

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 26 June 2002

ABSENCE OF Mr SPEAKER

The Clerk announced the absence of Mr Speaker.

Mr Deputy-Speaker (Mr John Charles Price) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

Mr Deputy-Speaker offered the Prayer.

AUDIT OFFICE

Mr Deputy-Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 38E of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, Performance Audit Report entitled "e-Government: User-friendliness of Websites", dated June 2002.

Ordered to be printed.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (POLICE AND OTHER LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS) BILL

MINING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (HEALTH AND SAFETY) BILL

Bills received and read a first time.

BILL RETURNED

The following bill was returned from the Legislative Council with amendments:

Property, Stock and Business Agents Bill

Consideration of amendments deferred.

PARLIAMENTARY REMUNERATION AMENDMENT (RECOGNISED OFFICE HOLDER) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 June.

Mr TINK (Epping) [10.04 a.m.]: The Opposition accepts the Government's reasoning in support of the bill and does not oppose it.

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [10.05 a.m.]: I have read with interest the public comments about this legislation. I fail to understand the reasons for it, other than to assume that both the Government and the Opposition have come to an arrangement of not following the rules that have previously been put in place. In other words, when something happens that requires a change of rules to meet certain circumstances, the parties get together and make an arrangement. As an Independent member of this Parliament I oppose the bill and indicate clearly that I do not think there has been enough public debate in this Chamber on it.

The fact that the honourable member leading for the Opposition said about ten words in support of the bill says a great deal about the arrangements that perhaps have been discussed prior to the bill being agreed to. There has been nowhere near sufficient scrutiny on behalf of the community. The bill should be opposed and the existing rules should remain. No additional arrangements should be made on behalf of members simply because of circumstances, which are very clearly outlined in the rules. If the number of members were to drop below ten, certain things would arise. That is a legitimate outcome and if this Parliament believes in public scrutiny and appropriate outcomes, it will not allow the passing of this legislation. It will lead to people assuming that some backroom deal has been done between the parties. That is highly inappropriate and the bill should be rejected.

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.07 a.m.], in reply: This bill has been on the notice paper for almost a week. It has already received substantial publicity, not by virtue of its second reading

in Parliament but the fact that it appeared in one of the major newspapers. I reject the criticism of the honourable member for Northern Tablelands that there was some closed deal between the Government and the Opposition on this issue. It involves the application of manifest fairness and equity. The honourable member is mistaken in his comments.

This bill was introduced on 18 June. He will note that today's program indicates in big, bold letters at the top that this would be the resumption of the debate on the Parliamentary Remuneration Amendment (Recognised Office Holder) Bill. The purpose was to draw attention to this bill more than any other bill. Ten years ago the honourable member may have been correct but honourable members in this Chamber now receive their entitlements by virtue of the Industrial Court. As a result of amendments made by the Government, we are entitled to no more than ordinary workers, namely, access to the Industrial Court of New South Wales. That is the end of the matter. Therefore, the Government rejects the criticism of the honourable member for Northern Tablelands and commends the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put.

Division called for and, pursuant to sessional orders, deferred.

LEGISLATION REVIEW AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 June.

Mr TINK (Epping) [10.09 a.m.]: The Opposition supports the Legislation Review Amendment Bill and congratulates those who have been working in this area, particularly members of the Standing Committee on Law and Justice who produced the report entitled "The New South Wales Bill of Rights". In the report, the committee rejected the notion that it was in the public interest for New South Wales to have a bill of rights. I agree with that finding. The committee went on to make a number of recommendations that would beef up the role of the Regulation Review Committee. I believe this is a good substitute for a bill of rights and recognition of the primacy of Parliament.

I also firmly believe the courts should not adjudicate on matters that should be considered by elected representatives rather than judicial officers. The philosophy of this bill is to ensure that such matters remain the responsibility of Parliament rather than the judiciary. I note from the second reading speech by the Leader of the House that the committee's decisions about new areas of jurisdiction will not be final or binding on Parliament but are intended to provide brief advice to members about matters within its jurisdiction. I respectfully agree with that point. We support the bill but we will propose an amendment to retain the current numerical composition of the Regulation Review Committee. We believe it should remain at eight rather than being increased to 12, as the bill proposes.

The committee will have more work as a result of this legislation, but other committees such as the Public Accounts Committee [PAC] and the Joint Standing Committee upon Road Safety have also done an extraordinary amount of work over many years. Certainly when I was involved with the PAC—I do not think the situation has changed recently—five members would produce about 11 major reports a year. Similarly, while the Joint Standing Committee upon Road Safety has more members, it has an extraordinary record of work. On that basis, the Opposition will not agree to increase the membership of the Regulation Review Committee and I will seek to amend the bill to retain the status quo.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Moss.

APPROPRIATION BILL

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL

GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION SCHEMES FUND) BILL

**PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING)
BILL**

STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL

Second Reading

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Take-note Debate

Debate resumed from 25 June.

Mr MOSS (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.15 a.m.]: This is another extremely successful budget delivered by a Government that over the past seven years has proved that it is arguably the most successful Government in the history of New South Wales. If there is one thing the Carr Labor Government will always be noted for it is that, more so than any other government in our history, it has continued to attack the State's debt. What a great achievement that is. This year we had \$1.6 billion extra in the kitty as a result of the Government reducing our debt-servicing payments from 14 per cent of expenditure to 9 per cent. That extra \$1.6 billion means that our schools, hospitals, transport system and police force, to name just a few government instrumentalities, will be much better off. Over the next four years this budget will plough \$3 billion into demand-driven, non-revenue raising public works projects such as schools and hospitals. Furthermore, public works expenditure over the next four years will be 26 per cent greater than in the past four years, as the Treasurer pointed out in his Budget Speech. That is an extraordinary achievement when one considers that the massive Olympics works program was undertaken during that time.

Once again education is a big winner in this budget, with more than \$8 billion being spent this year on our schools and TAFE institutions. That is almost half a billion dollars—or \$494 million, to be exact—more than last year. I was pleased to see included in the education budget \$10 million for a pilot program to reduce class sizes from kindergarten to year three. While this is only a pilot program, it is money well spent. The younger the child, the more attention he or she needs. This program measures up well with our early intervention strategies, as I am sure the Minister for Community Services, who is at the table, would agree. Just as early intervention from infancy is important to a person's overall wellbeing, intervention in the early years of a child's education will obviously produce a better-educated society. I fully support this program that aims to reduce infant class sizes in our schools.

This year the Government will pour more money into the Computers in Schools Program, including funding for technology support. We are upgrading not only equipment but also the human element behind the computer. For example, this year we are spending \$17 million on technology training for teachers. Technology training for teachers is important at this time, as obviously teachers have to be up-to-date with the latest in computer technology. Funding for this sort of training is important because it would be fair to say that not many of the teachers we have today grew up in the computer age. While that will change over the next 10 to 15 years, today's teachers deserve technology training and this Government is providing just that.

As in previous Labor budgets, we are experiencing increased funding and increased numbers in the police force. In dealing with law and order, I am most interested this year in our concentration on corrective services. The additional \$83 million allocated to corrective services is, as the Treasurer stated, necessary to accommodate the anticipated additional prison population resulting from our repeat offender legislation. More than 70 per cent of crime is committed by repeat offenders, of whom many will not obtain bail in the future because of the legislation, which means that the prison population will increase. This legislation is controversial. Many would argue that you do not stop crime by throwing criminals into gaol. By the same token, the fact that it is repeat offenders who commit the most crime indicates that we are not stopping crime by keeping them out of gaol. My view is that while gaol sentences will not stop all criminals from committing crime, sentencing under the repeat offender legislation will stop some crime and the crime rates will fall.

The Government is committed to making our streets safer. Certainly more people will go to gaol, but many people will be less likely to commit crime if they know that the risk of being caught means no bail and going straight to gaol. I stress that I do not celebrate that our prisons will get larger. However, if this means we are creating safer communities where law-abiding citizens are able to go about their daily lives freely without the threat of becoming victims of crime, then the money we are putting into corrective services is a positive step.

The big winner in this budget in terms of overall expenditure is the all-important area of health with more than \$500,000 million being spent on new and refurbished hospitals this year alone. My electorate comprises a substantial aged population; therefore, I am pleased that we are allocating more funding to services through the health portfolio that will benefit the aged. For example, dental services are up by \$16 million and additional funding for podiatry services means that an extra 65,000 people in New South Wales will be able to access this service through the public health system over the next 12 months.

As the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, I am interested in the Government's ongoing commitment to transport, including disability access on public transport. Only a couple of years ago there were no easy access buses in New South Wales. By the end of this year, after investing \$20 million into 65 new buses, we will boast 530 State Transit wheelchair accessible buses within the fleet, and with the Government's commitment to the disabled, that number is increasing each year. Also, many honourable members may not be aware that the Department of Transport and various agencies within the transport area are making concerted efforts to improve staff training.

A few days ago it was my pleasure to represent the Minister for Transport in Wagga Wagga where we opened a new staff training college for the Rail Infrastructure Corporation [RIC]. Approximately 500 Rail Infrastructure Corporation workers living within the Wagga Wagga region will benefit substantially from the opening of the training college. There is currently only one other RIC training college, and it is at Belmore in metropolitan Sydney. While railway workers from across the State have accessed that college from time to time, they have been unable to undertake the intensive courses that will now be provided at Wagga Wagga. I am pleased to say that in the not too distant future we will be looking at possibly opening another college, perhaps in Orange. All this means that staff will be better trained.

While I was in Wagga Wagga, a journalist from the ABC approached me with a question. He was most concerned about the time it takes for trains to get from Sydney to Wagga Wagga. Of course if the trains do not stop at every small station on the way, accommodating other residents of rural New South Wales, the train would get to Wagga Wagga more quickly. But it is not just the residents of Wagga Wagga who need the train, but everybody along the way. Apart from that, I pointed out to the journalist that the big issue in rail is not the time it takes for trains to get from point A to point B, but that trains arrive on time. On-time running is by far the major concern of rail commuters. All surveys conducted by the rail authority show that on-time running is of the most concern. Cleanliness on trains, efficiency of staff, the threat of violence, or the amount of security are all secondary to the concern about on-time running. People want to be convinced that when they get on the train it is going to stop at their station at the time they expect. That is fair enough.

The training at the RIC Wagga Wagga training college will ensure greater efficiency on the part of staff of the Rail Infrastructure Corporation, which will, in turn, contribute substantially to our goal of improving daily on-time running. The opening of the RIC training college in Wagga Wagga is an excellent example of the Government's commitment to regional development. We are not a city-based government—far from it.

In this budget \$3.2 million was allocated towards refurbishment of Campsie railway station, which completes the amount of funding available for this project. The Campsie railway will be opened as virtually a new station within the next 12 months. It will be totally upgraded with the acquisition of two lifts for disability access. It will have new security measures, new lighting, new shops built, and a new concourse. It is a very important railway station on the Bankstown line. It is only the second station on the Bankstown line that has received disability access and it is the second busiest station along the line.

The Canterbury electorate is faring well with regard to additional funding for roads. This year we have picked up \$600,000 towards the construction of the Bexley to Mascot cycleway. The project total is \$10 million, of which \$3.3 million is being allocated this year. Other initiatives in the Transport budget for roads in the Canterbury electorate include the allocation of \$150,000 for a residential noise amelioration program on Canterbury Road, \$14,700 to Canterbury Council for the road safety program, and \$280,790 for traffic management and improvements facilities. Ashfield, Burwood, Canterbury and Marrickville councils, all of which fall within my electorate, will receive a total of \$1.1 million for maintenance of regional roads. Approximately that same figure will be poured into the maintenance of State roads, such as Canterbury Road. This year a great deal of funding has been allocated to roads, and I am appreciative of that. The Housing budget for Canterbury includes 10 new public housing accommodation units, as well as funding to refurbish existing public housing stock.

Each year the Carr Labor Government has provided new public housing stock in my electorate. The waiting list for public housing in Canterbury is one of the longest in the State because the electorate has

excellent services, excellent transport services and ideal proximity to the city. People who live in Canterbury who are entitled to apply for public housing naturally do not want to move beyond the region. For that reason public housing is a major concern in the electorate. I am pleased to see that, despite the electorate being built out—we have no green space on which we can build massive new housing estates—we are continuing to improve our housing stock. I am always interested in budget funding for ethnic affairs or, as it is called these days, community relations because of the multicultural nature of my electorate.

I do not have statistics, but I maintain that the Canterbury electorate would be the most culturally diverse in the State. Some electorates probably have a larger ethnic component, but I am very proud to say that we have the league of nations. The greatest obstacle for any person from a non-English speaking background living in this country is command of the English language. Once people master the language, they are naturally able to assert more clout, feel more confident, and get their way more easily. I am pleased to see that the budget has allocated \$85.6 million to the Department of Education and Training to support intensive English as a second language program to assist students to learn English and gain literacy skills.

The Community Relations Commission has received an allocation of \$5.947 million to provide language services to various agencies and their associated clients. We are teaching English not only in our schools but also within ethnic communities through the agencies that support those communities. I am particularly interested in the allocation of \$1.3 million to the Youth Partnership with Arabic-speaking Communities, which naturally assists the Canterbury electorate. The Youth Partnership with Arabic-speaking Communities has been co-ordinated by the Premier's Department.

I am pleased to say that to date the program has been operating extremely well. An active partnership has already developed. Youth liaison teams are making positive connections with young people. The number of young people from an Arabic-speaking background taking part in sport and recreation has increased. A lot of information is publicly available to help the parents of young people of Arabic background. The program is going ahead in leaps and bounds, and we are following through by allocating more funding for its continuation this year. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The Government is continuing its commitment to reduce State debt. This budget, as with previous Labor budgets, continues with the deliberate strategy of reducing taxes and charges to a minimum. As a result of attacking one tax this year we will see a boost in employment of young people, and I refer specifically to the Government's decision to abolish payroll tax on apprentices. From 1 July anyone in New South Wales who employs apprentices will no longer be subject to payroll tax. That will have a great effect on boosting employment for young people and providing them with more opportunities to gain skills through apprenticeship training.

Furthermore payroll tax will be reduced from 6.2 per cent to 6 per cent. Stamp duty on certain areas of insurance will be halved, which will result in a saving to consumers of \$180 million in one year. The budget bolsters the reputation of the Carr Labor Government as the best financial manager this State has ever produced. Apart from some griping from the Opposition, I have seen no criticism of the budget in the media, and not one person has criticised any aspect of it to me. The budget has been very well received because every individual, every community and every region of New South Wales gains considerably from it. I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr R. H. L. Smith.

PARLIAMENTARY REMUNERATION AMENDMENT (RECOGNISED OFFICE HOLDER) BILL

Second Reading

Deferred division

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will now proceed with the deferred division on the question, That this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided

Standing Order 191 applied.

Noes, 4

Mr Barr
Ms Moore
Mr Oakeshott
Mr Torbay

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

APPROPRIATION BILL

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

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STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL

Second Reading

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Take-note Debate

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr R. H. L. SMITH (Bega) [10.46 a.m.]: The budget is very much a result of the policies of the Federal Government. For a number of years Australia has been going through a stable economic period and the New South Wales Government is benefiting greatly. The Australian economy is leading the world. We came through the economic downturn in Asia and then in Europe and America relatively well. Even after the scare of September 11 the Australian economy went from strength to strength. The budget is a typical Labor budget: high taxing, high spending. The Treasurer has been able to get out of gaol as far as his bottom line goes because each year since 1995 the expanding economy and higher taxes have provided extra income, mainly through the housing boom in Sydney and the extra stamp duty, which has offset the \$1 billion of overspending in each budget. I will speak mainly in relation to matters that impact on my electorate.

Although there are very few good things in the budget for the far South Coast and the Bega electorate, \$2.6 million has been provided for the Merimbula Public School, which has been in the planning stage for a number of years. The footprint was changed by the architects but this was not accepted by the school community. A compromise has now been reached and plans have been completed. Merimbula Public School will get under way this year, and I thank the Government for funding that will start that capital work. Planning for Bega High School began some time ago and involved the very careful removal of a disused cemetery from the school's proposed location. Bega Valley Council imposed a number of conditions on the closure of a road to enable the school to be located at the site. This year's budget has allocated \$1.6 million for the Bega High School towards its total cost of \$3.5 million.

A positive outcome of the budget includes the upgrading of the Milton hospital, which is just outside my electorate. The hospital is located in the electorate of South Coast but many of my constituents in Ulladulla use it. It is gratifying that that hospital has been allocated a total of \$4.4 million for an upgrade, of which \$500,000 has been budgeted for this year. The Opposition has put a lot of pressure on the Government for the upgrade. The shadow Minister for Health has visited the area a number of times in an attempt to embarrass the Government into upgrading the hospital. On many occasions I have described it as the missing link in the updating of hospitals along the South Coast. Finally it has received the necessary funding and the upgrading will get under way this financial year.

Unfortunately my electorate did not get very much more out of the budget. Many major projects that could have been included in the budget have been neglected. One controversial project is the Pambula River

bridge. Last year Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads allocated funding for a new bridge across the Pambula flat, which is flood prone. The Pambula flat and the bridge flood during minor rainfalls, and that effectively cuts the Princes Highway at that point. In times of flooding access to Pambula hospital is cut off for residents of Eden, and children from Merimbula cannot access the Eden High School. Approximately half of the Eden school population comes from Merimbula.

The bridge is necessary for tourism and greatly influences the lifestyle of people from the far South Coast. In the former budget the Minister, in his wisdom, supplied sufficient funding for a cement bridge to replace the timber bridge, but at the same level. In other words, it would still flood. That cement bridge would have lasted for at least 50 years and we would have this impasse every time it rained and the bridge flooded. In this day and age highways should not flood, especially highway number one, the Princes Highway. After a lot of community pressure the Minister realised that that was a stupid idea and has called off construction of the low-level bridge. That was a step in the right direction.

The problem we now have is that the higher-level bridge, which would withstand a one-in-20-year flood has been allocated only half the funding needed. The Minister has asked the Federal Government to supply the remainder; but, of course, this is totally a State Government responsibility because it is a State road. It is the Minister's responsibility. The latest edition of the local newspaper, the *Merimbula News Weekly*, carried the headline "Bridge stoush" on its front page. In that article the Bega Valley Shire Mayor, David Hede, is quoted as saying:

I understand the bridge is the State Government's responsibility and it is not the responsibility of the Federal Government.

The ball is now back in the court of the State Government.

A major tourism committee is the Merimbula Area Committee. Its chairman, Bill Brown, is quoted as saying:

The Princes Highway is the essential lifeline to the southeast and the maintenance of the highway is one of the State Government's responsibilities to this region ...

The various affected communities are quite rightly disgusted by the apparent lack of sensible progress on such an important piece of infrastructure and we call on the NSW Minister for Roads, Carl Scully, to simply show some leadership in his department and get on with the job.

That is the general feeling within the community. Minister Scully has played his political games and it is now time to fix the Pambula River Bridge and make sure it gives flood-free access to the area. Another matter of great importance to my area, something that will become the joint responsibility of the State and Federal governments, is the disintegrating likelihood of Australiawide Airlines taking over the regional airlines Hazelton and Kendell. Hazelton provides those on the far South Coast with a very good service to and from Sydney, Moruya and Merimbula, twice a day, and Kendell provides a service from Merimbula to Melbourne.

It appears that Australiawide Airlines is having some problems in finalising the arrangements to take over those two regional airlines. Merimbula Air Services, which owns the airport at Merimbula, put in a submission to the State and Federal governments stating that it would be prepared to run a service between Sydney, Moruya and Merimbula if it was given some funding. Merimbula Air Services is also prepared to take over Kendell's run from Merimbula to Melbourne, if it was given funding. That proposal should be given serious consideration in the next few days if Australiawide Airlines does not come through on its offer to take over the two airlines.

Roads in the shire have been neglected, particularly the Princes Highway. My counterpart, the honourable member for South Coast, and I attended a rally in Ulladulla which was trying to attract more funding for the Princes Highway. The budget provides minimal funding for roads south of Kiama. Last year the State Government spent \$50.5 million on the Princes Highway north of Kiama, and obviously part of that would have been Federal funding, whereas only \$7.6 million was allocated to roads south of Kiama; a very small amount.

This year's budget is much the same with \$30.8 million allocated to the highway north of Kiama and a paltry \$1.8 million for all of the highway south of Kiama. From Kiama to the Victorian border there would be about 400 kilometres of road, and that section has been allocated only \$1.8 million: that is nothing short of a disgrace. The condition of the Kings Highway is also of great concern. I wrote to the Minister for Roads stating that the road surface was so slippery between Governor's Corner and Pooh Bear Corner that cars were sliding off the road. We were informed that there was insufficient funding to correct that slippery surface. It remains in that state, with very little funding again this year.

I have spoken in this House about the Home Warranty Insurance Scheme in a private member's statement. The scheme is still in a mess. Many builders are struggling to get the compulsory insurance cover that will enable them to build homes. A number of builders believe that they should not have to use their family home as security. They say that the insurance companies take no risk at all because their family homes are of the same value as the homes they intend to build. The Government must do more in this regard, and very soon, to ensure that builders and their businesses do not go broke. A demonstration held outside Parliament House a few weeks ago should have made very clear to the Government the seriousness of the situation. Action needs to be taken now. It should have been taken 12 months ago.

The supply of public housing is an increasing problem in my electorate. It is becoming increasingly clear that nowhere near sufficient money is being spent on public housing. The situation becomes more desperate as the years go by. More and more people are coming into my office wanting cheap housing. Insufficient money is being allocated in the budget for public housing not only to take care of the backlog but to prevent the list from getting longer. The waiting period for public housing has become extreme. If people even want a chance of getting public housing they need a doctor's certificate to be placed on the priority list.

At the moment the Far South Coast is booming. The tourist industry has experienced the best couple of years that it can remember. Most businesses are pleased with the way things are going. Apart from the home warranty insurance issue, which I have referred to, the grant of \$7,000—previously \$14,000—to first home owners has helped the building industry to prosper over the past few years. If the home warranty insurance issue is overcome, that prosperity will continue. Overall, the budget was ordinary for my electorate of Bega. Some good initiatives are contained in the budget, but the majority of improvements we need remain at the same level they were prior to the budget being handed down. I hope that next year Bega will be more fortunate, particularly with road funding.

Mr W. D. SMITH (South Coast) [11.01 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak on the budget bills. The Treasurer has again announced a most outstanding budget which reflects our strong New South Wales economy. It is an honour to be part of a Government that continues to demonstrate consistent resolve and optimism and recognises the concerns of the people. The budget achieves the trifecta of improved government services, lower taxes and a surplus—a most impressive trio. It is the seventh surplus budget the Carr Government has delivered, with the South Coast winning a healthy share of the record \$6.35 million that is being spent on new and upgraded schools, hospitals, roads and other public facilities across the State. New South Wales has a Labor Government that moves with the times. It pays its way, and each year it puts aside something for the future. Getting ahead and saving and preparing for the future are aims that almost every Australian family understands and strives for. Getting ahead is just as important for a State or nation as it is for an individual or a family.

The budget reflects a Government that is experienced, optimistic, steady and steadfast. New South Wales and Tasmania are the only Australian States whose general government budget operations for the year are reducing debt, reducing liabilities and increasing net worth. This budget has provided the 42 per cent of the State's population who live outside Sydney with 50 per cent of the State's capital works and road maintenance budget. This \$3.6 billion investment will sustain about 53,000 jobs. A strong public works program not only provides jobs now, it also bolsters our prospects for a strong economy and a strong society for the future. It represents an increase of \$5.4 billion, or 26 per cent, on the \$20.7 billion spent in the past four years, which includes all of the expenditure on the Olympic venues and infrastructure. In 2002-03 alone the total State acquisition program will total \$6.4 billion, sustaining approximately 96,000 direct and indirect jobs. This investment represents an increase of \$794 million, or 14 per cent, on last year's budget.

In the general government sector, \$3 billion is being allocated to non-income earning but vital social and economic infrastructure, such as new schools, new hospitals, new roads and public transport improvements. Our government-owned business enterprises will undertake \$3.3 billion of new income earning investments, mainly in electricity, transport, water and housing. The health of the people of New South Wales is in good hands. The health budget has been increased by \$554 million, bringing total health spending to close to \$8.9 billion. The allocation for the annual expenses of running our 206 general hospitals, 280 community health centres and 500 early childhood centres will rise by \$579 million, from \$7.8 billion in 2001-02 to almost \$8.4 billion in 2002-03. That is another example of the Government's continued commitment to improving the State's health services.

Health services are a major issue for our families and communities, particularly those in rural areas. It is a credit to the Government that the needs of these communities are being acknowledged. Country Labor has

been a force in ensuring that greater attention is given to the urgency of health issues in country areas. It is filling the gap left by the neglect of the party that used to stand up for those communities: the National Party. The Carr Labor Government is committed to the provision of quality health services. Over the next four years a further \$1.938 million will be invested on new or refurbished hospital and health facilities, with \$504 million being allocated in 2002-03. As all members of Parliament representing country areas would no doubt agree, dental health is a serious concern for both families and communities. The provision of public dental treatment was allowed to fall to a pitiful state under the New South Wales Coalition Government prior to 1995. That was exacerbated when the current Federal Government scrapped the Commonwealth Dental Health Scheme, ripping \$134 million out of dental care.

The State Labor Government has been left with the continuing task of overhauling and rebuilding the New South Wales public dental health system. The additional \$16 million for dental health services to provide an additional 85,000 services per year, and additional 4,000 dental services to older people and new services in rural areas is certainly welcome. Mental health services will also undergo significant improvements thanks to the extra 226 mental health beds in addition to the 150 beds previously announced. The Carr Government's commitment to education and training is another formidable example of the continuing high value placed on public institutions.

We must remember that public education is an integral part of our society, one of its cornerstones, and there is no question that it plays an enormous part in the growth and development of our children. It needs to be respected and valued not only by governments but by parents, teachers, students, business and the wider community. This year education funding will increase by \$494 million on last year's budget to \$8.1 billion. This is a solid indication that the Government is taking a valiant stand on education and training. It is targeting schools with special problems and needs, further expanding the Literacy and Numeracy Plan, introducing initiatives to enhance the quality of teachers, ensuring an adequate supply of teachers in key learning areas, and continuing the school maintenance program, with approximately \$600 million allocated over the next four years.

Funding for community services and disability services represents a commitment by the Government to further improve conditions for the most disadvantaged in our communities. The increase of \$90 million to almost \$1.9 billion in funding for community services is truly welcome, particularly the 8.3 per cent, or \$131 million, increase for child protection. There is also \$186 million for adoption services and out-of-home care and foster care for about 14,000 children and young people, an increase of \$20 million or 12 per cent. The \$346 million for home and community care services represents an increase of \$28 million for the disability services program, now totalling \$443 million.

I welcome the extra funding for police and emergency services. I also welcome the increased funding for roads and transport. Last year the Treasurer claimed that New South Wales had the greenest government in Australia and I am happy to say that, notwithstanding welcome changes in other jurisdictions, that is still the case. Every government and every generation has an obligation to pass to the next a sustained and well-managed environment. This Government has worked hard to undertake far-reaching reforms on greenhouse emissions, introducing enforceable greenhouse benchmarks on electricity retailers, supplying a further \$23 million to continue the battle on salinity, introducing a seven-year reafforestation program worth \$100 million, and spending millions to reduce waste and to continue the fight against illegal dumping and littering.

The budget includes funding of the National Parks and Wildlife Service to a record \$334 million to protect the State's natural and cultural heritage. The Environment Protection Authority has done extremely well from this budget, receiving \$178 million to crack down on polluters, to reduce air and noise emissions, and to perform other activities. There can be little doubt that Australia is a very successful society and economy. I say that in acknowledgment of the efforts of all governments at all levels, irrespective of their political persuasion. Australia's success in recent decades has come from the ability of all tiers of government to make difficult decisions—often unpopular and poorly understood decisions. Those decisions have ultimately transformed the Australian economy into one of the strongest in the world—we have low inflation, we are outward looking and competitive, and we are winning investment and creating jobs.

The latest problem to come our way has been insurance, the costs of which are threatening our community life and business life. Our society cannot function favourably unless insurance is both available and affordable. The insurance problem has been slowly emerging for some time—the HIH collapse exacerbated the situation. The insurance crisis is the responsibility of both the State and Federal governments. The Commonwealth Government has the constitutional responsibility for insurance regulation and has to revamp its regulatory regime. It is up to the State Government to reform the level of court-awarded damages, ambulance-

chasing legal behaviour and the law of negligence. The package of legislation recently before the Parliament dealt with damages and legal behaviour. In September legislation will be introduced that makes fundamental and sensible changes to the law of negligence. This Government is dedicated to protecting businesses and life in general from becoming a debilitating nightmare of bankrupting litigation.

It is once again pleasing to see that the New South Wales Government has reduced taxes, making it the fifth successive budget to achieve this. Taxation is the price we all pay for civilisation, but this budget once again clearly demonstrates the Carr Government's determination to ensure that it is not too high a price. These tax cuts now tally \$1.4 billion a year—that is \$1.4 billion put back into taxpayers' pockets. Country Labor has continued to demonstrate its effectiveness in drawing attention to the needs and concerns of rural and regional communities in New South Wales. Once again I am delighted and grateful that the South Coast electorate is benefiting from the Government's commitment to ensuring a better and fairer deal for country New South Wales.

This budget will directly help the people of the South Coast to get ahead, with increased investment to improve our community's services, and tax cuts benefiting families and small businesses alike. The South Coast electorate covers more than 40 villages and has two main central business districts: Nowra and Ulladulla. Once again, the Government has recognised that the area is an asset to New South Wales. The South Coast continues to thrive after the devastating Christmas-New Year bushfires that threatened our very existence. The Government's \$1 million two-year recovery campaign designed to help increase tourism in the Shoalhaven—which suffered some negative consumer perceptions during the bushfire period—is proving to be a huge success, with the industry bouncing back bigger and better than ever.

It is an honour for me to be part of the Government's designs to deliver better services in health, education, policing, transport and community services. As with many rural and regional communities, there is no question that health and hospitals remain a major concern to South Coast families. Under this year's budget the South Coast will benefit from record funding delivered to the Illawarra Area Health Service. I am pleased that the budget includes the rebuilding of Milton-Ulladulla Hospital, with a total allocation of \$4.35 million to integrate in-patient, birthing and operating suites, emergency, imaging, occupational therapy, kitchen and domestic services. This is the biggest improvement to health service delivery in the southern part of my electorate in the 26 years that I have been a permanent resident.

We are also looking forward to increases in funding to allow a greater number of procedures, such as cataract operations and orthopaedic joint replacements, at the Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital. The redevelopment of the Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital continues, with the allocation of \$20.8 million this year for the ongoing work on the \$30 million total cost of the redevelopment project. The new buildings will cover some 7,000 square metres on the hospital site and the complex will accommodate a new emergency department three times the size of the existing one. Emergency beds will increase from eight to 20, there will be two additional operating theatres, intensive care beds will increase from five to 10, and renal beds will increase from six to 12. By January the paediatrics, maternity, surgical and intensive care units will be completed. By August 2003 the accident and emergency, imaging, new theatres and ambulatory care sections will be completed—a great boost for the community of the South Coast. I thank the Minister for Health for his considered approach to these issues as this funding will significantly improve a comprehensive range of hospital services to the people in the South Coast area. Older people and people with a disability will benefit from this year's budget, with a welcome \$2.6 million allocation to 28 community-based services on the South Coast.

Roads in the South Coast electorate are a major issue for families and communities. Roads funding for the region has been directed to some of the most important sites of concern. Funding of \$1.7 million has been allocated to build a north-bound overtaking lane on the Princes Highway between Ulladulla and Milton, with the total project cost being \$2.3 million and completion expected in 2004. A total of \$600,000 has been allocated for the upgrade of the Princes Highway at south Nowra. This includes \$125,000 for planning associated with the construction of a roundabout at Browns Road. These projects are part of the \$380 million commitment by the Government for the development of the Princes Highway up until 2010. There is a \$500,000 allocation towards upgrade of access to the Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital along Scenic Drive. In addition, \$30,000 has been allocated for pedestrian safety improvements outside Nowra Christian Community School at east Nowra to improve bus queuing arrangements.

The Government has allocated \$5.9 million for maintenance work, including \$1.6 million for widening of narrow curves on Cambewarra Mountain and \$298,000 for reconstruction work on the Princes Highway south of Nowra. In addition, Shoalhaven City Council will receive an allocation of \$1.6 million for council

roads in the area and \$1.35 million to progress planning for Main Road 92 in my electorate. There has been a funding increase of \$3.1 million—making a total of \$10 million—to upgrade roads, improve safety and enhance travel conditions on the South Coast. I thank the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads for his continued efforts to fund work on the Princes Highway as part of his \$380 million funding commitment to 2010. That work is a priority. Unfortunately, as the Federal Government continues to refuse to declare the highway a road of national importance, it has been once again left to the New South Wales Government to ensure the safety of the people of the South Coast on our roads. I also welcome the State budget's eighth record allocation for policing at almost \$8 billion, which will see extra spending on law and order on the South Coast. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Some \$50,000 will be spent on Nowra police station to accommodate the crime management unit more appropriately and to provide better workplace conditions for officers in the Shoalhaven Local Area Command. The South Coast community supports our local police and this expenditure will provide both a practical and a morale boost. I commend the Minister for Police for his commitment to putting more police on front-line duties. The training system has been improved, recruitment has been boosted and police across the State have been freed from desk duties. I look forward to seeing increased police numbers in the local area command to build on the two extra officers provided recently.

Education and training on the South Coast has also received funding in this budget, with capital works projects valued at more than \$6.3 million. Some \$3.5 million has been allocated to upgrade Milton Public School, including the building of additional classrooms, new administration facilities and a new library. The Milton community and I warmly welcome these improvements. Nowra East Public School and Nowra Public School are also major beneficiaries of the capital works program, with allocations of \$1.513 million and \$1.356 million respectively for the construction of new halls for dance, drama, indoor sport, performances, assemblies and community activities.

Access to public housing continues to be a priority in the South Coast electorate, as it is in many other areas. This budget again demonstrates the Government's commitment to providing government-subsidised housing for the South Coast. As part of its public and community housing program, 28 new properties will be built or bought for \$2,755,000, and \$3,178,000 will be committed to modernising properties in the community and modifying the homes of people with disabilities. Public housing in my electorate has undergone major improvements in past years, which has raised the morale of many residents. I thank the Minister for Housing for his continuing interest in improving conditions for public housing residents and for understanding the demands placed on this heavily utilised service.

Just last week I was happy to announce that the Government had allocated a further \$699,000 to the east Nowra housing estate in order to reduce crime, increase personal safety and improve tenants' access to services. As a consequence, the department will be able to employ eight new staff over the next two years, including an Aboriginal housing specialist and a handyperson; to engage and empower local residents to become involved in the community; and to link tenants with appropriate outreach services provided by the police, Community Services and Health. This initiative will also improve the financial viability of the area, reduce rent arrears, reduce property turnover and vacancies, improve property care, reduce crime and vandalism, and improve employment and training opportunities for tenants.

Conservation and the environment are particularly relevant to the South Coast electorate, with its unsurpassed natural beauty and pristine conditions. This budget sees the provision of nearly \$1 million in new annual funding to control the spread of the noxious weed *caulerpa taxifolia* and other aquatic pests found in South Coast waterways. *Caulerpa* is found in seven waterways in New South Wales, including Lake Conjola and Narrawallee Inlet in my electorate. If left untreated the weed could impact adversely on the habitats of juvenile fish. I hope that this extra funding will help to control the spread of the weed. We now have the money to explore better methods of controlling this invasive pest plant.

A new expert task force will work closely with local communities to build knowledge about ways to control the weed. NSW Fisheries has held trials to find the best way of doing this, using methods such as hand picking, dredging and smothering with a variety of substances. The most promising results have been produced by applying swimming pool salt to weed beds, and successful trials have already been conducted in Lake Macquarie and Careel Bay in Pittwater. A joint study conducted by NSW Fisheries and the University of Wollongong will continue to monitor and map the weed and investigate its impact on seagrasses and other organisms. A community education program is under way, bans on commercial netting and recreational prawn hauling are in place near infestations, and warning signs and marker buoys highlight areas where *caulerpa* grows.

The budget also allocates \$3 million to buy out commercial fishers in my area. The Jervis Bay Marine Park is the jewel in the crown of the South Coast electorate, and commercial fishing will be banned from all sanctuary zones and trawling will be banned in habitat protection areas. This funding will allow the buyout of approximately 15 commercial fishers who were entitled to operate in the marine park. Some 27 commercial fishers who regularly fish in the local area have registered an interest in being bought out voluntarily as part of the zoning process. This budget certainly delivers for the people of the South Coast and for the State as a whole. I commend it to the House.

