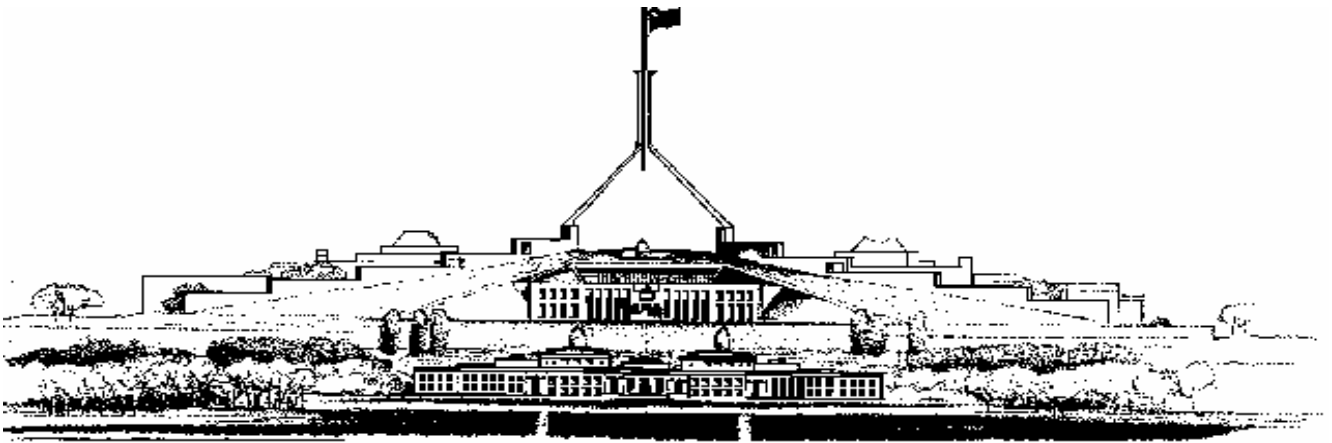




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 1, 2008

Thursday, 14 February 2008

FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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SITTING DAYS—2008

Month	Date
February	12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22
March	11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20
May	13, 14, 15, 16, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30
June	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26
August	26, 27, 28, 29
September	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
October	13, 14, 15, 16, 17,, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24
November	10, 11. 12, 13, 14, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28
December	1, 2, 3, 4

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<i>ADELAIDE</i>	972 AM
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<i>HOBART</i>	747 AM
<i>NORTHERN TASMANIA</i>	92.5 FM
<i>DARWIN</i>	102.5 FM

**FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD**

Governor-General

His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, Companion in the Order of Australia, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Military Cross

House of Representatives Officeholders

Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP

Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP

Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker's Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP, Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP, Ms Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Mr Albert John Schultz MP, Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP, Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Hon. Danna Sue Vale MP and Dr Malcolm James Washer MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP

Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Stephen Francis Smith MP

Leader of Opposition Business—Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP

Deputy Leader of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips

Australian Labor Party

Leader—Hon. Kevin Michael Rudd MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP

Chief Government Whip—Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price MP

Government Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP

Liberal Party of Australia

Leader—Hon. Brendan John Nelson MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alex Somlyay MP

Opposition Whip—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP

Deputy Opposition Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals

Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

Chief Whip—Mrs Kay Elizabeth Hull MP

Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Abbott, Hon. Anthony John	Warringah, NSW	LP
Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry	Lyons, Tas	ALP
Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman	Grayndler, NSW	ALP
Andrews, Hon. Kevin James	Menzies, Vic	LP
Bailey, Hon. Frances Esther	McEwen, Vic	LP
Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles	Paterson, NSW	LP
Bevis, Hon. Archibald Ronald	Brisbane, Qld	ALP
Bidgood, James Mark	Dawson, Qld	ALP
Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick	Dunkley, Vic	LP
Bird, Sharon Leah	Cunningham, NSW	ALP
Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen	Mackellar, NSW	LP
Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel	Curtin, WA	LP
Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles	Prospect, NSW	ALP
Bradbury, David John	Lindsay, NSW	ALP
Broadbent, Russell Evan	McMillan, Vic	LP
Burke, Anna Elizabeth	Chisholm, Vic	ALP
Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen	Watson, NSW	ALP
Butler, Mark Christopher	Port Adelaide, SA	ALP
Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael	Holt, Vic	ALP
Campbell, Jodie Louise	Bass, Tas	ALP
Champion, Nicholas David	Wakefield, SA	ALP
Cheeseman, Darren Leicester	Corangamite, Vic	ALP
Ciobo, Steven Michele	Moncrieff, Qld	LP
Clare, Jason Dean	Blaxland, NSW	ALP
Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth	Calare, NSW	Nats
Collins, Julie Maree	Franklin, Tas	ALP
Combet, Hon. Gregory Ivan, AM	Charlton, NSW	ALP
Costello, Hon. Peter Howard	Higgins, Vic	LP
Coulton, Mark Maclean	Parkes, NSW	Nats
Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay	Hotham, Vic	ALP
Danby, Michael David	Melbourne Ports, Vic	ALP
D'Ath, Yvette Maree	Petrie, Qld	ALP
Debus, Hon. Robert John	Macquarie, NSW	ALP
Downer, Hon. Alexander John Gosse	Mayo, SA	LP
Dreyfus, Mark Alfred, QC	Isaacs, Vic	ALP
Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig	Dickson, Qld	LP
Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine	Richmond, NSW	ALP
Ellis, Annette Louise	Canberra, ACT	ALP
Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret	Adelaide, SA	ALP
Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony	Rankin, Qld	ALP
Farmer, Hon. Patrick Francis	Macarthur, NSW	LP
Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas	Reid, NSW	ALP
Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM	Batman, Vic	ALP
Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew	Hunter, NSW	ALP
Forrest, John Alexander	Mallee, Vic	Nats
Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM	Kingsford Smith, NSW	ALP
Gash, Joanna	Gilmore, NSW	LP
Georganas, Steven	Hindmarsh, SA	ALP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
George, Jennie	Throsby, NSW	ALP
Georgiou, Petro	Kooyong, Vic	LP
Gibbons, Stephen William	Bendigo, Vic	ALP
Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen	Lalor, Vic	ALP
Gray, Hon. Gary, AO	Brand, WA	ALP
Grierson, Sharon Joy	Newcastle, NSW	ALP
Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter	Bruce, Vic	ALP
Haase, Barry Wayne	Kalgoorlie, WA	LP
Hale, Damian Francis	Solomon, NT	ALP
Hall, Jill Griffiths	Shortland, NSW	ALP
Hartsuyker, Luke	Cowper, NSW	Nats
Hawke, Alexander George	Mitchell, NSW	LP
Hawker, Hon. David Peter Maxwell	Wannon, Vic	LP
Hayes, Christopher Patrick	Werriwa, NSW	ALP
Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict	North Sydney, NSW	LP
Hull, Kay Elizabeth	Riverina, NSW	Nats
Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew	Flinders, Vic	LP
Irons, Stephen James	Swan, WA	LP
Irwin, Julia Claire	Fowler, NSW	ALP
Jackson, Sharryn Maree	Hasluck, WA	ALP
Jenkins, Henry Alfred	Scullin, Vic	ALP
Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey	Tangney, WA	LP
Johnson, Michael Andrew	Ryan, Qld	LP
Katter, Hon. Robert Carl	Kennedy, Qld	Ind
Keenan, Michael Fayat	Stirling, WA	LP
Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph	Eden-Monaro, NSW	ALP
Kerr, Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun, SC	Denison, Tas	ALP
King, Catherine Fiona	Ballarat, Vic	ALP
Laming, Andrew Charles	Bowman, Qld	LP
Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope	Farrer, NSW	LP
Lindsay, Hon. Peter John	Herbert, Qld	LP
Livermore, Kirsten Fiona	Capricornia, Qld	ALP
McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce	Barton, NSW	ALP
Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin	Groom, Qld	LP
McGauran, Hon. Peter John	Gippsland, Vic	NP
McKew, Hon. Maxine Margaret	Bennelong, NSW	ALP
Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise	Jagajaga, Vic	ALP
McMullan, Hon. Robert Francis	Fraser, ACT	ALP
Marino, Nola Bethwyn	Forrest, WA	LP
Markus, Louise Elizabeth	Greenway, NSW	LP
Marles, Richard Donald	Corio, Vic	ALP
May, Margaret Ann	McPherson, Qld	LP
Melham, Daryl	Banks, NSW	ALP
Mirabella, Sophie	Indi, Vic	LP
Morrison, Scott John	Cook, NSW	LP
Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor	Pearce, WA	LP
Murphy, Hon. John Paul	Lowe, NSW	ALP
Neal, Belinda Jane	Robertson, NSW	ALP
Nelson, Hon. Brendan John	Bradfield, NSW	LP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Neumann, Shayne Kenneth	Blair, Qld	ALP
Neville, Paul Christopher	Hinkler, Qld	Nats
O'Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick John	Gorton, Vic	ALP
Owens, Julie Ann	Parramatta, NSW	ALP
Parke, Melissa	Fremantle, WA	ALP
Pearce, Hon. Christopher John	Aston, Vic	LP
Perrett, Graham Douglas	Moreton, Qld	ALP
Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan	Sydney, NSW	ALP
Price, Hon. Leo Roger Spurway	Chifley, NSW	ALP
Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice	Sturt, SA	LP
Raguse, Brett Blair	Forde, Qld	ALP
Ramsey, Rowan Eric	Grey, SA	LP
Randall, Don James	Canning, WA	LP
Rea, Kerry Marie	Bonner, Qld	ALP
Ripoll, Bernard Fernand	Oxley, Qld	ALP
Rishworth, Amanda Louise	Kingston, SA	ALP
Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO	Goldstein, Vic	LP
Robert, Stuart Rowland	Fadden, Qld	LP
Roxon, Hon. Nicola Louise	Gellibrand, Vic	ALP
Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael	Griffith, Qld	ALP
Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell	Berowra, NSW	LP
Saffin, Janelle Anne	Page, NSW	ALP
Schultz, Albert John	Hume, NSW	LP
Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig	Maranoa, Qld	NP
Secker, Patrick Damien	Barker, SA	LP
Shorten, Hon. William Richard	Maribyrnong, Vic	ALP
Sidebottom, Peter Sid	Braddon, Tas	ALP
Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton	Cowan, WA	LP
Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil	Fisher, Qld	LP
Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn	Casey, Vic	LP
Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis	Perth, WA	ALP
Snowdon, Hon. Warren Edward	Lingiari, NT	ALP
Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael	Fairfax, Qld	LP
Southcott, Andrew John	Boothby, SA	LP
Stone, Hon. Sharman Nancy	Murray, Vic	LP
Sullivan, Jonathan Harold	Longman, Qld	ALP
Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell	Lilley, Qld	ALP
Symon, Michael Stuart	Deakin, Vic	ALP
Tanner, Hon. Lindsay James	Melbourne, Vic	ALP
Thomson, Craig Robert	Dobell, NSW	ALP
Thomson, Kelvin John	Wills, Vic	ALP
Trevor, Chris Allan	Flynn, Qld	ALP
Truss, Hon. Warren Errol	Wide Bay, Qld	Nats
Tuckey, Hon. Charles Wilson	O'Connor, WA	LP
Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh	Wentworth, NSW	LP
Turnour, James Pearce	Leichhardt, Qld	ALP
Vaile, Hon. Mark Anthony James	Lyne, NSW	Nats
Vale, Hon. Danna Sue	Hughes, NSW	LP
Vamvakinou, Maria	Calwell, Vic	ALP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Washer, Malcolm James	Moore, WA	LP
Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties	New England, NSW	Ind
Wood, Jason Peter	La Trobe, Vic	LP
Zappia, Tony	Makin, SA	ALP

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia;
Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

Heads of Parliamentary Departments

Clerk of the Senate—H Evans
Clerk of the House of Representatives—I C Harris AO
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—D Kenny (Acting)

RUDD MINISTRY

Prime Minister	Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP
Deputy Prime Minister,	
Minister for Education and	
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and	
Minister for Social Inclusion	Hon. Julia Gillard, MP
Treasurer	Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the	
Government in the Senate	Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Special Minister of State,	
Cabinet Secretary and	
Vice President of the Executive Council	Senator Hon. John Faulkner
Minister for Trade	Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs	Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Defence	Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP
Minister for Health and Ageing	Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and	
Indigenous Affairs	Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Finance and Deregulation	Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Devel-	
opment and Local Government and Leader of the House	Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital	
Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the	
Senate	Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research	Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Minister for Climate Change and Water	Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts	Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Attorney-General	Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Minister for Human Services and Manager of Government	
Business in the Senate	Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Resources and Energy and	
Minister for Tourism	Hon. Martin Ferguson MP

RUDD MINISTRY—*continued*

Minister for Home Affairs	Hon. Bob Debus
Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs	Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Ministers for Veterans' Affairs	Hon. Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women	Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Employment Participation	Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Defence Science and Personnel	Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation	Hon. Craig Emerson MP
Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Governance	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Ageing	Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Minister for Youth and Minister for Sport	Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare	Hon. Maxine McKew MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement	Hon. Greg Combet MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support	Hon. Mike Kelly MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia	Hon. Gary Gray MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Ser- vices	Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Parliamentary Secretary for International Development As- sistance	Hon. Bob McMullan MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs	Hon. Duncan Kerr MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister	Hon. Anthony Byrne MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Volun- tary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion	Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade	Hon. John Murphy MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Age- ing	Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Set- tlement Services	Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP

SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition	Hon. Brendan Nelson MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Employment, Business and Workplace Relations	Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Leader of the Nationals; Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Local Government	Hon. Warren Truss MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Defence	Senator Hon. Nick Minchin
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research	Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Shadow Treasurer	Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing and Leader of Opposition Business in the House	Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs	Hon. Andrew Robb MP
Shadow Minister for Trade	Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Shadow Minister for Families, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs and the Voluntary Sector	Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Shadow Minister for Human Services	Senator Hon. Helen Coonan
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training	Hon. Tony Smith MP
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Urban Water	Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation	Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate	Senator Hon. Chris Ellison
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy	Hon. Bruce Billson MP
Shadow Attorney-General	Senator Hon. George Brandis
Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy, Tourism	Senator Hon. David Johnston
Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Water Security	Hon. John Cobb MP
Shadow Minister for Justice, Border Protection and Assisting Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	Hon. Chris Pyne, MP
Shadow Special Minister of State	Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Small Business, the Service Economy and Tourism	Steven Ciobo MP
Shadow Minister for Environment, Heritage, the Arts and Indigenous Affairs	Hon. Sharman Stone MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer, Shadow Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Governance	Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing	Margaret May MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence	Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Business Development, Independent Contractors and Consumer Affairs, Deputy Leader of Opposition Business in the House	Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs	Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Employment Participation and Apprenticeships and Training	Andrew Southcott MP

SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued*

Shadow Minister for Housing, Shadow Minister for Status of Women	Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Youth, and Shadow Minister for Sport	Hon. Pat Farmer MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Cabinet Secretary	Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition, Northern Australia	Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health	Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education	Senator Hon. Brett Mason
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence	Hon. Peter Lindsay MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Roads and Transport	Barry Haase MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Trade	John Forrest MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship	Louise Markus MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government	Sophie Mirabella MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism	Jo Gash MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Ageing and the Voluntary Sector	Mark Coulton MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs	Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families, Community Services	Senator Cory Bernardi

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Thursday, 14 February 2008

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins)
took the chair at 9 am and read prayers.

TREASURER**Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (9.00 am)—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Treasurer being censured for misleading this House by stating in Question Time yesterday that he “cannot confirm” the appointment of Mr Bracks to head a major review of the Car Industry or that his own department had recommended that the Productivity Commission be appointed to conduct the inquiry in circumstances when:

- (a) he was fully aware of that appointment;
- (b) he had, in fact, attended a meeting of the Strategic Budget Committee of Cabinet on 30 January 2008 when the appointment was agreed; and
- (c) he had received and disregarded Treasury advice that the review should instead be conducted by the Productivity Commission.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Hockey—What about accountability and transparency?

The SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for North Sydney will get transparency.

Mr TURNBULL—Mr Speaker—

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (9.02 am)—I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

Question put.

The House divided. [9.06 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes..... 78

Noes..... 63

Majority..... 15

AYES

Adams, D.G.H.	Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R.	Bidgood, J.
Bird, S.	Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J.	Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S.	Butler, M.C.
Champion, N.	Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D.	Collins, J.M.
Combet, G.	Crean, S.F.
D'Ath, Y.M.	Danby, M.
Debus, B.	Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J.	Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K.	Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.	Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.	Garrett, P.
Georganas, S.	George, J.
Gibbons, S.W.	Gillard, J.E.
Gray, G.	Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P.	Hale, D.F.
Hall, J.G. *	Hayes, C.P. *
Irwin, J.	Jackson, S.M.
Kelly, M.J.	Kerr, D.J.C.
King, C.F.	Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L.	Marles, R.D.
McClelland, R.B.	McKew, M.
McMullan, R.F.	Melham, D.
Murphy, J.	Neal, B.J.
Neumann, S.K.	Owens, J.
Parke, M.	Perrett, G.D.
Plibersek, T.	Price, L.R.S.
Raguse, B.B.	Rea, K.M.
Ripoll, B.F.	Rishworth, A.L.
Roxon, N.L.	Saffin, J.A.
Shorten, W.R.	Sidebottom, S.
Smith, S.F.	Snowdon, W.E.
Sullivan, J.	Swan, W.M.
Symon, M.	Tanner, L.
Thomson, C.	Thomson, K.J.
Trevor, C.	Turnour, J.P.
Vamvakinou, M.	Zappia, A.

NOES

Abbott, A.J.	Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E.	Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F.	Bishop, B.K.
Bishop, J.I.	Broadbent, R.

Ciobo, S.M.	Cobb, J.K.
Costello, P.H.	Coulton, M.
Dutton, P.C.	Farmer, P.F.
Forrest, J.A.	Gash, J.
Georgiou, P.	Haase, B.W.
Hartsuyker, L.	Hawke, A.
Hawker, D.P.M.	Hockey, J.B.
Hull, K.E. *	Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J.	Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A. *	Keenan, M.
Laming, A.	Ley, S.P.
Lindsay, P.J.	Macfarlane, I.E.
Marino, N.B.	Markus, L.E.
May, M.A.	McGauran, P.J.
Mirabella, S.	Morrison, S.J.
Moylan, J.E.	Nelson, B.J.
Neville, P.C.	Pearce, C.J.
Pyne, C.	Ramsey, R.
Randall, D.J.	Robb, A.
Robert, S.R.	Ruddock, P.M.
Scott, B.C.	Secker, P.D.
Simpkins, L.	Slipper, P.N.
Smith, A.D.H.	Somlyay, A.M.
Southcott, A.J.	Stone, S.N.
Truss, W.E.	Tuckey, C.W.
Turnbull, M.	Vale, D.S.
Washer, M.J.	Windsor, A.H.C.
Wood, J.	
* denotes teller	

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (9.14 am)—I second the motion. So much for accountability—

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (9.14 am)—I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is the second occasion that you have called a member from the opposition side where the microphones have not been on. I would ask you to ask the attendants, or the people responsible to do it, to make sure that the microphones—

Mr Melham interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The honourable member for North Sydney will resume his seat. There are often times when people in the chair would like to have control over the microphones, and they would probably be off all the time. I acknowledge the point that has been raised by the member for North Sydney. I have been taking proceedings on the basis of who I have given the call to, and that means that that is appropriate. Hopefully Hansard will have a record of what went on, and I am sure that those who need to be advised about flicking the switch will flick the switch, and the honourable member for Banks is an early candidate to go and assist. If somebody can remind me where I was, I think we have a motion that the member be no longer heard.

Question put.

The House divided. [9.17 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes.....	79
Noes.....	<u>63</u>
Majority.....	<u>16</u>

AYES

Adams, D.G.H.	Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R.	Bidgood, J.
Bird, S.	Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J.	Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S.	Butler, M.C.
Champion, N.	Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D.	Collins, J.M.
Combet, G.	Crean, S.F.
D'Ath, Y.M.	Danby, M.
Debus, B.	Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J.	Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K.	Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.	Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.	Garrett, P.
Georganas, S.	George, J.
Gibbons, S.W.	Gillard, J.E.
Gray, G.	Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P.	Hale, D.F.
Hall, J.G. *	Hayes, C.P. *
Irwin, J.	Jackson, S.M.
Kelly, M.J.	Kerr, D.J.C.

King, C.F.	Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L.	Marles, R.D.
McClelland, R.B.	McKew, M.
McMullan, R.F.	Melham, D.
Murphy, J.	Neal, B.J.
Neumann, S.K.	O'Connor, B.P.
Owens, J.	Parke, M.
Perrett, G.D.	Plibersek, T.
Price, L.R.S.	Raguse, B.B.
Rea, K.M.	Ripoll, B.F.
Rishworth, A.L.	Roxon, N.L.
Saffin, J.A.	Shorten, W.R.
Sidebottom, S.	Smith, S.F.
Snowdon, W.E.	Sullivan, J.
Swan, W.M.	Symon, M.
Tanner, L.	Thomson, C.
Thomson, K.J.	Trevor, C.
Turnour, J.P.	Vamvakinou, M.
Zappia, A.	

NOES

Abbott, A.J.	Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E.	Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F.	Bishop, B.K.
Bishop, J.I.	Broadbent, R.
Ciobo, S.M.	Cobb, J.K.
Costello, P.H.	Coulton, M.
Dutton, P.C.	Farmer, P.F.
Forrest, J.A.	Gash, J.
Georgiou, P.	Haase, B.W.
Hartsuyker, L.	Hawke, A.
Hawker, D.P.M.	Hockey, J.B.
Hull, K.E. *	Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J.	Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A. *	Keenan, M.
Laming, A.	Ley, S.P.
Lindsay, P.J.	Macfarlane, I.E.
Marino, N.B.	Markus, L.E.
May, M.A.	McGauran, P.J.
Mirabella, S.	Morrison, S.J.
Moylan, J.E.	Nelson, B.J.
Neville, P.C.	Pearce, C.J.
Pyne, C.	Ramsey, R.
Randall, D.J.	Robb, A.
Robert, S.R.	Ruddock, P.M.
Scott, B.C.	Secker, P.D.
Simpkins, L.	Slipper, P.N.
Smith, A.D.H.	Somlyay, A.M.
Southcott, A.J.	Stone, S.N.
Truss, W.E.	Tuckey, C.W.

Turnbull, M.	Vale, D.S.
Washer, M.J.	Windsor, A.H.C.
Wood, J.	

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER—The question now is that the motion for the suspension of standing and sessional orders be agreed to.

A division having been called and the bells being rung—

Mr Broadbent—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. If this grave matter were held on a Friday sitting, this could not take place, I take it. There would be no—

The SPEAKER—That is not a point of order. It might be an observation, but it is not a point of order.

Original question put:

That the motion (**Mr Turnbull's**) be agreed to.

The House divided. [9.20 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes.....	62
Noes.....	<u>80</u>
Majority.....	<u>18</u>

AYES

Abbott, A.J.	Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E.	Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F.	Bishop, B.K.
Bishop, J.I.	Broadbent, R.
Ciobo, S.M.	Cobb, J.K.
Costello, P.H.	Coulton, M.
Dutton, P.C.	Farmer, P.F.
Forrest, J.A.	Gash, J.
Georgiou, P.	Haase, B.W.
Hartsuyker, L.	Hawke, A.
Hawker, D.P.M.	Hockey, J.B.
Hull, K.E. *	Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J.	Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A. *	Keenan, M.
Laming, A.	Ley, S.P.
Lindsay, P.J.	Macfarlane, I.E.
Marino, N.B.	Markus, L.E.
May, M.A.	McGauran, P.J.
Mirabella, S.	Morrison, S.J.

Moylan, J.E.
Neville, P.C.
Pyne, C.
Randall, D.J.
Robert, S.R.
Scott, B.C.
Simpkins, L.
Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J.
Truss, W.E.
Turnbull, M.
Washer, M.J.

Nelson, B.J.
Pearce, C.J.
Ramsey, R.
Robb, A.
Ruddock, P.M.
Secker, P.D.
Slipper, P.N.
Somlyay, A.M.
Stone, S.N.
Tuckey, C.W.
Vale, D.S.
Wood, J.

Thomson, C.

Trevor, C.

Vamvakinou, M.

* denotes teller

Thomson, K.J.

Turnour, J.P.

Zappia, A.

Question negatived.

SPEAKER'S PANEL

The SPEAKER—Pursuant to standing order 17, I lay on the table my warrant nominating the honourable members for Lyons, Pearce, Barker and Braddon to be members of the Speaker's panel to assist the chair when requested to do so by the Speaker or Deputy Speaker.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ENHANCED ALLOWANCES) BILL 2008

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Ms Macklin**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (9.28 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill delivers on the government's \$4 billion election commitment to help older Australians, carers and people with disability make ends meet.

It will give much needed financial support to around three million eligible Australians who are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, including pensioners and self-funded retirees.

This government understands the cost of living pressures faced by many in our community.

Increases in the cost of living and staple items like food and housing mean those on fixed incomes and those caring for the most vulnerable in our society need our support.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.
Bevis, A.R.
Bird, S.
Bradbury, D.J.
Burke, A.S.
Campbell, J.
Cheeseman, D.L.
Collins, J.M.
Crean, S.F.
Danby, M.
Dreyfus, M.A.
Ellis, A.L.
Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, M.J.
Garrett, P.
George, J.
Gillard, J.E.
Grierson, S.J.
Hale, D.F.
Hayes, C.P. *
Jackson, S.M.
Kerr, D.J.C.
Livermore, K.F.
Marles, R.D.
McKew, M.
Melham, D.
Neal, B.J.
O'Connor, B.P.
Parke, M.
Plibersek, T.
Raguse, B.B.
Ripoll, B.F.
Roxon, N.L.
Shorten, W.R.
Smith, S.F.
Sullivan, J.
Symon, M.

Albanese, A.N.
Bidgood, J.
Bowen, C.
Burke, A.E.
Butler, M.C.
Champion, N.
Clare, J.D.
Combet, G.
D'Ath, Y.M.
Debus, B.
Elliot, J.
Ellis, K.
Ferguson, L.D.T.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Georganas, S.
Gibbons, S.W.
Gray, G.
Griffin, A.P.
Hall, J.G. *
Irwin, J.
Kelly, M.J.
King, C.F.
Macklin, J.L.
McClelland, R.B.
McMullan, R.F.
Murphy, J.
Neumann, S.K.
Owens, J.
Perrett, G.D.
Price, L.R.S.
Rea, K.M.
Rishworth, A.L.
Saffin, J.A.
Sidebottom, S.
Snowdon, W.E.
Swan, W.M.
Tanner, L.

That is why the government is acting to help with these pressures.

Since being elected, we have already announced an inquiry into grocery prices, and we are delivering on our commitment for a full-time petrol commissioner.

Today we are delivering on another commitment, to increase utilities and telephone allowances for eligible seniors, carers and people with disability.

This bill will amend the social security law, the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 to give increased, and more timely, financial support to older Australians, people with a disability, carers and veterans.

Through these measures, these Australians on fixed incomes will be able to plan more easily to meet their regular financial commitments.

First, the bill will help older Australians receiving income support payments such as age pension and veterans service pension by significantly increasing the utilities allowance. This measure will benefit over 1.7 million aged income support recipients, 250,000 Commonwealth seniors health card holders, 700,000 disability support pensioners and 120,000 carer payment recipients. The annual rate of utilities allowance will increase from \$107.20 to \$500 and will be paid in quarterly instalments of \$125 for singles and eligible couples combined. This equals a total annual payment of \$500 for singles and \$250 for each member of a couple. We understand that these bills come in four times a year so that is why the allowance will be paid quarterly. Paying the allowance regularly gives older Australians peace of mind and certainty that they will have the funds on hand to pay their bills.

Secondly, the bill expands the qualification criteria for utilities allowance to cover people under pension or qualifying age and

receiving a carer payment, a disability support pension, an invalidity service pension, a partner service pension, an income support supplement, a bereavement allowance, a widow B pension or a wife pension. This equals a total annual payment of \$500 for singles and \$250 for each member of a couple in one of these new groups.

Under these first two elements, more Australians will receive more support to help with their utilities costs.

Thirdly, the bill significantly increases the rate of seniors concession allowance, which is paid to self-funded retirees, from \$218 to a total annual payment of \$500 for each eligible individual. In another change to make life easier for seniors, this higher rate will also be paid on a quarterly basis on the same days as utilities allowance.

Lastly, the bill provides a higher rate of telephone allowance for older Australians, carers and people with a disability if they receive income support and have an internet connection at home. The new rate of \$132 a year for singles will be available to those who have a home internet connection, an increase from the standard rate of telephone allowance of \$88 a year.

The higher rate of telephone allowance will also be available for eligible veterans and their dependants who have an internet connection at home.

The government understands that, in today's Australia, the internet is a critical means for families to stay in touch with their loved ones. Some Australians on income support pensions and payments can be at risk of becoming isolated from the community, and that is why we are helping them stay in touch with friends, children and grandchildren around the country and the world via the internet. Affordable home access to the internet has the potential to connect them

with a new world of communication, information and entertainment.

The government is proud to be delivering on these important election commitments.

Debate (on motion by **Mr John Cobb**) adjourned.

**HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT
AMENDMENT (VET FEE-HELP
ASSISTANCE) BILL 2008**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Ms Gillard**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (9.35 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Assistance) Bill 2008 is to implement the original policy intent of the VET FEE-HELP legislation passed through the parliament last year. That legislation extended the FEE-HELP student loan scheme to important parts of the vocational education and training sector, but it was poorly framed and now requires the corrections set out in this bill in order to operate effectively.

Consequently it has fallen to this parliament and to the Rudd Labor government to fix the incompetence of the Howard-Costello government and specifically the incompetence of the former minister for education, who is now the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

It is to be regretted that parliamentary time needs to be devoted to this patch-up job. But unfortunately there is no choice. If the errors in the current legislation are not corrected they will have budgetary consequences.

The objective of VET FEE-HELP is to provide an Australian government loan to ease the up-front financial burden for full-fee paying students in high level vocational education and training courses, including diploma and advanced diploma courses that have appropriate credit transfer into a higher education award.

Specifically the amendment will ensure:

- VET FEE-HELP is restricted to eligible full-fee paying students in diploma, advanced diploma, graduate certificate and graduate diploma courses; and
- VET providers have credit transfer arrangements with a higher education provider in place for each VET accredited diploma or advanced diploma qualification.

As it stands the current legislation does not achieve these aims and if left without amendment could result in an unintended extension of FEE-HELP far beyond the stated intention.

Such extension is not budgeted for in the forward estimates and could prove extremely costly. In the current inflationary climate such an unintended expenditure cannot be justified.

The current legislation fails to adequately set out the fee arrangements under which VET FEE-HELP can be offered to a student, leaving this wide open to a full range of VET courses. The proposed amendments ensure that VET FEE-HELP is to be made available only to students paying full fees, and a mechanism is put in place to ensure that the minister has clear information from VET providers on this matter.

Further, the current legislation does not ensure that, in order to offer VET FEE-HELP to students, VET providers must have credit transfer arrangements in place. This is corrected in the proposed amendments.

Increasing Australia's productivity is critical to our future economic prosperity and enhancing the skills and capacity of our workforce is a key to productivity. VET FEE-HELP provides a strong financial underpinning to help more Australians gain essential skills through vocational education and training.

VET FEE-HELP enhances opportunities for individuals to pursue study in the vocational education and training sector at the diploma level and above without the disincentive of up-front payment of full fees. FEE-HELP loans are not subject to income and assets tests and repayments do not commence until an individual's income is above a minimum repayment threshold.

VET FEE-HELP will create opportunities for Australians to pursue new careers or lift their qualification levels to diploma, advanced diploma, graduate certificate or graduate diploma. It opens the way for greater movement between vocational education and higher education. Aligning student financing arrangements between the sectors reduces the funding inconsistencies which can sometimes get in the way of students seeking to move between the sectors. It also eases the administrative load for multisector providers of both VET and higher education.

We anticipate that over the next four years more than 6,000 students will benefit under this scheme.

Higher level VET qualifications are the way of the future for skills development—and the Rudd Labor government has made them a centrepiece of its Skilling Australia for the Future policy.

Our Skilling Australia for the Future policy will increase and deepen the skills capacity of the Australian workforce. The government's plan for our future skilled workforce will close the skills gap in the Australian economy in three key ways: firstly, by fund-

ing an additional 450,000 training places over the next four years.

The first 20,000 of these new training places will be available from April 2008. These initial places will be directed to those outside the workforce and will help many Australians gain employment and stimulate workforce participation rates.

Secondly, we will ensure that most of the 450,000 places lead to a higher level qualification.

The new places will offer high-quality training opportunities which better suit the needs of our economy in the future. In an increasingly globalised world, we need to increase not only the number of Australians with skills and qualifications but also the depth of skills in our workforce if we are to drive up productivity and compete internationally.

The Business Council of Australia estimates that nearly half of the qualifications needed to meet the predicted demand for skilled workers over the next decade will need to be at certificate III level or above.

A 2007 study by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research highlighted the importance of associate professional occupations in the context of globalisation, technological change and the changing nature of work yet shows that in recent years there has been a decrease in the level of participation in diploma and advanced diploma qualifications in the vocational education and training sector.

Thirdly, we are placing industry demand at the heart of the skills training system through setting up Skills Australia and by strengthening industry skills councils.

The Rudd Labor government's Skilling Australia for the Future policy will give skills training in critical high-level skills a much-needed boost. VET FEE-HELP pro-

vides an important underpinning for growing participation in high-level skills training.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr John Cobb**) adjourned.

**INDIGENOUS EDUCATION
(TARGETED ASSISTANCE)
AMENDMENT (2008 MEASURES No. 1)
BILL 2008**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Ms Gillard**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (9.42 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Yesterday marked a significant moment in Australia's history, with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offering an apology to the stolen generations as the first act of business of the 42nd Parliament. The historic act of saying sorry, after decades of division and despair, heralds the opportunity for a new beginning for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to reconcile and move forward as one nation. Saying sorry is an important and symbolic act of recognition of the past hurts and mistreatment suffered by the stolen generations. But, as the Prime Minister acknowledged yesterday, it is an act that must now be followed through with practical measures to overcome the extreme disadvantage faced by too many Indigenous Australians.

This is an issue that is beyond partisan politics. Yesterday the Prime Minister reached out to the Leader of the Opposition to form a new partnership across party lines, to form a joint policy commission to start

work on closing the gap in housing—an offer which was accepted in a true bipartisan spirit.

We must set practical targets and act on them urgently. We must close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. The Prime Minister yesterday made a commitment to close the gap in life expectancy, in educational achievement and in employment opportunities; a commitment to halve the gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous Australians within a decade; and a commitment to halve the gap in infant mortality rates and life expectancy within a generation.

Education is the foundation upon which every individual builds his or her participation in society, their capacity to work and their ability to lead a healthy and active life. There is much work to be done to close the gap in education. Despite the fact that all the evidence shows us that, if you finish school you improve your chances of getting a further qualification, getting a job and increasing your lifetime earnings, only four in 10 Indigenous students stay at school until year 12. This is 35 per cent lower than the 75 per cent of non-Indigenous students who stay at school. The most recent national literacy and numeracy benchmark data shows that in all areas across Australia the percentage of Indigenous students meeting the benchmarks is significantly lower than for non-Indigenous students. Most concerning are the results for Indigenous students in year 7 numeracy. Less than half—only 48 per cent—of Indigenous students met the benchmark in 2006. The gap between Indigenous and all students in the 2006 benchmarks range from 13 percentage points in year 3 reading to 32 percentage points in year 7 numeracy. We will focus strongly on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for Indigenous children and on closing these unacceptable gaps between the

achievements and opportunities of our Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. This bill is a small but important first step.

There are an estimated 10,000 school-aged children in Indigenous communities who are part of the Northern Territory emergency response measures. Of these, the best estimates are that only some 8,000 are enrolled at school, leaving up to 2,000 school-aged children not enrolled at all. A further 2,500 enrolled students do not attend school regularly enough to benefit from their educational experience. If we are to encourage these young Indigenous people to come to school we need to have enough teachers ready to teach them. The Rudd Labor government is therefore committed to providing funding for an additional 200 teachers in the Northern Territory over the next four years. The government is determined to play its part with practical measures such as this and to work with Indigenous people and Northern Territory education providers to ensure that these young people receive the education they need and deserve.

This bill amends the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000 by appropriating additional funding of \$7.162 million over the 2008 school year for the recruitment of 50 of these additional 200 teachers. Additional funding of \$56.8 million will also be provided through subsequent acts for the remaining 150 teachers over the years 2009-11. Funding will be provided to Northern Territory education providers to recruit and employ the additional teachers. Northern Territory education providers will be responsible for deploying and housing the teachers employed through this initiative. I am also pleased to announce that I have recently approved funding for a number of complementary measures for Indigenous students in the Northern Territory, including a qualified teaching and accelerated literacy package to ensure that students benefit from

a high-quality teaching workforce and additional classrooms to ensure that existing infrastructure meets the demands of anticipated enrolment increases. The government has also promised to build three new boarding colleges for Indigenous secondary students in the Northern Territory and to expand intensive literacy and numeracy programs. While these challenges are daunting, this bill contains the first of many practical measures this government will bring forward in a renewed spirit of reconciliation and partnership with Indigenous Australia to begin closing the gap in educational outcomes. I acknowledge in the gallery Warren Mundine. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr John Cobb**) adjourned.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (PERSONAL INCOME TAX REDUCTION) BILL 2008

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Swan**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (9.49 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The amendments contained in this bill will cut personal income tax for all Australian taxpayers from 1 July 2008, and implement important taxation reforms that have been long championed by the newly elected government.

These tax reforms are designed to reward the hard work of Australians whose efforts are so critical to keeping the economy strong. They are also a down payment on a more internationally competitive tax system that will enhance the economy's productive capacity and help attract and retain highly skilled workers.

In order to continue our remarkable 17-year-long economic expansion it is necessary to draw more Australians into the labour market. The tax reforms contained in this bill are designed to do just that.

Lifting the supply of labour is a key component of the government's five-point plan to tackle inflation. Labour shortages are now widespread and employers frequently report they are the No. 1 one constraint on business expansion.

By expanding the pool of labour available to businesses they are better able to meet the high levels of demand they are facing for the goods and services they provide.

This tax reform package will significantly improve the financial incentives for second-income earners and those on welfare benefits to make the transition into the workforce or increase their hours of work. These incentives will be reinforced by other measures to be implemented by the government, including the 50 percent childcare tax rebate and 450,000 additional skills training places.

Economic modelling undertaken by the Treasury indicates the personal income tax reforms alone will lift aggregate labour supply by around 65,000 persons in the medium term. This increase in workers, together with the increase in the effort of existing workers, will make available around 2.5 million additional hours of work to the economy each week.

These tax reforms will also enhance the incentives for taxpayers to upgrade their skills and gain higher qualifications by allowing workers to keep more of the wage gains that come with being more highly skilled and productive.

The tax reforms in this bill are fiscally responsible. They will be progressively phased in, taking effect in three stages: from 1 July 2008, 1 July 2009 and 1 July 2010.

This phased introduction will ensure that the increased disposable income that flows from the tax reductions will better match the anticipated improvement in the productive capacity of the economy in the years ahead. It should also be noted that the tax reductions will be accompanied by new savings incentives, such as the government's new first home saver accounts, which will encourage eligible taxpayers to make the most of their disposable income gains by boosting their savings efforts.

Importantly, the new tax measures that take effect in the first year are focused on taxpayers that have the greatest labour supply response.

From 1 July this year, the government will increase the 30 per cent marginal tax rate threshold so that the 15 per cent marginal tax rate will apply up to \$34,000 of income, an increase in the threshold of \$4,000.

In addition, the low income tax offset will be increased from \$750 to \$1,200. It will continue to phase out at 4c for every dollar of income above \$30,000. This means that those eligible for the full low-income tax offset will not incur a net income tax liability until their annual income exceeds \$14,000.

Importantly and also for the first time, from 1 July 2008, low-income earners will receive half the benefit of this offset through their regular pay, rather than receiving the total as a lump sum when their income tax returns are assessed. This will ensure that they receive more timely tax relief in their take-home pay and will sharpen incentives to participate in the workforce.

Further tax cuts will apply from 1 July 2009, including an increase in the 30 per cent marginal tax rate threshold, so that the 15 per cent marginal tax rate will apply up to \$35,000 of income. In addition, the 40 per cent marginal tax rate will be reduced to 38 per cent.

The low-income tax offset will be increased from \$1,200 to \$1,350 from 1 July 2009. This means that those eligible for the full low-income tax offset will not incur a net income tax liability until their annual income exceeds \$15,000.

From 1 July 2010, the threshold for the 30 per cent marginal tax rate will increase so that the 15 per cent marginal tax rate will apply up to \$37,000 of income. In addition, the 38 per cent marginal tax rate will be reduced to 37 per cent.

The low-income tax offset will also be increased from \$1,350 to \$1,500 from 1 July 2010. This means that those eligible for the full low-income tax offset will not incur a net tax liability until their annual income exceeds \$16,000.

Importantly, this plan provides the greatest tax cuts in percentage terms to those most in need—low- and middle-income earners. Compared with their income tax liability for 2007-08, not taking into account the Medicare levy, a person with taxable income of \$20,000 will have an income tax reduction of around 56 per cent, a person with taxable income of \$50,000 will have an income tax reduction of around 18 per cent and a person with taxable income of \$100,000 will have an income tax reduction of around eight per cent by 2010-11.

I also note that the increase in the 30 per cent threshold and the low-income tax offset will provide a greater incentive for those outside the workforce to re-enter it and for those in part-time work to take on additional hours.

As a result of the increases in the low-income tax offset and the threshold for the 30 per cent tax rate, the income up to which senior Australians eligible for the senior Australians tax offset do not pay income tax will also increase.

From 1 July 2008, senior Australians who are eligible for the senior Australians tax offset will not pay income tax until they reach an annual income of \$28,867 for singles and \$24,680 for each member of a couple. From 1 July 2009, these income levels will increase to \$29,867 for singles and \$25,680 for each member of a couple. From 1 July 2010, these income levels will increase further to \$30,685 for singles and \$26,680 for each member of a couple.

This package provides more than \$30 billion of benefit to taxpayers over the period to 2010-11 and will enhance Australia's reputation as a low-tax country. This tax plan has been developed within the context of a responsible fiscal envelope to enhance individual incentive and workforce participation, particularly for part-time workers and secondary earners. Overall, these tax cuts will deliver assistance to working Australians under financial pressure and help prepare Australia for its future economic challenges.

The tax reforms contained in this bill are the first stage in the government's tax plan to flatten Australia's personal income tax system, by reducing the number of income tax rates from four to three—with a personal income tax scale of 15 per cent, 30 per cent and 40 per cent—and a more generous low-income tax offset delivering an effective tax-free threshold of \$20,000 to low-income earners. These further reforms will be implemented in due course as economic circumstances allow.

Full details of the amendments in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mrs May**) adjourned.

**THERAPEUTIC GOODS AMENDMENT
(POISONS STANDARD) BILL 2008****First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Ms Roxon**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (9.59 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I must say it is nice to be presenting my first bill as a minister and to have so many familiar faces up in the gallery today. I suspect they might be here for a rather different first speech, but it is nevertheless nice to have people here who are so friendly to our cause.

This bill makes a number of amendments to the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 to address the legal consequences arising from a recent decision of the Federal Court in *Roche Products v National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee* on 30 August 2007. In that case the Federal Court held that decisions made by the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee under subsection 52D(2) of the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989, which include decisions to amend the Poisons Standard, are legislative in character.

On the basis of that decision, it is likely that the Poisons Standard and its amendments are legislative instruments for the purpose of the Legislative Instruments Act 2003. As such, they are required to be registered in the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments, known as FRLI, to be enforceable. However, as they were treated as non-legislative instruments prior to the Federal Court decision in *Roche*, the Poisons Standard and amendments made to it up to the time of the *Roche* decision have not been registered in FRLI. Furthermore, as certain amendments made to the Poisons Standard were not registered within the periods speci-

fied by the Legislative Instruments Act, that act operates to repeal the amendments. It is therefore necessary to reinstate those amendments, and provide for the integrity and enforceability of the Poisons Standard up until the *Roche* decision.

The Poisons Standard consists of decisions made by the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee, established under the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989, regarding the classification of drugs and poisons into different schedules, from schedule 1 to 9, signifying the degree of risk. The Poisons Standard also contains a number of appendices which supplement the schedules by setting out additional controls, qualifications and exemptions affecting substances contained in the schedules. The higher the schedule, the higher the risk attributed to a relevant substance. Substances are then regulated under relevant state and territory legislation depending upon in which schedule the substances are included.

The Poisons Standard is also relied upon by the Commonwealth under the Therapeutic Goods Act for regulatory and enforcement purposes, such as for regulating advertising and labelling in connection with certain medicines.

Scheduling and rescheduling decisions by the committee are made based upon considerations of public health and safety, balanced with the need for public access to a substance. The committee may, for example, reschedule a 'prescription only' medicine to a 'pharmacist only' medicine on this basis, or vice-versa; or prohibit a substance from general access by the public to reduce the risk of abuse or dependence. It is therefore necessary in the interest of public health and safety to ensure that regulatory actions taken in reliance upon scheduling decisions made by the committee continue to operate.

To this end, the bill reinstates any scheduling decisions that may have been repealed, and puts beyond doubt that scheduling decisions made before the Roche decision are enforceable because they are deemed to have complied with the requirements of the Legislative Instruments Act.

The retrospective effect of the amendments will not add any new regulatory requirement. Rather, the retrospective effect of the amendments is necessary to preserve the status quo of the Poisons Standard, and amendments made to it, before the Roche decision. Decisions and actions taken by both the regulator and business relied upon the enforceability and integrity of the Poisons Standard and its amendments, and the retrospective effect of the bill is necessary to provide certainty for those decisions and actions.

The bill also makes it clear that the Poisons Standard and amendments made to it are exempt from the parliamentary disallowance process. This exemption recognises that it is inappropriate for Commonwealth instruments forming part of an intergovernmental scheme to be unilaterally disallowed, and the exemption is consistent with the operation of subsection 44(1) of the Legislative Instruments Act 2003. The exemption is also appropriate because of the need to ensure certainty in the continuing application of state and territory laws which refer to the Poisons Standard.

The bill also provides for a compensation regime in the event that the operation of the amendments to the act should result in an acquisition of property from a person other than on just terms.

Debate (on motion by **Mrs May**) adjourned.

CLASSIFICATION (PUBLICATIONS, FILMS AND COMPUTER GAMES) AMENDMENT (ASSESSMENTS AND ADVERTISING) BILL 2008

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Debus**.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr DEBUS (Macquarie—Minister for Home Affairs) (10.05 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The National Classification Scheme operates to classify the content of a range of entertainment media and provide important information to consumers about that content.

The Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Amendment (Assessments and Advertising) Bill 2008 contains two areas of reform to classification procedures. First, it changes the way the Classification Act deals with the advertising of unclassified product and, second, it changes the classification procedures for box sets of television series that are released for sale or hire.

The bill makes these amendments to improve the operation of the National Classification Scheme and to respond to the ever-changing technological environment for entertainment media.

The first initiative is part of a package of reforms which, together with amendments to state and territory legislation, will replace the prohibition on advertising unclassified films and computer games with a new scheme that will allow advertising, subject to conditions. Those conditions will be set out in a new Commonwealth instrument. The new advertising scheme was developed following public consultation on a discussion paper and has been the subject of discussions with state and territory censorship ministers.

The package of reforms will update the definition of advertisement to explicitly include advertising on the internet, and to exclude what is commonly known as product merchandising such as clothing. This recognises where consumers get their classification information from.

Currently there is a prohibition on advertising unclassified films and computer games. A limited number of exemptions is available for cinema release products. The increasing risk of piracy and rapid advances in technology have led to products being available for classification very close to their release date. The current system therefore causes difficulties for marketing of classifiable products. In light of these changing circumstances, it is no longer tenable to prohibit the advertising of unclassified material.

This bill enables a legislative instrument to set conditions on advertising unclassified films and computer games. The instrument will establish a strong new advertising message advising consumers to: Check the Classification.

The public expects, if a film is advertised before a film at a cinema, or on a DVD, that it will be suitable for the audience for the feature they have chosen to see. The same applies to advertisements accompanying computer games. So the instrument will permit unclassified films and computer games to be advertised only with films or computer games likely to be of the same or higher classification.

The instrument will establish an industry based self-assessment scheme whereby the likely classification of an unclassified film or computer game is assessed when advertising together with classified films or computer games. The instrument will introduce a stronger commensurate audience rule so that advertisements for films likely to be classi-

fied PG may no longer be screened to an audience for a G film.

The new scheme contains safeguards to ensure that audiences will not be confronted by advertisements for material likely to be classified at a higher level than the product they have chosen to view or play. For example, the Classification Act will be amended to enable applications to be made to the Classification Board for an assessment of the likely classification of an unclassified film or computer game in difficult cases or where it is not cost-effective for industry to self assess. Other safeguards include giving the director the power to revoke an assessor's status or, in serious cases, bar a distributor from accessing the scheme for up to three years. These powers are designed to deter users from abusing the system or making lax or inadequate assessments. Decisions by the director to revoke an assessor's status or bar someone from using the scheme will be reviewable by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Further safeguards include initial and annual training for individual assessors, random and complaints based auditing of advertising material and the retention of existing powers which allow the director to call in advertisements.

The second initiative contained in this bill is amendments to the classification procedures for films that are compilations of episodes of a television series that have already been broadcast in Australia. This bill enables a television series assessment scheme to be established. Under the new television series scheme a person appropriately trained and authorised may provide a report and a recommendation to the Classification Board to assist them in their classification of a box set of episodes of a television series. The Classification Board will retain responsibility for classifying the film. But its consideration

will be assisted by the assessment of an authorised assessor.

To provide flexibility to respond to changing technology, and the increasing capacity of storage devices, the details of the scheme will be included in a legislative instrument.

The television series assessment scheme also contains safeguards to ensure the integrity of the classification system and consistency of advice to consumers. These include requiring the board to revoke classifications in specified circumstances such as when the assessment on which the classification was based was highly unreliable. For example, an assessment may have lacked enough information about classifiable elements, or been misleading, incorrect or grossly inadequate.

In addition, the director has a power to revoke, in specified circumstances, an assessor's status. In serious cases, the director has the power to bar a person from being an assessor for up to three years, or bar an applicant from using the television series assessment scheme for up to three years. These powers are permissive, and only exercisable under certain conditions. They are designed to deter users from abusing the system or providing lax or inadequate assessments of additional content. Decisions by the director to revoke an assessor's status or bar an assessor or applicant from using the scheme may be reviewed by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

These amendments have been developed in response to concerns expressed by industry about the application of the existing laws in light of developing technology and changing marketing imperatives. The purpose of this proposal is to reduce the cost to industry and to streamline the classification process for the Classification Board.

The amendments contained in this bill will ensure the National Classification Scheme continues to serve both industry and the pub-

lic well, responding to the needs of the rapidly evolving world of entertainment media by providing reliable classification information for consumers.

I join several of my colleagues in recognising Mr Warren Mundine in the gallery. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mrs May**) adjourned.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 13 February, on motion by **Mr Hale**:

That the address be agreed to.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (10.13 am)—The Governor-General in his address to the parliament at the beginning of this week commented on the change of government and said 'how fortunate we are to live in a nation where governments change hands peacefully as a result of the free expression of the will of the people'. The smooth transition that there has been from the previous government to the new government, largely without great bitterness within the electorate, is indeed a tribute to our traditions and our democracy.

As a member of the outgoing government, I cannot say it was a period without pain. There was the disappointment, naturally, of having to say farewell to faithful staff, of meeting for the final time departmental officers who had served the government faithfully with fearless advice and assistance over the years, and of the knowledge that many of the people who had worked for the previous government would no longer have employment—all of those sorts of things were sad.

At the outset, I take the opportunity to thank my own personal staff, who made my role as a minister much more pleasant, enabled us to achieve some very worthwhile things and ensured that the government was

also able to achieve worthwhile objectives for Australians. But there is a new government, and I congratulate them on their election.

There is a situation in Australia at present where, for the first time in our history, Labor is in government in every state, in every territory, and now in the Commonwealth. That of itself gives me concerns, because the absence of checks and balances is indeed a potential threat to our democracy. If Labor abuses its position of absolute power then the comments of the Governor-General about peaceful transition and the way in which we as a country go about changing our governments would indeed be at threat.

Labor has a particular responsibility, in view of its all-powerful position, to ensure that it consults effectively with the community and to ensure that it listens—that it does not just hand-pick an audience to receive an address from the Prime Minister and a few cabinet ministers, that when it chooses advisory committees it does not just choose the old Labor faithful but in fact obtains advice from people with alternative views. It will be particularly important with the sorts of issues that are potentially divisive in the community that it recognises that Labor comes from a particularly narrow base at the present time: 70 per cent of the frontbench are trade union officials. Labor is not just influenced by the trade union movement—it is a wholly owned subsidiary.

Substantial funding for Labor campaigns come from the trade union movement, yet only a handful of Australia's workers are actually in the trade union movement, and it has been steadily dying over the years. It has a disproportionate representation within the policy-making processes of the Labor Party, whatever they might be, and certainly expects to be very powerful within the new government.

