for Wentworth visit the Pole Depot with me and commit $500,000 towards much needed capital upgrades at the centre. With so many activities it is bursting at the seams somewhat, and I am very pleased that we will be delivering the financial support to allow that important financial expenditure to occur next year.

Also this evening I congratulate the Autism Community Network, which is based in Riverwood. This is a parent-run organisation which is quite young—it was only founded in late 2011 by Steve Drakoulis and other members of his team—and it exists basically to assist families of kids who have an autism spectrum disorder. It provides one-on-one counselling; support services; and a range of other activities such as a drama club, an arts club, a cooking club and a fitness club. It is important to note that this organisation sprung up from the grassroots—from the hard work of just a small number of people with very little external support—and what they have achieved is certainly very impressive.

The Autism Community Network provides a significant number of its services online. For example, there is an online support platform where parents and families can go in and talk about issues they are facing with their child with an autism spectrum disorder. As you can imagine, that provides a lot of much-needed support to families who have a child with an autism spectrum disorder.

Such activities have been so successful that families from as far afield as right up in the Hornsby region and right down to Wollongong have been looking to get involved with the activities of the network—which, as I said, was only set up a year ago in the St George district. I extend to Steve Drakoulis and all his team my very hearty congratulations on their success.

Hotham Electorate: Education Funding

Ms O'NEIL (Hotham) (21:24): We have been having an incredibly important debate in this House over the last few days about education funding. I rise tonight make a contribution to the debate on behalf of my constituents in Hotham.

During the election campaign in September—whether I was doing a street stall in the Oakleigh South shops, down in Springvale South looking at the primary school in the primary school in Athol Road or sharing lunch with the lovely elderly Greek ladies who have their weekly function in Bignell Road in East Bentleigh—the number 1 issue raised with me was education. I think the constituents of Hotham understand some things that we on this side of the House are all well aware of—that is, that education does not affect just parents or children but all Australians, that education is the way we bring about social equity in our country and that education is also an incredibly important part of driving the economy and productivity.
All parts of Australia need the Better Schools funding program, but I will talk specifically tonight about Hotham—the patch that I represent—and about the people who live in the area. Many of you know that Hotham is a very multicultural place; parts of my electorate would, in fact, be amongst the most multicultural in the whole of Australia. Like many areas—and I know some of the members behind me here have similar types of electorates—we in my local area have been the great beneficiaries of many waves of migration. Lots of Europeans came in the postwar period; lots of Latin Americans arrived in the 1970s; many migrants from Asia, particularly from Vietnam and Cambodia, arrived during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s; and, more recently, there has been a big influx of refugees from Sudan, the Middle East and Afghanistan.

We are very lucky to live in such an environment, of course. Students tell me that it makes school very lively and interesting, but teachers are frank about some of the issues that the make-up of the area causes them in the classroom. I hear from teachers that they are likely to be teaching a class in which the skills of their students vary widely. They might have students in the class who have been read to every day since they were very young children mixed with refugees who might have skipped years of their schooling and who have only been able to speak English for a few years. Schools with such classes would be the particular beneficiaries of the Better Schools program.

I will talk specifically now about a few schools in my electorate. One is Westall Secondary College, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Under the Better Schools funding, this school was to see an increase of 30 per cent on their overall funding; 79 per cent of the students at the school are from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Springvale Rise Primary School was to see a 35 per cent increase in funding; 87 per cent of its students are from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Tucker Road Bentleigh Primary School was to see a 56 per cent increase in its funding. Cheltenham Secondary College was going to see a 56 per cent—$6 million—increase in its funding. These are serious amounts of money.

We have the Better Schools program, and we have been discussing it. But those on the other side have made the very unfortunate decision to take away the schoolkids bonus, which was so important to local families in my electorate. There were 6,300 families receiving the schoolkids bonus. A typical family will, we know, lose up to $15,000 during their children's life at school. I attended the annual general meeting of the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau last week and met a mum from Dingley there who talked to me about a student, about to start year 10, whom she was helping. He was being strongly advised by his school that he would need a laptop, which would have cost $700. Out in Hotham, most families cannot find $700 at the beginning of the school year. This is exactly the kind of thing the schoolkids bonus was designed to assist families with.