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [11.26 a.m.]: The 2002-03 budget announced by the Treasurer about a month ago is a little like the curate's egg: it contains a little that is good and an awful lot that is bad. From my point of view as the representative of a rural electorate and as shadow Minister for Agriculture and shadow Minister for Racing—two portfolios important to rural areas—the budget does not recognise fully the 27 per cent of people in New South Wales who live outside the cities of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. Nor does it acknowledge the fact that more than 40 per cent of the State's gross domestic product is generated by that 27 per cent of the population.

Racing has been scratched—to use a dreadful pun—from the Government's budget stakes. Racing activities around the State are contracting, particularly as far as TAB funding is concerned. For instance, Junee Harness Racing Club has lost 50 per cent of its meetings this year, while Wagga Wagga has gained an additional 17 meetings. There is a push to centralise harness racing throughout the State, and the same could be said for thoroughbred and greyhound racing. I am disappointed that the Government has not seen fit to acknowledge the dilemma facing a number of non-TAB clubs that cannot afford to pay the \$5,500 to \$8,000 in link and bearer charges that allow them to participate in TAB race meetings. Racing clubs at Forbes, Grenfell, West Wyalong, Junee and Temora are just a few of those in that situation. They must pay about \$8,000 in link and bearer charges to hold a TAB meeting. In many cases coaxial cables run past the front gates of the racecourse—in Junee and Forbes the cables run through the ground adjacent to the offices. Three major cabling systems connecting to Sydney and Melbourne run through the town of Cootamundra.

The budget fails to recognise that New South Wales is losing a considerable amount of racing activity to Victoria. Victorian racing has been offering better conditions—and particularly better prize money—for some time. In the past few months many quality thoroughbred racehorses have gone to Melbourne, and Sydney racing has suffered from smaller fields and a lack of excitement. The other factor is that there is now a push to force racing to use the old Kensington racecourse, which was popular in the days of World War II, when pony racing and number nine racing occurred. However, it is certainly not an international class racecourse such as Randwick and the popular courses in Melbourne.

The Government is underestimating the importance of racing in this State. The racing industry employs an estimated 100,000 people and generates some \$200 million a year for the Government by way of revenue from TAB taxation. The TAB, of course, then puts about \$183 million or \$184 million back into New South Wales racing. However, there is a great deal of angst as to how that is redistributed because an estimated \$40 million does not go back into prize money. The budget essentially neglects both the capital infrastructure and the great excitement associated with racing. The profile of racing should be lifted to enable it to meet the competition it faces today from so many other activities.

My other area of shadow responsibility is agriculture. This year the total budget of the Department of Agriculture is \$240.5 million. Last financial year the department budgeted for an expenditure of \$224.244 million but ended up spending an additional \$12.062 million. Allowing for the inflation rate of 2.5 per cent in this year's budget papers, actual expenditure in real terms for last financial year is \$242.213 million. In other words, the department has been allocated \$1.7 million less than last year. That is a slap in the face for the sector that has in many ways led the surge in exports from this State. Only today there is a major supplement on the wine industry in one of the leading national newspapers. The Hunter, the Cowra region, the Murrumbidgee region, the Hilltops region, and Tumbarumba are some of the areas that have trebled or doubled their figures—and quadrupled them in some cases—for production and export sales.

Only two weeks ago I was at Tandau Limited at Menindee in the west and was told about that wonderful operation Tandau runs. This year Tandau's chardonnay grapes yielded an average of 12 tonnes to the acre, and up to as much as 18 tonnes. They are grown on the sandhills and are totally irrigated. The company is getting extraordinary results. This morning I noticed in the national publication I mentioned a moment ago that the projections are that whilst there is a short-term glut of grapes at the moment, there will be in the near future a need for additional plantings of something like 4 per cent per annum. But the Government is ignoring that. The Government ignored the fact that the New South Wales sheep industry had gone through one of the greatest metamorphoses—or, one might say, Lazarus exercises—we have seen for some time.

During the 1980s and early 1990s the industry was depressed. There was a small surge at the end of the 1980s and the price of wool, mutton and lamb then went through a depressed period. But with some extraordinarily good results from growers, producers, agents and abattoirs in New South Wales scheduled wool production and the profitability of the product has been lifted significantly. The change in the character of our primary land industry is nothing short of extraordinary. The results of the new genetics that were brought into our breeding techniques have simply been magnificent. Our sheep meat, particularly lamb meat, is now eagerly sought after by the United States. However, we do face competition from the United States, which is called an unequal trading base.

The Government is paying lip service by allocating \$2 million to combat the problem of soil acidity. A miserable \$7 million has been allocated for the control of noxious weeds. That represents a hopelessly inadequate sum with which to tackle the eradication of noogoora burr in the Murrumbidgee, St John's wort in the Lachlan and the new weed called lipia. It is rapidly spreading in the north-west, down the lower end of the Lachlan and, I suspect, in many other parts of the State. It is one of the biggest threats that we have encountered for a long time, not only to agriculture but also to the environment. Lipia is a creeping type of weed and a lot of banks are collapsing into the rivers and streams because of its effects. To put up a miserable sum of \$7 million to fight parthenium weed, serrated tussock, Parramatta grass, lipia, the full range of burrs, and Paterson's curse is not so much an insult as poor financial planning.

With all the emphasis on the environment, increased production, modern management and introducing new technology, it is a dereliction of duty to fail to recognise that the major environmental problem—probably apart from carp in our rivers—is weeds. Once again I call on the Government to urgently review its funding for weed eradication in this State. The funding should be increased by at least 30 per cent and that should apply for the next three or four years until the weeds are brought under control. I am sure other members in the Chamber share my concerns. The bottom line is that weeds in New South Wales are out of control; they are not even being contained. Some of the poorest managers of weeds are those responsible for the control of Crown land, national parks—and State Forests particularly. They are all having major problems.

[Debate interrupted.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): I welcome to the Parliament a delegation of the Committee on Public Participation from the Senate of the Kingdom of Thailand. The Chairman is Mr Pinthong and the delegation is here with Consul General Kitt. I hope they enjoy their visit.

APPROPRIATION BILL

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL

GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION SCHEMES FUND) BILL

PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING) BILL

STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL

Second Reading

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Take-note Debate

[Debate resumed.]

Mr ARMSTRONG: I join with Mr Acting-Speaker in extending a warm welcome to our visitors to this, the oldest Parliament in the Commonwealth. The budgetary programs of the Department of Agriculture

make no mention of the importance of marketing agricultural products. That should come as no surprise, given the department's concentration on the regulation of agricultural endeavours ahead of productivity and profitability. Funding in this year's budget for natural disasters comes courtesy of the Federal Government. The State's contribution to this program is an embarrassment. Unless something happens in the next two to three weeks, I suspect that there will be some fairly major disasters in much of the wheat belt, certainly across the Western Division, the north-west and the Riverina, all of which are declared drought areas at present.

Only last weekend I was in the upper Riverina areas and the Bland area, which are in my electorate. There are many crops there where probably only 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the seed has germinated. If they are to be kept alive they will need rain in the next 10 days at the very least. I understand that some of the crops north of the Lachlan River are already starting to turn from green to gold. The next stage is to go into red. Once they do that they virtually do not come back. Major problems are coming, with no commitment from the Government to try to assist if there is a significant downturn in rural fortunes because of drought. I believe that is a management oversight on the part of the Government and it will no doubt be held accountable. I sincerely hope that the Government is prepared to make available some of the stamp duty funds it has received from the housing and property boom that it has obviously tucked away in a hollow log somewhere for election purposes. I hope it might make that sort of money available for the drought-affected areas and for weed control.

In relation to the property boom, as it has been called, as we know there has been an escalation in property sales in the major population centres and also in some of the smaller towns as well. There has also been an escalation in sales of rural farms because of the improved income in the rural sector. There have been many sales of rural farms, many family farm build-ups and many farm amalgamations. Some farmers have been trying to retire from the industry and are now able to do so because of the satisfactory prices in recent times. Only this morning I had a call from an agent at Tamworth to tell me about some of his sales results. He also suggests that it will not necessarily go on forever and that as members of Parliament we should be considering what we intend to do when the gloss comes off.

Funding for the electorate of Lachlan, which I represent, is again like the curate's egg. Cootamundra TAFE received \$3.8 million for a long overdue upgrade. Some \$200,000 is earmarked for expenditure in the current year. The upgrade, which will provide facilities for courses in food and beverages, nursing, child care and welfare, is due for completion in 2004. That is good news for a great town. The Junee Correctional Centre will undergo a major 150-bed redevelopment at a cost of \$30 million, with \$1 million to be expended during the next 12 months. The project, which is due for completion in 2006, will have benefits for the communities of Junee and Wagga Wagga.

As a rough rule of thumb, for every person incarcerated in a correctional centre there is one staffer. The centre injects significant money into the region. Unfortunately, policing figures are sometimes misconstrued. In a town like Junee the crime rate is statistically high because the Junee police have to deal with any problems that might occur in the gaol. Assaults or other crimes that are committed in the gaol are carried over into the figures for the shire of Junee. As a result the safety of a town like Junee is misrepresented. The figure that represents police call-outs to the gaol should be separate from the figure that represents police call-outs in the community generally.

Roads funding at a State level has been increased by only 7 per cent, which is insufficient to patch up the potholes. Our road network will continue to deteriorate. The electorate of Lachlan desperately needs additional roads funding to repair roads that have deteriorated in the past four or five years. The edges of many roads are now starting to break. More heavy transport vehicles are using our roads. It is the high horsepower of those vehicles, not their weight, that is causing problems. As the 450 or 500 horsepower prime movers travel up and down hills they create a rippling effect in the bitumen. It is only a matter of time before those corrugations start to break, unless the tensile strength of the pavement underneath is repaired and upgraded. In many cases the pavement was never designed to carry such high-horsepower vehicles. But it would be wrong of me to give the impression that the problem is weight, because the weight per axle is well controlled. A B-double is no more weighty on the road than the normal old J3 Bedford truck; in many ways it is probably less. Both vehicles are exactly the same width.

I welcome funding for the main highway at West Wyalong and the Yass to Forbes road near Boorowa. Trunk Road 56 has become popular since the extension of the M5. The 27 speed changes on the Great Western Highway up and down the mountains and the heavy fog during winter is encouraging people to travel the extra 100 kilometres across through Forbes, Cowra and Boorowa to Yass to get onto the Hume Highway. Traffic has diverted through that area as the road from Cowra to Yass has been upgraded. An additional \$150 million has

been allocated for policing throughout New South Wales. But a town like Lake Cargelligo still has only 40 per cent of its police officer allocation: 60 per cent of its allocation of police officers have not been appointed. Condobolin has only 50 per cent of its allocation of police officers, and Grenfell has been 33 per cent short of its staffing allocation for about four years.

The Government wonders why people complain. Why was the bowling club at Condobolin, for instance, broken into six times in February? Although people were apprehended, they were released on bail each time. A couple of months ago additional police were brought into Lake Cargelligo to assist with crowd control during a football match. Unfortunately, someone breached an apprehended violence order and two police officers out of the four available had to undertake a five-hour round trip to book the prisoner. Only two officers were left to deal with a big crowd. Fortunately, the crowd was well behaved, but over that weekend the town had many problems. Threats were made and damage was done. It was an unsavoury weekend. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Talking about policing is easy, but the numbers are grossly deficient. It is difficult to have officers in cars or available for night-time duty and for major events in country towns. In some towns confidence in policing is low. For instance, police in Lake Cargelligo have to travel to and from Parkes, which is two hours each way, and then an hour is needed to do the paperwork. When the court sits local police are required to supervise prisoners. Some time ago the Government promised that warders would transport prisoners, but that is yet to happen except in one or two positions. The budget fails to address policing problems in inland New South Wales.

I suspect that the budget is totally political. I expect that more money will be handed out in marginal and swinging seats as the year progresses, probably in the late spring. It is fair to say that in the last couple of days the Premier has indicated in question time that more is to come. But the extra money must meet the real needs. It should not be used as a political expedient. The people of New South Wales, particularly country people, will not be taken for fools. They will not be party to a cynical vote-buying exercise. They know where the needs are. I have referred to some of them this morning, and I again emphasise road funding, policing and health. Only this week we were told that the time allocated for the breast screening unit that services the towns of Harden and Boorowa will be cut by half. People generally want these essential services to be maintained. There is no doubt that health, education and policing are three essential services.

The budget did nothing to deal with the increasing problem of the use and sale of drugs in country towns. Sadly, I can say without fear of contradiction that not one community in more than 100 people in inland New South Wales would not have a drug problem. I have more than 120 places of learning in my electorate. When I visit those facilities I get reports from nearly every one of them of drug problems. In many cases the problems are not big. They do not involve hard drugs—perhaps marijuana. In many other cases it is thought that two or three people in the town are either peddling or using hard drugs. The bottom line is that drugs are an insidious, creeping blight on rural society, much the same as they are in the city. In the past three months the Premier has been striding up and down this Chamber talking about the Kings Cross injecting centre, where he gives away free drugs for people to inject.

But we hear little from the Premier about drug problems in country New South Wales, where nearly one-third of the population lives. The problems of those people should be acknowledged. Rural New South Wales was dramatically short changed after the Olympics. Throughout the Olympics process it was made obvious that major funding would be spent in Sydney to stage the Olympics. The Olympics were successful. However, country New South Wales has never been compensated, and compensation is long overdue. If the Government is serious about acknowledging the bush it should ensure that that compensation is forthcoming, particularly in sport and recreation activities, to bring us up to the standard expected of an average Sydney suburb following Olympic spending.

Water-based hockey fields and heated swimming pools are two examples. Junee council is using its resources to build an indoor sports centre with a heated pool. It is doing an absolutely magnificent job. The Government is providing a subsidy of \$250,000, for which the town and I are grateful, but the town is providing the majority of the money. Some towns are able to find the money; many are not. The small town of Stockinbingal has a population of about 50 people. The Australian Wheat Board is spending about \$50 million there at the moment on a new wheat receival facility. That will boost the population dramatically. The people want a swimming pool, and they would be fairly happy if the Government could provide half the money. Those are the types of areas where money is required urgently.

Temora West Public School has had no capital expenditure from the Government for 20 years—not a cent. But in that time there have been many capital improvements. A full-length veranda has been constructed on one side of the school to give previously unavailable wet weather ingress to the classrooms. The Government spent no money on a netball court, an assembly hall, or an area for students and parents to meet with the staff. The sick bay is a bed at the end of the corridor adjacent to the headmaster's small office. But a veranda and netball court have been provided. The old weather shed has been upgraded to provide a small assembly hall. A covered walkway has been constructed from the school to the road, and other covered walkways have been provided. One hundred per cent of the money for those projects came from the parents and citizens association.

Only recently the parents and citizens association asked me to put a proposition to the education Minister and the department. The school would be prepared to provide all the labour—qualified labour: plumbers, carpenters, you name it; they are all there—if the department put up the money for the materials to provide a shade area to protect the children from sun cancer and to provide an area where the children and parents can meet with the staff in privacy, and to provide a staff-room that is not the computer room/copying room/morning tea room. The Government rejected the proposal because joint ventures are not in accord with its policy. I have spoken to the new Minister, who has been most receptive, and I sincerely hope that he can deliver for this school that has been battling for a long time to get some financial assistance. Completion of the airconditioning program at Temora Primary School, the other primary school in the town, is also needed. Many schools are in the same situation, Coolamon being one. If half the school is airconditioned kids may have airconditioning in their classroom but not in the library.

Finally, I turn to the road across the Blue Mountains. Upgrading work on the Great Western Highway has been proceeding, with the Federal Government providing most of the money. There is a lot of controversy among some of the locals about its route. The bottom line is that it is being improved. But at the end of the improvement program there will still be 27 speed changes between Blackheath and the bottom of the mountains. As far as we know B-double transport from the west into the port of Sydney will still be denied—the only area of the State that does not have direct access. At present the west of the State is getting only 2 per cent of international visitors. Whether the figure will increase after the improvement of the highway is debatable.

The Blue Mountains tri-government lobby group—comprising every State and Federal elected member and representatives of 15 local government areas in inland New South Wales, so it is totally bipartisan—has successfully lobbied the Federal Government and the State Government for \$1 million each, and this has been recently announced by both governments, to complete a feasibility and engineering study into upgrading the Bells Line of Road into a six-lane highway to provide safe travel across the mountains for the people of the west of New South Wales and the people of the western suburbs of Sydney. We are not looking to build it tomorrow. We are suggesting that when the Sydney ring road is completed in 2007 construction should start on this highway. The project could then be completed in about 2010.

The project has been designed to suit government finance and to take advantage of the surplus engineering capacity available after the completion of the ring road. We have a responsibility to do something about the highway with the highest accident rate in New South Wales, the Great Western Highway. Locals tell me that the current upgrade will not improve the accident rate. Blind Freddie could see that if there will still be 27 speed changes within a short distance that will not help safety, encourage tourism or improve the quality of life of people in the Blue Mountains. We want to improve quality of life, we want to improve access and we want a more profitable State of New South Wales.

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [11.56 p.m.]: I consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to speak on the 2002 budget, which reflects the difference between the Coalition and the Government. The local media in the Cessnock electorate has said it all. The Cessnock *Advertiser* carried the following headlines: "State budget delivers on city's road network needs", "State budget's \$10.5 million for education in city", and "\$3.8 million allocated for Cessnock housing". A headline in the *Branxton-Greta Vineyards News* was "Electorate attracts record funds". The New South Wales budget took up quite a chunk of the *Newcastle Herald* for about three days after the budget was delivered. All the news stories were positive. This is a reflection of the attitude of the electorate to the budget.

The budget adopted in this Parliament was the seventh surplus budget, and the Cessnock electorate attracted a fair share. Capital expenditure for the Cessnock electorate is a massive \$88,678,524—one of the best the electorate has received. The budget will help communities to get ahead, with investments to improve community services and tax cuts that will help families and small businesses. New South Wales now has the lowest tax rates in Australia on general insurance policies. The State Government will have halved stamp duty

on 33 types of insurances, including home and contents, travel, public liability, strata unit, boat, business interruption, burglary, bad debtors, stock damage and property damage. These tax cuts will take effect from 1 August 2002, and this will benefit local residents and businesses, particularly small business.

Apprentices are recognised in the budget, with payroll tax being abolished for employers of apprentices. This will assist 31,000 young people across the State and should provide an incentive for employers to train apprentices, something that is badly needed throughout Australia. It is good that the Government is helping to increase apprenticeships by providing this incentive. The Commonwealth Government should consider similar incentives. Education is prominent in this budget, and the \$7.11 million provided for the Kurri Kurri campus at the TAFE as part of the horticulture and environment upgrade will provide major economic benefit to the Kurri Kurri community. The money will be spent on the upgrading of classrooms and administrative facilities and the establishment of specialist facilities to meet the needs of all horticulture and environment programs, including turf, floristry, landscaping and nursery. The project will greatly enhance the outdoor areas of the campus, providing students and staff with access to state-of-the-art educational resources and facilities. The local community will benefit economically by catering to the needs of boarders at the Kurri Kurri campus.

A further \$1.457 million is provided for an upgrade of the Cessnock TAFE and will allow the completion of access works at that site. Other work includes the replacement of existing demountables, accommodation at the TAFE, refurbishment of classrooms, new library, new canteen, and an administration and counselling centre. The money is in addition to the \$1.7 million provided pre-budget for school improvements across my electorate. The 2002-03 budget provides a record \$8 billion for education and training. The Minister for Education and Training deserves to be congratulated on his efforts in putting forward excellent school programs across New South Wales.

The former Minister for Education and Training deserves to be congratulated on his hard and diligent work in that area. The retention levels in years 11 and 12 need to be addressed. Currently a group of high school principals and departmental heads in the Cessnock electorate is looking at ways of encouraging youth to continue their education into years 11 and 12. Students retaining those education levels are sadly lacking in my electorate. A community member, Les Cooper, is trying to break the cycle of low achievers in the high school system. Les does a lot of good work with community groups and the schools, and deserves to be commended for that.

Health is a big win with \$3.5 million allocated to improve services to the communities in the Cessnock electorate. It is my understanding that services proposed to be enhanced in the Cessnock district include the employment of an additional educator and dietician to assist people with diabetes and the implementation of the Hunter Community Renewal Program. The Cessnock community has put its views forward to the rural health task force, and has highlighted the services that are in desperate need throughout the electorate. The main issue was the lack of general practitioners in the area, and those who are there are overworked. We need to improve the facilities to attract more doctors to Cessnock electorate.

The Hunter Area Health Service is looking at putting a clinic in the hospital grounds to entice doctors to the area. Hopefully that will happen this year. The only additional matter that needs to be addressed in the Health budget is capital works for hospitals in Cessnock, which need an injection of funds. I am sure that the Minister will address that at a later date. The difference between this budget and former Coalition budgets shows that the New South Wales Labor Government has the primary vote. According to a recent Morgan Gallup Poll, Labor attracted a 47 per cent approval rating and the Opposition plummeted to 28 per cent.

We can only speculate about how and why the Coalition is struggling for its survival while the Carr Government continues to provide policies and commands the will to succeed. The Carr Government also has produced a budget that clearly shows that New South Wales is the leader in economic and social reform across Australia. The Treasurer encapsulated the recent budget in two words when he presented it to the House. He said that New South Wales is "getting ahead". New South Wales is getting ahead in financial management, in investments across the State, and in social responsibility, crime and safety, and the Government is getting ahead of the Coalition.

The people of New South Wales have reacted very positively to the budget because it is socially responsible. It provides incentives for business growth, it provides a service and, lo and behold, the people of New South Wales get tax cuts. I am honoured to be given the opportunity to speak on this budget. What Coalition budget has ever provided the likes of what is contained in the Carr Government's budget? Under the

Premier's leadership this State has, over the past seven years, cut government debt by a massive \$7 billion. That means that our children will no longer be faced with a prospect of a State Government that is in debt up to its neck for the next 50 to 100 years.

I am proud to have been part of a Government that has thought of future generations and taken steps to reduce the \$12 billion debt that the previous Coalition Government incurred. As other members have stated, this budget builds on the past sound economic management practices and allows the State to continue its sustained growth into the future. New South Wales has the strongest economy in the nation and economic indicators show that there are no signs that the current situation will decline. The 2002-03 budget is a sound document that reflects the Government's approach to economic and social management. The approach of this Government and previous Labor Governments to taxation and spending has provided the ground work for economic growth unmatched by any Coalition Government in the past.

We have, again, shown the nation and the world that New South Wales provides the economic base that gives confidence to investors to continue to support growth. The recent budget ensures that New South Wales maintains its triple-A economic rating. That is great news for New South Wales and the nation. The Government has maintained and developed the appropriate checks and balances to ensure that New South Wales not only survived but thrived in the economic meltdown that followed the September 11 attacks on America's economic capital. A sour note is struck with many of my colleagues when we hear the Opposition, in particular the shadow Treasurer, constantly touting lies about the stability and soundness of the State's coffers. The Premier and Ministers show exceptional financial aptitude. The Government is interested in not only developing new economic infrastructure but in ensuring the successful initiatives are consolidated and supported.

This State has the lowest unemployment rate of any State and the best building program the Opposition has ever seen. The Government has again provided the surplus of \$168 million. We are the only Government that has led this great State into six surplus budgets, with another in the wings. It is laughable that the Coalition, when it last held government, could not produce a surplus after seven years. The budget aims to enhance the opportunities for residents across all areas of the State. The budget provides substantial allocations for our schools, hospitals, transport, law and order and public infrastructure. The budget allocates sufficient funds to allow the services to develop and provide first-class opportunities for all constituencies. On top of this the Government can afford, for the fifth year in a row, to provide substantial tax cuts. The people of New South Wales will, from 1 August, pay only half the current rate of stamp duty on all general insurances, and payroll tax will be cut by 0.2 per cent from 1 July. Employers who engage apprentices will no longer pay any form of payroll tax. That is a great incentive to train our young people.

Every member of this House is aware that a government creates revenue through its taxation system. The Labor Government has developed the State's taxation system to the point where taxes are reduced whilst budget surpluses are produced. Closer to home, I am proud to be aligned with a Government that listens to and provides funding for rural and regional areas. Country New South Wales has attracted more than \$3.6 billion in capital works and road maintenance. This is great news for those areas. As all honourable members would know, this injection of funds into rural and regional areas will create jobs. I am informed that these funds will sustain some 53,000 jobs. These figures show that rural and regional New South Wales is getting ahead, and will continue to do so.

Country New South Wales has a strong voice in this Government through Country Labor. The success of this relationship is reflected by the commitment shown to the bush in this budget. The Government has allocated \$2.4 billion for health, \$1.3 billion for roads, \$286 million for rail infrastructure and \$71.6 million for improvements to country passenger services alone. It is no wonder that country people are leaving behind their support for the Nationals and embracing Country Labor in unprecedented numbers. The Cessnock electorate was well provided for in the budget. The allocations made were indicative of our Government's commitment to Country Labor and country New South Wales. The budget delivered a huge \$39.5 million for roads in the Cessnock electorate. The Cessnock roads and infrastructure did not miss out. The Minister for Roads has taken note of the needs within the Cessnock electorate and has provided in excess of \$39.5 million for road improvements to the area.

As part of this record package to the Cessnock electorate, the Minister has provided the first \$3 million instalment of the \$10 million allocation to reduce traffic problems and improve the streetscape in the Cessnock central business district [CBD]. These funds will allow this important local project to proceed in a timely manner. The Main Street and Small Towns Program will benefit the community by beautifying Cessnock's main street, making it more pedestrian friendly. The street will be partly closed to the large amount of traffic that

flows through as a link between the F3 freeway and the New England Highway. The town has suffered from this traffic congestion long enough. The F3 link road project will go from Seahampton through to Branxton. I have spoken about this many times in this House, and I will continue to speak on this project until the Federal Government provides more funding. The lack of funding shows what the Federal Coalition thinks of country and rural areas. The State Government requested \$9.2 million. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The F3 link road is vital to my community to take away many of the traffic woes. Not only will it take traffic away from the Cessnock CBD, which will benefit main street businesses and their patrons, it will redirect the traffic onto a main thoroughfare, which will benefit everyone. We should all get behind this program. I am pleased that the Hunter members are getting behind this project and trying to push it forward. I note that the electorate of the Federal Minister for Transport, Mr Anderson, will benefit directly from this infrastructure, yet he will not provide adequate funding for the project. Astoundingly, he gave only \$4.8 million, instead of the \$9.2 million requested. The economic benefits of the Main Street and Small Towns Program is great for the Cessnock area. It will beautify the main street, allow cafes to expand onto the footpath and bring restaurant trade into the Cessnock area, not just to the vineyards. Those improvements will be beneficial to the local community.

The Government, in its budget, has shown continued commitment to support local councils, with allocations for improvements to roads under its care and control. To this end, Singleton and Cessnock councils share more than \$2 million to maintain their roads infrastructure. This budget has produced record funding for the Cessnock electorate. The list of projects is as wide as it is varied. I make special mention of some of the projects. The jewel in the crown of road infrastructure would have to be the \$5.6 million for the pavement reconstruction between Neath and Weston. Main road 538 was laid in the 1920s and 1930s during the Depression years and has had no major reconstruction since. It is in very bad condition. The Minister for Roads has diverted \$5.6 million from funding from the Harbour Bridge to be spent in country areas. It shows that the Carr Labor Government and Country Labor are working hard to reallocate funding across our electorate to ensure that our city counterparts are not the only ones to benefit from tollways.

An amount of \$582,000 has been allocated for replacement of fire engines at Singleton and Branxton. The Minister for Emergency Services should be congratulated for the large amount of money that he has put into the Rural Fire Services across my electorate. He has done a tremendous job. The money that the Carr Labor Government has put into Rural Fire Services is a 117 per cent increase on the Coalition's budget in 1995. Clearly, the Minister is a tireless worker in the emergency services field and should be congratulated for his hard work and endeavours in that area. The \$3.8 million for public housing from the Minister for Housing is badly needed in my electorate and is much appreciated. That money will not rectify the public housing situation in my electorate totally, but it will go a long way towards doing so. Community transport is a real issue in my electorate, as we have no public transport. The community transport program, which has received \$283 million, is making the hard yards on this issue.

We need more funding for community transport to provide for the transportation of people who attend chemotherapy treatment and medical appointments. As I have said previously in the House, as we adopt the hub and spoke method in the health system, we need to address the transport issue in rural and regional areas. When people travel to and from chemotherapy treatment, they need to be well catered for by a community transport program. The \$12.8 million for rail maintenance works includes track reconstruction, rerailing, underbridge renewal and signal and electrical upgrades. It is great to see that happening in my electorate. An amount of \$60,000 has been provided for maintenance for Branxton Railway Station. Although it does not sound like much, it is additional funding to an allocation in the last budget. This budget's allocation will finish the upgrade to Branxton railway station, which is much appreciated by the Branxton people.

The \$4.7 million to replace the Millfield Bridge, which has been an ongoing saga, is part of the Country Timber Bridges Program. When we first looked at replacing Millfield bridge, we came across a rare species of bat that was habitating under the bridge. We had to address that situation. I am sure the Minister for the Environment, who is present in the Chamber, would appreciate the problems associated with this rare species and the need to ensure its safety and wellbeing. The Minister for Transport has done that. There is an allocation of \$2.8 million for the reconstruction of the road between Cessnock and the Branxton. The actual reconstruction will take place between Palmers Lane and McDonalds Road, which is a very bad part of the road. The \$2.8 million has been long overdue. I am pleased to see the Government undertaking this work and finally addressing that road. The \$2 million to replace bridges on George Booth Drive is a further initiative of the Country Timber Bridges Program. It is great to see that occurring. There is \$25,000 for traffic calming measures on Wollombi Road adjacent to St Patrick's school.

Those measures will be embraced by schoolchildren, teachers and parents from whom I have received many representations about when work will start. Funding of \$800,000 has been provided for demountable

accommodation for Cessnock Correctional Facility. This will provide constant work and allow prisoners to be educated and trained in various skills. The transport of prisoners has been of concern to me for some time. Cessnock police often transport prisoners, yet I believe this should be the duty of correctional centre staff. Hopefully, this matter can be resolved this year. I am pleased that Kurri Kurri waste water treatment works has been allocated \$9.5 million because that allocation is long overdue. Also, Redbournebry Bridge project will be addressed in the near future. Allocations to my electorate are indicative of the support shown by the Government across the State regardless of the political alliance of sitting members. Cessnock is moving ahead, as is the rest of the State. I wish to reflect the sentiments of the Premier, who said:

The truth is that the Egan budget—or as we should better call it, the Carr-Egan budget number eight—is fair, generous, responsible, successful and, I must say, as this perusal confirms, widely endorsed.

I commend the budget to the House.

Mr KERR (Cronulla) [12.21 p.m.]: I shall deal first with a number of matters raised by the honourable member for Cessnock, who referred to roads. I should give him a report from the NRMA dealing with roads in the Sutherland shire. He should also have regard to what Sutherland shire residents think when they pay the additional toll on the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Mr Martin: We in the bush love the toll on the Harbour Bridge.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): Order! I call the honourable member for Bathurst to order.

Mr KERR: People in the Sutherland shire do not love the harbour bridge toll increases. They want a fair go. The honourable member for Cessnock should also look at the Ombudsman's report dealing with the mess the Department of Community Services is in. That department is also required to service my electorate. I do not want to be critical of the honourable member for Cessnock; indeed, I will support him in his preselection and I know he appreciates my support. Honourable members opposite voted for the move by the Minister for Police on legislation, which must have caused great concern to the honourable member for Cessnock when it was introduced. We would like to see the day when the Minister for Police, with his usual ruthlessness, gets up in this House and makes his inaugural speech as the member for Cessnock and says, "It is no good crying over spilt milk". We would like to see the honourable member for Cessnock as the candidate at the next election. I shall turn now to the economic setting for this budget. The Australian economy has been performing strongly because of the Howard Government.

Mr Ashton: Abbott and Costello.

Mr KERR: The original Abbott and Costello could have learned a bit about comedy from the new team, Carr and Egan. They are treading the boards at the moment. This budget would not have been brought in under a Keating administration because of the interest rates that were prevalent at that time. Perhaps the honourable member for East Hills has not read that chapter in Don Watson's book.

Mr Ashton: I am reading the book.

Mr KERR: That is an admission. He should concentrate on the economic conditions in which Keating found himself when he first became Prime Minister. He had to travel the length and breadth of Australia and speak to businesspeople because business had stalled and interest rates were high after more than a decade of Labor government. This budget is underwritten by the prosperity provided to this nation by the Howard Government. Real estate in the Sutherland Shire is booming yet residents are shouldering the burden and providing much of the prosperity for this State. Each of the budgets brought in by this Government has been overspent and has been subsidised by the property boom.

Mr Ashton: We are well represented by Labor members in the Sutherland shire.

Mr KERR: I will come to that a little later. Given the prosperity and river of gold coming from stamp duties because of the property boom, the Government could have tackled a number of major problems but has not done so. This is a lazy budget and it represents the wages of spin. It is appalling that \$500,000 is spent on media monitoring when the Burraneer Bay Public School community cannot get basic services. Cronulla South Public School could use that \$500,000—a school at which Gough Whitlam was a past president of the parents and citizens association. This Government is more concerned about politics than about people. It is more concerned about spin than about substance. Does anyone truly believe, when considering the waiting list, that we have better health facilities now than we did in 1995? The honourable member for Hornsby says she does not, and she comes from a health background.

Mr Debus: I am sure that is much more relevant than her membership of the Liberal Party in this context?

Mr KERR: I do not understand that question. People represent electorates in this Parliament and they are concerned about people.

Mr Debus: The honourable member for Hornsby was gracious enough to thank the Minister for Health for the money that is being spent in her hospital.

Mr KERR: Yes, I agree that she is a gracious person but she is also concerned about what is happening in health generally. In 1995 we saw through the fraud of Labor saying that it would halve waiting lists. We saw the artificial decrease in waiting lists, but the real test is in 2002, compared to 1995. In 1995 the then shadow Minister for Health said that about 320 beds were not adequate for the Sutherland shire. Despite all the construction work that will be trumpeted in the lead-up to this election—building that should have occurred five years ago—Sutherland Hospital will only have about 320 beds, a number that was inadequate seven years ago. Where is the hydrotherapy pool that Sutherland shire previously had? Our hospitals no longer have basic facilities such as beds and hydrotherapy pools. I have raised this issue before in the House. Hospitals are not just buildings but centres of quality health care provision. Sutherland hospital has lost many experienced nurses and the nursing staff who remain must work more shifts under almost unbearable pressure. Yet has any Labor member talked about wage justice for our nurses? Where is the money in this budget for increased wages for nurses?

Mr Ashton: In Canberra.

Mr KERR: It is your budget and you are responsible for paying the State's nurses, not Canberra. That is the truth of the matter. I have written to the area health board asking how it plans to deal with the drugs problem in my electorate, but I am still awaiting a reply. Drugs are an enormous problem in the Sutherland shire. Much local crime is drug related: drug addicts have assaulted people, burgled homes and stolen valuable property. I have spoken to police about the drug dealing that is occurring in various parts of my electorate, and police operations are being mounted to address this problem. There has been much publicity recently about the condition and cleanliness of trains on the Illawarra line. The Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads would not allow his dog to travel in those sorts of conditions. Our trains certainly do not compare with a chauffeur-driven car. Under this Government, one is lucky to be the pet of a particular Cabinet Minister and to have a dog's life.

Commuters on the Illawarra line must endure totally unacceptable conditions. The *Sydney Morning Herald* has disclosed the fall in patronage of our trains in recent years. Many passengers no longer use the Illawarra line because the trains are dirty and unreliable. Commuters relate stories about breakdowns and about Cronulla-bound trains from the city that terminate at Sutherland station and abandon their passengers on the platform. That sort of service is not acceptable in 2002, especially as commuters provide revenue to the highest-taxing Government in this State's history. It would be interesting to compare the revenue obtained from my electorate with the funding that it receives. If it is to encourage people back onto the trains in my area the Government must provide commuter car parking.

What is to be done with the vacant public land at Cronulla railway station? I have raised this issue time and time again by way of questions on notice. I have also written to the Minister about it. The Mayor of Sutherland Shire Council has sought a meeting with the Minister to discuss the matter. That meeting should take place and the land should be made available for car parking. Let us compare the number of police presently stationed at Cronulla with the number of officers who worked there under the previous Government. Cronulla police station is no longer a charging station despite the fact that it is on the front-line of policing in our area. As we approach summer—

Mr Piccoli: We have only just started winter.