In this context I also refer to the funding imbalance that is becoming apparent in the electoral process around Australia at present. In state election campaigns, Labor can be expected to spend six, eight or 10 times the amount that its opponents are able to muster. In the last federal election, whilst the coalition and Labor spent broadly the same amount of money, there was a new player in the field—the trade union movement—that spent more than everybody put together. Our democracy, referred to so generously and accurately by the Governor-General in his speech, can in fact be put at threat if there is not a strong and healthy opposition and that opposition does not have the resources to be able to effectively question the government when issues arise. So there will be a close observance about the way in which Labor uses its absolute power.

There are concerns in the community that those interests that are legitimate and contributing to our country but are not highly thought of by the trade union movement and Labor will lose out. That will be damaging to our country. Labor and its newly elected members need to heed the advice that I think most of us are given when we arrive in this place: not all wisdom sits on the one side of the parliament. Useful contributions can be made by both sides. It is important that we seek to work constructively. Our government has accepted the judgement of the people. We acknowledge that there has been a change. We want the new government to govern in the interests of our country. I hope that they will be prepared to listen to the views of others when significant issues arise.

From a personal perspective, I thank the people of Wide Bay for returning me as the member for their area. It was a challenging campaign, but I am pleased and grateful to the people of my electorate for entrusting me with their confidence. My electorate was substantially changed. I particularly ac-

knowledge the support received from the people of Noosa and district, who were added to my electorate this time. They did not want to be in the electorate of Wide Bay. It is a part of the Sunshine Coast. People of Hervey Bay that were moved out of my electorate into Hinkler did not want to be taken away.

We had a pretty dreadful redistribution in Queensland this time. I am not saying that it was particularly politically balanced—it was not. All Queensland members can draw attention to the ridiculous lines that were drawn on the maps. Almost every coastal city is split in two for no logical reason. That makes it very difficult for people to identify with their local member. Why were one or two suburbs taken out of Maryborough and put in an electorate with Bundaberg? Why was a bit of Bundaberg put into an electorate with Gladstone and, for that matter, with Longreach? It is just not logical. This was, frankly, the poorest redistribution I have ever seen. In the redistribution that comes up in Queensland again in the next couple of years, I hope that there will be a correction and that some of these illogical boundaries will be properly aligned.

In my own electorate, whilst my result was better than in most places, I really should have got every vote, because there were so many issues in the electorate where people were being very critical of Labor. I have three headline issues that particularly affected my electorate. The first was Labor's local government amalgamations, forcibly amalgamating councils throughout Queensland into mega regional governments.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

Mr TRUSS—Your leader, Mr Rudd, opposed what the Queensland government did before the election. Since the election he has done absolutely nothing to stop it. It was one thing before the election and another thing

after the election. It is a classic example of Labor 'me-tooing' before the election but, when they get into office, doing absolutely nothing. In fact, Mr Rudd had form on this issue, because when he was helping to run Queensland he forcibly amalgamated other councils against their will. But this time we had referenda across the state: 85 referenda, jointly supported by both sides of the House.

The results of those referenda were absolutely overwhelming. Only in one council was there a vote for a merger, and that was only by about 0.1 per cent. In more than 10 local authorities there were fewer than 10 votes in favour—everybody else against. In one electorate there was only one favourable vote. In my own electorate, every referendum was overwhelmingly defeated, and yet the state Labor government has done nothing. Where is the Prime Minister now? Has he yet spoken to the Queensland Premier to respect the democratic wishes of the people and to make sure that he winds back this amalgamation process before it is too late?

The second major issue in my electorate is Labor's plan to build a dam on the Mary River. I welcome the presence of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts at the table and I recognise that he will soon have to make a very important decision on this issue. I have welcomed his offer to come to my electorate, and I hope that he will do that, and I hope that he can make a decision in a genuinely bipartisan way based on the facts. I certainly offer to host him so that he can see what needs to be seen.

This is a devastating proposal for my electorate. It will flood something like 900 farms and private homes. It will be a multibillion dollar proposal. It has been imposed on the region against all engineering and scientific advice. There have been many reports on dam sites for Queensland; this one has always been rejected. It was rejected by previ-

ous Labor governments. It has been rejected by previous coalition governments. It does not stack up economically, it does not stack up socially and it does not stack up environmentally.

Brisbane is short of water. It is short of water because of the decision of the previous Labor government to abandon a dam proposal at Wolffdene, which would have been full through all this drought and left Brisbane people with little or no water restrictions. It would have been in a catchment area that has had generous rainfall and would have effectively resolved Brisbane's water problems, but they did not build it. This neglect has resulted in Brisbane having a water crisis.

The government is building a desalination plant at Tugun, which I believe is a significant part of the answer to Brisbane's water problems. It can do more in relation to recycling. It can build extra desalination plants. The dam will cost far more than many of the alternatives. It will mean Brisbane people will pay more for their water than they need to. If they had a desalination plant, it could be working and operational the day it is completed. A dam may wait years to be filled. The dam will not always have water in it when it is needed, so it will be an unreliable source of water. There will be a huge energy cost in pumping the water to Brisbane. It will be environmentally unsound and the government is already talking about acquiring large parcels of land to plant trees to try and make up for some of the greenhouse gas emissions that will result from this dam construction.

One of the key issues that the minister will need to consider is the dam's impact on the environment. There are a number of truly remarkable species in this river that are not found anywhere else in the world. The lungfish is one of the only fish in the world, and the only one in Australia, that has lungs. It is

an ancient species and it is thought that lungfish may be 30 or 40 years old before they breed and live perhaps as long as 100 years. It is a remarkable species because it is found only in a couple of other places in the world, and then in very small numbers. Then there is the Mary River turtle, which is another remarkable species because it is a turtle with gills, something that is also very rare in the world. So we need to make sure that the environment and the habitat for these species is protected, along with the Mary River cod, which is of course in no other river than the Mary. It is important for the future of the environment that these species be protected.

The minister will be receiving thousands of submissions from local people and the environmental movement unanimously condemning this proposal. It simply does not stack up on economic grounds, but unfortunately the federal government cannot intervene in that regard. That is just another bad decision by the Queensland state government. But we can intervene on environmental grounds and the environmental arguments are very, very powerful.

The third issue in my electorate that I want to refer to is the Bruce Highway. This is a dreadfully accident-prone section, rated the worst piece of the highway in Australia by road reports. There have been 34 fatal accidents over the last few years on the sections in my electorate. Before the last federal election, we promised to spend \$800 million to extend the four lanes north from Cooroy so that some of these really serious accident-prone sections could be eliminated. There is no question that this is the worst accident stretch on the highway. There is no argument about that. That is simply a statement of fact agreed by state and federal governments. The \$800 million would have made a significant difference. It is appalling that in the election campaign the federal Labor Party promised to take \$500 million of that money away

from the most accident-prone section of the highway. There have been several more fatal accidents on this section since the election and yet the Australian government, the Labor government, wants to take \$500 million off this road.

The government is talking about an infrastructure led battle on inflation. That is economic nonsense in the short term. If you are serious about building infrastructure, surely you would deal with an accident-prone section carrying very heavy volumes of traffic that feeds the entire Queensland coastline. This must be a priority, and I appeal to the government to reconsider its announcement and to ensure that this road is returned to its proper priority.

The change of government will obviously result in changes of policy, but there can also be no doubt that Australia is very much stronger, more prosperous and more secure as a nation as a result of the 11 years of coalition government. In my own electorate of Wide Bay, unemployment has dropped to the lowest level that anyone can recall. We have had incomes growing and Australian government services are very much better than those we inherited in 1996. My job will be to make sure that the Rudd government does not upset the momentum of sustained growth built by the coalition government over these years.

I am concerned that the Labor government has been elected without any clear plan. It has lots of empty clichés and proposals which, at best, have been vague. We hear about an education revolution, but what is it—closing down the Investing in Our Schools Program and putting computers in schools, many of which already have a computer system? Those sorts of things do not make an education revolution. It talks about ideas to manage the economy, but clearly it has not got any of its own. There has been an

economic ineptitude which has been quite staggering. Indeed, Labor, elected after 11 years in opposition, has so few ideas that it has to bring a thousand people in from around the countryside to tell it what to do—a thousand no doubt hand-picked people to give the sort of advice that the Labor Party wants. The man it has chosen to give advice in that regard is a longstanding friend of the Prime Minister and a longstanding Labor hack. That is the sort of person who will be chosen to give advice on those sorts of issues.

The reality is that this government does not know where it is going. Its plan to deal with inflation does not make sense. Many of these things it proposes are important. I strongly believe that we should have a budget surplus; that is something we should do. We do need to spend more on infrastructure bottlenecks, but, in the short term, that will actually increase inflation rather than decrease it. It is going to be a decade before you make a significant difference with infrastructure construction to actually put downward pressure on inflation.

The previous coalition government spent more money on infrastructure than any federal government in our history. We were the first to commit significant funding to roads. We were the first to commit funding to the national rail network in a way that has never happened before. It was a tragedy that, in the very first round of Labor government budget cuts, they cut \$65 million off rail maintenance and construction in New South Wales and Victoria—not, as the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government said yesterday, from inland rail. Very little of it is off inland rail; nearly all of it is from getting rid of bottlenecks on the existing rail network. I cannot say that his answer yesterday was untruthful—I think that is unparliamentary—but he must have been inadvertently misinformed.

If he cares to read his own budget statements supporting the announcement, he will see that most of this money was to be spent on existing rail lines.

We are going to do something about increasing skills; I am in favour of that as well. But building a few trade blocks, which were largely blocks that were taken away by a previous Labor government, is going to take years to feed extra trades men and women into the system. These are all important things; they are things that the previous government was doing. We were building trade colleges. Labor has chosen to do it at a high school level. Our trade colleges would have done the job faster but, for some reason or other, they are to be closed down, because of an ideological commitment by Labor with the state governments. The reality is that these are important priorities, but they are not a plan to tackle inflation in the next months. If this is an immediate crisis, as the government is choosing to say, then you need to take immediate action, and none of these things will deliver results in the short term.

The previous government inherited a government debt of \$96 billion. We were in surplus when we left. Interest on government debt was over \$8 billion. Now you are earning interest. Real wages growth under the previous government to ours was in the negative. It grew, without rapid inflation, by 20 per cent under our term. Average mortgage rates under Labor were 12.75 per cent. For us, it was 7.2 per cent. The unemployment rate was halved, the number of long-term unemployed was cut to one-third and the average inflation rate was halved. The net private investment was more than doubled and our tax burden was lowered. We lowered all of the tax rates. The number of Australians in work went up by two million—(*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Maribyrnong and Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Mr Shorten, I remind honourable members that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services) (10.33 am)—Congratulations to you, Mr Speaker, upon your election to this very important office. I rise today in full recognition of the honour which the people of Maribyrnong and the Australian Labor Party have granted me by enabling me to serve in this parliament. I rise in full recognition of the responsibility that comes with this honour: to serve my electorate and the Australian people. And I rise in full recognition of the historic moment the parliament and the Australian people witnessed yesterday when we said sorry to the stolen generation. What a time to join a new parliament, what a time to be part of a new government and what a time to be part of the creation of a new and more hopeful chapter in the ongoing story of reconciliation with Indigenous Australians.

Maribyrnong is a diverse electorate in Melbourne's west and north-west. It is, in fact, home to at least three Australian icons: Dame Edna Everage, the Cox Plate and the Harvester Judgement. Thus, Maribyrnong encompasses Australia's most famous housewife and deflator of egos, Australasia's premier weight-for-age championship and Justice Higgins's 1907 decision which gave Australian workers the right to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. It is an electorate which tells the Australian story of the 20th and 21st centuries. A hundred years since the Harvester Judgement, Maribyrnong is home to a community of hardworking Australians from all over the world, for whom a fair day's pay for a fair day's work is as impor-

tant today as it was then. I believe the people of Maribyrnong are true-blue Australian optimists, seeking long, meaningful lives, with their DNA hardwired to seek even greater opportunities for their children.

I have had a fortunate life and I have been fortunate to have been surrounded by smart and capable people. I would like to thank some of them who have given me their kindness, wisdom and advice along my path to this great chamber. Above all others—and I can say this on Valentine's Day—I thank my wife, Deb Beale, an endlessly intelligent, supportive and loving woman. I knew this instantly from my first outing, when she agreed to visit a picket line with me. I thank my family for their constant support and belief over the years: my mother, Ann, and my late father, Bill; my twin brother, Robert, and his family; my parents-in-law, Julian and Felicity Beale; and my great uncle Bert Nolan, a union man from the days of the Depression whose values inspired me. I mourn his recent passing.

I would like to thank the Jesuits and teachers of Xavier College for teaching me to question and debate. I would also like to acknowledge previous members for Maribyrnong—Bob Sercombe, Alan Griffiths and Moss Cass—for their distinguished public service; and, of course, my local branch members for their energy and efforts. I would like to acknowledge Bill Ludwig, the president of Australia's oldest continuous union, the Australian Workers Union; Cesar Melhem, who arrived in Australia as a young veteran of the violence in Lebanon and who is now the secretary of the Victoria AWU; and Paul Howes and the AWU national executive, who I expect will steward my union to even greater heights.

I would like to thank all the unions, members, delegates and organisers linked and animated by the desire to help other people.

They, like all modern Australian unionists, respect the employment relationship and the right to investment profits, but they would also seek mutuality of cooperation in the workplace. Bill Kelty, legendary Secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, has my gratitude for his mentoring. When I was a young and green solicitor learning about workers compensation from John Cain Jr, at Morris Blackburn, Bill invited me to join the union movement. I seized his invitation with alacrity, signing on to serve the cause of working people. It was an exciting, indeed electrifying, time. I spent each day meeting with and organising and empowering the unorganised workers of the farms and factories all around Australia. I once organised a wire factory, and 160 people wanted to join the union. We had to spend two years getting union recognition in that factory.

A man named Michael Chen became my friend and my delegate in that factory. He had economics degrees from China but was working as a wire bender at Tullamarine. He eventually came to work with me at the union as a financial controller, and now he is running his own fast-growing business. He is one of the smartest people I have met, and there he was—bending wire in a Melbourne factory. You see, when you are a union organiser—as people perhaps do not realise—you get the chance to see the full potential of individuals. On the boards of a woolshed, you know that shearers earn their pay. When you talk to steelworkers at the Port Kembla blast furnaces, to the underground miners at Mount Isa, to the oil workers in Bass Strait in winter or to those who staff the undertakers' night vans as they deal with the grief and tragedy of a road trauma or worse, you know you are in the presence of greatness. When you come face to face with heroism, cooperation and fighting spirit in workplace tragedies such as the Longford gas explosion in Victoria or the Beaconsfield mine collapse

in Tasmania, you know you are in the presence of ordinary people performing extraordinary deeds. Every company, every work site I have visited for the last 15 years, taught me the potential for greatness that individuals carry within them and showed me the limitless capacity of Australian workers and Australian businesses—and, thus, the limitless potential of the Australian economy and Australian society.

I have experienced the abundant goodwill of Australian workplaces, from both employers and employees. I know firsthand the many examples of cooperation, compromise and pragmatism which bring dividends for all involved. There are many untold success stories of business and workers that should be told and should be celebrated. I thank the many businesspeople with whom I have worked cooperatively over the years. They include some of Australia's most successful and imaginative enterprises, headed by those who understand that success in the economy is underpinned by leadership, legacy and consistent values. I have learned from them that business is hard work. Australia needs business. It is the principal 'doing' arm of our society. It creates wealth and jobs. But in the real economy, as union organisers know, building a business, running a farm or constructing a road is a really tough thing to do. There are no shortcuts—trust, openness, fairness, partnership, a bit of flexibility and compromise all round. Where you find these qualities, in my experience, you will spot a successful growing business and business leaders who understand that people are the most important feature of their business.

I believe much more can be done to harness the capacity of Australian people. To do this, we need to confront the realities. Business and government must stop their periodic blame shifting. The old class war conflicts should finally be pronounced dead. The real conflict today, I suggest, cuts across the old

divides. It is reflected within business, unions, the community and politics. The real conflict is between those who are stuck in a business-as-usual routine and those that pursue innovation, knowledge and creativity. Those are the drivers of economic growth around our world. Those are the drivers that can unlock the full potential of our fellow Australians. Now, more than ever, we need Australians to be educated, skilled and motivated. And we need them to be healthy and engaged.

I am honoured that my Prime Minister has appointed me as a parliamentary secretary with special responsibility for people with a disability. I am excited by the opportunity to help empower another section of the community, not so people with disability receive special treatment but so they receive the same treatment as everybody else—the rights which are theirs, with the dignity that they deserve. I believe the challenge for government is not to fit people with disabilities around programs but for programs to fit the lives, needs and ambitions of people with disabilities. The challenge for all of us is to abolish once and for all the second-class status that too often accompanies Australians living with disabilities.

In this great country, if I were another skin colour or if I were a woman and could not enter a shop, ride a bus, catch an aeroplane or get a job, there would be a hue and cry—and deservedly so—but if I am in a wheelchair or have a mental illness or an intellectual disability then somehow the same treatment is accepted. Why should I be told to be grateful to receive charity rather than equality? It is not enough just to rely on the existence of laws to prevent this treatment. It is something that, with every fibre that we have, we should cry out against. It should go without saying that all of us demand equal treatment for those living with disabilities, as we would for any other Australian. This ar-

gument, for me, is a natural progression and parliament, I believe, is a place where real change can occur.

I respect the institution of parliament and the crucial role that it has played in our national development. This is what has driven me to become a parliamentarian. At the close of the 19th century and the great debates of Federation, our forebears shunned the *laissez-faire*, master-servant views of the far Right and the revolutionary tendencies of the far Left. They went a middle way, creating unique institutions with both egalitarian and entrepreneurial tendencies. For me, the Australian parliament is the keeper of the middle way—labour and capital working together, metropolitan centres and strong regions in balance, prosperity, cross-subsidising growth and need across our large and diverse continent. I believe parliament operates best when it promotes tolerance and diversity. When political parties drift to extremes, the patient electorate makes it clear, through the ballot box, that they expect parliament to reflect the native Australian gradualism and pragmatism. I believe parliament is a moderating institution that is helping Australia to adapt to the big issues of the future.

Previous parliaments have said that they did not want the White Australia policy. Previous parliaments have said that they did want to protect our environment. Previous parliaments have said that we do want to have an old-age pension. Previous parliaments have said that we want an open economy, a national superannuation scheme and an end to the legal discrimination against women. I want to belong to a parliament that will deal with the big, over-the-horizon issues facing our nation for the next 25 years. I aspire to be a Labor member who helps our parliament to be a moderating force for change in a complex, changing world.

I hope to be a consistent and persistent Labor parliamentarian. I shall apply the lessons of my first four decades: the lessons of my family, the lessons of my education, the lessons of business, the lessons of my union days. All of these lessons, I believe, can be distilled into one phrase: never give up. What I want to accomplish in my time in parliament rests upon understanding what lies ahead for Australia in the next three decades. I am here because we must wrestle with a raft of issues. I am here because I do not accept that dignified aged care is somehow optional. I do not accept that quality health-care should be determined by the size of your wallet. I do not accept that women should be paid less than men. I do not accept that Indigenous Australians should lack economic power. I do not accept the inevitability of an unfair and complex tax system. I do not accept that the collapse of Australian manufacturing is a foregone conclusion. I do believe that politics can sometimes lag behind individuals, communities and business. I do believe that Australians need lifelong learning to prepare for their many careers over their lifetime. I do believe in closer engagement with India and China in the spirit of the longstanding great Labor internationalist tradition. I do believe in national infrastructure building greater capacity for economic growth. I do believe our teachers deserve more than they currently receive. I do believe that we should be saving more for our future. I do believe that we can and we must support our regions. I do believe that we can combine a sustainable environment and a sustainable economy. I do believe that governments should decrease the regulatory burden, promote competition and provide regulatory certainty. I do believe an Australian republic will arise.

How to achieve a long, meaningful life in a rapidly changing world is one of the great themes of our new century. I believe our in-

stitutions will have to rethink the way they do things, coming up with new ideas for extracting the maximum social and economic value from the advances in medical technology which offer us the potential of a century of life. What I want to accomplish for working people is about aspiration—not for material wealth and plasma televisions alone but for 100 years of health; for education and skills to do quality, interesting work; for living in decent and supportive communities; and for leading a rewarding and meaningful life.

There are many paths to this end. I advocate no rigid road, for I am sceptical of absolutes. Australians are—by nature, history and geography—pragmatic, and we are gradualists. Sometimes I think in the public reporting of Australian politics the desire to highlight conflict overlooks the clear Australian preference for compromise and consensus. Let me clarify this point. In every federal election since Federation, nearly half the nation has voted for either Labor or the conservatives; yet within days we reunite around the fundamentals of our society. I am an optimist. I believe Australians are optimists. We see few problems that cannot be solved by reason and debate, and we are confident that most problems can be solved. We are egalitarian. We do not believe in a static and confining social order, so we have no profound passion to uproot and destroy it. Yet, for all this convergence, there are serious and meaningful divergences.

The American historian Arthur Schlesinger described in the following terms the 19th century philosopher Emerson's view of the differences between American progressives and American conservatives:

Mankind ... is divided between the party of Conservatism and the party of Innovation, between the Past and the Future, between Memory and Hope.

In Australia, Labor is the party of innovation, the future and hope. So it is a great privilege to be here right now in this place in what feels, after the last election, like a different country. Our national leadership is young, vigorous, intelligent, civilised and innovative. I believe it will spur a re-emergence of public faith in our leadership, in our diversity, in contention, in nonconformism and in imagination. My vision of the Labor Party is that of a humane, insightful, pragmatic agent of change—not dogmatic, not utopian, not wedded to a belief that fundamental problems have only one solution. My experience of Labor is the unequivocal rejection of extremes.

Our Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has made Australia a proud member of the international community again by ratifying the Kyoto protocol. And I think everyone will remember where they were the day that he apologised to the stolen generations. Julia Gillard, our first female Acting Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, is the driver of our much-needed education revolution reforms. Wayne Swan, our Treasurer, knows that getting the economic settings right is vital for our nation to grow; but he will pursue these priorities with a sense of fairness and compassion.

From industrial relations to Indigenous affairs, from nation building to community renewal, Australia is reasserting itself as a nation of the future, a nation of hope and a nation of the fair go. This will be a nation that values its people, whose capacity for achievement is irreplaceable. We need individuals; they are fundamental to the progress of our society. It is the existence of free choice, of equal opportunity and innovation which drives the capacity of individuals. I believe that the audacious pursuit of creative innovation can expand our choices and enhance our lives. That pursuit lies at the heart of my commitment to this place.

In closing, I think of the thousands of people I have met around our nation. I think of passionate advocates; inspirational shop floor workers; people with disabilities, whose courage and determination are awe-inspiring and business leaders whose contributions enrich our nation and our community. I have always been struck by how united we are by our common desire to see every individual enjoy the longest life, full of quality and meaning. I am inexpressibly proud to be here as part of this new, fresh and hopeful Rudd government—a government that has already shown itself to be socially inclusive, a builder of bridges, a dissolver of divisions in society. This week has shown us all the real meaning of the politics of hope, and it is a privilege to be part of this. I hope my role in this parliament will serve to assist and support these ideals and advance a fair Australia.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (10.52 am)—Congratulations to the new member for Maribyrnong, the previous speaker, and to all those who have joined this parliament as a result of the last election, particularly my colleagues on both sides of the House from Victoria. I look forward to a constructive working relationship with them all and wish them all the best for the future.

For me it is truly an honour to be representing the people of Dunkley again, to be rehired for a fifth term after the recent election. At a local level, there is no greater, no more humbling and no more demanding role than being the advocate for a community as diverse, as full of optimism and as rich in character—though not without its challenges—as the electorate of Dunkley. It is a community that I grew up in, that runs through my veins. As I listen to the first speeches of the new members, I reflect on my first speech nearly 12 years ago and think what an extraordinary journey it has been. A chance for a fifth term to make possible

through action on the ground, supporting, collaborating and partnering with the local community and providing leadership, direction, optimism and hope for the future is what being rehired is all about. The people of Dunkley have again given me the opportunity to work with them and for them to make our region a better place—and I grab that opportunity with both hands.

It is important that I acknowledge a number of incredible people who have helped make that possible. Once again I have been blessed with an outstanding campaign team of tirelessly committed, community-minded and very gifted individuals. I sincerely thank my dear mate Greg Sugars, who was again volunteered by me to be campaign chairman at a time when his own business was demanding much of him and his family. I thank Virginia, Mason and Reilly for lending him to us once again. To Natalie Fairlie, Norm Branson, Bill Beaglehole, Arthur Rauken and all those in the campaign team: thank you for your dedicated efforts. And thank you to the many hundreds of people who volunteered—not only on election day. There is something character building about being at the Frankston railway station at 5 am and knowing that there are volunteers with you, so committed are they to our shared endeavours.

At a local level I must also acknowledge the team in the Dunkley electorate office as well as the staff in the ministerial office. They have been tireless in their efforts. I thank them most sincerely and value their friendship, their advice and their wise counsel. Noelene Warwick, Vincent Sheehy, Cameron Hill, Raeleigh Speedie, Judith Donnelly, Kristy Spena, James Sampson, Hayley Najim, Cameron Hooke, Claire Mackay, Brice Pacey and my former chief of staff Phil Connole are all remarkable individuals, and I wish them all the best for the future. To some of the new members and those in new offices: one of the character-

building things of a change in government is that the team thins quite considerably in opposition. Thankfully all those people are doing quite worthwhile and meaningful things, and I wish them well for the future.

I would also on this Valentines Day like to pay a particular tribute to my sweetheart, Kate. As many in this House will know, spouses endure much in public life. Kate is certainly well known in our community and is often viewed as a nice segue in raising issues with me. Her contribution is tireless—it is immense—and her forbearance as we travel around the country and very regularly within our community is quite remarkable. I again want to place on the record my devotion to and admiration for her—and hopefully, through her, pay a tribute to all the spouses and families of members of parliament. It is a team effort, and they make an enormous contribution. I would also like to thank my children, Alex and Zoe. They are quite young. Alex is 10. I thought my election was exciting, but I acknowledge his election as vice-captain of Diamond house at Viewbank Primary School. He campaigned well and got a good result, and I congratulate him on that. He and Zoe were great supporters during the campaign, being co-drivers in the campaign bus, enthusiastically offering material to those who were interested. Their support and encouragement are very much valued. It is a reminder of why we come to this place.

I will not recount my journey here, but it is important to know that it has inspired an outlook that I carry with me every day: your postcode does not determine your potential. Right across this continent there are people in communities for whom success is perhaps less familiar, but we should never allow that to diminish people's optimism about the future. The community that I represent is very diverse, and, for all those who are a part of it, their postcode is neither a roadblock nor a

meal ticket to success. All of them have what it takes to live a successful life. I hope that through my campaign motto, which has survived many elections, of being positive, passionate and persistent we can embrace a positivity and optimism about the future and go about our work with vigour and enthusiasm but recognise that important things do not always come easily and that you need to stick at them. Hopefully through that work I can achieve the benchmark that I have set for myself of being handy to have around for the local community.

It is also important that we pause and remember that a vast number of people—millions of Australians—voted for the return of the former government. They had been touched and encouraged by the prosperity and the opportunity and the greater sharing of those opportunities across Australia. They recognised that many achievements of the Howard government era stand this nation in great stead and provide the foundation for future achievements. It will be important, certainly in the coming months as the new government seeks to position itself, to not allow what was a very good government to be vilified needlessly. You would expect me to say these things having been a member of that government and a minister, but one only needs to look at the very masterful and artful campaign of the Labor Party, where they sought to position themselves as closely as they could to the work, the policy agenda, the goals and the programs of the Howard government and then just differentiate on a few particular things. Clearly the strategists and the thinkers in the Labor Party thought that things were not all that bad and that the nation was on the right pathway.

For the community that I represent, that is evidenced in a number of ways. For the first time in most people's living memory, our unemployment rate is either at or below the national average. For those in this House

who are not familiar with the Mornington Peninsula, it is some 40-odd kilometres, through to many more kilometres, away from the Melbourne central business district. If the economy stumbles, we fall flat on our faces in our community. Employment can be very difficult when opportunities contract. For too long we were exporting our brightest, as they left the community to try and find opportunities elsewhere. Thankfully, with the change of government—that is, with the introduction of the Howard government—more and more local people could be a complete part of their local community. They not only could engage with their family and friends and their social activities, their sporting interests, their religious pursuits, their communities but also had a chance to actually work in the community. You see unemployment rates now that had only been dreamed of in the past. You see people who were previously denied the opportunity to work, perhaps because they did not offer the skills that some others may have had, also able to gain employment. They have a chance to show what they are capable of, perhaps after a long period of unemployment or of different priorities—raising a family or the like.

When we talk about employment we need to realise that it is a very personal thing. Labor has made much of employment relations and that is understood. The election has encouraged us all to recalibrate some of the industrial relations laws. That is recognised. But it is very important that people have a chance to be employed. We hear much about the role of unions. My role is to be the union for people who do not have a job, to try to make sure that policies and decisions in this parliament mean the environment is conducive to more employment and that there is more investment so that everybody has the chance to gain a job and shape their future destiny. We achieved that over the course of the Howard government. I hope we do not

lose that, as we move forward. I hope that productivity is improved not by simply excluding the least productive from the labour market. That is no solution. We need to make sure everybody has the opportunity to be involved.

It was quite a masterful campaign by the ALP to align themselves so closely to the Howard government. In fact, we have heard it said that there was only a cigarette paper between the two parties. It was a very interesting campaign, yet we often hear now in this place that it was so different. It is interesting. We wonder and the nation will look to see just what kind of government the Rudd government offers, to see whether it lives up to those reassurances or whether the hubris that you have already seen in these early days sees a completely different agenda brought forward. I acknowledge the member for Kingsford Smith at the table. The areas that were very important to the community that I represent could be pursued not only at a national level through the enabling policies of a national government but also through the translation of those opportunities into particular initiatives for our community. Sadly, many of these will not move forward unless the new government recognises the importance of them to the Dunkley community. It is worrying because in 1996, when I was first elected, the Labor member I replaced acknowledged that our community had been forgotten about by the Hawke-Keating governments. I think that in part played into why there was a change of member. I hope, now that there is a Labor government back, my community is not forgotten again as the focus moves elsewhere. There are some worrying early signs. The member for Maribyrnong spoke eloquently about his journey and the importance of his community to him and in the context of the nation. I feel equally strongly but do not see the same investment in the west and the

north-west of Melbourne as in the south and the south-east.

We remember how our community was punished with a tollway after being promised the road would not be one. The south-east and east of Melbourne are the only ones who pay to use an arterial ring road; the northern and western suburbs do not pay. One of the consequences of this tollway is an enormous increase in traffic congestion—25 per cent is the estimate—on an already clogged highway network that ends its journey at the corner of Cranbourne-Frankston Road, an intersection already choking under the traffic. During the election campaign no remedy was offered, except from the Howard government. It offered financial support for the Frankston bypass, a project so important not only to relieve and to address the current and forecast congestions but also to make sure that our community is not disconnected from the rest of Melbourne purely because of travel journeys. For those listening who know the peninsula well, imagine a 40-minute trip from Main Street, Mornington, to get to Thompson Road in Carrum Downs. This separation by time of our community from other parts of greater Melbourne is a worry. I hope the Rudd government recognises that the enormous commitment that was made by the Howard government, if it were re-elected, is something it needs to carry through on. Those funding commitments were important because they were about showing that research into the direction, the grade separation and the EES process was not purely an academic exercise but that some action would flow from it.

We also had the promise of an Australian technical college. Under the former Labor government, the Hawke-Keating government, you very rarely heard about skills. In fact the Australian public and young people were fed a diet that success was only achieved by a university pathway. We know

that to be nonsense but we also know that there is a concerted effort required to re-engage people who are perhaps disconnected from their education and that Australian technical colleges were achieving that. The Australian technical college that was to be established in Frankston would have been an enormous boost for our community. Alas, that now looks like not being achievable either. I can assure the House I will persist. I am positive about this project and passionate about its need, and I will persist to see that that infrastructure is available.

Other election commitments are very important to our local community. They include the \$2 million contribution towards the construction of an environmentally compatible sea wall to support the boating facilities in Frankston and the vision for our city. It is very important, but we had not a noise about that from the Labor candidate. The ongoing work to enhance community safety and security, the incredibly successful CCTV programs in Mornington and around the railway station in Frankston were going to be rolled out even further, as was mobile technology that would address the scourge that too many Australians are experiencing—that is, the scourge of the doof-doof hoon in a souped-up VL Commodore at the front of houses, terrifying neighbourhoods.

Mr Baldwin—Doof-doof!

Mr BILLSON—Thank you, Member for Paterson. That is the bass sound of the vehicle as it drops a burnout out the front of someone's house. Speeding in local neighbourhoods is really affecting the humanity of those areas, but it is incredibly hard to police.

Mr Baldwin—It is a national disgrace.

Mr BILLSON—It is a national disgrace and it is a trend. When I look back on my Mazda 808 super deluxe coupe when I was of that vintage, it could not pull the skin off a

custard, so underpowered was it. I still felt cool, although others had another view. Today those entry-level vehicles are high-powered vehicles. We see too many young people losing their lives, too many neighbourhoods compromised by bad driving behaviour, albeit in passing. It is a small minority, but it is enough to cause a real impact, to have a detrimental impact, on people's quality of life and the quality of their neighbourhoods.

We had a commitment to fund movement activated CCTV systems which you could mount on a power pole or sit on the back parcel deck of a car to capture some of this conduct so that the vehicle confiscation laws would actually have some evidence to push off from. That was a very important initiative but one that we have heard nothing about.

Other initiatives included the revitalisation package for the Seaford RSL car park, the area around the foreshore and the lifesaving precinct, which would have provided a chance to enjoy the Seaford-Edithvale wetlands through all seasons, through the re-establishment of the pathways. These were important local projects, along with the Eric Bell Reserve redevelopment and upgrade project in Frankston North and support for the Langwarrin footy club and the community basketball stadium in Mornington. These were local issues that the local community, I felt, embraced.

The trend in voting patterns away from—dare I say—my kind was less obvious in my electorate. I think that was perhaps because these local projects mattered. Having said that, I also add that, for those like me who are advocates of Tip O'Neill's motto 'all politics is local', Tip was away from my electorate during this election campaign. The national mood certainly was embraced by many of the local voters and that was evidenced by a very low-profile, almost stealth-

like campaign by my Labor opponent. But, still, we persist and we work on.

I would like to add some further comments about the challenges ahead. We have heard much about a broadband agenda. We have seen little about the detail of it from the Labor Party. We saw yesterday a bill introduced into the House that will allow a stripping of the Communications Fund, the very future-proofing tool that regional and rural Australians are concerned about. We are going to see those taxpayer resources drawn away from where there is clearly an underservicing and a difficulty in providing commercially funded broadband services. They are to be made available for the metropolitan area, where there is no such problem. The logic of that astounds me, but this is what seems to be moving forward. I will talk more about that at another time.

I want to pay tribute to those that I had the good fortune of working with as a minister. The Department of Veterans' Affairs is a remarkable organisation. It carries an extraordinarily special duty to a very special group of Australians who have served our nation and given all that they have. It was an honour and a privilege to be the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, to work closely with Mark Sullivan and his department team and with the ex-service community, many of whom are often vilified by some characters that offer much in the way of commentary but very little in the way of constructive agendas for the future. I wish all those in Veterans' Affairs the best future. Alan Griffin, the new Minister for Veterans' Affairs, is already benefiting from the momentum that we created, but I hope that he also has a sense of the challenges that are ahead.

To the serving men and women of the Australian Defence Force: my role in assisting the humans in the ADF was a great honour and a privilege. Our people are our

greatest capability. We can buy aircraft and ships and all the kit under the sun, but it is our people that make those items of technology, that implement doctrine, that use their creativity, their judgement and their personalities to bring about the military and strategic objectives that they are tasked to carry out. To Angus Houston and all of the service chiefs, to Nick Warner, to the defence enterprise—all of the civilians and uniformed personnel who work at Russell and at many installations across the country: I salute you. You are a remarkable bunch of people. I admire what you do, and it was an incredible honour to work closely with you.

To the people of Dunkley I pay my highest compliment and pass on my sincere thanks. To be rehired by you, a group of people I have grown up with, is an honour. Your challenges, ambitions, hopes for the future and moments of reflection run through my veins as well. I hope I honour the trust and support you have placed in me for a fifth time. I hope I represent you with vigour and advocate your interests well in this place.

I should apologise because it seems as though I will need to be here on a Friday. I do not shirk from that role; I am happy to be a contributor in parliament any time. But parliament 'lite', as it is proposed on a Friday, is a bad move. When I come here and talk about the grievances of my community, I expect the people who are in a position to remedy them to be here as well. Rostered days off, or Rudd days off, are not good for our parliament. Parliament is valued. It should be respected. If being removed from this place for one hour is an important sanction for bad behaviour and being removed for 24 hours is a bigger sanction, not being required to turn up at all is an insult. (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Charlton and Parliamentary Sec-

retary for Defence Procurement, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech. I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement) (11.13 am)—Thank you, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your election. It has occurred to me, I must say, in my naivete as a parliamentarian, that your role is somewhat akin to a judge on a new reality television show called *So You Think You Can Talk!* But of course there is somewhat more gravity associated with the role and I wish you all the best in it.

I have committed my working life to the cause of fairness and justice in our society. I believe very strongly in a fairer distribution of wealth and opportunity. I have been an advocate for the rights of working people and I have campaigned against injustice. I believe that a strong economy is an essential foundation for social progress and I profoundly believe in our democracy. I am proudly Australian and I believe that, as an independent nation, it would be appropriate to have an Australian head of state.

My values and beliefs have informed my decision to stand for election to the House of Representatives. But the achievement of change, of course, requires more than individual belief or personal effort alone. It requires the collective action of those with common ideals. That is why I have been committed to the labour movement for many years and that is why I am a member of the Australian Labor Party.

As former Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley put it in 1949, Labor is 'a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to ... the people'. I am grateful for the opportunity that Labor provided me to stand as a candidate in the electorate of Charlton and I am very proud to have been elected. I am

also honoured to have been appointed Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement in the Rudd government. I wish to thank the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, for my appointment to this role and to congratulate him and all of the Labor team for the tremendous achievement of winning government.

Many people contributed to my election but I would like at the outset to thank my wife, Petra, for her personal support and sacrifice; and our children, Clara, Anna and Yannis. It has been a major upheaval for my family. I also sincerely thank my mother, Aida; my stepfather, Vic; and my sister, Jennifer—and I acknowledge my late father, Todd—for all that they have done to support me through my life.

Charlton is in the Hunter region of my home state of New South Wales. The electorate is named after former Labor leader and coalminer Matthew Charlton. It encompasses the western areas of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, a region of considerable geographic beauty in which live very diverse communities. I respectfully acknowledge the work of the previous member, Kelly Hoare, and, before her, Bob Brown. They represented Charlton since its inception in 1984.

While there is growing prosperity in many parts of the electorate, there is also significant disadvantage. Charlton has a large retired population, many of whom depend solely upon the age pension. The electorate has lower than average income levels, a large proportion of people who attended school only to year 10 and youth unemployment which still stands at around 16 per cent, so there is much work to be done. There is also a large Aboriginal community in Charlton, and I extend my respects to the traditional owners of the lands within the electorate, the Awabakal people, and their elders. I respectfully acknowledge the Awabakal and Koom-

pahtoo land councils and affirm my heartfelt support for the apology to the stolen generations. I will cherish the opportunity to work closely with Aboriginal people in the electorate.

Service industries are large employers in Charlton but manufacturing, coalmining and electricity generation are important economic drivers. The failure of the former Howard government on climate change has created uncertainty for the future of the coal and electricity industries in the region. There is apprehension amongst workers about their jobs and uncertainty about investment in the electricity industry. This is a problem area which I will take a keen interest in on behalf of the electorate and the Hunter region generally. In my view, a national trading scheme which effectively prices carbon emissions will be important for my electorate as well as for the country. Not only will it create an incentive to reduce emissions; it will provide greater certainty for jobs and for investment in all forms of energy.

Charlton residents have also suffered from insufficient investment in infrastructure. One of my main priorities will be to campaign for a new integrated rail, road and bus transport centre at Glendale, in the demographic heart of the electorate. Also high on my list is the implementation of the Rudd government's commitment to a new GP superclinic in the area. The ratio of GPs to the population is now 1 to 2,000, making it far too difficult for many people to see a general practitioner.

I would like to thank not only the voters of Charlton for their support but also the members of the Labor Party and the local community who made a significant contribution to my campaign. There are, as usual, too many to individually name. However, I would like to acknowledge a small number who dedicated very much of their time: Kelly and Lynne Lofberg, Angie Sidonio,

Janelle Smee and her family, Yasmin Catley and Megan Montefiore. I also received great support from businesspeople and many unions, and I particularly wish to thank the ACTU, the Maritime Union of Australia, the CFMEU mining and energy division and the Newcastle Trades Hall Council. I have very much appreciated the warmth extended to me from people in the community and I have had some great experiences while campaigning. My great-grandfather, who migrated to the Hunter from France, once owned a wine bar near Cardiff in the electorate. It closed, I think, in the 1950s. Imagine my pleasure when a very elderly and frail man came into my Cardiff campaign office and, after seeing my name on the window, asked if this was where the wine bar had moved to. He did say it was a long time between drinks!

I bring a variety of experiences to my new role. I grew up in Rooty Hill in Western Sydney. At that time it was a diverse, semirural community and a settlement area for many postwar European migrants. My father was a winemaker at Penfolds at the Minchinbury Estate. He died when I was 13 and this remains perhaps the most formative experience of my life. He instilled in me a sense of community, and I recall spending much of my time with him at community service and fundraising events in which he participated as a member of Rotary. Like many of my generation, I was influenced by the major political and cultural events of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the tumult over the Vietnam War and the excitement surrounding Labor's political ascendancy under Gough Whitlam—although, I have to say, in Rooty Hill these events were almost eclipsed by the shock and outrage over the nude scene in the rock musical *Hair*.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr COMBET—There are some of my generation here. Following school I worked

for some time and then studied mining engineering. As part of my studies, I worked in underground coalmining at Lithgow and joined the coalminers union at the age of 19. My early working and industrial experiences helped crystallise my commitment to the labour movement, where my heart and my passion could find expression through my work.

I left the mining industry and worked in a variety of community organisations, including the Workers Health Centre in Lidcombe in Western Sydney. It was there that I broadened my involvement with unions and first began what has extended now to 25 years of campaigning on behalf of asbestos victims. I studied economics and by 1987 became an official of the Waterside Workers Federation, now the Maritime Union. Tas Bull, the head of the union at the time, influenced more than anyone else my development as a union leader. He had the capacity to balance strength with pragmatism and the courage to advocate unpopular positions when it was the right course of action. I have missed him in the years since his death.

The experience I gained in a national role at the union prepared me for work at the ACTU, where I was privileged to work with one of its most outstanding and intelligent leaders, Bill Kelty. I was elected his successor in October 1999. My 14 years in Melbourne at the ACTU involved me in major events such as the 1998 waterfront dispute, and I shared those tumultuous days with my close friend and colleague John Coombs, who courageously led the Maritime Union. At the ACTU, I also led the successful campaign to rescue \$700 million of Ansett employee entitlements following the collapse of the airline, and I worked to achieve justice for the victims of James Hardie asbestos products. The James Hardie campaign resulted in a commercial settlement worth billions of dollars in compensation payments

over the next 40 to 50 years, and it is unique internationally. But it is a settlement which will, rightly, forever be associated with the late Bernie Banton, a genuine fighter for justice and a person who enriched my life and inspired countless others, and I am proud of what we achieved.

Over the last 2½ years, I have also been proud to be a leader of the Your Rights at Work campaign, conducted by the union movement. This campaign achieved widespread opposition to the former Howard government's workplace laws and it undeniably influenced national politics. The former government's arrogance and its unwillingness to listen to legitimate concerns about its Work Choices laws were part of its undoing. I vividly recall a meeting I had as ACTU secretary with former Prime Minister John Howard in May 2005. I explained how his proposed reforms would allow some employers to use AWA individual contracts to cut take-home pay and the damaging impact this would have on the most vulnerable people in the labour market. Mr Howard was unmoved.

In my role as a union leader, I learnt the importance of considering and balancing competing views and to respect the legitimate interests and concerns of business. Mr Howard's failure to extend this respect to the interests of employees hardened my resolve to mount a concerted campaign against the Work Choices legislation, with television advertising at its foundation. When the ACTU began its TV campaign, our research showed that about 35 per cent of Australians opposed the Howard government's planned industrial relations changes. Within months of our advertising, opposition to the laws had risen to 65 per cent, and it essentially remained at this level all the way through to last year's election. While advertising was important, the foundation of the Your Rights at Work campaign was its support in the

community and the grassroots activism of many thousands of people. I want to take the opportunity in this place to thank each and every one of them for their contribution to achieving change.

The Rudd government's workplace relations changes will restore fairness and balance to the workplace and they will not harm the economy. In fact, the High Court has now cleared the way for industrial relations jurisdictions to be rationalised on the basis of a national system and this will significantly reduce the complexity of regulation for business. Furthermore, the constitutional path is now clear for legislation to establish a simple and consistent safety net of employment rights, obligations and entitlements. Pay and employment conditions over and above the safety net will be the subject of genuine workplace-level bargaining. The only fair workplace bargaining system is one which respects the right of employees to collectively bargain. The fact is that individual employees rarely have comparable bargaining power with an employer, and that is why the right for employees to collectively negotiate with their employer is crucial. It is also why employees must be genuinely free to join, associate in and be represented by a union, if that is what they wish. Fighting for these rights has been a cornerstone of my working life and I shall stand up for them in this place. Basic rights such as freedom of association and the right to collectively bargain should, ultimately, in my view, join other fundamental democratic freedoms in a codified set of human rights in Australia. I believe the absence of such a code, perhaps in the form of a human rights act, to be a weakness of our democracy.

My particular interest, though, is in economic issues. I maintain strong relationships with members of the business community and I have enjoyed serving on the boards of a large superannuation fund and a bank, Mem-

bers Equity Bank. From the shop floor to the boardroom, I have witnessed in recent years the emergence of serious impediments to Australia's future economic prosperity. We have as a nation experienced a prolonged period of economic expansion, low inflation and strong employment growth. This strong economic performance has yielded historic fiscal dividends to government. However, serious skill shortages and underinvestment in infrastructure, poor preparation for an ageing population and a failure to encourage investment in research and innovation threaten our prosperity. The failure of the previous government to adequately address these issues is constraining GDP and productivity growth and therefore constraining future improvement in real living standards. It is a contributor to the inflationary and interest rate pressures we are now experiencing. As we well know, and as I know from my role representing working people, inflation hurts those Australians least able to afford it. The tragedy is that the former Howard government had a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest in future prosperity and it failed.

I strongly support the Rudd government's plan for investment in education and skills development, leadership in infrastructure, and new policies encouraging innovation and research and development. I have been an advocate of these policies for some time. The government's focus on education is particularly important for our country. Universal access to quality education is central, in my view, to any decent democracy. For many children, public education in particular is the only vehicle to overcome social and economic disadvantage. In my own electorate, I look forward to the improved availability of trades training in schools, broadband access and the availability of computers to students in years 9 to 12, and the government's emphasis on early childhood education. These

initiatives will make a huge difference. They are foundations for social equity.

Addressing the challenge of an ageing population through better retirement savings is also an area in which I have a keen interest. There are important reasons for boosting retirement savings. The current average superannuation account balance is around \$39,600 and only \$27,600 for women. For low-paid, casual and part-time workers it is much less than this. In the hospitality industry, where many thousands of people are employed, it is around \$8,000. At the current contribution rate, this will not be enough for many people to have an adequate standard of living in retirement. That is one reason to boost superannuation savings. Another is that our superannuation system is the main mitigating factor against wealth inequality in our society. Indeed, for many people it is the only form of savings that they have. Boosting super also increases the quantum of national savings available for investment. It enhances the capacity of retirees to finance the escalating cost of health care. By encouraging savings rather than consumption, we can diminish inflationary pressure. This issue, in my view, should not be confused, as some have done, with the tax cuts to be delivered by the government, because these are sorely needed by working families, but it is a longer term issue demanding public policy consideration.

While I look forward to involvement in these policy areas as a parliamentarian, much of my immediate work will involve the honour of supporting the Australian Defence Force through my role in defence procurement. I have already met many dedicated and talented people working in Defence and the Defence Materiel Organisation. Procurement is, many would say, a fascinating challenge, with almost \$10 billion to be expended this year on the acquisition and sustainment of material for the ADF. There are many unher-

alded successes in defence procurement, but it is well known that there are a few difficult issues as well. Together with the Minister for Defence, I have started reviewing some of the problem projects which are over budget and beyond their schedule. I also aim, with the minister, to continue the process of reform within the Defence Materiel Organisation.

It remains for me to thank the union movement, because it has provided me with the greatest opportunities of my working life, including a foundation for my election to parliament. I have received tremendous support and met wonderful people who deserve respect and recognition for their work, not vilification. I am especially grateful for the years spent with my colleagues at the ACTU and in the leadership with Sharan Burrow. Of the many whose friendship I enjoy, I would like to thank in particular Pirjo Laine, who worked with me for 13 years, and George Wright, who also worked closely with me over a long period of time.

As I embark upon this new beginning, I draw strength and inspiration from the achievements of the Australian Labor Party. From wartime leadership to postwar nation-building, from our pioneering role in the United Nations to the forging of our regional relationships, from Aboriginal rights to universal superannuation and Medicare, from opening access for people of my generation to tertiary education to economic modernisation, Labor has shaped this nation for the better. Labor is a builder, a creator of opportunity, a driver of social and economic progress and equity. Only Labor would take the unifying step forward for this country of an apology to the stolen generations.

It is time to find greater unity in our society, to turn the page on the recent years of division and intolerance. We are a diverse society, and my greatest hope for the future

is that we evoke in our community greater tolerance, compassion, decency and respect towards one another. I am very proud to be a member of the House and a member of the Rudd Labor government.

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (11.34 am)—I start my speech on the address-in-reply by congratulating the member for Charlton and all the new members of parliament. It is truly a great honour to be elected to this place. I also congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your elevation. It is a great honour for you. I know you personally and I know your integrity. I also rise today in this new parliament delighted to have been re-elected as the representative for the seat of La Trobe. My first task is to thank the voters in La Trobe for re-electing me and giving me the honour and privilege of being the federal member for La Trobe. It is a great honour for me. I again thank my supporters and all those who voted for me for their support.

I am determined to work harder than ever before, to ensure that the newly elected Rudd Labor government keeps to its promises in La Trobe. I recognise that in La Trobe a number of people voted for the Liberal Party for the first time and gave me personal recognition from my position on issues such as supporting the Kyoto protocol, opposing the pulp mill in Tasmania and opposing nuclear reactors. The Liberal Party have learnt a lot from this election and I know we will go into the future learning from our mistakes.

There are many people that I would like to express my thanks to for their dedication to my campaign and for their tireless commitment to ensuring my re-election. It takes a team effort and I would not be here today without support from a number of people. First of all, I must thank my parents, Bob and Jan. They are not traditional Liberal supporters, but they have actually come on board. It is really good to see my parents do that. I

thank them, because, as a member of parliament, it is actually your family who cop a fair bit of the burden for your decisions and your policies. I also have to get the name of my dog, Moejoe, into *Hansard*. Moejoe was a great support for me after hours.

Mr Baldwin—You didn't lose your mojo!

Mr WOOD—No, I haven't lost my mojo. Moejoe, hopefully, is with my parents as I speak. Like everyone, I love getting back home, and I get inspiration in after-hours time spent with, believe it or not, my dog, Moejoe. At two o'clock in the morning he would love a good walk.

When it comes to dedication and persistence, I must thank my Liberal Party supporters. In no particular order but first of all I must thank Peter and Chris Smith—they are here to see me as well as all the new members being sworn in, and I thank them for making that trip. Peter is also my FEC chairman. I thank Andrew McNabb, who campaigned tirelessly; Sue McMillan; and Stan and Steve Davey, who I cannot thank enough—they are not actually Liberal branch members but they campaigned for me for a month. I thank John Shipp, David Jancik and Michael Basset, who brought their youth and enthusiasm into the campaign; David Menaham; David Holmes, who was the first person in 2004 who said I should stand for parliament; Brad Battin; Julie Hughes, Carol Porter, Sheila Purcell, Margery Nowack and all the ladies from Berwick Women's section. I thank my branches in La Trobe, including Berwick, Fern Tree Gully, Emerald, Boronia, Dandenong Ranges, Gembrook, Upwey and the Berwick Young Liberals.

I also must thank the members of the Malvern Young Liberals club, who came out and campaigned with me; the Berwick-Ranges 500 club for their strong financial support; Tony Snell from the admin committee for his leadership and dedication during

the scrutineering process, which dragged on; the Wildes family for their assistance; Sharon Verschaeren; Brian and Pauline Hetherton; Betty and Peter McLaren; and also Mick Morland and Kay for their assistance.

To those I have not mentioned: I apologise but I can never thank you enough. One thing I try to do is thank all my supporters. I thank the Victorian state division for all their support and especially the state director, Julian Sheezel: you were great when I needed you to make phone calls to make things happen. Again, I also thank the Liberal Party for their trust in me as their candidate in 2004 and again last year.