That is not all that my local schools are contending with. We know that, under the new so-called agreement negotiated by Minister Pyne, the state government will have the ability to withdraw their own funding. The Victorian state government unfortunately has real form in doing this. There are two schools in my electorate, Clayton South Primary School and Coatesville Primary School, both of which had a commitment from the Labor government in Victoria, before 2010, to some new capital works. Three years later, neither school is aware of where the funding is going. In both instances the construction would have been complete by now, yet both schools have been left in limbo. In Victoria the state government even took
away Free Fruit Friday from primary schools. Taking fruit out of the hands of children is pretty small-minded and pretty mean.

All of us in this House know that politics is fundamentally about trust. Almost half of Australia's population are living in family units which have children in the home. Many of those people live in Hotham. My constituents tell me that they are not willing to put up with reductions in school funding, and that is the message I give today on behalf of the people of Hotham.

**Carbon Pricing**

Mr TUDGE (Aston—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (21:29): The carbon tax impacts my electorate more than many because it has such a large manufacturing base. Many of the manufacturers in my electorate are doing it tough.

So I use this opportunity to implore the Labor Party to honour our election mandate—and, indeed, to honour their own promise—and back the scrapping of the carbon tax. It would provide relief for manufacturers and provide cost of living relief for residents of my electorate and across Australia of, on average, $550 per family, per annum. Make the scrapping of the carbon tax a Christmas present for Australians.

House adjourned at 21:30

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

**Mr Pyne:** To present a Bill for an Act to amend the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000*, and for related purposes.

**Mr Morrison:** To present a Bill for an Act to amend the *Migration Act 1958*, and for related purposes.

**Mr Albanese:** To present a Bill for an Act to establish the High Speed Rail Planning Authority, and for related purposes.

**Ms Rishworth:** To move:

That this House:

1. notes the importance of having a well-trained medical workforce including doctors, nurses and allied health professionals for the sustainability of our health system;
2. acknowledges the work of Health Workforce Australia in increasing the percentage of clinical training days for students, with the most recently released figures demonstrating a 50 per cent increase in 2012 compared to 2010;
3. recognises that this increase in clinical training has been in part the result of the support provided to universities and health clinics through the Clinical Training Funding program;
4. notes with concern the evidence provided in Senate Estimates on the 20 November 2013 by the Assistant Minister for Health that unallocated funds to support clinical training are currently frozen; and
5. calls on the Government to immediately make available the money within Health Workforce Australia that assists universities and health services to make clinical placements available so that students can have improved access to placements in the upcoming academic year.
**Mr Husic:** To move:

That this House:

(1) notes with alarm the burden placed on the bushfire affected residents of the Blue Mountains and Central Coast via the combined mismanagement of recovery processes by the Australian and NSW governments;

(2) acknowledges that while emergency personnel and volunteers acted swiftly and bravely to minimise the impact of the horrific October fires, the Australian and NSW governments have made decisions that have hurt families and businesses in the aftermath of the fires, namely:
   (a) failing to extend full disaster relief support payments;
   (b) presiding over a poorly executed response to the clean-up process; and
   (c) breaking a promise by failing to provide consequential concessional loans to small businesses struggling to recover after the fires; and

(3) calls on both the Australian and NSW governments to urgently act to remedy this situation and assist homes and businesses to fully recover in a quicker timeframe.

**Ms Claydon:** To move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:
   (a) eating disorders and poor body image present a significant problem for both males and females in Australia; and
   (b) the social messages given to people by their family, friends, teachers, medical professionals and the media can have a significant negative or positive impact on a person’s body image; and

(2) calls on:
   (a) all Members of Parliament to take a leading role in the promotion of healthy living, exercise and positive body image in Australia; and
   (b) the Government to commit to continued support for the National Body Image awareness program.