Mr KERR: We can still look forward to surfing at Cronulla. The honourable member for Murrumbidgee will be aware of the famous saying in his area: If you give a man a fish you will feed him for a day, but if you teach him to surf at Cronulla you will make him happy for life. It is no wonder so many of the honourable member's constituents enjoy holidaying in Cronulla. Former assistant commissioner Geoff Schuberg is an adviser to the Minister for Police. He has said publicly:

In the early 80s I was one of 12 detectives working out of Cronulla, supported by detectives at Miranda, Sutherland and Engadine.

In a police division which basically took in the shire and Royal National Park, we had a capacity to put together up to 50 police, at short notice, for any form of special operation.

The previous Government allocated the necessary resources because Cronulla was a key police station at which many officers were stationed. It is interesting to note how police are being used in the Sutherland shire. A Sutherland shire councillor—one of our civic fathers—was expelled from Sutherland Shire Council. Under the Local Government Act, a mayor may remove or designate someone to remove a councillor from the chamber and, according to general law, use reasonable force to do so. However, on this occasion a senior police officer was called to remove Councillor Paul Smith, who may be known to some Labor members. Why were the police called to escort him from the council chamber? Were councillors afraid that he would pull a knife or a gun? That is a ridiculous use of police time. Victims of a house break-in must telephone the help line and senior police do not respond immediately to their call. Yet it appears that under this council and this Government police have nothing better to do than escort a councillor from council chambers.

Much has been said about education. The honourable member for Rockdale referred yesterday to the contribution of the teaching profession to our society. We often overlook—although the honourable member for The Hills does not—the fact that the quality of every other trade and profession depends ultimately upon the quality of our teachers. Our teachers must not be forced to work under substandard conditions, yet that is happening in schools in my electorate. Our schools are being neglected. It is wrong to expect members of parents and citizens associations to bear the financial burden of providing basic education equipment and facilities. I commend those school communities that have worked extremely hard to provide basic facilities that the Government should have supplied. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Kurnell is the birthplace of modern Australia. It is a pity that the Minister for the Environment is leaving the Chamber because he might have wished to interject about the state of Botany Bay National Park. The Minister could explain to the House why the National Parks and Wildlife Service has been allocated insufficient funds to properly maintain Botany Bay National Park. I ask all Government members to visit the birthplace of our nation and to see the state of that park. On 23 May 2001 I wrote to the Minister because I had received a letter from the Chairman of the Friends of Towra Point which stated that a parcel of land was for sale and should be purchased by the Government. That land, which adjoined the Towra Point nature reserve, had been offered for private sale. The Government had the opportunity to purchase that parcel of land and to provide it as an addition to the Towra Point nature reserve.

The honourable member for Cessnock talked about the future and our children. What better way to secure our future than to ensure that land was purchased to enhance the birthplace of modern Australia so that we could have inspiration from our past? Of course, the Government did not avail itself of that opportunity. If honourable members look at the total asset acquisitions in the 2002-03 budget they will see that they have been reduced since the previous budget. That is not good enough. I refer to the entrance to Kurnell, to the state of the road and to the way in which it is being used as a dump. Every year the residents of Kurnell have a clean-up day, but the Government and the council should keep it clean every day. Roads have been neglected in the Sutherland shire.

Mr Ashton: They are good.

Mr KERR: No, they are not good enough by any stretch of the imagination. Government members should not talk about roads in view of the contribution that Genevieve Rankin made when she was running the roads before bridges campaign. Labor members in the Sutherland shire talk a lot about the Woronora bridge in the present tense; they do not talk about it in the past tense and the campaign to stop that bridge from being built

Mr Martin: You have been living in the past.

Mr KERR: People who forget the past are condemned to relive it, and people in the Sutherland shire are not so gullible. They know the track record, they know what the left wing of the Labor Party did in the Sutherland shire. On Monday night I spoke to the Mayor of Sutherland Shire Council, Councillor Kevin Schreiber—a close ally of the Labor Party—who said that the Government has not provided sufficient funds for many of the basic facilities in the shire, including library services. Time does not permit me to speak at length on this issue, as I have other things to speak about. However, we are proud of our libraries in the Sutherland shire.

Mr Ashton: You should get to them more often.

Mr KERR: I use libraries, as do tens of thousands of residents. At least the honourable member for Cessnock was conscious about the future and the need to educate our children. One of the best ways to educate our children is to adequately stock libraries so that they can experience the joy of learning. It must be done by way of a meaningful partnership between State Government and local government. I note that the honourable member for Heathcote was critical of the council last night. If we shortchange the library we shortchange the next generation. That would be a tragedy. People use libraries to acquire basic skills and adequate knowledge, including people who will be doctors in the future. I refer to a problem that was first highlighted by the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*: the insurance crisis this Government has allowed to engulf the community.

Mr Martin: You're joking!

Mr KERR: I am surprised that the honourable member would have the nerve to interject. The *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* and I warned that the insurance crisis was going to occur. We knew because of Elouera Surf Lifesaving Club's litigation quite some time ago. My advice to the honourable member for Bathurst is to subscribe to the *St George and Sutherland Leader*. He would then be alerted to a lot of problems that are brewing for his Government.

Mr Martin: You can get a Dubbo Liberal.

Mr KERR: Well, he can also subscribe. The Elouera Surf Lifesaving Club was sued at the District Court and the judgment found against the club. The Opposition offered to allow legislation to be introduced. This is the Government's famous stage two legislation with respect to protecting voluntary organisations. In June 2002 we are hearing a lot about civil liability and the need to protect voluntary organisations. However, this problem has been occurring for a number of years, and was highlighted by what occurred at Elouera surf club. That was not the only warning bell that was sounded. If honourable members refer to past issues of the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* they will see that David Campbell featured prominently on the front page of one edition. He talked about his Scottish society, the premium it was required to pay and the difficulties it was facing.

I conducted a survey of voluntary organisations in my area and found that they all had problems meeting insurance premiums—and this was last year. It is a nonsense for people to suggest that the insurance crisis has cropped up like a summer storm. People who were alert or who read the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* would have been aware that this was occurring. Given the current economic setting, by any standard, this budget fails to deal with problems at the State level. At the local level, the people of the Cronulla electorate have been shortchanged and have every reason to be angry.

[*Debate interrupted.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Precedence of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.40 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to provide that Government business take precedence of general business on Thursday 27 June 2002.

As honourable members who contributed to today's debate on the budget would know, the Government is anxious that the appropriation bills pass through this House and the Legislative Council. As honourable members are aware, money bills commence in this Chamber, particularly relevant cognate bills. For that reason the Government has no choice but to suspend private members' day tomorrow to give priority to Government business for that purpose. I encourage all honourable members, as they have, to take the opportunity to speak both to the appropriation bills and the take-note debate to the Address-in-Reply.

There are other factors of equal importance—namely, that the Government's legislative program involves seven or eight bills that will come from the upper House. Those bills emanate from the upper House for a couple of reasons. First, the Minister who has responsibility for the legislation is in that Chamber; and, second, the recent change to sessional orders in the upper House that all bills have to be introduced by the 18th of the

month. In that sense, the Legislative Assembly and its members are a creature of the upper House because of that edict. No-one can deny that the change to sessional orders has made the conduct of debate in this Chamber somewhat difficult. Instead of the bill being introduced and a robust debate taking place in this Chamber, it elicits a very benign response in the upper House.

On short notice the Government was forced to accept 18 June as the cut-off date for legislation. That is not to say that legislation is not given the requisite scrutiny when it comes to this Chamber, but it is more of an afterthought. I am concerned that legislation that may be amended by the upper House with which the Government does not agree will have to be sent back to the upper House for consideration. I am advised that the upper House will cease sitting on Friday. If we receive bills that are not in accordance with government policy or approved form they will have to be returned to the upper House by Friday. The budget is important, and I do not want to deny honourable members the opportunity to debate it.

Undoubtedly the honourable member for Epping will respond to my speech, as did his predecessors. I refer to the trend of honourable members postponing motions on the notice paper. It is a trend that we will have to do something about. I understand the tactics of postponement—it may be to give priority to one or other bills or motions. However, it may be that if a member postpones his or her motion three or more times it will have to be agreed that it is deemed to have lapsed. In other words, there must be a bona fide reason for the member to postpone his or her motion. I understand that at times members are unable to attend or may be ill, but they should avail themselves of the opportunity when it arises—

Mr Piccoli: Rare as they are.

Mr WHELAN: No, they are not rare. They were rare until 1991, when procedures changed. If the honourable member wants me to go through the figures that highlight the inability of the former Coalition Government I will do that. The former Coalition Government did not have the numbers; the Independents had the numbers. As shadow Leader of the House, I voted with the former Coalition Government to ensure that its legislative program had priority. This problem is a product of there being a large number of Independents. I am talking only about machinery, not the philosophy of members in both Houses. I am talking about how this Chamber can work efficiently. It would be costly to bring honourable members back on Friday. It would also be costly to bring members back next Wednesday. It is something we have to consider. [*Time expired.*]

Mr TINK (Epping) [12.45 p.m.]: The Opposition opposes the motion moved by the Leader of the House, who said that the Government had no choice. It did have a choice. It had a choice to set out a program for this session that would provide time for private members' business and Government business. There were weeks that the House could have sat but did not. The Government had a choice, but it did not take it. The Government runs this House. There was a choice, but it was not taken and private members' business has suffered as a result. The Leader of the House criticised the practice of members postponing private members' bills and motions. The Government postpones all sorts of bills, puts them off from one session to another, adjourns bills, motions and all sorts of things. I cast no aspersions on the Leader of the House for that. Most of the time we go along with it.

However, I fail to see how honourable members can be criticised for wanting to postpone private members' business. The Government postpones business every day. Unless there is some particular aspect to the postponement, such as stage two of the reforms to insurance that should come on more quickly, we would strongly and rightly criticise the Government. But we never criticise the Government for postponing procedural matters. I am disappointed that tomorrow I will not have the opportunity to deal with the excellent motion foreshadowed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition about the Premier's book, *Thoughtlines*. Notwithstanding that it appears to be offered at a discount price, the book provides some interesting reading. I looked for policy ideas in the book, and I got to page 182 before I found one. It was the most diabolical and disturbing policy idea I have ever seen in my life:

I've got a great idea: a surgical amendment to the *ICAC Act*. Not only will ICAC investigate the corruption of public officials, but the corruption of those who *report* public officials. It's a suggestion being kicked around the Cabinet Office, even as we speak.

This, of course, is the Premier's reference to ensuring that all reporters, members of the media in this gallery and elsewhere, become subject to the reach of the ICAC in relation to the way they report matters of government. It is a matter of importance for the House to debate. It falls squarely in the ambit of the motion that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition could have moved tomorrow, but for the motion before the House. We should consider why *Thoughtlines* is being offered at a discount price. I can understand why the Government would not want such a debate to proceed. Other than the embarrassment of the event, I got to page 182 before I found a policy

idea—that the ICAC could investigate reporters. That is the last and most desperate measure of a dying Government—intimidating journalists from telling the truth about the disgraceful ongoing performance of this Government. It is no wonder it wants to shut us up tomorrow. No wonder the Government is shutting down debate on the foreshadowed motion of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. If the Government lets us have a go the book might get off the remainder list. I got my copy from the Parliamentary Library—I'll be blown if I'm paying for it! I suggest to all honourable members, particularly those in Caucus, that they also borrow the book from the Parliamentary Library. On page 3 the Premier states:

Today I shall be meeting with interference, ingratitude, insolence, disloyalty, ill will and selfishness.

That is what the Premier thinks of Caucus. If I were a Government member I would not buy the book. Instead, I would go downstairs to the Parliamentary Library, put my name down, borrow it and have a look at what he really thinks. Government members could then join us in debate on this issue tomorrow. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

Ms Allan	Mrs Grusovin	Mr Orkopoulos
Mr Amery	Ms Harrison	Mr E. T. Page
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hunter	Dr Refshauge
Mr Ashton	Mr Iemma	Ms Saliba
Mr Bartlett	Mrs Lo Po'	Mr W. D. Smith
Mr Black	Mr Lynch	Mr Stewart
Mr Brown	Mr Markham	Mr Tripodi
Mr Campbell	Mr Martin	Mr Watkins
Mr Collier	Mr McBride	Mr West
Mr Crittenden	Ms Meagher	Mr Whelan
Mr Debus	Ms Megarrity	Mr Woods
Mr Face	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Mr Gaudry	Mr Moss	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gibson	Mr Newell	Mr Anderson
Mr Greene	Ms Nori	Mr Thompson

Noes, 36

Mr Armstrong	Dr Kernohan	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Barr	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Mr Brogden	Mr Maguire	Mr Stoner
Mrs Chikarovski	Mr Merton	Mr Tink
Mr Collins	Ms Moore	Mr Torbay
Mr Cull	Mr O'Farrell	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr George	Mr D. L. Page	Mr Webb
Mr Glachan	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	
Mr Hazzard	Mr Rozzoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton	Mr Fraser
Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner	Mr R. H. L. Smith

Pair

Ms Beamer

Ms Hodgkinson

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL****APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL****GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL****PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION
SCHEMES FUND) BILL****PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING)
BILL****STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL****Second Reading****GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY****Take-note Debate**

[Debate resumed.]

Mr NEWELL (Tweed) [1.10 p.m.]: I express my delight at the recent State budget, which has given a huge boost to the Tweed community. Families and small businesses recognise that the budget gives them the assistance they have been looking for to enable them to get ahead. I am the first Labor member for the Tweed area for some 70 years; the seat was formerly held by conservatives. People recognise that in the past two to three years things have been happening in the Tweed. Although the State Government operates from Macquarie Street it is taking an ever-increasing interest in what is happening in the Northern Rivers area. I am happy to report to the Tweed electorate on the benefits it will get from this budget.

The budget has allocated the biggest amount in New South Wales history for the building of new schools, hospitals and roads. The budget has resulted in the Premier being referred to colloquially as Bob the Builder—and deservedly so because the budget builds substantially on the State's infrastructure. In the Tweed electorate the average income is towards the lower end of the scale, according to statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The electorate looks forward to the return of government investment in services. Many people in the Tweed appreciate that the State Government, unlike the Federal Government, is giving them the services they need.

The budget forms part of the Government's commitment to improving the quality of life for local residents. As the Treasurer's eighth budget is in surplus, the people acknowledge that the Government has done a great job in ensuring that New South Wales gets ahead. The State Government is making its mark in financial responsibility and fiscal prudence and is thus keeping Australia forging ahead. I have listened to the arguments of members opposite, and I have tried to find some reason for their refusal to acknowledge the role played by the New South Wales Government in the success of Australia's national economy. New South Wales is certainly leading the way, but I suppose politics get in the way of a considered acknowledgment.

However, I acknowledge that a number of members from the other side of the House have acknowledged some of the benefits their electorates will receive. The Premier has been able to relay some of those benefits to the House during question time. The Treasurer, Mr Egan, pointed out that of all Australian governments only New South Wales and Tasmania have been able to come up with the trifecta of reducing debt, reducing liabilities and increasing net worth. New South Wales has certainly retained its triple-A rating and has been able to put on the table a compassionate budget, one that will assist all of New South Wales. This budget will result in New South Wales forging ahead and leading the way in the Australian economy.

My electorate has benefited substantially from the budget, particularly the budget for Roads, which I have referred to recently in this House. The budget continues funding for the Yelgun to Chinderah Freeway, which will be opened on 4 August. The freeway, which will cost \$348 million, is one of the biggest, single infrastructure projects in New South Wales. It is certainly the biggest part of the massive Pacific Highway

upgrade that has been under way for a number of years. The freeway will cut travel times on the Pacific Highway by about 25 minutes and eliminate the notorious Burringbar Range. It will also be a boost to the local economy.

The budget is not only about capital expenditure; it is also about providing services. The Government has not forgotten social capital. People appreciate the fact that benefits to their local economies go hand in hand with enhanced capital expenditure and the boost to infrastructure. Their local economies will provide more jobs because of this massive spending boost. The Tweed electorate will benefit from two new bridges. One is the Kynumboon Bridge over the Rous River, for which tenders have been let. The new bridge replaces an old timber bridge that had been condemned and had a weight restriction on it for a number of years.

The second bridge is a new pedestrian bridge over the Pacific Highway at Sexton Hill, which the people in the area of Banora Point have been calling for for a number of years. I am delighted to have been able to deliver on that. The new bridge will ensure that the kids going to school at Banora Point from east Banora will be able to cross the highway safely. The students will have the choice of riding bicycles to school or walking. People who travel by the surfside buses in the evening will no doubt appreciate using the new bridge. Rather than having to run the gauntlet with the four lanes of traffic over the top of the hill, they will be able to safely cross over that traffic on the pedestrian bridge. Work has already commenced on the walkways and cycleways that link the pedestrian overpass to Banora Point.

The local council also picks up \$1.6 million in funding for local roads. That block grant funding will allow sections of local roads to be upgraded. I have received messages of appreciation from the electorate in that regard. Funding also goes to the Tweed Shire Council for a number of positions, including road safety officer. That important position includes overseeing work done by the shire council. The Health budget includes allocations for the Tweed Heads Hospital, which was opened by the Premier in March. The Government has provided funding not only for the bricks and mortar but also for the services that the hospital will provide.

Recently the psychiatric ward was opened. The hospital will receive further funding for improved services and refurbishment. More particularly, recurrent funding has been boosted to ensure that the hospital will provide an enhanced number and range of services to the local community. The hospital provides services to the electorate of Tweed and, under a cross-border arrangement, it also provides services, particularly maternity services, to the lower Gold Coast around Currumbin and Palm Beach. That is also the drawing area for elective surgery in the hospital, and that obviously increases the waiting list. Many people do not seem to understand that between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of those on the Tweed Heads hospital waiting list are Gold Coast residents.

A major item in the Health budget is the mental health unit. I am delighted about that funding. I called for the establishment of the unit in my first speech in the House. I was concerned about the inadequate mental health services in the Tweed. Funding for the acute care services and ongoing services to the chronically ill provided by the mental health unit has received a boost. I am delighted that the Carr Labor Government has been able to respond with the sort of assistance that the Tweed electorate badly needed and that the local community was seeking. Those needs have been met, particularly by this budget. As the mental health unit, or psychiatric ward, gets up to speed, it will provide an expanded service not only to the lower part of Queensland, but also to the Brunswick Heads-Ocean Shores area in the northern part of the Ballina electorate.

Recently the Deputy Premier visited the Tweed electorate. He had the honour of announcing that the State Government was committing \$220,000 to help revitalise the Tweed Heads central business district [CBD]. Over the years, with the advent of shopping centres at Tweed Heads and South Tweed, the Tweed Heads CBD has become run down. Many shops and services and other infrastructure, such as banks, have moved from the centre of the CBD to those shopping centres. That has left the CBD area looking neglected. Two to three years ago the area received a substantial amount of money from the New South Wales Government Town Centres Program to improve the streetscape and to revitalise the town. However, it needs further revitalisation.

Some years ago when the Pacific Highway went along Wharf Street up into Griffith Street, the area around Coolangatta and Kirra was choked with traffic and there was almost continual gridlock. The New South Wales Government built the Tweed Heads bypass, which took traffic out of Tweed Heads and saved Kirra and Coolangatta from the gridlock that was snarling their development. After the Tweed Heads bypass was built, the traffic moved out. The Gold Coast City Council, no doubt assisted by the Queensland Government, improved Griffith Street, and the area has been enhanced by that revitalisation. The \$220,000 allocation to put in place a plan to revitalise Tweed Heads CBD will fit in with the development of Griffith Street on the Queensland side of the township.

The Queensland Government did not commit any funds to the Tweed Heads bypass, which was built by the New South Wales Government, yet the bypass took traffic out of Coolangatta and Kirra and led to the substantial development of the Coolangatta area. The development of the Tweed Heads area is under way. As I said, for a number of years the town has been dying because assistance was not forthcoming. The formation of a ministerial task force means that the revitalisation of the Tweed Heads CBD is now a priority of the State Government. With the help of stakeholders, Tweed Shire Council and other community groups, this initiative will be instrumental in turning the Tweed Heads area into a vibrant and functional city centre. The town's potential was recognised in September 2001 when the Tweed Economic Development Corporation displayed a draft plan for revitalisation. Everyone got behind that initiative, and everyone is getting behind the task force to put in place a plan to revitalise the Tweed Heads CBD.

Another winner for my electorate of Tweed is Education and Training, which is a concern for everyone. In this day and age young people need all the assistance they can get with training or retraining to obtain a good job, to become established and to move on with their lives. The Department of Education and Training is providing that assistance. In particular, the Government has made a commitment to the stage one upgrade of Tweed River High School, which has been established for some time and does a great job. It has a fantastic reputation in the district. The Government has committed an amount of \$3 million, with \$1 million in this budget, to upgrade the facilities at that school.

The Government has also made the commitment to build a new primary school at Bogangar-Cabarita Beach. We are also providing funding for a new high school at Banora Point. Tenders are being called to get that project under way later this year. Banora Point is a growing area and has a substantial population. A few years ago there was concern in the community, when it was announced that the Government was looking to building a high school at Banora Point, that there would not be sufficient numbers to warrant high schools at Tweed River and at Banora Point. A number of studies have shown that more than enough students were coming through until 2005 to ensure the numbers remained viable at both high schools. A great deal of work has been done to ensure that the results of those studies were accurate. A community group, which undertook a study and released its options for the future direction of education in the Tweed, endorsed the model that the State Government is funding.

Cudgen Public School, where the Government has recently completed a new permanent library, also benefits from the Education budget. That library, which was an election commitment in 1999, is now being used by Cudgen Public School and is appreciated by the local community. Cudgen Public School is a fantastic school. The Premier visited the school in the run-up to the last election. He was delighted with the programs and other initiatives being undertaken there. The Premier took a great deal of interest in the computer room. The school was more than pleased to use it as a showpiece for the education provided to its students and to show that it is keeping up with changing technology to equip students for the future.

To return to health services, the Murwillumbah health service is already operating and a community health centre is about to be opened at Kingscliff. That township is in a growing area of the Tweed coast and for some time the community has looked forward to the establishment of a community health centre. It has been part of the plan of the Northern Rivers Area Health Service to establish a Kingscliff community health service and some months ago I had the pleasure of turning the first sod on the site. In the near future I look forward to being part of the opening ceremony when the building is commissioned and the community health service is under way.

A number of initiatives have not been directly announced in the budget but they have contributed substantially to the local economy in the Tweed. One is the Tweed River entrance sand bypass project. I cannot emphasise enough the impact this has had on promoting the Tweed River as a tourist facility. Previously the river had been underutilised but as the entrance is now navigable, a number of charter operators use the river and more berthing facilities are now required. This project has been a great boost to the local economy. Also, the businesses of boat builders along the Chinderah and the Tweed River area have improved. This budget has ensured that the Tweed area continues to thrive. [*Time expired.*]

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Fraser.

[*Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr Mills) left the chair at 1.31 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.*]

LEGAL AID COMMISSION AMENDMENT BILL

Bill received and read a first time.

PETITIONS

North Head Quarantine Station

Petition praying that the head lease proposal for North Head Quarantine Station be opposed, received from **Mr Barr**.

Bank Services

Petition asking the House to make banks provide a basic service for all and to make arrangements for the aged and the disabled, received from **Ms Andrews**.

Freedom of Religion

Petitions praying that the House reject legislative proposals that would detract from the exercise of freedom of religion, and retain the existing exemptions applying to religious bodies in the Anti-Discrimination Act, received from **Mr Glachan**, **Mr Stoner**, and **Mr Whelan**.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Prosecutions

Petition asking that the National Parks and Wildlife Service be directed to redress the injustice suffered by the Bacic family and to ensure that future prosecutions under the National Parks and Wildlife Act are properly and responsibly based, received from **Mr Rozzoli**.

Manly JetCat Services

Petition seeking reversal of the decision by Sydney Ferries to stop JetCat services to Manly at 7.00 p.m., received from **Mr Barr**.

Manly Traffic Arrangements

Petition requesting urgent improvements to the Seaforth roundabout at the top of Sydney Road, Manly, received from **Mr Barr**.

Lane Cove Tunnel Works

Petition praying that the House initiate a review of Lane Cove tunnel works, received from **Mr Collins**.

Cammeray Traffic Arrangements

Petition praying that pedestrian traffic signals be installed at Raleigh Plaza on Miller Street, Cammeray, and that the 1997 traffic study be implemented, received from **Mr Collins**.

John Fisher Park

Petition praying that the Government support the rectification of grass surfaces at John Fisher Park, Curl Curl, and opposes any proposal to hard surface the Crown land portion of the park and Abbott Road land, received from **Mr Barr**.

Old-growth Forests Protection

Petition praying that consideration be given to the permanent protection of old-growth forests and all other areas of high conservation value, and to the implementation of tree planting strategies, received from **Ms Moore**.

Battery Cages for Laying Hens

Petition praying for support to phase out battery cages for laying hens, received from **Mr Amery**.

Circus Animals

Petition praying for opposition to the suffering of wild animals and their use in circuses, received from **Ms Moore**.

White City Site Rezoning Proposal

Petition praying that any rezoning of the White City site be opposed, received from **Ms Moore**.

Beat Policing

Petition calling on the Government to focus policing strategies and resources on beat policing, received from **Mr Debnam**.

Casino Policing

Petition requesting increased police numbers at Casino and that the police station be manned 24 hours per day, received from **Mr George**.

Albury Electorate Policing

Petition asking for increased police presence in Henty, Culcairn, Walla Walla and surrounding areas, received from **Mr Glachan**.

Warragamba Police Station Closure

Petition asking that the decision to close Warragamba Police Station be reversed, received from **Dr Kernohan**.

Cronulla Police Station Upgrading

Petition praying that the House restore to Cronulla a fully functioning police patrol and upgrade the police station, received from **Mr Kerr**.

Surry Hills Policing

Petition praying for increased police presence in the Surry Hills area, received from **Ms Moore**.

Malabar Policing

Petition praying that the House note the concern of Malabar residents at the closure of Malabar Police Station and praying that the station be reopened and staffed by locally based and led police, received from **Mr Tink**.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr SPEAKER: I note the presence in the gallery of former Minister Neil Pickard and his wife. I welcome them to the House.

FIREARMS AMENDMENT (PUBLIC SAFETY) BILL**SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT (PUBLIC SAFETY) BILL**

Bills received and read a first time.

COMMITTEE ON THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION**Report**

Mr Price, on behalf of the Chairman, tabled the report entitled "Review of the ICAC: Stage III—The Conduct of ICAC Hearings", together with the minutes of evidence taken before the Committee.

Report ordered to be printed.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

POLICE OFFICER ASSAULT SENTENCES

Mr BROGDEN: My question without notice is to the Premier. In view of continuing violence against police and the shooting of Constable John Hassett yesterday, why will he not adopt the Coalition policy of compulsory life sentences for murdering police and a minimum four years imprisonment for malicious wounding of police? Why will he not acknowledge that police deserve the strongest possible legislative support as they face the daily risk of serious injury while carrying out their duty?

Mr CARR: For all the reasons I have stated in the House on two previous occasions, and for all the reasons the Minister for Police outlined to the Police Association annual conference a few weeks ago.

TOBACCO FRANCHISE FEES

Mr W. D. SMITH: My question without notice is to the Premier. What is the Government's response to a recent High Court decision involving Rothmans of Pall Mall Australia and tobacco franchise fees?

Mr CARR: I noted tobacco was the subject of some discussion in the House yesterday. It is a happy coincidence that we can consider this matter today. By the way, the honourable member for South Coast has had great success in battling the idea of the big bad gaol in the tourist haven of the South Coast. While communities in the Central West are crying out for a gaol and the jobs it brings, the honourable member for South Coast was in my office today with petitions containing hundreds of signatures from families on the South Coast who want their region to remain a beautiful tourist haven, not dominated by a gaol.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Oxley to order. I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order. I call the honourable member for Epping to order.

Mr CARR: No-one in my electorate complains about Long Bay gaol. It was there before anyone who now lives in the State electoral district of Maroubra. This issue concerns the great matter of public health. On 5 August 1997 the High Court ruled that State wholesale tobacco licensing fees were unconstitutional. During a limbo period of about five weeks tobacco wholesalers collected fees from retailers but because of the High Court decision, did not pass the money onto the State Government. This created a windfall of around \$240 million for tobacco companies nationally. It came out of the pockets of smokers, passed through the hands of retailers, and is now in the coffers of the tobacco industry—an industry whose products, when used as directed, cause addiction, illness, premature death—which is reaping big financial rewards. British American Tobacco Australasia, the subject of some consideration yesterday by honourable members, reported in the year 2000 an after-tax profit of \$93 million. Yet it is the beneficiary of this windfall.

A major development in the tobacco excise issue occurred last year. In December 2001 the High Court ruled that fees collected by the wholesalers in the five weeks between the last tax payments and the High Court's decision had to be repaid to the retailers. The High Court said the money should go back to the retailers because they brought the action. Justice Kirby, however, noted that this was unfair and recommended Commonwealth legislation to prevent the windfall. Subsequently a class action has been initiated on behalf of 1,500 retailers who paid excess fees to wholesalers in 1997. The matter is currently before the courts. The retailers have already passed on the tax to consumers in the price of cigarettes. It is not fair for tobacco wholesalers to keep these funds. It is double dipping by retailers and it is not feasible for individual smokers to receive refunds. The best and most sensible way forward is to secure this money for public health; for an anti-smoking campaign better funded than any we have seen in the past. A sustained long-term, properly funded anti-smoking campaign would have more health benefits than any other public education campaign.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for North Shore to order.

Mr CARR: What a bad-tempered person she is! What a negative person she is!

Mrs Skinner: Why not put more money into an anti-tobacco campaign?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for North Shore to order for the second time.

Mr CARR: I could well believe that article in today's *Daily Telegraph*: "The member for Lane Cove was told by the Leader of the Opposition to stay away from their weekend's national conference". To be told to stay away is an extraordinary and brutal way to treat a former leader and typical of the ill nature we have just heard expressed by the honourable member. Members opposite are bitter, nasty people.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order: The Premier is misrepresenting my interjection. It was a very positive suggestion to put more money into anti-tobacco campaigns. Our policy adopts it.

Mr CARR: They are negative people. The lead item on last night's Orange Prime television was "Premier Bob Carr's announcement in the Parliament that there was a band of prosperity throughout the central West". Orange is a boom town. Local people interviewed in the Central West say "We are booming. Country New South Wales has never been better off".

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for North Shore to order for the third time.

Mr CARR: The honourable member asks what was said. Councillor Gledhill said "Rural New South Wales is on a high and we don't need people giving us negatives". The boom town of Boorowa will certainly give Bob Carr the red carpet treatment! Enough of these distractions.

Mr Slack-Smith: Point of order: It is obvious that the Premier cannot even pronounce the word "Boorowa".

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Barwon will resume his seat.

Mr CARR: We try to get a serious case up, and we face this wall of interjection that drags us off into various territories.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Murrumbidgee to order.

Mr CARR: Let us get back to the great issue of public health with which I am trying to engage this House. This provides us with an opportunity for the best funded, most sustained and most beneficial public health campaign we have ever seen.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the National Party to order.

Mr CARR: The Crown Solicitor advises that it is not within the State's power to intercept these funds. This can be done only by the Commonwealth. Today I have written to the Prime Minister urging him to introduce legislation to impose a 100 per cent tax on any money retailers recover from wholesalers through this process of court action.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the National Party to order for the second time.

Mr CARR: I have also proposed that the Commonwealth require wholesalers to indicate the amount recovered from retailers in payment of tobacco franchise fees after 5 August 1997. This amount should be subject to 100 per cent super profits tax to be paid by the wholesalers. Either way, the Commonwealth should secure this money and return it to the States and Territories. There is a precedent. On 23 August 2001 the Federal Parliament passed legislation on excise incorrectly levied by the Commonwealth on beer between 1 July 2000 and 4 April 2001. Those funds were not returned to brewers or publicans: they were allocated to an alcohol education and rehabilitation foundation. That is a perfect precedent for the right thing to do on alcohol and the right thing to do on tobacco. I encourage support from all current and former members of the Liberal Party, some of whom are very sensitive to the needs and opportunities presented by the tobacco industry.

Honourable members should be aware of the facts on smoking, which is the largest cause of preventable death and disease in Australia. NSW Health advises that increasing spending on tobacco control programs would result in more public health gains than expenditure on any other prevention program. New South Wales already leads Australia on legislation and regulation in this industry. We have made it illegal to sell cigarettes to under 18-year-olds. We have banned point-of-sale promotion and smoking in most public places. We now need to turn to a mass media campaign to encourage smokers to quit, and to prevent young people from becoming hooked on these products.

Mrs Skinner: You need to spend decent money.

Mr CARR: I am talking about decent money, that is what it is all about—very decent money and money that the public ought to have available to fund such a campaign. To be effective, these campaigns need to be long term and properly funded, that is, provided with decent money. Without leadership from the Commonwealth, without the Commonwealth unlocking these funds, we face the very real possibility that what was a windfall for the tobacco companies may become a windfall for tobacco retailers when what it really should be is a windfall for public health.

MENINDEE LAKES PARK TRUST CARAVAN PARK TENANT EVICTION

Mr SOURIS: My question is directed to the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. How does he justify his political interference twice at the insistence of the honourable member for Murray-Darling by overriding the decision of the Menindee Lakes Park Trust to evict an aggressive and abusive caravan park tenant, despite the previous Minister's refusal to be so compromised?

Mr Carr: The number two question.

Mr AQUILINA: Yes, it is earth shattering.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the National Party has asked a question. He will listen to the answer in silence.

Mr AQUILINA: As the Premier said, one wonders how this could be the number two question for the Opposition, an earth-shattering political question. I undertake to get the information and get back to the Leader of the National Party.

REGISTER OF ENCUMBERED VEHICLES

Miss BURTON: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Fair Trading. How is the Government protecting consumers from purchasing stolen or rebirthed cars?

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: A question has been asked by a Government member. Ministers should stay awake and listen to the questions.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am waiting for the Minister to respond.

Mr Hazzard: Mr Speaker—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst has the call.

Mr Aquilina: Point of order: I heard the question being asked, but regrettably I was waiting for you to give me the call. I do not recall receiving the call from you to answer the question.

Mrs Chikarovski: To the point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Wakehurst has the call. Members should be aware that the standing orders provide for the answering of 10 questions. Therefore, the honourable member for Kogarah will be able to ask her question again and the Minister will be given the opportunity to reply.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES STAFFING

Mr HAZZARD: My question is directed to the Minister for Community Services. As this leaked internal email shows that the Department of Community Services told the Public Service Association two weeks ago that if the PSA capitulated DOCS would "advertise 170 additional case worker positions on Monday", how can she justify not appointing those staff when, on average, one child known to DOCS or other agencies dies every fortnight?

Mrs LO PO': The Opposition would have been well served if, last night, it had asked questions of my budget. It asked not one. It was an absolute travesty. Not a single question was asked. Absolute pathos!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst has asked a question. He will listen to the answer in silence.

Mrs LO PO': For the Opposition to ask anything about resourcing my department is an outrage. Never did any government inherit such a shell, a wreckage, as we did in DOCS in 1995.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order for the second time.

Mrs LO PO': I will get around to him, do not worry. We have a pathetic shadow here, because they have a pathetic leader.

Mr Hazzard: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The Opposition asked a whole series of questions about the budget, but this Minister did not answer them.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr Hazzard: She now has the opportunity, and we look forward to her answer as to what she intends to do with resources for DOCS staff in the PSA.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order.

Mrs LO PO': To refresh everyone's memory, this is what the Greiner Government, the Cabinet that included the honourable member for Willoughby and the honourable member for Lachlan, did. They slashed 1,000 positions from DOCS.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Leader of the National Party that he is on two calls to order.

Mrs LO PO': The honourable member for Wakehurst should stay here. Almost a quarter of the Community Services offices were closed. Twenty-three offices were close in places such as Casino, Murwillumbah, Wellington, Camden, Singleton and Young.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Parramatta to order.

Mrs LO PO': Offices in Sydney suburbs such as Campsie, Smithfield and Granville were closed. The positions of 77 child protection workers were axed. Three police child mistreatment units were disbanded—at Flemington, Wagga Wagga and Campbelltown. The Coalition even managed to underspend the child protection budget in its first three years of office by \$11 million.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Swansea to order.

Mr Scully: How much?

Mrs LO PO': By \$11 million. That is the record of the Coalition, so the honourable member for Wakehurst has no licence to ask me anything. It was a disgraceful episode in the annals of public administration, a massive scar on the Greiner premiership, and an enduring shame to every Liberal Party and National Party member who went along with it.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Wakehurst on three calls to order. Is the honourable member Wakehurst asking the Chair to remove him from the Chamber?

Mrs LO PO': I am proud to be part of the Government that has restored DOCS.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Lachlan to order.