In 2004, I made some election commitments and I must again thank the former Prime Minister, John Howard, for all his support in the electorate of La Trobe. Projects such as Fernlea House palliative care received funding; Fernlea House received \$800,000. This is a state government responsibility but the former Prime Minister, John Howard, recognised the need and committed the funding—I thank him for that. With this commitment anyone in the seat of La Trobe can go into Emerald today and see Fernlea House and the way it is being managed. This election commitment has been delivered. Bryn Mawr Bridge in Berwick—I am sure there are a few people who may be listening to this speech as they are driving across this bridge in Beaconsfield—is again a state Labor government responsibility, which we committed \$10 million to and which, again, was delivered in my first term.

In last year's election campaign, La Trobe voters saw Labor's 'me too' strategy in full flight not at the national level but at the local level. I am delighted that, in the election campaign, the Labor Party were forced into matching three of these commitments. Labor matched my election commitment of the

substantial upgrade to Clyde Road in Berwick to ease traffic congestion. We initially promised \$25 million for this project and we are seeking the second half from the state Labor government. My Labor opponent Rodney Cocks—and I congratulate him first of all for his tireless efforts—tried to trump me by announcing \$30 million for the grade separation. We committed this in the May budget, which I believe was also matched by Labor. I hope they stick to their promises.

Just as importantly, I was at the Beaconsfield Progress Association in a debate with my opponent Rodney Cocks. He made it very clear to all those present that Tim Pallas, the roads minister for Victoria, had agreed and he was able to successfully negotiate an agreement that the state Labor government would match the funding of \$30 million, so I will keep the Brumby government accountable to this promise.

Labor matched my election commitment of \$2.5 million for a performing arts centre for the Emerald Secondary College. First, I must congratulate all the students who participated in last year's rock eisteddfod, where they came third—they were my inspiration for pushing this project to see whether it was warranted. The students worked so hard for this project and they must be congratulated for their persistence and especially for coming third in the whole state. It was an amazing effort. But there is one person in particular who must get all the accolades for this, and that is Wayne Burgess, the principal at Emerald Secondary College. He was the one who invited me to the rock eisteddfod that night and put the plans and the concept together. He put an amazing application together. He was strongly supported by the school president, Doug. Wayne, you did an amazing job.

Wayne wrote me a letter dated 30 January. It states:

On Thursday 11th October 2007, Emerald Secondary College received a commitment that a re-elected Howard government would provide \$2.5 million for this community facility.

And, as I said, we heard the echo from the Labor Party in Wayne Burgess's letter:

On Tuesday 16th October 2007 Stephen Smith, Shadow Minister for Education and Training made a similar commitment.

In actual fact it was an identical commitment, and we are now calling for the new Rudd government to honour this commitment to the students at Emerald Secondary College. I believe the decision on the day was that it would be in this year's federal budget in May. Let us not start breaking promises; let us commit to this project. It is so vitally important.

Labor also matched my election commitment of \$2 million for a new sports stadium in Timbarra. The history of Timbarra is this: initially the state Labor government was planning to sell the land but after a large, strong local campaign, it was decided that the land would be held onto. I must congratulate the former Liberal candidate for Narre Warren North, Councillor Mick Morland, for pushing this issue with Brian Hetherton and also the Casey council for their commitment. In the last state election a promise was made by Luke Donnellan, the state Labor member for Narre Warren North. I congratulate him for getting the funding for this—I will be honest about that—but where is the school? It has not been built. There are no plans. There is nothing happening, so it is one of those empty and vague election promises. Unless we actually see something done, it was not worth making the announcement in the first place.

That brings me to my point: not only do we need the school to be built; we need the funding for the new \$2 million sports stadium to be allocated, just as the Howard government's commitment was to be allo-

cated in this year's May budget. The Labor Party has assured the voters of La Trobe that will be the case, so I look forward to seeing the May budget and to seeing these announcements being made. It is only fair and just.

Labor also made some of their own commitments. They made a commitment to a childcare centre for Sherbrooke, which will be placed in Upwey. I look forward to seeing that. I have always been a strong supporter of the Sherbrooke Children's Centre. We were looking at getting funding for that under Regional Partnerships, working with Christiaan O'Dea. I congratulate him for his tireless work on this proposal.

Again, I look forward to the opening of a \$2.5 million GP superclinic in Berwick, although I am still of the view that it should be closer to Lakeside and Pakenham. That is where the services are actually needed, because that is the fastest growing growth corridor. Plus we also have a GP superclinic right next-door to the Casey Hospital, so you are going to have two superclinics right beside each other.

There was also a promise to build a technical school in Berwick. I congratulate the Labor government for making that announcement but, alas, I have been told recently that their commitment to build a technical school at Dandenong has been scrapped and the next one they are looking at cutting is the one in Berwick. I would hate to see this scrapped. It is one of the fastest growing growth corridors in the area. Education is so vitally important. We have heard the Prime Minister talk about the education revolution, so let us actually make this happen. We had an election commitment on this too. The difference is that, as with Bryn Mawr Bridge and Fernlea House, we delivered these in a cycle. I really hope this is actually committed to. I put the Labor government on notice

that I and all La Trobe residents expect to see each and every one of their promises fulfilled.

Further, I have been disturbed by reports that Labor is considering scrapping projects to which the former coalition government allocated funding well before last year's election. For instance, last year the Shire of Yarra Ranges was awarded \$2 million in Australian government funding to expand and enhance the Burrinja arts and cultural centre in Upwey. This is a project that the council has put a huge amount of work into getting. There was an SOS for us to come through and commit to this project. The state Labor government had committed to this project.

We get people being very cynical, saying this was all about votes. If you look at the polling booth results in Upwey and Tecoma, these are not hardcore Liberal support bases, but these people were desperate for this performing arts centre. They have worked long, hard and tirelessly for it. The state member for Monbulk, James Merlino, has also been pushing for this. It will be a slap in the face not only for the residents of Upwey, Tecoma and La Trobe in general but also for your state Labor counterparts if you scrap this project. The entire \$10 million project will be in jeopardy if this commitment is not abided by. I understand that since the election the Shire of Yarra Ranges has had preliminary discussions with representatives of the relevant Commonwealth department, yet the Labor government has still not announced whether funding will be allocated. This is a disgrace.

Further, over the past three years I have worked with the CSIRO to develop a proposal to conduct a biological control into Wandering Trad in the Dandenong Ranges. For those who do not know, wandering trad is a creeper which goes into creeks. It sucks

up the water, it prevents wildlife such as platypuses from moving around and it also causes great skin irritations to all pets, including my dog, Moejoe. I was very glad to see that the No. 1 issue of the Howard government and the former Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, Malcolm Turnbull—and I congratulate him—after coming and meeting all the local environmental groups was to get a biological control of \$450,000 over three years to target this weed. I was so glad that, prior to the election, I was able to get this as a commitment—not during a campaign but before the election was called. So it was all being delivered under the previous government—under the Howard government—and allocated in existing funding. I have with me a front page from the *Ferntree Gully, Belgrave Mail*. The heading is ‘Forgotten hills’. It is from when the now environment minister, Peter Garrett, attended the area. It states: ‘While many had expected Friday’s event would have been the ideal opportunity to unveil a vote-winning commitment to the weed battle, neither speaker’—neither my opponent nor Mr Garrett—‘would make that a commitment’. The article quotes Mr Garrett as saying:

We will have a policy to address that question in an amplified form on the way to the election.

The amplified form appeared after the coalition, the Howard government, made a \$30 million commitment to weed eradication in the Dandenong Ranges. This is the largest commitment ever made by any government. If you compare the state Labor government’s commitment of \$15,000 with that, it is an absolute disgrace. We made this \$450,000 commitment, and yet I have heard this is one of our previous election commitments to be cut by the current government. Minister Garrett, I plead with you not to cut this project, because it is of such significance. It would also be contradicting what the Labor Party was actually saying to residents in the

seat of La Trobe. A media release from my opponent, Rodney Cocks, from Monday, 12 November 2007, states:

LABOR’S \$15.3 MILLION PLAN TO TACKLE WEEDS

In actual fact, the coalition had \$30 million. The media release goes on to say:

A Rudd Labor Government will invest \$15 million over four years from unallocated departmental funds to:

- Establish a comprehensive national applied research program to investigate and solve the most serious invasive plant problems—

including Wandering Trad, Bridal Creep, Ivy, et cetera. The Labor Party put in their press announcement that they will commit to tackling this problem of Wandering Trad, and yet the first thing they do when they get here is look at reneging on a commitment to the voters under the previous government. That is a disgrace.

On one hand, you are saying you will commit to tackling this problem. We made the election commitment under the previous Howard government, thanks to Malcolm Turnbull and the great fight and support of all the local environmentalists, all of whom want to see this weed eradicated, and the first thing you are doing is looking at not only breaking your own media release but also reneging on our commitment to tackling this Wandering Trad. It is an absolute disgrace and I really hope—I plead with the minister—this decision will be revisited because of its importance. We are so desperate in this area to solve this issue. It is interesting, too, that Rodney Cocks, the Labor candidate for La Trobe, said in a press release:

... it is clear that the Howard Government has no national plan to tackle this issue, as they recently announced that the highly successful National Weeds CRC will be abolished in June 2008.

Guess what! The National Weeds CRC was one of the groups who wrote a letter of support saying you need to get rid of Wandering Trad, and it supported the proposal. I think it is a disgrace that the first thing that the Labor Rudd government is doing is looking at breaking previous election promises made by the Howard government and not honouring them.

Again, I thank all the voters in La Trobe for their support. Whether you voted for me or not, I will be your representative and I will work tirelessly and hard for everyone from every political persuasion.

Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your elevation. I am a bit disappointed that having just come into the chamber, you missed the final sentences in my speech about my concerns over weeds, as I understand you are a passionate weed ambassador too.

The SPEAKER—I did note the member got on to weeds. Feral weeds, yes. Before I call the honourable member for Cook, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech and I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (11.54 am)—It is with humility and a deep sense of appreciation to the electors of Cook that I rise to make my maiden speech in this House. Today I wish to pay tribute to those who have been instrumental in my journey and to share the values and vision that I intend to bring to this House. I begin by acknowledging the first Australians, in particular the Gweigal people of the Dharawal nation of southern Sydney, who were the first to encounter Lieutenant James Cook, the namesake of my electorate, at Kurnell almost 240 years ago. I also commence by expressing my sincere appreciation to the people and families of the Sutherland shire in my electorate of Cook for placing their trust in me on this first occasion.

The shire community is a strong one. It is free of pretension and deeply proud of our nation's heritage. Like most Australians, we are a community knit together by our shared commitment to family, hard work and generosity. We share a deep passion for our local natural environment and embrace what Teddy Roosevelt called the vigorous life, especially in sports. It is also a place where the indomitable entrepreneurial spirit of small business has flourished, particularly in recent years. In short, the shire is a great place to live and raise a family. As the federal member for Cook, I want to keep it that way by ensuring that Australia remains true to the values that have made our nation great and by keeping our economy strong so that families and small business can plan for their future with confidence.

At a local level, families—in particular carers—will come under increasing pressure because of the inability of local services to meet the changing needs of an ageing population. The character of our local area is also threatened by a failure to deliver critical state infrastructure such as the F6 extension for our current population, let alone the population growth targets set by the state government for the future.

On the Kurnell peninsula, the modern birthplace of our nation, we must reverse 150 years of environmental neglect, most recently demonstrated by the construction of Labor's desalination plant—a plant that New South Wales does not need and the shire community does not want.

We must also combat the negative influences on our young people that lead to depression, suicide, self-harm, abuse and anti-social behaviour that in turn threatens our community. We need to help our young people make positive choices for their lives and be there to help them get their lives back on track when they fall.

For the past nine years, the Hon. Bruce Baird has ably represented the Cook electorate. Bruce Baird is a man of achievement, integrity, faith and, above all, compassion. He has set a high standard. I thank him for his service, his personal guidance over many years and for being here today.

My colleagues and I would not be here without the support of the Liberal Party and the thousands of volunteers who believe in our cause. They provide the ultimate in political support—they show up. And, as we know, history is made by those who show up. I thank them all, especially in my electorate of Cook. I particularly thank my good friend Kevin Schreiber; my campaign team, led by Michael Douglas and Scott Chapman; our local Liberal shire councillors; and my local, state and federal parliamentary colleagues, especially those here today.

For almost five years I had the privilege to serve as the State Director of the Liberal Party of New South Wales. Then, as now, I was surrounded by people who walked the journey with me. I thank them all for their support, especially Chris McDiven, Rhondda Vanzella, the Hon. Shane Stone, Senator Bill Heffernan, David Gazard and the Hon. John Howard, the greatest Prime Minister since Sir Robert Menzies.

In addition to working in politics, the great bulk of my professional experience has been working with industry. I thank the many staff, colleagues and industry leaders I worked with during that time, in particular Peter Verwer and the Hon. Tim Fischer, who provided great guidance and support.

From my early days at the Property Council of Australia to my many roles in the tourism industry, I have developed a healthy respect for the passion and commitment of Australian businesspeople, especially those in small business. It is business that creates jobs and it is business that drives our econ-

omy. This is achieved through the initiative, enterprise and sacrifice of business owners and the hard work, skill and professionalism of the employees they lead.

In this parliament, let us make laws that encourage businesses and their employees to excel. Let us ensure that business is not unreasonably burdened by our efforts but, rather, empowered to grow and create more jobs, especially locally. Let us also make sure there are strong incentives, as well as protections, for all employees—not a one-size-fits-all approach—and ensure we preserve the right of the individual to negotiate their own conditions directly with their employer, should they wish to do so. Furthermore, let us acknowledge that we live in a highly competitive global economy and not deceive our constituents that we can tame these forces. Rather, let us protect our way of life by ensuring our economy is strong, equipped and positioned to perform.

I turn now to the most significant influences on my life—my family and my faith. Family is the stuff of life and there is nothing more precious. I thank my family members here in the gallery today for their support. It is my hope that all Australians could have the same caring and supportive environment that was provided to me by my parents, John and Marion Morrison, and my late grandparents, Mardie and Sandy Smith and Douglas and Noel Morrison, whom I honour in this place today. My parents laid the foundation for my life. Together with my brother, Alan, they demonstrated through their actions their Christian faith and the value they placed on public and community service. In our family, it has never been what you accumulate that matters but what you contribute. I thank them for their sacrifice, love and, above all, their example. To my wife, Jenny, on Valentine's Day: words are not enough. She has loved and supported me in all things and made countless sacrifices, consistent with

her generous, selfless and caring nature. However, above all, I thank her for her determination to never give up hope for us to have a child. After 14 years of bitter disappointments, God remembered her faithfulness and blessed us with our miracle child, Abbey Rose, on the seventh of the seventh of the seventh, to whom I dedicate this speech today in the hope of an even better future for her and her generation.

Growing up in a Christian home, I made a commitment to my faith at an early age and have been greatly assisted by the pastoral work of many dedicated church leaders, in particular the Reverend Ray Green and pastors Brian Houston and Leigh Coleman. My personal faith in Jesus Christ is not a political agenda. As Lincoln said, our task is not to claim whether God is on our side but to pray earnestly that we are on His. For me, faith is personal, but the implications are social—as personal and social responsibility are at the heart of the Christian message. In recent times it has become fashionable to negatively stereotype those who profess their Christian faith in public life as ‘extreme’ and to suggest that such faith has no place in the political debate of this country. This presents a significant challenge for those of us, like my colleague, who seek to follow the example of William Wilberforce or Desmond Tutu, to name just two. These leaders stood for the immutable truths and principles of the Christian faith. They transformed their nations and, indeed, the world in the process. More importantly, by following the convictions of their faith, they established and reinforced the principles of our liberal democracy upon which our own nation is built.

Australia is not a secular country—it is a free country. This is a nation where you have the freedom to follow any belief system you choose. Secularism is just one. It has no greater claim than any other on our society. As US Senator Joe Lieberman said, the Con-

stitution guarantees freedom of religion, not from religion. I believe the same is true in this country.

So what values do I derive from my faith? My answer comes from Jeremiah, chapter 9:24:

... I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the Lord.

From my faith I derive the values of loving-kindness, justice and righteousness, to act with compassion and kindness, acknowledging our common humanity and to consider the welfare of others; to fight for a fair go for everyone to fulfil their human potential and to remove whatever unjust obstacles stand in their way, including diminishing their personal responsibility for their own wellbeing; and to do what is right, to respect the rule of law, the sanctity of human life and the moral integrity of marriage and the family. We must recognise an unchanging and absolute standard of what is good and what is evil. Desmond Tutu put it this way:

... we expect Christians ... to be those who stand up for the truth, to stand up for justice, to stand on the side of the poor and the hungry, the homeless and the naked, and when that happens, then Christians will be trustworthy believable witnesses.

These are my principles. My vision for Australia is for a nation that is strong, prosperous and generous: strong in our values and our freedoms, strong in our family and community life, strong in our sense of nationhood and in the institutions that protect and preserve our democracy; prosperous in our enterprise and the careful stewardship of our opportunities, our natural environment and our resources; and, above all, generous in spirit, to share our good fortune with others, both at home and overseas, out of compassion and a desire for justice.

Australia is a strong nation. It is the product of more than 200 years of sacrifice—most significantly by those who have served in our defence forces, both here and overseas, and by those who have fallen, particularly those who have fallen most recently, and to whom I express my profound gratitude. But a strong country is also one that is at peace with its past. I do not share the arm-band view of history, black or otherwise. I like my history in high-definition, wide-screen, full, vibrant colour. There is no doubt that our Indigenous population has been devastated by the inevitable clash of cultures that came with the arrival of the modern world in 1770 at Kurnell in my electorate. This situation is not the result of any one act but of more than 200 years of shared ignorance, failed policies and failed communities. And we are not alone: our experience is shared by every other modern nation that began this way. There is much for us all to be sorry for. Sadly, those who will be most sorry are the children growing up in Indigenous communities today, whose life chances are significantly less than the rest of us.

We can choose to sit in judgement on previous generations, thinking we would have done it differently. But would we? Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Nor can we compare the world we live in today with the world that framed the policies of previous generations. So let us not judge. Rather, having apologised for our past—as I was proud to do in this place yesterday—let us foster a reconciliation where true forgiveness can emerge and we work together to remove the disadvantage of our Indigenous communities, not out of a sense of guilt or recompense for past failures but because it is the humane and right thing to do. Having said this, we cannot allow a national obsession with our past failures to overwhelm our national appetite for celebrating our modern stories of nationhood. We must celebrate our achieve-

ments and acknowledge our failures at least in equal measure. We should never feel the need to deny our past to embrace our future.

On 29 April 1770 James Cook landed at Kurnell and so began the modern Australian story. James Cook was a man before his time. He embodied the true spirit of the Enlightenment age. Against a backdrop of brutality and ignorance, he displayed an amazing empathy and respect for his own crew and the people and lands he visited. He should be revered as one of the most significant figures in our national history. On 29 April 2020 we will mark the 250th anniversary of Cook's landing at Kurnell. This should be the most significant national celebration since our Bicentenary. This will require federal, state and local government to overcome decades of neglect of the Kurnell Peninsula and a failure to manage the site with the respect it deserves, particularly at the state level. The time has come to truly respect and rehabilitate our nation's birthplace at Kurnell.

Australia is a prosperous country. Our prosperity has produced significant dividends—in particular, jobs for millions of Australians. The reason we have working families in Australia is that they have jobs. They have jobs today because of the strong economic management of the Howard government, which provided an environment for business to grow and prosper. After 11½ years of the Howard government the Australian economy is the strongest it has ever been—no ifs, no buts. I would like to honour today the member for Higgins, the Hon. Peter Costello, for his leadership of our economy over this time. He is our finest Treasurer ever and that position is in no present threat.

Yet the storm clouds are gathering. We must cast our eyes forward and embrace a new round of economic reforms. Of particular significance is the need to reform our

federation. However, we must proceed carefully. The realignment of our federation, particularly in priority areas such as water, taxation and infrastructure, must be about delivering a better system of governance for our population and our economy. It should not be done to cover for the inability of state governments to do their jobs, especially in health and education. There is a remedy to the incompetence of state governments that requires no constitutional change—vote them out, especially in New South Wales. We must also give attention to local government and give them a direct voice in how our nation is governed. They should be given a clear and mandated role in service delivery and the means to do their job. Commonwealth, state and local government should operate like a three-legged stool, each supporting the other. At present it is more like a three-legged dog.

We are a prosperous people, but this prosperity is not solely for our own benefit; it comes with a responsibility to invest back into our communities. Our communities are held together by the selfless service of volunteers. We must work to value their service and encourage more of our community to join the volunteer ranks and assist local organisations engage and retain today's volunteers, particularly from younger generations. We must also appreciate that our not-for-profit sector has the potential to play a far greater role in the delivery of community services than is currently recognised. As global citizens, we must also recognise that our freedom will always be diminished by the denial of those same freedoms elsewhere, whether in Australia or overseas.

Social entrepreneurs such as David Bus-sau, our Senior Australian of the Year, have shown the way forward. Our attention in this area cannot be limited only to areas of strategic self-interest. It must be pursued as the responsibility of our common humanity. In Africa, 6,500 people die every day from pre-

ventable and treatable diseases. Over just six weeks that is more than the 250,000 people estimated to have tragically died following the tsunami tragedy that evoked such a compassionate and generous response from Australians—and I commend them for that. Africa, though, is a humanitarian tragedy on an unimaginable scale. It is a true moral crisis that eclipses all others. The African tragedy is driven by war, poverty, disease, famine, corruption, injustice and an evil that is robbing generations of Africans, our fellow human beings, of their future. Paul Hewson, better known as Bono, said:

There is a continent—Africa—being consumed by flames.

... when the history books are written, our age will be remembered for ... what we did—or did not do to put the fire out ...

We must engage as individuals and communities to confront these issues—not just as governments. We have all heard the call to make poverty history. Let us do this by first making poverty our own personal business.

The Howard government increased annual spending on foreign aid to \$3.2 billion. The new government has committed to continue to increase this investment and I commend it for doing so. However, we still must go further. If we doubt the need, let us note that in 2007 the total world budget for global aid accounted for only one-third of basic global needs in areas such as education, general health, HIV-AIDS, water treatment and sanitation. This leaves a sizeable gap. The need is not diminishing, nor can our support. It is the Australian thing to do.

In conclusion, it says in the Book of Joel, 'Your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions.' Let us have in this place a vision of young men and women that realises the dreams of generations past—the dreaming of Dharawal elders of ancient times, the dreams of Cook and his era of dis-

covery and enlightenment and the dreams of my grandparents' generation, who fought wars, survived the Great Depression and gave birth to our great Liberal Party with the dream of a brighter day for those who came after them. May God bless and guide us all in this place as we serve those who have had the good grace to send us here on their behalf.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Brand, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Mr GRAY (Brand—Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia) (12.15 pm)—I pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land. I honour the prior occupation of our continent by Indigenous peoples before the great European migrations. I am of part of those migrations. In June 1966, Mum and Dad packed our bags and a trunk and, along with my brother, David, and sister, Carol, we sailed from Southampton, England, on the ship *Fairsea*. I was eight years old. Our destination was Adelaide. We were a family of £10 Poms, part of the migration that filled the steel mills, the manufacturing plants and factories of Kwinana, Newcastle, the Illawarra, Geelong, Adelaide and the Iron Triangle of South Australia. Although that was more than 40 years ago, the smell of diesel fumes still makes me feel seasick. The voyage took us first to Western Australia, where we spent the day visiting the city that many years later became my home town. Then we sailed to Adelaide, disembarked, boarded a bus and travelled north for 400 kilometres to Whyalla. We stayed in a migrant hostel before settling into our state housing commission house, this would be our home for the next 13 years. My dad, Gordon, worked at BHP's Whyalla steel mill.

In 1976, I graduated from Whyalla High, having been taught along the way by wonderful teachers such as Ken Harrington, Dale Dodderidge and Bruce Wilton. They taught me well and they taught me much. Today when I meet teachers, principals or education specialists I think of the teachers who gave me the tools to shape my views. Teaching is a vital and invaluable profession. I will not forget the work of my teachers, their educating, their mentoring and their generosity. In this place, I acknowledge them all.

Throughout the 2007 election the government promised an education revolution—a revolution that will end the technology gap, the digital divide. That is why the government will put computers in schools for all year 9 to 12 students. I am committed to using my time in this place to do what I can to strengthen our schools and support our school children and teachers.

The education plans of our new government are vital to future generations of Australians. It is important that we invest in education. The future of our nation depends upon it. We all know education is not just what we learn at school. From my teachers I got the educational foundation for building a career. From my parents and my friends I learned the principles that underpin the two forces in my life: Labor politics and love. I learned my first lessons in politics from dad. He has an uncomplicated approach to life and a simple view of fairness. From my mum, Olive, I learned about love—love without complexity or condition. From mum I also learned about family.

First, let me speak of Labor politics. I joined the Australian Labor Party in 1974 at the age of 16 and met a wonderful influence in my life, Laurie Wallis, a former boiler-maker who was elected to this parliament in 1969 and retired in 1983. As I studied for my degree in economics at the Australian Na-

tional University here in Canberra, Laurie would invite me up to parliament to watch the theatre of politics. After graduating in the early 1980s, I travelled to the Northern Territory. I taught a little and did a few odd jobs that took me around the Territory. Eventually, I got a job with the late Bob Collins. In Darwin, generous people gathered me in and helped me to understand their world. I will always remember Barbara James, the Gerritsen family, Dawn Lawrie and of course Bob.

In the Northern Territory I met people who were deeply committed to building pathways out of poverty for Aboriginal people. We were also focused on getting Aboriginal people into parliament, a cause which is no less important today. Politics may be a difficult life choice but, at its best, it helps form enduring experiences and strong friendships. A cynic may believe politics is about acquaintances, alliances and transient friendships. I have never thought that was true. In any event, it makes us what we are and it makes me what I am. Politics brought me back to Canberra in 1986 to work in the national office of the Australian Labor Party, where I was fortunate to meet Robert Ray. Robert taught me the importance of courage and that principle and politics are comfortable bedfellows. He was a real mentor. From Bob Hogg and Bob McMullan, who were great national secretaries of the Australian Labor Party, I learned about patience, carefulness of thought and generosity of spirit. I also learned a vital lesson for politicians: we should never get too far ahead or, indeed, too full of ourselves.

My mission as I followed them as the Labor Party's national secretary was to continue the work they had begun: to build the ALP as a truly national organisation. From all these people I learned, and will forever strive to master, the greatest lesson: always seek to learn from others.

I will speak now of love. I met my wife, Deborah, when she worked for the Australian Labor Party in Western Australia. Deborah is now my closest friend. She is the person on whom I rely, the strength that holds our family together, the one to whom I turn as we set the principles of life for our three young sons. At almost 50, I find my beautiful, bright and wonderful boys, Riley, Darcy and Toby, are a constant source of pride, joy, love and fun. I stand before you as a new member of parliament but I am first and always the father of my boys and husband to my wife. My family will always come first, and I thank Mum for this lesson.

Just as a strong economy is the essence of a strong nation, loving families and sustaining relationships are the essence of a strong community. From a young age it was clear to me that principles are the central value of politics, that the language of democracy is discourse and debate and that the most important element of all is compromise. Without compromise we lose cohesion and risk progress. Life in politics has taught me the importance of liberal democracy, of a strong economy and of the central importance of social cohesion.

In winning the seat of Brand for the Australian Labor Party, I acknowledge and pay tribute to Kim Beazley for his contribution to my local community and to Australian public life. Kim was not just a politician. He is a statesman. He is our former leader and Deputy Prime Minister. He epitomises the notion of public service, giving a great part of his life to the party, to politics, to parliament and to the Australian people. I am honoured to continue in his footsteps as Labor's representative in this place for the people of Brand.

In acknowledging the privilege that I have been given, it is impossible not to recognise the support and help I have received and continue to receive from my family—

Deborah, Riley, Darcy and Toby—and also from Rosalie and Peter Walsh and the broader Walsh families, who are, by nature, much more forgiving than the former senator. Many of us are lucky enough to have friends who have become family. Thank you, Lois Anderson.

I acknowledge and thank friends and local ALP branch members Rob Millhouse, Joy Stewart, Barry and Jerroldine Gilbert, Kath Gallop, John and Peg Cotter, Esther Grogan, Margaret and Max Duff, Sandra Lee, Coral Richards, Peter Kane, Andy and Margaret Mitchell, Brendan McShanag, Gus Riggs, Kelly Harman, Guy Morgan, Ray Thomson, Aleta Johnston, Natalie Machin, Terry Healy, Briony Sefton, Ron Hassell, Lee and Rita Gunn, Senator Glenn Sterle and, of course, my campaign manager, Renay Sheehan. I also thank Renay's husband, Aaron, for his tolerance and generosity and Chloe, their daughter, for her sacrifices.

None of us in this place can win election campaign without the help of many people. I thank all of our branch members. I thank my local MPs, David Templeman, Mark McGowan and, especially, Paul Papalia. All of these people deserve the credit for my being here. I trust I will do them justice.

The electorate of Brand covers about 430 square kilometres along the Western Australian coast from south of Perth to Peel Inlet. It includes the cities of Kwinana, Rockingham and Mandurah. These are significant centres and major sources of industrial activity, housing and employment. Fleet Base West at Garden Island is also strategically central to the nation's defence capability. In 2008, the electorate of Brand will generate about \$20 billion towards the Australian economy. The Kwinana industrial area will contribute most of that amount.

For our economic and strategic capabilities, Brand is one of the most important elec-

torates in Australia. It is where increasing numbers of people come to live, to work, to raise families and to retire. It is where young people find that the Kwinana industrial area can provide the trades and skills which are tickets to the world. It is where we build ships, generate energy, smelt metals, make fertiliser, liquefy gases, produce agricultural products, process chemicals, export grain, build houses and even turn seawater into drinking water. It is where industry and environmental protection go hand in hand. It is where we have made industry good for people because it creates wealth and it creates jobs, and work creates dignity and pride for people and their communities. It is also good because profitable industry can afford the highest environmental standards; indeed, it is a virtuous cycle.

In keeping with this theme, Kwinana is where the success of one industry depends on the success of its neighbours. Kwinana is one place in Australia where we lead the world, trading in and reusing the by-products of industry for greater energy efficiency, water conservation and lower emissions to the soil, air and water. Kwinana industries share more than 120 synergies, a great example of which is the sequestration of 70,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, which is now mixed with mining residue to lower its alkalinity so that the residue can grow trees. It is where we keep our industry clean, productive and protected by a green buffer zone.

Such interdependence is unique and a credit to those who own, manage and work in businesses in Kwinana and Rockingham. These industries directly and indirectly pay the wages of 26,000 Australians every year. Innovative industry sits comfortably with modern and effective trade unions. Professional and flexible workplaces are supported by insightful unions. Increasingly I see growing confidence between employers and or-

ganised labour, a confidence which I hope continues.

Australia has many rapidly growing coastal regions and growth corridors like Kwinana, Rockingham and Mandurah which need federal support, particularly as we experience unprecedented demographic change. By way of example, in the Rockingham, Kwinana and Mandurah areas, industry expects that about half of their current skilled workers will retire in the next 15 years. Only six per cent of their workforce today is under the age of 24. Western Australia's industry is reporting the imminent retirement of a large cohort of skilled workers. It also reports great difficulty in recruiting trainees, trades professionals, plant operators and project managers, safety personnel, accounts clerks and receptionists. Unless we, as a nation, respond to our skills crisis, we risk the sustainability of economic growth. This is not special pleading for my electorate. Western Australia and the nation need to deal with this dynamic. Kwinana and Rockingham are where we take the lead in educating our children and creating the pathways to industry, jobs and the future.

Providing the best skilled workforce makes our economy resilient. It makes communities strong and gives opportunity to thousands of future Australians. It is why we need a coherent and sustainable training plan. Kwinana and Rockingham have every ingredient we need to create the best model for training workers. It is one of the nation's largest industrial areas; it is crying out for people. It has 18 secondary schools. It has technical and further education institutions and university campuses. The massive industries and growing communities of Rockingham and Kwinana are where Labor's plan for skilling Australia will come to life.

Of all the democratic nation-states created in the 20th century, none has been as suc-

cessful as Australia. We have created the most effective democracy and a strong economy. But democratic processes are always a work in progress. We have done some things well. The secret ballot, for example, is a unique Australian creation. We have led innovation in parliamentary processes, yet it took 60 years to extend the franchise to Aboriginal people and a further seven years to include them in the census. Our robust institutions, strong public sector and sense of nationhood have helped generations to build a wealthy, capable country. Along the way we have allowed differences of opinion to surface and be discussed and yet we are still able to get along. This is an endearing and enduring legacy to all of those who perform public service for this country. But it is also our duty to support the emerging fragile democracies in our region. We have not been good at exporting our model nor at engaging hearts and minds in the seeding of democratic institutions. When we look to Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and Fiji we see the need for these nations to build a robust democracy. But it is not easy, and emerging nations such as Timor demonstrate the need for a strong economy when building a strong democracy. My friend President Jose Ramos-Horta is a great man—honourable, hard-working and true to his task. As he lies in a hospital bed in Darwin, wounded by a bullet from a rebel's gun, we have cause to pause. The struggle to build a strong and sustainable democracy must be theirs, but their struggle to build a sustainable and resilient economy is also ours. Without a strong economy, democracy will not survive. Without a strong economy, there is no capacity to protect the environment, to create civil order or to protect property rights. It is clear to me that we must work to build sustainable economies, capable governments and jobs in our region. Democracy

will thrive amid affluence, as it does in Australia.

In this context we cannot usefully discuss sharing the fruits of economic growth unless we have first created wealth and sustained its creation. Getting the economy right is at the very heart of nation building and at the heart of our national interest. A robust and sustainable economy allows for a surplus to be distributed to those in need. I believe that for a liberal democracy to survive it must be underpinned by a strong economy and continually improving living standards. By continually improving the productivity of our economy we create economic wealth to support our greatest purpose: the sharing of its benefits. These benefits include better education, shelter for everyone, environmental protection and better opportunities for the poor, the dispossessed, the disadvantaged and the homeless. A healthy economy allows us to best respond to present and future challenges and is central to our success as a nation. Indeed, a strong economy is in my view the central pillar in our mission to define and determine our national interest and to give life and meaning to the values of Australians.

As I begin my term as the member for Brand I commit myself to unwavering support for the human, physical and financial infrastructure which allows our economy to grow. By definition, this involves consideration of our national interest and our national values. This is my aspiration and I accept it will draw criticism from time to time. Indeed, Australians enjoy criticising their politicians. That is how it is. It is part of the discourse and debate of a vibrant democracy. It is also something I welcome. It nurtures my desire to learn from others in my quest to do what is best and what is right for our nation. This is what I have learned from the influential people in my life. I hope I can make proud the people who put me here. I hope I

can always do what is best and right for our nation.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12.35 pm)—Can I add my congratulations to the new member for Brand, somebody who comes into this place with a very big reputation. I have not had the opportunity of meeting him yet, but he is very well regarded in the business community in Western Australia and I wish him luck in representing the point of view of that community within the new government. If I might just make an aside: the new member for Cowan was due to give his maiden speech at this time. For anyone who is waiting for him to speak, he has been detained and will be speaking at about 1.15 pm. I am very much looking forward to hearing his contribution.

I now want to take the opportunity, in giving my speech in the address-in-reply debate, to talk about the thing that is dearest to me: my electorate. I begin by saying that I am very pleased to be here, still representing the electors of Stirling. I had a very hard fought campaign in Stirling. I think it was equally difficult with, if not more difficult than, the campaign I had in 2004 to win the seat from the former member, Jann McFarlane. I want to take this opportunity to thank some of the people who were responsible for making sure that we won that seat and who helped me to be returned to this place.

Firstly, there is my campaign chairman, John Franklyn. He has been my campaign chairman for the past four years. He came to the role without any particular political experience. He learnt the job extraordinarily quickly. He worked on it practically full time for the six months in the lead-up to the election. I owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. He is somebody who has my deep and abiding respect and I look forward to working with him over the next three years to

make sure that we also secure this marginal seat in 2010.

Fay Duda is somebody who has worked for me on previous occasions and continues to play an enormous role in my campaign, particularly as finance chairman. She is a very good friend of mine. I appreciate the enormous efforts that she put in, on behalf of the Stirling campaign, in the lead-up to the election. I want to place on record my enduring gratitude for everything she did.

And then there is the rest of my campaign team. My treasurer, Doug Dougall, is an excellent man who did his job. He has a very quiet manner. He did his job with very little fanfare but extraordinarily efficiently. I thank him for all the effort that he put in. It would not be right if I finished without mentioning my mother and father, who were an essential part of my campaign team. I again thank them for all of their efforts. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of my sisters, Jennifer and Catherine, who are not part of the natural Liberal constituency but nonetheless put aside their own political preferences and helped me throughout the campaign. Very importantly, I would like to acknowledge my partner, Georgina Bower. As well as working tirelessly on the campaign, she put up with a rather irrational and difficult person at home on various occasions during that campaign.

I will now come to my office. My electorate staff is led by Liz Behjat. She has just been preselected in a winnable position to go into the upper house of the Western Australian parliament, which I am very pleased about. She worked incredibly hard. She is an amazing on-the-ground campaigner. She worked with my other electorate officers—Erin McGrath, Sylvia Norton and Amy Yelash, as well as Stephanie Power and occasionally Katie Brooks. They worked incredibly hard. I thank them very sincerely for all

of their efforts and I am looking forward to working with them over the next three years.

I had very good support from some Young Liberals in Western Australia. I want to quickly acknowledge Dan Hyde, John Pawley, Matt Dawson, Lauren Gregan, Caiden Gray and Michael Storozhev. They were the ones who came with me to the shopping centres. We really campaigned for the whole of 2007. They often came with their hangovers but they were there nonetheless and they worked extremely hard, and I thank them for that. The Stirling division again really put in a fantastic effort for me. I particularly acknowledge Ann Johnson, Marie Grout and Mal and Glenyse Holmes, who are at this time actually getting a tour of this House. I am very pleased that they have been able to come over for the start of this new parliament. I would also like to acknowledge my patron, Senator Christopher Ellison, who is an extraordinarily good mentor and did a lot to help me succeed in 2007.

The campaign was extraordinarily hard fought, as I have said, and I think it is only right and proper that I acknowledge my opponent on this occasion. I actually saw him in the House yesterday. His name is Peter Tinley. He worked very hard and he ran a very good campaign. I would like to place on record that we had an enormous duel and that he came very close to wresting the seat from me. We were able to hold it in the end through our very hard work over the three years, but I would like to acknowledge that he ran a fair and very good campaign and he was a very formidable candidate.

I am very keen to concentrate in my speech in the address-in-reply debate on the promises that were made to my electorate, both by me and by the Labor Party, during the campaign. Part of the Labor Party strategy in Stirling was to match any promise that we made. So, as far as I am concerned, the

new government have committed themselves to honour every promise that the Liberal Party made to the electors of Stirling in 2007 and I will be holding them to account for the promises they made in matching the commitments that the Liberal Party had given. Those promises were not always on the record. I cannot necessarily produce written evidence that the Labor Party promised them but certainly every time we announced a policy they were on the phone saying that they would match it, and I would certainly be able to provide evidence from some of the community groups in my electorate to say that is what was occurring. That is fair enough, and I do not have a problem with it, but I do very much expect the new Rudd government to fulfil those commitments.

Since becoming the member for Stirling in 2004, I have been very privileged to work with the community to secure important projects, such as vital infrastructure for schools, incentives for small business and money to upgrade some of the more dangerous roads and black spots that affect my community. I am determined in this term to continue that work. As I said, we made promises on all of those particular issues and I expect the new government to fulfil them. I would like to go through some of those promises. These promises include the promises that we made to the electorate and the promises that Labor also made, and I think it is reasonable to expect that, now that the Labor Party has won the election, they will fulfil the commitments that they made to Stirling residents.

Crime is probably the No. 1 concern of Stirling residents. I know that from talking to people. You only have to go out on any Saturday morning to a shopping centre to feel the sense of frustration that people feel about what they see as uncontrolled crime rates. The reality is that it is very difficult to get a clear picture of where crime is at in my electorate because the state government are not

up-front in the way that they publish crime statistics. Sadly, they are more interested in protecting their own backs than in providing serious information about the state of crime in Stirling. There is absolutely no doubt that it is extraordinarily difficult to get a police response when you require one. The police do an extraordinarily good job. They work very hard, but they are underresourced. Officers are leaving the force at a far greater rate than the Labor government can recruit other officers. That is a serious problem. At any given time in Stirling, which falls within the west metropolitan police district, the police are about 20 per cent undermanned. That makes it virtually impossible for these hard-working police officers to do their job.

One way that we can alleviate some of the pressure on the police is by enhancing the services that the City of Stirling provides for community safety. The City of Stirling is the only local government area within my federal seat of Stirling. It already has a very effective community safety patrol, with four cars and a number of officers, and we promised to enhance that service to the tune of \$1.6 million. This was part of a seven-point plan that we had for the electorate, and we wanted the council to use that money to deploy extra patrols and make the local community safer.

Funnily enough, after we made this commitment, Labor announced the \$1.6 million Safer Suburbs Plan—that is the same amount of money and the same plan but with a slightly different name. The Safer Suburbs Plan includes personal alarms for residents and four extra security officers for patrols to be done by the City of Stirling 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I would like to know when this \$1.6 million Safer Suburbs Plan will be funded. I want those four extra security officers patrolling our local streets as soon as possible. They will be welcomed by my local community.

It is everybody's right to feel safe and secure in their own homes. Fear of crime has become a cancer throughout the suburbs that I represent. I have collected thousands of signatures as part of an ongoing crime petition, and I coordinated crime forums across the electorate where concerned residents were able to talk to local police and safety patrol officers about personal and home security. I was very privileged that the then Minister for Justice and Customs attended a number of those forums, as did Senator Chris Ellison.

The previous Liberal government was tough on crime. The federal government is not traditionally the primary responder to this issue, but there is a huge gap in the state government's provisioning of this service. I understand it is like that in other parts of Australia, and I can certainly confirm it in Western Australia. We tried to address this issue through the National Community Crime Prevention Program, in conjunction with the City of Stirling and my local police and local action groups. We were able to fund closed-circuit television cameras at some known hotspots within Stirling: particularly the Carine Skate Park in Mirrabooka and the Nollamara Shopping Centre. I would urge the new government to continue that program because it is a very worthwhile program that is making a difference to what is a very serious problem.

Probably the second major issue that was raised with me through my first term as the member for Stirling was road safety and the condition of local roads. I worked very hard to get the former government to fund an overpass for a highway called Reid Highway, which runs through my electorate. The original plan for it would have been that it would have operated as a normal highway, across overpasses where it intersected with other major roads. But at the time the highway was built, as a temporary measure—and, I as-

sume, to save funds—they instead stopped the highway at various intersections and put traffic lights there. That creates an extraordinarily dangerous situation at two particular trouble spots in my electorate. I have been working very hard to address those issues and to secure funding for those two overpasses. If they had been built at the time the highway was built, they would have cost about \$2 million each. The cost continues to rise every time we look at it. The latest estimates that we have had is that it would probably cost about \$25 million for each of those overpasses, and the longer we delay it, the more expensive they will get, but they are vitally important. People are literally being injured and dying there on a regular basis, so it needs to be addressed.

I secured a \$20 million commitment from the previous government to fund these overpasses. I had the privilege of taking the former Prime Minister out there during the election campaign. I secured \$20 million to build these overpasses where Reid Highway intersects with Mirrabooka Avenue and Alexander Drive. Federal Labor also promised unconditional funding through the AusLink II program for the Alexander Drive overpass and, in what could only be described as classic weasel words, said that they would consider building the overpass at Mirrabooka Avenue also. The Labor government in Western Australia refused to accept the funding from the Howard government but was pleased to accept the funding commitment from federal Labor. Such is the state of the Labor government in Western Australia that, during that election campaign, it completely ignored the interests of the people of Western Australia in order to campaign on behalf of its federal Labor colleagues, which I think is shameful. Regardless, this commitment has been made and it needs to be fulfilled. Road safety is not something that should be trivialised in the context of an election campaign,

and these projects are extraordinarily important for local families. I have been overwhelmed by the support that our commitment to build these overpasses has generated, and I expect the Rudd government to fulfil its commitments on both of these projects.

The Rudd government also promised a number of other things. Time is rather short, so I will go through them rather quickly. The then Leader of the Opposition and now Prime Minister came out and kicked soccer balls around with some young soccer players at Macedonia Park, home of the Stirling Lions Soccer Club. He said that he would upgrade the facilities at that club to the tune of \$1 million. That was a commitment made by the Prime Minister and I do not doubt that he will fulfil it; it was a personal commitment from him. I would like to see that happen sooner rather than later. The club makes a very big contribution in my electorate. It formerly catered specifically to the Macedonian community. As is the case with a lot of these soccer clubs, it now caters to the much broader community. That is a very worthwhile project and I will be making sure that the new government delivers it.

We committed \$464,000 to upgrade the women's change rooms at a number of reserves in Stirling. Labor matched that funding, and I expect them to deliver on that promise. We promised important upgrades at the Butler's Reserve in Scarborough and the Grindleford Reserve in Balcatta, home to the Balcatta Soccer Club, of which I am privileged to be the No. 1 ticket holder. These facilities will be able to encourage women into sport. I expect the government to deliver on that promise also.

A number of sporting facilities were promised funding during the campaign. Carine Senior High School is an excellent facility—a very good high school—in Stirling and one of which I am particularly

proud. We promised that we would join with the state government or another funding partner to provide \$82,500 to upgrade their tennis and netball courts. I would like to see the new government consider this. I do not have it on the record that they did equal that funding promise, but I will certainly be asking them to consider that request.

Every school in my electorate has already been severely disadvantaged by the axing of the Investing in Our Schools Program. This was one of the first actions of the new Rudd government—an extraordinary decision considering that Mr Rudd made education such a core part of the Labor Party's platform. The money from the program went directly to building infrastructure in my local schools, and I am astonished that they would be targeted for savings. Labor promised \$10,000 for rainwater tanks at both the Trigg Island and Scarborough surf lifesaving clubs. They are vital community institutions in Stirling. As patron of Scarborough and as vice-patron of Trigg Island, I am very keen to progress this initiative and get these rainwater tanks installed as soon as possible.

Labor also made a commitment to provide \$300,000 on an annual basis to the Stirling business enterprise centre. That is a project that was built by the former government. We provided almost \$1 million for that project to go ahead. It is a wonderful business incubator in Stirling. It contains about 32 fledgling businesses, and it is always full. They have an opportunity to be mentored by people who are in residence there. They get cheap rent. They are expected to use it for a year and then be in a position where their business is viable enough to go out into the community and get premises at commercial rates. It really is a wonderful incubator for small businesses. I know a number of businesses that have graduated from there and have gone on to greater things—\$300,000

per annum, I will be making the government accountable for not providing that money.

Labor also committed \$1 million for a multicultural centre in Stirling. Stirling is extraordinarily diverse. All of the major ethnic groups that are represented in other parts of Australia are represented in Stirling. It is an absolute microcosm of a multicultural Australia. We have communities that have come from all over the world, and now we have new arrivals from Africa. This money was promised to provide outreach in education for new migrants. It is vitally needed, and I expect the Rudd government to live up to that promise.

Time is very short. I was born and raised in Stirling. It is one of the best places in Australia to live, work and raise a family, and an enormous sense of community exists there. I want to know that people in my community can get the best possible future for their families and for themselves. Keeping our local economy strong, lowering the rates of crime and antisocial behaviour and educating our young students will be my priorities in my second term as member for Stirling. *(Time expired)*

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Fremantle, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech. I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (12.56 pm)—Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we stand, the Ngannawal people, and the traditional owners of the land in Fremantle, the Nyungar people, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present.

In life we tend to remember moments rather than hours or days or years. I will surely remember this one, as I also remember the moment when I learned that my

friend Jean-Selim Kanaan, one of the UN's best and brightest, with whom I had worked in Kosovo, was killed in the bombing of the UN headquarters at the Canal Hotel in Baghdad on 19 August 2003. The year before he was killed, Jean-Selim published a book called *Ma Guerre a l'Indifference*, 'My War Against Indifference'. I dedicate this first speech to Jean-Selim and to all the others who have served in the cause of peace and in the war against indifference.

Politics is a war against indifference. Like many people who have sought or who seek to make a public service contribution through politics, I cannot be indifferent to the millions of Australians who have been left behind during the resources boom and who struggle with rising costs of living while their incomes remain static, or who cannot gain access to housing or health services when needed. I cannot be indifferent to the massive underinvestment in public education, skills training and infrastructure that has occurred in the past decade, or to the trebling of the HECS debt in that period. And I cannot be indifferent to the homeless, or to those suffering mental illness, or living with disability, or to the one billion of our fellow human beings who live in extreme poverty. Politics is also about service. It is about the service we give to those ideals that inform our present conduct and that shape our vision of the future. It is about the service we give to the people who have chosen us to represent them and the service we give to all Australians through our contribution to the work of this national parliament.

As a new member I am deeply humbled to have been elected by the people of Fremantle to be their 10th representative in this place since Federation. And I am at their service. Fremantle was named after Captain Charles Fremantle, a man of somewhat dubious reputation and doubtful seafaring skills, who nonetheless had the foresight to declare Fre-

mantle 'a place of consequence'. Fremantle might properly be regarded as Australia's Ellis Island—the first landing place for migrants arriving by sea. Today it is a hard-working, multicultural community made up of men, women and children who are Australian by birth and Australian by choice. Based around a major working port, whose efficiency owes much to the Maritime Union of Australia, Fremantle has developed a unique charm and character, being home to what many regard as the best-preserved 19th century cityscape in Australia, the busiest regional airport in the Southern Hemisphere, at Jandakot, one of the fastest growing local council areas in the country, at Cockburn, and the greatest football team in Australia, the Freo Dockers. Fremantle also supports a precious natural and Indigenous heritage—for example, the Bibra Lake and Beeliar Wetlands—as well as a rich cultural, artistic and intellectual tradition through its many artists, writers, musicians, students and academics.

I am happy to say that indifference is anathema to the people of Fremantle. They are engaged, politically conscious and have strong and 'sometimes bolshie' views, as Carmen Lawrence noted approvingly in her valedictory speech. They also have high expectations—not surprisingly for an electorate which has been represented since World War II by four outstanding Labor members: Australia's great wartime and nation-building Prime Minister, John Curtin; Kim Beazley Sr, who, as acknowledged in a condolence motion this week, made critical contributions to education policy and the quest for justice for Indigenous Australians while serving as the member for Fremantle for 32 years and as a cabinet minister in the Whitlam government; John Dawkins, a cabinet minister in the Hawke and Keating governments during a period of tremendous economic reform; and Carmen Lawrence, the first woman Pre-

mier in Australia, a health minister in the Keating government and the first popularly-elected National President of the Australian Labor Party. I honour the very significant contributions of my predecessors in the seat of Fremantle, and I want to take this opportunity to thank Carmen Lawrence for the support and wise counsel she has given me over the last year and pay special tribute to her extraordinary contribution to state and federal politics. Carmen used her peerless intelligence, compassion and strength to promote the cause of women in public life, to protect the environment and support the arts, and to assist vulnerable members of our society, such as people with disabilities, carers, seniors, Indigenous communities and refugees. I know that she continues that work today.

I also want to thank my family for their love and support, especially my parents, George and Lorraine; my sister, Georgina, and her husband, Chris; my brothers, Aaron and Justin; and my grandparents, Henry and Beryl Burge and Jean and Jesse Pat Parke. I never knew my Grandfather Parke, who, like many veterans, continued to suffer the effects of war after returning home; and he died when my father was only a teenager. I would like to thank my dear friends, some of whom are here today and some very far away. I also thank the Western Australian branch of the Australian Labor Party and my federal and state colleagues, with special thanks to Jim McGinty and Alannah MacTiernan. I thank the hundreds of local members and other volunteers who worked incredibly hard on my campaign under the guidance of my wonderful campaign team. Finally, I want to acknowledge with gratitude the support of EMILY's List.

I note the Labor Party's success in selecting and promoting women as parliamentary representatives. Women make up approximately 35 per cent of the Labor parliamen-

tarians in this new parliament, and women constitute 36.5 per cent of all state, federal and territory Labor parliamentarians. This is compared with 23 per cent and 13 per cent for the Liberal and National parties respectively. To those who say there is no great value in proactively addressing the representative imbalance, I say: look at those numbers.

Like many of my predecessors, I come to the task and the honour of representing the people of Fremantle as a relative newcomer to Fremantle. I am like many Australians who trace their personal and professional development, their sense of identity, through many places, here and abroad. I am, at the outset, from my family's orchard farm near Donnybrook in country Western Australia. My great-grandfather, John Stanley Parke, and his son George were the first people to export Granny Smith apples to the world, and they did so in 1922 through the port of Fremantle. My family were unusual among farmers for being Labor supporters, and they instilled in me a passion for social justice, for the environment and for the welfare of animals.

I grew up and was educated at public schools in the beautiful south-west of WA, where I later returned to work as the solicitor-in-charge at the Bunbury Community Legal Centre. It was while acting on behalf of the legal centre's clients that I learned the value of strong local representation and advocacy. As Margaret Mead observed:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

I am from Kosovo and Gaza and Beirut and New York. These are the places where I worked for the United Nations in a number of roles: peacekeeping and reconstruction in Kosovo and humanitarian affairs in Gaza. In New York I helped establish the UN Ethics

Office, and in Lebanon I was part of the UN commission investigating the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who was killed exactly three years ago today. I am, like many Australians, from many places. But I have come home to Fremantle. I hope that my capacity to act as an effective parliamentary representative has been enriched by my experiences in both Australia and abroad.

I began this first speech talking about the war against indifference. I now want to set out three of the most important areas in which I intend to wage that struggle. The first is Australia's place in the world. We are living at a time when everything is more connected than ever before, and we are surrounded by change and uncertainty. Advances in information technology, increased levels of migration and displacement, and the integration of nation states into free trade and single-currency collectives are, variously, key trends of 21st century globalisation. It is imperative that Australia transform its education and training systems, communications and transport infrastructure to ensure that we can participate fully and to the highest level in the global economy.

The Rudd Labor government's commitment to an education revolution, with its strategic emphasis on maths, science and technology—as well as its program to significantly upgrade Australia's broadband infrastructure and foster innovation—will assist in this transformation. While our connection to the world brings us unprecedented opportunities for international trade, travel and communications, it also presents us with an altered risk and security environment. Scientists and economists have warned about the impending catastrophic impact on the natural and human environment of climate change. Even the head of the Australian Federal Police has declared climate change to be the greatest security threat of this century.

With regard to global terrorism, there can be no justification for the pursuit of political objectives through an accumulation of shattered bodies and destroyed lives; yet our response to such acts of violence must be resolutely long term and proactive, rather than last-minute and reactive. As noted by former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, you cannot fight a war on terror without also fighting a war on disadvantage, discrimination and despair. Security, development and human rights are inextricably linked. Tackling poverty in our region through the Millennium Development Goals is part of a wider strategy to deal with terrorism, climate change, pandemics and refugees. The tragic and profoundly anti-democratic events in East Timor this week highlight the importance of supporting our neighbours in their struggle to uphold democracy, stability and the rule of law. In my view it is crucial that the global community returns to a law based system of international engagement and action. We know the consequences of abandoning that approach. They include the war in Iraq, the use of torture and Guantanamo prison. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an instrument with a bipartisan legacy that goes back to Australia's critical role—when 'Doc' Herbert Evatt was President of the UN General Assembly—in drafting the declaration. I would respectfully submit that one of the pressing tasks for this new parliament as a whole—as we remember that anniversary—is to rescue Doc Evatt's legacy.

I would like to relate, at this point, a recent experience. In July 2006 I was working in Beirut when the war started between Israel and Hezbollah. Three days earlier, the main concern for ordinary Lebanese was the World Cup soccer final between France and Italy. Suddenly, to their immense bewilderment, these life-loving people found them-

selves in the midst of a war. UN international staff and Lebanese people with a second passport, including many Australians, were evacuated by ship to Cyprus. We enjoyed a warm welcome on board from the Australian Federal Police officers who had volunteered to work on the evacuation, but it was a gut-wrenching experience to be sailing away to safety while our local Lebanese staff stood on the quay and waved. These were just ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances over which they had no control.

My experience overseas has shown me that, but for an accident of time and place of birth, any of us could be facing war or persecution or genocide. Any of us could find ourselves needing a place to go and be safe for a while. I am proud to say that Fremantle has been, and continues to be, such a place. It is now home to people who have come from Africa, often escaping the gravest circumstances. Just as in the past, Fremantle has received migrants from South-East Asia, the United Kingdom and southern Europe. To all these people, Australia represents a new hope and, for many, a new experience—the experience of life without fear. As Nobel Peace Prize winner and Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has said: 'The only real prison is fear, and the only real freedom is freedom from fear.'

Australia's international focus must be on revitalising our engagement with the Asia-Pacific region and on consolidating our important bilateral and regional relationships. I also have a particular interest in seeing Australia once again play a positive role within the United Nations. In light of Australia's longstanding place as one of the founders and champions of the UN and of multilateralism, it has been distressing to witness the damage to Australia's international reputation during the past decade as a result of the treatment of asylum seekers, the refusal to

ratify the Kyoto protocol, our involvement in the Iraq war, and the Australian Wheat Board scandal. These things also served to distract attention from the excellent work performed by Australian peacekeepers and AFP personnel around the world, as my colleague the new member for Eden-Monaro attested in his first speech yesterday.

I look forward to working with my parliamentary colleagues to ensure that Australia renews its cooperative and constructive participation with other nations in international and regional fora to address global challenges such as climate change, poverty and capacity development, nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, refugees, migration, security and pandemics. And, very importantly, I believe Australia can play a key role in the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The second area to which I intend to devote special attention is the issue of sustainability. Once upon a time, if you were not an environmentalist, it might have been said that you did not have a heart. Today, if you are still not an environmentalist, it must be said that you do not have a brain. The deadly serious challenge of global warming means that we must now contemplate the limits and conditions of our long-term existence on this planet. We have to acknowledge that the way we have been going is not sustainable. We must make up for a decade of national inaction by taking steps to reduce our dependence on oil, to develop renewable energy sources and energy efficiencies, and to accept that demand management is part of the equation, and we need to protect our biodiversity and our water resources.

You cannot have a strong and sustainable economy without a strong community and a sustainable environment. I am happy to say that strength of community and the pursuit of sustainability are well established in the Fremantle electorate. South Fremantle Senior

High School has set out to be the first carbon neutral secondary school in Australia. The Southern Metropolitan Regional Council, which serves the recycling needs of several city councils in the electorate, is an Australian leader in sustainable waste management. Indeed, if the national emissions trading scheme is designed effectively, organisations like the SMRC will be carbon creditors, able to fund the further research and development of their technologies by trading the contributions they make to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

On the seabed off Fremantle there is a company trialling a simple wave-power technology that is designed to generate clean power and produce desalinated water. Inland, the rapidly growing south-eastern part of the electorate is now linked to the city of Perth by a state-of-the-art train service that the Western Australian Gallop-Carpenter government has brought to completion. All the while, there is a range of community groups fighting to protect the Beeliar regional wetlands, to rehabilitate injured native animals, to protect Indigenous heritage, to protest against Japanese whaling and to push for sustainable transport, housing and industry.

Finally, as the sum of my ideals, I believe in the promise of good government. Government can reflect the best in us and it can, by the collective power we vest in it, be a creative and enabling force for positive change. Democracy is not something that only happens every three years on election day; it is a living thing and it must be nourished, tended and maintained through greater openness, access and interaction between government and the wider community. In launching my election campaign last year, Kim Beazley noted that one of the consequences of a change in government would be the reopening of the space for public debate. To that end, I welcome the Prime Minister's initiatives to hold community cabinet meet-

ings; to depoliticise the Public Service, the boards of statutory bodies and the system of funding grants to research centres and community organisations; to strengthen FOI and bring in federal whistleblower protection legislation; and to restore ministerial accountability.

On other issues of governance, let me say that I will add my voice to the arguments in favour of longer, fixed-term Commonwealth parliaments and greater transparency in disclosure of election donations, in favour of a federal bill of rights, and in favour of a requirement for parliament's consent before Australian troops are committed to war in the absence of an immediate security threat or a UN Security Council mandate. I say also that I look forward to that special moment, in the not-too-distant future, when Australia will finally have its own head of state.

I began this first speech with a dedication to Jean-Selim Kanaan and his war against indifference. Let me end by acknowledging another inspirational person, Heather Vicenti. Heather is a Fremantle constituent and she travelled from Coolbellup to Canberra this week as my guest, on behalf of the people of Fremantle, to be present for the apology. Heather, who is now 72 years old, was born in the goldfields east of Kalgoorlie, a member of the Wongi people, and she was taken from her mother when she was two years old. She spent most of her childhood at Roelands Church of Christ Mission outside Perth, where she was trained as a domestic servant. During her challenging life she, in turn, had children taken away, and four of her seven adult children died in tragic circumstances, including a son who was shot by prison guards while in custody. Heather has written a book about her life and her experiences as a member of the stolen generations. Its title is *Too Many Tears*.

As Sir Ronald Wilson said in the *Bringing them home* report, 'The process of storytelling was itself the beginning of a healing process.' It is my hope that the stories of the stolen generations, and of Indigenous dispossession more broadly, will continue to be told and heard together with a celebration of the cultural diversity and richness of Australia's Indigenous heritage as one of the key strands within the new national curriculum. I know that Heather's experience, energy and indomitable spirit are a kind of irrepressible magic that will remain a touchstone for me as I join with my fellow parliamentarians in seeking to bridge the unacceptable chasm in quality of life and life expectancy that still exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Finally, while I acknowledge that there is an aspect of our democracy that is necessarily and even usefully adversarial, I also believe there is greater scope for cooperative, consensus politics. We have seen this week what can be achieved when parliamentarians leave aside the us-and-them approach in favour of a joint commitment to the welfare and dignity of our fellow Australians. I hope that my work in this place on behalf of the people of Fremantle can be part of an ongoing cooperative effort towards more such victories in the war against indifference.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Cowan, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech. I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (1.17 pm)—At the commencement of my first speech in this place, I would like to record my thanks to the people of Cowan for their confidence in electing me. I am humbled by their endorsement, and I will not let them down. I am the fourth member for Cowan and also the first MP in some time who does actually live in the electorate. Before proceeding, I would

like to acknowledge the service of the previous member for Cowan, the Hon. Graham Edwards, and before him Mr Richard Evans, who was our last member for Cowan.

For many years I have focused strongly on serving the people of Cowan. For enabling me to work for the people and to win the election, I owe a great debt of thanks to my wife, Kelly, and my children, Emily and Rebecca, who are here today. They knew that I had embarked on a mission and that a lot of things needed to be done for the people of Cowan. With my family's support, I sacrificed much of our family time to pursue that mission. They also know that the future for our family will have its challenges, so I thank them for their ongoing support. I thank my mother, Connaught, who is also here today, for her unconditional support. I know that, should my father have lived to see this day, he would have been very proud.

Although my family gave me time, a lot of very hard work was done by the Liberal Party, by volunteers and friends, some of whom are here today. I would especially like to thank the Liberal Party, which has given me the opportunity to stand in this place, and in particular the state president, Danielle Blain, the state director, Mark Neeham, and his assistant, Zak Kirkup, for all their support. I would also like to place on record my thanks to Colin Edwardes, my campaign chairman. He was always there for me during the tough times. I would also like to thank my dedicated team for Cowan, which included Jonathan Daventry; the Hon. Cheryl Edwardes; Tim Brooks; Kate Taylor; Sherryl Paternoster; Peter and Norma Tyler; Geoff Paddick; and many Young Liberals, including Matt Dawson, whom I thank for being here today; Alex Butterworth; Ryan Blake, who is also here; Heidi Brooks; Douglas Brooks; Matt Blampey; Ange Wills; and my friend Sue McDonald for her efforts in the 2004 campaign. I would like to especially

thank Scott Edwardes, who was courageous on election day when he faced up to the aggression and intimidation of employees of the Your Rights at Work movement at Noranda Primary School. That was an interesting morning. In addition, I greatly appreciated the support and guidance provided by the Hon. Julie Bishop MP; Mal Washer MP; Senators Chris Ellison, Mathias Cormann and David Johnston; former Senator Sue Knowles; the Hon. Peter Collier MLC; and the Hon. Ray Halligan MLC. In particular I owe a debt of gratitude to Chris Ellison for his advice and encouragement over the last three years. Chris is a man of great honour and integrity and I respect him for his strength of character. I also thank those members of the former government who were there for me but were not themselves returned, particularly the Hon. John Howard and the Hon. Mal Brough, who did such great work for this country.

During my election campaign, one of the most frequently asked questions of me was: 'Why do you want to be the member for Cowan?' The answer is quite simple, really. I have put myself forward because I believe that I can make a positive and dedicated contribution to providing the people of Cowan with better lives. I strongly believe in better community safety, better road safety and greater opportunities for the families in Cowan.

As a resident of Cowan and a father of two young children under the age of 10, I worry about their safety and their futures. I believe that the vast majority of parents in Cowan have those same feelings about their own children. Yet, sadly, there are some places in Cowan where graffiti, hooning and antisocial behaviour are at near epidemic proportions. There are also places where crimes such as drug dealing, burglaries and assaults are far too common. Those crimes particularly impact on children where their

families are both victims and, in some cases, perpetrators.

For my own part, I believe that parents or carers who provide their children with examples of crime, drug addiction or illicit drug use clearly demonstrate that they are poor role models. I believe in intervention where necessary and the removal of children where necessary from the threat of these dangers. It is my view that children in these circumstances are better off with a couple where a man and a woman truly appreciate their responsibilities and can provide appropriate examples of behaviour and respect for society.

At the centre of this situation is, arguably, the great scourge of drugs. Unfortunately, the number of police in Western Australia has been in decline for years now. Subsequently, they have a reduced capacity to deal with these critical problems. The situation is made worse by the soft drug laws introduced by the current state government in Western Australia. The incapacity to act, coupled with these weaker laws, leads to toleration. The use of misnomers such as 'party drugs', 'soft drugs' or 'recreational drugs' tends to normalise drug use. In a similar vein, terms such as 'harm reduction' and 'harm minimisation', I believe, are very dangerous indeed. It is my strong view that the only path is to work towards a life without illicit drugs, an abstinence approach.

We are in good times at the moment, where hard work is being rewarded, and particularly so in the wonderful state of WA. It is a great situation where just about anyone in WA who wants a job and is prepared to work hard can get one. Since the last election, in this place the majority view has become that the economic success of this country is due to luck and international demand for resources. This view of course denies the influence of economic and waterfront re-

forms that have made this country and particularly Western Australia reliable trading partners of China and other developing countries. My reason for raising this point in this speech is that it has never been my view that a belief in luck or other superstitions adds any value.

I have a background of highly competitive sport and 15 years as an Army officer. From these backgrounds I have come to realise that it is only through hard work that success can be assured. When I was at school we prepared for such events in our rowing calendar as the Head of the River. At school we would train only three times a week for four or five months. I recall being defeated badly through many a rowing season, and yet on the day of the main event we would still have hope for victory. We would of course have a blind disregard for the facts and reality, but we thought that if we wore our lucky socks we could still pull it off on the day. Yet the same result would always occur: if not last—and I know my mother remembers these days—then very nearly last. So I describe my school rowing days as days when we rarely won anything.

Once I left school and began rowing at club, state and—in a brief period—international level, we used to train anywhere from eight to 13 times a week. Within the club competition we were rarely defeated because we used to train harder than anyone else. Based upon these experiences, I have come to realise that in politics, just as in sport, nothing will be all right on the day. We cannot wear our lucky socks or pray for victory when the work has not been done. Often it takes years to achieve goals. I think we know that after the last four years of this campaign. When people talk about a particular set of circumstances and describe comprehensive success as being a result of luck, I say, 'Look to the past to see how this future has come to pass.'

Along with rowing, the other great defining period of my life has been my 15 years of service in the Army as an officer. From this period I have come to realise that in order to truly achieve one must live every moment to its fullest. It is simply not enough to plan to make it to the end of a challenging activity. One must try to maximise the level of performance, knowledge and experience that you gain from the whole activity. Simply put: one must try to be the best person one can be.

I therefore bring my experiences of failure, struggle and, ultimately, success to assist me to achieve both in this chamber and in my electorate of Cowan. It does, however, remain important for me to say that I stand here with these friends around me not because I was born into my political party; nor did friends introduce me to that political party. I joined the Liberal Party of Australia only after reflection and thought, when I came to see that the philosophies, beliefs and approaches represented by members on this side of the House provided the best ingredients for progress in Australia.

When I talk of progress it is progress for the benefit of the people of Australia and particularly of Cowan—which brings me to the centre of the world: the electorate of Cowan. My mistake: I mean the centre of the civilised world. The electorate of Cowan bears the name of Dame Edith Cowan, who lived between 1861 and 1932. She was the first female member of an Australian parliament and was elected to the Western Australian Legislative Assembly as the member for West Perth between 1921 and 1924. This great lady also holds the distinction of having a university named after her for her service to the community.

The electorate itself comprises 195 square kilometres of the outer northern suburbs of Perth. Economic confidence and the result-

ing growth in the last decade have seen a substantial increase in the number of houses and businesses in Cowan. Unemployment dropped in the late 1990s and has dropped even more in the last seven years, so there are now many more working families in Cowan as opposed to the high percentage of non-working families before that time. The growth of the Cowan suburbs in terms of both homes and businesses is a testament to the great Western Australian spirit of working hard for a better future.

That spirit is particularly clear when you consider the number of organisations in Cowan that work well for their members, organisations which I have personally had some association with. Firstly, I would like to mention the RSLs and, in particular, Ron Privilege and the members of the Wanneroo-Joondalup RSL sub-branch, who each Anzac Day hold a dawn service, a march and then a very popular district commemoration in Wanneroo. I am particularly pleased to mention them because I too am a member.

I would also make mention of the Ballajura RSL. They maintain a very fine war memorial and peace park adjacent to the Ballajura Community College. Scotty Alcorn and the dedicated members of the sub-branch have found a great place in their local community with the peace park, and I am proud to have helped them get a federal grant of \$125,000 a couple of years ago under the Regional Partnerships Program, which at that time did not have bipartisan support in Cowan.

In relation to the veterans community, I would also like to mention the Extremely Disabled Veterans Association of Western Australia, of which I am the patron. They are a dedicated, effective and hardworking association serving the interests of World War II and Korean War veterans. I would particularly like to pay tribute to the long years of

work in the association by Sue Plane and Ruth Down. These two ladies know only too well the adversity that life can grant.

Within Cowan there are also two large and vibrant business associations. I am a member of the Malaga and Districts Business Association, which works closely with the City of Swan to serve and advocate for almost 2,000 member businesses—that is a big organisation. The president is my good friend Rod Henderson. Up in Wanneroo, the Wanneroo Business Association works closely with the staff of the City of Wanneroo. Peter Newbound is the president there and I look forward to working closely with the WBA as a member.

I want to make mention of a number of ethnic groups within the electorate of Cowan that have made a positive contribution to the Australian way of life. These groups understand, respect and embrace the institutions and values of our society. They understand that the people of Australia have no issue with race, colour or religion but, rather, regard a person by their actions. They have integrated into this country and have placed their loyalty first and foremost with Australia and its laws, above and beyond all others. Yet they still have an understandable concern for their former homelands, and it is on this point that I wish to concentrate.

Firstly, I would like to mention the people of Vietnamese heritage; they number many thousands in Cowan. They are hardworking people who are strong with a sense of family. I would like to thank Dr Van Phat Nguyen, Mr Tung and Mr Troung for their assistance and support. I know that many Vietnamese who came to Australia as refugees remain concerned about human rights issues in Vietnam.

I would also like to mention the assistance and support of Mr Zoran Coseski of Marangaroo, who is the Honorary Consul for the

Republic of Macedonia in Perth. Although born in Australia, Mr Coseski is a great advocate for Macedonia.

I would also like to make mention of the situation in Cyprus, where the island remains divided following the invasion in 1974 by Turkish forces. Land was seized, families separated and many Greeks are still missing. As part of future negotiations, I look forward to Turkey providing compensation or restitution for the land of Greek Cypriots seized during that invasion.

Next, I would like to mention that great and enduring concern of the Jewish people in Cowan—namely, the Middle Eastern peace process and the rightful pursuit of a two-state solution in Palestine. The great problem with the pursuit of lasting peace and harmony is that it is difficult to identify a Palestinian authority willing and able to speak for their side. It appears even more difficult to see a Palestinian authority that would be capable of delivering on negotiations, thereby ensuring a peaceful future.

Before I conclude, I also want to make mention of two very important local issues in Cowan—namely, the school closures in Girrawheen and Greenwood by the state government. In Girrawheen, the state Labor government is closing Blackmore Primary School, against all reason and sense. Despite the vocal and well-justified protests of the parents and local community, ably led by Tory Clerke, it is still going on. Sadly, it appears that the resale value of the Blackmore Primary School site of some \$17 million is just too high to be passed up.

Just over in the next suburb, the Kingsley and Greenwood Residents Association, together with local parents such as David and Robyn Bertolini, are fighting to stop the sale of one hectare of the Allenswood Primary School site. While the sale of the nearby East Greenwood Primary School site is already a

sure thing, the site of the rebuilt school at Allenswood will be reduced in size so that more money can be made from land sales. While the priority should be an effective educational precinct with appropriate infrastructure, the emphasis seems to be on cash flow into the coffers of a state government that is consistently unable to manage projects on time or to budget. It is no wonder that the people of Perth are cynical about that government.

Earlier in this speech I made mention of why I became a candidate. However, every reason needs to be accompanied by action and I have relentlessly pursued the interests of my fellow residents. I have, in the last few years, won or helped to win a number of grants and extensions of services for the suburbs of Cowan. Yet, as I spoke to increasing numbers of people in the electorate, they told me their concerns about community safety, road safety and opportunities for themselves and their families. Those concerns have driven my successful advocacy for the grant of road funding for the Ocean Reef Road extension, as well as the road funding initiatives concerning the upgrade of Wanneroo Road and the upgrade and extension projects of Hepburn Avenue and the Reid Highway interchange at Alexander Drive. I note that the latter of those two initiatives was picked up in the election campaign by the Labor Party and therefore I look forward to their delivery via the election promises legislation that I would imagine we will be seeing soon.

In addition, I recall our being promised a superclinic of GPs in Wanneroo, \$1 million of CCTV for the City of Wanneroo, \$1 million for a footbridge overpass in Banksia Grove and \$500,000 for a youth drop-in centre in Ballajura, so I will look forward to also seeing the detail on those projects in the same legislation. Should the government be interested in improving the quality of life of

people in Cowan, I have other initiatives that could be added to the list.

Over the last four years I have walked along hundreds of roads in Cowan, spoken to thousands of people and looked into the lives of my fellow residents in order to understand them and their issues—all that in order to make a difference. I have seen great hardship, yet I have also seen great courage. At times I have found weakness in spirit but also strength of character. But, in amongst it all, there is a clear need for a representative dedicated to building a stronger and more secure community in Cowan. I asked for that role and I am now humbled to have been granted that responsibility by my fellow residents of Cowan.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare, the member for Bennelong, I remind honourable members that this is her first speech. I therefore ask the House to extend the usual courtesies to her.

Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare) (1.37 pm)—I rise to speak for the first time in this House as the new member for Bennelong. In line with the historic importance of what has been said in the parliament this week, I wish to acknowledge, first and foremost, the original Bennelong. Along with another resident of Sydney Cove, Colbee, Bennelong was captured, taken from his family, but befriended by Governor Arthur Phillip. Bennelong eventually travelled to England and met King George III, a trip which can be reasonably described as the equivalent in today's terms of a trip to Mars.

It is a complex story, the story of early European settlement. The historian Inga Clendinnen refers to a brief period in those early years where there was a 'springtime of trust'. She talks of the honour and courage of

the men of the First Fleet and the creative resourcefulness of the 'Australians', as she calls the Indigenous population. This is something about our history that should be known—that there were individuals and there were moments when trust and goodwill ruled hearts on both sides of the divide. The universal disaster did not have to happen and it does not have to happen now.

For Bennelong there was no happy ending. When he returned to his own land after three years in England, he was scorned by the Europeans and by his own people. He was the first of tens of thousands of Aboriginals who have attempted or been forced to straddle both worlds, only to end up lost between both. The brewer James Squire provided shelter for Bennelong in his last years, which is why he lies buried in an unmarked grave near the site of the old brewery in Kissing Point in Putney, in the electorate that now bears his name.

A question for us all as we start out on the road to reconciliation is to ask: what was Bennelong trying to do in forging a friendship with the British? At the very least, we can say he was making a connection, attempting to build a bridge. And that is what we need to do. It is my sincere hope that in offering an apology for the suffering and injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, we can make a new start and work together in a meaningful way. As Martin Luther King said nearly 50 years ago:

We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny.

What I have learnt from a lifetime of reporting is that we are at our best when we work together and when we appreciate difference. Diversity enriches us. It lifts the spirit.

First of all, I would like to pay tribute to the work and extraordinary commitment to public life of the previous member for Ben-

nelong, John Howard. His service to the community and representation in the federal parliament for 33 years is a great record and a fine achievement. Mr Howard was a hardy warrior for his beliefs, and that too should be acknowledged.

I come to this place with the firm view that the contest of ideas matters, belief matters and knowledge matters. While it is true that the great ideological struggles of the 20th century are behind us, the ground has shifted in this new decade and in this new century. The sheer complexity of modern life bewilders many, but the new century is a rich one and there is much to appreciate. The monocultural Moorooka that I recall from my girlhood in the 1950s and sixties has vanished. These days the place is enlivened by the presence of many African families. As my mother Mary, who is in the gallery today, often says, with a more than disapproving nod about my irregular attendance, 'These families are filling the pews at Sunday mass.'

The seat of Bennelong, which I am proud to represent, provides a near perfect snapshot of how the country is changing. Join the throng on the weekend in the Eastwood mall and you will find that Rowe Street is both a modern-day Babel and a dynamic part of cosmopolitan Sydney. While parents race around to fit in 101 chores, the teenagers have mobile phones strapped to their ears and the younger ones are plaguing their parents and saying, 'When do we eat?' The body language is clear, while the verbalising is as likely to be in Chinese as in English or Korean.

There are other changes. The Kims are forming partnerships with the Kellys. The Lis are walking down the aisle with the O'Farrells. For some, these changes are unsettling. But there is a younger generation that is entirely at ease with who we are and

what we are becoming. Exceptionally well educated, many have secured a second degree from an international university and are multilingual. Some will be in mixed-race marriages. What they all have in common is that they will see their professional lives as crossing borders. They will be citizens of the world, trained here initially but orbiting around the world and working and playing in those places that will enrich them.

They will still call Australia home, but when they are in Delhi, Hong Kong or London, what story will they be telling about home? How do we want the Australian story to look for the coming generation? I think it needs to be a big story and that it is time to revive some big ambitions about how we build sustainable cities, how we restore our rivers, how we recreate a first-rate education system that elevates excellence for all and how we treat everyone with dignity and equality, regardless of physical ability, race or sexual preference.

What we need is a new imagining, a revived sense of what is possible. The negativity and the tedium of the culture wars will not get us there. But look at our history with all its warts and all its failures and you will still find plenty to inspire wonder, hope and optimism. You will also find that, if there is a common animating principle in Australia, it is that we look forwards, not back. Survey the suburbs, towns and farms of this country and you will find the desire to assure the happiness and independence of the next generation is inextinguishable. This altruism is in the nature of most human beings—it is one of the better angels, to which all good governments should listen. How hard we work to satisfy that desire and how well we succeed is a measure of our progress as a nation and as a democracy.

What people want now, I think, is an intelligent national conversation. The prevailing

orthodoxy, to this point, has been that, because we are enjoying such bounty, we are indifferent, to the point of being somnolent, about the bigger societal questions. Well, I happen to think that 2007 demolished that idea. Most of the commentators missed the mood shift. But it is there. It is real. All sorts of people know that politics and policymaking matter. Our national spirit matters. The lesson for me from the past year is that there is a great reservoir of goodwill that lies untapped beneath the surface of our national life, and smart governments will find ways to liberate and direct it.

Many of us lead charmed lives. I am one of them. It was not always thus. I had a good deal of unhappiness in my early years, which is why I identify with scratchy teens. But at some point I just got on with it. Being curious helped. I am also convinced that any success I have enjoyed in my professional and personal life has come about because of the generous embrace of friends and mentors. What they have in common is a well-developed *joie de vivre* and, importantly, a deep appreciation that no problem is so great that it should not be tackled over a decent lunch—at some length.

So, along with many people in this chamber and many others who helped get me elected, I have been the lucky beneficiary of rich opportunities. But in recent years many of us have been feeling something else—an unease, a stirring in the soul, a sense that things are not quite right, that too many are missing out, that, far from leading charmed lives in the lucky country, too many Australians are leading pinched lives. What it is, this stirring in our souls, is a realisation that our famed egalitarian spirit is more talked about than real. This is the paradox of modernity: alongside the exceptional economic prosperity the country has enjoyed, we are also seeing what Professor Fiona Stanley calls an increase in the social gradients.

When we look at the key indicators for the development, wellbeing and health of our children and our young people, the gaps are not shrinking; they are widening.

The experts all tell us the same thing: that 50 per cent of a child's educational performance is determined before that child even enters the formal school system. Yet still, today, 20 per cent of Australian children do not have access to a quality preschool. Among Aboriginal children, as with so much else, the reality is so much worse. Only 46 per cent of four-year-old Indigenous children receive a preschool education. Regrettably, the Commonwealth has been the missing player in this most critical area. We know that those children who are missing out on an appropriate early learning experience will struggle in the first years of school. So this is where the education revolution begins. It begins before school with significant fresh investment and a new approach that integrates care and early learning. I am proud to be part of a government that has put this issue at the very centre of its policy approach. How successful we are will determine whether or not in future publications Professor Stanley can remove the question mark that she currently has in her title *Children of the Lucky Country*?

For this to happen, we also need to see a revival in the capacity of governments to do things, to get on with it. Part of the sheer thrill of being elected to this chamber at this point in our history is that it coincides, I think, with a revived belief in governments as active players and navigators of our national life. For too long, governments have suffered from withered imaginations and from a collapsed will. For our grandparents it was so different. The Sydney Harbour Bridge was constructed at the peak of the Great Depression. The planners had the foresight to put in eight lanes. The same could be said for the Storey Bridge, an iconic part of

the Brisbane landscape and a piece of engineering that is part of the McKew family history. I come from a family of builders, and my grandfather Joe McKew ran the Evans Deakin plant which built the bridge in conjunction with Dr John Bradfield. As the family story goes, every time a new span of the bridge was due to be manoeuvred into place, all the McKew boys, including my father, Bryan, were marched off to mass. Divine help was deemed necessary to assist with the engineering. The point is, these were big projects, undertaken when the country was smaller and poorer. But there was nothing small about the enterprise.

When we consider our major cities today, particularly Brisbane and Sydney, and how the metro infrastructure can struggle to get people to work on time, surely it is time to reconnect to the enterprise and ambition of the past. We need nothing less than a return to nation building—but in a modern way. We need to recruit the talents of our innovators and our technologists, our teachers, our writers and our best policy thinkers. In my own electorate we have significant research and educational institutions—Macquarie University, the CSIRO and the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE. There is also an emerging technology corridor of leading global companies in ICT, medical devices, media and environmental technologies. But the potential of this corridor is yet to be realised. We need an innovation economy, one that recognises that comparative advantage in the modern world is underpinned by those things that the private sector cannot provide: a workable tax system, first-rate health and education systems, and strong research networks. That is the 21st century role of government.

I come to this House as a proud member of the Australian Labor Party, a party that has always had as a core belief the view that active, reformist policymaking should be di-

rected towards maximising equality of opportunity. I like the way the Melbourne philosopher John Armstrong puts it:

The proper goal of power is civilization. And civilization depends, crucially, on spiritual prosperity: upon what we care about, on what we admire, what sorts of ideals and hopes we have.

Part of what I care about—friendship, beauty and the life of the mind—was nurtured by my teachers at All Hallows Convent, a school that sits high above the Brisbane River and overlooks the bridge built by my grandfather.

The older I get the more I appreciate that I was taught by women, by lay and religious staff, who seemed to me to know what was worth knowing. When one considers the deep provincialism of Queensland during this period, this seems extraordinary. But the best of these women were not bound by borders or prejudice. They did what all good teachers do: they took their charges on a journey and fired the imagination.

Wherever you look across this country you see the work of women. It is a particular joy for me to come to this place as one of 40 female representatives. From the time of Federation, it would be 40 years before the first two women, Dorothy Tangney and Dame Enid Lyons, were elected to the federal parliament. One could say that things have moved at a glacial pace. Part of the explanation is that in Australia, never an easy country for women, it is still too hard.

For most of our history the value of labour has been split on a gender basis. The institutional die was cast at the beginning of the 20th century when the basic female wage was set at 54 per cent of the male rate. For decades, Jessie Street, Edna Ryan and others fought to correct this historic injustice, but it would take until the 1970s and three landmark equal pay cases to remove gender classifications from job descriptions. It remains a

continuing disgrace that, 30 years on from these cases, we still cannot say that pay justice for women has been achieved. Women's workforce participation now stands at 58 per cent and the educational achievements of women have never been higher. Yet, whether you are behind the counter of a cafeteria or in the executive suite, if you are female, wage parity is not guaranteed.

When we consider the wider economic picture for women, it is not what it should be. Australia remains one of very few developed countries to have no national system of maternity leave, and returning to work and negotiating flexibility is still problematic for mothers. Is it any wonder that women find themselves in midlife agonising about their limited retirement savings following a life of interrupted work? It is time for this country to junk its historic ambivalence towards female workers and embrace once and for all a set of policies that recognises the real worth of everyone's labour. A few years from now I want to be able to say to the young women graduating from Ryde Secondary College and Marsden High School or those on the campus of Macquarie University in my electorate and their equivalents across the country that Australia is closer to being the meritocracy it should be.

I am here in this place first and foremost as a representative of my local community. If you look inside the suburbs that make up Bennelong, you see the real, contemporary, rather amazing Australia. And it is not the same as what you see on TV. It is much more complex, subtle and wonderful. As I said on the night of 24 November last year, I spent 30 years interviewing Australians—often the most admired and most powerful Australians; many of them in this place—but now I know I missed the best of them. To get to know them you have to knock on front doors and listen to them in the street—and you find out so much more when you are not carrying

a camera and a microphone. It is the stories that are so compelling, stories that cry out for greater attention.

I thank the House for the courtesy of listening to this first speech, as I thank the many, many volunteers and ALP branch members, without whose help and belief I would not be here. Throughout 2007, the women and men, and the boys and girls of the 'purple army', as they called themselves, were united under a simple banner: nothing is impossible. The foot soldiers of the purple army are among the finest and most selfless individuals I have ever met. I would like to thank in particular Lucienne Joy, John Range, Trish Drum, Michael Butterworth, Sally Sitou, Richard Ho, Marie Faulkner, Louise Rose, Tim Quadrio, Senator John Faulkner and the Hon. John Watkins for their friendship and guidance. And to my partner, Bob, a political legend if ever there was one: you are to me the reason for everything.

I hope my time in this place validates and vindicates the faith you have all placed in me. Like all members, I come here wanting to make a difference. To the people of Benelong, your needs come first. I will not let you down.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (1.57 pm)—I rise to speak in this address-in-reply. I know I have limited time but I will be seeking to continue my remarks at a later time. Listening to the Governor-General's speech, something struck me in his opening comments about this great democracy that we have. The decision of the Australian people was that we saw a change of government, and that change, from the coalition to the Labor government, was a peaceful transition.

I want to talk about another level of government where democracy is also very important. I believe our whole democracy starts at the level of local government in our local communities, which are the cornerstone of

this great nation of ours. I want to particularly focus today on the leadership that has been displayed by local councils, local mayors and the community in general during the extraordinary floods that we have recently seen and continue to see in the state of Queensland.

In western Queensland, out in the Murweh Shire Council headquarters on the Warrego River, we saw the leadership of the Mayor, Mark O'Brien, coming to the fore and the important role that local government plays when you have a state of emergency without warning, without notice. You have to have a response if you are going to save communities and prevent the further damage that would occur without great local leadership.

Through Mark O'Brien and other councillors in North and Central Queensland, I saw the importance of local government and local leadership in a time of national emergency. When they responded to the emergency in Charleville, they needed to put up a levy bank quickly because the one that they had partly constructed was not complete. It was quite invigorating and inspiring to see the speed at which the local community acted in putting up a temporary levy bank to protect the town from what would have been devastating floods.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. The debate may be resumed at a later hour. I thank the member for Maranoa for his forbearance when the chair was unable to get an orderly House for him. The member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Dr NELSON (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Given his pre-election commitments, can the Prime Minister now give Australian families a guarantee his

shopping trolley full of inquiries will give Australian families a shopping trolley full of cheaper groceries?

Mr RUDD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. When it comes to one of the core sets of factors impacting on the family budget each week, it is the cost of petrol, groceries and mortgages. In each of these areas, the government has advanced plans to the Australian people, and we intend to get on with implementing them. On the first one, when it comes to housing affordability, I note the fact that the government which preceded us had no minister for housing. This government has appointed a minister for housing, and we have already, within the first 72 days of operation of the government's term, outlined how we intend to implement our first home saver accounts. There are a range of other policies on housing affordability, because that goes to the ultimate cost-of-living pressures on working families.

Then it goes to the question of petrol. This government has a plan to appoint a petrol price commissioner. Our predecessors—and I notice that the former Treasurer smiles in the seat which he now occupies—in the previous government failed to act decisively when it came to effective monitoring of petrol prices. They failed to do it until, in the middle of last year, we in opposition said that our policy would be to appoint a petrol price commissioner. As a consequence of that, the government, led by the then Treasurer, announced such an inquiry. This government has already undertaken other measures to enhance greater external scrutiny on the oil majors when it comes to the cost of petrol. On grocery prices, we have indicated we will have a—

Dr Nelson—Mr Speaker, on a point of order of relevance, this is presumably of interest to many people, but the question is about the cost of groceries for Australian families. I

would appreciate it if the Prime Minister would come back to the basic issue.

The SPEAKER—Order! In the past, the occupant of this chair might have been able to glean from the Leader of the Opposition's question a number of factors to justify relevance. First of all, the Leader of the Opposition talked about the promises made by the Prime Minister—very broad. Secondly, he talked about the shopping trolley of inquiries—very broad. It could be said that the Prime Minister was actually picking that part of the question. The Leader of the Opposition then went on to something that was more specific: the cost of a shopping trolley of groceries. This is the dilemma that occupants of this chair have had about the relevance rule. Of course, to talk about any promise that was made would be completely out of order, in my belief. But to add the 'shopping trolley of inquiries' and the 'shopping trolley of groceries' then leads to this dilemma that we now have. At this point in time, I will rule that the Prime Minister is in order, but I ask all members of the House—

Mr Downer—Of course!

The SPEAKER—I thank the honourable member for Mayo for his biased comment. It will get him nowhere.

Mr Downer—I just said, 'Of course!'

The SPEAKER—Well, it will get him nowhere. If he wants to participate in the House trying to reform question time, he might discuss it with his colleagues on both sides of the chamber.

Mr RUDD—The cost-of-living pressures which affect working families are housing mortgages, the cost of petrol and the cost of groceries. On the cost of groceries, over the last 10 years food prices have risen an average annual rate of 3.8 per cent—well above the 2.9 per cent average for the CPI. A large part of the rise in the price of food can be attributed to the drought and high world

prices for commodities such as grains. The government is keen to ensure that consumers have access to a competitive market for basic food items.

On 22 January 2008, the government directed the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to undertake an inquiry into the competitiveness of retail prices for groceries under the Trade Practices Act 1974. Under the TPA the ACCC can monitor prices, costs and profits in any industry or business, as directed, and report the results. The ACCC has been instructed to take a broad approach to its inquiry and ensure all aspects of the grocery supply chain are included, from the farm gate to the checkout point, with the ACCC report due to the government by 31 July 2008. This is action which the previous government never undertook.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I ask that you ask the Prime Minister to table the document from which he was reading.

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

Mr Rudd—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Is the document confidential?

Mr Rudd—Yes.

The SPEAKER—The document is confidential.

Workplace Relations

Mr HALE (2.05 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister explain to the House the importance of today's release of an exposure draft of the National Employment Standards? Will the Prime Minister outline what other modest wage measures the government will support for parliamentarians in the year ahead?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. This government was elected on a platform of helping working

families under financial pressure. That goes to the core of changing the industrial relations system of this country, an industrial relations system which we inherited which was unfair. Part of unpicking that unfairness lies in today's release of the exposure draft of the National Employment Standards. It is the government's next step in honouring its commitment to build a fair and flexible industrial relations system. It follows the introduction of the government's transition to Forward with Fairness bill into the House yesterday.

The government's new workplace relations system will provide a decent safety net for fair minimum pay and conditions for all employees. The government believes in a consultative process and in laying out what it intends to do on the industrial relations blueprint it has for the future. It laid out its workplace relations policies well in advance of the last election in detail—unlike various governments which have preceded us. It has also continued to consult widely and does so through the agency of the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations at present. Consistent with that spirit of consultation, the minister is laying out an exposure draft for comment on these important National Employment Standards.

The National Employment Standards establish a stronger safety net than existed in the past from the so-called Australian fair pay and conditions standard under Work Choices. For example, under the AFPC, no matter how many hours an employee was being forced to work, an employee could generally not seek relief for working excessive and unreasonable work hours until they had been employed for 12 months. The National Employment Standards make it clear that an employee cannot be asked to work unreasonable hours—period. Flexibility will be retained in modern awards to allow for averaging of hours when that is relevant for

particular work arrangements, such as fly-in fly-out arrangements. Such arrangements will be relevant for determining whether the additional hours required are reasonable. That is just one example of how the government's workplace relations system will deliver fair and minimum standards and sensible flexibility for business. We believe in a simpler set of arrangements for business and we believe that it is important to have appropriate responses from industry and from others once this exposure draft is tabled.

These National Employment Standards, which are important for all working families—though met with the derision of members of opposite, who seem not to have learned the lesson from the last election when it comes to industrial relations—provide as follows: (1) minimum weekly hours of 38 hours per week plus reasonable additional hours; (2) a right to request flexible working hours for parents of young children; (3) 12 months additional parental leave for families by granting each parent a separate entitlement of up to 12 months unpaid parental leave so that a baby has up to two years continual care from a parent on unpaid leave; (4) annual leave of four weeks per year of service; (5) personal carers leave of 10 days for each year of service; (6) community service leave to allow employees to request absence from work; (7) long service leave arrangements to be protected under a new nationally consistent approach; (8) reasonable notice of termination arrangements and a right to redundancy pay; (9) protection of public holidays; and (10) a right to basic workplace information. These are important reforms for working families right across the country, working families which had inflicted upon them an industrial relations system about which they were not consulted at the last election. They were not consulted one bit. It was imposed on them unilaterally

by a government which has now paid the political price for it.

But I am asked further whether there are any other measures which the government would embrace and measures which would be supported by members of parliament here on the overall question of how we approach the inflation challenge this year, including wage restraint. In a modest exercise in wage restraint the government has decided to propose to the parliament a regulation which will have the effect of not increasing MPs' salaries through until the middle of next year. Furthermore, the government proposes that, when this measure comes to a close in mid-2009, there be no clawback mechanism for any salary forgone between now and then. This is a modest measure. It does not of itself solve the nation's economic challenges or problems. But it does, I believe, indicate to the public at large that the government—and I hope the parliament—is serious about the overall challenge of wage restraint. Therefore, we are not calling on working families to engage in some sort of freeze on their wage claims or wage outcomes. Working families are already under financial pressure. But we need to be able to face the Australian community in the eye and say that we in the privileged position of this place are doing one small bit when it comes to exercising some wage restraint on our part. I will conclude by saying this. Right across the country and the economy many people have responded to various claims for further CEO salary increases. Markets ultimately determine these things. But, in the difficult challenges we face ahead this year on the economy and inflation, I would hope that those in the most privileged positions in the corporate sector also reflect carefully on the need for CEO wage restraint in the year ahead.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I ask that you ask the Prime Minister to table the document from which was reading.

The SPEAKER—Order! Was the Prime Minister reading from a document? Is the document confidential?

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Given the new standards that the Prime Minister has endeavoured to set in this place, was that not a ministerial statement rather than the answer to a question?

The SPEAKER—The question was well and truly in order, and the answer was relevant to the question.

Economy

Dr NELSON (2.12 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Given it is a fact that the last three budgets have delivered surpluses of 1.5 per cent or more of gross domestic product, how will the surplus of 1.5 per cent of GDP in this 2008 budget reduce inflation and take pressure off grocery prices for Australian families?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. When the government outlined its five-point plan to tackle inflation earlier this year, restraint in public demand was one of the measures. I will come back to the direct question which the Leader of the Opposition has put forward concerning the budget surplus target for this year. It was one part of a five-part approach. The second related to how we best encourage private savings in the economy, because it is the aggregate of private demand and public demand which of course is one-half of the overall inflation equation. Therefore, restraint is important in both. But that is not the end of the story. The rest of the inflation equation goes to the supply side. It is on the supply side I would commend to the attention of the honourable member that the government which preceded us was most lax indeed. We have been warned on 20 separate occasions by the Reserve Bank on the question of capacity constraints within the economy: skills and infrastructure. Then, on top

of that—beyond skills, beyond infrastructure—is the overarching problem also of workforce participation. On these supply-side measures it is not just the Reserve Bank which issued this series of warnings. Many respected economic commentators did the same over a long period of time. And why I suspect those opposite respond so volubly to this argument when it is put forward is they happen to know that it is true. If you look at the content of each of those warnings, the sharpness of the advice which the previous government received from the institution responsible for the conduct of monetary policy in this country, they were ignored—skills, infrastructure and workforce participation.

Go back to the first of those elements, which the Leader of the Opposition raised, on how we deal with public demand and the shape of the budget surplus. We have indicated that our target for the year ahead is for a minimum budget surplus of 1.5 per cent. I note for the record that, as the government approached the election, in its official documents it was projecting a budget surplus not in excess of 1.1 per cent. If the government, as it then stood, had a different view of the shape of the budget surplus, which should have pertained in the year ahead, why did it not say so prior to the election? Or was it content simply to continue the spending binge in which it was engaged in the years leading up to the election, in the hope of stealing another election through profligate spending?

Workplace Relations

Mr ADAMS (2.15 pm)—Thank you, Mr Speaker, and let me congratulate you on your election to that role. I have enormous faith in you.

The SPEAKER—There have been suggestions from my left about sending flowers instead of congratulating me. I would be a bit

suspicious if you had done that on Valentine's Day!

Mr ADAMS—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do have another Valentine in my life.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I feel I am now losing control of the House! The member will get to his question.

Mr ADAMS—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. How important to fairness in the workplace is a safety net that cannot be stripped away?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Lyons for his very well put question and the associated remarks. Can I join with the Prime Minister in indicating that the government today has taken another important step forward in the delivery of fairness and balance in Australian workplaces. We have released an exposure draft of our 10 new National Employment Standards. Under Labor's industrial relations system, these will be protections that every working Australian can rely on—protections about hours of work, annual leave, public holidays, personal leave, long service leave and a new category of community service leave. There will be rights to parental leave, including a new right—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will cease interjecting. The Deputy Prime Minister should ignore these interjections.

Ms GILLARD—Once again, the former Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations is showing his complete ignorance. There will be a right to parental leave, including a new right to sequencing leave, so that the mother and father of a child, if they choose, can sequence their unpaid maternity and paternity leave so that they can have the first two years of a child's life with a parent

at home. It includes a new right to request flexible and part-time work, a right to have information about employment law, and a right to notice of termination and redundancy pay.

These provisions have been produced as an exposure draft to enable public commentary. We will not make the same error made by the Howard government when it put out its Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard, which it did without adequate consultation, and it had to issue version after version with increased complexity and red tape for Australian businesses. We care about making these provisions work. That is why an exposure draft is here, with a public commentary period. This is one part of Labor's safety net for working Australians.

The second part of Labor's safety net is a modern, simple award system for employees who earn \$100,000 or less. That modern, simple award system will be created by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The modernisation request was contained in the explanatory memorandum to our Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Bill, which was presented to the House yesterday.

What is very important about this safety net under Labor is that, under Labor's workplace relations system, the safety net can never be stripped away. Never again will an Australian walk into a workplace not knowing if that is the day that they will have an Australian workplace agreement thrust into their hands which strips away aspects of the safety net. We will not allow that to occur in Labor's system. There will be no Australian workplace agreements and no individual statutory employment agreements. This is in stark contrast to Work Choices and the industrial relations extremism of the Liberal Party. What they gave us was Australian workplace agreements that can strip the safety net

away—including, today, stripping away redundancy pay and basic protections like a notice of change of shift.

It is important for this House and the Australian people to note that, when the Leader of the Opposition said to them that Work Choices is dead, he did not tell them the truth. Today in the Senate the Liberal Party has voted to keep Work Choices going. Today we asked the Liberal Party to process our transition bill, which will mean there will be no more new Australian workplace agreements. We asked them to process that bill in exactly the same time frame that the parliament processed the last industrial relations changes of the Howard government. That is, we asked the Liberal Party to apply their own standards to themselves. Faced with that proposition of applying their own standards to themselves—something that they must agree is fair, something that they must agree is proper, given that it was brought into the parliament by the former Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, who is now their guardian of parliamentary practice as the Manager of Opposition Business—they must concede that that is a fair time frame in which to process legislation. The only reason they did not agree to it is that they want Work Choices to continue as long as possible. Notwithstanding the words of the Leader of the Opposition, they believe in Work Choices and they believe in industrial relations extremism. Any Australian who has put into their hands in this time period an Australian workplace agreement that takes away a basic condition that they rely on should look at that Australian workplace agreement and say to themselves, 'This agreement is in my hands because the Leader of the Opposition is not a truthful man, and the Liberal Party believe in Work Choices and industrial relations extremism.'

Workplace Relations

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.21 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Education and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the minister guarantee that her preferred workplace agreement—union negotiated collective agreements—do not take away award conditions such as penalty rates and leave loading?

Ms GILLARD—I was waiting for page 2, but page 2 did not come. For a former minister of the Howard government who claimed to care so much about literacy, it would be really useful if the Deputy Leader of the Opposition read Labor's policy. If she is in any doubt about how to find it, it is on the internet. We campaigned on it for all of 2007. I will send it to her. The policy contains the answer, and I will give it to you now. The policy is Forward with Fairness. You should read it. And if you did read it, you would know that we do not have a preferred industrial instrument in Forward with Fairness; we talk about creating a fair and balanced system in which people have choice. People have choice, if they want to, to negotiate a collective agreement. They can do that with or without the assistance of a trade union. That is a matter for them, because that is a basic freedom of association matter. Alternatively, they can choose to not collectively bargain; they can choose to have individual agreements. The important thing about those individual agreements is that they stand on top of the safety net. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and her party today voted for a continuation of Work Choices—

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question was simple: will she guarantee—

Mr Debus—On what grounds?

Ms Julie Bishop—Relevance! Will she guarantee that union negotiated collective agreements will not take away award conditions, including penalty rates and leave loadings? Will she guarantee? Yes or no?

Ms GILLARD—What I am trying to do is to explain the equivalent of complex mathematics to someone who cannot count, so it does require a bit of explanation. Under Labor's full system, you will have a choice as to whether you have a collective agreement or an individual common-law contract. You might want to concentrate here, because you might learn something: the collective agreement is not lawful unless it passes a full no-disadvantage test against the award. That means that people under a collective agreement have to do better than the award. How is that different from the current system? Under the current system, award conditions can be ripped away without any compensation—redundancy pay gone, notice of change of shift gone. You believe in that, you voted for its continuation today.

Mr Jenkins—Order! The Deputy Prime Minister should just be a bit careful about which 'you' she is talking about. She should address her remarks through the chair.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.25 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Hon. Dr Stephen Martin, a former Speaker. On behalf of the House I extend to him a very warm welcome. Alongside of him, we have a recently retired member of this place and a former member of the New South Wales parliament, the Hon. Bruce Baird. I welcome him very warmly, having served on committees with him.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Workplace Relations

Ms HALL (2.26 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. What information is available about the impact of Australian workplace agreements on working families?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Shortland for her question. Today in the Senate, the Liberal Party voted for the continuation of Work Choices. In order to do that—to vote for a continued industrial relations extremism and a continued ripping off of Australian working families—it tried to hide behind creating an inquiry. One of the terms of reference of that inquiry is—would you believe it!—the 'economic and social impacts from the abolition of individual statutory agreements'. This has come from a political party which, in government, deliberately did not want to know how Australian workplace agreements were hurting working families.

They could have collected this data, analysed it and released it but they did not want to know how bad these agreements were. They did not want them to come to public light. Given the members of the Liberal Party used to get up in this place and screech on about how good AWAs were for working families, for women, for young people—for all Australians—you would have thought they would have comprehensively analysed the data at their disposal. But, of course, they did not. What we do know is that, in May 2006, the Office of the Employment Advocate revealed that it had been reviewing AWAs to determine how many were stripping away what the former government deceptively and contemptuously called 'protected award conditions'.

I welcome the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's new-found interest in things like annual leave loading, because the data showed this: under the government of which

she was a cabinet member, 64 per cent of Australian workplace agreements cut annual leave loading. That is how much she cares about annual leave loading—64 per cent of those agreements cut annual leave loading. Then, 63 per cent of them cut penalty rates. Does she now care about penalty rates because she has made the short walk from here to there? She clearly did not care about them then—63 per cent of those agreements, no penalty rates.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order under standing order 64(c). The minister continues to refer to the honourable member by a term other than her seat, and she should desist from doing so.

The SPEAKER—All members should refer to members by their seats whilst here in the chamber.

Ms GILLARD—The member of the Liberal Party, sitting opposite, when in government could have had this data and did not want to know about it. Fifty-two per cent of these agreements cut shift loadings, 51 per cent cut overtime loadings, 48 per cent cut monetary allowance and 46 per cent cut holiday pay. The government at that stage denied it was doing any further modelling but, in April 2007, data was leaked to the media that revealed further erosion by Australian workplace agreements of pay and conditions. In that leaked data, 75 per cent of agreements cut shift loadings, 68 per cent cut penalty rates, 57 per cent cut monetary allowances and 52 per cent cut public holiday pay.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—What we know—and the former minister really should be a bit more wise about his interjections—is that they never properly coded or analysed the data to be able to tell whether the loss of these conditions was compensated for. The minister could have authorised analysis of

that data, but he did not, because he did not want to know the answer. He deliberately wanted to run a system where he did not want to know the answer. What we do know is that these conditions were ripped away by a government that put the information into the dark and did not want Australians to know. What we do know is that Australian workplace agreements ripped away those basic conditions, and we also know that many of those agreements had in them no particular compensation in terms of the amount of money that was paid to people. This is the system that the former government put into place in this country. This is the system that they argued for in the lead-up to the last election, and this is the system that the Australian people voted against and rejected. They voted in favour of Labor's fair and balanced system but, in arrogant contempt of the views of the Australian people, the Liberal Party—informed by their born-to-rule mentality—have today voted for a continuation of Work Choices. They have voted to spit in the face of the Australian people and to deny them fairness and balance at work. Every Australian should know this and every Australian should judge them on the basis of it.