Mrs LO PO': DOCS is the department that deals with the most dysfunctional families and the most abused and neglected children in the State. We have increased funding to the community services portfolios by nearly a billion dollars since 1995, from \$993 million to \$1.915 billion, a 92.8 per cent increase. We have doubled funding in this critical area. Today I am proud to announce that the Government will appoint 100 new DOCS workers to continue the rebuilding.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Baulkham Hills to order.

Mrs LO PO': It is part of our response to the Kibble review, whose recommendations we embrace. The recommendations advise that we need to review the DOCS management structure, continue to work with the Public Service Association [PSA] to get on top of demand management issues—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for The Entrance to order.

Mrs LO PO':—review DOCS internal systems to ensure staff have a streamlined structure of reporting and responsibilities, and develop a new strategy to help prevent abuse driven by drug and alcohol abuse. One thing is clear: mandatory reporting is here to stay. The honourable member for Wakehurst was on radio saying that he believes in mandatory reporting, but it should be discretionary!

Mr Hazzard: Point of order: I am not sure that anybody actually believes a word that this Minister says any more but, on the basis of relevance, that is not true and she knows it is not true, although we did say—and the premiers agree with us—that mandatory sentencing should be reviewed. But the Minister did not say that; she called a policy review a corker.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mrs LO PO': The honourable member for Wakehurst deserves an Oscar for that performance. Mandatory reporting is here to stay, but we need to make sure that it works better. For example, under the legislation, in each school a teacher, a school counsellor and the school principal are all required to make individual reports to DOCS about the same incident. Duplication such as this is unnecessary and we will fix it with some careful amendments to the legislation. And we expect the Coalition's support. But the core of the announcement is these 100 new positions. We will not just throw these positions into the department to be soaked up by ineffective work practices.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mrs LO PO': We want these positions to make a difference in the suburbs and towns where need is greatest. DOCS offices opened in past years may be servicing areas with fewer children and young people, in places such as the inner city. At the same time areas of need such as the North Coast are growing. So we need agreement to put positions where the use and neglect are happening—not where DOCS staff are comfortable or where old patterns dictate. We also need DOCS staff to be more flexible in working hours. Abuse and neglect do not follow business hours. Child protection is a 24-hour, seven days a week job. That is the harsh reality of working with the State's most dysfunctional families. So, again, better work practices will mean better protection for kids. That is why we will work with the Public Service Association to ensure DOCS work practices are amended in a constructive way. We know we will have the support of DOCS workers, because their professional satisfaction lies in helping abused and neglected kids and putting troubled families back together. At the same time we want to ensure that hard work, skill and excellence are properly recognised by the department. That is why we will seek to ensure that promotions within DOCS are based on merit, not on seniority. No public servant should gain a promotion simply for sitting at a job.

Mr Brogden: You did. That is how you became a Minister.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mrs LO PO': Promotions must be earned in DOCS and everywhere else.

Mr Carr: The Leader of the Opposition got his job by one vote.

Mrs LO PO': Treachery was not part of my armoury; it was part of his. Today's announcement is another step in the restoration of DOCS, ensuring that it has the resources to do its job and, more importantly, ensuring that the department and its staff use their resources in the most efficient way possible. Too much is at stake for us to risk anything less.

REGISTER OF ENCUMBERED VEHICLES

Miss BURTON: My question is to the Minister for Fair Trading. How is the Government protecting consumers from purchasing stolen or rebirthed cars?

Mr AQUILINA: I thank the honourable member for Kogarah for her question and for her persevering interest in this matter. The Department of Fair Trading Register of Encumbered Vehicles, REVS, is a public

register of information on cars and boats that have been used as security for loans from banks, finance companies or credit unions. The primary role of REV's is to alert the car buying community of any money owing on a particular vehicle that people are interested in buying. The aim is to protect innocent and unsuspecting consumers from seeing a car they have purchased being repossessed by a finance company. In addition to providing this important service, the Department of Fair Trading has also played an important role in the fight against stolen vehicle rebirthing rackets.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Lane Cove to order.

Mr AQUILINA: Just this morning I met with the honourable member for Kogarah, a local police commander and departmental officers to discuss ways to further combat the problem. Since 1986 the New South Wales police service has provided REV's with details of motor vehicles reported as stolen. REV's checks all consumer inquiries against these details and alerts buyers as to whether a vehicle is on the stolen vehicle register. REV's currently receives stolen vehicle information from the New South Wales police service four times daily. It holds details of more than 300,000 reported as stolen in New South Wales and 165,000 recorded as written off. All REV's searches—more than 20,000 per week—are checked against this database. In the past 12 months more than 11,000 have found that the car in question had been reported as stolen. That is almost a thousand a month. For more than 36,000 inquiries the car had been found to be written off—possibly rebirthed. This means that in the last 12 months more than 47,000 consumers have been alerted to the fact that their potential new car has been reported as stolen or possibly rebirthed. That is 47,000 consumers who otherwise would have been duded.

Today I can announce that the Government's fight to combat stolen car rebirthing rackets will move up a gear. About 10 per cent of REV's inquiries relate to cars that are registered interstate. In the past we have not had access to details on these vehicles. But a new project will better protect buyers against border hopping car thieves by providing access to a national database of stolen cars. The project will link REV's with the National Exchange of Vehicle and Driver Information System, known as NEVDIS, for the first time. Within 12 months it will enable prospective buyers of second-hand cars to conduct a REV's encumbrance search and establish whether the car had been reported to any Australian police service as being stolen.

With support from the RTA, car buyers can find out whether a car has been listed by an insurer anywhere in Australia as a total or partial write-off. That is a powerful weapon against gangs who bring stolen cars into New South Wales and either sell them as is or rebirth them using parts from written-off vehicles. Providing consumers with even more protection will make it even more difficult for those gangs to operate in this State. This initiative will keep the New South Wales Register of Encumbered Vehicles in the forefront of motor vehicle consumer protection in Australia. New South Wales is leading the drive nationally to improve consumer access to vehicle status information.

CLINICAL ACADEMICS MEDICAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE

Mr MILLS: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Minister, what is the latest information on the medical indemnity issue?

Mr KNOWLES: Clinical academics are doctors who are employed by universities and who teach in one of our hospitals. In New South Wales there are 247 clinical academics. As with any corporation, small business or government department, universities are required to have insurance cover for the actions of their employees. However, with the collapse of reinsurance markets and the withdrawal of multinational insurers such as St Paul from the global insurance market, universities have been unable to obtain insurance for their academic staff.

The practical effect of universities not having insurance cover is that clinical academics, all 247 of them in this State, are placed at personal financial risk and therefore in the overwhelming majority of cases are unwilling to work, teach or supervise junior medical staff in the public health system. The 247 clinical academics are employed at the University of Sydney, the University of New South Wales and the University of Newcastle. Whilst relatively few in number, compared to the overall number of visiting medical officers working in our system, they form the core of the teaching and training capacity of our health care system, not only in New South Wales but right around the country.

As they transfer their knowledge to junior medical staff, they continue to reinforce the primacy of the public health system in this nation as the place for teaching and training excellence and quality. They are,

therefore, essential to our health system. Everyone understands that universities are responsible to the Commonwealth Government. Universities are funded by the Commonwealth and the wages of clinical academics are paid for by the Commonwealth. Their education programs are auspiced by the Commonwealth and the content of the medical training courses and number of placements offered in universities are determined by the Commonwealth.

Nonetheless, it probably will not surprise honourable members that in the case of providing insurance cover the Commonwealth Government does not seem to want to recognise its responsibility. The vice-chancellors of the three teaching universities have advised me that the Commonwealth has been unwilling to offer support for their predicament, that is, their inability to gain insurance for clinical academics. The Commonwealth has shown very little concern for the fact that the insurance cover for the clinical work undertaken by those academics is due to expire at the end of this month, in five days time.

In face of continuing inaction by the Commonwealth, and the urgency of maintaining the presence of teaching and training in our public health system, last night I met with the representatives of the three universities, the vice-chancellors and the dean of medicine from Sydney university, and we agreed that the New South Wales Government will provide coverage until the end of this year to at least ensure that our clinical academics can continue to provide their clinical services. That means that this Government will indemnify universities for the actions of their academics when treating public patients in public hospitals, subject to agreed excess requirements applying to claims made during the period of cover.

Mrs Skinner: Exactly, that is what it should do.

Mr KNOWLES: The honourable member for North Shore interjected, "Exactly, that is what it should do". I do not think that anyone in this nation would agree with that assertion. The Commonwealth Government, with responsibility for universities, is unwilling to cover the insurance costs of its employees. Imagine if any private company tried to do that. Imagine if any private corporation said that it would not indemnify its employees; they can find it somewhere else and take their own risk.

In recognition of that intransigence the Government will pick up, in the short term, or the next six months, the coverage for clinical academics. Of course, we have agreed to explore other options for the longer term. The extension of cover until the end of the year is, I acknowledge, a short-term solution. However, it will give the universities ample time to lobby their masters in Canberra and, in an effort to get the Commonwealth on side, do something about it, and ideally secure a permanent solution. This is an important component of the medical indemnity problems that are manifesting themselves around the country.

The Prime Minister may have thought that he had dealt with this by extending the coverage to visiting medical officers insured with United Medical Protection [UMP] until the end of the year. I have already spoken in this House about the closure of general practitioner clinics because they are unable to get indemnity cover. I have already spoken about the Family Planning Association, and any number of services outside the gamut of UMP. Clinical academics are the latest in that line and I can assure the Prime Minister that it is set to continue. If the Prime Minister thinks that the problem of medical indemnity insurance will be resolved simply by extending the coverage to UMP-insured doctors until the end of year, he is kidding himself.

We have to make sure that the Commonwealth Government understands the very simple message that the medical profession is determined to make the Commonwealth Government understand that it has a responsibility to provide leadership and solutions. It has to do that well before Christmas. I assure the Commonwealth Government—and this is a clear message to Canberra from organisations such as the universities, the Australian Medical Association, the professional colleges, the non-government organisations, and the general practitioners—that unless there is a lasting and long-term solution well before Christmas, the problems we saw just a few months ago, with doctors unwilling and unable to work because they cannot get coverage, are set to continue.

The State Government has demonstrated its bona fides on this. No other government in this country has received support from the medical community for its initiatives on medical indemnity insurance. That was acknowledged as recently as last weekend when the president of the Australian Medical Association reaffirmed her support for our model. We stand ready to do our bit with the Commonwealth, but it requires the Commonwealth to step up to the plate and take responsibility for things that are rightfully in its domain. Universities and the clinical academics are ready, and the Commonwealth has a hide to let them down and leave them exposed in the way it has.

LACHLAN RIVER WATER SHARING PLAN

Mr ARMSTRONG: My question is directed to the Minister for Agriculture. Does the Minister support the Government's proposed Lachlan River water sharing plan that expert opinion says has the potential to reduce farmers' incomes by \$40 million a year with a \$200 million flow-on loss to the wider community? Will the Minister seek an immediate policy review from his colleague the Minister for Land and Water Conservation?

Mr AMERY: I congratulate the honourable member for Lachlan on raising an issue that relates to farmers' incomes. I will get to the point about the Lachlan River plan in a moment. However, it is very important that we acknowledge his question, because he alone among the National Party has been trying to get primary industry issues on the agenda in the National Party for quite some time. Would we, for example, during his tenure as the former Leader of the National Party ever hear him ask a question about a lease arrangement in a caravan park in Menindee Lakes, when all those other major issues are confronting regional New South Wales? I do not believe he would have, and I do not believe that he would do it now as shadow Minister for Agriculture. They are not just my views or those of Country Labor. I draw members' attention to the *Land* newspaper, which is published every Thursday. None other than the very respectable and nationally renowned agricultural and regional reporter Peter Austin, in his "Peppercorn" column, said:

It says something about the role of the National Party in 2002 that the agenda for the New South Wales annual conference at Broken Hill last weekend contained only two motions (of 78) on "primary industry and trade".

It gets better. We all attended branch meetings as young party members and moved our motion, only to have it fail for want of a seconder. That has happened to all of us. However, one of the matters on the agenda from one of the branches dealt with diagnostic fees from veterinary laboratories—an issue that the honourable member for Lachlan championed when he was the Leader of the National Party. That motion did not fail for want of a seconder—it failed for want of a mover! Have honourable members ever heard of a motion failing for want of a mover? In his article Peter Austin talked about the structure at the National Party, and went on to say:

Then it would have been a conference more along Labor Party lines, with rival factions plotting and lobbying and honing their arguments in a bid to sway the majority to their respective views.

Coalition parties have tended to deride Labor for its factionalism and conference-floor clashes, but I wonder if this might not be a healthier way to determine party policy than leaving the real argy-bargy to the parliamentarians locked in the joint party room.

As Country Labor keeps saying, "That once great party!" Primary industry issues are now taken over by Country Labor and rural Independents. The National Party no longer has an emphasis on primary industry—may it rest in peace. Moving on to the socioeconomic information, the answer has just arrived—I knew if I talked long enough something would turn up! The issue which the honourable member for Lachlan raised was one which I had a great deal to do with when I was also the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. I say to the honourable member for Lachlan and his constituency, who are lobbying on this point, that when I was the Minister for Land and Water Conservation and the Minister for Agriculture there was no conflict in the way—

Mr Yeadon: Without natural resources there is no farming in the long term.

Mr AMERY: A very good interjection from the Minister for Forestry. I will tell honourable members why there is no conflict between the promotion of agricultural production and natural resource management. While the National Party uses the forums of its party—although it does not do that often these days—and the Parliament to talk about this year's crop or next year's crop, the Government wants to ensure that natural resources are there forever. That is what we are talking about.

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: Clearly, the aide-mémoire the Minister has just received ignores the point that if we do not get about eight inches of rain there will be nil irrigation of the Lachlan Valley next year. How is he going to get on with the Minister for Land and Water Conservation then?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr AMERY: I could go through some of the notes I have here. However, officials of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Land Water Conservation are members of the community-based committees. The impact assessment of the draft water sharing plan for the Lachlan has been commissioned. The honourable member for Lachlan raised this matter with me when I was also the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, so it is hardly something new.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Murrumbidgee to order for the second time.

Mr AMERY: The report has not yet been released.

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: The report was released this week for discussion.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Lachlan will resume his seat.

Mr AMERY: I have to give it to the honourable member for Lachlan—at least one member of the National Party is having a go. Members should not be too nasty. River, ground water and water management committees are provided with guidelines on social and economic assessment. That is the fundamental issue behind the matter that the honourable member for Lachlan continually raises. They are also provided with background information about their region and various studies. Each committee has also been provided with \$20,000 to contract socioeconomic studies. The Lachlan regulated river committee has not commissioned such a study with the \$20,000 allocated to it by the Government. However, to support the development of the draft water sharing plan, various other studies have been undertaken.

The Department of Land and Water Conservation undertook a regional economic assessment. I will leave that aspect to the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. The first element of the question of the honourable member for Lachlan was, "Do you support?" Yes, I support the committee process. It is an all-party arrangement working with the community to give us natural resource outcomes that not only will manage our land and water resources better but will provide our primary industries with soil and a high standard and continual supply of water forever. That is where we are coming from. We are concerned about not just this year's crop or next year's crop; we are concerned about a water resource forever.

LUCAS HEIGHTS NUCLEAR REACTOR GEOLOGICAL FAULT LINE

Ms MEGARRITY: My question without notice is to the Minister for the Environment. What is the Government's response to community concerns about a report of a fault line under the Lucas Heights nuclear facility?

Mr DEBUS: As always the honourable member for Menai has been most effective in advocating for her community on the issues that relate to the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor. Members would be aware of reports that a geological fault line has been found beneath the site of the proposed replacement research reactor at Lucas Heights. I understand that the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency [ARPANSA] has confirmed the discovery. I call on the Federal Government to act quickly to allay the entirely understandable community concerns about this extraordinary discovery.

This is the latest event in the history of mismanagement of the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor by the Federal Government. It is a matter of the greatest concern, and the community has a right to ask why this new fault line was not detected during the environmental impact statement process before approval was granted for the new reactor. I inform the House that I have, in consequence, written to the Federal Government urging an immediate investigation into seismic activity under the reactor site and calling for this information to be released to the public for full and open scrutiny.

This discovery goes to the height of concerns raised by the State Government as far back as 1998 in a submission to the environmental impact statement procedure. That submission related to site selection and the appropriateness of the site. The New South Wales Government submission noted that inadequate information was provided to justify the choice of the Lucas Heights Science and Technology Centre as the preferred site; that the process of site selection was carried out before the preparation of the draft EIS; and that information on alternative sites considered was not made public. The State Government was not alone in raising these concerns during the EIS process. In fact, the International Atomic Energy Agency independent peer review for the EIS concluded—

Mr Hazzard: Bang!

Mr DEBUS: It concluded:

The Lucas Heights site and the exact location of the facility within the site have not been selected using a rigorous survey process.

Bang, indeed, to the honourable member for Wakehurst.

Mr Hazzard: I apologise.

Mr DEBUS: I accept the retraction of the honourable member for Wakehurst. The International Atomic Energy Agency said that the site had not been selected using a rigorous survey process. Furthermore, as part of the preliminary safety analysis report prepared by the independent atomic energy agency it recommended that "an additional study should be undertaken for seismic hazard assessment". It is now clear that this additional study should have been conducted before the approval for the new reactor was granted by ARPANSA. The Federal Government must make public the findings of any investigations it undertakes into the geological stability of the site.

TOW TRUCK INDUSTRY

Mr DEBNAM: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Given the continuing allegations of intimidation and violence within the tow truck industry and calls for the ICAC and police investigation, will the Minister finally inform the House about ongoing difficulties within the authority and the widespread industry opposition to the latest Penrith proposal?

Mr SCULLY: That is the second question the shadow Minister has asked about the Tow Truck Authority. The job allocation scheme is being managed by the Tow Truck Authority. As I indicated on an earlier occasion, it will be implemented at a time and in a place when it is ready to do so. I have to say that this Government inherited a profoundly awful tow truck industry. Photios here has no memory of what the tow truck industry was like.

Mr Hazzard: Point of order: The Minister says that we have no memory. Mr Photios has not been a member of this place for three years—what is the Minister on about?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! No point of order is involved.

Mr SCULLY: I have nothing further to add.

WINE INDUSTRY

Mr PRICE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Agriculture. How is the Government protecting the New South Wales wine industry?

Mr AMERY: Another member of Country Labor has asked me a question about primary industry. The honourable member for Lachlan is not the only member with an interest in primary industry. Wine and grape production in this State has more than doubled in the past six years, representing a significant input into the New South Wales economy. The electorate of the honourable member for Maitland is very much in the heart of the wine growing area of this State. In wine sales alone, New South Wales generates around \$612.5 million a year. The latest estimates suggest that the New South Wales wine and grape industries directly employ more than 6,000 people. The flow-on factor means that more than 24,000 people can attribute their income to the wine and grape industries.

I am pleased to report to the House that the Carr Government makes a significant contribution to the wine and grape industries through NSW Agriculture's research, advisory and regulatory programs. NSW Agriculture is a core partner, together with the Charles Sturt University and the New South Wales Wine Industry Association, in the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre, which is located at Wagga Wagga. The partnership currently involves six NSW Agriculture viticulture staff—five in Wagga Wagga and one at Dareton—two additional technical officers at Wagga Wagga, and one entomologist is soon to be appointed. In addition to this large commitment, the Carr Government has also committed funding of \$500,000 towards the construction of a \$1.4 million laboratory at the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre at Wagga Wagga.

The Government has contributed a further \$250,000 towards the \$600,000 C. D. Blake experimental winery, also at Wagga Wagga, and a further \$200,000 has been allocated to infrastructure, including shade house developments. NSW Agriculture has been successful in leveraging funding from the Australian National Training Authority for a training facility totalling \$2.2 million for industry and Charles Sturt University viticulture students. Important field sites—trial plots of vines—for the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre

have now been established by NSW Agriculture in Griffith, Wagga Wagga, Tumbarumba, Gundagai, Harden, Young, the Hunter Valley and Port Macquarie. I am pleased to report that research will continue to expand across the State, covering all aspects of the wine and grape industries, such as vine pathology, sustainable viticulture, grape and wine quality, and wine production technology.

With regard to phylloxera, I can report to the House that a new initiative worth \$600,000 over three years was launched in March to combat this devastating insect. The money will be used to conduct a large-scale survey of all new viticulture zones in New South Wales for phylloxera. The survey will cover more than 2,800 hectares of new vineyards. Under the agreed national management plan for phylloxera, new areas cannot be considered free of phylloxera until a series of three annual surveys has proven the area to be free of the pest. If the areas are subsequently declared free of phylloxera, restrictions on the movement of planting material, fruit and machinery between new and established grape growing areas can be removed. The winemaking industry will also benefit from greater freedom of product movement both within New South Wales and interstate. Phylloxera is considered the most severe insect pest of grape vines in the world. The phylloxera insect causes swelling—called galls—on the grape leaves and it feeds on vine roots, eventually killing the vine. Since the 1990s, strict quarantine controls have prevented the spread of the pest to other areas of Australia, including key New South Wales grape growing areas such as the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and the Hunter Valley.

NSW Agriculture has a number of regulatory, extension and research officers who maintain quarantine protocols to ensure that the New South Wales grape growing areas remain phylloxera free. Other States have similar programs to ensure national co-operation on this matter. No new plantings appear to be infected by phylloxera and it is unlikely, given the strong quarantine program, that any of these areas are infected. Current quarantine measures prohibit or restrict the movement of planting material, fruit and machinery used in vineyards between major grape growing areas. The growth of our export markets is more than 20 per cent a year, with a present value of \$1.75 billion. New South Wales provides around 312 million tonnes, or 35 per cent, of the combined Australian domestic and export markets. This production comes from a total of more than 31,000 hectares of wine grapes.

[Interruption]

That was an interesting interjection about water. This industry is going ahead and it could not do so without the sustainable supply of water, which makes a lie of the Opposition's argument that these industries are being hurt by the Government's water reform policies. The wine industry is a clear example that the water reform program is working. Through the research, teaching, training and information exchange generated by the department through the National Wine Grape Industry Centre and through NSW Agriculture's comprehensive network of district horticulturalists, protection from devastating insect pest infestations and diseases is dramatically enhanced. I congratulate the honourable member for Maitland on his interest in all matters rural and his strong support of the wine industry, particularly in the Hunter Valley.

Questions without notice concluded.

STATE OF ORIGIN MARKETING STRATEGY

Ministerial Statement

Ms NORI (Port Jackson—Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism) [3.29 p.m.]: Good tourism marketing involves, amongst other things, seeing an opportunity and seizing it and taking advantage of a window of opportunity, no matter how short the lead time or how short-lived that opportunity. It is fair to say that that is the case with tonight's State of Origin rugby league game. The opportunity lasts for one night and presented itself only three weeks ago when Queensland squared the series. Tourism New South Wales has worked with the National Rugby League [NRL] to put in place a tactical marketing strategy in a very short period.

Tourism New South Wales devised a promotion when it was offered the opportunity to sell tickets to the game. Within three days of having discussions with the NRL, it had received extensive industry support. The New South Wales Holidays Program, Accor Hotels and Resorts, and the NRL have combined to offer packages starting from \$158. With about 4,000 tickets already sold in Queensland, the New South Wales economy will benefit to the tune of about \$1 million. Honourable members should remember that the expenditure of \$1 million in tourism money supports almost nine tourist jobs. Tonight's State of Origin is just a foretaste of what we can expect—and what we are planning for—when we host the Rugby Union World Cup in 2003. We anticipate that that event will inject \$300 million into the State's economy. I congratulate Tourism New South Wales and the National Rugby League.

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.31 p.m.]: It is always interesting to hear a speech about football from Labor members. Their leader thinks the State of Origin competition is played between New South Wales and Victoria and who, in celebration of tonight's match, entered the Chamber wearing a maroon tie—the colour of the Queensland team. The Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism is prepared to rise without warning and make short ministerial statements. Yet she declines constantly to address the main issues facing small business in this State. She declines to address the issue of unfair dismissals, and she never has anything to say about workers compensation and public liability insurance premiums in this State.

The Minister represents not small business but her faction of the Australian Labor Party. If she were at all interested in small business we would hear about unfair dismissals, workers compensation and the costs of industrial and labour regulation in this State. The Minister is not interested in small business, and her interest in tourism is as shallow as her leader's interest in tonight's State of Origin game, which he believes is between New South Wales and Victoria. He gets excited only when he thinks he will meet Steve Bracks, whom he believes is coming to Sydney tonight to watch the State of Origin game.

POLICE SERVICE AMENDMENT (NSW POLICE) BILL

Bill received and read a first time.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Mount Kembla Mining Disaster Centenary Commemoration

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.32 p.m.]: This matter should be debated urgently because it is 100 years since this country's worst mining disaster. I have no doubt that honourable members on both sides of the House believe that the matter should be considered urgently, especially as the House will not be sitting again until after the commemoration of the disaster at the end of July. The committee that has organised this commemoration must be recognised urgently by this Chamber.

Minimum Gaol Sentences

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.34 p.m.]: Everyone acknowledges that the matter to which the honourable member for Wollongong referred is important and of significance to the House. The coalmining industry is a great industry and we are all concerned about coalmining disasters. Nonetheless, I submit to the House that it is more important to debate this afternoon the issue of serious crimes of violence committed in our community. Only yesterday a police officer was tragically shot in the execution of his duties. The Premier stated that police officers and their families should be protected, and introduced legislation—which we are about to debate—to extend the protection offered by the Crimes Act to members of the families of police officers. Thus this debate is extremely timely.

The penalties imposed by the courts for crimes of serious violence are inadequate and sentencing procedures must be overhauled. The maximum penalty imposed for the malicious wounding of a police officer is 12 years, but only one person convicted of this crime has received a prison sentence—of 12 months—in the past four years. The crime of assault occasioning actual bodily harm of a police officer carries a maximum penalty of seven years. However, only 41 per cent of those convicted of this crime received a prison sentence. Three in five people charged and convicted of assault occasioning actual bodily harm of a police officer did not even receive a prison sentence. The Coalition believes that is wrong and the Leader of the Opposition proposes to impose a minimum sentence of four years in gaol for anyone convicted of causing actual harm to a police officer in the execution of his or her duty. That is an important issue that the House must debate urgently.

The most common sentence for murder in New South Wales is only 14 years in prison, and 22 per cent of those convicted of murder received minimum terms of 10 years or less. Fewer than one in 10 received a sentence of life imprisonment, which is the maximum penalty for this crime. The Leader of the Opposition has advocated establishing two sentencing categories for those convicted of murder: first, 25 years to life for the most serious crimes; and, second, 15 years to life for lesser crimes. The House must decide whether to debate this matter this afternoon. Honourable members who are concerned about the imposition of inadequate prison sentences for murder will support us.

The maximum penalty for aggravated sexual assault is 20 years. However, the most common sentence served is three years in prison. This is why the Leader of the Opposition has advocated that a minimum penalty

of 15 years imprisonment be established for the crime of gang-rape. Only two people—or 1 per cent of those convicted—received the maximum penalty of 20 years for this crime. The Premier is so concerned about this issue that he recently introduced legislation that will increase the maximum penalty for this crime to life imprisonment. We believe Labor members should join us in approving minimum sentences of 15 years, as advocated by the Leader of the Opposition. The crime of sexual assault, or rape, carries a maximum penalty of 14 years. However, the most common period served in gaol is just 18 months. That is totally inadequate and ridiculous. Fewer than one in five of those convicted of this crime received a minimum sentence of more than 3½ years. No-one received the maximum sentence of 14 years. The Leader of the Opposition supports a 10-year minimum gaol sentence for that serious crime.

We ask the House to endorse the concept of compulsory minimum sentences for serious crimes of violence. Those honourable members who agree with us will vote with us. Those honourable members who believe people who commit serious crimes of violence should not serve a minimum term of imprisonment will vote with the Australian Labor Party. That is the test for the House this afternoon: Do honourable members believe those convicted of serious crimes of violence should be punished with gaol terms or do they believe sentences in such cases should be left for the court to decide, so that large numbers—I have cited the figures—of offenders can walk free? Three out of five people convicted of committing serious assaults on police officers do not even receive a prison sentence. Under a Coalition government murderers, rapists and those who commit serious crimes of violence will go to gaol for a minimum period. The House has the opportunity to join us this afternoon in condemning serious crimes of violence and to ensure that those who commit them go to gaol.

Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Wollongong be proceeded with—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Ms Allan	Mrs Grusovin	Mr E. T. Page
Mr Amery	Ms Harrison	Mrs Perry
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mr Price
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hunter	Dr Refshauge
Mr Ashton	Mr Iemma	Ms Saliba
Mr Bartlett	Mrs Lo Po'	Mr Stewart
Mr Black	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Brown	Mr Markham	Mr Watkins
Miss Burton	Mr Martin	Mr West
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Whelan
Mr Collier	Ms Meagher	Mr Woods
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr Yeadon
Mr Debus	Mr Mills	
Mr Face	Mr Moss	
Mr Gaudry	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gibson	Ms Nori	Mr Anderson
Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Thompson

Noes, 36

Mr Barr	Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Brogden	Mr Maguire	Mr Souris
Mrs Chikarovski	Mr McGrane	Mr Stoner
Mr Collins	Mr Merton	Mr Tink
Mr Cull	Ms Moore	Mr Torbay
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Farrell	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr George	Mr Oakeshott	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Glachan	Mr D. L. Page	Mr Webb
Mr Hartcher	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	
Mrs Hopwood	Mr Rozzoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Humpherson	Ms Seaton	Mr Fraser
Dr Kernohan	Mrs Skinner	Mr R. H. L. Smith

Pairs

Ms Beamer
Mr McManus

Mr Armstrong
Ms Hodgkinson

Question resolved in the affirmative.

MOUNT KEMBLA MINING DISASTER CENTENARY COMMEMORATION**Urgent Motion**

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.50 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises the dangerous nature of coalmining in New South Wales;
- (2) applauds the State Government for its efforts to improve mine safety;
- (3) supports the 100-year commemoration of the Mount Kembla mining disaster in which 96 men and boys perished on 31 July 1902; and
- (4) congratulates the Mount Kembla Mine Disaster Centenary Commemoration Committee on their efforts and the week-long program of events from 31 July until 4 August.

The one-hundredth anniversary of the Mount Kembla mine disaster in which 96 men and boys were killed will occur at 2.00 p.m. on 31 July this year. It was the worst mining disaster in Australian history. At around 2.00 p.m. on 31 July 1902 a large volume of flame and smoke was seen to burst from the main tunnel of the Mount Kembla colliery near Wollongong. A massive explosion in the mine resulted in the tragic loss of 96 lives and many serious injuries. A royal commission was set up to investigate the disaster. The cause of the explosion was found to be the ignition of firedamp or methane gas supplying a miner's light. The explosion generated a coal dust explosion that wrecked a large portion of the mine. The recommendations of the royal commission included more testing for gas, improvements in ventilation and shot-firing practices, and the use of safety lamps where gas was present. The miner's safety lamp has now been replaced by modern, electric lamps and other safety equipment.

Twenty-eight members of the Mount Kembla Mine Disaster Centenary Committee have spent more than a year organising the commemoration of the event that rocked the suburb 100 years ago. The aim of the commemoration is to involve the community and recreate that period in 1902. At 2.00 p.m. on 31 July sirens will sound throughout the village, telegram boys will whiz down the main road on bikes, people dressed in period costume will take horse-and-cart rides around the village and pub goers will play iron quoits. A church service will be held at the Mount Kembla Soldiers and Miners Memorial Anglican Church, and the scene will be complete with a smithy's shop, a wood-fired bakery and a maypole dancing exhibition.

The members of the centenary commemoration committee include Liz Roberts and Chris Powis—the two women who have done most of the work—Neville Kirkwood, Tony and Tess Pollard, Andrew Stevenson, Lizzie and Brad Williams, Paul Mack, Brian O'Keefe, Jenny Doyle, Robbie Cheadle and Cate Stevenson, who is the secretary of the committee. Some years ago Wendy Richardson, another member of the committee, wrote a play called *Windy Gully* in memory of what happened at Mount Kembla on that tragic day. Other members of the committee include Phil Donaldson, Peter Houwelling, Peter Hutton, Greg Costello, Joan Reczek, Clare Curtis, Carol and John Herben, Glenn Barkley, Geoff Callaway, Chris Ryman, the treasurer, Mark Hayes, Alison Rowe and George Theophanou.

The committee has worked for 12 months to bring this part of Mount Kembla's history to the notice of the whole of the country. A Mount Kembla identity, 93-year-old Fred Kirkwood, knows where almost every victim of the 1902 Mount Kembla disaster is buried. For the past 70 years Mr Kirkwood, with members of his family, has kept a close eye on many of the graves of the 96 men and boys who died in the explosion. For the past 67 years Mr Kirkwood has been the rector-warden at the Mount Kembla Soldiers and Miners Memorial Anglican Church where 38 victims are buried. A miner for 46 years, Fred was born in 1909, seven years after the disaster. He has lived at Mount Kembla all of his life.

The Mount Kembla mine opened in 1882, and Fred started work there in 1923 at the age of 14. Fred was elected Secretary of the Mount Kembla Miners Lodge in 1939 at the age of 30, a position he held

unchallenged until 1958. Fred retired from the Mount Kembla mine in 1969, aged 60. He is the best-known identity in the village. A road has been named after him, and three of his sons followed in his footsteps and became miners. Mr Kirkwood and his family members regularly tended to and mowed grass around the graves at the Mount Kembla church. Weekend detention offenders, under the supervision of Corrective Services officers, now do that job. Sadly, because of the ravages of time, many inscriptions on the graves at the church in nearby Windy Gully are difficult to read.

The mining division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union [CFMEU] has come to the rescue by allocating \$13,000 from the special trust fund to cover the maintenance of those graves. The secretary of the mining division of the CFMEU in the Illawarra, Bob Mitchell, presented a cheque for that amount to the committee. The Government also came to the party with a grant of \$19,250 to assist with restoration work. The Premier, Bob Carr, visited Windy Gully at Mount Kembla on Friday last week. He was very impressed by the work the community and the committee have done to commemorate this tragic event. Fred is particularly concerned about the condition of some grave monuments in Windy Gully that were difficult to locate. He recalled that those graves included the graves of four brothers who died in the explosion.

Mr Kirkwood's father, George, survived the disaster after managing to escape through the tunnel some distance from the scene of the explosion. He was lucky. They would not let any of the survivors go back into the mine to help look for others. We have to remember that there have been some horrific mining disasters in this country. The southern coalfields in the Illawarra have probably suffered more than most. On 23 March 1887, 115 years ago, a gas explosion at the Bulli mine resulted in the death of 81 men and boys. Only 23 years ago, on 24 July, 14 men were killed in a gas explosion in the Appin colliery that ripped the guts out of that mine.

The Bulli mine disaster has been commemorated every year for many years. During the memorial service, the names of miners who have been killed at work are dedicated in the Memorial Wall. More than 600 names of southern district miners appear on the wall—that is 600 men and boys who have lost their lives in the mining industry on the South Coast since mining started at Mount Keira in 1849. The memorial service is an opportunity to reflect on how dangerous the mining industry was and still is. Even though governments have considered, and continue to consider, how to make mining safer, there is only one way to ensure that people's lives are protected: each individual must trust his own judgment about what is and what is not safe. You get only one chance. If miners are not prepared to back themselves against outside pressures, other disasters might follow.

An original miner's cottage at Bulli provides an authentic step back in history. It contains authentic mining equipment straight from the pages of a history book. The original miner's cottage has been preserved as a museum for exhibitions and educational visits. I was disappointed that the House divided on the question of whether this motion should be debated today. It is up to us as public office holders and representatives of communities throughout the State to acknowledge that the worst mining disaster in the history of this country occurred 100 years ago next month. When we remember the number of people who have died throughout the State since the beginning of the mining industry, it is important that we recognise what happened on that terrible day, 31 July. We should also remember that people have been willing to give their time to ensure that history is recorded and, out of respect for the men and boys who lost their lives in the country's worst mining disaster, the names on their headstones are reconfigured to their former glory.

Mr J. H. TURNER (Myall Lakes—Deputy Leader of the National Party) [4.00 p.m.]: The Opposition notes the comments of the honourable member for Wollongong. We join him in supporting the commemoration of the Mount Kembla mining disaster. There can be no more dangerous occupation than coalmining, particularly in the periods spoken about by the honourable member for Wollongong. I was born and raised in Cessnock in the northern coalfields. Although I was not the son of a coalminer, I went to school with many sons of coalminers, and my family had many friends who were involved in the coalmining industry. I remember the angst people had as their loved ones went off to work in the mines. Now there are about 15,000 coalminers. I do not know how many there were back in those days. When the mine siren sounded at times other than the normal knock-off times people had their hearts in their mouths because it usually indicated a serious accident or death in the mine. The siren could be heard right through the town.