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr HAASE (2.32 pm)—Mr Speaker, may I add my congratulations on your election to high office. My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister give me and my constituents a commitment that he will not be a part-time Prime Minister and run a part-time parliament by refusing to front this House on sitting Fridays?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I call the Prime Minister.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I remind members on my right that the Prime Minister has the call.

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. I responded to one part of his question yesterday, in the response I think I gave to the Leader of the Opposition concerning sitting Fridays. The position of the government is absolutely clear on that. The purpose of sitting Fridays is to ensure that backbenchers in this parliament have an opportunity to bring to the attention of the parliament issues of concern to them in their local communities, such as in the honourable member for Kalgoorlie's community. My experience as a backbencher in this place is that the opportunities to raise concerns here as a backbencher are limited. Therefore the parliament providing further opportunities of a sitting Friday to do so is an appropriate way forward. We remain committed to that reform. And we would hope that all honourable members, including the honourable member who has asked the question, make appropriate use of that mechanism.

Economy

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (2.34 pm)—My question is directed to the Treasurer. Would the Treasurer please update the House on the implications of today's employment figures for the inflation challenge?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for his question, because today's employment figures are welcome figures.

A government member—Hear, hear!

Mr SWAN—Hear, hear—too right! We always welcome the creation of jobs on this side of the House. On this side of the House, it goes to the very core of our being. We welcome the creation of 28,600 new jobs in January, with the unemployment rate falling to 4.1 per cent. As I said yesterday, we are very optimistic about the future of the Australian economy. We recognise that unem-

ployment is low and that we are in our 17th straight year of growth. But we also have very substantial challenges, because we are in the midst of a terms of trade boom, which has been delivering the wealth creation and the jobs of recent years. The challenge that we have as a nation is to prepare for the future, to meet the challenges that flow from that terms of trade boom, because the labour market is tight. It is the tightest it has been in a generation.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SWAN—It means it is very tight; it means it is low. That is what it means: very low.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer has the call!

Mr SWAN—The problem with the opposition is that they cannot recognise the scale of the skills crisis in this country, which they neglected, which they denied—

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt will cease interjecting.

Mr SWAN—Those opposite did ignore the capacity constraints in the Australian economy precisely at the time that we needed them to put in place some far-sighted reforms. And they did not do it. They ignored 20 warnings from the Reserve Bank over three years about capacity constraints in the Australian economy. This government will not ignore those capacity constraints. At the very core of the program that we took to the Australian people are schemes to address the skills shortage and a whole series of plans to deal with infrastructure bottlenecks. This government will expand the skills base in this economy. The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations has already announced additional training places, and we

have announced what we are doing in terms of infrastructure.

But also, in this environment, what is really important is labour force participation. Enhancing labour force participation, giving incentives to Australians who work hard, is very important. So I am proud to say that today I introduced into the House the tax cuts that will provide incentive for people not only to further participate—

Mr Hockey—Our tax cuts.

Mr SWAN—No, they are not.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I warn the honourable member for North Sydney.

Mr SWAN—These tax reforms will put incentive in the system. They will enhance labour force participation and, in particular, they will encourage second-income earners into the workforce. The previous government, the opposition over there, ignored for years disincentives in the tax system. They simply ignored them. We are proud to put these forward today. In addition, we have put forward an increase in the childcare rebate.

Mr Hunt—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Put him out of his misery!

The SPEAKER—The member for Flinders will leave the chamber for one hour under standing order 94(a).

The member for Flinders then left the chamber.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—To the disorderly interjections that indicated that the member for Flinders was not warned, it has been the tradition of the one hour that there is not a need for a warning. When they were first put in place there was no warning, and I will be returning to that basis. If people clearly are trying me on, I will give them what they have earned.

Mr SWAN—The previous government was not prepared to front up to these challenges. This government is on the front foot from day one. Those opposite do not recognise the problem, so they cannot be part of the solution.

Days and Hours of Meeting

Dr NELSON (2.40 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. In light of the Prime Minister's proposal to freeze MP salaries for next year, will he, consistent with productivity principles, now commit to being a full-time Prime Minister and guarantee that he and his ministers attend every scheduled parliamentary sitting day and answer questions from the Australian people? Is he also proposing to freeze public service salaries?

Mr RUDD—On the question of the sitting days and question times for this parliament, the number of sitting days proposed under this government for 2008 is 82. The Howard government average was 67. As to question times, it is proposed for 2008 under this government to have 67 question times. The Howard government averaged 63 question times.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—It is a fact. For government business there is an extra three hours and 25 minutes per week, and for private members business there is an extra one hour and 35 minutes per week—and that is apart from community cabinets. As to the other point which the Leader of the Opposition raised concerning our proposal to exercise modest restraint when it comes to MP salaries, I would like very much to hear what the Leader of the Opposition's position on that is.

Mr Randall—What about public servants? You didn't answer the question.

The SPEAKER—I would make the comment, in fairness to everybody con-

cerned, that there was so much hubbub that the final part of the Leader of the Opposition's question could hardly be heard by anybody, even those of us who are close to him.

Mr RUDD—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I did not hear that part of the question which the honourable member said was about public servants. The measures that I propose purely relate to those of us here—members of parliament. It is time that we ourselves, as the parliamentarians of the nation, gave this as a modest demonstration of restraint in a year in which there are inflationary challenges across the economy.

On a point I raised about private members business, I said before that, under this government, there will be an extra one hour and 35 minutes per week. I am advised by the Leader of the House that is one hour and five minutes extra a week and not one hour and 35 minutes.

Dr Nelson—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister is not answering the question. The question is: will he return to being here every parliamentary sitting day on a Friday to answer questions from the Australian people?

The SPEAKER—Order! There is no point of order. The Prime Minister has resumed his seat and has finished his response.

Climate Change

Mr MELHAM (2.43 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer update the House on the work Treasury is undertaking on the economics of climate change?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for his question. This government sees climate change as one of the greatest intergenerational challenges that this country faces. To enhance our understanding of climate change, the Australian Treasury is undertaking detailed modelling of the macroeconomic impacts of emissions reductions. It is very

important work. This modelling will be a very important part in our determinations of an emissions trading system. The Treasury is consulting broadly with international and domestic experts in developing modelling assumptions. This modelling work is expected to be complete by mid-June.

In designing the government's response to climate change, the Australian government will draw on a range of work, including this modelling from Treasury, independent academic analysis by Professor Garnaut and other analysis from here and abroad. We on this side of the House recognise the costs of climate change and that the costs of inaction are far greater than the costs of action. That is why we will take an evidence based approach to finding solutions for the long term. It is very important. Australia now has a government that recognises the important implications of climate change and is addressing them.

Automotive Industry

Mr TURNBULL (2.45 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Was the Treasurer aware prior to giving his answer yesterday that the government had made a decision to appoint Mr Steve Bracks to head a major review of the car industry?

Mr SWAN—I welcome the question. The decision to formally appoint Mr Bracks was taken last night by the minister. Let me say, the appointment of Mr Bracks is a fine appointment. Let me also say that we take this industry very seriously. A lot of jobs are involved in this industry and there are very big challenges. This review is very important and it will receive the full backing of the government.

Economy

Mrs IRWIN (2.45 pm)—Mr Speaker, the red roses have not been sent, but congratulations on your election as Speaker. My question is to the Minister for Finance and De-

regulation. Can the minister tell the House what the challenge of rising inflation means for the Australian economy, businesses and families? What action is the government taking to address this challenge?

Mr TANNER—Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment, and I thank the member for Fowler for her question. I would remind the House of three simple but extremely important facts: the underlying inflation rate in this country has hit 3.6 per cent—the highest in 16 years and it threatens to go higher; we have had 11 interest rate increases in a row; and government spending in the current financial year, according to the budget figures of the previous government, is running at an increased rate of 4½ per cent in real terms, possibly even higher depending on which indicator you use. These are three simple facts that should be seared into the consciousness of every member of this House.

Increased inflation threatens us with increased interest rates, less economic efficiency and eroded savings. This government is absolutely committed to ensuring that we take action, both in the short term and in the longer term, to meet and defeat the inflation challenge. We are absolutely committed to getting inflation under control. On 21 January in Perth, the Prime Minister announced the government's five-point plan to tackle the inflation problem; to deal with skills, infrastructure, participation in the workforce and private savings; and, of course, to tackle the problem of government spending accelerating way too quickly.

As was mentioned earlier today in the House, we are absolutely committed to getting the surplus above 1½ per cent of GDP, and that means significant cuts in government spending, serious cuts in government spending. It means tough decisions. Last week I announced a very modest first instal-

ment, which was required to be addressed because of the additional appropriations legislation needing to be put to this parliament, an instalment which will yield savings of approximately \$643 million over four years—but that, I stress, is only a modest first instalment.

We will be guided in this exercise—the razor-gang exercise that we committed to prior to the election and that we are now following through on—by our election promises. We will fulfil those election promises. Of course, we will be guided by existing contracts; we will honour contracts. But there will be pain; there will be difficulty; there will be tough decisions. That is unavoidable. After years of excessive, wasteful, profligate spending by the former government, that pain is necessary in order to ensure that we avoid the far worse pain that higher inflation and higher interest rates will bring to ordinary working people in this country.

As you can probably see, the government's analysis of this problem and its prescription for a solution are not shared by everyone. Not everybody agrees. During the course of last year the former Treasurer, the member for Higgins, just as inflation was starting to push up against the top level of the Reserve Bank's range, said that the government had inflation just where it wanted it. The Leader of the Opposition said a couple of weeks ago that, when the former government handed over to the current government, the Australian economy had been in absolutely first-rate condition. There was no inflation problem according to him. The shadow Treasurer, the member for Wentworth, is on the record as saying that the inflation problem is a fairytale; it does not exist.

But, as usual, you can always rely on the National Party to top the lot. When you are

in the market for a bit of economic literacy, you can always rely on the National Party! Last week, in response to the initial cuts that I announced, the Leader of the National Party held a press conference. When he was asked, 'Isn't it necessary to cut government spending in order to put downward pressure on inflation?' his response was: 'The United States has actually got a higher inflation rate than Australia and it is actually increasing government spending.' So, in other words, we should be increasing government spending! The National Party solution to the inflation problem is to increase government spending.

Here they all are: the economic party animals of Australian politics. They have formed a new parliamentary friendship group: it is called the 'friends of Corey'! They are all out there with the big yellow shades—the party animals of Australian politics. They have not realised that the party is over. It is time for a bit of discipline, and it is time for somebody to clean up the mess. That is what we are going to be doing. The reason is that we understand what is happening in the supermarkets, the petrol stations and the estate agents of this country. The opposition do not.

In conclusion, the government is committed to achieving good economic outcomes for the working people of this country. Central to that is ensuring that we continue the low inflation that has occurred over 16 years under governments of both political persuasions. Returning to that low inflation rate is critical to ensure that the working people of this country enjoy good economic opportunities and good economic outcomes. But I will tell you this: there will be some things you will not see as part of our exercise. You will not see \$457 million spent on government advertising in 16 months, which is what you saw under the previous government. You will not see \$350 million spent in a single year on

Work Choices—triple the amount previously spent on industrial relations machinery—as you saw under the previous government. You will not see the kinds of outrageous rorts under the Regional Partnerships program that the Auditor-General so thoroughly exposed. You will not see the ludicrous indulgences like \$350,000 given to a private individual to build a carriage to give as a private gift to the Queen. They are the kinds of things that you will not see in our efforts to get inflation under control, because we realise that every dollar that the government has to spend on behalf of Australian taxpayers is coming from a working family's budget. That is a very great responsibility. We are not going to be spending the Australian taxpayers' dollars on those things.

Automotive Industry

Mr TURNBULL (2.53 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Isn't it the fact that the decision to appoint Mr Bracks was discussed and agreed by the cabinet strategic budget committee on 30 January, a meeting which you attended?

Mr SWAN—No.

East Timor

Ms SAFFIN (2.53 pm)—Mr Speaker, I offer you my congratulations on your election as Speaker. My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Can the foreign minister update the House on his meeting with the East Timorese foreign minister in Darwin, following the attack on East Timorese President Jose Ramos-Horta?

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Has the member for Dickson something that he wants to share with the whole chamber? I think that he should sit there quietly.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I thank the honourable member for Page for her question and acknowledge her longstanding in-

terest in East Timor. On Tuesday I travelled to Darwin to meet with the East Timorese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Zacarias da Costa. The purpose of that visit was to relay personally to the East Timorese foreign minister the Australian government's response to the deplorable acts that had occurred earlier in the week in respect of the East Timorese President, Dr Ramos-Horta, with the attack on him, and the attack upon the East Timorese Prime Minister.

I took the opportunity of speaking to medical staff at the Royal Darwin Hospital, in whose care the President is. I also took the opportunity of speaking with Ramos-Horta's family. I personally relayed to Zacarias da Costa the Australian government's speedy response to the deplorable events. Firstly, I relayed our best wishes for a speedy recovery so far as the President was concerned. Secondly, I relayed our quick response to the East Timorese government's request for support: additional troops, additional police and the stationing of HMAS *Perth* off the coast of Dili.

The East Timorese response was one of very grateful acknowledgement of our support. The foreign minister and I agreed that—after the East Timorese government, the Australian government, the United Nations and the international stabilisation force had effected a full and proper evaluation—we would take account of what, if any, lessons there were to be learned as a result of these terrible actions.

Taking the opportunity to speak to the medical staff at the hospital, two things became clear. Firstly, but for the very skilled work under enormous pressure at the Aspen medical facility in Dili, the President would not now be in the serious but stable condition that he is in. Secondly, at the Royal Darwin Hospital the President is in the highest quality care. Before I came into the chamber,

having checked upon the President's medical condition, I was informed that he remains in a serious but stable state. Members would appreciate that in these circumstances stability is progress.

I also took the opportunity of expressing the Australian government's and the Australian people's sorrow and sympathy to members of the President's family, in particular his mother and his sister. The family members are very appreciative of those best wishes and also very appreciative of the good work that is being done at very short notice by officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who are doing their best to take care of the family members visiting Darwin in these terrible circumstances. Can I also indicate that I took the opportunity of meeting with the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, who indicated to me the Territory government's readiness and willingness to provide whatever support they can to the family.

This morning I took a phone call from the Portuguese foreign minister, who expressed his concern to me. Portugal has a longstanding historical and emotional interest in East Timor, and the minister indicated to me that once an evaluation had been done Portugal stood ready to consider any requests that might come its way. Portugal will do that in full cooperation and consultation with the Australian government. I am appreciative of that expression of support and best wishes from the Portuguese government.

The East Timorese foreign minister, Zacarias da Costa, has returned to Dili from Darwin, but I very much hope that he will be in a position to visit Australia next week as part of a longstanding arrangement for a guest-of-government visit to Australia. That will entirely depend on the circumstances in Dili which, as I came to question time, were still being described as tense but calm. We

certainly hope that that continues. The Prime Minister will visit Dili and speak with the East Timorese Prime Minister tomorrow, relaying all the things that I have outlined to the House. At the first available opportunity he is personally attending Dili at a time of great need as far as East Timor is concerned, reflecting the Australian government's, the Australian parliament's and the Australian people's longstanding support for and long-standing friendship and special relationship with East Timor.

Automotive Industry

Mr TURNBULL (2.59 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Given the Treasurer's statement that the decision to appoint Mr Bracks to head the review of the car industry was only made last night, can he tell the House when Mr Bracks and the other members of this review—Mr Tim Harcourt, Mr Peter Upton, Dr Elizabeth Webster and Mr Nixon Apple—were advised of their appointment and in what manner?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for his question. The decision was taken by the minister only last night. There have been consultations about this for some time. This is the normal process of government. There is a panel and there have been discussions with people about appointments to the panel. Of course that has occurred. That is the normal process of government. The decision was formally taken by the minister last night. There have been discussions for some weeks. We have put together this review. It is a first-class review with a first-class head and a first-class panel.

Afghanistan

Mr DREYFUS (3.00 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Defence. Can the minister please outline what steps the government has taken to ensure that NATO has a coherent military plan and overall strategy in place for success in Afghanistan?

Mr FITZGIBBON—I thank the member for Isaacs for the question. I know that, like many new members to this place, he will be making a substantial contribution to the debate in Australia. In opposition, the Labor Party supported the intervention in Afghanistan. We did so because we wanted to ensure that the mission, so important to Australia's national security, enjoyed broad public support. The new government continues to support the Afghanistan project. The international community cannot afford to sit back and allow a failed state to remain a breeding ground for terrorists prepared to kill innocent people en masse in the name of their extremist beliefs. I described the war in Afghanistan as a project, and I did so quite deliberately. I did so because the work of the international community there necessarily goes well beyond the military action—consolidating new democratic health and educational institutions, building economic capacity absent of narcotics and developing Afghanistan's security forces to the point where the government can independently enforce the rule of law or require coherent and coordinated plans which marry all military and non-military strategies.

Unfortunately, such coordinated and coherent plans have been the absent part of the Afghanistan jigsaw. Indeed, the highly respected Lord Paddy Ashdown said only today that the absence of an agreed national strategy meant that in Afghanistan 'defeat is now a real possibility'. What a tragedy failure in Afghanistan would be for all of those who have given their lives for the cause or have been badly injured. What an ominous development it would be for global security and for the Afghan people. What a tragedy it would be if all the good work done so far in the end were to count for nought.

There have been significant gains. Economic growth in the war-weary country is currently running at an impressive eight per

cent. Health care in Afghanistan also continues to improve. Indeed, 80 per cent of the Afghani people now have access to basic health care services. Infant mortality rates continue to steadily decline. The number of Afghan children receiving an education now exceeds some six million. Importantly, a number of those, some two million people, are girls. The outcomes flowing from Australia's military role have been significant and substantial. The work of our Special Forces, our infantry, our cavalry and other elements are very highly regarded by our partners. Our Defence Force engineers, tradespeople and project managers are rebuilding local infrastructure. They have helped construct schools and bridges. Amongst those schools is an important trade-training school. What a tragedy it would be if this were all for nil.

Unsurprisingly, the future of the Afghanistan project was an early priority for me when I was appointed the Minister for Defence. Alarming, early in the course of my work I found a lack of common objectives amongst the partners—no coherent strategy; confused chains of command and blurred lines of responsibility; a failing counternarcotics strategy; the absence of benchmarks for progress; a crisis in burden sharing, with a number of NATO countries failing to meet or live up to their side of the bargain; and poor progress in advancing Afghan security forces towards the critical mass in skill required for them to be able to hold our military gains. But what surprised me most was the extent to which Australia had been denied access to important war information and excluded from the strategic-planning processes. Our people have been going to war, some to make the ultimate sacrifice, but it seems their political masters have been happy to sit on the sidelines.

Mr Downer—That is not true.

Mr FITZGIBBON—I hear the interjection from the former foreign minister.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will ignore interjections, and the honourable member for Mayo will not interject.

Mr FITZGIBBON—He says, 'That is not true.' Let me refer the former Minister for Foreign Affairs and all members of the House to an ABC radio interview which occurred on *AM* just this morning. The interview was with a NATO spokesperson. The reporter asked the NATO spokesperson whether these complaints to NATO were new. He asked the spokesperson very deliberately, 'Oh, do you mean Australia and other non-NATO countries have made these complaints before?' And here is his response. It is very important. He said:

Countries like Sweden and Finland for example, that are very heavily deployed with us in Afghanistan, but are not NATO members have raised this issue in the past...

I repeat: 'Countries like Sweden and Finland'. I did not hear any reference to Australia in the NATO spokesperson's remarks. But the new government is determined that if we are to send our troops to war we must be privy to the war plan and we must always be part of the planning strategy. No government, surely, can make informed decisions about whether to send their people to war or keep them at war without access to the vital information required both to assess the risk involved and to assess the likelihood of success.

In Vilnius last week I told my NATO counterparts and the Secretary General that their failure to share information with the Australian government and to exclude us from those planning processes were both unsustainable. I am pleased to report to the House that no NATO country raised any objections to my appeals and that, along with a number of key defence ministers, including

from the US, the UK, the Netherlands and Canada, the Secretary General made a personal commitment to me that he would do all he could to right this wrong. I was very pleased to hear the Secretary General's spokesman today also reinforce that commitment that I heard in Vilnius last week. I was also very pleased to hear him acknowledge, on behalf of NATO, the very good work our troops are doing in Afghanistan. Advancing beyond the Vilnius promises will not be easy, nor will embracing or getting NATO to embrace new strategies, but the size of the challenge should be no reason not to try; the stakes are all too high.

Automotive Industry

Mr TURNBULL (3.08 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer confirm that the Treasury advised the government that the Productivity Commission should conduct the review of the motor vehicle industry, as opposed to the 'jobs for the boys' panel that was established?

Mr SWAN—It is certainly a matter that I discussed with the Treasury, as I do on all of these matters. I discussed it with the Treasury and they provided advice. As a consequence of that advice, the Productivity Commission is advising the panel, and that is a very good thing. I did discuss it with the Treasury. I took their advice and the Productivity Commission is involved.

Infrastructure

Mr BUTLER (3.09 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. How will the government's plans for Infrastructure Australia improve productivity in the transport sector?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the honourable member for Port Adelaide for his question. Building long-term productivity growth after years of decline is indeed a central priority of the Rudd government. Like few other areas,

development of infrastructure has the capacity to boost the productive economy, to lift our living standards and to lock in our long-term prosperity. That is why infrastructure is a key element of the government's five-point plan to fight inflation and to boost productivity. The government committed to establishing Infrastructure Australia to coordinate nationally significant infrastructure, including transport, water, energy and communications. Infrastructure Australia will develop a strategic blueprint for our nation's infrastructure and it will drive investment where it is needed most. It is an unprecedented overhaul of the way that we think about infrastructure development in this nation.

This government makes no apologies for moving away from the 'business as usual' approach of the last 11½ years. The Reserve Bank warned on some 20 separate occasions that capacity constraints were creating inflationary pressures.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE—Those opposite should listen to what happens in parliament. The Treasurer has already tabled the 20 different warnings from the Reserve Bank about capacity constraints.

Opposition members—When?

Mr ALBANESE—They were tabled earlier today. I say that to help the opposition.

The SPEAKER—The interjectors will cease interjecting and the minister will ignore them.

Mr ALBANESE—I am surprised that they have not heard about these warnings because many of them were made at the House of Representatives economics committee hearings with the Reserve Bank Governor which are held twice a year. If they looked at *Hansard* they would see the warnings from the Reserve Bank of Australia about the capacity constraints and the prob-

lems that exist with skills and infrastructure. Twenty warnings on 20 separate occasions were ignored by those opposite. The Rudd Labor government is committed to putting in place structures that will fix the problem.

The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics estimates that urban congestion will cost nearly \$20 billion by 2015. With the freight task set to double by 2020, the greatest impact will be in urban areas, particularly around our ports, our inner modal terminals and our distribution centres. However, a policy for moving goods will not work without a policy for moving people. It is motorists in their cars, much more than truckies in their cabs, that are clogging our cities. Whether it be road or rail carrying commuters or containers, the systems must work together to achieve the best outcomes for workers, businesses and exporters. Freight must be able to move seamlessly, not be slowed down when moving from the farm gate to the kitchen table and from the mines to the ports.

Transport will represent a significant element of the Infrastructure Australia work program. I have taken steps to ensure that there is early progress to advance a national transport reform agenda. I am working closely with my state and territory colleagues to drive national transport outcomes. I have written to the National Transport Commission requesting urgent advice on the development of a national policy framework and a national infrastructure plan for all modes. This work will dovetail the work of—

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I draw your attention to the fact that statements are usually dealt with at the end of question time and they afford a member of the opposition the chance to respond. This is the standard practice of this House. I note some reference to the new program as accommodating statements. I would request

that you tell the minister to come in here and give us answers, not statements.

The SPEAKER—I give the same response that I gave to the honourable member for North Sydney earlier on: the question was in order and the answer is relevant. If people peruse the old *Hansards* they will see that the former member for Scullin has made some remarks about ministerial statements. I refer honourable members to those remarks—as they might guide the feelings of the occupant of the chair! In fact, what is now happening is in order.

Mr ALBANESE—Thank you, Mr Speaker. We did not get any answers to questions from the minister for infrastructure in the Howard government because they did not have one. For 12 years they did not have one. We have a plan to address these issues through Infrastructure Australia. Transport is central to that task, and that task is central to fighting inflation and boosting productivity.

Automotive Industry

Mr TURNBULL (3.15 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer to his previous answer. When was the Treasury advised of the government's decision to appoint Mr Bracks to head the panel and when did the Treasury give its advice to the Treasurer regarding the role of the Productivity Commission?

Mr SWAN—We took advice from the Treasury, and the government took its final formal decision last night.

Health

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (3.16 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Since 3 December last year, what has the government done to help build a better health system for a modern Australia?

Ms ROXON—Thank you for the question. I know the member for Canberra has had a great interest in health issues not just in

this region but across the country. I am very pleased to be able to say that, since the election of the Rudd Labor government, we have been incredibly busy in the health area. In less than 100 days we have put in place some of the infrastructure for reforming our health system to build a modern Australia. That is something that the previous health minister was decidedly against—any sort of reform was a dirty word—and I note that the new opposition spokesperson on health has not yet rebutted that view. So, as far as we are aware, it is only this side of the House that is interested in reforming our health system so that we can deliver for a modern Australia and for working families. We have not just put the infrastructure in place; we have also delivered on practical reforms. With respect to elective surgery waiting lists, there is money to provide 25,000 procedures across the country. The 25,000 people who will have their hip replacement done or their cataract surgery done will be able to live their lives free of pain because we are the first Commonwealth government to put money into elective surgery. That is something the previous government never did.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms ROXON—Interestingly, the members from Queensland are interjecting. Perhaps the members from Queensland want to explain why they do not think we should give Queensland \$27 million to undertake 4,000 procedures for Queenslanders who live in the electorate of the members who are interjecting. You do not want the people who are waiting for knee surgery, cataract surgery or hip surgery to have their procedures done? It would be interesting if the members opposite objected to the government paying for 25,000 people to have their elective surgery done across the country. Perhaps they want to stand up and say why they are against families in their electorate getting assistance from the federal government, when they

know full well that the previous government ripped \$1 billion out of the public hospital system. The Leader of the Opposition, even with this background in health, the member for North Sydney and the member for Warringah all stood by in the previous cabinet and let that \$1 billion be ripped out of our system. So don't all come in here and complain about us, piece by piece, trying to fix the system and the mess that you left.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms ROXON—Interestingly, the members from Victoria are also interjecting. Perhaps the members from Victoria would like to stand up and say—the member for Casey is welcome to; he has a very good hospital in his electorate—why they do not want \$34 million paid to Victoria for nearly 6,000 procedures to be undertaken for people in their electorate.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Honourable members will cease interjecting. I suggest the minister just ignore them and not encourage them. The interjectors should just sit there quietly.

Ms ROXON—In addition to the \$150 million already being delivered to undertake 25,000 procedures across the country, in the space of three months I have met four times with my state colleagues to bat out and negotiate health reform. Interestingly, that is already double the number of times that the previous minister met in a whole year with the state health ministers. I am sure that the former Minister for Health and Ageing is well aware that in three months I have already doubled the work that he did in a whole year.

Importantly, there are a number of other very important initiatives that have been undertaken. I think members, despite their interjections, will share with me my pleasure in Labor having already instigated our home nurse visiting program for Indigenous moth-

ers. This is something that we supported and that the previous government was committed to. It is being extended massively by this government with a \$260 million commitment to investing in early childhood health and development for Indigenous children. It is really important and we have hit the ground running with it. On top of that, we have already implemented initiatives to attract more nurses into our hospitals. All of these are things that the previous government neglected. We are proud that we are up and running on these initiatives. All of us will benefit from an improved health system that will be developed under a Rudd Labor government so that we ensure we have the modern health system that is needed for a modern Australia.

Agriculture

Ms LIVERMORE (3.21 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Can the minister inform the House—

Mr Truss interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Capricornia will get the call. I advise the House that only one person jumped for the call.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The honourable member for North Sydney will sit down. I will just deal with an interjection. Nobody jumped when 'Prospect jumped', as you put it, Leader of the National Party. In the past, an alert side of the House may have had somebody jump. I am not offering advice and consultancy to the opposition but I just make that observation.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I clearly saw the member for Wentworth jump to his feet as you were looking over there. It has been the practice of Speakers of this House to grant some leniency—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. I will tell you what happened: the member for Wentworth got two inches off the seat, stared across the chamber and dropped, making it very difficult for the Speaker to give him the call.

Ms LIVERMORE—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Can the minister inform the House what steps he has taken to deliver on Labor's election commitments for rural and regional Australia and comment on any other initiatives that he has taken to ensure that Australia's primary industry sector has a vibrant and sustainable future?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. She has significant primary industries within her electorate and is also, I understand, an ambassador for Beef Week in Queensland. I would like to kick off by referring to some malicious rumours that have been put out by the National Party, which claim that I do not have a background in primary industries. I would like to put on the record that they are absolutely true—I do not. That is why I have decided that it is essential not only to be taking advice from my own department and from the official stakeholder groups but also to be spending every moment that I can actually meeting with people who work the land, on their land. To that end, I am pleased to report to the House that since receiving the portfolio in December, I have met with primary producers in Roma and Kyogle—with the Prime Minister—and in Emerald, Tamworth, Inverell, Glen Innes, Guyra, Armidale, the outskirts of Hobart, Launceston, Innisfail, Griffith, Hay, Broken Hill, Mildura, throughout the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia—

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If the honourable member wants to give us a guided tour of Australia,

surely he can do it in a ministerial statement. This is an answer to a question, and previous Speakers have made a point of bringing the member's attention back to the question that has been asked, rather than allowing him to go on with gasbagging.

The SPEAKER—The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry knows that he has to get back to the basis of the question. The minister will answer the question.

Mr BURKE—In the course of those visits I have had the opportunity, with regard to the different election promises which we have undertaken, to gain a view of the different views of people working the land—for instance, on the reforms which we have undertaken and are now implementing with respect to wheat marketing arrangements for the \$3.5 billion wheat industry in Australia. Both Kelly Shields and Mark Hyde, and the pastoralists and graziers when I visited them in Western Australia, are very supportive of the changes of the government. At the same time, the WA Farmers Federation are taking a different view and are urging me to depart from the promises that the Labor Party took to the election.

I inform the House that we will be keeping to the promise to have a regulated but competitive wheat export market in Australia. The process for drafting legislation to establish Wheat Exports Australia has begun. I have also established the Independent Expert Group to advise me on the 'industry good' functions previously undertaken by the AWB. The IEG met for the first time last week. It is chaired by South Australian wheat grower John Crosby. Under the existing law, we have also issued three wheat export permits allowing further wheat exports to Iraq and the UK.

Our promise on the Torres Strait fisheries buyback has been implemented. The new member for Leichhardt has been a strong

advocate on this issue, and the outcomes acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and the livelihood of Torres Strait traditional inhabitants while providing long-term economic and employment opportunities.

We have also extended assistance in the wake of equine influenza. That assistance was due to end on 8 February but has now been extended to 14 March. Particularly given the comments today from the New South Wales Minister for Primary Industries, we are very hopeful that there will no longer be red and purple zones by 14 March. I have had the opportunity to meet with the leaders of the peak bodies of the Australian horse industry from Queensland and New South Wales and also those involved in the racing industry at Warwick Farm. It is no exaggeration to say that in the wake of EI the horse industry has been devastated in recent months, and I am sure that we will have more to say on that when the Callinan inquiry reports.

The damage caused by the floods in New South Wales and Queensland has been particularly shocking. When I visited Emerald with the Minister for Human Services and Kyogle with the Prime Minister, we had the opportunity to meet with affected families. It was made clear to us that the full extent of damage by floods is not always clear at the high-water mark. We were able to lend a helping hand under the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements and hear about the good work being done on the ground by the members for Flynn and Page to help working families affected.

The savings measures on drought have been referred to and were announced by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. The two concepts of drought and climate change, while different, are intrinsically linked. The member for New England, as well as presenting me with an Akubra, for which I thank

him, took me out to Brian and Marion Reid's sheep and cattle farm at Bendemeer, near Tamworth. Compounding the problem of drought that those families were able to tell us about is, of course, the serious inflation problem. It is not simply people in suburbia who are affected by mortgages and who are concerned about Australia having the highest inflation rate in 16 years. To that end, we identified where savings could be made within the drought assistance programs that would not affect farmers who are receiving much-needed help.

Unfortunately, in the wake of those savings, which were done in a way that would not affect farmers who were receiving much-needed help, a fear campaign was waged by the Leader of the National Party which, if successful, will only have the impact of causing farmers who are entitled to assistance not to apply. It is the first time there has been a departure from bipartisan support on drought assistance.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am reluctant to do this on his maiden ministerial question, but I draw the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry back to the question he was asked. It was about beef and a range of other issues. He is totally out of order in relation to his own question. It should be a ministerial statement.

The SPEAKER—My recollection is that it was a wider question than the member for North Sydney—

Dr Nelson—It was a long time ago.

The SPEAKER—I accept that from the Leader of the Opposition. I believe the minister's answer is in order. On the other comments about ministerial statements, I am in the hands of the chamber down the track about those things. It is early days.

Mr BURKE—Listening to primary producers on their own properties is the way

that we intend to do business. That is how primary industries will be part of building a modern Australia to meet the challenges of the future for working families and the country.

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

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Question Time

Mr HOCKEY (3.31 pm)—Mr Speaker, in accordance with the practices of previous Speakers, I ask that you balance the equation in relation to questions at the next question time of this place. Otherwise, the closure of question time today can only be considered a deliberate gag by the Prime Minister on a series of questions by the member for Wentworth.

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr TUCKEY (3.31 pm)—Mr Speaker, would you be prepared to provide the House, through your office, with a list of the various sitting week arrangements of the House of Representatives that have applied over the years—for instance, from postwar 1945—including evidence of the provision of question times and MPI debates?

The SPEAKER—I invite the honourable member to have a discussion with the Chamber Research Office.

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr PYNE (3.32 pm)—Mr Speaker, in congratulating you on your election can I let you know that you will have no trouble with me in terms of the matters of the House.

The SPEAKER—You now have my attention. I am worried too.

Mr PYNE—Mr Speaker, given the concerns that have been raised about whether parliamentary privilege attaches to Friday

sittings, inter alia because of the suspension of quorum requirements, will you obtain and release the legal advice referred to by the Leader of the House in the debate on Tuesday? If not, will you obtain your own legal advice and report back to the House?

The SPEAKER—Because I think that the member for Sturt is seeking a considered response, I will take advice from the Clerk and, without stating the extent to which I will be able to answer all the items in his question, I will provide him with information.

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr RANDALL (3.33 pm)—Mr Speaker, I have two questions to you. The first one is by way of elimination. I am interested to know whether members opposite, before making their maiden speeches, are entitled to ask questions. If that is the case, fine. My second question is about you, Mr Speaker. Given that parliament is to sit on Fridays, will you yourself be here all of Friday?

The SPEAKER—I will answer the easy one first. Members are allowed to ask questions before they have made their maiden speeches. It is quite clear.

Mr Tuckey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—No, Member for O'Connor; that is not the case. It is not their maiden speech. On the second matter: I am obliged by standing orders to attend to open proceedings of the parliament on any day. As I am obliged to implement the standing and sessional orders as decided by the House, that will be my intention.

Mr Randall—Further to my question, Mr Speaker: the question was whether you will be here for all of the day.

The SPEAKER—I am not making any promises but I assume I probably will be. It is a sitting day.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Mr Snowden—You have no trouble standing up.

The SPEAKER—Very close, Minister, very close. I emphasise the point that I do not wish to enter into the debate that went on until two o'clock in the morning on the first day of sitting. I am obliged under the standing and sessional orders to ensure that the standing and sessional orders are implemented and I will be doing that faithfully on behalf of the House. Therefore, I believe that it is the responsibility of the Speaker to make themselves available for any day that parliamentary procedures are being carried out.

Parliamentary Seating Plan

Mr SECKER (3.36 pm)—Mr Speaker, I have a question to you on the seating plan that we have in front of us. We have actually got two members for Batman including you, Mr Speaker. I am wondering if action has been taken to change that.

The SPEAKER—Action will be taken to change it, but I think it is a shot across the bows from me to the member for Batman: I am advancing southwards down High Street!

COMMITTEES

Allocation of Annual Reports

The SPEAKER—I present a schedule showing the allocation to committees of annual reports of government departments and agencies. A copy of the schedule will be incorporated in *Hansard*.

The schedule read as follows—

Allocation to Committees of Annual Reports of Government Departments and Agencies.

Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Portfolio

Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts

Attorney-General's Portfolio

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*

National Native Title Tribunal**

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs and to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio

Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (regarding indigenous programs)*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Communications

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*

Indigenous Business Australia**

* Referred also to Standing Committee on Education and Training

** Referred also to Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations

Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts Portfolio

Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (regarding indigenous programs)*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts and the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories (regarding Australian Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic Territories)

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Portfolio

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*

Land Councils which fall under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Aboriginal Land Commissioner

Aboriginals Benefit Account

Indigenous Land Corporation

Torres Strait Regional Authority

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

Health and Ageing Portfolio

Department of Health and Ageing (regarding Indigenous programs)*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Portfolio

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry*

Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

Australian Landcare Council**

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation**

Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation*

Land and Water Australia

Landcare Australia Ltd**

Northern Territory Fisheries Joint Authority**

Queensland Fisheries Joint Authority**

Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority***

Western Australian Fisheries Joint Authority**

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources

*** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts Portfolio

Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts*

Australia Business Arts Foundation

Australia Council for the Arts

Australian Film Commission

Australia Film Finance Corporation Ltd

Australian Film, Television and Radio School

Australian Greenhouse Office

Australian Heritage Council

Australian National Maritime Museum

Bundanon Trust

Bureau of Meteorology

Director of National Parks

Environment Protection and Heritage Council

Film Australia Limited

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Murray-Darling Basin Commission**

National Gallery of Australia

National Library of Australia

National Museum of Australia

National Oceans Office

Natural Heritage Trust

National Water Commission

Office of the Renewable Energy Regulator**

Office of the Supervising Scientist

Sydney Harbour Federation Trust

Wet Tropics Management Authority

* Referred also to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories (regarding Australian Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic Territories) and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (regarding indigenous programs)

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Australian River Co. Limited (reports year end of 30 November)

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of Climate Change*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics

Standing Committee on Communications

Attorney-General's Portfolio

Classification Board*

Classification Review Board*

Office of Film and Literature Classification*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Australian Government Information Management Office

National Archives of Australia

Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio

Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy*

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Australian Communications and Media Authority

Australia Post

NetAlert Limited

Special Broadcasting Service Corporation

Telstra Corporation Limited

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (regarding indigenous programs)

Standing Committee on Economics

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Portfolio

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts and the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources

Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio

Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Communications

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Education and Training, the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Portfolio

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and

Youth and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Department of Finance and Deregulation

Australian Industry Development Corporation*

Australian Government Employees Superannuation Trust

Australian Political Exchange Council

Australian Reward Investment Alliance

Commonwealth Grants Commission

Commonwealth Superannuation Administration (ComSuper)

CSS Board

Medibank Private**

Parliamentary Retiring Allowances Trust

PSS Board

Referred also to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*

* Referred also to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Health and Ageing Portfolio

Department of Health and Ageing*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

Immigration and Citizenship Portfolio

Department of Immigration and Citizenship*

* Referred also the Joint Standing Committee on Migration and the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Portfolio

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government*

* Referred also the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Regional Development and Local Government

Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio

Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research*

* Referred also the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Department of Climate Change*

Australian National Audit Office

Australian Public Service Commission

Commonwealth Ombudsman (incorporates Defence Force Ombudsman, Tax Ombudsman and ACT Ombudsman)**

Management Advisory Committee

Merit Protection Commissioner

National Australia Day Council

Official Establishments Trust

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio

Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism*

* Referred also the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources

Treasury Portfolio

Department of the Treasury

Australia and the International Financial Institutions (i.e. Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank)

Auditing and Assurance Standards Boards

Australian Accounting Standards Board

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission*

Australian Competition Tribunal

Australian Loan Council

Australian Office of Financial Management

Australian Prudential Regulation Authority

Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation

Australian Securities and Investment Commission

Australian Statistics Advisory Council

Australian Taxation Office

Board of Taxation

Companies Auditors and Liquidators Disciplinary Board

Corporations and Markets Advisory Committee

Financial Reporting Council

Foreign Investment Review Board

Inspector-General of Taxation

Life Insurance Actuarial Standards Board

National Competition Council

Payments System Board

Productivity Commission*

Reserve Bank of Australia

Royal Australian Mint

Superannuation Complaints Tribunal

Takeovers Panel

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Standing Committee on Education and Training

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies**

Australian Research Council***

Australian National University

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics, the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

*** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Portfolio

Australian Maritime College*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Regional Development and Local Government

Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*

Australian Building and Construction Commissioner

Australian Fair Pay Commission

Australian Fair Pay Commission Secretariat

Australian Industrial Relations Commission & Australian Industrial Registry

Coal Mining Industry (Long Service Leave Funding) Corporation

Comcare

Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal**

Employment Advocate

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency

Indigenous Business Australia***

Remuneration Tribunal

Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission

Seafarers Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Authority (Seacare Authority)

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics, the Standing Committee on Education and Training and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

** Referred also to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

*** Referred also to Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Social Security Appeals Tribunal*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

Human Services Portfolio

Department of Human Services*

Centrelink*

CRS Australia (Rehabilitation Service)*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing and the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Indigenous Affairs

Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

Attorney-General's Portfolio

Family Court of Australia*

Family Law Council*

Federal Magistrates Court of Australia*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Portfolio

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*

Australian Institute of Family Studies

National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc

Office of the Status of Women

Social Security Appeals Tribunal**

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations

Human Services Portfolio

Department of Human Services*

Australian Hearing**

Centrelink*

Child Support Agency

CRS Australia (Rehabilitation Service)*

Health Services Australia**

Medicare Australia**

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations and the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

Health and Ageing Portfolio

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*

Gene Technology Regulator**

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Medibank Private*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics

Human Services Portfolio

Department of Human Services*

Australian Hearing**

Centrelink*

CRS Australia (Rehabilitation Service)*

Health Services Australia**

Medicare Australia**

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations and the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

Health and Ageing Portfolio

Department of Health and Ageing*

Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency Ltd

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare**

Australian National Council on Drugs

Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency

Australian Sports Commission

Australian Sports Drug Agency

Food Standards Australia New Zealand

Gene Technology Regulator***

National Blood Authority

National Health and Medical Research Council

National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme

Professional Services Review

Pharmaceutical Benefits Pricing Authority

Pharmaceutical Benefits Remuneration Tribunal

Private Health Insurance Administration Council

Private Health Insurance Ombudsman

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

*** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Attorney-General's Portfolio

Australian Customs Service*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*

Anglo-Australian Telescope Board

Australian Institute of Marine Science

Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation**

Australian Research Council***

Questacon – The National Science and Technology Centre

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics, the Standing Committee on Education and Training and the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

*** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Education and Training

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Australian Industry Development Corporation*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics

Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio

Export Finance and Insurance Corporation*

* Referred also to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Health and Ageing Portfolio

Gene Technology Regulator*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth and the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio

Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research*

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

Industry Research and Development Board

Pooled Development Funds Registration Board

* Referred also the Standing Committee on Economics

Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio

Tourism Australia

Treasury Portfolio

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission*

Productivity Commission*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics

Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Regional Development and Local Government**Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Portfolio**

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government*

Airservices Australia

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Australian Maritime College**

Australian Rail Track Corporation Limited

Civil Aviation Safety Authority

International Air Services Commission

Maritime Industry Finance Co Ltd

National Transport Commission

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Education and Training

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Stevedoring Industry Finance Committee

Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs**Attorney-General's Portfolio**

Attorney-General's Department*

Administrative Appeals Tribunal

Administrative Review Council

Australian Crime Commission

Australian Customs Service**

Australian Federal Police

Australian Government Solicitor

Australian Institute of Criminology

Australian Law Reform Commission

Australian Security Intelligence Organisation

Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC)

Classification Board*****

Classification Review Board*****

Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions

Copyright Tribunal

Criminology Research Council

CrimTrac

Family Court of Australia*****

Family Law Council*****

Federal Court of Australia
Federal Magistrates Court of Australia*****

Federal Police Disciplinary Tribunal
High Court of Australia
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission***

Insolvency and Trustee Service, Australia
National Native Title Tribunal****
Office of Film and Literature Classification*****

Office of Parliamentary Counsel

* Referred also the Joint Standing Committee on National Capital and External Territories

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

*** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

**** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

***** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Communications

***** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Commonwealth Ombudsman (incorporates Defence Force Ombudsman, Tax Ombudsman and ACT Ombudsman)*

Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security**

Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General

Office of the Privacy Commissioner

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

** Referred also to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Portfolio

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry*

Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation

Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

Australian Landcare Council**

Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority

Cotton Research and Development Corporation

Dairy Australia

Dairy Adjustment Authority

Export Wheat Commission

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation**

Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation**

Grains Research and Development Corporation

Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation

Landcare Australia Ltd**

National Rural Advisory Council

Northern Territory Fisheries Joint Authority**

Queensland Fisheries Joint Authority**

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

Sugar Research and Development Corporation

Western Australian Fisheries Joint Authority**

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts

Environment, Heritage and the Arts Portfolio

Murray-Darling Basin Commission*

Office of the Renewable Energy Regulator*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts

Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research*

* Referred also to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio

National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority

Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio

Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism*

Snowy Hydro Limited

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Australian Electoral Commission

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Attorney-General's Portfolio

Defence Force Discipline Appeal Tribunal

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Defence Portfolio

Department of Defence

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Australian War Memorial

Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Authority

Defence Housing Australia

Frontline Defence Services

Judge Advocate General

Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission

Military Superannuation and Benefits Board of Trustees No. 1

National Treatment Committee

Repatriation Commission

Repatriation Medical Authority

Royal Australian Air Force Veterans' Residences Trust

Services Trust Funds

Veterans' Review Board

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

ASC Pty Ltd (Australian Submarine Corporation)

Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*
Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office

AusAID

Australia-China Council

Australia-India Council

Australia-Indonesia Institute

Australia-Japan Foundation

Australia-Korea Foundation

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research**

Australian Trade Commission

Export Finance and Insurance Corporation***

* Referred also the Standing Committee on Economics

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources

*** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation

Immigration and Citizenship Portfolio

Department of Immigration and Citizenship*

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Commonwealth Ombudsman (incorporates Defence Force Ombudsman, Tax Ombudsman and ACT Ombudsman)*

Office of National Assessments

Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security**

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

** Referred also to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Immigration and Citizenship Portfolio

Department of Immigration and Citizenship*

Migration Review Tribunal

Migration Agents Registration Authority

Refugee Review Tribunal

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Economics and the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

Attorney General's Portfolio

Attorney General's Department *

National Capital Authority

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts Portfolio

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts* (regarding Australian Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic Territories)

* Referred also to the Standing Committee on Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (regarding indigenous programs).

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

Report No. 22 of 2007-08

The SPEAKER (3.37 pm)—I present the Auditor-General's Audit report No. 22 of 2007-08 entitled: *Performance audit: Administration of grants to the Australian Rail Track Corporation: Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government*".

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (3.37 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*. I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency—Quarterly reports of the Chief Executive Officer for period:

1 January to 31 March 2007.

1 April to 30 June 2007.

1 July to 30 September 2007.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Hockey**) adjourned.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Economy

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

The Government's inconsistent and reckless approach to economic management.

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 TURNBULL (Wentworth) (3.38 pm)—The Treasurer was asked yesterday a very straightforward question in the House about the appointment of Mr Steve Bracks, the former Victorian Premier, to head a review of Australia's car industry. He said that he knew nothing of it. He said he was not able to confirm the appointment at all.

Mr Albanese—Is this the MPI?

Mr TURNBULL—Yes, this is the MPI.

Mr Albanese—Have you read it yet?

Mr TURNBULL—Yes, I have read the MPI—absolutely. The Treasurer had the opportunity to be straight and forthright with this House. Instead he denied everything and then today relied on the claim—and no doubt further enquiries and investigations will see how much validity there is in this claim—that the decision had only been taken last night, notwithstanding that we know Treasury had provided him and the government with advice that the Productivity Commission should conduct that inquiry. There is no body in Australia better qualified to look into industry matters of this kind than the Productivity Commission itself—after all, it started off as the Tariff Board and then became the Industry Assistance Commission and the Industry Commission. This is the most distinguished independent economic think tank in Australia. It has years of expertise in looking into these industry matters and so, naturally, Treasury recommended that it would be the appropriate body. That advice was rejected. A political group was assembled, headed by a former Labor Premier aided by a number of trade union officials, and instead the Productivity Commission was reduced to a minor role to do some economic modelling.

When the Rudd opposition were seeking to become the Rudd government, they contended that they were fiscal conservatives, economic conservatives. I recall the Prime Minister saying, shortly after the election, that he wanted the Treasury brought:

... to the centre stage of what this Government does in the future. We cannot afford to fall behind when it comes to national economic reform and I intend to harness the full resources and capabilities of the Treasury in so doing.

We have a vital manufacturing industry in Australia under great pressure, for which the

best economic insights and the most objective and clear-headed advice is needed. Treasury says the Productivity Commission is the right body to provide it—and so it was—and that advice is ignored and we have jobs for the boys. What we have here is the wrong job for the wrong boy. If ever there were an appointment that was a political fix, a job for the boys, to get a predetermined outcome, it would be this one, and all of those people who believed that Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan were going to be economic conservatives now realise that they are only interested in jobs for the boys.

Throughout his term as Treasurer, the Treasurer has acted in a way which is uniquely reckless. When we speak about economic matters and when we speak about inflation, it is vital that we speak about them moderately and objectively. It is particularly vital that treasurers and, indeed, central bank governors do so as well. We need facts. We need sober assessment. But what have we had from Wayne Swan? This is a man who said he was dripping with empathy, concerned about the price of groceries, concerned about the struggles of ordinary Australians sitting at their kitchen table, and worried about the impact that interest rate rises would have on them. And what did he say the day before the Reserve Bank met to consider a rise in interest rates that most commentators regarded as likely or very likely? He said:

The inflation genie is out of the bottle.

There was nothing he could have said which would have been more likely, more certainly calculated, to ensure that that interest rate rise would occur. It was a rhetorical flourish, it was a headline-grabbing flourish, and it reminds me of Paul Keating's much lamented and much criticised remark that Australia was heading towards a 'banana republic', which produced a whole series of eco-

nomomic consequences—because when a Treasurer speaks, the world listens, the whole economy listens, the whole global economy listens, and what he says will inevitably have a consequence as to the way our economy is viewed.

One of the other reckless things the Treasurer has done is run down the Australian economy. We have to recognise that we have problems in our economy; we always will. As I said before, a treasurer complaining about economic challenges is like a fire-fighter complaining about fires. It is the job of the Treasurer to deal with economic challenges. That is the job description. But, when you for politically partisan purposes create a false impression of the Australian economy, you undermine the living standards of all Australians because it impacts on the regard, the rating, the credibility and the credit of our country. So it is vital to be accurate. To be fair, not everybody in the government is as reckless as the Treasurer. The Assistant Treasurer, Mr Bowen, who I see sitting opposite, said on 22 January, 'The evidence of a serious inflation problem has only begun to mount over the last six months or so.' I beg your pardon—that was the finance minister on 5 February. But the Assistant Treasurer said on 22 January, 'Inflation has been low in Australia over the last few years.' Those two ministers were correct; they were absolutely correct. The Treasurer has said that inflation has been on the march for a couple of years. He is trying to create the impression that inflation has been ramping up consistently for a couple of years, that the Reserve Bank has been there, warning the former government, and that the former government ignored all those warnings.

Mr Bowen—That's right.

Mr TURNBULL—The Assistant Treasurer said, 'That's right.' It is completely untrue. In fact, as recently as 14 June last year

the Reserve Bank Governor, Glenn Stevens, said in a speech where he considered the whole economic outlook that inflation was actually moderating. He said:

Inflation did pick up in Australia during the middle years of the current decade ... That peak in the CPI inflation rate was affected by some temporary factors, which have now reversed.

He went on to say:

The most recent data for inflation ... showed a more welcome trend, with underlying measures of inflation running at a reduced pace and the CPI rate on its way down as well.

An opposition member—When was that?

Mr TURNBULL—That was June 2007. The reality is that it was not until the last half of last year that signs developed to demonstrate that the governor's outlook or forecast was wrong. The forecasts of the Reserve Bank became more troubling, for those who are concerned about inflation, in November and particularly in February.

The reality is that we do have an inflation challenge here in Australia, and the opposition take it very seriously indeed. But we take it so seriously that we do not tell falsehoods about it. The reality is that as far as the numbers indicated, be they the headline CPI or the numerous measures of underlying CPI, inflation was coming down in the first half of this year, following—and no doubt as a consequence of—the three rate rises in 2006. In other words, it appeared that monetary policy was doing its job. Inflation had been going up, the Reserve Bank tightened the screws—that is their job—and put rates up 75 basis points over that year, and inflation started to come down. The signs that inflation was not behaving as the governor had suggested in June 2007 only started to become apparent—and, of course, not everybody was as convinced as everybody else—in the June numbers, when they were released in the second

half of 2007. It is very important to recognise that, throughout the 47 quarters of the Howard government, inflation, whether you measure it as the headline rate or use any of the underlying measures, was managed within the target band. The objective of inflation targeting, which the Treasurer signed off on in December 2007, in essentially the same form as it had been for some years, is to maintain inflation—and inflation is consumer price inflation or the headline CPI—within the band of two to three per cent on average over the cycle. It is expressly stated that it will not be within that band in every quarter. It is designed to allow for fluctuations above and below the band. The focus is on the average. The record is there. If you take headline CPI, it is between two and three per cent; it is 2½ per cent. You can take the underlying measure that is calculated on an exclusion basis by eliminating volatiles, and it is around 2½ per cent. You can take the weighted median, another underlying measure, and it is 2½ per cent. The trimmed mean is 2½ per cent.

That was the test that was set in the objectives of monetary policy agreed to by Peter Costello in 1996 and restated a number of times, most recently by the Treasurer. And it was met. Yet, if you listened to the Treasurer's rhetoric, you would think the economy had been left in a mess. This is an economy with unemployment at a 35-year low and there are more Australians in work than ever before. I see a new member, a former secretary of the Australian Workers Union, opposite me. I wonder what he thinks about being a member of a government that has no regard for employment. There was no thrill of excitement, no delight expressed from the government benches, at the unemployment figure today. It was down to 4.1 per cent. When we were in government and new employment numbers came out, Peter Costello was on his feet, filled with pride that there were

more jobs. What has gone wrong with the Labor Party? I remember Neville Wran used to say, 'Jobs, jobs, jobs.'

What is the economic objective of the new Rudd government? The truth is that the objectives of monetary policy are not just to deal with inflation; they are to maintain medium-term price stability and that means handling inflation. We are all committed to that. But equally important is maintaining full employment. Yet we seem now to have a government that has no interest in maintaining full employment.

When we talk about Reserve Bank warnings, we hear about these 20 warnings. This is the most selective list. It is a long list. They are invariably quotations from Reserve Bank documents taken dramatically out of context. One of the documents is the one I just mentioned from June 2007, where, in fact, far from warning the government that inflation was going up, the Reserve Bank governor said: 'Don't worry. We've got everything under control. It is heading down. Things are looking good.' I just quoted it. That is exactly what they said.

Inflation is a huge challenge. Managing Australia's economy is a huge challenge. But it has to be done responsibly. It has to be done with language that is moderate, objective and above all accurate. At the moment, the Treasurer, far from taking on economic challenges, is creating economic problems himself.

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (3.53 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, congratulations on the job. The member for Wentworth is acutely embarrassed, most particularly about a number of outrageous and wildly inaccurate statements that he has been making about inflation in the last month or so. What we have seen today from the shadow Treasurer in his discussion of inflation is an attempt simply to fiddle the figures

because the truth is too hard for him to digest and too hard for him to comprehend. He spoke before about how proud the member for Higgins was of his economic record—so proud indeed that he could not even attend the House to listen to the member for Wentworth! He would not come, because the record is far from perfect. We are going to have a debate about the size of our inflation problem; we are going to have a debate about its causes, because getting this right is absolutely essential to Australia's economic future.

If the member for Wentworth were to have his way, there would not be the policies in place that need to address the capacity constraints that we have experienced for years and years in relation to infrastructure and skills. There would not be those policies in place at all because the former government was in denial. We have this wonderful construction and fiddling of the figures because he is so embarrassed, most particularly by his performance on *Insiders* on Sunday. What did he say on *Insiders* on Sunday? I will tell you what he said. He said that the underlying inflation rate did not matter—the underlying inflation rate was not the one used by the Reserve Bank—and that the government was wrong to focus on the underlying inflation rate.

The other porky that he told on *Insiders* on Sunday was that there is no such figure as a 3.6 per cent underlying inflation rate; it does not exist on the Reserve Bank's website. Wrong again! It is most certainly there. What he has been trying to do is to somehow reanalyse the figures to wash away the inflation that everyone in the community has been feeling, not just for the last two months, three months or six months but for years and years. The reason the member for Wentworth is so embarrassed about this is that he dropped another clanger a couple of weeks ago. Do you know what that clanger was? He

said inflation was a fairy story. And perhaps nothing more demonstrated how out of touch the member for Wentworth is than his description of that inflation figure for the December quarter as a fairy story, because working families around this country know about inflation. They do not need the member for Wentworth to fiddle the figures. They have been feeling inflation, because it has been on the march for the last two years—substantially on the march. Of course, the former government was warned.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SWAN—They were most certainly warned. Arrogant self-promotion does not pass for serious economic analysis.

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order!

Mr SWAN—What we have not had from the member for Wentworth is serious economic analysis. There has been none at all. There are two things he does not really comprehend. The statement on monetary policy which came out from the Reserve Bank earlier this week was very grim news. Of course, if you are going to deal with it, you have to understand its causes. The parting gift from the Liberal Party of Australia and the former Treasurer to the Australian people was this elevated level of inflation—an elevated level of inflation over and above the target band, headline and underlying, for the next two years.

What we get is a redefinition of the figures. What he has been doing out there for the last couple of weeks is somehow trying to redefine away the problem so you cannot be held responsible for your complacency and for your neglect over the last couple of years. That is what is at stake in this debate. This government has put together a comprehensive plan to deal with inflation: a five-point plan, the type of plan that the Liberal

Party could not put together at any stage of the last three years.

Mr Keenan—No, we couldn't come up with those clichés!

Mr SWAN—You certainly could not. You certainly could not come up with a plan. You have denied the problem. The problem we have with the member for Wentworth is that perhaps he is the only member of parliament in the country who could make the member for Higgins look in touch. He is the only member who could possibly do that.

Mr Turnbull—You make Kevin Rudd look numerate.

Mr SWAN—Oh dear. So the member for Wentworth ought to be honest enough to, first of all, admit that underlying inflation has been on the march for a lot longer than the last six months—a lot longer than that.

Mr Keenan—Stop repeating yourself.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! Stop interjecting.

Mr SWAN—Of course the reason he is so embarrassed is that we had this ridiculous statement from the Leader of the Opposition. He described the Australian economy as being in a first-rate condition. There are some good things in the Australian economy and we discussed them today. The latest employment figures are good. We have had 17 years of growth. That is good. But all of this is now threatened—threatened by an inflation problem that must be brought under control.

Mr Ciobo—By your state Labor governments—\$80 billion worth of debt.

Mr SWAN—There we go.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Moncrieff.

Mr SWAN—All of this is threatened by an inflation problem which we accepted responsibility for on day one. As I said in the

House the other day, we accept responsibility for dealing with this problem. But why don't you just have the common decency to accept some responsibility for causing it? The notion that inflation just suddenly jumped out of the bottle in the last six months shows how out of touch the opposition is. If you have been out there doing the shopping or going to a childcare centre, if you have been out there paying your bills, you will know that inflation has been elevated for some time. What is the history of this? Why has he started to redefine the figures? Because the member for Wentworth is so acutely embarrassed by this fact.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

Mr Debus interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dickson and the Minister for Home Affairs will stop injecting across the table.

Mr SWAN—Last year, around September, the previous Treasurer, the member for Higgins, made the now famous statement that inflation was right where he wanted it. That is what the former Treasurer said: inflation was right where he wanted it. This just demonstrates how you guys in government got this all wrong. And now it falls to us, the Rudd Labor government, to put in place a series of fundamental reforms to address these problems. We are absolutely determined to do that. The first step we are taking is to bring under control your reckless spending spree of the last three or four years. We saw in the last four-year period the biggest increase in federal spending of any other four-year period in the last 15 years, just at a time when the terms of trade were pumping up the economy.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney.

Mr SWAN—What we needed to do was attend to the capacity constraints, as the Reserve Bank advised you to do repeatedly—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr SWAN—over the last three years. What we would have done was to take the warnings on inflation very seriously.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney will stop interjecting.

Mr SWAN—Of course, what that means is that the first step that has to be taken is that the federal government itself has to take the lead, has to provide restraint. So it falls to us to cut back your reckless spending spree—and we will, which is why the Prime Minister has made his commitment for a surplus of at least 1.5 per cent of GDP. It is why the Prime Minister made the announcement in the House today about there being the need for restraint—and there is, because those in the opposition do not understand the problem. We have to have some fiscal discipline.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business is already on thin ice.

Mr SWAN—But, secondly, we must attend to the skills crisis in the Australian economy left to us by the Liberals. You cannot go out and talk to anyone in this country, any employer, large or small, anywhere in the country, who does not talk to you about a skills crisis. But nothing was put in place to deal with this precisely at the time when urgent action was required, when inflation was on the march. When inflation was on the march, what were you doing? I know what you were doing, because we talked about it a bit. You were out there playing tag team with

Peter Costello. That is what you were doing. That is what the shadow minister was up to.

Mr Turnbull interjecting—

Mr SWAN—Yes, you were. You were out there trying to shame him into putting in place some decent tax reform. That is what you were doing. You were not actually looking after the fundamental interests of the Australian economy—and you were not doing anything about the infrastructure bottlenecks. You would come into the House day after day, week after week, playing the blame game—blame the states; do not accept any responsibility for political leadership, which is what the Reserve Bank was advising you to do.

Mr Ciobo—I've eaten mousse with more substance than you.

Mr SWAN—And it shows. What is also important is some fundamental tax reform—fundamental tax reform to put incentive in the tax system, so the people who do work hard to make our economy strong get a fair go. Of course, the previous government was content to leave in place the most horrendous effective marginal tax rates, particularly ones which affected second-income earners. You left them there year after year after year after year, and we shamed you into acknowledging the problem. We absolutely shamed you into acknowledging the problem. We did. And we can go back through the record.

We understand that working families deserve not only some tax relief but also a tax system that works for them, and we are determined to put one in place. I am proud to have introduced the bill that came to the House today, along with other measures that the government will bring forward as part of its election commitments. The increase in compensation for out-of-pocket childcare costs, for example, and the education tax rebate are all very important parts of assisting working families—who are under tre-

mendous financial pressure—on the one hand, and, on the other hand, effectively lifting workforce participation, which is so important.

Mr Ciobo—It's at a record high now.

Mr SWAN—Yes, it is, and it needs to go higher—something that you have not recognised either—because we do live in a situation where there is a terms of trade boom that has fuelled demand and it has to be dealt with. It is part and parcel of our five-point plan.

We on this side of the House recognise the enormity of the challenge that we face—and we are up for it. We will not deny the problem. It was absolutely laughable for the member for Wentworth to claim that our accurately describing the size of the inflation challenge was somehow going to cause inflation. I will tell you what it causes: acute political embarrassment to the opposition, because you should be ashamed of your record. The opposition's claim to economic competence—

Mr Turnbull interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Wentworth!

Mr SWAN—has been blown away completely—

Mr Turnbull—You've been warned.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—You will be warned in a minute.

Mr SWAN—by the statement on monetary policy that was delivered by the Reserve Bank only on Monday and blown away completely by the December CPI number, the inflation for the months of October, November and December—a 16-year high.

Mr Turnbull—On one measure.

Mr SWAN—He is still denying it. The member for Wentworth still denies that it is high. Shadow minister, if you do not under-

stand the problem, you cannot be part of the solution. The sort of grandstanding that we have had from you today and over the last couple of weeks shows how ill prepared you are and how you are not fit to occupy the role that you do. The clangers that you have dropped on program after program have seen you become a figure of fun in economic commentary right around this country—and I have to say that I was surprised to see it. (*Time expired*)

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (4.09 pm)—I would say that that is the worst performance by a Treasurer in well over 12 years. Today Australian people listening to the debate going on in this chamber and people who have been listening to this Treasurer over the last several months really must cringe. The Australian people, small business, and big business at the moment, have been sapped of their confidence. This is an arrangement that cannot continue. This bloke is completely and utterly out of his depth. Businesses out there at the moment really are concerned about whether to put on extra staff and they are concerned about whether they will make extra investment. That is all because the economic circumstances in this country have changed very quickly. If the confidence goes from the marketplace in this country, unemployment will go up and we will see a fall in investment—and that will be bad for the long-term economic situation facing our country.

The reality is that, when the coalition came into government in 1996, it inherited a debt from the Labor Party of close to \$100 billion. It was off the back of Australian families paying 17 per cent for interest rates on their homes—it was over 20 per cent for people who were in small business or who owned farms. All Australians know that, over the last 12 years, our economy was transformed into one of the best in the world. All of that is in the process of being undone. All

of that will be undone by a bloke who is completely out of his depth and is fast becoming the laughing-stock of financial markets right around the world.

What has happened so far over the last couple of months is that, because this bloke, this Treasurer, is out of his depth, he is going about a process of rewriting history. He is out there telling people that he inherited a poor-performing economy. He is out there rewriting figures. He is out there fabricating stories about the way in which the member for Wentworth has presented the difficulties in relation to inflation. This bloke thinks, as he did during the election campaign, that if he repeats a line long enough and often enough it will become a truth. The reality, of course, is quite the opposite, because the Australian people know that this is a Treasurer who, in the history of Australia, is the most unqualified person to be running a \$1.1 trillion economy and he is thoroughly demonstrating that fact.

This is a bloke who has never run a business. He has never employed staff. Outside of running some hack organisation in Queensland, he has not had any experience in economic management. I say to Australian families and small businesses right now: watch this space very closely, because this is a concerning time in this country's history. The reality is that most people are worried. Most people are worried about a return to 17 per cent interest rates. If we have a wages blow-out in this country, they are worried about a return to high interest rates under a Labor government. They are concerned about returning to high unemployment. High unemployment, of course, was the other hallmark of the former Labor government and it is fast becoming a concern for this country. Good employment figures were released today, but really what will happen is that, if the inflation difficulty is not reined in by this government, if it does not face up to the eco-

conomic realities, those difficulties will be delivered to the Australian people.

For the record and for all Australian people, the reality is that, when Labor came into government on 24 November, the Australian economy had been run well for the last dozen years. Madam Deputy Speaker, we have heard from the Prime Minister and the Treasurer about how they will rein in this inflation difficulty they talk of. They talk about a five-point plan. Do you know that one of the points of that plan is to address the issue of home loan affordability? They want to create a greater environment for people to be able to buy a house. That is all admirable. However, what they have tried to do in re-writing history over the last few months, particularly the history of inflation, is to say that, through the five-point plan and their policy on home loan affordability, they will reduce the pressure on inflation.

Do you know what that plan promised? That plan promised to deliver to national savings about \$3 billion to \$4 billion over the estimates, over a four-year period. This is a \$1.1 trillion economy. The Treasurer of this nation is asking economists to believe that adding between \$3 billion and \$4 billion to national savings—adding to national savings is a good thing; nobody questions that—over a four-year period in a \$1.1 trillion economy, where the government itself spends \$1 billion a day, will put some downward pressure on inflation.

That shows the shallowness of this bloke. It shows the deception and the fraud that he is engaging in at the moment, and it is again a demonstration of the old-style union politics. He is out there with these shallow, weak arguments, and he is not convincing anybody at the moment. He has no economic credibility whatsoever. He has no capacity to carry an economic argument, and he has no ability whatsoever to convince financial markets

that he is on top of his brief any time soon. This bloke was spooked from day one, when the banks stared him down, when they increased their interest rates beyond what they should have, beyond what the expectation from Australian families was. His performance in question time this week has been nothing short of embarrassing. It has been embarrassing not just for him but for the people behind him—you see them laughing behind him during question time. You see the gallery laughing when this bloke gets up to answer a question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member will refer to the minister by his appropriate title.

Mr DUTTON—Well, this bloke, the member for Lilley.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—No. The member will refer to the Treasurer by his appropriate title.

Mr DUTTON—Well, the Treasurer is a bloke who is out of his depth. The Treasurer is a bloke who is the laughing-stock at the moment of economists, of the press gallery, of his colleagues and ultimately of the Australian people. The difficulty and the most important point to make out of all of this—which I opened with—is that this is undermining confidence. This really is undermining confidence in the Australian economy. Talking it down, talking about the inflation genie getting out of the bottle—that is all very difficult.

The other aspect of the Labor Party plan at the moment is to slash government spending. The point I made before was that this government spends about \$1 billion a day. This is a big, international economy, a \$1.1 trillion economy, with a Treasurer who does not have the capacity to manage it. The other day there was an announcement from the Minister for Finance and Deregulation talking about some spending cuts of just over \$600

million, which to the average Australian—to all of us—is an enormous amount of money. But the way in which the Labor Party couched this spending cut was that it was going to be part of bringing down pressure on inflation. It is not going to have any impact on reducing inflationary pressures in this country. That is why people from the Reserve Bank governor down are laughing at the contribution of this Treasurer at the moment. To suggest that, in a \$1,100 billion per annum economy, this is going to bring down inflation—that it will put a downward pressure on inflation—really just goes to the laughing-stock demonstration that this guy is putting forward.

When the Labor Party talks about government spending under the Howard government, it is talking about spending in areas like family tax benefit, to help families. It is talking about areas like child care, where there was increased expenditure under the Howard government. It is talking about tax cuts. It is talking about all of these issues. There is no proposal on the table at the moment that I am aware of to trim billions of dollars from those measures. It is really quite amazing when you look at how shallow this argument is. Nothing has been more startling than the revelation by this Treasurer—to underscore his economic inability—when he said that the \$31 billion of tax cuts were okay this year because they were a Labor Party election promise and they would not add to inflationary pressures, but tax cuts in the out years would not be allowed because they would be inflationary. That is how shallow and inept this Treasurer is. The Australian people at the moment are laughing at this bloke. (*Time expired*)

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, and Assistant Treasurer) (4.19 pm)—I am happy to talk about recklessness and inconsistency in economic policy, because we

have heard plenty of that from the honourable gentlemen opposite in the last half an hour. As the Treasurer said, we have seen the shadow Treasurer grappling, struggling, with the issue of inflation since he became shadow Treasurer. We have seen him desperately searching for the right sound grab. He has tried to claim that inflation was not a problem. He has tried to deny that it was at a 16-year high. And, as the Treasurer said, he had a shocker on *Insiders*. It was a woeful performance. He should have stayed in bed. The country would have been better off, and he certainly would have been better off. We saw him say on *Insiders*:

The other measurers of inflation, so-called “underlying inflations”, which are statistical adjustments are ... none of them were 3.6 per cent, not one. So, where the 3.6 per cent comes from, I could make a guess but it is not one that was published by the RBA.

That was the shadow Treasurer on the *Insiders* program on Sunday. I am happy to table the RBA February statement, which was released the next day: underlying inflation, you guessed it, of 3.6 per cent. No wonder he is having trouble.

Mr Turnbull interjecting—

Mr BOWEN—It is an average, he says. He is having real trouble with the inflation figure. But the best has been his solution. He is full of advice for the Treasurer on how you can fix inflation. He has a plan. It is a cunning plan. It is very smart: ignore it and it will go away. ‘Stop talking about it,’ he says, ‘and it will go away. Don’t talk about inflation, because you put it up.’ So when I saw the Reserve Bank’s statement on monetary policy I thought: ‘Oh well, they’re going to say that the cause of inflation is the Treasurer’s comments. They’re going to say there’s too much inflationary expectation in the economy, so that’s what’s causing inflation.’ But what did the Reserve Bank say? They said:

Given the current strength of domestic demand and pressures on capacity, a significant moderation in demand will be needed if inflation is to be satisfactorily reduced over time.

They said nothing about inflationary expectations, nothing about the Treasurer's comments. They recognise that the causes of high inflation are the supply-side constraints in the economy and the roaring demand throughout the economy. But the shadow Treasurer has, in just two short months, developed a new economic paradigm. He says: 'Ignore it and it will go away. Put your head in the sand.' Ostrich economics, that is his solution! Give me Swan economics any time over ostrich economics, because that is his solution. His solution is to ignore it and it will go away.

What a joke! That is his plan as Treasurer. 'Make me Treasurer,' he says, 'and I'll ignore it. It will go away; everything will be okay.' What a plan! There you go—the shadow Treasurer's alternative approach. His fresh idea for Australia is to ignore it and it will all go away. The Baldrick of Australian politics, with his cunning plan, better do something better than that because the Australian economy needs a better plan than that. That is why we have a different plan. That is why we have a five-point plan. Now, what is point 1? It is to put fiscal policy to work and have a budget surplus at least 1.5 per cent of GDP. Why is this important? I will share with the House some quotes. They are not from me. They are not from the Treasurer. They are not from anybody on this side of the House. They are from well-respected economic commentators Access Economics. What did they have to say about fiscal policy under the previous government? Cop a load of this:

Although it is usual for bad spending decisions to cumulate over the life of a government, the quality of spending decisions in recent years has deteriorated even more than usual as the previous

government found itself the recipient of a China driven boom in revenues ... the spending decisions flying out of Canberra in recent years proved positive Whitlamesque.

Now, we love Gough on this side of the House, but I do not think Access Economics meant it as a compliment. They were not talking about how great it was that government spending was out of a control under the member for Higgins and the previous government.

From 2002, the previous government pumped an extra \$40 billion a year into the economy. We are facing inflationary pressures because they have pumped money into the economy which we have to fix. We have to impose the cuts and there will be some tests for members opposite. We will see how serious they are about inflation. We will see how serious they are when we put out our budget, when we put out our cuts and when we put out our expenditure review process. Let us see where they stand on inflation. Let us see how serious they are. Do they go for the cheap political 'keep the fishing hall of fame' line or do they support the cuts? There will be some tests for the opposition as we go along in the process. We will see how they go.

The other quote is from the Reserve Bank. What did they say about government revenue and expenditure in their November board minutes? They said:

New expenditure and revenue measures announced since the budget and in the early part of the election campaign had since reduced the projected surplus to around 1 per cent of GDP. This meant that fiscal policy was roughly neutral in its overall effect on growth as conventionally measured, the recent initiatives having offset the 'automatic fiscal stabilisers'.

You will recall that, when the Prime Minister announced that the budget surplus would be taken to 1.5 per cent of GDP, the shadow Treasurer raced out and said: 'That would

have happened anyway. The government is not doing anything.' But the Reserve Bank begs to differ with Professor Turnbull. The Reserve Bank points out that the projection was for the budget surplus to be one per cent of GDP and in their words, not mine, effectively neutral. When you have an inflationary economy, you cannot afford to have budgetary policy and fiscal policy effectively neutral. You need a different approach, and that is our approach. There are other elements, of course, to our plan on inflation. We will be examining options to improve private savings. We will be tackling the skills shortage with 450,000 training places over four years. We will be dealing with infrastructure bottlenecks and workforce participation. These are all medium- to long-term solutions. They will not bring down inflation overnight. We have been bequeathed high inflation by the members opposite.

Talking about inconsistency, I was intrigued to hear the shadow minister for finance, the member for Dickson, say that it has been a problem that the Treasurer has not been able to stop the banks from increasing their interest rates over and above the Reserve Bank cash rate. He conveniently ignores that that started while they were in office. The Adelaide Bank increased its interest rates over the Reserve Bank cash rate while they were in office. I do not recall the member for Higgins—the then Treasurer—calling in the Adelaide Bank and having a stern conversation. What is their solution? They are going to use moral suasion. They are going to convince the banks to be good corporate citizens. They are going to call them in and have a very stern chat to them. That is their solution. Their solution to inflation is on the one hand to ignore it and on the other hand to have the Treasurer of the day call in the banks and say: 'You have been very naughty boys. Don't do it again!' They seem to think that will have some effect. Either they are

going to reregulate interest rates or they are not. What is your policy? Would you change the law so that the Treasurer sets bank interest rates or not? If you would not then your words are hollow and your policy is an excuse for failure. They are a joke. They have no consistency. They ignored 20 warnings from the Reserve Bank on inflation. Over 12 years, they ignored 20 warnings from the Reserve Bank, as tabled by the Treasurer in question time.

Mr Turnbull interjecting—

Mr BOWEN—They will be questioning about them! Time is short, but we have a series of plans to deal with inflation. You shrugged your shoulders when you were in office and said: 'Australian working people have never been better off and therefore there is nothing we can do. There is nothing we can do about grocery prices. There is nothing we can do about petrol prices. We will just let the market reign. We won't care about competition.' We believe in competition on this side of the House. You do not, but we believe in competition. That is why we have given the ACCC real teeth. That is why we are getting the ACCC to ensure that there is competition in the grocery market. That is why we are giving the ACCC the job of standing up for Australian consumers. You shrugged your shoulders and said that there was nothing you could do about the fact that grocery prices have gone up 43.6 per cent over the last 12 years, a rate double that of comparable countries. You thought it was fine. Well, we do not. We have a different approach. We believe that competition can play a role in reducing inflation. We believe that competition is how consumers win. That is why we have given the ACCC real teeth and that is why the ACCC has used the powers that we have given to it.

The shadow Treasurer really needs to think carefully the next time he goes on a

Sunday current affairs program. He might be better off staying in bed. At the least, he should read the Reserve Bank statement before he goes on and understand that inflation is not caused by the Treasurer saying that inflation is a problem. There is a difference between cause and effect. Inflation going up causes the Treasurer to say that inflation is a problem. The Treasurer saying that does not affect inflation. (*Time expired*)

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (4.29 pm)—I will say this for the Assistant Treasurer: he is a lot of wattage on the bottom of the Labor economics ticket. That was probably one of the most impressive job applications that we have ever seen in this place. But let me dispense with some of the snake oil that we are getting from the government about the state of our tremendous economy, the economy that has been called by the economists ‘the wonder down under’. Let us have a look at the economy that this government inherited, because no government in the history of Federation has inherited an economy of this strength. The Howard government delivered record low unemployment. Real household wealth doubled under the period of the Howard government. The Labor Party inherited no debt.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms **AE Burke**)—Order! It being 4.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Mr Paddy McGuinness

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah) (4.30 pm)—This week the parliament has eulogised Bernie Banton, Matt Price, Sir Charles Court and Sir Edmund Hillary, and I rise this afternoon to praise a man equally worthy of parliamentary tribute, namely, the journalist and editor PP McGuinness, who died last month.

For more than 35 years, Paddy helped to shape Australia’s public debate as a writer, an editor of the *Financial Review*, a columnist on the *Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* and, finally, as editor of *Quadrant*, Australia’s finest intellectual magazine. In this final role, he gave a forum for Keith Windschuttle to bring more academic rigour and less political correctness to the study of Indigenous history.

Paddy loved ideas. He had an unquenchable intellectual curiosity and he endowed the Centre for Independent Studies library with what is probably this country’s finest collection of Marxist documents. Paradoxically, Paddy was an early advocate of economic reform, the tariff cuts, the privatisations and the deregulation begun by the Hawke government and deepened by the Howard government, but unlike so many other economic rationalists he was not oblivious to the short-term pain of change and never lost his affinity with average wage earners.

The eclectic crowd at Paddy’s funeral ranged from John Howard, John Stone and Peter Coleman to Bill Hayden, Eva Cox and Bob Ellis, but it also included many otherwise unknown people whom Paddy had befriended in the pubs of Balmain. Although Paddy could be acidic in debate, he had a gentle heart. Clad all in black, taxi drivers would often mistake him for a priest. Paddy would patiently hear their confessions, but as befitted a pre-Vatican II atheist, as he called himself, he would never offer absolution. Paddy once advised me that to succeed I needed to look older and put on weight. That was advice he was happy to take himself.

In his last editorial in the current issue of *Quadrant*, Paddy asked ‘whether Rudd will have the strength to continue his essentially rationalist position’ and concluded:

At the very least Rudd is going to find himself dealing with a torrent of criticism from his supposed friends, especially the Greens (who have no sense) and the bourgeois Labor Left.

Paddy was frequently scornful of politicians but eventually joined their ranks as an elected member of Leichhardt Council. Notwithstanding this effort, I think his journalism will be his lasting legacy to public life—a legacy, I might add, which even the most senior cabinet minister would struggle to equal. God bless you, Paddy. Public life will long miss your good counsel.

Threatened and Extinct Species

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (4.33 pm)— Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your election to high office. It is very well deserved indeed. I consider it a grotesque piece of arrogance on our part as a human race that we think we have the right to destroy other species—plants, birds and animals—on our way to affluence. While some species have prospered as a result of human activity, the vast majority have not, and many species are now threatened with extinction. In December 2005, the USA based National Academy of Sciences reported that human activities are leading to a wave of extinctions that is over a hundred times greater than natural rates. According to the World Conservation Union, almost 800 species have become extinct since the year 1500, when more accurate records began. The Alliance for Zero Extinction has identified a further 800 species on the brink of oblivion. These species are confined to around 600 sites around the world. Only one-third of them enjoy legal protection, and most are surrounded by human population densities approximately three times the global average.

Human activity has increased extinction by between 1,000 and 10,000 times the normal level in rainforests as a result of reduc-

tion in area alone. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the earth is down to its last five per cent of tropical forest cover and is losing that at a rate of over 200,000 square kilometres a year, with the rate of loss increasing. The world has entered the 21st century with little more than 10 per cent of its original forest cover intact and, according to the anthropologists Richard Leakey and Roger Lewis, all the forest cover will be largely gone by the year 2050.

The country which has the world's worst record for species extinction turns out to be Australia: 27 mammal species, 23 bird species and four frog species have become extinct over the past 200 years. Our wildlife is some of the most beautiful and unusual in the world. We are known around the world for our unique wildlife but, unfortunately, we have a very poor track record of protecting it. Everyone knows about the loss of the Tasmanian tiger, a stunning animal which is now sadly extinct, but people are less well aware of just how bad our overall track record is. We have the worst rate of mammal extinction in the world. Since European colonisation, about 10 per cent of Australia's mammals have become extinct. In fact, almost half the mammals that have become extinct globally in the past 200 years have been Australian.

The World Wildlife Fund says—and it is right—that we urgently need to build a safety net of terrestrial and marine protected areas to help our unique and threatened wildlife weather the upheavals of climate change. We need to reduce the impact of invasive species like foxes and cats on our native species, we need to assist Indigenous Australians to manage fire on their country and prevent late, hot, dry-season fires wiping out species and their habitats and, above all, everyone needs to commit to reducing carbon emis-

sions to prevent a wave of mass species extinctions in Australia.

I believe there is an opportunity to strengthen the protection for threatened species and their habitats in the review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, which the Labor government has promised. The last government failed to keep the EPBC Act list of threatened ecological communities up to date because it was pandering to National Party pressure. This has meant that large tracts of threatened habitat across the country are not receiving the protection that is warranted from the federal government under the legislation. We need to recognise the importance of biodiversity protection; it is a crucial part of this country's climate change mitigation efforts. We need a major national biodiversity action plan and a national biodiversity initiative. I commend for the consideration of the government, the parliament and the people of Australia such an initiative, which has been put forward by the Humane Society International. I commend the Humane Society International and WWF for their essential work. I urge all Australians to support their efforts at work. I urge us to ensure that we will not allow other species to become extinct on our watch, during our lifetimes.

Banka Island Massacre

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (4.38 pm)—I rise to ask that we remember the 21 Australian service nurses who were killed 66 years ago in an event that would become known as the Banka Island massacre. This Saturday, 16 February, will mark the 66th anniversary of this horrific event. One nurse, Sister Lieutenant Vivian Bullwinkel, was the sole survivor of the massacre. Her story is one of tragedy, triumph and, above all, compassion. Vivian Bullwinkel was one of 65 Australian service nurses who escaped a besieged Singapore on the merchant ship the

SS Vyner Brooke. The ship, built to carry fewer than 15 passengers, was carrying more than 300. Two days later the ship was hit by Japanese fire, sinking in less than 20 minutes. Together with the women and children who survived the attack on the ship, 22 Australian service nurses made it to shore on the nearby Banka Island.

A day later, about 100 British soldiers, whose ship had also been attacked, landed on the island. The women and children left for the nearest village for help. The Australian nurses stayed behind to take care of the wounded British soldiers. It was decided that the best bet for survival was to surrender to the Japanese army on the island. A small group left to find the Japanese troops. When they returned, the Japanese soldiers marched the men out of sight. The nurses heard gunfire and moments later the Japanese returned, wiping clean their bayonets. They ordered the nurses to stand in a line and walk into the sea. When the nurses were waist high in water the Japanese troops opened fire. Sister Vivian Bullwinkel was shot but not killed. She lay silently in the water until the Japanese soldiers had left the beach, later meeting up with a wounded British soldier, Private Pat Kingsley. She tended his wounds for 12 days before surrendering again to the Japanese. Both were taken to prisoner of war camps. Vivian was sent to the Sumatra prisoner of war camp, where she was reunited with 31 of her fellow nurses who had survived the sinking of the *Vyner Brooke*. Eight of them would die in the camp. Vivian would also later find out that Private Pat Kingsley died of his wounds in captivity. Determined to tell her story, Vivian survived 3½ years as a prisoner of war. In 1947, she was able to give evidence of the massacre at a war crimes tribunal in Tokyo. Only 24 nurses survived the events following the sinking of the *SS Vyner Brooke*. Fifty years later, Vivian returned to the island, officially opening a

memorial to the 41 nurses who did not return home.

During my years as veterans' affairs minister, I had the incredible honour to get to know Sister Vivian Bullwinkel. Her strength of character, compassion and her amazing emotional capacity to forgive her captors cannot truly be expressed in words. Until her death almost eight years ago, she endlessly devoted herself to honouring the service and lives of her fellow nurses. She received the Florence Nightingale Medal, an MBE and an AM. As well as opening a memorial on Banka Island, the year before her death Vivian attended the opening of the Australian Service Nurses Memorial on Anzac Parade, which honours all past and present Australian service nurses.

In the Hall of Memory in the Australian War Memorial a stained glass window of a nurse stands above our unknown Australian soldier. Accompanied by the Red Cross symbol, the Australian Coat of Arms and the sign of charity, the nurse symbolises 'devotion'. Sister Vivian Bullwinkel embodied this quality. She is a role model. Dedicated to her patients, her fellow nurses and their enduring legacy, she was the living example of that stained glass symbol of charity and devotion.

It is important that this Saturday all of us take the time to remember Vivian, her fallen comrades and the many Australians who sacrificed so much to give us what we often take for granted today. Indeed, it is Vivian herself who put it best—and I quote:

I would like people to appreciate that the lives, opportunities, sports and freedom for our young were bought at a price.

Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (4.43 pm)—Yesterday was a great day to be a member of parliament, a day that will be remembered by many and talked about for years to come. It was, of course, the day that the Prime Minis-

ter of the country said sorry to the stolen generation. It was the greatest of days and I, like so many of my colleagues, felt so privileged to have been present on the floor of this House sharing the space with four great former prime ministers, the current Prime Minister and so many Aboriginal elders and representatives of the stolen generation. The Prime Minister, on behalf of the Australian parliament, said sorry three times and without qualification.

I was expecting the apology—we had promised it and it still moved me deeply—but I have to say that what I did not expect and what surprised and moved me more than anything was the sense of joy, relief and hope about the House, the warmth of the welcome towards our Indigenous brothers and sisters and their sense of confidence and belonging in this place. In fact, I have said several times that Indigenous Australia owned Parliament House yesterday and that is a great thing. We should never underestimate the power of belonging and of being valued, particularly for those who have been so disadvantaged in so many ways for so many years.

It was a day to honour the people of a living culture that dates back tens of thousands of years and to feel relieved and pleased for them that finally the day had come—the day to acknowledge the experiences of the stolen generation, to walk with them into the light, to look them in the eye, to recognise them in their grief and to acknowledge, once and for all time, the sheer scope of the nation's responsibility for fractured lives, broken families and decimated culture and to say the simple words: 'I'm sorry.' It was a day to acknowledge openly that Western civilisation in Australia flourished at the expense of the dignity and, in many cases, the very survival of the oldest living culture in the world.

The losses of the Indigenous people over 200 years of modern settlement are beyond measurement. But I think we should acknowledge that the nation as a whole, through our own actions, lost much more than we can comprehend when we valued our own culture and needs above those of the first inhabitants and when modern Australia as a nation accepted such incredible losses of life, culture and family for the first Australians as the price paid for our own development.

I am incredibly saddened, on this day following the day we said sorry, that I cannot meet my local tribe, the Barramatugal clan of the Darug nation, in its full strength. When we rowed up the Parramatta River just a few weeks after first settlement we found a space which was like a park because the local tribes had burnt the land. The crescent in the Parramatta River was their meeting place. We built Government House there at that meeting place. Today there are a few elders—we know a few of them well. But the opportunity to meet that nation and that tribe in its full strength is gone forever from this nation. I feel that I have lost the opportunity to know my community well because of this loss—to meet them and marvel at a people whose perception of the world, space, time and land is so different from ours, to marvel at concepts that exist in one language and not in another, and to be introduced to the land on which I live by a people who have a very real spiritual connection to that land. We as a nation have all lost something. The settlers and governments that destroyed so much, gained so much and lost so much for future generations actually had some say in the choices that they made, but the stolen generation did not have a choice.

The new seat of Parramatta has a larger population of Indigenous Australians than the old one and some members of our Indigenous community are clearly under stress.

We in this House have the task, as we return home, of taking the sense of appreciation and hope with us to work with local communities on moving forward. We all have much work to do, but the events of yesterday make that task just a tiny bit easier.

2020 Summit

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (4.47 pm)—I wish to raise a matter of serious concern to many of my constituents and to many other Australians. On 3 February the Prime Minister announced that he would hold a summit of 1,000 of what he described as Australia's 'best and brightest' to generate ideas for the future of our nation—that is, his 2020 summit.

There was great disappointment in both the Jewish community and in the wider community over the Prime Minister's decision to hold this summit on the weekend of the Passover, 19-20 April. I wrote to the Prime Minister last week to urge him to change the date of the summit. All religious holidays are in our calendar, and it must be possible to find two days which do not conflict with any of them. It is, frankly, incredible for the Prime Minister to insist—having had this matter brought to his attention by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry at the outset—on holding the summit on a weekend which will preclude the attendance of most Jewish Australians. Is the Prime Minister saying he will have a gathering of 1,000 of Australia's best and brightest non-Jewish Australians? That seems incredible. Passover is a very important festival in the Jewish religion. Not only is it a festival of family and giving but it is also a time to remember the perseverance of the Jewish people and the redemption of their ancestors from bitter slavery in Egypt.

I do not imagine that Mr Rudd would have considered holding the summit on a weekend which would conflict with Easter or on a day

which could conflict with Christmas. I wrote to him last week about this, raising it in what I hoped he would see as a constructive way, and I have had no response.

I know the member for Melbourne Ports has also raised this issue with the Prime Minister, and it appears that he has also ignored the concerns of his colleague. I urge the Prime Minister to reconsider the date of this summit. It is unreasonable to ask Jewish Australians if they want to attend this summit on a day which conflicts with their religious obligations. The first nights of Passover are festivals which the vast majority of Jews celebrate. Even Jews who would regard themselves as being fairly secular will find this a very difficult time to attend such a summit.

This should not be a gathering of 1,000 of our best and brightest non-Jews; it should be a gathering of our best and brightest from all religions, whatever their background and whatever their faith. I respectfully urge the Prime Minister to have regard for my concerns, the concerns of my constituents and those of the member for Melbourne Ports and change the date to make it work for everybody.

Australian Police medal

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (4.51 pm)—I rise to congratulate Superintendent Stuart Wilkins, who was awarded the Australian Police Medal in the Australia Day honours this year. Superintendent Wilkins is a proud member of the New South Wales Police Force. In fact, he is the Commander of the Macquarie Fields police station. He has had a proud history, going back some 28 years, in the New South Wales police. Predominantly, he has been engaged in investigating homicides and other serious crimes.

People will recall that in 2005 there was a much publicised event that occurred in Macquarie Fields, which is in my electorate. Un-

fortunately, a riot took place. Subsequent to that riot, Superintendent Wilkins was transferred to Macquarie Fields. I happen to know personally the amount of work that Superintendent Wilkins has put into working with the community—with Father Chris Riley's Youth off the Streets and every other agency in Macquarie Fields. It is extraordinary to see the lengths to which he and his command have gone to normalise relations in the community.

I have particular appreciation and respect for the police, partly because of having spent a good part of my life representing the interests of police officers in a professional capacity and also because my father was a senior officer in the New South Wales police. I have had the opportunity on many occasions, formal and otherwise, to ask police why they chose policing as a career. Extraordinarily and invariably, the response has been 'to make a difference'. I take that as absolute sincerity because that was the very same comment that my father made to me many years back when I questioned him as to why he had joined the police. Superintendent Wilkins has made an enormous contribution to his command in Macquarie Fields. He has made a significant difference to the life of the community generally but also to the normalisation of relationships and to the fact that we can rely on the enforcement of law and order. That is an extraordinary thing.

The Australian Police Medal is a rare honour. Since its establishment in 1986 there have been only 1,067 of these awards presented. As I understand it, the police services are only allowed to present one award per 1,000 members. Consequently, the award given to Superintendent Wilkins is significant, certainly in terms of the community but also because it is recognition by his peers of his extraordinary efforts during his career in the New South Wales police—in particular,

what he has done in administering the command at Macquarie Fields.

The lot of a police officer is always difficult. It is often seen as a thankless task. Police officers are in place to protect the community and community values, and often they are referred to as 'the thin blue line'. It is incumbent on people who occupy seats in this august body to recognise that there are people out there who are prepared to put their lives on the line every single day as they go about their duties on behalf of all members of the community. On behalf of a very grateful community, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Superintendent Wilkins and all the other police throughout this country and congratulate Superintendent Wilkins on a job well done.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 4.56 pm

Thursday, 14 February 2008

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 9.31 am.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Flinders Electorate: Railway Crossings

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (9.31 am)—Earlier this week I had the sad task of speaking with Gwen Bates. Gwen Bates is the mother of Kay Stanley, who was 32 when she met a tragic accident recently. That accident was on the railway crossing at Tyabb. This was an unmarked crossing to the extent that, whilst it had lights, there were no boom gates. That is a common practice on the Mornington Peninsula; to the best of my advice, there are seven such railway crossings which do not have boom gates. Mrs Bates asked me to raise this matter with the Premier and with the parliament. It was one of the most difficult conversations I have had since becoming a member of parliament. Her daughter, Kay, was a teacher at the local pre-school. She was the light of her life and, sadly, was pregnant. That life has now been lost. After the fact, boom gates—I am told—have been added belatedly.

My request to the Premier of Victoria through this chamber is very simple. The Mornington Peninsula has seven railway crossings which have no boom gates, and this is an urbanised area. The Stony Point to Frankston line runs through Stony Point, Crib Point, Hastings, Tyabb, Somerville and Baxter. To have railway crossings with no boom gates in a highly urbanised area is an accident waiting to happen. Sadly, this is the second such fatality on these crossings in recent times. Sadly, this was foreseen and people were forewarned about it. In the best spirit, the position was put to the Victorian government that action needed to be taken.

I made the pledge to Gwen Bates that I would raise this matter here and raise it with the Victorian Premier, which I have done in writing. Much more importantly, though, she has said that she will not leave and return to England and she will not rest until there is action taken so that other mothers do not in the future have to face the same tragedy. On behalf of Gwen Bates and on behalf of her sadly lost daughter, Kay Stanley, I say with the greatest respect: all these crossings need boom gates now. They need them now, Mr Premier. (*Time expired*)

Education Funding

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (9.35 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker, congratulations on your election to your position. In my electorate of Braddon, on the beautiful north-west coast of Tasmania, schools just gone back, and that causes me to reflect on just how important education is. One of the great things that have occurred during the last 18 months is that education has been put back on the political map, and many people in education and in the community have been excited by Labor's plans for the future and for the present in education.

Just recently, I went to a night of excellence at a senior secondary college, Hellyer College in Burnie, another at The Don College in Devonport and also one at the Australian technical college which is part of the Northern Tasmania College, which has a campus in Burnie. I was very pleased to acknowledge the tremendous work of the teachers involved in all these colleges and the excellence of the students who were recognised on those evenings. One thing those evenings certainly made clear is that Australia's future is in good hands, particularly given the quality and the calibre of the students who were being recognised on those nights.

I am really excited about some of the key Labor initiatives that are going to be implemented during this term of government—particularly the trades in schools announcement of \$2.5 billion to assist and enhance skills development in our schools. I know that a number of my schools are already highly excited about the prospect of applying for that. I am also very pleased with the response to the announcement of technology funding of \$1 billion, particularly for computers in schools. I notice with interest that the minister for education and the Prime Minister have announced that they will be sending out letters of audit for schools to apply for this funding.

Finally, I am really excited about the idea of developing a national curriculum to apply some national consistency and standards throughout Australia, particularly in English and history, mathematics and the sciences. If we are able to get these competencies and characteristics right, across the nation, and also allow for greater portability of qualifications and standards between the states, for all our students, then that will be good news. I would like to wish all our teachers and students well, particularly in my electorate of Braddon, for this coming year, and I look forward to assisting in rolling out a number of these highly exciting initiatives for education in our community.

Equine Influenza

Mrs MARKUS (Greenway) (9.38 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment. It has been six months since the equine influenza epidemic broke out in Australia and crippled the equine industry and associated businesses, particularly in the Hawkesbury, which is located in my electorate of Greenway. This highly contagious, virulent disease spread to the Hawkesbury, and the entire region was quarantined and, as I speak today, is still classified as being in the purple zone.

When the outbreak first occurred, I met with Brian Fletcher from the Hawkesbury Race Club to discuss, and come to some understanding about, the significant impact of the outbreak on the community and what we, as the then government, could do to assist. I attended a meeting where I was able to speak and listen to the challenges faced by horse owners, staff and people with equine related businesses. It was at this meeting that I heard the challenges they would face for a significant length of time.

I then spoke extensively with the then minister for agriculture, the Hon. Peter McGauran, and discussed with him the challenges and financial hardships being faced. I was very pleased when the coalition government announced last year the \$110 million to assist the equine industry, which was in addition to \$4 million previously announced. The package included a wage supplement, a business assistance grant, the Commercial Horse Assistance Payment and grants for non-government and not-for-profit equestrian organisations. I welcome the new Australian government's announcement last week that it would extend this financial assistance, particularly CHAPs, the commercial payments assisting horse owners.

Equine influenza has affected many people, including horse owners, breeders, transport companies, local supply shops, local catering businesses and stable hands, to name a few. Last week I met with representatives of the Arabian Horse Society of Australia, who are based in my electorate of Greenway, and I listened to the challenges that their members will face for up to two years. In an impact study conducted by the Australian Horse Industry Council, to which 2,721 people responded, it was estimated that they, as a collective group, experienced losses of up to \$3.6 billion between August and December 2007. The impact study also

showed that 33 per cent of respondents believe that their current financial hardship will, regardless of whether the zones are lifted, go well beyond August this year. I urge the Australian government to acknowledge the challenges and hardships faced by the equine industry and to continue to provide financial assistance to those who will require ongoing assistance. The alternative, if assistance is not given, is that many individual family businesses will not be operating. In many instances these businesses have been running for generations. *(Time expired)*

Visas

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—I welcome back the member for Hasluck.

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (9.41 am)—Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—and I congratulate you on your election to the position of Deputy Speaker. I rise today to speak on behalf of a small group of people who reside in my electorate and also on behalf of a number of others who live throughout Australia. It is perhaps an unusual group of people to speak on behalf of because these individuals do not have the right to vote in Australia. Of course, I am talking about people who are residing in Australia on 410 or retirement visas. There are fewer than 5½ thousand people who reside in Australia on a 410 retirement visa.

I was first made aware of the issues confronting these people when I was doorknocking the electorate of Hasluck back in 2001. Dave and Marie Austin, who at the time lived in Helena Valley, were very active local members of my community. They had left the UK. They had sold up all their possessions and moved to Australia, fully having made the decision to spend the rest of their lives here. But at that time they were obliged under the terms of the 410 visa to make an application every two years to renew that visa. They explained to me the stress and anxiety that was caused by that process. They also explained the requirements for them to deal with the Foreign Investment Review Board as they were ‘temporary residents’. Even over the purchase and subsequent sale of their houses, they were obliged to liaise with, and meet the requirements of, the Foreign Investment Review Board. Holders of the 410 visa confront a lot of red tape and contradictions.

Many of these people have banded together through organisations like BERIA, British Expatriate Retirees in Australia; AIRS—the Association of Independent Retirees; and, more recently, Retirees WA. I am sure members are familiar with all these organisations. They have banded together to try to address some of their concerns. Since 2001 there have been some enhancements and improvements to the conditions associated with 410 visas. Indeed, visa holders are now only obliged to apply every four years for their visas rather than every two years. Nevertheless, they still confront a number of contradictions and concerns, whether that is access to credit cards, difficulties with housing purchases or the complexities of dealing with the Foreign Investment Review Board.

I am confident that shortly a number of 410 visa holders will meet with Senator the Hon. Chris Evans, the new Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, as I recently requested. I hope he is able to deal with and address some of their concerns and issues. I urge other members of the House to take the time to meet with 410 visa holders in their electorates and to listen to their concerns and see if we can address these issues on their behalf. *(Time expired)*

Hon. Ian Raymond Causley

Mr HAWKER (Wannon) (9.44 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker, I too congratulate you on your election to your very important role. I would like to record my appreciation to the former

member for Page and former Deputy Speaker, the Hon. Ian Causley. Ian served as the Deputy Speaker from 2002 through to his retirement at the last election. I think he did a truly outstanding job.

Ian came to federal parliament in the seat of Page in 1996, following on from time in the New South Wales state parliament from 1984 to 1996. During that time he had a fairly distinguished career, holding a number of portfolios. He had very fond memories of the New South Wales parliament, so much so that we got a daily reminder of the clerks' meeting. The Deputy Clerk, who is in the chamber, would recall well that we always heard how it was done in New South Wales! Nonetheless, when I was elected Speaker in 2004 I really appreciated the advice and support that Ian Causley gave. It was always frank advice but it was always constructive.

The other thing about Ian for which I commend him is that he was always punctual. When he was taking over in the chair you could rely on Ian to turn up not only on time but quite often early. That was something that was also much appreciated. As I say, he was always a source of sound advice. He earned the respect very much of all members of parliament for the way in which he upheld the standards when he was in the chair and ensured that democratic processes could continue. I know that my predecessor, the Hon. Neil Andrew, would echo everything I am saying because he too appreciated the great support that Ian gave him.

In his valedictory speech I think Ian was quite happy to describe himself in a number of ways that were quite frank. He said:

No-one will ever die wondering where I stand on certain issues.

That was a fairly good way of summing it up. He also talked about his philosophy. I do not have much time but I will quote one point he made:

In many ways I believe that our democracy has been taken over by the fact that the minority is always heard too much these days.

He made a very telling point. Again, I wish to record my appreciation for the tireless work that Ian did, particularly for the great support that he gave me as Speaker and the excellent way in which he contributed to the parliament, especially in ensuring that our chamber continued to function properly.

Parramatta Electorate: Chinese New Year

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (9.47 am)—I rise today to wish all Australians who are celebrating the lunar new year at this time of year all the best for the coming Year of the Rat. This year, when we can expect new beginnings and sweeping changes, some of which we have already seen in the last two days in this place, may I wish them and their families health, wealth and prosperity. I have to say, just to get it into the *Hansard*: Kung Hei Fat Choy. The lunar new year is, of course, part of our calendar now, but as recently as a generation ago traditional celebrations by Australians of Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and other Asian backgrounds must have seemed strange and exotic.

On Saturday in Parramatta we celebrated in Prince Alfred Park, where people of Chinese background, now Australian but coming from China, Singapore and Malaysia, joined together with the broader community to celebrate the coming Year of the Rat. The Chinese New Year has been celebrated in Australia since the 1850s, when early Chinese settlers came during the gold rush. Our Chinese community is one of the oldest and strongest communities in modern Australia. As early as 1861, the colonial census showed that China-born residents accounted

for 3.4 per cent of the population, the second largest immigrant group after the British—and they still retain that position today. In my electorate of Parramatta, surrounding Prince Alfred Park, they account for between eight and 10 per cent of the population. They are the largest group after the English and are a vital part of the economic and social life of the region.

In Parramatta we lay claim to some of the earliest history of Chinese settlement in Australia. We do not claim the first Chinese person to have arrived in Australia in 1803. Clearly a person of poor judgement, he did not move to Parramatta! His name was Ahuto and he was a carpenter. But the second one, Mak Sai Ying, came as a free settler in 1818. He settled in very quickly and opened the first pub in Parramatta in 1829. So in the history of Parramatta, Mak Sai Ying, our second Chinese settler and our first one in Parramatta, is well and truly woven in to the culture of our region. Had he been wearing a blue and yellow football jersey at the time we could well and truly give him Australian honours!

More recently in Parramatta we celebrated with the Vietnamese Tet and the Korean Seollal—our Vietnamese and Korean communities are great, strong and growing communities—and we will celebrate at Warwick Farm with the Vietnamese Tet on Saturday. For everybody who celebrates the Year of the Rat this year, I wish them a happy, healthy and prosperous new year and give fair warning that next year lunar new year falls on 26 January. In my electorate we will have the lunar new year, the Republic Day of India and Australia Day on 26 January. There will be one hell of a party in Parramatta next year. I suggest you all come along!