The Bellbird mine disaster occurred near where I lived. I cannot remember the date but about 25 miners perished in that disaster in horrific conditions. Indeed, the mine is still sealed and to the best of my knowledge is still burning all these many years later. Regrettably, recently there was the Gretley mine disaster in which four miners were drowned. That again brought home the incredible dangers of mining. There have been some improvements but more remains to be done. This House will shortly debate a bill about mine safety. The

honourable member for Wollongong referred to the centenary commemoration of the Mount Kembla disaster and other memorials in southern areas. Mick Frame, a Labor identity in the northern area, was a driving force for the establishment of the memorial at Freemans Waterhole, where ceremonies commemorate the loss in the mining industry at that place. At the National Party conference only a week or so ago at Broken Hill the Line of Lode Memorial sits on the slag heap as a constant reminder to the people and visitors of Broken Hill that about 830 lives have been lost in that area—a horrific figure. There were many mines in the area but most of those lives were lost in the one mine.

The Mayor of Broken Hill paid tribute to Tim Fischer, who, as Deputy Prime Minister, arranged for funding of about \$5.5 million for the Line of Lode Memorial. That imposing structure is a fitting memorial to honour the men killed in mining in that part of the State. Although we would hope not to have to pay out any more money for mine memorials in future as we would not want any further people lose their lives in mines, inevitably and regrettably the nature of mining is such that there will be further deaths. We can only hope to limit those deaths and ensure that the best practices are put into place. The honourable member for Wollongong referred to the need for miners to take individual responsibility and make a judgment call. Whilst I agree with that, it has always been the view of the Opposition that there must be responsibility from the mine wall to the boardroom. Indeed, when I was shadow Minister for Mineral Resources that formed part of my policy for the last election. Boardroom decisions can often impact on the mine wall.

The death rate in mining is reducing in Australia. As shadow Minister I took the view that we should transfer the lessons we have learned to less developed countries. For instance, I understand that about 13,000 miners are killed each year in mining accidents in China. In 2002 that is totally unacceptable by any standard. We have a responsibility to assist countries that do not have the expertise that we presently have. Mining is international: a miner will relate to a miner anywhere in the world. It is a special brotherhood. I digress slightly to mention a memorial that was two paddocks across from where I used to live, the memorial for the Rothbury riots. I referred to responsibility from the mine wall to the boardroom. The miners took a stand against the barons of the coal industry. In that alleged riot—some would say that it was not necessarily a riot; the miners were probably participating in their demonstration very vigorously—a miner was killed.

That was an example of the rough and tumble of the mining lifestyle in those days. Things have moved on considerably. There are now drag lines and modern technology. But people still go underground each day, taking their lives in their hands, to produce the wealth for this country, to put the coal into ships to send to other countries to make the steel that we need to grow our country. We must do everything possible to ensure their safety.

This House will soon debate the Mining Legislation Amendment (Health and Safety) Bill, which will further enhance mine safety. It provides for the appointment of inspectors to perform functions under the Act solely in relation to mines, the amendment of the coalmine regulations and the Mines Inspection Act to provide that the exercise of the functions referred to are subject to certain requirements, and the amendment of the Mining Act to provide for the establishment of a Mine Safety Advisory Council. That is an important provision. The council will include representatives from peak bodies and employee organisations and will provide advice to the Minister on any policy matters in relation to occupational health and safety in mines, and other advisory functions relating to occupational health and safety of mines that are prescribed by the regulation. I note that the bill has the support of both industry and the unions, which is encouraging. I congratulate the honourable member for Wollongong on bringing forward this issue. It is a timely reminder of the role of the mining industry. I will finish with the words used yesterday by the shadow Minister for Mineral Resources, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in another place, who said:

More importantly than that, the protection of those who work in mines is paramount, and this legislation will build on an existing framework of safety in the mining workplace.

Those words adequately sum up the situation.

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [4.09 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Wollongong. I represent an area of the western coalfields based around Lithgow that, like the south, has had its fair share of tragedy since coal was first mined in the Lithgow Valley in the 1830s. In the 189 mines that have come into and gone out of existence in that time, there have been 92 recorded deaths. Between 1884 and 1949 50 miners were killed and from 1949 to 2001 a further 42 were killed. The year 1949 is a defining point in the history of the coal industry in the west because it was the year of the great strike when the Chifley Government brought the troops in to break the strike. It certainly was a turbulent time. Today we are talking about the impact those tragedies have had on mining communities.

In recent years a memorial has been built at Quota Park, on the outskirts of Lithgow as one turns right to head towards Bathurst. That memorial was a joint effort by the Quota Club of Lithgow, the united mineworkers group, the union representing the men, the Joint Coal Board, various community groups, and Lithgow City Council. A life-size sculpture of a miner, by Margaret Sherman, stands in the park and around it is a memorial list of the 92 men who gave their lives. Unfortunately, some of those deaths occurred in recent years. Many of the men were known to me: I had played sport with them, had a drink with them or worked with some of them. In the 30 years I spent in the mining industry the hardest job I had as a human resource manager was when I had to knock on the door of the family home to tell the family that the husband, or father, would not be coming home because he had been fatally injured. That was part of the fabric of the mining life.

In the early days many tragedies resulted from the lack of action by greedy owners, who had no real thought about safety. Men worked in atrocious conditions and ventilation was almost non-existent. Many miners worked under contract, and in the old shot-firing days they basically crawled around on their hands and knees with a pick and shovel. In the 1890s there was a major disaster at the Lithgow Valley colliery when a fire started in the ventilation boiler. Some seven people were killed and that triggered a royal commission. The Parliamentary Library has the proceedings of that royal commission on record. The findings of the royal commission led to some improvements, but any improvement in safety was a long and slow path. It was only because of the sheer persistence and organisation of the mining unions that advances were made. With the advent of the Joint Coal Board, the dust problem was attacked.

My grandfather, Bob Martin, was a mine deputy. He died as a very young man, just after World War II, from the effects of dust. My father and his brothers have told me about the suffering my grandfather went through in his last years after being affected by the coal dust. That problem is almost non-existent now because of changes brought about by the persistence of the union and the action of the Joint Coal Board. Technology has played a role in helping us avert tragedies. The advent of longwall mining eliminated pillar extraction and the risk of roofs collapsing as miners withdrew from the workings; that was always a risky business. Anyone who ventured beyond the last line of support was always at risk.

Through technology, the Joint Coal Board, the efforts of the union, and legislation in this House and other parliaments, Australian mining has become as safe as any in the world. However, we need to be ever vigilant. It is my fervent wish, and that of everyone, that the last name added to the list on the memorial in Lithgow will be the last that is ever added to it. But we cannot take that for granted. More and more the mines operate at larger tonnages. If anyone had said 20 years ago that a coalmine at which I worked could produce three million tonnes a year and employ about 170 workers, that person would have been laughed at. Productivity increases have been enormous, but we should not be seduced into thinking that safety is not important. Safety will always be a major problem in that industry and something we all have to be vigilant about. I congratulate my colleague on bringing this important motion to the House today.

Mr PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [4.13 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I speak on this motion and I extend my congratulations to the honourable member for Wollongong on raising it. The motion refers to a tragedy that occurred 100 years ago in which 96 workers were killed in a mine explosion, but it goes further and addresses concerns about inherent dangers in mining operations. Far too many people have been killed in mining disasters in Australia. The motion presents an opportunity for members of this House to acknowledge the hard work of those men and women and the dangers they face, and to acknowledge also those who have died while performing that work. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the dangers inherent in life, and particularly in work. Almost every form of work has inherent dangers, but mining is one of the most dangerous occupations.

My family has farming background, which is another of the more dangerous occupations. We can never be too vigilant about work safety for staff. Everyone in this House and throughout New South Wales promotes the notion of improving work safety because of the consequences to those who are injured and to their families. I obtained some research material from the Parliamentary Library about the mining disaster of 31 July 1902. At the end of that day 33 women were widows and 120 children were fatherless. Those families faced the consequences of inadequate work safety. The honourable member for Wollongong acknowledged those who will be involved in the commemoration of the Mount Kembla mine disaster centenary and outlined some of the functions and services that will be held next weekend.

There will be a solemn lighting of 96 candles at the miners' memorial, a memorial service at the Soldiers and Miners Memorial Church at Mount Kembla and numerous other functions that will acknowledge those who tragically gave their lives. I reiterate that we all need to remain vigilant about work safety, particularly with mining. We have heard of all too many deaths in the mining industry. The honourable member for Bathurst said that he hopes that the last name on the list will remain the last name on the list. He has the absolute support of all members of Parliament in that regard.

Ms SALIBA (Illawarra) [4.17 p.m.]: I support the motion and in doing so note that the Mount Kembla mine site is in my electorate. On a number of occasions I have met some members of the committee that has been planning the commemoration. A lot of time and effort has been put into organising that worthwhile week of commemoration. The committee has been very committed to acknowledging the history of Mount Kembla and those who lost their lives there. The Mount Kembla Mine Disaster Centenary Commemoration Committee Secretary, Cate Stevenson, and Treasurer, Chris Ryman, were ably assisted by all members of the committee.

Committee members are Liz Roberts, Chris Powis, Neville Kirkwood, Tony and Tess Pollard, Andrew Stevenson, Liz and Brad Williams, Paul Mack, Bryan O'Keefe, Jenny Doyle, Robbie Cheadle, Wendy Richardson, Phil Donaldson, Peter Howelling, Peter Hutton, Greg Costello, Joanne Reczek, Clare Curtis, Carol and John Herben, Glen Barkley, Geoff Callaway, Mark Hayes, Alison Rowe and George Theophanou. The committee has met on a regular basis and put together a celebration of the 96 lives lost at Mount Kembla during the mine disaster. A royal commission inquiry was held in March, April and May 1903. The royal commission noted that if safety lamps had been used rather than naked flames, those lives could have been saved.

I recognise that coalmining is a major industry in New South Wales. This financial year the coalmining industry turnover is \$6.5 billion. It is a major employer in the Illawarra and across the State. I also recognise that coalmining is a dangerous industry. It is important that the industry works towards safety in mine sites. The New South Wales Government has recognised that mine safety is an issue. In particular, a paper called "Safety Works", which was launched by the Minister for Mineral Resources, includes a proposal to update the coalmines health and safety Act in the near future. A discussion paper was issued to people who work in the mine industry, mine owners and community members asking for their views. As a result of these measures, we will be able to implement strong legislation that will protect mineworkers.

I reiterate the remarks of the honourable member for Wollongong when he said that miners should follow their instincts. They should not allow themselves to be pressured into cutting corners for the sake of making more money. It is a very dangerous industry and it is important that miners' lives are the most important issue and that we protect the people who choose to work in the mining industry. We need this industry. The operations of a number of our electricity suppliers are based on coal. In the Illawarra, coal is needed for BHP and for exports from the Port Kembla coal terminal. I commend the honourable member for Wollongong for moving this urgency motion, I applaud the State Government for its efforts in improving the mine safety and I congratulate the committee on its efforts. I look forward to celebrating with the committee and commemorating the people who died in the mine disaster. I am sure that the close-knit Mount Kembla community will continue to remember those people.

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.22 p.m.], in reply: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this important debate. Back in those days 100 years ago mineworkers went underground in gassy and dusty conditions with a naked flame to provide light for them to work. On the very day the explosion occurred and killed those 96 men and boys, the union was at the coal tribunal in Wollongong arguing that a number of small explosions had occurred which they believed were due to the flames igniting the gas. The union argued that a very serious incident could occur if something was not done about the method of lighting. The argument of the coal barons was no different then to the arguments that are put today. They said that if they had to provide safety lights, rather than a naked flame, they would not be able to afford to operate the mine. They said the cost of providing underground safety lights would affect their profitability and, therefore, they would not be able to continue to work the mine and hundreds of jobs would be lost. They argued that point on the very day that the explosion took place.

About 14 years ago I went to see a play at the Theatre South in Wollongong called *Windy Gully* by Wendy Richardson. It was just before I was elected in 1988 and the play was a fundraiser for the campaign. The play depicted what had happened at Mount Kembla mine those many years ago. So many men were killed. In some instances, there were three or four victims from the one family—fathers, brothers and sons. The effect on the Mount Kembla village lasted for 50 years. That is an indication of how many people and how many families were affected by this disaster. Some people say that the devastation to the village and to the mothers, sisters, widows and young children left behind lasted for 50 years before the hurt was healed. Having talked with the committee last Friday and with others over the past six or seven months, I do not believe that the hurt has ever healed.

When the committee was formed 12 months ago to make sure this tragic event was remembered in history, so that young people in the community and far afield are well aware of what happened, I was honoured

to be asked to be its patron. The committee members knew of my long-term association with the coal industry and that I had worked in the coal industry for 26 years before I was elected to Parliament. They knew that I had a real commitment to making sure that communities such as at Mount Kembla and Bulli received just recognition for the tragedies. I spoke about the Bulli incident earlier this afternoon. The men who died there left behind about 50 widows and 155 fatherless children. The same thing happened at Bulli: the same period of loss affected the families there, and still does today.

Mining is a dangerous industry. The honourable member for Myall Lakes spoke about the number of people killed in the industry. Every year throughout the world about 20,000 mineworkers are killed. Australia has one of the safest operations anywhere in the world, but still men are killed. No-one wants to see that happen. I have no doubt that all members of this Parliament will do everything in their power to make sure that when the men go underground to create wealth for this nation they come out at the end of their shift and go home to their wives and loved ones. We have to make sure that the people who work in that incredible environment are looked after in the best possible way. I reiterate that the mineworkers themselves have to be their own check inspectors.

Motion agreed to.

NATIONAL PARKS WILD HORSE CONTROL

Matter of Public Importance

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.28 p.m.]: I speak today on an issue that has been raised previously in this Parliament, that is, the management of brumbies in national parks in New South Wales. In doing so, I advise the House that I intend to concentrate on the brumby cull that occurred in Guy Fawkes River National Park on 20 to 22 October 2000. The reason I raise this as a matter of public importance today is self-explanatory. The Minister for the Environment, the Director-General of National Parks and Wildlife, Mr Brian Gilligan, and Dr Tony English have all said on numerous occasions that the cull was done in a humane manner. That is something I cannot and will not accept. I put to the House that what has been said by Dr English, the Minister and Mr Brian Gilligan is false.

I would like to quote to the House from a report issued on 15 November entitled "Report on the Cull of Feral Horses in Guy Fawkes River National Park in October 2000", submitted to the Parliament by Dr English. Dr English is a man of some renown. He is head of the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Sydney. The report comprises 26 pages but it is interesting to note that the first 20 pages of the report deals with the history of Guy Fawkes River National Park and the brumbies within the national park. The report does not address the slaughter of the brumbies until page 20. Section 75 of the report states:

The intention was to shoot no horses closer than 300 metres from the river ... but when this was not possible the carcasses were later moved away by slinging under the helicopter. Some 40 were moved in this way, these generally being animals that were so poor and weak that they did not move away when the helicopter approached.

I do not believe that. In fact, the evidence is contrary to what is stated in report. The report continues:

Four wounded horses were located and shot from the helicopter on the third morning. The fact that one horse was shot twice but not killed, and not located by this process, was obviously at odds with this protocol.

The protocol was that they were looking at the horses, making sure they were shot more than once—indeed, some of the horses were riddled with up to 25 bullets. The cull numbers ranged from 227 to 616 yet we are still not sure how many were shot. Dr English only looked at 39 carcasses but in his report and in discussions with me he stated that the location of each horse that was shot was global positioning system noted. If that were the case, I believe Dr English and the Government had an obligation to inspect more than 5 per cent. The report basically concludes that the aerial shooting in Guy Fawkes River National Park involved the appropriate technique under the circumstances and that the shooting was carried out in a humane way under approved protocols designed to kill all horses as quickly as possible. I do not accept that these horses were killed humanely.

As a result of that fiasco, 12 charges were brought by the RSPCA against the National Parks and Wildlife Service. On numerous occasions the National Parks and Wildlife Service had the matter adjourned. It is set down for hearing on 3 July, with witnesses to be called to give evidence to support the RSPCA claim that the horses were killed in an inhumane way. Annexure D refers to the horse that was found three days after the shooting and states:

Whilst it was assumed that the 2 shots had been fired from a helicopter due to their position on the top of the body, in the absence of bullet fragments it was not possible to prove beyond doubt that this was so. The possibility of the shots being fired from high ground is discussed, but no firm conclusions were drawn.

Honourable members would be surprised at the anger that wells up in me when I read that statement. Dr English was employed to give an independent report, yet for him to infer, after the National Parks and Wildlife Service admitted that it had shot somewhere between 227 and 616 horses in three days, that someone else had entered the park at that time and shot the horse from high ground, is nothing short of a disgrace. It is hiding the real facts. The report further states:

The fact that this horse was not killed and then not detected alive in subsequent fly overs could have been due to its colour, which would have made it very difficult to see against the brown landscape. It can also be assumed that the horse was lying down or did not move much due to its wounds, and a stationary animal is always much more difficult to detect from the air than a moving one.

This is subterfuge of the worst kind, as is what will happen on 3 July. The RSPCA has contacted its witnesses and told them that under section 5 (1) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act they will not be needed at court because a plea has been entered into. The National Parks and Wildlife Service will plead guilty to one count of cruelty to horses. This is astounding. I ask the Minister to give a truthful explanation about this matter. I believe that almost two years later the National Parks and Wildlife Service has decided that it can plead guilty to a minor offence, and plea bargain with the RSPCA. I know that the RSPCA is happy with the plea, but I am not. There were 12 charges yet the National Parks and Wildlife Service will plead to only one charge.

The fact remains that this was a barbaric slaughter. Photographic evidence to be produced during the three-week court case would have proved each of the 12 charges and embarrassed the National Parks and Wildlife Service to such an extent that its credibility, which is not very good anyway, would have been shot—to coin a phrase. The National Parks and Wildlife Service inhumanely slaughtered these animals but tried to suggest otherwise, also stating that there was no feed in the park. I challenge the Minister for the Environment and Minister responsible for the Protection of the Environment Administrations Act to prosecute the service for fouling waterways, something that was not done. At the time I wrote to the Commissioner of Police and asked him to lay criminal charges but I did not even receive a response.

This is a cover-up by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. I commend the actions of the RSPCA. However, it has accepted the plea because it has already spent thousands of dollars bringing the prosecution and having the matter adjourned. The RSPCA is scared that if the matter goes to court the service will weasel its way out by claiming it is an entity, or by some other process, and the RSPCA will lose and have to pay costs. I call on the Minister to direct the National Parks and Wildlife Service to plead to all 12 charges. It should admit its liability and the fact that it botched its attempt to slaughter these horses in October 2000. The truth should be told and the matter should be referred to the ICAC. If the Minister is not prepared to do that, then I will. The subterfuge of this slaughter has been a disgrace. It is a taint on the Minister, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and on Dr Tony English, a man who had great respect in the community. Only by putting all the evidence on the table will the matter be cleared up.

Mr DEBUS (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts) [4.38 p.m.]: Unlike the honourable member for Coffs Harbour, I do not propose to canvass the RSPCA's prosecution of the National Parks and Wildlife Service over the culling of horses in the Guy Fawkes River National Park. As all responsible members know, the matter is presently before the courts. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour should be aware that it is inappropriate for the substance of the matter to be debated in Parliament and he would do well to exercise caution in his comments, although, as we know, caution is not one of his strongest points.

The prosecution has been the subject of careful discussion between the legal teams of the RSPCA and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which have considered the issue in detail. I urge honourable members to allow the proper legal processes to take their course. There is no doubt that feral horse management in national parks is sensitive and far more complex than the honourable member for Coffs Harbour appears to understand. There are extremely strong feelings on both sides of the debate as to how best to deal with the issue, and the reaction to the Guy Fawkes operation is sufficient evidence of that. Since that operation a huge amount of work has been done by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, animal welfare groups, including the RSPCA, environment groups, horse riding groups and interested community members to help find solutions to this very vexed question.

Whether or not the honourable member for Coffs Harbour is prepared to acknowledge it, it is broadly accepted that feral animals—foxes, wild dogs, cats, pigs, goats and horses—in national parks must be

controlled. Feral horses can cause significant environmental damage and there is no doubt that they compete with native animals for scarce food and water. Even worse from the perspective of the farming community, they can carry exotic diseases that threaten livestock, and thus eventually farmers' livelihoods. Feral animals cannot be allowed to remain unchecked in national parks or on any other land tenure. I said after the Guy Fawkes incident that a better way must be found to control these horse populations, and that is exactly what we are doing. Honourable members will recall that I decided to ban permanently the aerial culling of horses in New South Wales national parks. That decision is clearly in keeping with broad community expectations. Other options for removing horses from parks around the State are being examined and trials of appropriate methods have begun in some areas.

I take this opportunity to inform the House about the wild horse management plan for the Kosciuszko National Park. There has been little management of wild horses in Kosciuszko, and it appears that their numbers have increased significantly over the past 20 years. By the late 1990s they had begun to appear in the alpine areas of the parks—that is, above the tree line. In summer their impact on the fragile alpine environment is obvious. This impact includes the establishment of trails, damage to streams and river banks, water pollution, the creation of wallows, the trampling of bogs and severe damage to native vegetation. Such impact is not acceptable in the most sensitive area of Kosciuszko National Park. That is why the National Parks and Wildlife Service has been working with a community-based steering committee that comprises scientists, a veterinarian and representatives from conservation, tourist and industry groups, to name just a few, since November 2000 to find solutions to the problem.

On the basis of extensive public consultation, I can inform the House that agreement was reached that the alpine area of Kosciuszko is a unique environment that must be protected from the impact of horses, that the control methods used must be humane for horses, and that management of horses should not be limited to the alpine area but should be extended across the entire park. A draft wild horse management plan was released for public exhibition on 31 May 2000 for a period of six weeks. It proposes that capture and removal techniques using horse riders under contract arrangements be trialled over a period of two years. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has worked closely with the steering committee, and particularly with local horse riders, to begin the process of removing horses.

The project is seen to have many positive benefits both locally in establishing a partnership of local horse riders, and more widely in promoting methods of managing wild horses that have the support of the wider community. At this stage I can report that the trial was successful in the recent humane removal of 13 horses from the alpine area of Kosciuszko. I have been advised that recent aerial surveys of Guy Fawkes River National Park have revealed that some 150 horses remain in the park. Of course, those remaining horses must be managed properly. Quite simply, a better way must be found to control them and to reduce the adverse effects that they are having, and undoubtedly have had, on the park's environment.

Mr Fraser: Minor effects.

Mr DEBUS: That is frankly ridiculous. That interjection undermines any pretence of seriousness that the honourable member for Coffs Harbour might have claimed in raising this issue for debate. A better way must be found to control the adverse effects that horses have had in Guy Fawkes River National Park. That is why I asked the extremely eminent independent veterinary scientist Dr Tony English to prepare a plan of management to reduce the number of feral horses remaining in the park. During community consultation on the heritage value of the horses in the park was raised. I allocated \$20,000 to establish a heritage horse working party to carry out a study to investigate the validity of these claims. The study that I commissioned allowed a thorough investigation of the view of many local people that the horses have historical importance.

The working party comprised interested community members and was chaired by Associate Professor Frank Nicholas, a renowned genetic scientist from the University of Sydney's veterinary science faculty. We obviously required genetic evidence to reveal the historical origins of the horses. The final report of the heritage working party is expected to be available soon. In addition to the heritage study, Dr English—I emphasise that I hold him in the highest esteem—has also recommended a moratorium on the removal of any horses from the park until a heritage study is completed; that the National Parks and Wildlife Service continue to monitor the environmental effects in the park associated with the removal of the horses; and that horses be removed from the park only after consultation with experienced stockmen, veterinarians and the RSPCA.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has learned from the community reaction to the Guy Fawkes feral horse cull. It has worked with local communities to formulate practical and widely accepted plans to deal

with this serious environmental problem. I only wish that the honourable member for Coffs Harbour would show more interest in devising constructive solutions to what are by any rational measure complex problems. It is not sufficient for him to attempt to score cheap political points for local consumption. This is a complex, difficult issue that other people—including me—are treating seriously.

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [4.46 p.m.]: Brumby management in New South Wales national parks is an issue of public importance. However, judging from what we have heard in the past few years, this matter of public importance should probably refer to "brumby mismanagement" in New South Wales national parks. Opposition members must challenge the Government about its decisions and performance and oppose its unpopular or unconscionable actions in our community. I commend the honourable member for Coffs Harbour for continuing to raise the slaughter—there is no other word to describe it—of one of Australia's national icons, the brumby, in a national park in his area.

Controlling feral horses has been a major problem across New South Wales, indeed throughout Australia, for some time. Until very recently government authorities with responsibility for our national parks have been unable to manage the feral horse problem in Kosciuszko National Park. We must acknowledge the cultural and heritage value of these wild horses to Australia. In recent years the Royal Easter Show and the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games restored the brumby to its rightful place in the hearts of Australians and brought it to the attention of people throughout the world. Like the honourable member for Coffs Harbour, I was dismayed by the method that the National Parks and Wildlife Service chose to control the problem of wild horses in Guy Fawkes River National Park.

The Minister for the Environment referred to the plan advanced by the community based steering committee for Kosciuszko National Park. I applaud Dave Darlington and his team and others who have been involved in putting that plan into operation. Local people Kerry Rayer and Brian Seears, who live south of Dalgety, received some brumbies from Kosciuszko National Park. They quickly socialised these wonderful animals, broke them in and trained them, and soon they will be offered for sale. Another exciting program can and will be used to control wild horses. The Stockwhip Program, a pilot program, has the support of the Premier's Department, the Snowy River Shire Council working group, Corrective Services and the RSPCA. Under the Stockwhip Program low-risk prisoners will capture, train and market brumbies from Kosciuszko National Park. It is a win-win situation: the environment will win, the community will win, the prisoners will win, and the brumbies—an icon—will win.

Under that program brumbies will not be shot. The Nature Conservation Council does not like the idea. It wants to shoot the brumbies now, before winter. It does not like the idea of using experienced men on horseback—as has been done for almost 200 years throughout our national parks, certainly throughout the alpine regions—to go in and follow, track and capture the brumbies so that the numbers can be managed. It is a major problem. There are 3,000 to 8,000 brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park. I cannot believe for a moment that the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Government or the Minister would condone an aerial program that used indiscriminate shooting.

There are strict guidelines for the control of kangaroos through the use of rifles. We certainly would not tolerate such methods being used again in relation to brumbies. I fully support the actions that have been spoken about today. The brumbies are an icon; they must be managed. The damage that they cause is arguable and questionable. One of those brumbies was captured and it is being ridden just a few months later. In fact, it is being ridden from Darwin to Adelaide in a fund-raising ride. The ride is not only promoting the Year of the Outback and the Year of the Mountains; it is promoting one of Australia's wonderful icons: the brumby.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.51 p.m.], in reply: I was disappointed by the response of the Minister for the Environment to this issue. I have spoken to him privately on several occasions in relation to this issue. I have told him that I do not believe that his permanent ban on aerial culling is an appropriate measure because it would be the best way to cull some forms of wildlife—be it donkeys or horses—in some terrains. The decision was a knee-jerk reaction by the Minister at the time. He said, "Look, I will try to kill this issue, we will ban it". I know that some Coalition members called for a ban, but I did not agree with them. I still do not agree with them. As the Minister said, this is a complex issue. We need to ensure that the culling techniques utilised by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and any other government departments are appropriate to the situation. Banning something *carte blanche* does not necessarily address the issue.

The Minister says that there are scarce resources. I admit that there are scarce resources—we all know that. But he treats this issue in a light-hearted manner. He says, "It is before the courts." It is not before the

courts. It has never been before the courts because the National Parks and Wildlife Service has kept it out of the courts for the past two years, thinking that people will forget about it. I can tell the Minister that it is not just a local issue. The park is not in my electorate; it borders my electorate. This issue has been taken up by people across Australia. As the honourable member for Monaro said, the brumby is an icon. It has been argued that horses in Guy Fawkes River National Park are descendants from the first Light Horse Brigade horses. They are walers. I think the majority of them were killed in the slaughter. The Minister talked about the damage done by wild horses or brumbies. I pointed out to him that the *Australian Magazine* of 9 December quotes a fellow by the name of Tim Low, a conservationist. The article states:

Kill all the brumbies, says Tim Low, with mischievous intent. As a biologist and the author of *Feral Future*, Low's argument is simple: less than 8 per cent of the mainland...

According to Low's calculations, the red kangaroo was the heaviest mammal present; now it's the 13th heaviest. Australia has among the world's highest rate of introduced species preying on or destroying the habitats of native animals.

Low concedes that the brumby does less damage than donkeys and buffalo (which are in much larger numbers) or even foxes, rabbits and pigs. Nevertheless they move in mobs...

He talked about them muddying, dirtying and fouling river beds. I have photographic evidence. I again challenge the Minister. I can show the House evidence—I have the photographs—of horses dying and rotting, of carcasses in the river. However, the Minister failed to act through the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] and it said it would not happen. I know a fellow from the Casino area who was charged because someone found a dead calf, which had been dead for two days, in a waterway. He was charged by the EPA. I have evidence of rotting brumby carcasses; the calf carcass was not rotting. I challenge the Minister to clean this up. He should give the public confidence in his portfolio and say that he does not have a conflict of interest. I believe he does have a conflict of interest. As the honourable member for Monaro said, the Minister should resign on this issue—he knows what went on, he knows the cover-up that was perpetrated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, he knows that it is copping a plea to keep the evidence out of court.

I advise the Minister that I will make sure that this evidence gets publicised. I do not know how I will do it, but I will make sure it goes far and wide. I condemn him as Attorney General and as Minister for the Environment for allowing the National Parks and Wildlife Service to put a plea in on one charge only. I suggest that it should plead guilty to all 12 charges that were brought by the RSPCA. Do not hide behind a future management technique. I commend those management techniques. However, if it were not for this slaughter those techniques would not be in place. The Minister should report his department to the appropriate authorities, ensure that it is prosecuted to the hilt, and not let it cop out on a plea bargain which does not reflect the slaughter and the savagery that was evident in Guy Fawkes River National Park.

Discussion concluded.

APPROPRIATION BILL

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL

GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION SCHEMES FUND) BILL

PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING) BILL

STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL

Second Reading

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Take-note Debate

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.58 p.m.]: It was interesting to sit in the House last night and listen to the contributions of the honourable member for Newcastle and the honourable member for Maitland. I know of

one interjection when the member for Newcastle was speaking—unfortunately, he did not answer it. It was said that this budget is a Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong budget. I received a sign of glee and affirmation from the Deputy Speaker because I think the people of Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong read only the budget speeches of the members from those areas. They did reasonably well out of this budget. I wish to raise a number of issues. This Government says that the Treasurer has had seven surplus budgets. We do not deny that fact: we do not deny that year in year out the budget has been in surplus, the State has been in surplus, the books have been in surplus.

However, the budget has been in deficit because every year the Government has had to introduce additional appropriation bills to make up the shortfalls within budget allocations. The only reason that the Government has been able to do that is because of the extremely high incomes that have been earned on stamp duties as a result of the property boom in Sydney, the Olympic boom, and the payroll tax that it promised to reduce. The Government's income has been bursting at the seams. Government members have been able to pork barrel their electorates, as they will do until the end of this year. They will then say, "No, you have only got what you have asked for."

Anything that the Coalition offers, the Government will put on the barometer and say that we are spending money that we do not have. If the Treasurer had acted judiciously and prudently he would have ensured that all New South Wales debt was retired, debt racked up over many years by the Wran Government that we inherited. Only the prudential management of the former Coalition Government gave this State a triple-A rating, which ensured equity across the State. A procession of Ministers has told us that the Government is doing wonderful things in the Coffs Harbour electorate, such as fast-tracking the pipeline from Nymboida to Coffs Harbour to improve the water supply. Government members do not realise that the people of the Coffs Harbour electorate know that the so-called fast-tracking is a falsehood. The pipeline was mooted and priced under the former Coalition Government.

When the Carr Labor Government came to office it put a two-year hold on all capital works in all country areas. As a result, the pipeline was put on the backburner. Consequently, the Coffs Harbour hospital was delayed. I have a letter to the editor that I can show anyone who is interested—I am sure that the Hon. Dr Refshauge would not be interested—in which the former Minister for Health promised to complete, furnish and occupy the new Coffs Harbour hospital by the end of the Government's first term in 1999. The hospital was not even started by the end of the Carr Labor Government's first term. The site identified by the former Coalition Government was eventually purchased after much haggling. The hospital and health service in the Coffs Harbour electorate cannot meet the needs of the population. Today 14 surgical beds remain closed, despite assurances from the current Minister for Health and the Premier that we would have a three-year budget for health so that we would know where to put the money.

Health services diminished because increased funding from the Minister for Health, as announced by the Premier, only made up the increase in staff wages under normal circumstances and award conditions for that period. Every time we have received or asked for a new service—I have screamed for services—we have ended up with a one-off allocation. When the Premier came to the Coffs Harbour electorate to launch the Federal campaign for the local Labor Party member he found \$970,000 of unallocated funds. The chief executive officer, Mr Clout, tells us that his budget is poor, yet the Premier can find \$970,000 of unallocated funds to improve services at the Coffs Harbour Base Hospital. I am yet to see the balance sheet to determine whether that \$970,000 was allocated. Before people move into the Coffs Harbour electorate they consider airport services, roads, rail and health. A large number of retired people reside in my electorate. People have been assured that there will be a new hospital.

However, people are not told that they cannot get their hips or knees replaced, or have their vascular surgery done, at the hospital. If people are unfortunate enough to have cancer and need chemotherapy, but have private health insurance, they are directed to go to Brisbane, Newcastle or North Shore Hospital. It is a disgrace. On Mr Clout's own admission, approximately \$33 million flows from the Coffs Harbour area to Sydney. That means that \$33 million per annum worth of services are provided to people from the Coffs Harbour electorate in Sydney. I am the first one to admit that that \$33 million could not be returned 100 per cent. Heart surgery and other major surgery cannot be performed in our hospital, even though it is a level five hospital and it has two operating theatres—neither of which has been opened since the hospital opened during the last Federal campaign. But let us assume that a little more than one-third of the money could stay in Sydney. In fact, we could leave \$15 million in Sydney to provide the services we need at major teaching hospitals.

At least \$18 million of services go to the bone, hip and joint replacement clinic at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Last night I noted that the honourable member for Maitland referred to the proposed hip and

joint replacement clinic for Newcastle. That is commendable. But give us the funding so that our orthopaedic surgeons, who spend 80 per cent of their allocation on trauma surgery, can perform more elective surgery. The waiting list for elective surgery at Port Macquarie hospital is about 1,400. In Coffs Harbour it is about 400. Because of the way the health dollar is directed within the Mid North Coast Area Health Service, patients are directed to Port Macquarie. Somewhere between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of orthopaedic surgery in Coffs Harbour is elective, and 70 per cent to 80 per cent of it is trauma. In Port Macquarie 20 per cent to 30 per cent of orthopaedic surgery is trauma, and 70 per cent to 80 per cent of it is elective.

The waiting list in Port Macquarie reflects that people from Coffs Harbour, Macksville, Kempsey, Grafton and Dorrigo are on the waiting list. We cannot attract orthopaedic and other surgeons to the Coffs Harbour health campus as they now call it, but it is a base hospital, because they cannot be assured of elective surgery. We cannot provide that service because funding is not available. I implore the Minister for Health to come to my electorate for a day. We will not tell the media about it. I will write to the doctors and, on the quiet, we will ask the people on the waiting list to talk to the Minister. We will see whether we can get through his steely exterior so that he might provide us with a real increase in recurrent funding to provide the health services my electorate needs and deserves. The Treasurer made great noises in the Budget Speech about mental health facilities at Coffs Harbour Base Hospital. But what the Treasurer did not tell us was that we have now opened 19 beds out of 30, which means that 11 beds in that convalescent unit remain closed. Nurses are walking away from the hospital in droves because they are far too stressed. Horror stories come out of there day in and day out.

Last weekend Mrs Burley, a 94-year-old woman from Dorrigo, found that she had a blood clot in her leg. She was taken to Dorrigo hospital, where she was told that she could not be taken to Coffs Harbour hospital because it has no vascular surgeon because there is no budget allocation. She could not be taken to Armidale because it did not have funding to complete the operation. Port Macquarie could not do it because it was booked out. Mrs Burley, who was in extreme agony but who was given every care and attention from the people at Coffs Harbour and Dorrigo hospitals, died on Sunday. Anyone would consider 94 to be a good innings, but no-one should have to die in agony because a vascular surgeon could not be accessed within an hour's drive of the person's home. It is an absolute disgrace. I call on the Minister to apologise to her family, who are extremely distressed that such a grand lady could not get the service she needed because of a lack of funding and attention by this Government.