Mallee Electorate: Schools

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (9.50 am)—I rise to my feet because I do not share the enthusiasm that the member for Braddon has with respect to the so-called education revolution proposed by the new government. I am particularly disturbed to see that, despite not mentioning this during their campaign, they have made a decision to axe what has been an excellent program in delivering capital support to country schools. I refer to the \$1.2 billion Investing in Our Schools program. To their credit, I accept the decision that they have made to roll this appropriated money into other programs of their own. I am on my feet to make a plea that they reconsider the reallocation of that generous appropriation just for the use of laptop computers in schools because I do note that their policy exempts primary schools.

There are actually 125 schools contained within the federal division of Mallee—I imagine that there would be very few members in this place who have that many schools—of which 86 are primary schools. In addition to that, we have in Victoria a model referred to as a P-12, which is the whole 12 years of primary and secondary education combined into one campus. There are 12 of those schools. We are talking about 98 schools in country north-west Victoria which will miss out on this alleged education revolution if the government does not reconsider the manner in which it will reallocate that \$1.2 billion.

I have been so pleased, having argued very strongly whilst in government for a program like this to meet the needs of country schools. Many of them, particularly the primary schools, are very small—there are a huge number of schools that would have less than 20 students—but, in rural, isolated locations, those are decisions that families make so that their children do not have to spend an enormous amount of time, particularly at a primary school age, to get to a big, structured school. That program delivered realistic capital investment like shade over the playground—a pretty simple concept, but when you consider the hot, arid climate of the north-west of Victoria, it is an essential need for young children to be protected from the sun.

I was alarmed over the two or three years of the operation of this program to see some schools investing capital in the renovation of their toilets, which is some indication of the neglect on the part of the state government in respect of my schools.

I make this plea to those government members present: reconsider so that my primary schools in particular do not miss out on this revolution, which they want to be a part of. (*Time expired*)

Endangered Species

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (9.53 am)—I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election to that high and important office. Australia is very fortunate to be blessed with a wonderful array and diversity of different bird species. Unfortunately, we have failed to look after this magnificent inheritance. We are something like the world record holder when it comes to species extinction. Over the past 200 years, 23 different bird species have become extinct. You might think that we would have learnt from this sorry chapter of our early history, but it is the fact today that there are many bird species which are either critically endangered or on the endangered list. Five are critically endangered and 34 are on the endangered list. The Carnaby's black cockatoo, which is unique to the south-west of Western Australia, has had its numbers fall by at least 50 per cent over the past 45 years as a result of extensive clearing of native bushland. In the Kimberleys today there are fewer than 2½ thousand adult Gouldian finches. They are under threat as a result of altered fire patterns and grazing pressures.

You have the situation of the albatross around the world. There are 24 species. Twenty-three of these are listed as endangered. The global expansion of longline fishing has done them great harm. We also have in Australia migratory shorebirds. They astonish people around the world with their annual migrations, flying thousands of kilometres each year to respond to changing seasons and the beat of their internal drum. Unfortunately, they are dependent on each country through which they travel maintaining their living areas and breeding areas. They are only as strong as the weakest link in the chain.

There are things that we can do and need to do in order to protect our vanishing bird species. For example, we have not implemented the Action Plan for the Conservation of Migratory Shorebirds in the East Asian-Australian flyway: 2001-2005. We should do this. We should increase the number of sites involved in the action plan's network. I mentioned the predicament facing the albatross as a result of longline fishing. We should be implementing and monitoring the threat abatement plan for seabirds and ensuring that the bycatch in nets in the trawl fisheries and longline fisheries does not threaten the existence of these magnificent and endangered seabird species.

Of course, the key to protecting wildlife is protecting their habitat. We have had far too much land clearing in Australia over the years, which has done our wildlife immense damage. We need to build on our national reserves system and make sure that there are corridors available for birds and other wildlife so that they can continue to survive in Australia and add beauty to our modern existence. (*Time expired*)

Fadden Electorate: Regional Partnerships Program

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (9.56 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker, let me join the chorus of congratulations on your elevation to the position of Deputy Speaker. I rise to register my con-

cern as to the uncertainty regarding the ongoing Regional Partnerships program. I note that the Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government commented that the Rudd Labor government is committed to ongoing investment in regional Australia. He is quoted as saying:

We are having a very close look at the regional partnership program and we will be saying more about it in the future.

I note the minister has also said that he intends to keep it but to make significant changes. The uncertainty I raise this morning is that a number of applications are currently being held up, awaiting ministerial approval. One particular application in my seat of Fadden is for the Oxenford Youth Centre, which is the only youth centre in the strong growth corridor from Oxenford through to Coomera. You may be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that Fadden is the fastest-growing electorate in the nation. More people are coming to Fadden than to any other electorate in the entire country, and they are moving into this growth corridor. The strain on infrastructure, especially on social infrastructure, is significant. This is the only youth centre in the area and it deserves priority from the minister.

I have met with the area consultative committee, whose members I applaud for their generous use of their personal time, being volunteers, and we are working on two further applications: one for the Oxenford-Coomera RSL subbranch hall and the other for St Vincent de Paul, for 28 units for homeless people. At present the area consultative committee is waiting for guidance from the minister.

I think everyone in the chamber would agree that homelessness is a significant problem. In Fadden—and this is the fastest-growing electorate in the nation—there is not a single bed for the homeless in the entire electorate. There are nine units for domestic violence, for women and children, but none for men and children. Having spoken to those who do great work on the Gold Coast, I know there are more and more men and children who are now homeless. Clearly, given there is not a single homeless unit available in this area, the minister providing certainty as to the Regional Partnerships program so that we can submit appropriate documentation to support St Vincent de Paul having the 28 units for the homeless built is certainly worthy of the attention of the House. I simply ask that the minister look at the Regional Partnerships program and provide certainty as quickly as possible as to how it will go forward in the future. I look forward to his response.

Shortland Electorate: Grocery Prices

Ms HALL (Shortland) (9.59 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker, along with everyone else, I would like to add my words of congratulation upon your election as the Deputy Speaker. I feel absolutely certain that you will add something special to the role and that you will be noted for being an outstanding Deputy Speaker.

One of the issues that have been paramount in Shortland electorate is the cost of living and the rising price of groceries. As I have told the House on many occasions, Shortland is the electorate with the 10th oldest population in Australia. We have a very, very large population of pensioners. Many of those pensioners live from week to week and find it very difficult to survive. One of the issues that they constantly raise with me is the price of groceries and how they are finding that the cost of living is making it more difficult for them to live. On many occasions, pensioners have brought me in shopping slips that show what they were paying last month and what they are paying this month, what they were paying last year and what they

are paying this year. This graphically demonstrates to me that there has been an increase in the price of groceries.

The previous government chose to ignore the voice of the pensioners in the Shortland electorate, the voice of families in the Shortland electorate and, for that matter, the voice of families and pensioners throughout Australia. They just allowed the price of groceries to increase and said, 'Well, we can't do anything about it.' The Rudd Labor government went to the last election promising the Australian people that it would actually try and do something about it, and that is why one of the first acts of this government has been to establish an inquiry into grocery prices.

The Rudd government has instructed the ACCC to take a broad approach to this inquiry and ensure that all aspects of the chain are included, from the farm gate to the checkout. I think this is very important. The inquiry will be taking submissions from people. I believe that it is of such vital importance that I have circulated the details of the inquiry throughout my electorate. I have asked those pensioner groups and those people who have been struggling under the previous government to put a submission in to the inquiry. When the inquiry reports back on 31 July, the Australian people will have had a chance to have their voice heard, and we will know once and for all—(*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' statements has concluded.

APOLOGY TO AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Debate resumed from 13 February, on motion by **Mr Rudd**:

That—

Today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations—this blemished chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (10.02 am)—Yesterday in this place, members of the Australian parliament joined together to offer an apology to the stolen generations. We said sorry for the pain and suffering that flowed from the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We said sorry to them, their families left behind and their descendants. We said sorry for the indignity and degradation inflicted on a proud people and their proud culture. We reflected on the mistreatment of Indigenous Australians and apologised for the laws and policies of successive governments which brought profound grief and loss to these, our fellow Australians, and we promised that such injustices would never happen again.

We asked that our apology be received in the spirit in which it was offered, as part of the healing of the nation. We acknowledged the past and laid claim to a new future of shared opportunity for all Australians. We did it to go some way towards righting past wrongs, to complete this unfinished business. We did it to build a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians based on respect, cooperation and mutual responsibility. With our apology comes our pledge for new approaches and fresh ideas to solve the enduring inequalities in health, education and employment.

Yesterday was a day that many Indigenous Australians feared they would never live to see. It was far too long coming, and for that I am sorry too. I will never forget the mixed and raw emotions so clear on the faces of those seated on the floor of Parliament House, those in the galleries and those outside on the lawns: deep sorrow and grief, of course, but also the healing emotions—relief, joy and a great and deserved pride in the Indigenous peoples of Australia. It has been a very long journey to get to this day, a long and sometimes fraught journey that has tested the will and courage of so many people. There is no denying that along the way there has been disillusionment and disappointment, but now truth and good sense have prevailed.

This journey began when brave men and women stood up and demanded justice and recognition and acknowledgement of past oppression and injustice. For too long they were ignored and disparaged, but they refused to be silenced and slowly others started listening. Over the years the momentum of reconciliation has ebbed and flowed. At times there was frustration, anger, and even despair that the road to reconciliation could be so tortuous. But the course was set. There would be no giving up. Slowly, over the decades, more and more Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, heard and understood and spoke out.

Today, as the minister responsible for Indigenous affairs, I want to acknowledge the work and commitment of all those people. It is totally impossible to name them all, but I do want to name a few: the wonderful leadership shown by the late Sir Ronald Wilson and Mick Dodson

in their leadership of the inquiry that resulted in the *Bringing them home* report; Tom Calma, the Social Justice Commissioner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; Lowitja O'Donoghue, an extraordinary woman; Sir William Deane and Fred Chaney, who have persisted against great obstacles along the path of reconciliation; and our previous prime ministers Malcolm Fraser, who has joined Lowitja O'Donoghue as a patron of the Stolen Generations Alliance, Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. All of these previous prime ministers have shown such great leadership. Also, I do particularly want to mention a previous Indigenous affairs minister, Robert Tickner, who was the minister at the time when the *Bringing them home* inquiry began.

I want to extend my very special thanks to those who have given me such wise counsel in the consultations leading up to today, and particularly all of those members of the Stolen Generations Alliance and the National Sorry Day Committee. I will name just two people—so many gave me so much. In particular, I want to say thank you to Christine King and Helen Moran, who gave me not only wise advice but so much of themselves as well.

In my own office I want to say a very special thankyou to Rita Markwell and Helen Hambling, who made yesterday such an extraordinary experience for so many Australians, and my department, who put together all the arrangements to bring people here to Canberra, to make sure that the day could be the special day that it was. I want to add my particular thanks to everyone at Reconciliation Australia, who for so long have done so much but who, in the last couple of months, have really helped many, many Australians—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to come to the heart of what we were trying to do in the very special celebrations that we had in the country.

In 1996, the then Governor-General Sir William Deane delivered the inaugural Lingiari lecture in Darwin. He recounted the story of Vincent Lingiari, who in 1966 defied the bosses and led members of the Gurindji tribe off Wave Hill station, where they worked for a pittance as stockmen. At nearby Wattie Creek they established a settlement called Daguragu. This unprecedented strike began as a protest against appalling working and living conditions but crystallised into a demand for the return of the Gurindji's traditional lands. In fact, when the Gurindji were later offered money to return to work, Vincent Lingiari replied: 'You can keep your gold; we just want our land back.' The Wave Hill strike lasted seven years. It became a potent national symbol of the struggle for Aboriginal land rights. To this day it continues to be a powerful symbol.

What happened at Daguragu and the subsequent ceremonial return of the land by the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, was a turning point in Indigenous and non-Indigenous history. Who can forget the image of Gough spilling a handful of Daguragu soil into Vincent Lingiari's outstretched hand—the symbolic gesture marking the coming home of country? Who would deny the significance of that simple symbolic gesture—Gough, known to the Gurindji as 'that big man', handing back Daguragu soil to the Gurindji people and their children forever? It is a symbol as quintessentially Australian and as much part of our national story as the poetry of Banjo Paterson and the paintings of Emily Kngwarreye.

Much has been said and written in the past few weeks about symbolism and its significance. Some people have argued that this symbolic act of saying sorry will somehow undermine or even replace the practical, on-the-ground reforms needed to fix up the huge gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I believe the exact opposite is true. Saying

sorry gives us the impetus to move on. It means we can get on with the huge job of closing the gap. Yes, it is a symbolic gesture, but one that I certainly passionately believe will allow us all to tackle the substance of the issue—that is, to remove the crippling inequalities that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. True reconciliation can never be achieved without Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians recognising and dealing with the wrongs of the past, the dispossession, the oppression and the degradation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This has been the common thread running through the hundreds of conversations I have had with Aboriginal people over the last few months.

Another underlying sentiment has been their extraordinarily generous willingness to accept the apology in the spirit in which it has been offered. For me this has been probably the most inspiring and humbling thing about the occasion—the dignity and humanity of their assurance as they said to me, ‘As you say sorry, we forgive.’ Our apology is not about imposing guilt or shame on this generation of Australians; it is not about attributing personal blame. Rather, it is an expression of sorrow for the cruel injustices of the past. It is an understanding that the past cannot be denied or set aside. We spent decades dismissing or ignoring the past and now we have had the courage to face up to it. Having done that, we can learn from it and never make the same mistakes again. We can become an Australia that knows and profoundly understands the complexities of the past—the good and the bad—an Australia that admits that past government policies damaged Indigenous families, that comprehends the pain and devastation of the children who were removed and the relentless grief of their parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles. We want to be a nation which, having failed to enter into their hearts and minds, now feels and shares that loss and grief.

For the stolen generations, the past is a constant and painful presence that never leaves them. For all of us who have read the pages of the *Bringing them home* report, which documents the systematic removal of up to 100,000 Indigenous children from their families, these harrowing stories are revealed. It contains just some of the stories of the children forcibly removed in the 60 years between 1910 and 1970. Children were taken from their mothers and fathers on the basis of their race under laws that allowed this practice. Their stories have a common theme of hurt, loss, grief and a common lament that they are forever visited by this sad and troubled past. It was so live and painful yesterday for so many people. For them, the past can never be a distant country.

The past shapes our national character and identity. As a nation we are just as much defined by past wrongs and injustices as we are by past acts of courage and heroism. As Sir William Deane so eloquently puts it: the basic fact is that national shame as well as national pride can and should exist in relation to past acts and omissions, at least when done in the name of the community or with the authority of government. Where there is no room for national pride or national shame about the past, there can be no national soul.

What happened here in Parliament House yesterday marked the beginning of a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, a partnership of mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility. Through this partnership we can drive reforms to close the gap that divides us. The responsibility for a just and equitable future for Indigenous Australians falls on all of our shoulders. We know that despite the ambitions of the 1967 referendum, the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians remains dramatically worse than the rest of the community. Many still endure inadequate health

services, overcrowded and substandard housing, poor access to education and barriers to getting a job. Alcohol and drugs are crippling Indigenous communities, there are entrenched health problems—and so the list goes on.

We know that it is our task together to address these problems. The government does fully comprehend the enormity of closing this gap on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities, and we know that it can only be done by working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, all of us working together. Clearly the old approaches have failed, and that is a responsibility we all have to shoulder. What we need is a new era of cooperation and responsibility and a new way of doing things. That is why we have set ourselves concrete targets to make sure that the fundamentals of decent life—good health, nutrition, a safe and comfortable, high-quality education, an opportunity to share in the dividends of the economy through work—are shared by Indigenous Australians.

Within a decade we have pledged to halve the gap in mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children under the age of five. In the same period we have pledged to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy through the comprehensive package focusing on early childhood development. (*Time expired*)

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (10.17 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker, congratulations on your elevation to this spot. It is good to see a woman like you in this position; thank you.

Where do I start? There are some in my electorate who want me to stand here and apologise on their behalf for a period in our history we have coined ‘the stolen generations’. There are others who are equally emphatic that there is nothing to apologise for. There are some who say an apology is a personal thing and that I do not have the moral authority to be so presumptuous as to apologise on their behalf. There are some who simply do not care one way or another—and then there are those who expect to see the words before we go to parliament. Somewhere in that continuum rests the ideal solution.

So, after giving it much thought, I decided that I could only speak for myself, and those who agree with me or disagree with me are entitled to their thoughts. I have had a long association with local Aboriginal communities, especially through their elders, and I want to especially thank Auntie Nola Roberts for her mentoring, advice and friendship.

When my own daughter was born in the hospital some 46 years ago I was asked if I would breastfeed another baby, a beautiful Aboriginal child who I desperately wanted to adopt and who is now a well respected member of the community and a mother in her own right. During the time of the reconciliation walk I, Joanna Gash, did apologise for those inhumane acts perpetrated on Aboriginal families through government policy prevailing at that time. However, I do not recall anyone at the time saying: thanks, Jo, that really meant something. In fact, the apology imperative had become so ritualised by that time that any sincerity expressed took a back seat.

Today as we stand here uttering sorry, I wonder how many of us are doing so because we really feel it—or we are just doing it as a grand gesture? I come from Europe, Holland, where Anne Frank, a Jewess, suffered through oppression of her race. She suffered vilification, hatred, was hunted down, captured and eventually exterminated. Europe has a long history of ethnic oppression and vilification, and so too do Africa, Asia, the Americas and every other continent and landmass in the world, with the exception perhaps of the Antarctic. It is an in-

herent human trait to dominate each other but it is also an inherently human trait to learn and to change.

As we grow older and learn from our experiences, our views change. Our evolving individual maturity is no different to the society that we share. We grow, we learn, we evolve and part of that evolutionary process is to recognise that some of the things that we did in our past were not right and that they caused harm. Over time our society, like every other society throughout mankind, has matured and will continue to do so.

At the time, the stolen generation intervention may have seemed appropriate to the larger white population. To those that were subject to the intervention, it was an entirely different matter and remains so today. In fact, we can draw similar parallels with what is happening in some of our homes today where the government decrees that a child must be removed from dysfunctional and harmful households, ostensibly for the good of the child. Who is right and who is wrong? Only time will tell. But I can guarantee this: the authorities today, like those of 50 years ago or more, thought they had right on their side and acted within their consciences. I have no doubt that there were genuine cases at the time, warranting this type of intervention, and there were other cases that were totally unwarranted, unnecessary and counterproductive. I suspect that many Aboriginal children, removed from their families by the state, were removed arbitrarily almost as a form of process and procedure rather than through any perception of threat to their individual welfare. Simply put, it appears the state wanted to raise them as 'whites'. Was it fair? Was it justified? Was it beneficial? In the fullness of time, the prevailing mood is that we need to move on, but, until we apologise to those genuinely aggrieved, we will be held back by the lack of it.

I note that the state governments have all apologised in their own right and that leaves only the Commonwealth. But, I would like to emphasise the need for this gesture to be seen as genuine and not contrived. If I am part of a parliament making this apology, in all its sincerity, then I do not want it to be exploited for another agenda. My apology is offered in good faith so that we can all grow together undivided with forgiveness from the beneficiaries of our apology. Until there is a full moral reconciliation, the era of the stolen generations will remain like a millstone around our collective necks. So, to those that were unjustifiably and immorally taken from their families, I am sorry for the injustices that you have suffered. I am sorry that we as a nation are not mature enough to see that we were misguided.

I call upon those aggrieved victims to find it in their hearts to forgive and to have the maturity and courage to acknowledge that those not involved should not be punished for the sins of their fathers. It is time for the wounds to heal and I want to be part of the healing process. It is now time for leadership. We want to know, after this apology, what next? How will the circumstances change? What changes will be made by the Rudd government? I was very pleased to see the bipartisan support for that committee, not just in words but in constructive actions and positive results, so we as Australians can walk the same path together. It makes me feel ashamed when I hear of the reports of abuse and that I can do nothing about it. I apologise to Joyce Donovan of the victim support group in the Illawarra and thank her and her supporters for the excellent work they do. I apologise that I have still not achieved the safe house for women.

The question I ask is: will this apology stop drug and alcohol abuse, stop child abuse, resolve the homeless problem, stop domestic violence, stop the high rate of infant mortality,

stop all those things that have plagued the Indigenous community so long that even their leaders are saying, enough is enough? This is a question that is equally directed at both the government and the Aboriginal community. What can we do to stop all this?

In conclusion, can I mention that the Bomaderry Mission, in my electorate of Gilmore, will be 100 years old in May and they were not invited to the parliament for the apology. They were very upset about that.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (10.24 am)—by leave—I thank honourable members opposite for their generosity in allowing me to continue my remarks on the apology to the stolen generations. To do this we must recognise that what works in the Pitjantjatjara lands will not automatically work in Redfern. What is needed is a flexible, innovative approach that factors in the specific circumstances of each Indigenous community to achieve our national objectives. We have already started. We are providing comprehensive funding for child and maternal health services, early development and parenting support, and literacy and numeracy in the early years. Health services are being improved and expanded. This includes upgrading remote health clinics and extending sexual assault counselling and renal dialysis services. We are prioritising the expansion of alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation services across the Northern Territory to deliver more detox beds and more health workers to treat people who have alcohol addiction. We are also expanding sobering-up shelters in Katherine and Tennant Creek so that alcohol abusers can be accommodated in a safe environment. Over the next five years we will make sure that every Indigenous four-year-old has access to early childhood education with proper pre-literacy and pre-numeracy programs. Giving Indigenous children the best chance for a bright future requires a sound foundation of education and training. Literacy and numeracy are the building blocks, but currently the performance of Indigenous children often falls behind. To improve attendance rates at school we are funding 200 additional teachers in the Northern Territory and working with all state and territory governments to boost attendance and to make sure there are enough classrooms. We know the practical challenges are immense. It is a big job; but we must, and I am convinced we can, get it right.

Yesterday also signalled what I truly hope will be a new era of bipartisan support for Indigenous issues. This is too important to be politicised. We must all rise above politics. As the Prime Minister said, we should ‘elevate this one core area of national responsibility to a rare position beyond the partisan divide’. As a sign of our commitment to a fresh, bipartisan approach, we are proposing a joint policy commission to be chaired by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Our first task is to develop and implement an effective housing strategy for remote communities over the next five years. Housing is vital to closing the gap. You cannot improve people’s health or give Indigenous kids a good education or expect them to be part of the workforce if they do not have a decent roof over their heads—proper housing so that children can sleep safely at night, so they can do their homework when they get home from school, where mums and dads can raise their kids without the pressures of the severe overcrowding that currently exists.

As I said at the outset, this has been a very long time coming. It has not been an easy journey. At times it seemed that we would not make it and the fact is that, when we did, we gave testimony to the strength, courage and determination of many, many people. The same strength, courage and determination will be needed for the tough task ahead. I have no illu-

sions about the extent and complexity of the challenge that lies before us, but neither do I doubt that it has to be done. And no-one should ever doubt the government's resolve to get that job done.

It is our passion to build a fair and just Australia so that we have a nation where a child growing up in Sydney or a child growing up in the Kimberley can look forward to the same future, where it does not matter, it does not make any difference, whether you were born in the bush or in the city; a nation where good health and a decent education do not depend on geography or race and where opportunity stretches right across this huge country of ours, from Bidyadanga to Wreck Bay; a nation where all our children can look back at the past with honesty and pride and understand that on 13 February 2008 Australia was big enough to squarely face the wrongs of the past, to say sorry and to move on; a nation where all of our children recognise the significance of that day in the desert when the 'big man' gave back the ancient Gurindji land and the sand trickled through Vincent Lingiari's fingers; and a nation where all of us can go forward together as true friends and equals.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (10.30 am)—Madam Deputy Speaker, I add my congratulations to those already extended to you. Colleagues, yesterday was a momentous day for all Australians and for this parliament. This House was the scene of a long-overdue but ultimately powerful bipartisan resolve to express our nation's collective sorrow to the stolen generations, and I fully endorse that motion. I am sure this House was deeply moved, as I was, by the rapt attention with which that scene was viewed yesterday by the whole nation. To understand the depth of hurt and suffering felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people requires each of us to open our hearts and to ask ourselves this question: how would we feel if our children or our grandchildren were taken from us because of the colour of our skin or our cultural background? In making that empathetic leap, we discover true sympathy.

The narrative that led to the forcible removal of the children of Indigenous Australians is complex and deeply disturbing. Having been dispossessed of the land, they were then remorselessly driven from every landscape that offered potential benefit to the white man, even from those reservations grudgingly allotted to them by government. No homeland was sacrosanct to the black man if it was capable of supporting agriculture or yielding up precious metals. Gone was hunting, gone was gathering, gone was country and therefore gone were the elements that gave expression to Aboriginal culture. In their place came fringe dwelling, destitution, disease and dependency and, worst of all, a deep and abiding depression of the spirit.

But it must not be assumed, as it is commonly assumed, that Aboriginal subjection and collapse happened overnight. There is evidence in abundance of Aboriginal efforts to participate in the economy of the time. In Western Australia—for I am more familiar with the historical narrative in my own state—not a few took up seasonal work on farms and participated in the arduous clearing and fencing of land for agriculture; otherwise they were left to eke out a meagre living from stripping bark and hunting possums, but not for long. Successive waves of immigration led to increasing demands for lands and, in turn, further marginalisation of Aboriginal communities. Inevitably, tensions with white settlers increased and the relationship became hostage to downturns in the economy.

By 1913 the Western Australian government succumbed to political pressure with a demand 'to segregate all Aborigines onto state-owned farms and total abolition of private employment of Aborigines.' Even bark stripping and possum hunting became subject to govern-

ment sanctions. Deteriorations of relations led to massacres, kidnapping and the selling of Aboriginals, including women and children, into what was tantamount to slavery. Mrs Mary Bennett, publisher of *The Australian Aboriginal as a human being* report to the Australian Board of Missions, was quoted in the *West Australian* newspaper:

I have just returned from a year's investigations in the Kimberley where, as in other parts of Western Australia and the Federal Territory—where women have neither human rights nor protection if they are native or half-castes—slavery is in operation and there is white slave traffic in black women.

Mary Bennett went on to criticise severely the failure of government policy, saying:

...it pays the white man to dispossess the natives of their land wholesale. The compulsion is dispossession and starvation reinforced by violence ...

Inevitably relationships between black women and non-Aboriginal men led to increasing numbers of half-caste children, who were left fatherless by state laws which prohibited inter-racial cohabitation. The quality of the relationship was not considered material. Administrators like AO Neville fervently believed that these children were better off being taken from their mothers and placed in state-run institutions.

Much has been written of government policies administered in Western Australia by Mr AO Neville and subsequently reprised in other states and territories. Though driven in part by the Victorian prejudices and mores of his time and his interest in miscegenation, Neville fought fervently with his superiors for the establishment and retention of state-run institutions and for the proper funding of staffing, supplies, maintenance, education and training opportunities. Not only did his pleas to government fall on deaf ears; they led to flat rejection. Nevertheless he continued to plead successfully for proper funding of his wretched department throughout his long career. In a report to government in 1930, Neville wrote:

... many of the old people were unable to withstand the privations due to hard times and sickness. The loss of child life was greater than ever. Epidemic diseases are bound to cause numerous deaths amongst a people compelled to live under conditions such as those under which our natives exist.

His biographer, Pat Jacobs, in her landmark account gives graphic descriptions of conditions prevailing in state institutions, with inadequate food and unduly harsh punishment, sometimes of very young children. The so-called protectors were anything but.

Throughout the history of tragic events there were many heroes, black and white, who fought for justice and worked in practical ways with Aboriginal communities, writing to ministers and giving evidence before royal commissions. The history of the stolen generation was forensically documented in our time in the *Bringing them home* report in 1997 by Sir Ronald Wilson, former High Court judge and president of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Who, on reading that report, could not be deeply moved by the harrowing accounts of those who gave evidence? Almost a decade after, we are only now beginning to discern the full extent of the tragedy that has overtaken the Indigenous culture. We are beginning to appreciate that the symbolism of an apology in no way excludes the implementation of practical reconciliation policies. Rather, it facilitates them—yes, indeed, it facilitates them.

It was never a reasonable or fair argument, in my view, to deny an apology for fear of consequences. Justice must be done to our Indigenous peoples, and if consequences follow then they must be faced up to. This is fundamental to our system of law. The proposed bipartisan commission announced by the Prime Minister, the Hon. Kevin Rudd, yesterday is a welcome development to which I give my enthusiastic endorsement. I congratulate the Minister for

Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, who has now left the chamber, for the dignified way in which the proceedings have been undertaken in this House over the last two days.

My enthusiasm I owe in no small part to my distinguished predecessor in the seat of Pearce, the Hon. Fred Chaney, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 1978-80. Fred Chaney has dedicated all of his adult life to engaging with Aboriginal people and speaking out for them on matters of social justice. I was pleased to see his presence in this great parliament over the last few days, for this House has produced no more fervent advocate of Indigenous rights than Fred Chaney. It is a privilege to be able to recall his service on this profound occasion.

Author and journalist Stuart Rintoul recalls that in 1909 the Aboriginal travelling protector James Isdell wrote in official correspondence:

I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring.

Mr Deputy Speaker, and to my colleagues in this place, through you: how could they forget? Yesterday was atonement by all of us who have been guilty of forgetting, denying and delaying. Can anyone imagine, having witnessed the outpouring of emotion by our Indigenous brothers and sisters, that they could ever erase from their memories the cruel and intolerable circumstances, all of them legally sanctioned, that were visited upon them? In such circumstances, would we have forgotten?

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Defence Science and Personnel) (10.41 am)—Mr Deputy Speaker, congratulations on taking up this onerous and very responsible task.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Sidebottom)—Thank you.

Mr SNOWDON—I acknowledge the member for Pearce and her contribution, which I thought was insightful and heartfelt, and also the member for Jagajaga and her contribution this morning. I think we have seen a great deal of strong leadership being shown on both sides of the parliament in the last 24 hours. One wonders why it took so long. A simple operation yesterday, really, just to say sorry—not difficult, not hard, a very simple exercise when it all comes down to it.

Yesterday we began in the 42nd Parliament a tradition; we had an event which is certain to become a tradition. We showed respect to the Aboriginal owners of the country on which this place sits and we acknowledged their ownership. The Prime Minister described the welcome to country as significant and, indeed, it is. But it was superseded by the monumental significance of the apology made yesterday to the stolen generations. It is significant for each and every one of those individuals affected by these past practices and those beyond them, but it is also significant for all of us, for all Australians, and it is profoundly significant for me.

Past policy in this area was wrong and people suffered. The words spoken in apology by the Prime Minister and others have been moving, respectful, as the member for Pearce has just demonstrated, and even noble. I want to support what has been said eloquently and evocatively by many speakers in the last 24 hours and to add some of my own reflections, far more personal in nature—personal because they derive from my 30-plus years of mixing with families in the Northern Territory affected by the assimilationist and racist policies of past governments. I have shared their range of emotions, from their happiness as adults reminisce-

ing about shared childhood times to their sadness at the loss, the hurt, the loneliness, the confusion and the anger that they sometimes feel—and paradoxically, illogically, but no less genuinely, their guilt.

What is yet to be fully recognised is that many stolen generation members share what other victims of wrongdoing often feel or are made to feel—that they are somehow to blame for what has happened. Even more painful for some is the doubt and guilt they can feel as they attempt to build their own family life. The people institutionalised were denied learning about families and later in life they have no experience to draw on as partners and parents. Often, as we know, they themselves were subject to abuse. People I have come to know well over the years speak of the anxieties and, perversely, their guilt in having to guess how to deal with the difficulties of parenthood.

By saying sorry, the government is finally helping the victims—the children, the parents, the brothers, the sisters, the aunties, the uncles—to move on, to leave behind the dark clouds of doubt or guilt that they may have burdened their lives with for so long. In saying sorry to these people, the parliament has performed that duty. Our nation's apology is significant and meaningful. Sorry: simple to say, complex in its significance.

The *Bringing them home* report documented the many personal stories of people removed and of the mothers and families who suffered from the removal of their children. The stories are from throughout Australia, but I am very familiar with many of the stories of those from the Northern Territory. There is one person whose life and times have mirrored the story of the stolen generations in the Territory, and that is Alec Kruger. Alec was on the floor of the chamber yesterday. His recently published book, *Alone on the Soaks—The Life and Times of Alec Kruger*, which was co-authored with Gerard Waterford, reveals a great deal about how the removal of children happened in the Northern Territory and its effect on the lives of so many, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. I was taken by Alec's words early in his book. When commenting on his reaction to the premiere of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, that very excellent film, Alec writes:

I was nervous that people around us would think less of us. That it would feed the idea it was somehow our fault and we could have done something about it.

I have spoken earlier about how the burden of unjustified guilt can be destructive. I believe that yesterday, the parliament saying sorry, giving a united voice to that word, went a long way to eradicating that crushing burden. Yes, finally, the burden has come back to rest on government and government policy.

Any fair-minded person reading any of the available evidence is shocked and repelled by what was done not in the name of welfare but in the name of assimilation. As historian Dr Peter Read, from the ANU, noted when studying the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act 1909:

White children too were removed from their parents. But white single mothers could apply for a pension to look after their own children.

Children could be committed to a suitable relative and they could be returned after a period of good behaviour.

Institutionalised children could be returned home for holidays.

No such provisions existed under the Aborigines Protection Act 1909 NSW, for its intention was to separate children from their parents (and their race) permanently.

It is only in recent times that we as a nation have realised what happened to many people—people alive today, people many of us know, people who have been here in Canberra this week.

When in 1990 Barbara Cummings, from the Northern Territory, completed her research into the removal of children and their institutionalisation, with its publication as *Take this Child*, many of us realised how little we knew of that part of our history. We realised how little we knew of the extensive attempts to destroy Aboriginal family life and traditions. Many people in the Northern Territory were shocked to learn of the systematic way in which a separation was undertaken.

Boys from Central Australia, people I know, adult men of my own age, were institutionalised in the Top End, often on Croker Island or at Garden Point in the Tiwi Islands. Michael Long is an example. Michael Long's father came from Ti-Tree and was taken to Croker Island and eventually to the Tiwi Islands. Boys from the Top End were sent to 'the bungalow' in Alice Springs, thereby ensuring complete absence of any family contact. The now infamous removal of children en masse from Phillip Creek, outside of Tennant Creek, and the journey to Darwin, over 1,000 kilometres in the back of an open truck on dirt roads, in those days, shows the lengths that the authorities went to to ensure permanent separation. Regrettably, and sadly, they were successful in many instances.

Even now, people in their 50s and 60s and even older are finding their family and family members for the first time since they were forcibly separated. For some the reunion is too hard; the damage is permanent. For others many years of no contact, of being told, 'Your mother wanted nothing to do with you. She didn't love you and she didn't care,' evoked anger and confusion in the stolen offspring rather than the desire for reunion. Reunion that has occurred was often slow, tenuous, fragile. For many others adopted or fostered interstate, often into uncaring and abusive situations, linking back up with the family was never an available option. To all of them, the parliament has said sorry.

Alec Kruger's account of his first reunion with his mother is interesting. Alec was taken perhaps as a three-year-old in 1927. Fifteen years later, more or less by accident, he met his mother for the first time since his separation. He was then wearing an army uniform. He ended up in Katherine and was directed to the Aboriginal compound on the outskirts of the town. Alec writes:

It had been more than fifteen years since I had been snatched and taken away by the police. For my mother to have me back standing in front of her must have been a tremendous shock.

... I didn't have a lot of experience dealing with strong emotions. Institutions, stockwork and then the army had toughened me up to shut down anything too hard. It had been such a long time since I had felt my mother's hug or any family affection, not since I was too young to remember.

Hugs and affection were not to be the inheritance of many Aboriginal people from the Territory and from many other parts of Australia.

I think it is difficult for us to understand this—those of us who are parents, who have children, who come from families where love is part of existence and the absolute bedrock on which we base our lives. Yet these young people, Alec Kruger among them, were taken, separated forever effectively. To finally gain that acquaintance again, to come in contact with the

family, how difficult it must be. I know of the heartfelt work of many who are involved in linking families together and eventually the positive rewards, the emotion that occurs as a result of that work.

We know how the arts have become a place for people to talk, to demonstrate their feeling about these things. Musicians—among them Bobby Randall, who was on the floor here yesterday, and Archie Roach—have given us hauntingly sorrowful, emotional songs about these experiences. They have played their very important part in the national recognition of what happened and what needed to be done. Now let that apology, that sorry, ring around the nation.

It is very difficult in my circumstances to actually convey the depth of feeling that exists within me, within my family and within many people that I work and live with about how important yesterday was. That is why, when I saw the emotion in the media last night of people actually joyfully crying, one wonders why we could not do it before. What is it that prevented us doing it? Happily, though, it has been done.

And now we have the challenges before us. We have said more than sorry. I have been working in and out of this place for 20 years, and for all of those years I have talked about Indigenous poverty. For all of those years I have talked about Indigenous education, health and housing. At last there is a beacon, a beacon which was lit by the Prime Minister yesterday, a commitment in the form of this commission which will involve the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister himself to unify and find a way to deal with the intransigence that exists with many of these policies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, unfortunately my time has run out, but I have to say to you that I am immensely proud to have been here yesterday. I am immensely proud to be part of a Rudd Labor government which is forging this new pathway ahead. It will be difficult. We should not underestimate the task in front of us. I would just say to you, and I say to the parliament and anyone else who might be listening, that we cannot do it on our own. We can only do it in partnership. We can only do it if we show respect to the Indigenous people of this country and work with them. We should not treat them as third-party objects; they should be treated as partners in the process. Too often in the past they have been the subject of policy, the objects of policy, and the stolen generations are but one example. I reaffirm again my commitment to the task that is before us and my support for that great deed that was done in this parliament yesterday.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (10.56 am)—I am the member for the Victorian seat of McMillan—and I am sorry. McMillan is geographically beautiful but has the same history of the destruction of Indigenous culture and community as much of this great southern part of the land of Australia. I am sorry for what has happened. The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs said only a few minutes ago that one of the responses to her yesterday was: ‘As you say sorry, we forgive. Forgiveness is freedom, a licence to move forward.’ Those are my words, not hers. In fact, the sentiment of forgiveness being freedom and a licence to move forward is a glimpse of a better tomorrow for many people, particularly for Indigenous people but also, of course, for non-Indigenous people. Freedom abounded yesterday in this House.

I have been completely taken aback by the experience of yesterday—and I do not come to this matter newly born. The member for Pearce mentioned former senator and member of the

House of Representatives Fred Chaney. Fred Chaney was a close friend of Barry Simon, the former member for McMillan. I was taken by the scruff of the neck by both men early on in my political activity and addressed this issue, because I came from a community in small town country Victoria where seldom would we come across an Indigenous person or have to address these issues. The issue did not come before me to be confronted, and now we have been confronted with this issue. The nation was confronted with this issue, and the people of the nation responded in a way that we can only be proud of. The momentum that grew over the 10-day or two-week period culminated in yesterday. As Greg Combet, the member for Charlton, and I walked out of the building in procession to the Senate, I said to him: 'You can come to this House and stay for 23 years and you may never experience another day like today. You may never experience this, and it is an honour to be in this House at this time.'

I have been taken aback by the responses not only from those who have spoken on the issue, such as the Prime Minister—and I applaud him—and the Leader of the Opposition. I note the magnanimous and magnificent way in which the Prime Minister stretched out his hand in a bipartisan manner and then walked in unity with the Leader of the Opposition across to the Indigenous elders. It was a moment to behold, one recognised by the nation. The speech I wrote five days ago was a speech to draw my colleagues, whether they be Liberal, Labor, Independent, Democrat or Green, together to take to the table for yesterday's sitting. But that happened as a consequence of yesterday and there was no need for that speech because so many, in unity, came to a place in their hearts and their minds where they saw this nation's heart crying out for a decision of intent, a decision in unity and a decision for both the individual parliamentarian and the corporate being of the parliament. They came in bipartisan concern over an issue that has been gurgling around in this nation for too long. In a symbolic way it was dealt with yesterday as the Prime Minister of this nation spoke the initial words of the apology. But the words of the scribes in our newspapers have really grabbed my attention. Tony Wright, writing in his column today, says:

Never, perhaps, has a deeper silence descended upon a prime ministerial speech in the House of Representatives.

In the crowded galleries above the gathered representatives, a handkerchief fluttered here, a hand moved to brush away a tear there. An old woman laid a comforting arm around the shoulders of—who knows, her daughter? Eyes were drawn to each of these small stirrings because all else was still, as if the whole place was holding its breath.

"For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

"To the mothers and fathers, the brothers and sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry."

Here was the word, used twice in two quick sentences by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, that everybody in those ranked, packed galleries had come to hear. There was, quite audibly, the exhalation of breath.

That same release—the hope of an expulsion, really, of a national burden—could be felt across the country, in public gatherings before giant screens in places such as Melbourne's Federation Square and Sydney's Martin Place, to clubs and parks in small towns and school classrooms ...

In Inverloch 40 people gathered on the beach at the time that the Prime Minister and the opposition leader were making their address. Forty people from my electorate were on that beach in Inverloch: a mixed group of people, one that would not be joined on any other issue,

the idea, driven out of the Uniting Church grabbed hold of by the thought of reconciliation of the nation. Forty people were standing on a beach and they were equally as important as the thousands who were out the front of this building. How many other 40s were around Tasmania? How many were around New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia? We know of many.

How many souls were simply on their own celebrating the moment? How many who were on their own stopped and said, 'Thank God for that; thank God we've done that'? They probably did not have a badge. They would not have had a T-shirt. They would not have had friends to hug. But I bet there were more than a million who stopped on their own and said: 'This nation has moved. This nation has done something.' A friend—a good friend—of mine rang me the other day and said, 'Don't apologise for me.' He does not identify, and I do not think any of us can. We can have empathy, we can have concern and we can talk about the issue, but we cannot know the loss of a child or the removal of a child. My only experience of that is seeing a whole family completely disintegrate after a car accident, which I was in, when my friend was lost. There was complete disintegration. They had all the support and money that they needed, but the family disintegrated. What would it be like if you had none of that support? I do not pretend that I know how that would feel. It is like saying to a mum with a disabled child, 'I know what you're going through.' You do not. You do not live it 24 hours a day.

I wanted something, and then I ran across the sports pages of the *Age* and the story of Syd Jackson was there. I can identify with Syd Jackson. He is one of the greatest footballers I have ever seen pull on a boot, along with Barry Cable and others mentioned in this article. But when you read it, you can identify:

'A lot of my friends passed away early because they'd had a pretty tough life, and even now, I'm forever going to funerals in connection with people I knew at a young age,' Jackson said.

'I always wonder where I'd be without football ...'

But also:

... six decades after he was taken from his mother's back at the age of three in Leonora in central WA—Jackson will welcome the long-awaited apology to his people from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd as a chance for the nation to truly embrace reconciliation.

But he also will feel for his cultural brothers and sisters, including his own two siblings, who were never given a chance like him to also have a meaningful identity.

'People win cases after being wrongly put in jail and are given compensation, while we've had the same thing for generations,' Jackson said yesterday.

'I was lucky because I got some support, but there are many faceless people without identities who did not have access to the social benefits this so-called lucky country had to offer. They just disappeared from the community.

'They had police problems, no jobs and just couldn't get on in life and they should be compensated. But I don't know what adequate is and it will never be enough because they lost their family, their language and their culture and have been discriminated against all their lives in terms of those social benefits.'

It is an article that you really have to grab hold of and read. The report continues, and this is the piece that really grabbed hold of me:

But he now believes the message of apology will help ease the pain.

'People look at me walking around in my suit and doing my work and wouldn't get close to understanding the grief I carry around in my head every day,' he said.

The grief he carries around in his head every day. I have to refer to Mike Steketee's article. He says:

Research quoted in the 1997 Bringing Them Home report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission gives the lie to those who argue that most children were rescued rather than stolen. Some, particularly those placed with families rather than in institutions, did receive greater opportunities than otherwise. But that did not necessarily make up for losing their parents. The studies found that indigenous people removed as children were less likely to be in a stable relationship with a partner, twice as likely to report having been arrested and convicted, three times as likely to have been in jail and twice as likely to report drug use. Their health was worse and they were disproportionately represented in Aboriginal deaths in custody.

There is much evidence to support all of that.

As the member for McMillan, I said I was sorry. As a member of this great House, I was proud to be a participant yesterday. But I believe this is a first step. It is unburdening for me and this nation to put yesterday behind us, and we can engage the day with a view to a brighter future, a future with hope for many. However, that deserves the response not only of the bipartisan commission that has been outlined but also of this parliament as we address the issues that have been raised by others this day. As Sir William Deane said, we will not have achieved our goals until such time as a black baby has the equal opportunity of a white baby in Australia.

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, and Assistant Treasurer) (11.10 am)—Many words have been said on this motion and many more will be said before it passes this chamber. I do not profess that there is anything I can say that will add to that debate. I do not profess that there is anything I can say that will be more eloquent than what was said by those who have come before me or those who will go after me, certainly not more eloquent than the Prime Minister yesterday. We just heard another eloquent contribution from the honourable member for McMillan.

Yesterday was a very emotional day. I was prouder yesterday than the day I was elected to this House; I was prouder yesterday than the day I was sworn in as a minister in this government—proud to be associated with the Prime Minister and with a government which has taken this action and proud to be a member of the chamber, which stood as one on that moment. It would be a matter of some regret for me if, after I left this House, I were to say to somebody that I was there for the apology motion but I did not speak, and I am not going to let that happen. Even though I do not propose to detain the House for very long, I do want to speak on this motion and add my apology, my personal apology, to that which the Prime Minister gave on my behalf and on behalf of all members.

Between 1910 and 1970, between one in 10 and one in three young Aboriginal children were removed from their families. Some went to a loving environment and were nurtured in their new homes; most were not. None of them were removed for any other reason than their colour and their race, and that means that the motives of those who did the removing, at the end of the day, are in some senses irrelevant. The fact that they were removed from their families, their loving families, because of their race is something that we need to be sorry for and something that we are sorry for as a parliament and as a government.

On 22 February 1933, JA Carrodus, who was Secretary of the Department of Interior of the Commonwealth, said: 'The policy of mixing half-castes with whites for the purpose of breeding out their colour is that adopted by the Commonwealth government.' It is appropriate that this parliament apologise for that offensive, stomach-turning policy which was carried out in our name as a nation. No parent who has not experienced it can begin to imagine the heart-ache and the gut-wrenching, stomach-turning sense of loss of the parents who watched their children being removed or came back to find their children gone; nor can we begin to imagine the psychological impact on children who had this done to them.

Those affected do not have to imagine it; they live it every day, still. They will live it every day that they are on this planet. We are therefore forced to imagine it if we can even begin to. As former Prime Minister Keating said, 'It seems to me that if we can imagine the injustice then we can imagine its opposite.' We can have justice. It will require imagination and goodwill. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition yesterday invited us to imagine it with them and, as the member for McMillan said, the Prime Minister extended the hand of friendship to the Leader of the Opposition and asked him to come with us on that journey.

The state is a continuum: members change, members come and go, ministers come and go. As a member of that continuing entity—the state, the government and the parliament—I apologise. As a parent who cannot begin to imagine what the parents went through, I am sorry.

We hear a lot today about early childhood, about the importance of the first years of life and about how somebody's chances in life are determined by the time they are three. Can we begin to imagine what we did to the chances of those people who were ripped from their families at very early ages? If it happened today, the eyes of the world would be upon us. If it happened today, we would be regarded as a pariah. There would be sanctions, we would be cut off from the world community—rightly so. But it happened at a different time. The fact that it was a different time does not excuse it. There were people who argued at the time that this was wrong. There were people, white and black, who said, 'This cannot be allowed to continue.' There were people who, despite the norms of the time, said, 'This is offensive.' They were not listened to. They were right.

But now we must build on this apology and move on. We must tackle the issues of child mortality, life expectancy, education, health—the list is endless. There have been governments of both persuasions who have tried over the years and who have had varying degrees of success, but nowhere near enough. Now we recommit ourselves as a parliament to doing that.

I remember as a relatively young man watching the then Leader of the Opposition Kim Beazley responding on the television when the report was first released. I think you might have been in the chamber at the time, Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom—no, you came just afterwards, my apologies. I remember the Leader of the Opposition losing control of his emotions during that speech. I remember wondering why. I remember thinking: what could be in that report? I went away and read it and understood immediately what had brought the then Leader of the Opposition Kim Beazley to that conclusion. Yesterday was perhaps an equally emotional day in a very different sense, a sense where we can now build on that and move on.

I do not speak for my electorate today; I speak for myself. I must say I have been just a little surprised about the strength of feeling in my electorate—the emails coming to my office are 10, 15 to one in favour of the apology. But I do not profess to speak for those who do not

support the apology; I profess to speak for myself and, to the degree I can, for those who do. I speak as a member of the continuing state and say, on behalf of those who came before us, we are sorry. I speak for them. I speak for all those who wish to move on and build on that in a sense of friendship and achievement—I am sorry.

Mr GEORGIU (Kooyong) (11.17 am)—Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, congratulations on your elevation. I would like to echo one sentiment expressed by the member for Prospect, and that is the sense of pride in being part of a body that could have a debate like this on both sides of the parliament. What the member for McMillan said, what the member for Pearce said, and what the minister on the other side said was very moving. It is very important. I wish to endorse what is a momentous apology of the parliament to members of the stolen generation, to their families and to their communities.

Let me first say how moving it was to have been in the House to hear the apologies given in the presence of those members of the stolen generation who were there in the House. The fact is that many thousands of Indigenous families across Australia have been affected by this tragedy and this injustice. Indigenous communities have lost their children and they have borne the burden of grief. We need to acknowledge the harm that was done and we also need to accept responsibility for the fact that our predecessors in this parliament played a major part in the removals. I do embrace this need both as a person and as a politician and I say unequivocally that I am sorry.

In 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission *Bringing them home* report revealed that between 1910 and 1970 across Australia many thousands of Indigenous people had been forcibly removed from their families, as a matter of deliberate government policy. The report told the stories of hundreds of living witnesses. They told of grief and loss, tenacity and survival. The knowledge of what had occurred in our recent past shocked and deeply moved our nation. It was the impetus for a Sorry Day movement that saw hundreds and thousands of ordinary Australians take to the streets and express their desire for reconciliation.

Through the recommendations of the report, the members of the stolen generations called upon this parliament to acknowledge the truth and to formally acknowledge the harm that had been done. Let us be entirely clear: this parliament was directly involved in the practice of Indigenous child removal in this country. Our predecessors enacted the laws that sanctioned it. They armed the bureaucrats, the police and the welfare officers with the tools to administer it. This parliament directly oversaw Aboriginal administration in the Northern Territory for the 50 years in which it pursued a policy of removing so-called 'half caste' children from Aboriginal settlements.

An insight into the thinking that underpinned these policies and these actions is given by the resolution agreed to at a national meeting in Canberra in 1937. This meeting was one of Aboriginal administrators from Commonwealth and state levels on the future of mixed-race Aboriginals in Australia. That resolution stated:

... the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth—

and it urged that—

... all efforts be directed to that end.

The absorption policy was furthered by the involuntary removal of mixed-race children from their Aboriginal families. The circumstances of child removal varied across Australia. In some states, young children were separated from their families but remained in dormitories on the same reservation. In others, they were sent to institutions to prepare them for employment in their early teens. In the postwar era, the policy of child removals continued throughout the nation as a matter of furthering Aboriginal assimilation. The number of children removed increased in the 1950s and the 1960s. Children were removed on grounds of alleged neglect. They were forced to attend faraway schools. They were removed for medical treatment and they were adopted out at birth.

For as long as it existed, however—and I think this needs to be emphasised when we are reflecting on the mores of the time—the removal policy was strongly opposed by many Aboriginal and other Australians. The Chief Protector of Aborigines in the state of Queensland once described the ‘kidnapping of boys and girls’ as a ‘serious evil’. Some parliamentarians spoke passionately against passing laws that allowed the arbitrary removal of Aboriginal children. One said:

These people have the same parental feelings and have the same love for their children as have white people; we must take that into consideration.

Aboriginal parents frequently pleaded with local authorities to stop the removals. A letter sent to the ‘Protector Aborigines’ in Alice Springs in April 1941 reads:

Will you please place this Protest, as we do not understand any forcible removal, of any of us, from this Central Australia, our birthright country.

The testimony of what was done does not just lie in historical records; it lies in the memories and the words of the members of the stolen generations themselves, and it is these testimonies of living witnesses that are truly compelling. They tell of the panic created by police raids on Aboriginal camps:

You can understand the terror that we lived in, the fright—not knowing when someone will come ...

They described the moment of separation:

We jumped on our mothers’ backs, crying, trying not to be left behind.

They speak of mothers—

... chasing the car, running and crying after us—

of parents fleeing with their children into the bush, darkening the skin of their half-white kids, and mums who ‘always made sure that everything was right in case welfare came around’. They spoke of ‘stolen years’ that have been lost forever. And they have asked for our apology.

One woman told the HREOC inquiry:

The Government has to explain why it happened.

... ..

... an apology is important to me because I’ve never been apologised to. My mother’s never been apologised to, not once, and I would like to be apologised to.

Through this motion, the Australian parliament is saying sorry to the members of the stolen generations and to their families and to their communities. This motion rightly calls us—all of us—to recognise what was done. We must heed the stories of those who suffered. The injustices of the past are many; the wounds are deep. This motion speaks of healing and of future

resolve. It commits us to never allowing injustices against Indigenous people to be perpetrated or repeated.

I have received hundreds of communications from my constituents asking me to support an apology to the stolen generations. In its bipartisan support for this motion, the parliament gives expression to a profound and widely shared sentiment of the Australian people. This unity demonstrates our commitment to address injustices that have been unfinished business for far too long. This motion exemplifies a new national determination to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. We need to move forward and do so with urgency. We need to do whatever it takes to address the causes of Indigenous disadvantage in Australia today. In apologising to the stolen generation, this parliament unites in a solemn recognition of the injustices of the past. We must use this united resolve to work together with Indigenous Australians to eradicate the injustices of the present.

I wish to place on record my gratitude to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who pursued the cause of an apology over the years when it seemed so difficult to attain. I support this motion wholeheartedly and without reservation. It has been too long in coming, and I share what I think is a widespread sense of relief that it is now done. As Sir William Deane—and I share the member for McMillan's taste for the former Governor-General's quotes—said:

This brings us back to the stage where we can really see and appreciate the importance of the spiritual as well as the practical aspects of reconciliation. We have again come to the stage where, spiritually, I think we are together. Now we can go on and start doing something.

I commend the motion to the House.

Ms KING (Ballarat) (11.27 am)—I want to start my contribution by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this parliament gathers, and I pay my respects to their elders. I also wish to pay my respects to the Wathaurong and the Dja Dja Wurung people, the traditional owners of the land in which the boundaries of the electorate of Ballarat fall. I also want to commend the member for Kooyong and the many members of the opposition who have spoken or will speak on this motion. It is truly wonderful that, as of yesterday, we have bipartisan support on the apology, and I think it is very important that we have had that.

Yesterday we had quite an extraordinary day, a day when we saw just what this country is capable of when we have compassion in our hearts. I want to add my voice to those of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in saying sorry to the stolen generations. I strongly support the motion of apology moved by the Prime Minister and respectfully offer my own apology. There are many things that I am sorry for. I am sorry that it has taken this parliament so long to formally acknowledge the harm done to you and successive generations of your family. I am sorry that the successive laws of parliaments and governments inflicted such pain, suffering and grief on you. I am sorry that these policies led to the shattering of families and to many of you never having known where you came from and not having the love of your families to guide you.

Yesterday the government honoured its commitment made not just during the election campaign but in successive ALP policy platforms to offer an unreserved apology to the stolen generations. I know that there are people in the community who do not quite understand why yesterday was so necessary if we are to move forward as a nation. I encourage everyone, if they get the opportunity, to read the *Bringing them home* report, which details what happened

to the stolen generations. The key findings of this report—and this report is now 10 years old; 10 years ago this report came out—are that nationally between one in three and one in 10 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families between 1910 and 1970. Indigenous children were placed in institutions and church missions, were adopted or fostered and were at risk of physical and sexual abuse. Many never received wages for their labour and welfare officers failed in their duty to protect Indigenous wards from abuse. This is in a report that is 10 years old. These children were removed from their families not on the basis that they were victims of abuse, although there may be some cases of that. They were removed from their families solely on the basis of their race. As the Prime Minister asked us to do yesterday: imagine if that were you. This is not some distant event that happened in the dim, dark past of Australia's history. Children were being removed under various assimilation policies as late as 1970. It has occurred within living memory of this generation.

My own district played a part. The four children's institutions in Ballarat—Nazareth babies home, Ballarat babies home, Ballarat Orphanage and St Josephs—were all recipients of stolen generation children, many of them coming from as far away as Gippsland. I am ashamed to say that, as a 20-year-old working in what was the Ballarat Orphanage, I did not know its part in the history of this generation of children and I would like to add an apology for my ignorance and my lack of curiosity about the history of the institution I worked in. Some of the stories of the stolen generation children who were placed in Ballarat Orphanage are contained in a local publication called *Faded Footprints: Walking the Past*, produced by the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative. The artwork on the cover of this terrific publication signifies all of the different communities from which people were taken—from across Victoria, to the centre, to Ballarat. The footprints in the illustration, which was done by fantastic local artist Marley Smith, slowly fade as they leave their communities and move in towards the Ballarat Orphanage to show that their culture was slowly fading as they moved into the orphanage because there was no teaching or training or acknowledgement of Indigenous culture once the children were placed within that institution. Many of the children—some of whom are now elderly; some of whom are now in their late 40s—say to this day that they are still learning about their culture and their heritage.

One of the children whose story is told in this wonderful publication was here in parliament yesterday. He is Murray Harrison, or Uncle Murray, as we know him at home. Murray has given me a copy of the book to present to the Prime Minister. Inside it he has inscribed, 'On behalf of my sisters and myself please accept this gift.' Murray's story is like so many others. Murray was living with his uncle and aunt in Bruthen in Gippsland after his mother passed away, leaving his father to care for seven children. One day, when his Auntie Dora was out picking peas—she was a seasonal fruit picker—and his Uncle Stewart was working in the axe handle factory, some men came. As Uncle Murray says:

We really had no idea as to how to defend ourselves. The government agency just came and took us. We were not neglected. We were not uneducated. We were a family who understood what it was to be in society. When we got to the courthouse in Bruthen, we said, 'No, we are not the people you want,' and they just with the stroke of a pen said, 'Well, we'll change the name'—and that was it. By the time my auntie realised we were gone, we were in Melbourne.

Murray and his two sisters were then taken to Melbourne to the Royal Park children's homes, where they were separated. Murray was put in what he describes as a cell. Murray says:

When you are 10 years old and you've never been shut in and you go into a dark room and the door is shut on you—well, 60 years later I can still hear that rotten door shutting.

I caught up briefly with Murray yesterday and I think it speaks so enormously of his incredible generosity that the first thing he said to me when he saw me yesterday was 'thank you'. It was very humbling. It is us who should be thanking Uncle Murray for being so patient with our ignorance of what happened to him and many like him. I hope yesterday goes some way to silencing the echoes of that shutting door for Uncle Murray, but I know that words alone cannot change what happened to him. There are many other stories in *Faded Footprints*. Karen Atkinson, who was taken into care at a very early age, spent 10 years in the Ballarat Orphanage and at the age of 15 was sent out to work and fend for herself. Her mother died three weeks prior to her leaving the orphanage, so she never saw her again. She did have some contact with her father throughout the remainder of his life. And there is Ray Fernell, who says:

The first time I went there it was like being put into some other strange environment again, which was a bit scary because you have got different people and you weren't sure what you can do and when you can do it.

There is Faye Thorpe's story, Nancy Peart's story and Lloyd Clarke's story—many stories of Indigenous people who came from a long way away in Victoria to Ballarat Orphanage and who then ended up settling in Ballarat. Dianne Clarke describes:

So they bailed us up there and took the parents, like dragged them off, kicking and screaming, around to our window and they were fighting. Our parents were putting up a good fight. Our mum was real little but was fired up and was fighting for her kids and I remember seeing the police just giving it to her, just punching her on the ground.

You can imagine the desperation of these parents as their children were being taken. These stories are just a very small number of the stories of Indigenous people of stolen generations who ended up in Ballarat and in the Ballarat orphanages and institutions in my electorate. I wish to formally acknowledge them here today.

I was also moved yesterday by the many schools across my electorate that participated in some commemoration of the apology. Some flew the Aboriginal flag and some like St Patrick's College dedicated their entire school assembly to talking about the stolen generations or, as in Edmund Rice School, welcomed strangers into their midst.

I hope that yesterday goes some way to bringing a greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians of what happened in our history and that we make sure that it never, ever happens again. I hope that it also means that we can move forward together, because there are many things as a nation we must do. One of those, which was acknowledged so strongly by the Prime Minister yesterday, is to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I again support the motion of the Prime Minister, which was supported by the Leader of the Opposition so gracefully yesterday, in making an apology to the stolen generations. It is long overdue, but it is wonderful that it has been done and I think together we can move forward as a nation, non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians together.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (11.37 am)—I have profound difficulties with the idea of an apology to the so-called stolen generation. Before I start, I would like to voice my dismay at the way in which the Prime Minister attempted to politicise this issue. Labor has been calling for

an apology for months, and the Labor government has been in power for over two months, and yet it could only release the wording of this much vaunted apology to the opposition and the Australian people at 5.43 on the evening prior to the apology. Is that because, despite its assertions, it really does not care that much and only thought of it at the last minute? Or is it that it is playing this as wedge politics? Or is it that it had legal advice that this will make the Commonwealth liable for compensation and it did not want it to be made clear to either the opposition or the Australian people? Indeed, if it was hoping for bipartisan support, why did it not give the opposition access to the legal advice? This clearly indicates that, on the part of the Labor government, there was no goodwill associated with this issue.

One of the first things I would like to note is that the majority of my constituents do not support this apology, perhaps for reasons the government is not prepared to acknowledge or consider, but it is a fact that my constituents reflect the majority view that, at this time, it is not the right thing to do. As a representative of my electorate, it is obviously critical that I represent their views. A survey carried out by a Channel 7 news poll in Perth yesterday asked the question, 'Do you agree with the government apology?' More than 13,000 responded and 90 per cent voted that they did not support the apology.

There are numerous reasons why I have decided not to support the apology. It is very important that I put these views forward so that I am not misrepresented. First, to the specifics of precisely who this apology is being made to, many in the community seem to believe that the apology is to the Aboriginals in general or to be made for invading Australia in the first place. The fact is that the apology is made to Aboriginals who are of the so-called stolen generation. The stolen generation relates to people of Aboriginal descent who were removed from their parents based on their Aboriginality. In the case of the Commonwealth government, responsibility for these policies was only in the territories. With regard to the Northern Territory, there was a court case, *Cubillo v Commonwealth*, that examined these issues in great detail.

Cubillo v Commonwealth found that, specifically with regard to the Northern Territory, there never was a policy of removing Aboriginal children for race reasons. This result was upheld on appeal. Justice O'Loughlin found no policy of systematic forced removal. Where forced removal occurred, the government was motivated by 'the twin forces of a sense of responsibility for the care of children and concern for their welfare as potentially unwelcome members of the Aboriginal community'. In relation to the breeding out allegations, O'Loughlin said 'there is much that might be said about the presentation of such an allegation in the light of the total absence of evidence to support it'. So it would appear that, according to the courts, there never was a stolen generation in the Northern Territory. There certainly were children removed, but it was for reasons other than race. As such, with regard to the specifics of whom the policy is addressed to, there is actually not an apology to be made by the federal government.

What is tragic is that the issue of an apology is made out to be a huge step in the reconciliation process—one that will make a huge difference on its own. The problem with this argument is that one merely has to look at what has happened in my state of WA to see just how meaningless an apology is. In WA, the state government was responsible for its own apology. Although an apology was delivered by the state, in the parliament, in 2001, Aboriginal life expectancy in that state has decreased since that time. This is a travesty and demonstrates that

mere rhetoric, for which Labor is renowned, is no substitute for policy designed to actually address the problem.

There is something very interesting in the PM's record on this. He was the mandarin—an appropriate term here, I think—in charge of the Queensland bureaucracy during the Goss Labor government. What policies came out at that period on the plight of the Aboriginal people? Let us give him the benefit of the doubt. Maybe he has seen the light subsequent to becoming the member for Griffith and coming to this place. I searched ParlInfo for Rudd's speeches in *Hansard*. Under the search term 'Aboriginal' I got two hits—one speech was about a local primary school and the other was about Howard's Aboriginal initiative last year, which he supported. For 'Aboriginals' I got zero hits, for 'ATSIC' I got zero hits and for 'native welfare' I got zero hits. So much for his genuine concern at the plight of the Aboriginal people of Australia. It would seem that, in all his time in this place, it is only in the past few months that he has discovered their plight.

In my perception, we have got our priorities wrong. Samuel Johnson said, 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions.' Unfortunately, this is the case here. For the last 40 years we have done all the wrong things for all the right reasons. We have given generously financially with scant regard for the effect of sit-down money on communities where there is no responsibility or accountability for the welfare. This is completely degrading, and I can only imagine the loss of self-esteem this engenders. Is this doing the right thing? I do not think so. Reverse racism is still racism, and there is something extremely paternalistic in handing out money in situations where other Australians would not qualify. What is that saying to the Aboriginal community—that they are not up to being responsible for themselves, so the government will look after them as if they are children? How can we continue supporting communities that are inherently unviable? Communities of around 20 or so people cannot be economically viable, and in supporting these unviable communities we condemn their inhabitants to a life of welfare dependency. This can never be acceptable.

Something that worries me is that at present you have social workers who are loath to remove Aboriginal children who are neglected or abused, because they are concerned with potential repercussions that might apply with removing these children. In fact, this extends further into Aboriginal communities. Dr Stephanie Jarrett, visiting research fellow, who did her PhD thesis on the pathology of violence inside one Aboriginal community, stated:

Lawyers use cultural rights to reduce penalties for domestic violence ... Where does this leave Aboriginal women? Domestic violence is the major source of Australia's internal refugees.

I apologise for the awful truths that are often buried under mountains of reports, excuses and bureaucratic activity. How can a mere apology even scratch the surface of the appalling figures that we have in terms of Aboriginal welfare?

The Australian Medical Association reported on the alarming rates of STD infection in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Its report states:

In the six months to June this year, 41 children aged under 10 presented with gonorrhoea, 41 with chlamydia, five with syphilis and 40 with trichomoniasis.

Among them, one child under four was diagnosed with gonorrhoea and another in the same age bracket with chlamydia.

It concludes:

The Aboriginal population accounted for 66 per cent of all chlamydia cases and 92 per cent of syphilis cases within the six-month period.

That begs the question: if this were happening to white children, what would society expect from the law in dealing with these perpetrators? Once again, how woefully inadequate is the word 'sorry'.

Consider in your hearts the truly indescribable suffering of a young Aurukun girl, 10 years old, who was raped by a group of juveniles. The attack left her with gonorrhoea. As Andrew Bolt wrote:

So why this monstrous leniency for the pack rape of an Aboriginal girl?

Because, said the judge in sentencing the juvenile rapists, "I accept that the girl ... probably agreed to have sex with all of you".

A 10-year-old? What makes the story even more indefensible is that, after the first attack, she was moved to safety to a family in Cairns and yet was forced to return to Aurukun because a social worker believed that it was defensible on the grounds of her cultural, emotional and spiritual identity. This is the sort of warped logic that has resulted in so much of the trauma and probably irreparable damage done to so many children.

What must be done in order to give these communities a future and the young people hope? Stop trying to attain the moral high ground by simply throwing more and more money into programs that have palpably and comprehensively failed. Take the success stories and start reproducing them around the country, beginning with actions that will deliver the most basic need for all of these people: a safe place to live and then the other basics of life, such as a healthy environment, housing and a good education.

Late last year, the Western Australian state government tried its utmost to prevent the release of a report into its dysfunctional Department of Indigenous Affairs. For whatever reason—lack of resources or policy based on ideology instead of sensitive practicality—this department failed the very people it was meant to serve. How real or sincere was the apology from that government, given the evidence of its actions? Despite the Prime Minister talking about the righting of wrongs of the past, he appears to be ignorant of the fact that it is impossible to right wrongs of the past. It is only possible to improve the future and learn from mistakes of the past.

Now I come to something that I am very sorry about. I am sorry that this parliament has lost a true champion of the Aboriginal people. Mal Brough was the previous minister for Indigenous affairs; he was someone determined to really make a difference to the Aboriginal people. He did not make a fuss about his own Aboriginal heritage but set about to try to break the cycle of poverty, despair, abuse and hopelessness. I sincerely hope that the new minister is as committed and as fearless as Mal Brough was to ensure that the conditions many Aboriginal communities find themselves in today are eliminated and consigned to the dustbin of history.

In conclusion, I would like to apologise to the Aboriginal people that, over the past 40 years, we have not initiated policies that have addressed the root causes of your people's problems. I apologise for the terrible situation some of your children find themselves in, as we have not had the courage—until the Northern Territory intervention—to systemically address the problem. I am sorry that we have allowed you to live in non-viable communities, pretend-

ing that by giving you welfare we were solving the problem. I am sorry that, despite apologies given by the states that were supposed to start actions that would genuinely help Aboriginal problems, Aboriginal life expectancy and health outcomes are not improving. I worry that many in Australia will now think that the job is done, whereas the job has not even started.

My hope for the future is to see Aboriginal society fully participating in Australian society, sharing with all Australians and reaping the benefits of cooperation and participation while retaining its own very distinct culture and heritage, as with so many other communities within Australia. I will push for policies that are not paternalistic and demeaning but instead are central to those who are struggling to help themselves. I will fight to ensure that children live in conditions of safety where they can dream and aspire to whatever they desire. I want an Aboriginal society that sees limitless horizons, not the short-sighted view of squalid communities which crush the human spirit. That is what I will fight for. That is my pledge.

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts) (11.51 am)—In the very first instance I want to disassociate myself from the remarks of the member for Tangney and note that the parliament as a whole did something yesterday which reflected well on each and every member of the House who supported the motion of the Prime Minister. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the formal acceptance by the parliament of the need to apologise to the stolen generations is something which marks off an end point in what has been a difficult, at times contentious, but ultimately futile debate that we have had in this country about the necessity of an apology. So I rise to support the motion moved by the Prime Minister.

I offer to the people of the Eora or Euro nation an expression that I understand conveys the meaning of sorry: *ngang doo ool*—I am sorry. I offer it unreservedly as a member of parliament, a member of the Labor Party, as someone who has grown over the years to understand the depth of Aboriginal experience and the sorrow that people have felt not only as a consequence of the state-sanctioned actions of institutions in the past that saw people removed from their families but more generally for the history of our engagement with Aboriginal people which has carried so much heartbreak, so much cultural dislocation and is a burden that we all bear.

It is a truly significant moment when we as a nation finally put on record the simple act of recognition of a past wrong. It is a time when we lift ourselves up as a country, as a nation, and lay another part of a foundation for moving forward with Indigenous Australians, whose forbearance I acknowledge, whose lack of animosity, whose lack of rancour, whose generosity of spirit has characterised this debate and characterised the participation of all those communities that visited the parliament yesterday. But this apology still comes late. For many Australians, but particularly for members of the stolen generation, the disturbing history has been a kind of a cloud that has hung over our heads. The apology is a symbolic statement, but it lifts the cloud. It provides space and opportunity for a more genuine and a more connected relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It promotes a steady footing to take on the important task of redressing disadvantage, of closing the gap that the Prime Minister spoke about in the parliament yesterday.

There was an expression used in the past: ‘white Australia has a black history’. I certainly feel that our engagement with this history is absolutely critical, not only in better understanding what has happened and trying to fathom some of the reasons for that but also, with that

better understanding, working out clearly how we can concretely move to deal with those practical issues of disadvantage that Indigenous people still face across a range of factors.

I learnt most of what I know about the history of Aboriginal people from songs—from song makers in the desert, with their clap sticks—when I first visited the Western Desert and was privileged to sit with elders, hear their songs and receive the translation of their songs. Song makers of the modern era are Archie Roach and the Warumpi Band. There are the paintings of Harry Wedge and many other painters too numerous to mention here. This is the way in which that knowledge and that history have been transmitted to us Australians. There is a fantastic repository of music, art and writing by Aboriginal people that we can now draw on and that will infuse us with a better understanding of the sorts of journeys that we need to take in the future.

I did not learn much about it at school, although I am very pleased to say that that situation has changed. There is a much greater addressing of Indigenous history than previously and an acknowledgement of that history. The way in which schools and young Australians respond to this apology I think will tell us that these young Australians do very clearly understand that we are at the dawn of a new age. We do not in any way take away from the work, the efforts and the activities of those who have passed by before, but for young Australians surely an apology of this kind offers them every prospect for working much more closely and much better with one another and also with Indigenous people to address those difficult matters that lie ahead.

The import of the motion, as the House knows, stems from the recommendations of the inquiry by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission conducted by Sir Ronald Wilson into the issue of the forced removal by authorities of tens of thousands of Aboriginal children from their families and their subsequent placement in institutions such as orphanages, often run by the church, and also their adoption. The *Bringing them home* report, which followed, contained a number of first-person accounts from members of the stolen generations.

No-one could read those deeply moving and personal reflections and not be in some way moved or affected. Indeed, I think it is difficult even for us in this House, where we talk for a living, it sometimes seems, to find words to adequately respond to that situation. Those of us who have families—and most of us here do, I think—are able to gain some insight into and have some empathy for what people went through. They found themselves often taken without notice. They may have ended up as domestic help in a farm or in a region of which they had no knowledge whatsoever, where they had no family and no connections of any kind. Often they were prevented from speaking to their families and from receiving food parcels.

I have to say that I took some exception to the comments in the speech by the Leader of the Opposition, even though we welcome the apology, when he referred to current situations of sexual abuse that people in Indigenous communities face. Let us be very clear about this. When young girls were taken from their families and were part of the stolen generations, they too were subject to terrible sexual abuse, often at the hands of people in the churches. Those churches have apologised for that. They have focused on that. They have reflected on that. They deeply grieve about that happening. But that was the historical reality, and no amount of trying to strike some middle ground between the concerns of the backbench and a wider community can obscure that fact for the Leader of the Opposition.

Even when the removal was voluntary—and sometimes it was: a mother in some instances might have felt that she was in a difficult situation, and she was concerned for the wellbeing of her kids—the child was then faced with suddenly going into a completely unknown environment. There is an account by Anne which says:

... a dreadful feeling of emptiness like lightning striking from inside, crippled me with fear. Then for the first time I realised the reality of the situation, I was leaving our dear mother, my brothers and sisters ... behind ... I was leaving the only home I have ever known.

In this case there was a kind of consultation, but in many cases there was not. There was no preparation for this shock, this abrupt dislocation, and the ongoing psychological and emotional trauma that people felt was real. For that, we surely should be saying sorry.

There is another aspect to the situation and conditions that the stolen generations faced which I do not think has had enough emphasis in the accounts and recollections of that time. It has certainly been raised by members of the stolen generations themselves. It is to do with the way in which their lives were completely taken apart in terms of family connection. Because many members of families were literally dispersed to different institutions, sometimes ultimately to different states, they were not aware at all of the movements, the whereabouts or the life histories of their own relatives.

I read an account from one person who did not know until 1995 what his brothers and sisters had done or where they had ended up. That is when he finally learned the whereabouts of his brothers and sisters and what had happened to them. 1995 is not recent history; it is yesterday. These effects were being felt yesterday, are being felt today and will continue to be felt into the future.

For the record, we do know that children were taken at any age, and often they were very young. We do know that the policy of the time was to absorb them into white society. We do know that people were graded by the colour of their skin. The terms of reference proposed by former Labor Attorney-General Michael Lavarch followed a sustained campaign to examine this situation. Those things were known at the time and, as a consequence, the commission heard some 500 accounts and had access to another thousand or so written testimonies. After the inquiry had considered those tales, it made the recommendations, including, importantly, recommendation 3:

That, for the purposes of responding to the effects of forcible removals ... reparation be made in recognition of the history of gross violations of human rights...

That recommendation included and identified acknowledgement and apology, measures of restitution, rehabilitation and compensation. On this occasion, the government has moved to address the first of these identified matters and it has made its position on issues of compensation clear. But it is my fervent hope that, in the future, the government, the opposition and the community will begin to consider how the remainder of these issues can be best approached and dealt with. The formal apology was step 1; the Rudd Labor government has moved and made that formal apology.

It needs to be noted that the Howard government's response to the report at the time was swift. The then Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Senator Herron, wrote to Father Frank Brennan and said:

Such an apology could—

and I note that he said 'could' —

imply that present generations are in some way responsible and accountable for the actions of earlier generations, actions that were sanctioned by the laws of the time and that were believed to be in the best interests of the children concerned.

There have been strong echoes of this argument recently from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, but I have heard others speak to this argument as well.

Mr Hayes—The member for Tangney.

Mr GARRETT—The member for Tangney clearly went on at some length about it, I am advised. But here is an argument that is based on a false distinction and on a misunderstanding of what an apology is ultimately really about. It held little weight when it was first put by the former Prime Minister; it holds even less weight today.

But, regrettably, the matter remained unresolved. It was a disquieting reminder of a failure of moral leadership. Former Prime Minister Keating made the Redfern address. Former Prime Minister Whitlam spoke eloquently to Vincent Lingiari. But, for former Prime Minister Howard, the issue just did not present itself in those terms. I will make no further reflections on the former Prime Minister other than to say that this was one of the great deficiencies of his leadership of this country. Not only did the argument that was put ultimately fall by the way in the face of what was so necessary for the course of an apology, it frustrated and stalled the truly genuine and reconciled engagement which we need to have with Indigenous communities and Indigenous leadership on the raft of issues that many in their communities face.

The consequence of the refusal of the former government to countenance an apology was that it suddenly became off limits. There was an idea that you should simply acknowledge the past and agree in that acknowledgement to say something about it. The fact that that acknowledgement could not be made in the highest parliament of the land stayed with people. It frustrated people. It disappointed people. It made them very sad. What was the point of it in any event? There have been culture war discussions about history. Let us be really clear about that history. I am the member for Kingsford Smith. The south of my electorate includes the northern border of Botany Bay. This is where Cook landed. This is where two Indigenous people met Cook with raised spears. This is where one was shot.

This is a community that has had visited upon it a range of difficult and confronting challenges over the years, including being a final refuge for members of the stolen generation. This is a community that still bears up to that history to this very day. Distinguished Aboriginal leader Mick Dodson identified a certain kind of deafness that seemed to permeate our response to the situation during the period of the former government. That certain kind of deafness has now become a listening to what people actually went through, an understanding of the great, great sorrow and hurt that they felt, and finally a recognition that this is about the soul of our country. Making this apology in this way breathes some life into, and shines some light on, our joined future. From this—it is more than a little thing—much bigger things will grow. It was a day of reckoning for the people of Australia and it is a matter of immense importance. I say with profound gratitude that I was a part of a government that was able to say, in the parliament, sorry. (*Time expired*)

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (12.06 pm)—I would not have missed attending the parliament yesterday morning. It was in fact a historic day. Over the last 12 years I have been privileged

to take part in many important events in the parliament. Yesterday was as good as anything that I have seen in the last 12 years. I am not ashamed to say that tears were rolling down my cheeks—it was such an event. Unfortunately, I am disappointed to say that I think the day was spoiled. There was an opportunity to not have the day spoiled. The day was spoiled when a significant number of Indigenous Australians and others who were participating in the historic day refused to accept that both sides of the parliament offered a sincere and genuine apology. What they did was not gracious; it spoilt the day.

The activists, the do-gooders and the Howard-haters have done a great disservice, in my view, to Indigenous Australians. They clearly did not realise they were turning their backs on the ability of our nation to put the past behind us. They want division and confrontation to continue. As a nation, we do not want that. Yesterday was a day when all Australians, no matter what their views were, could put those views behind them and walk together into the future for the benefit of our Indigenous brothers and sisters. It now appears that the back-turning was coordinated at rallies around the country. That spoilt the day, and that is very sad indeed. It signals to me—this is my greatest fear realised—that there is now little hope that anything is really going to change. A big day in the parliament, enormous goodwill, and we are not going to see any change. That really concerns me.

Let me relate to the parliament now some information about another Indigenous community. Two weeks ago I spent a week with the Indigenous community in Vanuatu. Vanuatu is a Melanesian community. Let me tell the parliament what I found about that community and the contrast between them and our own Indigenous community. In Vanuatu, everyone owns their own piece of land—everyone. They have their little plot in the village, no matter where it is. If they want to sell it, they can sell it. If they want to deal in it, if they want to move to another village, they can go and buy another piece of land in that village. And because they own their own land, individually, they take great pride in it. Of course, that does not happen in Indigenous Australia. They all build their own homes. They do not rely on the government to build something; they build it themselves. And, again, because it is their labour and their place, they take great care of it—and there is a contrast there with Indigenous Australians. Moreover, the village is always clean and tidy; the homes are clean and tidy. The pride is evident.

In Vanuatu, everyone works. They may work in the village garden or their own garden, but they work and they contribute and they feed their families. There is no social security in Vanuatu. There is no welfare. There are no handouts. There is no demand, ‘Just send us money.’ They are self-reliant; they look after themselves. They look after themselves very well. And, because of that, their health is in good order. Their life expectancy is in good shape. Compare that with Indigenous Australians. There is no alcoholism. People do not drink themselves stupid. Yes, they have kava, but they use it in a responsible way. There is superb leadership in the communities. There is always a village chief and there is always respect for the village chief. The village chief calls the village together when important decisions are to be made, and they all participate in making the decision, and they all stick by the decision that is made by the village. It is quite a contrast.

Another compelling contrast is in education. In Vanuatu, the government does not provide free education. Everyone has to pay to go to school, and that includes primary school. Do you know what the indigenous in Vanuatu do? They scrimp and save and work hard, and they raise the money, because they are determined that every one of their children will go to

school. And they go to school. What happens in Indigenous Australia where education is free? The kids do not go to school.

It is a chalk and cheese comparison. I am reminded of a visit that I made to the Federated States of Micronesia where, again, it is a Melanesian indigenous culture. But here is the difference: the United States just sends money, and that is how the Federated States work—they rely on the drip-feed from the United States. Do you know what that has caused for the indigenous people in that area? They have lost their farming skills. They just expect to have their food sent to them. Remind you of anything? It certainly reminds me of something, and great Aboriginal leaders like Noel Pearson have reflected on the same issue.

So what do we do about it? I have, for a long time, articulated that there are really three things that are needed in Indigenous communities before you will be able to fix the health problems and the education problems. Those three things are law, order and governance. Until Indigenous communities respect law and order and respect that governance has not got to be about nepotism and who you can favour, there will be no change. Until there is land ownership, there will be no change. And, of course, from land ownership come pride, economic prosperity and jobs. The final thing is leadership. Without strong leadership and without the will to follow that leadership in Indigenous communities, nothing will change. That is really sad.

So I grieve personally and I grieve on behalf of my community of 8,000 Indigenous Australians that, while things could be better, given the way we are going they are not going to be. It is a kind of fatalistic point of view, but I think we have to address the issues that I have indicated to the parliament today, and state governments have a responsibility to do so equal to that of the federal government. If we do not fix law and order, governance, landownership and leadership, in 100 years time someone will be standing in my place in this parliament saying, 'Things are disgraceful in Indigenous communities' as they will not have changed.

I want to leave the parliament this afternoon with a quote from comments made by the Reverend Shayne Blackman, who leads the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and also Shalom Christian College in Townsville, which is in my electorate. Shayne makes this observation:

There can be no better expression of an apology for the mistakes of the past—
than—

a commitment to programs and policies that truly deliver on our lifelong hopes and dreams for the future.

That is an incisive comment from an Indigenous leader in North Queensland. I support Shayne Blackman's comments, but I support very much fixing law and order and governance, landownership and leadership in Indigenous communities.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.17 pm)—I would like to start my contribution to this debate on the Prime Minister's motion of apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples by apologising to the Indigenous people of this land. I would like to apologise for the past injustices that have been done to the stolen generations and to give an undertaking to work to see that those injustices are made right in the future.

I am not the only member of this parliament—there is one other member on the opposition side—to have been a member of another parliament when such an apology was given, and to

have witnessed an apology on two occasions. I sat in the state parliament of New South Wales about 10 years ago and was there when an apology was given to the Indigenous people of that state. It was a very moving experience on that occasion. But I would have to say, having been part of what happened in this House yesterday, that yesterday's was probably the most inspirational, moving experience that I have had as a member of parliament. It was historic. It was a very emotional day and other members who have spoken before me have said how they had tears in their eyes. I felt exactly the same and saw all those people in the gallery feeling exactly the same way I felt. Those present were so committed to the making of that apology, receiving that apology and then moving forward into the future. I think it shows our maturity as a parliament and our maturity as a nation. The magnanimous nature of our Indigenous Australians was shown—as I heard the minister say earlier today—when the minister gave the apology and that apology was accepted. That is how it is. It is the start. It is the beginning. It is the first step forward for the future. While sitting in this chamber this morning, I have heard some of the most wonderful speeches I have heard in this parliament. This apology is very personal. Each of us views it in a different way and it means something different to all of us.

I grew up on the north coast of New South Wales. I lived next door to a hospital and from time to time young Aboriginal children would turn up in this hospital. They would be allowed to come and play with me and I thought it was wonderful and then they would go. I did not understand and did not have a clue what was happening. These were children who were ripped away from their parents, taken from families, put in the hospital and then farmed out into the community. When I was at high school, a large number of Indigenous students came to that school, in the town that I grew up in. There were basically two rules, two streams within that system. The school I attended was Macksville High School. The non-Indigenous population generally were streamed into the top classes; the Aboriginal kids were generally streamed into the lower classes. The expectation placed on those children was totally different from the expectation placed on me. Their treatment was very different from the treatment that I received.

There was one Aboriginal student by the name of Gary Foley. I think he now lives in Melbourne. When he did his school certificate year 10 he performed outstandingly. He came back in year 11, and I can remember it as if it were yesterday. The then principal of the school stood up and said, 'Gary Foley, what are you doing back here?' Gary Foley was not there the next day. These are the types of things that have been perpetuated through our education system, perpetuated through our health system, where those young Aboriginal children who used to turn up in the hospital next door to me then disappeared and throughout their life had totally different expectations placed upon them.

I see this apology as the beginning, a start to the future. Yesterday in parliament, when the Prime Minister stood up and made his speech, you could have heard a pin drop because it was perhaps one of the most significant speeches that a Prime Minister has ever made. Then I looked around and the way people jumped to their feet and clapped was spontaneous. That spontaneity happened because he had touched their hearts. He had built a bridge between this parliament and those Indigenous Australians who have suffered for so long. I welcome the fact that the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister are going to work together bipartisanly to move forward from that apology to try to address the dreadful educational and

health outcomes that Indigenous Australians are faced with, those social determinants that affect their lives each and every day and the battles that they have to combat.

One might ask: why are we apologising? Some of those young people who were taken from their families have had successful lives. I believe that the member for Tangney made a contribution stating that he felt it was actually in the interests of those people who were taken from their parents, that his electorate proved it and that he believed that those children were better off taken away from their parents.

I will address it from the perspective of a mother. If anyone tried to drag my children from me, I know how I would feel. If, as a child, I had lived in an environment where I did not know who my parents were; where I was isolated, where I did not have the love and the nurturing that I did have, then I know I would be a different person from the person that I am today. It is not about wealth, it is not about all those 'things' that we can buy—it is about family, and family is so important in Indigenous communities. That is what we have denied the stolen generation.

One of those watershed experiences in my life was reading the *Bringing them home* report. I remember that I was sitting in a plane when I was reading this. I had tears running down my face as I read story after story; I could feel the hurt of those people. As a nation, for us to have sat back and let that happen—as I have already said, I lived right next door to a hospital where it was happening—means that we do have something to apologise to our fellow Australians for. Let us clean the slate and move forward; look to the future.

Yesterday's experience was made even greater by the fact that some of our past prime ministers were present: Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. We also had a previous Governor-General present, Sir William Deane, whose work in this area has been monumental and whose contribution to this debate has been outstanding. Fred Chaney was also present and those people involved with Reconciliation Australia were present. This made the day historic, because it brought together those against whom the injustice had been done and those who recognised that there had been injustices. To right those injustices, the apology needed to be made so that we as a nation can become a whole nation, so that we can truly join hands with our fellow Australians—Indigenous Australians—and look to a future where we will be a united nation.

In my own electorate I am pleased and proud to have been able to join with the Bahtabah Aboriginal Land Council, Mr Michael Green of Bahtabah LALC and Mr Robert Coombs, the state member for Swansea, in celebrating this historic occasion with a local community function, held yesterday. I have recorded my commitment on a plaque that, with the member for Swansea, I have presented to the Bahtabah people.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Hayes**) adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (12.29 pm)—I move:

That the Main Committee do now adjourn.

Port Phillip Bay

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (12.29 pm)—I rise in relation to the effects of the now-begun channel-deepening process upon dive operators within the electorate of Flinders, on the Morning-

ton Peninsula and within Port Phillip Bay. There are two issues that I wish to raise here. The first relates to the impact of the toxic sludge from the mouth of the Yarra; the second relates to the economic impact and the environmental impact on the dive operators, their businesses and those who wish to partake in activities in the south of the bay.

Let me turn first to the toxic sludge. I have made it clear throughout previous years, and I reaffirm that position, that, whilst I recognise that the broader project is inevitable, the process of taking from the mouth of the Yarra two million tonnes of toxic sludge—which contains zinc, cadmium, mercury, other heavy metals, dieldrin, DDT and a toxic cocktail of approximately 270 other recognised pollutants—and then dumping it in the middle of Port Phillip Bay is a negligent, unacceptable and ultimately dangerous process which should not be allowed to occur. I want to repeat that: that process of dumping toxic sludge is unacceptable. It is held in suspension for 150 days and it is subject to tides, weather, waves and all the vagaries of being in a suspended solution. For 150 days zinc, cadmium, lead, mercury, dieldrin and DDT will be allowed to float free in the bay.

There is an alternative, and that has been set out both by my colleagues at the state level in the Victorian alternative government and by us. It is very clear that land based options for the disposal of two million tonnes of toxic waste, or approximately eight to nine per cent of the project, must be fully examined. As it stands, it is unacceptable. That is a position which I have put previously and which I maintain as the member for Flinders, and the federal opposition have set that down as a very clear position.

The second issue is in relation to the divers and the dive companies within the electorate of Flinders. What I want to say is very clear. Already we have reports from people, such as Jason Salter, who is a dive operator on the Mornington Peninsula, that the quality of the water—and the diving—has been greatly affected. The position of the Port of Melbourne Corporation is that people can simply dive elsewhere. In reality that will mean that the impact on local businesses will be profound. They have essentially been treated in a way which is not only arguably unconstitutional but also improper and immoral. I say that because their businesses will be cut to the quick without any compensation.

The state has moved to deny the possibility of compensation for these businesses as an ordinary fund or process which should be the corollary of a major project. In effect, it is transferring wealth from small business owners to an enormous state owned corporation and to the great shipping companies and stevedoring companies. This is the transfer of the hard-earned family earnings of small business operators to big business. That is what is occurring, and there is no feasible compensation process. The state has ruled that out. The small businesses know that it is economically impossible for them to take on the Port of Melbourne or corporations which are hundreds of times larger, if not thousands of times larger, than them. So they have no real approach.

My position is very clear. It is the same as the Victorian opposition's. A compensation fund must be set up. There must be an approach to dealing with businesses who are right now, this day, about to lose their economic viability. The mums, dads and families who have given years to build businesses will be the ones who will suffer. Very simply: there should be no toxic dumping and there should be a peninsular recovery plan. (*Time expired*)

Fowler Electorate: Federal Election

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (12.34 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you on your return to the parliament and on your election as Deputy Speaker. I am sure that we can rely on your fairness and management skills to bring out the best in debates in the Main Committee and the House. I would also like to take this further opportunity to thank the people of Fowler, who have done me the honour of electing me to be their representative in this parliament for the fourth time.

The Fowler electorate that I represent today is very different from the electorate I represented in the last parliament. The redistribution of electorates in New South Wales placed 40 per cent of the former electorate in the neighbouring seats of Blaxland and Hughes—and I congratulate my colleague Jason Clare on his election to the seat of Blaxland. In place of those areas transferred to other electorates, Fowler now includes semirural areas which were formerly part of the electorates of Macarthur and Hume. I was greatly pleased with the election results from booths in those new areas, where swings to Labor of over 10 per cent were seen. Overall the Labor vote in Fowler increased by almost five per cent, and I am most grateful for the support I received as the Labor candidate. I am now looking forward to the challenge of representing the people of Fowler in the 42nd Parliament.

I also welcome the large number of new faces elected to the Labor side of the parliament in the November election. As one of the class of 1998, which saw a large batch of new members, including you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, I can be confident that the class of 2007 will also make its mark on this great parliament. There are too many to name, but here I would especially like to welcome the return of the member for Braddon, whom we dearly missed after the 2004 campaign. Welcome back, Sid.

On a sadder note, we will miss our one casualty of the November election. Kim Wilkie, the former member for Swan, lost by a very small margin. Kim has been a great friend to many on both sides of the parliament as well as a dedicated member whose service as Deputy Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties and on the Speaker's panel will be missed by all. As a bench-mate for the last six years I will certainly miss his wicked sense of humour, not to mention his 'boy's own adventure' tales of his times in the Defence Force parliamentary program. I am sure other members will join me in wishing Kim Wilkie well in his life beyond this parliament. I can fully understand how some members opposite must feel, having lost so many close friends and colleagues.

The election of the Rudd Labor government on 24 November was a historic occasion. It is only the third time in my lifetime that the Labor Party has been voted into government at the federal level from opposition. The result was decisive and, while many reasons have been given for the Howard government's loss, clearly the issue of Work Choices stood out as a major cause. I know that, in my campaign in the Fowler electorate, it was the issue that voters focused on, and the results confirmed just how important that issue was. In neighbouring seats, Labor candidates were able to attract large swings thanks to the vigorous campaigning of trade unions on the Work Choices issue. It would be very foolish of opposition members not to concede that Work Choices was the biggest reason for their loss. But this was not the only issue. In western Sydney and other parts of New South Wales, working families did not believe that they had 'never been better off', despite the assurances of John Howard, the former member for Bennelong.

As we consider the impact of further interest rate rises, the greatest challenge for the Rudd government will be to manage an economy which is stretching the available resources in some regions, while others are stagnant. Managing the Australian economy today will require new strategies and tools if we are to successfully see this country through this difficult period. A true Labor government, with the interests of working Australians at heart, must not betray the confidence placed in us by the people of Australia.

In the short time I have left to speak, I would like to thank a young lady, Emma Brindley, for the wonderful work she did in the Macarthur campaign on behalf of the ETU. Thank you.

Solomon Electorate: Australian Rules Football

Mr HALE (Solomon) (12.39 pm)—May I join the long list of people who have congratulated you, Madam Deputy Speaker Burke. I was not going to, because I have seen you shrug every time you hear it, but I will take the opportunity. Congratulations on your appointment.

Today I rise to speak about an AFL team from the Northern Territory which is to play in a southern football competition in 2009. While the details of this team are still to be finalised, it is a fantastic step forward for people in the Northern Territory and, in particular, its footballers. It has been a dream of former administrators of the football leagues up there, and one man in particular deserves special mention, a guy by the name of Darryl Window. Darryl has been very passionate in pushing for this to occur.

By coincidence more than by design, this week is the 20th anniversary of the AFL bicentennial carnival, which was first held in Adelaide in 1988. At this carnival the Northern Territory was crowned division 2 champions. That team was coached by John Taylor, who coached at the St Marys Football Club in Darwin. His coaching record was impeccable, with 11 premierships to his credit in his 13 seasons as coach. Legends of Australian Rules football such as Maurice Rioli, Michael McLean and Michael Long played in that team, and the team went through undefeated at the bicentennial carnival. Twenty years on and the side now looks as if it will be playing in a major southern competition in the winter of 2009.

One really good side of this is that the netball side has been involved as well. In Victorian country areas and in New South Wales in particular there is a close association between football and netball, and this has become the reality with this side. There has been dual sponsorship, with funding going towards the netball to give young ladies an opportunity of playing at a higher level.

Due to the tyranny of distance, we need this sort of opportunity for people in the north of Australia. It is not only about football; it is about community and lifestyle. One of the rules they have for the team, which I think is fantastic, is that you have to be either working or studying; you cannot live the life of a footballer who gets to sleep in all day and party all night. I think there are some benefits to that. It encourages young players to look at their life outside football and have some employment or study opportunities to fall back on. The CEO of the Northern Territory Football League, Tony Frawley, and AFL ambassador Michael Long have been instrumental in lobbying businesses as well as the Territory and federal governments to make this team a reality, and I would like to put on record their contribution.

Anyone that has been watching on TV the football being played up in Darwin at the moment and televised around Australia through the ABC would have seen the Tiwi Bombers run

around. They are a fantastic side, and I think that this side will play a very similar style of football, so I do look forward to reporting to the Main Committee how the side is going.

For players up there it is certainly a difficult pathway to the AFL, and I think that this will enhance opportunities for players who are not part of the draft process to play AFL football. A lot of times we need players to go interstate, and second-tier clubs are often not set up adequately to cope with players coming down. A lot of our Indigenous players struggle with that. This will give our locally based players in Darwin and Alice Springs the opportunity to stay in the Territory with the support of their friends and family and play at a second-tier level with the hope of stepping up to the AFL. The other benefit of this is that Alice Springs will be heavily involved, and there will be traineeships and employment opportunities in Alice Springs for people involved with the team. So I will report back to the Main Committee once they start playing next year.

Mr Trevor Sprigg

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (12.43 pm)—On 17 January 2008 the Western Australian parliament lost a popular member and colleague, and Western Australia lost one of its sporting heroes: Trevor Sprigg MLA died suddenly at the age of 61. Trevor leaves his wife, Lyn, five adult children and six grandchildren, along with many good friends and colleagues who will feel the loss of Trevor and miss him dearly. Trevor's eldest son said he was surprised at Trevor's reputation as a hard man on the footy ground. He knew his dad had a softer side. He knew the man who shed tears of pride when the national anthem was played and loved nothing more than playing footy and cricket with his grandchildren in the backyard. I am proud to say that Trevor Sprigg was a good friend, and it is here today that I honour his memory and recall him as a larger-than-life character who achieved success in several different careers throughout his life.

Trevor said in his maiden speech to the Western Australian parliament that it seemed to him that his destiny was to be involved in representing people somewhere along the line. He certainly spent his life doing that. When you look at Trevor Sprigg's life achievements, he fulfilled his destiny of service to the community and the people of Western Australia for a long time. Trevor began his working career as a high school teacher, and in fact one of my staff members proudly informed me that she had been one of his students. Trevor encouraged, cajoled and trained his students to achieve their highest potential. It was an indication of what was to come in his later sporting career. Most Western Australians know Trevor as a champion footballer who held all positions associated with his beloved footy. He was a player, coach, team manager and chairman of selectors at various clubs, including the West Coast Eagles in the early 1990s. A born sportsman, he found the time to play first-class cricket and was awarded life membership of the East Fremantle Football Club, the East Mercantile Cricket Association and the East Fremantle Cricket Association. Later in his sporting career he was a consultant to the WA Football Commission on the formation of the Fremantle Dockers. If that is not enough for one lifetime, Trevor Sprigg was the promotions manager for the Swan Brewery, controlling a budget of \$4 million per annum for sporting grants and scholarships. Never letting an opportunity go by, in his spare time Trevor was a part-time football commentator on radio as well as TV and in addition was a sports writer for the *Sunday Times* and the *Melbourne Age*.

Trevor was elected to parliament in 2005 as the member for Murdoch, within my electorate of Tangney. From the moment he was sworn in he hit the ground running and proved to be an energetic, enthusiastic and committed representative. On the field he was an uncompromising defender—and he carried that into politics. He was an uncompromising defender of the people of Murdoch on such matters as the controversial and disastrous deletion of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and Roe Highway stage 8, childhood obesity, the expansion of St John of God Hospital and the encroachment of large power lines in his suburbs. He paid attention to the details, looked after his electorate's concerns and was always available to his constituents. It was a testament to his strength of character and the respect he enjoyed from his parliamentary colleagues that he was nominated opposition whip, a role he accepted with much pride and capability. His commitment to the Liberal Party was such that he was rushing back from an interrupted holiday to attend an important party room meeting. He was also concerned with an attempt by those who coveted his seat to remove him—in the guise of a redistribution—from most of the area he had represented so well. All these matters were weighing heavily on him. In closing, I will say that Trevor was a man of great humour who had a great commitment to his constituents and a great love for his family. What you saw was what you got. The new Liberal candidate, Christian Porter, will no doubt represent Murdoch with great distinction, and I am sure he will appreciate that he has very large shoes to fill.

Education

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (12.48 pm)—As I look around the parliament, one thing that tends to unite a lot of parliamentarians is—oddly enough—that we are parents. In my case I am a very, very proud grandparent. Leading on from this, as parents or grandparents we want the best for our children and for our children's children. One of the things that I take particular pride in, in terms of the election of the Rudd Labor government, is our commitment to education. To have the best jobs and the best opportunities in life, Australian students need to receive a first-class education. They need a world standard education. This will require a considerable amount of investment, both public and private, and we will need to look at the quality of subjects to ensure that students are well trained. We also need to have dedicated teachers and the best classroom facilities. Our children have to have access to computers, laboratories and workshops.

Labor's policy, which is now being put into operation, of providing for a digital education revolution, will set a benchmark for education in this country. Students from years 9 to 12 will soon have access to computers and digital information technologies. Under Labor's plan, schools will soon—next month, in fact—be able to apply for grants of up to \$1 million, either for the facilitation of computers or to enable the introduction of computers for every student in years 9 to 12. That is an investment, over four years, of \$1 billion. I think that is a significant commitment to the welfare of families—most of all to the welfare of our kids. It is an investment in their futures.

Over the course of our lives as parliamentarians we do spend a lot of time at schools. Since the announcement of the Rudd Labor government's commitment to the digital education revolution, I have received an enormous amount of support for that policy. That support has come not only from school principals but also from P&Cs, student bodies and parents. The policy has a uniting aspect to it, because, as I said earlier, this is an investment in the futures of our

children. So whether those schools be government schools, systemic Catholic schools or independent schools, all see this as a significant contribution.

There is a school in my electorate in Prestons, the Islamic school Sule College, which has 1,100 students with 600 high school students. This year alone there are approximately 400 students in years 9 to 12. The financial controller of that school, Recep Aydogan, indicated to me that his school community was over the moon that a federal government would take so seriously their commitment to taking education forward.

We are not just continuing funding to education; we are putting funding resources into a targeted aspect of education which will take things forward. We are not talking about simply giving IT education; this is a matter of incorporating computers and computer based technologies into the teaching of all subjects. This is a matter of taking our teaching methods and learning tools into the future. This is a matter of equipping our kids as they grow up with the knowledge and skills they will need in order to participate in a world that is vastly changed from the one we grew up in and one that is highly competitive. I support the policy. (*Time expired*)

Asia Society

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (12.54 pm)—In December 2007 I received a letter from the global organisation Asia Society, and I want to acknowledge that letter. I want to put on the record of the parliament that the Asia Society very generously invited me to join their international advisory council. I also want to place on record—both as an individual who very strongly supports the values, aims and philosophy of the Asia Society and as the sitting federal member for Ryan—that I was greatly honoured by that invitation. Of course, I accepted it as a great privilege and with feelings of humility. I want to spend some time today, as I will do over the term of this parliament, speaking more about our relationship with Asia and, indeed, about organisations such as the Asia Society.

The Asia Society was founded in 1956 by a very distinguished American, John D Rockefeller III, and it was initially formed to promote a greater knowledge of Asia in the US. Today the society is a global organisation—it has offices in Hong Kong, Manila, Mumbai in India and here in Melbourne. Its US offices are in New York, San Francisco, Houston, Los Angeles and Washington DC. It also stretches to mainland China, where there is an office in Shanghai, and to South Korea, where it has an office in Seoul. Clearly, it is a global organisation with a footprint in many important cities of the Asia-Pacific region.

The society originally aimed to promote a greater understanding between Americans and Asians, but today its mandate is wider than that. Its mandate is to try to connect all citizens of the world with each other as much as possible, but with a clear focus on Asia. It tries to fulfil its mandate through a wide range of cross-disciplinary programs and events.

We know that today we have a very globalised world. As economies and cultures have become more linked and interconnected, the Asia Society has an even greater opportunity and obligation to expand its mission and its philosophy across the region and the peoples that it touches. We all know that globalisation has made enormous inroads in many parts of the developing economies in Asia, but we also know that it has left some negative footprints, and there are big gaps in those parts of the region. The Asia Society exists to try to close the gap, so to speak, and to raise concerns in the capitals of the developed economies and the devel-

oped world—in addition, of course, to the rightful role and place of the governments of those countries.

The Asia Society has a big focus on issues such as human rights, the status of women, environmental issues and global health issues, such as HIV-AIDS. I want to reflect on the remarks of significant world leaders. President Hu Jintao of China said:

Over the years, the Asia Society has endeavored to strengthen U.S.-Asia exchanges and cooperation and promote China-U.S. relations ...

Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, of India, spoke of the Asia Society in glowing terms:

... the Society has been invaluable in bringing together a wide variety of opinions on the encounter between Asia and the United States—

and now, with an office in India—

... has contributed to the transformation in India-U.S. ties manifest in recent times.

Former Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, spoke of the Asia Society thus:

The Asia Society has been playing an important role in deepening ties and understanding among the peoples of Asia-Pacific and the United States. I truly expect the Asia Society will enhance this role for furthering the region's stability and prosperity.

In closing, I want to again thank the chairman of the Asia Society, Richard Holbrooke, and its president, Dr Vishakha Desai, for their very generous invitation, acknowledging my skills and passion for developing and strengthening this country's ties with Asia. I am pleased to say that, when I joined the Australian advisory council last year, I also joined the Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, and our shadow foreign minister, Mr Robb, on that advisory council. Now that I have been invited to join the international council, I also join a former foreign minister, Gareth Evans, and a former federal minister, Warwick Smith, on that council. (*Time expired*)

Question agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 12.59 pm