I note that the Hon. Harry Woods, under the auspices of the Department of Regional Development, will give Coffs Harbour City Council \$25,000 on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Coffs Harbour City Council said, "We will take it." The council will use that money to try to attract more specialists to Coffs Harbour. It is a political move. We have a Labor mayor, and I would suggest a majority Labor council, which will waste \$50,000 trying to attract services. The \$50,000 would go a long way if it were put into elective surgery at Coffs Harbour, rather than put into a shopfront-type activity to try to attract new services to Coffs Harbour. The one thing that will attract new services—such as more ear, nose and throat specialists, vascular surgeons and orthopaedic surgeons—is money.

Give us money and we can provide the service. Open up the closed beds and operating theatres and the doctors will put their hands up to come to a magnificent area to service the people that are already there. I was told yesterday by Cactus, a fellow from Macksville who I think is a life member of the North Coast surf life saving association, that he has to travel from Macksville to Coffs Harbour for dialysis treatment because he cannot be given that treatment at Macksville hospital. Macksville hospital is not in my area; it comes under the network of Coffs Harbour Base Hospital. He told me that up to five patients a week travel by ambulance to Coffs Harbour hospital from Macksville to receive dialysis. The cost of this service, I am led to believe, is in the vicinity of \$7,000 a week. That is a great deal of money. Rather than spending it on ambulance services it should be put into a dialysis unit at Macksville.

The outflows—the air ambulances, the Isolated Patients Travel and Assistance Scheme payments—involve money over and above the \$33 million that is going down to Sydney. It is an added cost. I have asked the Minister to have a good look at Mr Clout's operations. I think they are fairly inefficient, with the outflows to Sydney involving a 10 per cent to 15 per cent wastage. Health funding should be more transportable. Money should be given back to the people of Coffs Harbour and put into Coffs Harbour Base Hospital so that people can receive the service they need. It would be cheaper for NSW Health and there would be less stress on patients. I know that both the Parliamentary Secretary at the table and you, Mr Deputy-Speaker, can relate to this problem directly. Imagine having to tell your wife—or mine—when she had cancer, "You toddle off to Sydney for your chemotherapy and leave your children and your loved ones where they are. When you have had two weeks of chemo come home for two weeks and then go and get another dose—whatever the treatment for that type of cancer is." The stress of that on a cancer patient is absolutely unforgivable.

We need extra funding. The Minister had a crack at me by claiming that I did not want the extra cataract operations in the area. I do, but I want the money to be spent where it is most needed, to ensure that people have quality of life and the health care that they deserve in my electorate. I do not believe this is being provided properly under Mr Clout's administration. The Minister should bring a performance audit team to the area and have a good look at the way the money is being spent within the whole of the North Coast Area Health Service. Across the whole of the area I am told that when there is a problem a nurse with a clipboard is employed. They do not employ a clinician; they employ someone who knows the system and who knows how to provide excuses back to the general public, the local member and the Minister to ensure that the issue goes away.

People know that if they come to me as the local member and I rattle cages in the right way they can be bumped up the waiting list. That is a bit sad. In effect, my office is becoming a de facto booking office for elective surgery in the Coffs Harbour area. That is not good enough. The one thing that will fix the problem is a genuine increase in funding to people in the Coffs Harbour electorate. We need a genuine increase, not only one to cover the increase in wages. We are the second-lowest funded health service in regional New South Wales, yet we have one of the fastest-growing populations. Many retired people who have moved to the area have medical conditions. We welcome them; they add to the great lifestyle in Coffs Harbour. But they should bring funding with them or the funding should be adequate to give us per capita equity. Last night I heard the honourable member for Newcastle and you, Mr Deputy-Speaker, saying that at long last the Newcastle area has some equity in health funding. We do not have the per capita funding that you have. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

A fairly large percentage of the increase in health funding will go to other areas in New South Wales to fund elective surgery for patients from electorates such as mine. John Hunter Hospital provides fine services—some are absolutely brilliant. Two young friends of mine were airlifted to that hospital not long ago as a result of a car accident. They received first-class treatment at John Hunter Hospital. I commend the nurses and other staff of that hospital and the staff at Coffs Harbour hospital as well. But let us make their life a little better by giving them the equity in funding that they deserve as health professionals, because they are not getting it now.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

WITNESS PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PENALTY NOTICE OFFENCES) BILL

Bills received and read a first time.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NSW HEALTH FOOD BUSINESS REGISTRATION

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [5.18 p.m.]: Recently a constituent of mine, Mr Clayton Pine, wrote to me complaining about a problem he had encountered which amply demonstrates the Carr Government's lack of commitment to small business. Mr Pine runs a tea and coffee supply business called Pine Tea and Coffee from premises located in the industrial estate at Castle Hill. It is a small business but a growing one that supplies a large number of restaurants with their tea and coffee requirements. It carries out roasting of coffee beans and packing on the premises. I might add that Mr Pine won two gold medals at the Royal Easter Show for his roasting of coffee beans. Mr Pine's faxed letter reads as follows:

Recently NSW Health ran an advertising campaign to have all food operations of any description register as Food Businesses by 24th May 2002 or incur up to \$50,000 fine.

The advertisements advised that if you were not already registered then you must make sure that you register with NSW Health or your local Council.

We of course are registered with our local Council as a Food Premises ... Accordingly, we thought that we were registered.

A couple of days after the due date a customer told us that the existing Council registration was not enough and that this NSW Health requirement represented another initiative.

We rang Baulkham Hills Council and a very helpful Mr. Angelo Varios ... confirmed that another registration was required. Council had only been advised of the requirements in February 2002. When asked why Council had not contacted all registered

Food Businesses in the area we were told that there were no funds allocated by the State Government so Council had no funds to run a campaign.

Mr. Varios advised that the charge was \$55 to register at Council and no charge direct to NSW Health or via the Internet on foodnotify.nsw.gov.au which we did immediately...

When asked about the possibility of a fine Mr. Angelo Varios said that it was most unlikely as we were not the only company who had contacted him and in fact, according to him, there are many businesses still not registered as they are still unaware of the requirement. He said the whole issue had not been handled well.

Many businesses are either confused or unaware of any need to register having not seen or heard the television or radio advertisements.

At no time did we receive any mail regarding the requirement to register.

Will the government be fining all late registrations or unregistered food businesses in this election year?

Here we have the absurd situation of a company that had done the right thing and registered as a food premises with Baulkham Hills Shire Council—and I have seen its registration—and was facing the prospect of a \$50,000 fine, because NSW Health, that is, the Government, did not do its job properly. Since all food businesses already have to register with their local councils why could NSW Health not have contacted those councils and asked them for a list? The registration procedure on the web site identified by Mr Pine is not difficult, although it asks for a lot of details, such as the number of employees, the type of food product sold and so on. There is no fee for registering on the Internet. If that information was not available from councils, and it was important for NSW Health to collate it, the advertisements run by the Government should have specified that all businesses were required to register and that this registration was separate from the existing registration with council.

However, apart from the ambiguity of the Government's advertising campaign and the potential for innocent parties to be hit with the usual exorbitant fines there is another problem with this new requirement of NSW Health. It is just more red tape. If obtaining that information is so essential, why did the Government not pay councils to contact the registered food businesses in their areas? And why is there a requirement under three Acts—the Local Government Act, the Food Act and now, presumably, the health legislation—to register? Surely one central registration would do. While ever this unnecessary waste and duplication continues the Carr Government cannot claim to be representing the interests of small business appropriately.

It is this kind of heavy-handed bureaucracy, backed up by threats of fines that are out of all proportion to the penalty, that gives government as a whole a bad name. Mr Pine felt sufficiently concerned about this to write to me. He is concerned also that other food businesses that are intent on doing the right thing may end up being fined as a consequence of the Government's negligence. There are many instances in which the Government has flicked all sorts of responsibilities to local councils without providing adequate funding. There is no question that NSW Health is at fault in this case, and not the law-abiding food businesses such as Pine Tea and Coffee Pty Ltd.

CLOVELLY COMMUNITY BANK

Mr E. T. PAGE (Coogee) [5.23 p.m.]: I pay tribute to a Victorian, Rob Hunt, the Group Managing Director of Bendigo Bank, who realised that in the seven years from 1993 to 2000 2,060 bank branches, or 29 per cent of all branches, in Australia had closed. More than one-third of the closures were in country towns and in some towns four or five branches were whittled down to none. He was concerned about the effect of those closures on country communities and on community shopping centres in the cities. Australia's only regionally based bank, the Bendigo Bank, recognised the problem and its impact on the community and looked for a solution. Mr Hunt believed that a subsidised operation would not work and felt that the change required to effect the solution had to come from within the community. He promoted the idea of a community bank, based on community input, keeping money in the area in which it was generated and providing a proper service for the people who live in the area.

In my electorate of Coogee the Clovelly Commonwealth Bank branch closed early in 1999, leaving an automatic teller machine [ATM], which closed in August 2000. The local post office carried out basic transactions, but there were long queues and older people had trouble with ATMs. Previously I have spoken in this House about my friend Ernest Foyle, who passed away in August 2000. Prior to his death I addressed the House on the impact on my constituents of bank closures, and I made mention of Ernest Foyle's work in the community against that scale of economic rationalisation. He was particularly concerned about the effect of the closure of the Commonwealth Bank branch at Clovelly on older people living in the area, low-income earners and the bank's employees.

Ernest was proud that his community banded together to try to do something about that. Christine Gardiner, the proprietor of a local business, Guitars'N'Things, was horrified by what had happened and could see the economic effect on her community. She dropped 3,000 leaflets in local letterboxes calling for a public meeting. More than 100 people turned up at the meeting and expressed unanimous support for the setting up of a community bank. Information nights have been held at the Clovelly RSL and the Clovelly surf club. A feasibility study was done to test the practicalities of setting up a community bank. Local businesses pledged \$1 million to the bank. That is twice what was proposed in any other feasibility study in Australia.

The Clovelly Community Bank got off the ground, and last Wednesday night it held a function to present share certificates to its shareholders. Of the 260 potential attendees, 140 were present, demonstrating the genuine support and enthusiasm for the project. The shareholders were addressed by Christine Gardiner, who is now the Clovelly Community Bank's board chairperson, David Macauley of the New South Wales Bendigo Bank and Patrick Monnox, the appointed manager of the Clovelly Community Bank. As I speak, work is continuing on the bank's premises. Today the building was handed over to the board.

Next Saturday the official opening of the Clovelly Community Bank will take place, I am sure to the great delight of all involved. I will certainly be there. The board recently employed staff for the branch, including a manager, a customer service supervisor and three customer service operators. The initiative at Clovelly has motivated the Bondi community to work towards its own bank. I wish its chairman, Tibor Molnar, and his board the best of luck in their endeavour. I congratulate the board chairman, Christine Gardiner, who has been the driving force behind the creation of the Clovelly Community Bank from day one. I wish Christine, the secretary, Bernard Rubens, the board, the staff, the shareholders and customers every success. I am certain that the bank will be great for the storekeepers in that small shopping centre in my electorate. It will help to maintain the viability of the area and generate income that will be returned to the community.

HOME WARRANTY INSURANCE

Mr CULL (Tamworth) [5.28 p.m.]: I again bring to the attention of the Government the continuing crisis that is crippling the building industry. I have been asked by builders in my electorate to express their outrage at the consequences for their businesses of the Home Owners Warranty Insurance Scheme. The need for home building insurance reform was identified in a review of the legislation and as a result of concerns raised by home owners and builders. The reforms were meant to significantly improve the level of protection for consumers and to provide a better licensing and dispute resolution system for the industry. I am sure that members agree that the current legislation does not address the concerns of the building industry. The current situation is intolerable. It is time the Government acted to address the crisis in the building industry.

This problem has been brought before the House on several occasions, including the recent rally in Macquarie Street at which numerous small builders expressed their grave concerns about the industry and about their survival. However, the Government still refuses to take action to protect the industry. That is happening at a time when builders contact my office daily and indicate that they cannot work under the present system. They have indicated that they intend to leave the industry unless changes are made to the Home Owners Warranty Insurance Scheme. The Government needs to acknowledge that, as a group, builders do not have a body to represent their interests as a whole. Many small builders feel betrayed and dejected because the Government is not prepared to address their concerns. When the Government privatised home warranty insurance, it promised to deliver a tough regulatory and licensing regime to replace the Building Services Corporation. The Government has done nothing to overcome the onerous conditions under which the building industry is operating, particularly in relation to demands by insurance companies that builders provide indemnity before they will issue insurance cover.

Insurance companies are now dictating the amount of work a builder can undertake by placing limits on insurance cover. Insurance companies set limits on cover according to the personal assets shown in previous financial statements. This Clayton's insurance policy is backed by builders who are forced to use their personal assets as security, yet the insurance companies are happy to take their premiums. Why are builders being asked to pay premiums to insurance companies when the liability for any claim is secured by the builder's personal assets? I was approached by a builder in Tamworth who expressed grave concerns about his personal survival and the survival of his business. He recently applied to have his limit increased. He had been operating with HIA Insurance Services since home warranty insurance was introduced about six years ago. He had never had a claim made against him. He had been building for 29 years and started his own business 10 years ago.

He first applied for home warranty insurance as a sole trader. However, he has since formed a partnership with his wife. After he had applied for a review of his limit, all the forms were returned to him. He

had to reapply for a new licence in the partnership name at the cost of another \$110. When he reapplied, which took three weeks and cost an additional \$627, he was refused a licence on the basis that he did not have a partnership record, having previously worked as a sole trader. That meant he was restricted to doing work worth less than \$12,000. When one remembers that this man had been building for 29 years and his main income was from the construction of new homes, what use is it to him to be restricted to doing work to the value of \$12,000?

If he wants this restriction removed, he has to resubmit all information to the insurance company. When it is approved, he has to apply to the Department of Fair Trading to have the restriction removed. At the same time, his business is left in limbo. He has been unable to retain his employees or to provide work for his subcontractors. This case indicates the bureaucratic nightmare with which builders are confronted. They struggle to retain and maintain their businesses. Many builders are being forced to leave the industry or decrease the size of their businesses because of the restrictions being placed on them by insurance companies. The reduction in building activity is to the detriment of our local economy and prohibits young apprentices from getting jobs and working in the industry. I ask the Government to address this problem as a matter of urgency.

Mr AQUILINA (Riverstone—Minister for Land and Water Conservation, and Minister for Fair Trading) [5.33 p.m.]: The honourable member for Tamworth did not tell me that he intended to make this private member's statement this afternoon. However, I did note from the business paper that he would be doing so, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to make an initial response. By and large the honourable member made generalised statements in his speech. In relation to the specific matter he raised, I would be pleased to have my department look into it, as we have done for hundreds of builders who have come to us about individual problems. We have been able to resolve most of those problems. Certain claims made by the honourable member, such as the claim that builders are required to provide deeds of indemnity to obtain insurance, are not correct and create unnecessary concern for builders. I do not know how many times I have said publicly and in this House that on 16 May Royal and Sun Alliance gave an undertaking that, except for a small category of persons who comprise about 5 per cent of the total number of builders, it would not require deeds of indemnity.

I am sure the honourable member for Wagga Wagga will confirm that a number of builders whom I met in Wagga Wagga were surprised when I told them that the company did not require deeds of indemnity. Either that fact had not been communicated to them or they were not cognisant of the details. A number of other measures have been undertaken by the Government to assist builders. Generally speaking, we have been able to resolve most of the issues affecting builders. I would be the first person to acknowledge that not all the problems have been overcome. I have said repeatedly that the Government's reforms have been incremental. We have been trying to ensure that we improve the situation on a day-by-day basis. Tomorrow we will conduct a roundtable meeting of builders, and consumer and insurance company representatives to work through this matter. There will be further outcomes from that meeting. [*Time expired.*]

CESSNOCK AMBULANCE STATION

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [5.35 p.m.]: I raise the maintenance of Cessnock ambulance station and community expectations throughout the Cessnock electorate in relation to the way government-owned and occupied buildings should be maintained. Following a phone call from the Mr Jowett, the president of the local Rotary club, I visited Cessnock ambulance station. Mr Jowett told me of the disgraceful standard of the ambulance station and expressed great concern about the Government's commitment to the community of Cessnock. It was unfortunate that at the time of my visit no officers were on duty, as that prevented me from entering the building. I am sure that the staff were fulfilling their obligations to serve the community and provide the best service they can.

The services that these dedicated people provide to the community in an extremely harsh environment are nothing short of amazing, as was highlighted this week. All members of the House would be aware of the shooting incident at Cessnock involving Constable Hassett. A brave and honourable police officer was shot. This hard-working and dedicated officer was protecting the community from people who break the law. It is good to know that Constable Hassett is in a stable condition and should recover from the injuries that were inflicted on Tuesday. When the police officer was wounded, Cessnock ambulance officers attended the scene to provide aid and transport services to him. Constable Carmel Kaczmar, who was with Constable Hassett, should be congratulated on her bravery and professional attitude when confronted with an extreme situation. The community of Cessnock fully supports the police and extends its sympathy to the families and friends of those two brave and dedicated officers. The support of the community for the police is great to see.

The part played by the ambulance officers in this horrific incident should be noted. Without concern for their own safety the officers went straight to the scene to ensure that the best possible care was administered as

quickly as possible. To continue to provide the highest level of service possible, the ambulance officers must have up-to-date, well-maintained and appropriate facilities from which to work. When I visited the station, I noted that the building and grounds were in need of maintenance work to bring them up to a standard that meets the service's needs and the community's expectations. The building is of sound construction and is noted as being unique in Cessnock as it is of late art deco architecture. The architectural importance of the building was highlighted by its identification in the Cessnock City Council heritage local environmental plan.

It is important to the people of Cessnock that the ambulance station building is maintained to a suitable standard and that it is used for the purpose for which it was built. I am concerned that a health facility which is so important to the community's wellbeing and safety had been allowed to deteriorate. The site requires extensive work to bring it up to the standard expected by the community it serves. The community expects that government-owned and occupied buildings should be maintained. Our constituents regard the proper maintenance of public buildings as a reflection of the commitment of the Government to the area and its people.

Since my inspection some maintenance has been undertaken to replace light fittings and fix broken windows. I am told that new doors will soon be fitted to the station to make it more secure. The treatment room is not able to be used and is in need of urgent attention. I have made representations to the Parliamentary Secretary for Health seeking the necessary funding to carry out maintenance on this important infrastructure to bring it to a suitable level. The Parliamentary Secretary has taken action and hopefully the community will soon have a beneficial outcome. It would be inappropriate for Cessnock Rotary to maintain this facility because the Government should maintain its own buildings. [*Time expired.*]

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [5.40 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Cessnock for raising this important matter. Cessnock ambulance station was built in the days when each district in Newcastle, Maitland, Lake Macquarie and Cessnock had individual ambulance services. These were later absorbed into one Hunter regional ambulance service prior to the State Government taking over the service statewide. Many of the buildings need considerable work to bring them up to modern-day standards. Unlike many other ambulance stations, the Cessnock station is an impressive building, constructed in the main from money from miners' wages in the form of a stump. It has been part and parcel of the Cessnock community for so long that the community wishes to maintain and keep the building, rather than have a new station. This can be done with the Cessnock building, unlike other stations that do not comply with modern standards. In the old days Cessnock also serviced the Kurri Kurri area. I will ensure that the comments of the honourable member for Cessnock are passed on to the appropriate Minister.

KIDS AT RISK PROGRAM

Mr MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [5.42 p.m.]: I speak tonight in support of a matter that has been brought to my attention by a constituent of North Rocks who wrote to me in the following terms:

Thank you for taking time to listen to my thoughts on the "Kids at Risk Program" based at Chullora TAFE.

As of Friday (14.6.02) the program has been cut from 105 student places to 30. No Catholic or other Non-government school are able to do the program, they are excluded.

The "Kids at Risk" program is a great program doing some great things for year 9 and 10 kids in South Western Sydney.

The program has received high praise from schools, parents, community groups and employers.

This program does not have all of the answers to all the problems for kids in South Western Sydney but it does have answers and it offers these kids hope and a future.

Thank you for assisting us to get this program going for the 100+ students ready and waiting to do this course.

I made some inquiries and noted that the course was also referred to in that excellent newspaper the *Bankstown-Canterbury Torch* on 16 January, which stated:

[This young man] lacked motivation and didn't enjoy school, so much so that by Year 10 at Sir Joseph Banks High School in Revesby, he had been placed in a special education unit.

The class was for students considered "at risk" of not attaining enough employable skills before completing their high school education ...

But[his] life has changed markedly for the better in the past couple of years.

Now 18, the young Panania resident is employed full-time as an apprentice mechanical engineer in fitting and machining at Belmore and his future looks rosy.

The reason for the turnaround was his involvement in a special program, run by the Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE's Chullora campus.

Called Workskills, the course involves its students in a year of community-based work, enabling them to gain a broad range of practical skills and equipping them for a host of different apprenticeships.

This type of praise is echoed by a number of people. Kerry Roberts wrote about her son, stating:

I am writing to express my appreciation to your TAFE for running the Community-based Program Course at Chullora Campus called Fitting and Machining. This course was available to my son, Chris while he was studying last year for his School Certificate at De La Salle, Revesby.

The skills that he gained through this course enabled him to obtain employment in a local air-conditioning firm. It was only through this course that Chris recognised that he wanted to work with sheet metal and he was able to make use of the employment opportunity presented to him. I am sure that without the course behind him it would have taken a lot longer for him to enter the workforce.

The careers adviser of Kingsgrove North High School stated:

We would like to express our concern at the possibility of the Community Based Program for "kids at risk" being discontinued. The course is very important for students who find school difficult or have problems at school. This year we have eight students who were going to complete the course.

That school would be concerned if this course is tapered off or discontinued. The careers adviser of Sir Joseph Banks High School wrote:

The continuation of this course and the opportunities that it provides for our students should be a high priority. Appropriate funding should be made available to ensure vocational courses of this calibre are available for Year 10 students, particularly those at risk of disengaging from the education process. The proven success of the course outlined above will be in jeopardy if funding is not allocated.

A letter in support of Chullora TAFE from the Holy Spirit College is in the following terms:

We are writing on behalf of Holy Spirit College Lakemba. For the past three years, students of Holy Spirit College have benefited from participating in an eighteen week course offered at the Chullora Annex of Bankstown TAFE. At the beginning of this year, we had a group of fifteen Year 10 students organised to enrol for this course, when it was suddenly cancelled. The students were devastated.

The careers adviser of Condell Park High School stated:

I am also expressing my concern as their careers adviser. Firstly, why was this decision to cut the funding made on the spur of the moment?

Another parent stated:

My son Dean ... attended Chullora every Thursday ...

My son has gained a lot of knowledge from this course, which has helped him obtain an apprenticeship in 2002.

The relieving principal of Sefton High School wrote

A Fitting and Machining community-based program for Youth at Risk has been a highly valued resource for Students at Risk at Sefton High School.

The praise goes on. This is a very worthwhile course that could help the young people of south-western Sydney who will not necessarily attend university but need to be prepared for a trade so that they can make a worthwhile contribution to the community. Many young people fall through the cracks and are not suited for university but they cannot enter a trade because they do not have the necessary experience or educational qualifications. This course provided all these things. The Kids at Risk Program was beneficial in helping many young people in south-western Sydney to obtain a job. I ask the Minister to review the situation to ensure that more places are available.

DEATH OF REVEREND WILLIAM ARTHUR JAMES BROWN

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [5.47 p.m.]: I speak on this sad occasion to acknowledge the life and work of Reverend William Arthur James Brown, the late rector of Lambton in the Newcastle dioceses. Bill was born in

December 1916 and passed away on 13 June this year. He had an extraordinary career. He had been in the ministry from the very first. He was accepted for the ministry by the Bishop of Newcastle, Bishop de Witt Batty. He was a Surry Hills boy and attended Cleveland High School for a period and then threw himself into the church. He entered St John's College in 1939 for a three-year course but with the outbreak of World War II Bill was pulled out after a relatively short time and had to complete his course virtually by correspondence. Bill was ordained as a priest in Christ Church Cathedral Newcastle on St Matthias Day, 24 February 1942. He served at Islington as priest-in-charge.

Bill was quite a character within the electorate and certainly within the dioceses. He and two other priests were not exactly feared but they were certainly revered at the synod, the diocesan council and various other meetings. Bill, the Reverend Bill Childs and the Reverend Gordon Coade were great colleagues. Those three devised a socially oriented program for the diocese, which was a bit of the shock for a diocese like Newcastle. They were great people. Bill was a great singer and Christian advocate. He had an extremely colourful career. For a time he was chaplain at the Wagga Wagga Air Force base and was involved with the apprentice training group at the base. He also held positions in the dioceses of Brisbane, Grafton, Canberra-Goulburn and Wangaratta. Bill attended world conferences, including the Second World Conference of Christian Youth in Oslo in 1947. He was quite famous for visiting Moscow as a delegate to the World Conference on Religious Peace in the days when one was not supposed to go anywhere near Russia. However, Bill was one of a number of Anglican priests who visited that country to demonstrate their solidarity with the Orthodox Church.

Bill's time as president of the Lambton-New Lambton Returned and Services League Club is still spoken of to this day. He managed to keep that club together and will be remembered for many years for his work there. Bill was a great bowler and was recognised throughout the area both for his support of bowling organisations and his ability as a bowler. He was a member of the Australian Labor Party—which was rather unusual for an Anglican priest—and president of my State council for several years in the old electorate of Waratah. Bill was particularly well known and loved by the local Aboriginal community. He established the Casino Aboriginal Welfare Society and the North Coast Aboriginal Advancement League. In later years he was president of the Hunter Region Aboriginal Co-operative, which established the Durungaling Aboriginal Girls Hostel at Lambton. Bill had Aboriginal people in his family and in his household for more than 30 years.

Bill's wife, Belle, whom he married in 1943, was his great mainstay. They had four children—Christopher, Phillip, Barbara and Penny—and it was great to see them at the funeral of their dad. We can only recognise Bill as a great contributor to our society. He had a view of politics, of religion and of humanity, and we do not see too many people like that. Bill was a classic. He was acknowledged by the community when he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal several years ago, which was a well-deserved tribute. It was my honour—humble though it was—to place that decoration on Bill's casket during the funeral service. Bill was a great man, a great friend, a true Christian and someone of whom our community should always be proud.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [5.50 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Maitland for paying tribute to the late Reverend Bill Brown in Parliament tonight. Bill Brown was selected for the Newcastle diocese by the late Bishop de Witt Batty. The bishop was an Englishman who appeared to be quite strict and conservative—he even used to wear gaiters as he walked down Bolton Street from Bishop Court. Bishop de Witt Batty left a legacy to the diocese: he made certain that all the priests who came to Newcastle in his time had a background of employment. He ensured that those postulants who came to the diocese straight from school went to work for Stewart Lloyds—with whom he had an arrangement—on the floor of the mill. The bishop maintained that priests in working-class parishes should get some dirt on their hands and know what the working man was about.

Bill Brown is the last of those priests. Cedric Douglas and Bill Childs have passed on—both Bill Childs and Bill Brown were extremely verbose. Bill returned to the Newcastle diocese from Grafton in 1966 and was rector at St John the Baptist in Lambton for several years. He and his wife, Belle, were much adored for their marvellous work. Bill had many interests. He was president of the local Returned Services League and became an Air Force chaplain. Even in his advanced years, Bill loved to do locum work. He was much loved at St Stephens at Adamstown, a church with which I have been strongly connected over the years. It was Newcastle's equivalent of Christ Church St Laurence, and Bill was in his element there. He was loved by the diocese and I am glad to have contributed to this tribute tonight. I offer my condolences to his wife, Belle—who is not in the best of health—and to their children.

NATURAL DISASTER FUNDING

Mr D. L. PAGE (Ballina) [5.55 p.m.]: I raise this evening the issue of natural disaster funding and the criteria used to assess that assistance. On Sunday 16 June this year a number of severe storms crossed the far north coast of New South Wales, striking the centre of Ocean Shores and some isolated surrounding areas. While the damage was not widespread, the winds were very strong and, because the storms travelled in what has been described as narrow strips, were very intense in the areas affected. It was surprising how much damage was done in a matter of minutes. Temperatures and humidity had been unusually high throughout the day, provoking the late afternoon wild weather.

In the Ocean Shores area there was roof damage to approximately 40 dwellings and significant tree and other vegetation damage on both private and public property. The local State Emergency Service [SES] branch obtained an emergency order that applied essentially to life-threatening situations—for example, trees that threatened to fall on houses or trees that had fallen on roads or downed powerlines. Some 114 jobs were completed under this emergency order, and I commend the Byron shire and the SES Byron local commander, Noel McAviney, for the wonderful job that he and his team of volunteers did in protecting life and property.

The funding situation is that the New South Wales Government pays the cost of all works done under an emergency order or when a natural disaster is officially declared. However, a problem arises in relation to funding other clean-up works. This is because the damage, while very severe, was not spread across a large area. Notwithstanding that this event was a natural disaster in that it was a disaster caused by natural phenomena, the full cost of the clean-up beyond the life-threatening situations covered by the emergency order must be borne entirely by local ratepayers via the council. A week and a half after the storm the clean-up is yet to be completed, with work still required along public roads, in parks and on fire trails where fallen trees must be removed.

Byron Shire Council has been working closely with the SES to clear the trees and other vegetation, but it is a mammoth task. As I said, while SES funding has been made available to clear trees and so on from roads and private property that threatened life, Byron Shire Council has been left to foot the bill for cleaning up public reserves and for re-establishing fire trails. This work is estimated to cost at least \$20,000, possibly more. It appears that when the storm is geographically isolated it is difficult to have that area declared a natural disaster zone despite the fact that damage is substantial. Accordingly, the assistance that the State Government releases when a natural disaster is declared was not forthcoming in this instance. In other words, a natural disaster was not declared because the damage, while severe, was confined to the Ocean Shores area rather than spread across a broader region.

I believe consideration should be given to assessing areas eligible for natural disaster relief on an individual basis regardless of the size of the area affected. The reality is that genuine natural disasters occur in smaller geographical areas and the costs of the clean-up can be very expensive. The fundamental principle underpinning natural disaster assistance is that State and Federal governments are in a much better position to fund clean-ups than local ratepayers through the local council. Therefore, I think it is time to consider the circumstances in which natural disaster assistance is made available. The fact that a natural disaster is not spread across a local government area should not mean that it cannot be deemed a natural disaster. More consideration should be given to assessing each situation on its merits.

This clean-up will cost Byron Shire Council about \$20,000. That may not seem a lot of money, but it is a substantial sum for a council that is struggling financially and it is money that could have been used to fund other worthy community projects, which now will not be offered. Therefore, I request that the State Government consider sympathetically reimbursing Byron Shire Council for the cost of the clean-up. I would also like the State Government to review the criteria it uses to provide natural disaster assistance. It should be more needs based and less rigid. The bottom line is that the event was a natural disaster, isolated but severe. In some cases funding will be much greater than it has been for Byron Shire Council. The State Government is in a much better position to provide assistance than local ratepayers. The criteria should be made more flexible so that natural disaster funding assistance is more needs based.

STAR STRUCK 2002

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.00 p.m.]: On 13 June I had the great pleasure of attending the tenth year of the Star Struck performance by public schools across Newcastle and the Hunter Valley at the Newcastle Entertainment Centre. Some 3,300 students, 115 schools and a 700-voice choir

performed before a packed audience, as they did on every night and every day of the performances. Star Struck is a real tribute to our public education system, and to the talents and dedication of the performers, backstage workers, students and teachers in the period leading up to the performances, and to the commitment of parents, carers and grandparents involved in making this most spectacular show a highlight of the school and entertainment year in Newcastle and the Hunter Valley.

It all began back in 1992 at the opening of the entertainment centre by the Hon. Virginia Chadwick, then Minister for Education. She said she hoped that the following year there would be a school spectacular like the one at the Sydney Entertainment Centre. At that time Sue Leask was the promotions and media liaison person for the Department of Education. She received a call from the entertainment centre management about available dates and she discussed that with the then Regional Director, Alan Beard. Notwithstanding trepidation, Sue contacted the only Hunter teachers involved in the Sydney spectacular, Oly Maywald, John Deacon and Greg Paterson, and they came together and discussed setting up a performance. By August 1993 we had the first of the Star Struck performances. What a fantastic 10 years we have had. I could not put it in any better words than those of producer-director John Deacon which appear in the program:

In 1993 there was a sense of anticipation, excitement and tension as the lights dimmed for the opening of the first Star Struck. Our team was all new and all local. Our performers untried. We had only sold 1,100 tickets out of a possible 3,790 to the performance. It was raining — heavily. The show began. We were absorbed and so proud.

The finale brought the months of preparation to a crescendo. The team then went to the doors to personally thank everyone who came to the show. A majority of the audience went directly to the front desk to purchase tickets for the remaining nights. We sold out. Star Struck was born.

Tonight will represent a decade of production. Incredible. I can number the shows, I know their names and the story behind the scenes but I still have trouble realising the significance of the achievement.

There are students performing in Star Struck this year who were not even born when we first began...

Conservatively there would be over 15,000 students who have been part of the journey. I think many more. Some may only perform once. Many appear annually throughout their school life. Some performing tonight have actually been there from the beginning.

The show from the start was created and fostered by teachers. We taught, rehearsed and co-ordinated the students and then celebrated with them. If some dancers went left when the others went right it didn't matter...

He describes what a fantastic platform this has been for the exhibition of student performances in dance, drama, music and song. The fabulous work of our schools has been put before the parents and citizens of Newcastle and the whole of the Hunter Valley. I pay tribute to those who were involved, to the 700 voice choir and the fantastic team dancing during the spectacular performance. I pay tribute also to the work of our teachers in bringing these performers to their pinnacle and putting their excellence on display. I pay a great tribute to the major sponsors: Energy Australia, the City of Newcastle, Port Stephens Council, Newcastle Port Corporation, City of Lake Macquarie and Hunter Health. I pay tribute also to the media sponsors: NBN television, the Newcastle *Herald*, KOFM, NXFM and all of the minor sponsors. Star Struck really brings together the students, schools and teachers of the Hunter, assisted by tremendous support from business and community in Newcastle. Well done Star Struck. Ten great years. *[Time expired.]*

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [6.05 p.m.]: I compliment the member for Newcastle on speaking about a very important milestone for the performing arts in the Hunter region. Star Struck, a fledgling organisation 10 years ago, has grown into one of the greatest performing arts events in Australia. The people of the Hunter pull together, and that trait is evident in Star Struck. My youngest son performed a few years ago and I was as proud as all the other mums and dads there when he got out on his unicycle and played the part of Mulga Bill, to the quiet amusement of everybody in the hall. Star Struck makes a great statement about the State education system. The teachers were guiding spirits and, assisted by many other volunteers including mums and dads, did it all.

Star Struck, which captured a wealth of talent, has enabled many children from junior school to attend the Hunter Performing Arts School, for which the honourable member for Newcastle and I worked so hard recently to have moneys made available in the budget. That specialist performing arts school is an outstanding success. We can be very proud that the event has survived for 10 years. Star Struck has given many children a lot of enjoyment and has enabled them to find talents that they probably did not think they had. I happened to be going around some of the schools in my electorate in the weeks leading up to the performance and saw that it is a good part of school life. Star Struck gives a child who is not overly talented an opportunity to perform with his friends in front of an audience. That is one of the best aspects of the event. As the Member for Newcastle said, good luck and thank you to everybody involved. Happy birthday, Star Struck, for 10 excellent years. *[Time expired.]*

DUBBO ELECTORATE DRUG REHABILITATION SERVICES

Mr McGRANE (Dubbo) [6.07 p.m.]: As this is Drug Awareness Week I thought it appropriate to bring before the House what is happening in the Dubbo electorate in relation to drugs. The Department of Juvenile Justice has funded the Ted Noffs Foundation to manage a rehabilitation unit at Dubbo. A suitable rural property near Dubbo has been refurbished to make it a suitable and effective rehabilitation facility. The Minister for Juvenile Justice, the Hon Carmel Tebbutt, will open these premises this Friday. This is a highly significant initiative in providing drug rehabilitation services to rural and regional young people. It is an outcome of the Government's Drug Summit plan of action. The unit in Dubbo is similar to a facility that has already been built at Coffs Harbour. The unit will help people at risk in the juvenile justice system by addressing drug and alcohol problems while they remain close to their communities. The selection of staff has been undertaken by the Ted Noffs Foundation in collaboration with the Department of Juvenile Justice. A total of 15 staff members will care for up to six young people at one time.

Both the Ted Noffs Foundation and the department have been keen to alleviate fears about the effect of these units on the local community. It has been a great exercise to go through the information provided by the Ted Noffs Foundation and the department, and to conduct meetings in the area. Sometimes these meetings can go off on tangents, but their successful running in the Dubbo area is a credit to the Ted Noffs Foundation and the department. Drugs are a major problem in regional New South Wales, as they are throughout any part of Australia and the rest of the world. The community of Wellington is also part of my electorate.

Unfortunately, Wellington has a long history of unacceptably high unemployment. This has manifested itself in a significant level of drug and alcohol activity among young people. About 18 months ago the mayor, the local inspector of police, the magistrate, representatives from the department and I took part in a think tank. We then saw the Minister. Consequently, we instituted the Wellington Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment Program, which enables individuals facing drug-related criminal charges the opportunity for counselling and rehabilitation. This is a great initiative not only of the Government but also the local community.

It is wonderful to see local police, the local magistrate, the local council and a cross-section of the local community working together to try to alleviate the problem. There are various ideas about how people with drug-related problem should be rehabilitated. Some people take the attitude that people who use drugs have only themselves to blame. I disagree with that view. I have great sympathy for the unfortunate people who, for various reasons, have become involved with drugs. Once people are involved with drugs the next step is becoming a criminal. It is a slippery road to nowhere. Prevention programs for young people before they take that first step into a life of criminality is a great initiative. It is costly, but the cost of releasing these people into the community and their living a criminal life is horrendous. To help people back onto the straight and narrow is a major plus. I commend the Drug Summit for its initiatives and for the initiatives implemented in the electorate of Dubbo.

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.12 p.m.]: I have heard some really great things about the Wellington Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment Program, which is a great example of the old adage that prevention is better than cure. The community has to be involved in dealing with problems associated with drugs. We simply cannot leave it up to government departments. What is happening in Wellington and Dubbo is exactly that: a community effort. I have no doubt that it is in no small way a reflection on the involvement of the honourable member for Dubbo who is very proactive in ensuring that young people especially get our fair go. You have to identify the problem and then put a solution in place. Mentoring and assistance for these people is far better than going down the slippery road to which the honourable member referred. It costs the community dearly in the long run not only in rehabilitation but also the criminal activity that results from involvement with drugs. I thank the honourable member for Dubbo for bringing to the attention of the House not only the great program in Dubbo but also the diversion program in Wellington. I congratulate him on his efforts.

BULLI HIGH SCHOOL

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira) [6.14 p.m.]: I draw the attention of honourable members to Bulli High School, a State comprehensive high school that, a couple of years ago, identified it had a problem. The school was situated in a changing socioeconomic area and there was a drift of students away from this public school to private schools. Over a three-year period enrolments declined by something like 300 students. Representatives of the school sat down with what was known as Project 2000 to institute a planning process to identify the problems leading to this decline in enrolments and how those problems could be solved. The project participants included the Principal, Peter Ricketson, the Deputy Principal, Peter Sims, and a number of other staff members including Suzy Brooker, Marie Pickering, Graeme Sutherland, Scott Copland, Rita Brown, Heather Bailey, Bob Scott and Jacqui McRobert.

A number of students were also involved: year 11 students Amy Ziebell, Gregg Cornwall and Will Farrier, and year 8 students Renee Dowling and Andrew Tuck. The feeder primary schools were represented by Inese Lide, the Principal of Waniora Public School and Stan Warren, the Principal of Austinmer Public School. Parents and citizens representatives, parent and community representatives, observers from the Department of Education and Training, and community organisations were invited to participate. The aim of the project was to determine, in a co-operative way, what parents and students wanted from a comprehensive high school. The project produced a vision statement in these terms:

Bulli High School will be an outstanding world-class community-based comprehensive high school offering a technologically enhanced teaching and learning environment based on independent self-directed student learning.

The vision statement will be achieved through six core goals that includes focusing on students; the strong support of teachers; a curriculum that offers a comprehensive range of learning opportunities for academic, vocational and personal growth; uses technology to enhance teaching and learning and develop higher order skills, build knowledge, solve problems and interact with a wide range of information sources and people; and builds a culture of respect, responsibility and integrity. The school changed its logo to include respect, responsibility and integrity as an identifier and to reinforce with young people the importance of those obvious aspects of our culture and community. The sixth core goal is that the high school will operate as a flexible multidimensional learning community that meets the academic, welfare, cultural, social and vocational needs of all of its students.

It is a very inclusive project that seeks to ensure the best quality public education at Bulli High School. In May I had the opportunity to introduce the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Watkins, to the school community so that he could see how the program works. Last Friday the Premier visited the school because of his well-known interest in education and so that he could see one of the very real ways the school is living up to its vision statement of a comprehensive and flexible school. The school ensures that students can make sense of electronic information by placing it within a sequentially developed curriculum framework. It has been a real challenge.

The school uses the Intranet to publish course material. It is very much based on continuing learning and on-line learning. One of the real advantages is that students in the feeder primary schools are using on-line learning in a language program. Unfortunately, the language program is under threat because the Federal Government has again cut back on public education funding for this specific program. The school is very keen to pursue grants for innovation and excellence. Each school submits a program that is a bit of a risk, but one that demonstrates innovation in public education. I will support that concept for Bulli High School. [*Time expired.*]

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.19 p.m.]: That is a good news story from the honourable member for Keira. This State has a great public education system but Project 2000 highlights what can happen in public education. I congratulate the honourable member on having the Minister for Education and Training and the Premier look first-hand at that program at Bulli High School. Comprehensive high schools and their feeder primary schools can benefit from these important programs. Our young people should have the maximum educational opportunities, and there is no better way than with dedicated teachers, parents and support staff. What is being achieved at Bulli High School meets those criteria. The honourable member for Keira mentioned some noble objectives. I congratulate him on bringing this matter to the attention of the Parliament.

PARRAMATTA ELECTORATE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Ms HARRISON (Parramatta) [6.21 p.m.]: Today I speak to the House about this Government's school improvement program. This money has been allocated to the Access and Amenity Program for public schools across the State. In my electorate of Parramatta \$80,000 will be shared between Arthur Phillip High School, Melrose Park Public School and Telopea Public School. This money is made available for these schools to upgrade their fencing, pedestrian access and school identification. The school's entry foyers will also be upgraded. In March 2001 the Carr Government announced \$413 million for a four-year schools improvement package. This package was intended to build, renovate and renew government schools.

In February of this year the New South Wales Government announced that an extra \$70 million would be spent on a massive school yard blitz. As part of that package \$4.8 million was recently allocated to the Access and Amenity Program. It is from this allocation that these Parramatta schools will utilise funds for minor capital works. Each school's individual needs will be different. Therefore, individual schools will participate in nominating on what the funding will be spent. I understand the education department properties directorate is

already in communication with school principals. This will ensure that individual schools obtain exactly what they need most in this area. These types of works are elementary issues, and will enhance the school environment for both students and staff as well as visitors and parents.

There will be significant improvements with works such as fencing: galvanised and weldmesh fencing will be replaced with better quality fencing along the main school frontage. On school identification, the school's name will be clearly displayed at the front entrance. This will guide visitors to administration areas. On pedestrian access to school administration, clearly defined pathways and appropriate low-maintenance landscaping will lead to school offices. Security doors will also be installed. Front porches of the administration areas will be covered to provide a welcoming entry. Additionally, front counters and access will be improved for use by people with disabilities. The internal administration areas will be painted and carpeted, and lighting will be upgraded. More visitors chairs and tables will also be provided. Waste disposal areas will be upgraded and relocated away from street frontages.

Some or all of these upgrades will be achieved through this Government's funding—a fundamental improvement of a fundamental issue. Overall, however, these upgrades will produce a more welcoming aspect and increase the sense of school identity. As the Minister for Education and Training has said, this is just the first phase. In this financial year \$257 million will be provided for capital works in schools. The honourable Minister has overseen a capital expenditure increase of 16.5 per cent, to \$300 million, in the coming financial year. Overall, the minor capital works program has been increased by 85 per cent, from \$54 million to \$100 million. The Government is, through its front yard blitz, renovating and renewing New South Wales schools and TAFEs. It is making education better for everyone, including the schools of Parramatta.

Private members' statements noted.

[Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr Mills) left the chair at 6.26 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Private Member's Statement: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to enable the honourable member for Gosford to make a private member's statement.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CENTRAL COAST RAIL SERVICES

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [7.31 p.m.]: I thank the Leader of the House for his ongoing courtesy and conduct of the House. Express rail services are needed between the Central Coast and the city. I have written to the Minister for Transport about this matter and I have asked him to consider an extension of services to include at least two additional express services during peak hour. It is important that commuters from the Central Coast, the largest commuter area in Australia, have the opportunity to get to their place of business in Sydney within a reasonable time. At present residents of the Central Coast spend up to four hours travelling. Two express services in the mornings and two express services in the evenings would be of enormous advantage. I am working with the shadow Minister for Transport to establish the necessary railway paths so that upon the election of a Coalition government in 2003 the Coalition can offer express rail services to the Central Coast if the present Labor Government is not prepared to do so.

We need more services to and from Ourimbah station to service students attending the university and TAFE. Ourimbah was once a comparatively low-usage railway station on the Central Coast, but with the establishment of the university annex at Ourimbah and the TAFE—25,000 students attend courses each year—it desperately needs additional services. The university campus is ideally located close to the railway station. Therefore, the students desperately need an effective rail service to and from Ourimbah from Gosford and Woy Woy in the south and from Wyong and Newcastle in the north. Another ongoing concern is the price of railway tickets. In 1995 a weekly adult ticket to Sydney cost \$33, next week it will rise to \$46—an increase of 38 per cent in just six years. That is far greater than the consumer price index [CPI], which averages about 2.5 per cent

per year. In fact, it is almost twice as high as the CPI. The people on the Central Coast, which is a low-income area, are repeatedly plagued with a high-cost rail ticket, but they are not getting an effective service. The CityRail figures show that the number of railway passengers to and from the Central Coast has decreased as more and more people use the overcrowded F3. The public transport system is failing residents.

It is interesting that the expected price increase, beginning next week, does not apply to commuters travelling less than 20 kilometres. In Sydney, the great majority of people, who travel less than 20 kilometres, will have the benefit of paying the present fare. Travellers from the Central Coast, Blue Mountains and the Illawarra will have to pay a lot more. That is unfair. On behalf of the people of the Central Coast I register a strong protest. I ask the Government to reconsider this matter and to treat residents of the Central Coast with some consideration, give them parity, and ensure that they do not find themselves subsidising the fares of those who travel less than 20 kilometres. Central Coast rail commuters have to pay more for the pain that they endure. I have received correspondence from Krisli Anderson, representing the Central Coast Commuters Association Club. I acknowledge the great work that Krisli and the association's president, Mr Kevin Parish, have done. Krisli was right when she said, as reported in today's edition of the *Express Advocate*, that the fare increase is outrageous. She said:

We travel further and the level of service is getting worse. In fact, the service is dismal yet we now have to pay more.

I have also received complaints about ongoing overcrowding, another issue that needs to be addressed. Recently there was a report about girls from the Central Coast who travel to Asquith Girls High School and are almost forced off overcrowded trains. We need effective and reasonably priced services. We need the Government to acknowledge that the Central Coast is the largest commuter area in Australia and that the fare structure and the service needs to be massively improved if Central Coast people are to continue to use trains and not be forced onto the F3.

Private member's statement noted.

PARLIAMENTARY CONTRIBUTORY SUPERANNUATION FUND

Appointment of Trustee

Motion, by leave, by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That Morris Iemma be appointed to serve as trustee of the Parliamentary Contributory Superannuation Fund in place of Richard Sanderson Amery.

APPROPRIATION BILL

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL

GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION SCHEMES FUND) BILL

PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING) BILL

STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL

Second Reading

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Take-note Debate

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [7.36 p.m.]: I continue my speech on the budget and the allocations for the Coffs Harbour electorate. I have received a capital program report from the Treasurer, Mr Egan. Under the

heading "Aboriginal Housing" it states that \$380,000 has been allocated. That is greatly appreciated and greatly needed, but that amount will allow the purchase of only two accommodation units for the Aboriginal community in Coffs Harbour. It is my belief that we need far more than two units. The Aboriginal community in Ulong, in my electorate, is very proud. In the days of the Coalition Government we built the first Aboriginal housing in Ulong. Since the Coalition lost power no Aboriginal housing has been built there. I call on the Government to go to Ulong, Toormina, Coffs Harbour and the outlying areas to see what is needed for Aboriginal housing. While the money that has been allocated is greatly appreciated, it goes nowhere near meeting the needs of the community.

Under the heading "Department of Education and Training" Boambee Public School hall and canteen structure has been allocated only \$80,000 this year, towards a total cost of \$1.7 million to complete the works. The school has been screaming for those facilities for a long while and numerous letters have been sent to the Minister. In this House I have asked the Minister to provide the demountable classroom that had been promised to Boambee school for more than 18 months. This year only \$80,000 has been allocated towards that project, which is expected to be commenced in June 2003 and completed in 2004. I suggest that that allocation is nothing more than subterfuge. Work in progress at Dorriggo High School, at a total cost of \$2.1 million, has been allocated an expenditure to the end of 2002 of \$568,000. This year's allocation was \$1.483 million, and that was greatly appreciated. I delivered numerous letters and petitions about that school to the office of the former Minister for Education and Training. It was literally rotting out from under the feet of the students and teachers.

If the Government had maintained the cyclical maintenance program that was in place when it came to office in 1995, the \$1.7 million expenditure would not have been necessary. The Dorriggo school needs funding. This great school has a phenomenal record in achievement in the Higher School Certificate examinations. From this small community of 1,200 people, and a total population of 3,000 on the plateau, the school has an extraordinary number of students year in year out, generation after generation, who achieve results in the top 10 per cent of the State. I commend the teachers and the community. The work on Dorriggo school is long overdue. Whilst I welcome the funding, it should have been provided two or three years ago.

From the Department of Health budget \$54,000 has been allocated for rural accommodation. That amount is laughable in a capital works program. From the Department of Housing budget there is \$831,000 for various projects and Land and Housing Corporation asset management, and five units of accommodation in Coffs Harbour at a total cost of \$702,000, with expected completion later this year at a cost of \$160,000. That funding is welcomed. The waiting list for housing in the Coffs Harbour electorate is ludicrous. People are on the waiting list for 10 to 12 years and in some cases they die before they are provided housing. That area needs to be reassessed by the Government. There is an allocation of \$12,000 for the Department of Public Works and Services. What on earth is that for? I acknowledge there is funding for sewerage and water works, but they are well behind time on that project.

I turn now to speak about the Legal Aid Commission. Until the establishment of a legal aid office in Coffs Harbour, local solicitors handled the work efficiently and well at a reasonable cost. I am told by the Law Society in Coffs Harbour and the practitioners who undertake legal aid work that since the establishment of the legal aid office the cost to the State has more than doubled and the workload has halved. I ask the Attorney General to reassess this situation. About a fortnight ago I was approached by some people within my electorate who had urgent matters before the courts. I have written to the Attorney General about these matters. One matter involved a property settlement in a divorce case. The problem was not the fact that they could not obtain legal aid, it was the fact that they could not get a legal aid solicitor. I rang about seven solicitors in the Bellingen area. In the end, the husband and wife went to court unrepresented to discuss property settlement and custody issues because they could not access a legal aid solicitor.

That tells me that the legal aid system in Coffs Harbour is not working. It tells me that despite the fact that an office has been established, paying huge rent and employing staff, receiving an increase in budget—\$53,000 for enhanced computer systems, \$13,000 for a computer replacement project, and miscellaneous works of \$9,000, totalling \$75,000—the system is still not working. I do not believe that the Legal Aid Service in Coffs Harbour is delivering the same standard of service that was provided prior to the opening of the Legal Aid Office. The Attorney General should look at this situation in the interests of regional and rural New South Wales, particularly in my electorate. The Attorney has done nothing about Coffs Harbour courthouse, which was built in 1963. It is a typical 1960s building. Although it has a lift, it is archaic.

It was proposed in the budget estimates 1994-95 that a new courthouse and justice centre would be established in Coffs Harbour. That proposal has been totally ignored by this Government. I give credit to the

former Minister for Police, the honourable member for Strathfield, who maintained the upgrading of Coffs Harbour Police Station. The station has now outgrown that upgrading, but if our area had a decent justice centre, as was proposed, we would not be in such dire need for a new courthouse. The Government is now pouring half a million dollars or more per year into a Legal Aid Service that is not providing adequate services. As I said, the office provides half the service at twice the cost. That is disturbing.

New South Wales Fire Brigades has received an allocation of \$306,000 for the replacement of a fire pump appliance at Woolgoolga. Robert Lawson, who is the husband of one of my electorate officers Michelle Lawson, is a member of the Woolgoolga Fire Service. I commend him and those other members of the service for the great job they do day in and day out. About two or three months ago I attended a house where a fire had started. The officers were there at seven or eight o'clock at night. The place was well alight. They put out the fire and saved the property. They do a great job at a low rate of pay. They are paid on a call-out basis. They worked furiously during the fires prior to the Christmas bushfires at Corindi and saved property, although three or four homes were lost. They volunteered to fight the bushfires in Sydney. I commend them and all other volunteers within the electorate. The fire pump appliance is a great addition to the station. I commend that allocation within the budget.

An amount of \$272,000 has been allocated for plantation establishment and maintenance in the Coffs Harbour electorate. That is also laughable. State Forests identified 3,000 acres of land it wanted to purchase to clear and replant as plantation forestry. The National Parks and Wildlife Service said State Forests could not clear the property. The property had been heavily logged and there was hardly any timber left on the property. There were no habitat trees or other types of trees that needed to be preserved. Yet the National Parks and Wildlife Service did not allow State Forests to clear and replant.

We have to move ahead. We are lagging behind every other State in Australia with regard to a plantation forestry program. Only 49 per cent of the resource that was supposedly reserved under the regional forest assessment [RFA] is available. A mill owner, Alan Biggin, spoke to me today from Nana Glen. He had been promised logs. Those salvage logs were diverted, but have now been rediverted because the sleeper contract in New South Wales has been cancelled. A mill on the North Coast was to produce 35,000 sleepers, but the contract has been cancelled. The contractor was in Sydney, so that puts a big question mark over rail maintenance over the next 12 months in this State. Alan Biggin now has the timber back. He had to put off nine employees and he is working with one part-time employee.

Mr Biggin borrowed \$360,000 on the strength of guarantees given to him by State Forests with regards to resources. He is now behind with two payments on the loan for his machinery. He does not fit into the category purely because he did not have a quote for the logs at the time of the structural adjustment package. He relies on this business. Now he is well and truly behind in his payments. State Forests does not care, and I know that the Minister for Forestry does not care. The Minister waves the conservation banner all the time, but he knows that there are more trees on the North Coast now than there have ever been. The timber harvesting on the North Coast is below the yield that is needed by State Forests to maintain contracts to the industry. Yet people such as this hard-working citizen, who had to lay off nine employees, cannot make the repayments on the equipment he bought on guarantees given by the State Government. To flag \$272,000 for plantation land when State Forests purchases land it cannot plant out is laughable.

I say to the Government to send a few Ministers to Coffs Harbour—they can do it quietly if they like—and I will show them the problems we have. The Government should address those problems seriously. Rather than play politics, the Government should look after all of the people in New South Wales. It should not look after only those in areas that the Government regards as New South Wales: Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. As we have heard from the members representing Newcastle and the South Coast over the past couple of days in their response to the budget, they seem very pleased with what they got. This sounds like an election budget. Unfortunately, the Labor Party has given up on the Coffs Harbour electorate and the budget reflects its lack of attention to the people in my electorate.

Mr WEST (Campbelltown) [8.50 p.m.]: The 2002-03 State budget once again delivers for the people of New South Wales. Like previous budgets of this Government it is a responsible budget. It invests in the future of New South Wales while ensuring that enough is put away for the lean times without mortgaging our children's future. This budget not only focuses on the bricks and mortar—roads, schools, hospitals and community buildings—it builds on the services. A school is only as good as the teachers in it; a hospital is only as caring as the doctors and nurses, and communities are only as safe as the police who work in and patrol the area.

This budget increases the allocation for services. It aims to get even more of the dedicated staff into the front line to join other hardworking public servants. The Howard-Costello approach tried to soften us up for a blighted and shrivelled future, as the Treasurer said. We reject that. We declare our optimism and our steady and steadfast resolve to make things better, step-by-step, year after year, decade after decade. I refer to initiatives such as the allocation of \$8 million to recruit police for the front line and encourage more police to join the probationary constables in the Campbelltown and Macquarie Fields command.

I have spoken at length with a number of police who are new to the job in the area and who tell me it is very rewarding. Just the other week I was fortunate to join local police on patrol in the Campbelltown area. I was impressed by the way they went about the job, dealing with problems and taking preventative measures. They undertook pre-emptive patrols of known hot spots, walk-throughs of local venues to chat with locals and managers of clubs and pubs to head off problems and had a reasonable approach to solving complaints. I also saw that their job has many elements that are a testament to the calibre of the officers. Police deal with incidents such as animals that are hit on busy roads and end up dying, radio calls to attend domestic disputes and operations where danger is a real concern.

The officers cope with the demands of the job and get satisfaction from serving their community. Indeed, I chatted with shopkeepers in the local area and they commented on the efforts by police to ensure the area is safe and friendly. That is why it is pleasing to see not only an increased police budget of an additional \$153 million in 2002, bringing the total allocation to \$1.8 billion, but also the smaller projects such as the \$245,000 upgrade of Campbelltown police station to improve its operations. There will be increased focus on visible front-line policing and the Government will meet its commitment on police numbers. Every year this Government has increased the budget for policing.

I will now turn to the area of roads and transport. This Government has provided more funds for roads, hot on the tail of a major resurfacing of Appin Road in my electorate, which has improved the journey enormously. Before the Roads and Traffic Authority started this work, residents travelling between Therry Road and Woodland Road, heading south, faced a tortuous chain of potholes and problems that cost many a driver a tyre. Now, only weeks later, we have a smooth journey along an important road. This budget contains more money for Appin Road improvements. An extra \$1 million has been set aside for the section from Woodland Road to Fitzgibbon Lane to improve overtaking. The budget includes an allocation of \$186 million for the purchase of 141 millennium train rail cars, \$770 million for train and track maintenance across New South Wales, \$30 million for signalling and other safety works, \$222 million to commence construction of the Epping to Chatswood rail link and \$40 million for easy upgrade stations. It also includes funding for improvements to Appin Road outside the electorate, and I know that the residents of Appin are looking forward to continuing works along this important road.

The New South Wales Government's toll free M5 East has delivered huge benefits for local families. The journey will be further enhanced, with work under way to remove the last set of lights at Moorebank on the Hume Highway. But local roads will also benefit, with more than \$6 million allocated to roads in the Campbelltown City Council area for maintenance and local road projects. Residents of Raby will have safe opportunities for bike riding with \$44,000 having been allocated for a cycleway, which will encourage the use of this healthy and non-polluting form of transport. The rail link to the city is an important artery for Campbelltown. It takes many local people into the city for jobs, entertainment and other activities. On-time running is an important step to improving our local rail system, delivering people to work and home to their families on time and with more certainty. Therefore, it is good news that \$12 million has been allocated to improve the rail network between Glenfield and Campbelltown, with \$7.5 million to be spent this year. These works will help to improve on-time running and ensure that our lines run at full capacity. I look forward to CityRail commencing that work soon.

More money has been allocated to provide shelter at Campbelltown railway station, which will also enhance the journey for many commuters from this busy and important station. It will make the wait for a train more pleasant, especially in wet weather. Of course, we are all excited to see the millennium train, which will have its first fare-paying run on Monday from Campbelltown station. This four-car train will set off from Campbelltown at 8.40 a.m. and heralds the next generation of train travel for local commuters—a far cry from the old red rattlers that used to ply our line.

Increases in the education budget will also benefit Campbelltown, especially as it has such a young population and many children are still coming through the school system. This year's allocation for the education portfolio will total \$8.1 billion, an increase of \$494 million over last year's increase and more than

\$2.3 billion since Labor came to office. It includes more money for expansion of the State's literacy and numeracy plan, more money for initiatives to work with teachers to improve their teaching skills, and \$40 million for targeted assistance to schools with special problems and needs. It includes \$10 million over two years for pilot programs, including a pilot on reduced class sizes, and a number of other projects.

The budget provides \$567 million to continue the Computers in Schools Program, \$157 million for the progressive upgrade of bandwidth in schools and TAFE, \$82 million for e-learning accounts for staff and students in schools and TAFE, and \$17 million for technology training for teachers. Efforts to create priority action schools and encourage our best and brightest into teaching will be good news for Campbelltown. Most teachers in the Campbelltown district are dedicated to the area and the young minds they help to shape. I have always found that the discussions have been fair and based on getting the best for our area. The principals, parents, citizen delegations have been about getting a fair go for their school communities, not jumping the queue. I will continue to work with local schools and the Minister to ensure that they get their fair share. Indeed, I want to thank the Minister for his efforts on behalf of a number of schools in my electorate. I refer especially to Airds High School, which is about to sit down with the department and draw up plans for a new hall that will service not only the school but also the wider community.

Health continues to be a big winner in Campbelltown and New South Wales. In 2002-03 the health budget will receive \$554 million more than last year's allocation. Further funding will be for 226 mental health beds and the provision by the Government of medical indemnity insurance for doctors treating public patients in public hospitals. Residents will also benefit from more than \$9 million to improve the emergency trauma unit at Liverpool Hospital, which is the major centre for serious trauma, such as car accidents, in our area. Getting the best care in times of major trauma, especially head injuries, will improve the prospects for many and, together with preventative action, will help to reduce the road toll.

Our local hospital continues to be a huge winner, with a further \$15.4 million to continue this sensational upgrade. Campbelltown Hospital is being transformed into a great facility for the local people, with cancer services, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, for the first time ever. This will have a huge impact on the quality of life of many people. There will be dialysis in the hospital for the first time so that local people can receive quality care right in Campbelltown. It will also have a separate paediatrics emergency ward. Even though the new hospital is not yet finished, it is impressive. The paediatrics emergency ward is bigger than the current emergency unit. Both the paediatrics and general emergency wards are better equipped and laid out for monitoring and response.

It is hard to guess the effect that these improvements will have, but one will gain a fair idea from the improvements that have already taken place, such as the new children's ward. It has gone from a bleak ward to a place that parents tell me works better and feels better. It has a separate play therapy room and children do not have to put up with being in the same room as snoring adults. Families are welcome and parents feel that they are important. That is in no small way a result of the great staff on the ward, but the new ward does help. While I am speaking on health I would like to thank Paul Sinclair, the Chair of the Kids of Macarthur Foundation and his hardworking team on a successful fundraising night recently for local health equipment. The money raised on the night is being matched dollar-for-dollar by the State Government and shows the generosity of the Campbelltown community when it comes to helping children. Well done to the team. I cannot wait until the new hospital opens. When the New South Wales Government opens the hospital it will deliver the world-class facility that Campbelltown deserves.

The budget has many other good news stories for our locals. Stamp duty on general insurance has been slashed to the lowest rate in Australia. Payroll tax on the wages of apprentices will be completely abolished from 1 July. Payroll tax has been reduced from 6.2 per cent to 6 per cent and the payroll tax base has been broadened so that fringe benefits and eligible termination payments will be treated in exactly the same way as the income of ordinary wage and salary earners. More pensioners will be able to access podiatry services, representing 55,000 extra visits. Community transport in the area will benefit from an allocation of \$833,000 to help those who need a hand to get around. Housing, water services, justice and legal aid in the Campbelltown area will all get a boost.

New South Wales Fire Brigades has also received a massive funding increase. Some \$290,000 has been provided for a new fire tanker for Campbelltown. Across the State there is \$6.1 million to upgrade brigade communications; \$127 million for the Rural Fire Service, including money to purchase new and used tankers; and \$1.4 million for the purchase of geographic information systems to plot fires more accurately. There is more money for the State Emergency Service [SES]. It will receive \$30 million, including \$300,000 for initial hepatitis B vaccinations for all 9,000 SES volunteers. There will be \$1.3 million for emergency rescue equipment.

Services will continue to flow to the electorate in the coming weeks and months as a result of this budget. For example, the Campbelltown preschool will receive \$100,000 and the Macarthur Legal Centre will receive \$257,000 to deliver services to tenants with legal problems. This budget is not only about delivering the best facilities for local areas but about giving them the tools to recruit and retain the best staff, who make New South Wales work so well.

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [8.01 p.m.]: I have pleasure in speaking tonight about the 2002-03 State budget and how it affects the electorate of Orange, and what it does and does not do for regional New South Wales. The electorate of Orange comprises the wonderful city of Orange, the wonderful town of Cowra and many other smaller towns and villages in between. The budget does not solve to any great extent existing problems in some of those small villages and fails to address the issue of how to activate growth and jobs in those areas. Fortunately most of those small towns are located reasonably close to the major centres of Cowra and Orange, which provide many employment opportunities.

The budget has some highlights. The need for a new police station has long been a topic of discussion in Orange. The Premier has visited Orange quite often recently to talk about the additional police officers who will be stationed in the city. The problem is that there is nowhere to put them. The main police station was built in the 1970s and designed to accommodate about 14 officers. Detectives are stationed in a building across the road and a cottage was purchased in another street that backs onto the detectives' building to accommodate the area commander and the highway patrol. In between there are two demountable buildings, which have air-conditioning and little else. These four or five buildings are completely unsatisfactory. They are separated by one of Orange's main streets and officers must move between the buildings at all times of the day in all weather, dodging heavy traffic. It is a most inefficient arrangement. Orange City Council and I have called upon the Government to make a commitment to build a new police station that will allow police officers to perform their duties far more efficiently.

The town of Cowra is growing quite nicely and that population growth has prompted the need to man Cowra police station on a 24-hour basis, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings. However, the Government has failed to respond to residents' calls to staff the police station 24 hours a day. That is not satisfactory. This is a town of about 10,000 people, if we include the populations of surrounding areas, and calls to police on a Saturday evening are transferred to Orange. By the time an officer is sent to investigate or the matter is held over until the next day, the emergency has passed and it is too late to apprehend those who were trying to break into a house or were vandalising buildings on the main street.

Another big issue in Orange is the need for a new hospital. I am pleased that the Minister for Health is supporting that call. We expect to receive in the next few days the results of the \$500,000 feasibility study that is being conducted to determine the health needs of the Mid Western Area Health Service, which comprises not only Orange and Cowra but Bathurst, Parkes, Forbes and beyond. This study will identify the area's health needs for the next 40 or 50 years and attempt to establish how they will be addressed. Even though construction has not yet commenced, I congratulate the Government on its foresight in promising to build new hospitals in both Bathurst and Orange. Those hospitals will cater to the perceived medical needs in the area over the next 40 or 50 years. I hope that these projects will eventuate and that the Government will make good the promise made by the Coalition in the 1999 election campaign to build a new hospital at Orange. The hospital must go ahead if the Government's concerns about the area's health needs are genuine. Orange is growing and the hospital will be designed to meet its expanding health requirements.

We must get heavy vehicle traffic off Summer Street in Orange. Orange City Council has proposed the construction of a ring road and is pushing for the construction of half of that ring road— what we call the northern bypass—at a cost of \$16 million to \$18 million. We have not been able to secure a funding commitment from the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads, who has rubbished and poured scorn on the council and the residents of Orange. He had the audacity to say that a bypass is not needed and not wanted in Orange. He used the excuse that a small number of people oppose the bypass project, the route of which—surprise, surprise—is adjacent to their homes. Although that bypass has been on Orange city maps since 1982, some people who live north of the city allege that real estate agents did not inform them of the project or their solicitors assured them it would never happen. They purchased their properties on that advice and, now that the project might become a reality, they are complaining that they do not want it in their backyard.

We desperately need a heavy vehicle bypass for Orange to divert some of the 2,000 trucks—some of which carry highly inflammable petroleum products—and B-doubles with four decks of sheep or two decks of cattle that travel along Summer Street each day, stopping and starting at traffic lights. This is not satisfactory in

a modern city, but the Government will not commit to assisting Orange City Council by constructing a bypass around the central business district. The Premier has noted several times in the past fortnight that Orange is a boom town. Somehow or other he is taking all the credit for that when, in fact, that growth has been generated by private enterprise investing money, risk capital and shareholders' funds to develop their companies.

The Cadia Hill goldmine and the Ridgeway goldmine, which have as many as 500 employees, bring great employment and financial benefits to the city of Orange. Electrolux, which was formerly Email but was taken over 12 or 18 months ago, has committed millions of dollars to upgrading the efficiency of its plant to ensure that it is competitive worldwide and that its products sell well on overseas markets. A number of smaller companies are expanding in Orange and also provide excellent employment opportunities. For example, the wine industry is bringing enormous employment opportunities to the casual work force as well as benefits to service industries such as irrigators and plant and equipment repairers, et cetera. The whole area is becoming diversified and it is not as reliant on one or two industries as it has been in the past.

Before we are able to totally benefit from that growth, provision must be made for the products from those industries—agricultural industries, value-adding industries, goldmines or Electrolux—to be transported over the mountains into the Sydney Basin and to export markets as efficiently as possible. Goods and services need to be transported from Sydney over the mountains to Orange to make the industries as efficient as possible. However, that potential prosperity is being hindered by the lack of a decent road. The Government continually fails to realise the benefits of constructing a four-lane divided highway over the mountains so that access to the area is a great deal quicker and safer. A good road would be of enormous benefit to those living on the mountains. At the moment the Great Western Highway is being used simultaneously as an open service road in the mountains and as a national highway for the whole of the Central West and beyond.

Unfortunately, at the moment the highway is doing neither properly, but the Government will not commit real money to providing a four-lane divided highway to bypass towns and villages and to make travel efficient and safe, and provide a boost to tourism. We are all aware of those benefits, but the Government fails to recognise them. Another industry of great potential is the quartz mine at Glenella, just outside of Cowra. There has been a great deal of discussion in this House about the location on the South Coast of the charcoal plant, as to whether it will go ahead and how its products will ultimately be transferred to Lithgow for the silicon plant. The Government will not make a commitment to upgrade the rail line to compete efficiently with road transport. At this stage, there is enormous pressure associated with the cost of transporting charcoal, quartz from the Glenella mine and the finished silicon product from Lithgow to the coast. If we had an efficient rail system with an upgraded line to move freight with modern locomotives that travel at a reasonable speed, those products could be efficiently carried by rail rather than on the roads. After all, heavy transport vehicles damage the roads.

The Cowra to Blayney line that the Minister for Transport opened with a great flourish a couple of years ago has virtually remained unused, apart from a couple of tourist trains. It is one thing to open a line and another thing to complete it to such a standard that it can be used by high-speed modern rail freight trains. At the moment it is limited to class 80 locos, which are about 40 years old and limited to a speed of 20 kilometres per hour. But the Government wonders why a modern commercial business is not using the line. Those problems are only some of the deficiencies that are tending to take some of the gloss off some of the great things that are happening in the electorate of Orange at the moment. After about three years of negotiation and after the residents of Millthorpe contributed an agreed portion of their rates to fund the sewage augmentation process, I am pleased that the Government has finally allocated funding for a sewerage treatment plant for the village. It is proposed that sewage will be treated at the Blayney sewerage treatment works. I hope the project will be fast-tracked now that the funding has been approved.

The Government has allocated \$174,000 to upgrade Millthorpe Road and the Mitchell Highway to Vittoria. This week I placed a question on notice seeking details on that upgrade. I asked if the project will include lighting at the intersection of Millthorpe Road with the highway, which is badly affected by fog during winter. There is evidence that the vast majority of accidents that occur at that intersection are caused by fog. I hope some of that money will be allocated to improve the lighting and thus make the area as safe as possible during fog. I also congratulate Australian Native Landscapes on recently taking over the old Browns Creek goldmine, which, although still a viable goldmine, suffered a rather big explosion. I am not sure whether the cause has been determined, but as a result of the explosion the mine was suddenly flooded.

It was deemed to be not viable to pump out the water because that would have upset the water table for many kilometres around. It was decided to leave the water where it was, and Australian Native Landscapes

spent a considerable amount upgrading the mine. The company intends to spend up to \$4 million on the installation of a system that will mean employment for as many as 55 people. The project mixes horticultural products incorporating natives vegetation, products from sawmills and human sludge to make various products that are transported to markets in the Sydney Basin. I understand that some products are sold overseas. I congratulate the company on its initiative. The Browns Creek goldmine is outside Blayney and just within the electorate of Orange.

I also congratulate Windsor Farm Foods, which has taken over the old Cowra Export Packers Pty Ltd site in Cowra, on spending many millions of dollars to upgrade its plant, thus ensuring its viability. The latest project, which will cost \$7 million, is the transfer of the Illawarra Jam Co. Pty Ltd, which is affiliated with Windsor Farm Foods, to Cowra and to upgrade it to make it more efficient. The company will export a considerable quantity of the product that comes out of Cowra. A company that was once considered to be so run-down that there was every possibility that it would close forever is being rejuvenated by Windsor Farm Foods. As a result of the company combining its operations with its food section at Nowra, Cowra will become a major manufacturing site. A large percentage of the produce is marketed for export, especially into the Asian market. I congratulate Windsor Farms on its initiatives. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Not enough money has been allocated for national parks. I have highlighted the deficiencies of the Canobolas State Recreation Area. Nowhere near enough funding has been allocated to bring that area up to the necessary standard to realise its tourism potential. Mount Canobolas, which has enormous problems with weeds, especially blackberries, is one of the tourist attractions in Orange. Lake Wyangala State Park, which is just out of Cowra, has enormous problems with St Johns wort and blackberries. I have put a question on notice asking the Government what it will do to ensure that the park is retained as one of the tourist attractions of that area. The Premier has correctly boasted that Orange is a boom town—but not because of anything the Premier or the Government have done. It is a boom town as a result of the initiatives of private enterprise.

It is worth noting that in the past 12 months the economic growth rate in Orange was 4.6 per cent, compared with 3.5 per cent in Bathurst and 2.6 per cent in Dubbo. Although, sadly, regional New South Wales continues to have a net loss of population those three areas are working against the trend and are growing comfortably. The Australian Bureau of Statistics figures reveal that since the last census the indigenous population of Orange has increased by 30 per cent, with 1,393 residents of Orange being deemed to be indigenous. Unfortunately, only 24 of that number are aged over 65. Those figures are indictment of our society. The Government, the Coalition and all Australians must give serious consideration to how we can counter that rather disturbing statistic, which is probably mirrored all over Australia.

The statistics reveal that Orange has three females who were born in Egypt, but no males from Egypt. Three males who were born in Turkey live in Orange, but we have no females born in Turkey. Some 41 dwellings in Orange will cost more than \$500 a week to rent. Three people live in a tent. Eight enterprising young teenagers—four boys and four girls—aged between 15 and 19 take home more than \$1,500 week. Our area is diverse. Those statistics will not make world headlines, but they are worth noting tonight. Cabonne, which is virtually a doughnut shire around Orange, has had a slight increase in population, which is always good to know. Most of the population of Cabonne works in Orange. One benefits from the other. Orange has enormous shopping facilities, not only for the residents of Orange but for residents from well beyond Cabonne. Cowra shire's Economic Development Manager, Graham Apthorpe said that he was very pleased to see Cowra defying the trend of population loss. He said:

Not only are we a rich agricultural area but our important secondary industries are critical to job generation and population growth.

Local government in Cowra has played a substantial role in stimulating business activity but the overall trends for population loss in country areas show that other levels of government need to change their thinking about regional economic development.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics counted 12,462 people living in Cowra on census night, an increase of 2.6 per cent since 1996. Orange, Dubbo and Bathurst were the major growth centres, with Orange increasing by 7.9 per cent, Bathurst by 9.8 per cent and Dubbo by 8.1 per cent. I look forward to seeing the Premier and his wife in my electorate on Saturday evening. My wife and I are looking forward to attending the Black and Gold Ball to celebrate the ninetieth year of education at Orange High School. Yesterday, today and last week the Premier was boisterous about his visit to Orange and about how he was pleased to clear his diary to come back to Orange. However, it is disappointing that, although he places so much importance on coming back to Orange for the ball, he will leave the function by 9.00 p.m. before the real celebrations have begun.

The Orange area is growing. It is expanding in population, industry and building. The CareFlight base at Orange is proving to be enormously beneficial for those in an isolated area who are seriously injured. The

helicopter is able to get in and out and transport the injured person back to Orange Base Hospital as quickly as possible. It helps not only to save lives but to prevent more serious injuries that might occur if the patient had to wait some hours for a road ambulance. Forward-thinking councils, such as Orange, Cabonne, Cowra and, to some extent, Blayney—my electorate covers only a small section of Blayney—have enabled us to supply a diverse range of employment opportunities, but we still have a long way to go.

We are looking forward to the new hospital in Orange but we are also looking for upgraded facilities for some of our smaller hospitals and upgrading of facilities at Cowra hospital. I look forward to the rebuilding of the Cudal hospital, a new police station in Orange, the heavy vehicle bypass around Orange, the four-lane highway over the mountains and all those things that will help to make the whole area more attractive so that we can retain our young people by providing them with job opportunities and attract people out of the Sydney basin into our great area.

Anyone who comes into Orange or Cowra as a result of a job opportunity finds it difficult to leave. They are so keen to stay that, quite often, they take on a lesser position because it is such a great area. However, there is still a lot to do. I look forward to the challenge of representing that area and winning the election in 2003. I will continue to represent not only the small and large businesses in the electorate of Orange but also its people, particularly those who are not as fortunate as the rest of us. It is a never-ending battle to obtain funds to provide those people with an appropriate quality of life. The challenge not only for me but for everyone in this House is to ensure that the lives of those who are not as well off as the rest of us are made as comfortable as possible.

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [8.30 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the Treasurer on another outstanding budget for the State of New South Wales. The numerous initiatives detailed in the budget documents will result in New South Wales continuing to lead Australia in economic growth. The programs in the last seven budgets show New South Wales continuing on an upward curve. This year's budget contains probably the most extensive program of public works in the history of New South Wales. I congratulate the Treasurer and the Carr Ministry on being forward thinking enough to invest in enormous infrastructure improvements in health, transport and schools particularly.

St George Hospital is not in my electorate but serves the people from my electorate. Over the past three or four years it has been the beneficiary of a number of extensive improvements, the most recently to be completed being the day-surgery facility. Other speakers have outlined the improvements to the hospital so I will not repeat them. Improvements have also been made to Canterbury Hospital. Both hospitals provide great service to people from my electorate. I congratulate the Minister for Health on the standard of service provided by the hospitals and the Treasurer on the enormous funding increase for the Health budget.

In relation to the Transport ministry, work is taking place at Riverwood and Beverly Hills stations. On numerous occasions I have mentioned the magnificent improvements resulting from the M5 East, which opened six months ahead of schedule. Beverly Hills Primary School will benefit from funding for stage two of its redevelopment. Over recent months other members and I have detailed the enormous funding provided to our schools. This year \$70 million will be provided, \$1 million of which will go to maintenance improvements for schools in the Georges River electorate. These have been detailed previously and I will not go through them again.

Although we talk about allocations of billions or millions of dollars, some of the most important improvements emanate from smaller grants. I am thinking of a couple of comparatively small allocations in the budget for my electorate that will have a great impact. One is provision of a new raised pedestrian threshold in Hillcrest Avenue, Hurstville. Tragically, a person was killed at the crossing last year, and another person was seriously injured. The funding provided through the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] to assist Kogarah council to build a raised threshold for not only the local residents but also the students of Hurstville South Primary School is extremely important. Similarly, Hurstville council has been looking for funding for a number of years to provide lights at the corner of The Avenue and Cross Street. That funding is provided in this budget.

Approximately \$160,000 has been provided to Kogarah and Hurstville councils for improvements to local roads in my electorate. Without provision of those funds by the State Government those improvements would not occur. Those allocations are significant to the local community, as is the \$40,000 for road safety programs in my electorate. Those allocations are relatively small but important to the community. That applies also to the recurrent funding for community service organisations in the Georges River electorate. A name that comes to mind is the Pole Depot at Penshurst, which I have mentioned on numerous occasions. It provides services to the aged, the migrant community and youth. Kim Buhajiar leads a great team at the Pole Depot, and we provide ongoing funding.

Georges River Community Services is under the leadership of Susan Smith. Only two weeks ago I detailed its many programs. Sadly, I record the passing of John Vaughan. His wife, Joan, has been the secretary of Georges River Community Services for many years. John died earlier this week only a week or so after their fiftieth wedding anniversary. I record the contribution John made to the Georges River community, especially through his support of Joan and her work at Georges River Community Services. We also provide money to St George Community Services, which is under the leadership Chris Spackman. One of its programs is the shopping program that gets people out and helps with their shopping. I have previously detailed the numerous programs of that organisation. The Minister for Education and Training provides funding for Learning Links. He has visited and seen the great work that Learning Links does. Only last week I had the opportunity to open new premises for Learning Links at Penshurst, which will assist with its school-age services. The Minister is nodding in agreement.

The school-aged services unit is under the directorship of Tracey Webster. Sadly, Tracey will be leaving Learning Links to work with Ronald McDonald House, another great charitable organisation. Tracey has given tremendous service to Learning Links. The chief executive officer, Warren Johnson, will miss Tracey. I record my thanks to Tracey for the work she has done for our local community in assisting children with learning difficulties and the leadership she has provided in the school-aged services division. I congratulate Kerry Butler and Sandra Samuel on the work they are doing with Learning Links. Through the generosity of the Minister for Health I have been able to provide financial support to the St George cancer support group, which does magnificent work. Over a number of years I have spoken about the work of the group. It supports the families of people suffering from cancer. Shirley Percival is the president. About a month ago I attended the tenth anniversary of Shirley's taking over as president. She is doing some great work there, as is the secretary-treasurer, Karen Barden. I am pleased that the Government's budget continues to support these community groups.

Oatley Seniors is another group that comes to mind. Beryl Butters is a lovely lady who gets the group together and gets them organised. That group of seniors is working to support each other, provide activities at the base on Hurstville Road at Oatley and have visits to various places, which are of great benefit to the members. We should reflect on the great work done in the community by service organisations. As members of Parliament would recognise, this is the time of year for the changeover of positions of presidents and executives of service organisations. I record my thanks to Neil Thompson, the outgoing president of Lugarno Lions, for the work that they do. A couple of functions they are well-known for are the Spring Fair and carols in the park at Evatt Park each Christmas.

I congratulate the outgoing President of Oatley Lions Club, Kevin Parker, on the work he has done. One of its traditional events is the Spring Fair and Oatley Lions is looking forward to the National Tree Planting Day on 29 July. The Oatley Lions Club is heavily committed to that. I thank the outgoing President of St George Lions Club, Tony Zammit, and congratulate him on the work he has done in the 12 months of his presidency. This year Oatley Lions Club again held a very successful golf day and sportsmen's lunch. The money raised by service clubs goes back into the local community.

Tomorrow night Kevin Pretty will pass over the presidency of St George Central Rotary Club to Peter Munk at the club's dinner. That club has been heavily involved in assisting Camp Quality and it put on a magnificent race day at Oran Park, just prior to Christmas for the children at Camp Quality. James Forrester has been President of Hurstville Rotary Club for the past 12 months, and its changeover is next Monday. Each year Hurstville Rotary Club puts on an antiques fair at the Hurstville entertainment centre which draws enormous support from the community. The outgoing President of Georges River-Riverwood Rotary Club is Michael Taylor. That club runs a very successful gala concert each year. I thank and congratulate the service organisations that do so much for their local communities.

The State Government works with local councils and I have a great relationship with my local councils. Jim Taylor, the Mayor of Kogarah Council, is well respected in the community and provides outstanding leadership. He has the community at heart and I know he is looking forward to the council's annual ball. As Jim is behind the ball's organisation it will be a great success. The Mayor of Hurstville City Council, Vince Badalati, is doing a magnificent job. That council has a tradition of fine work and Vince has continued that, and I congratulate him on the work that he is doing. It is great to be able to go to functions with Kogarah and Hurstville councils and hand out State Government grants, stormwater trust grants, foreshore improvement grants, and others.

I note the contributions of the general managers of those councils, Gary Sawyer at Kogarah and John Patterson at Hurstville. It is appropriate to thank the recently retired, long-serving general manager of Hurstville

City Council, Howard Wallace. I am fortunate that my community has a number of people have shown great initiative in the inventions that they have produced. Specifically, Wayne Devine, a previous Hurstville Citizen of the Year. Wayne invented the liberty swing, which is for people with a disability. The liberty swing provides an opportunity for people in a wheelchair to experience a swing. His invention has been very successful. Wayne is a Mortdale businessman.

About three streets from Wayne's business Wal Bancroft has a workshop. He invented a device that enables wheelchairs to go virtually straight into a car. That magnificent engineering work will be very successful. I look forward to that device making a major contribution to those who suffer from a physical disability and need to travel by wheelchair. It will save a lot of modifications to vehicles and assist in the resale of those vehicles. It is appropriate to reflect on the work of environment groups. The Oatley Flora and Fauna Society, under the presidency of Cliff Crane and the secretary Robin Dickson, has promoted good environmental practices within the community.

That society brings people together at its monthly meetings, where guest speakers attend, and also on their numerous walks, locally and throughout the State. I congratulate them on the work that they do. I acknowledge the work of the local Oatley Neighbourhood Watch group. Anne Jones and Jan Smith Eagles provide leadership in the community not only on neighbourhood watch issues but also on other community issues. It is good that people are prepared to take on those responsibilities. I mention now their local RSL sub-branches. At Hurstville RSL Ron Bates and Peter Newton have been involved for years in doing great work. At Penshurst RSL Russell Norrish, the President, and Norm Sandstrom, the Welfare Officer, contribute to the backbone of our community.

It is great that the Government can support those groups. The President of the Mortdale RSL, Bill Mackay, and its Secretary, Norm Vaughan, and at the Oatley RSL Garry George, Alf McGrath and Ian Thompson do some wonderful work for their communities. I thank them for their work. Similarly, although this is not highlighted in the budget, the local clubs do a lot of work. There have been considerable negotiations with the club movement to regulate taxation on the poker machines. There is no doubt that the Government has worked very closely with Clubs New South Wales. In my electorate the clubs are very happy with the stability that the Government has provided to the industry.

I acknowledge the work of the St George Masonic Club's General Manager, Bill Watts, and President, Bruce McCann, and Hurstville RSL's Ron Bates and Rod Bell, Oatley RSL's Tony Taylor and Bob Cox, Mortdale RSL's Mick O'Brien and Bob Wilson, Penshurst RSL's Wal Chinn and Margaret Smith, the Illawarra Catholic Club's Bernard Harley and Mike Walker, and Hurstville United Sports Club's Rick Knowler and Warren Makepeace. These great clubs provide facilities for their members and for the community. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The very important component of the club movement is the bowling club fraternity. In the Georges River electorate we are very fortunate to have a number of successful bowling clubs, which vary in size. They include the Grandviews Bowling Club, with its President, Norm Ellis, and Secretary-Manager, Mark Nolan, the Peakhurst Bowling Club with its Chairman, Tony Riley, and President, Frank Darby. Frank has been involved with the club for a number of years and is about to stand down. At Oatley Bowling Club there is Jim Caney and recently I attended Mortdale Bowling Club where I spoke with Alan Rugless and Ross Beesley. I was pleased to advise them that the Government has provided capital assistance for work at that club.

Previously the Government assisted the Beverly Hills Bowling club, which is ably run by Ken Moeser and Ian Johnson. Capital assistance grants have been given to various sporting clubs. The junior sporting clubs provide an important role in the community. Any assistance that the Government can provide to the many volunteers who assist in setting up the grounds and coaching children by way of lighting or canteen facilities and storage sheds would be of benefit to the community. The President of the St George Australian Rules Club, Chris Raper, was happy to receive a capital assistance grant for lighting at Olds Park, which is used by that club and also by the Penshurst Panthers.

I particularly refer to the contributions made to Penshurst Panthers by President Paul Ryan, Bernie Holdsworth and Col Tegg, who are the administrative arm of that sporting team. I also think of the coaches involved. Similarly, I acknowledge the contributions by volunteers to the St George Soccer Association and a couple of local clubs. I was at Gannons Park on the weekend where I saw Tom McLoughlin and Roger Harradence from Lugarno soccer club. Last week I saw Tim Hooper from Forest Rangers club, Arthur Panagos, President of St George Olympic, Ray Luck from Penshurst West and Bob Klinker from All Saints Oatley West club. They hope to have some improvements made to their club at Oatley Park. Those people give generously of their time to soccer.

Over the years many people have contributed to St George junior league. Some of those people are Roger Riley, Gordon Lowrie, Gary McCullough, Paul Reeves, Rick Knowler, Denise and Neville Clapson, Denis Johnson and Chris Books. Their names roll off the tongue. They all contribute so much to our community, as do local clubs such as the famous Renown United club. As the Minister for Education and Training said, Reg Gasnier played with that club and, as the honourable member for Bathurst reminds me, Billy Smith. Shane Millard is involved with the club and Bev Armstrong is the secretary. At Penshurst RSL club there is Cathy Crowe, President Ken Harris and Graeme Hemopo. Brian McCullough has been coaching sides for years. At Kingsgrove Colts there are Steve Kelly, Gary Fa'afua and Con Tziomanif. Hurstville United is assisted by Warren Surplice, Steve Glanville and Phil Stanton. At St Josephs Riverwood, the club I coach, there is Chris Stevens and Darren Springett. These people give generously of their time. As I said, we can provide the funding but we need the volunteers to provide the commitment. That is what these people do every week.

I have been attending cricket presentations of late. I refer to the local cricket clubs: Penshurst West with Trevor Baigent and Greg Aitchenson; and Illawarra Catholic club, which is my club, where Roger Ridgeway does a tower of work and Geoff Holmes also assists. At Mortdale Heights there are Graeme Wales and Bob Sleet; Ian Faulkner at Lugarno Sports; Neil Quirk at Beverly Hills Eagles; Tom Davies at Kingsgrove Cricket Club; and George Phillips and Tom Ryan at St Joseph's Riverwood. These volunteers make the community in which we live a better place because they give so generously of their time, expertise and energy.

As local members serving the community we also need to recognise that we are assisted by many people who give in so many generous ways to local organisations or to the area in which they live. In particular I refer to Merv and Berry Evers. Betty has been involved in the community consultative group for the M5 East extension and the East Hills railway line duplication. She has put the community's perspective at various meetings. Similarly, Don Green has been involved with the M5 east project. Those people give so generously of their time. Trevor Camage is another name that comes to mind. He pointed out to me the planning problems associated with the potential development at Oatley. I was able to act on that advice. Trevor gave enormous energy and commitment to ensuring that poor planning did not take place. I also refer to Peter Varga, who is concerned with the M5 East extension at Beverly Hills. He is working solidly for his community and is making a great contribution.

Yesterday I received a phone call from Vince Lemon. He calls me with plenty of ideas. He is community-minded and conscientious and wants to make a contribution. These are the people that local members spend time talking to on behalf of the Government. Another name that comes to mind is Brian Byrne. Brian spends a lot of time on the phone because he is passionate about what he believes in. Similarly, the Oatley Residents Group is another community organisation that puts its views strongly to me as its local representative. I particularly refer to Kerry Williams and Laurie and Maree Derwent and the contributions they make. As the local member I am fortunate to have a great deal of support in the work that I do.

I referred earlier to the various transport and road improvements in our local district and the funding that we as a Government provide. In that regard, I refer to Mr Arthur Hardiman who has done work in relation to Hillcrest Avenue. Arthur Hardiman is my representative on the Kogarah council traffic committee. He is a former Kogarah council alderman of many years standing and was a former Mayor of Kogarah. Now he is over 80 years of age and is still making an energetic contribution to that committee as my representative. He is very generous with his time. I had an on-site meeting with him only two weeks ago at Oatley.

Phil Edwards represents me on the Hurstville traffic committee. Again, he is a local citizen who is prepared to give of his time and energy and make sure that our community is a better place in which to live. That is what this budget is all about: making sure that we live in a better State and in better communities. The Government provides funding through education, transport and health and also provides all the important infrastructure improvements. This budget provides the most significant capital injection into public works ever seen in New South Wales. It is all about making New South Wales a better place in which to live, not only in Georges River, but in Vacluse, Bathurst and Maitland and throughout New South Wales. It is about ensuring that the people of New South Wales continue to have one of the lowest unemployment rates in Australia.

It is absolutely imperative that we as a Government continue to provide the leadership that ensures that the people of New South Wales continue to have the best services. I congratulate again the Treasurer, the Premier and the whole ministry on the work they are doing to ensure that the people of New South Wales are well served. I congratulate them on behalf of the people of the Georges River electorate. I look forward to serving my electorate up until March and, hopefully, if they are so generous, after 22 March next year. I am pleased to see the honourable member for Vacluse nodding in agreement. I look forward to having his support and the support of many other members.

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [8.57 p.m.]: I am delighted to have the opportunity to reply to the budget and to reply to the honourable member for Georges River. Since he was so generous in his comments about me during his speech, I will make some comments about him. He took the traditional approach of simply reading a list of names onto *Hansard*. I can understand that because he does not have anything positive to say about this budget. I commend him for his initiative in simply reading onto the record a list of constituents. He was unable to get many names on the record, but he was able to get a few. That is because he had nothing substantial to say about the budget. There is very good reason for that, and I will come back to that point.

The honourable member for Georges River also said that he is delighted to have the opportunity to serve his electorate up until 22 March next year. He clearly hopes that he will have an extension of time after that. I doubt that he will. I raised with him yesterday an issue that one of his constituents had brought to me, that is, graffiti on railway stations. This is a major problem across much of the CityRail network and particularly in his electorate. It is a shame that the Government has not paid more attention to that issue in particular. That is why he will not be here after 22 March. I will address a few local issues and, because I will not be able to help myself, I will comment generally on the budget and specifically about transport. I will refer to a number of local issues to begin this address. The major issue in the budget month, if I can term it that, in my electorate is the dramatic cutbacks in public transport that have been undertaken by the Carr Labor Government this month. Not only are there cutbacks this month, on 1 July we will see significant changes in the pricing of public transport.

To start off the month the Minister for Transport simply took an axe to bus services in the city of Sydney and in the eastern region of Sydney. The Minister for Transport actually had good practice because he had previously taken an axe to bus services in Newcastle. Community outrage continued there for many months and still continues today. I am working with a number of people in the Hunter and Newcastle regions to make sure that people remember right through to 22 March 2003 the axe that was taken to public transport in the Newcastle area.

It is significant that the Minister had practice in Newcastle because then he moved on to the city and the eastern suburbs. He not only decimated a number of bus services, he ambushed the community by refusing to release the detailed timetables for those bus services until they were actually implemented. He put out for consultation an indicative route structure and that route structure had a number of services removed. People were very concerned about that and they remain concerned today. But what they did not realise was the double whammy in this cost-cutting move of the Carr Labor Government when it was attacking public transport. One punch was to remove bus services and the second punch was simply to cut the frequencies of the remaining services.

People in the city and the east were hit with these reduced frequencies on 23 June and the reaction has been extraordinary. My phone has been running hot since last week when people realised what the Carr Labor Government was doing to public transport in New South Wales. We will continue to fight for the reinstatement of both the cut services and the previous frequency of service. Interestingly, the Government chopped the last remaining connection between buses and ferries in my electorate, and I am talking about the 321 bus. Now, in order to connect with the ferries at Rose Bay people have to get off the bus—if they choose to use the bus instead of their car—on New South Head Road and cross what is essentially a six-lane highway in peak hour traffic to try to get to the wharf to catch the ferry.

And this from a Government that everyday lives and breathes the rhetoric of improving public transport! But the Government has done exactly the opposite. It has dropped the last remaining connection between ferries and buses and suggested that integrated public transport in New South Wales is no longer an issue to this Government. But that is not news to many people, because members opposite have known for the last five years that the Minister for Transport, Carl Scully, has been widely acknowledged, certainly in this institution and in the public arena, as the Minister for tollways. That is his only obsession, his only interest whatsoever. He is widely known as the Minister for tollways.

Mr Martin: Who invented them?

Mr DEBNAM: The honourable member for Bathurst agrees that the Minister is known as the Minister for tollways. Whenever he is confronted in the public arena with transport infrastructure problems he immediately defends himself by telling people about the number of tollways he has built. He rejoices in tollways and that is the shame of it. It is the shame that he is the wrong person for the wrong job.

Mr Price: Is that your policy from now on, to abolish all tolls? That is the policy, is it?

Mr DEBNAM: What electorate are you?

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): Order! The honourable member for Vacluse has the call. If he does not wish to continue speaking I will give the call to another member.

Mr DEBNAM: The honourable member is delighted to defend the Minister for Transport, who is better known as the Minister for tollways. It is interesting that a member in the Hunter Valley so defends tolls. We must really ask what a Labor Government is going to do following the election, given that for five years since December 1997 and presumably through to the election—although I doubt it because this Minister has a lot of problems—he will continue as the Minister for tollways. He is supported by some backbenchers who very enthusiastically defend the Minister for tollways. One must ask what is going to happen post 22 March. If one looks at the technology that this Minister for tollways and the Roads and Traffic Authority have been playing with on pricing roads, and where the Government is headed with its friends in the business, as well as the technology that the Minister for tollways has been pursuing for a year or two now, we can see what is going to happen post 22 March 2003.

The honourable member for Maitland is into pricing roads and I bet they are in the Hunter region. That is what this is all about. He is defending the Minister for tollways and clearly is into pricing as a demand management strategy. The people of New South Wales have another message for him, which they will deliver on 22 March. The Minister for tollways has demonstrated no interest or strategy in integrated public transport policies. In fact, in my electorate the Government has cut the last remaining link between ferries and buses in servicing those ferries, and that is to the detriment of the community. The Government also invested for the Olympics. Certainly, the Government has delivered for Olympic business. It invested in delivering the Bondi Junction interchange but it is now run down. It is a common joke in the area that the Government built an information kiosk into the structure. It was opened for the Olympics but was shut down immediately after.

I shall move on to schools. The Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Watkins, has taken over a disaster policy from the former Minister. One must agree that Minister Aquilina was the Minister for disasters during his time in the education portfolio. He has now moved to the Fair Trading portfolio, which I shall deal with shortly. Minister Aquilina delivered to the present Minister for Education and Training a policy of failing for the future. In my area that has very direct consequences, that is, the merger of two schools, Dover Heights High School and Vacluse High School, and the sale of the Vacluse High School land. The Minister is well aware that I oppose the sale of that land. It will not happen. There are considerable difficulties with respect to Dover Heights High School and I have discussed with the Minister on several occasions problems with pursuing the strategy of shoehorning an overlarge facility onto a site that is surrounded by high-density housing. It causes massive problems for residents. Residents are very intent on making sure that their voice is heard, and it will be in the near future.

I turn now to police. Police have simply been stripped from my electorate. My electorate is serviced by a police station at Rose Bay, which interacts with a number of other areas, and a police station at Waverley, which interact also with a smaller presence at Bondi Beach. The strategy of the Carr Government has been very clear in its seven years in office. With nine months to go, its strategy has been to privatise policing and it has done it very effectively. These strategies have been a disaster, whether in my electorate or in other areas, but it is most noticeable in my electorate in police presence. There is none. A number of police are trying their damndest to do a very good job at the front-line. They are overstressed and underresourced. They have continual problems in providing responses to the most basic of incidents in the area. That is without discussing Bondi Beach, which is a magnet for troublemakers. Bondi Beach is certainly more than just another residential suburb. It is a magnet for criminal activity and antisocial behaviour. The local police simply do not have the resources to deal with it.

I would like to mention that the team working on public housing in the eastern suburbs have provided a very good service to my office and to my constituents. They are dealing with a very extensive waiting list and many of the personal difficulties experienced by some of my constituents. I applaud the efforts of that local office. I have had many discussions with the Minister for Public Works and Services about the Government's apparent inability to deal with Strickland House. The property is a major asset to the people of New South Wales but has been an embarrassment to successive governments for 13 or 14 years. I welcome any suggestions from the Minister that would resolve the issue in the interests of the people of New South Wales and of protecting a magnificent property and asset.

I have a few general comments about the budget. The strategy followed in this budget is exactly the same as that pursued in every previous budget. It does my heart good to hear Government members repeat in

this House the Treasurer's appalling rhetoric that this is every inch a Labor budget. That is very true: This budget delivers uncontrolled spending in almost every portfolio and withdraws funds from those areas that really matter to the people of New South Wales. I remember the first two years of the Carr Government when there were public spats between the Premier and the Treasurer. They were often conducted internationally because of the Premier's unrestrained desire to travel. The Premier would issue calming statements from London or Paris to the Treasurer, who was fighting with his colleagues at home.

It became clear in the first two years of the Carr Government that the Treasurer had lost the battle to control the wild spending of his colleagues around the Cabinet table, and the Premier eventually gave up on trying to debate the issue internationally. So the Treasurer resorted to a single financial strategy to which he has stuck for five years. This strategy is well known across New South Wales and certainly around the central business district: claw in as much revenue as possible. Whether one looks at portfolio areas with wild spending or simply at major portfolios, one can see a common strategy: pull in any dollar we can find whether by way of a new tax or charge or via negotiations with the Commonwealth. The Government does anything it can to find new money basically because the Treasurer gave up on trying to control expenditure.

An argument about the debt shuffle has been going on for the past few weeks, and it has been wonderful watching Treasurer Michael Egan digging himself into a deeper hole as he tries to explain that he is not shuffling debt from the core budget sector into government businesses. That is exactly what he has been doing, and he has done it very successfully while pursuing the traditional Labor strategy of loading government businesses with debt. He has applied that strategy historically and he has indicated in the budget papers that he has every intention of pursuing it in the forward estimates. The Carr Government budget is indeed every inch a Labor budget. It is all about politics and it will come back to bite the Government. It is a budget of unrestrained spending in which departments are not accountable. The Auditor-General is expressing increasing concerns about an ever-widening number of issues, which we will highlight every day until the next State election in nine months. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Home warranty insurance is a significant budget area for three reasons: first, the exposure of the Government; secondly, the expenditure of the Government; and, thirdly, the embarrassment of the Government. I have studied this area since I became shadow Minister for Insurance Regulation several months ago, and it is clear to me that the Minister for Fair Trading is struggling to find a way forward that will satisfy home builders, who are in dire straits across the State. The timing is wonderful in that the Minister has convened an industry roundtable for tomorrow, 27 June. This is a last, desperate attempt on the part of the Minister to try to find a way forward, but I predict that tomorrow's roundtable discussion will conclude that the Carr Government has failed spectacularly to resource and properly manage industry regulation, industry licensing and auditing and inspection. In fact, the Government has failed to fulfil its responsibilities in the area of quality assurance in home building.

Let us consider the history of this issue. The Minister for Education and Training, who is at the table, also has some involvement in this area, to which I shall turn in a moment. The Premier privatised home warranty insurance five years ago and, since then, home warranty insurers have had the Government over a barrel. I suggest that the Minister would agree with that: Having privatised home warranty insurance and failed to fulfil its side of the bargain in terms of industry regulation and administration, the Government is indeed over a barrel. When the insurers said they had a problem, the Government had nowhere to go. It had only a couple of options. The privatisation of home warranty insurance will haunt this Labor Government until 22 March 2003.

When the insurers came to the Government in the past year or so and said they had a problem with home warranty insurance, the Government could do nothing but ask what they wanted. The insurers asked for two things: a reduction in consumer protection and government underwriting of their activities. What did this Carr Labor Government, which privatised home warranty insurance, do then? The Government did exactly what the insurers wanted because it is in their pockets. Paul Keating used to go around saying that he had the Reserve Bank in his pocket and now the insurers go around saying that they have the Carr Government in their pocket. The Government has reduced consumer protection in relation to home building and has underwritten insurers in order to keep them in the market and forestall their threat to depart. This week the Minister announced an extension of that underwriting from 30 June to 31 December. He most reluctantly put a figure on that underwriting. I will give him the benefit of the doubt by citing his worst case scenario figure, which was a cost of \$7.5 million. Given the frequent lying and dishonesty we get from this Government, that figure is probably dramatically understated.

Mr Price: That is an outrageous statement.

Mr DEBNAM: The honourable member for Maitland debates the point. I have taken that figure from the transcript of the estimates committee hearing at which the Minister suggested reluctantly that the New South Wales taxpayers might have to pay about \$7.5 million in a worst case scenario situation. Given that the insurers have the Carr Government in their pocket, it was interesting to hear the Minister admit on Monday evening that the Government paid insurers \$500,000 to employ staff to do their job. The taxpayers of New South Wales, through the Government, paid half a million dollars to insurers so that they could hire staff to make their job easier. That is what this Carr Labor Government is all about. For cream, the Government offered insurers the services of two staff for five weeks. Let us say that assistance was worth \$10,000.

Also in regard to home warranty insurance, the Government collects a total of about \$23.4 million from the building industry, and one of the main complaints from that industry is that there is no one in the Department of Fair Trading who can talk to them about building issues. There is no technical competence within Fair Trading. It would be fair to say that one would be hard put to go beyond saying that there are 11 staff in Fair Trading with technical building qualifications. However, the Carr Labor Government is pulling \$23.4 million out of the building industry, presumably to be used for the regulation and administration of the industry, and it is doing it with just 11 staff. It is just another form of backdoor taxation; another rip-off for the people of New South Wales.

I think the difficulty for the Carr Government is that it is still in denial on the issue of home warranty insurance. I will admit that the current Minister has inherited this problem. I can understand why he is not going to go past the next election. One has only to look at him to see that he is happy enough. He is happy enough in each of the portfolios that he has been asked to take on by the Premier, and the latest disaster he has inherited is Fair Trading and home warranty insurance. Until the Government actually admits that it has a problem with its own administration of the industry there will be no solution. Insurers will be coming back to the Government every couple of months asking for more, and the builders will be in an uproar until the Carr Government moves beyond its denial. I would say to the member opposite and to every member of the Government, we will be in every one of your seats, working with your builders, highlighting the failures of this Government on home warranty insurance. What is clearly needed is a total overhaul of the Department of Fair Trading's administration of the home warranty scheme.

Mr Price: Tell us what he is going to do to fix it all; give us a clue.

Mr DEBNAM: Listen and you might learn something. Currently insurers are de facto regulators for home builders. That is the source of most of the industry problems at the moment. It is a relationship that the insurers and the builders do not welcome. They simply do not want the insurers to be the de facto regulators. The department must take back the responsibility to regulate the industry and lift quality assurance. Fair Trading needs a total overhaul as soon as possible. In the current circumstances that is the best summary I can give on the home warranty insurance debacle.

I now move to another scandal—the Transport portfolio. I often like to term the current state of affairs as the six Scully scandals, and I would like to briefly run through those in the few minutes remaining. If we look at the Minister's performance over the last few months, one of his most dramatic performances was to delay or cancel—whatever words you like to use—the new timetable. That is the first scandal. What he was trying to do with the new timetable was simply slow down the system. A couple of things happened. The Minister suddenly realised that he had two major problems. Firstly, he did not have the new trains that he was expecting, and secondly, he did not have the confidence of his colleagues.

He could not make that announcement, so what he did was announce that he did not have enough train drivers. That was not true. It is not true today, and the Minister has done nothing to correct the situation if he wants to stick to that excuse. The real problem was that there was dramatic community outrage in many areas with the cutback in services that the Minister was proposing. The colleagues around the Cabinet table simply looked at Minister Scully's record and said "You have not delivered anything in your time as Transport Minister. We do not trust you to make a timetable change in the few months before an election. You will not do it". Have a look at the second Scully scandal: a Transport Minister who chauffeurs his family dog around in the government car. That struck a chord with many people in Sydney and in the Minister's electorate.

Mr Price: The dog probably loved it.

Mr DEBNAM: And it should strike a chord. The member opposite thinks that was a good idea. I do not think the people of New South Wales think it is a very good idea. The Transport Minister who has contempt for commuters but chauffeurs a dog in the government car is on a hiding to nothing. The third Scully scandal is

the Millennium trains. We have invested—as taxpayers, as the people of New South Wales—\$200 million in the project. Those trains will be four years late. On Sunday we will see the mother of all stunts when at 10.30 at Central station one of the four carriages will begin operating in New South Wales.

Mr Price: That is almost as good as your tilt train: not quite, but getting a long way towards it.

Mr DEBNAM: People should have a look at what is offered there and if they are not satisfied with the four Millennium carriages that are being offered—and I have referred to them before as the joke of the millennium, it is true—they can get a souvenir poster and a fridge magnet. I suggest that on Sunday morning at 10.30 people should have a look at those four carriages and realise that \$200 million is involved in this project, and four years missing. The fourth Scully scandal is that public transport fares are to go up next week, on 1 July. Despite the fact that there has never been a worse public transport service in New South Wales, this Minister has the hide to increase prices. We will remind everybody through to 22 March that this Minister has not been interested in public transport, he has not delivered, but he is still putting prices up.

The fifth Scully scandal is the cutbacks in bus services in Newcastle, which he hit hard. The members from Newcastle did not complain, and they will rue that day right through to 22 March. In the eastern suburbs and the city the Minister also took an axe. The sixth Scully scandal relates to the Tow Truck Authority. I have raised that issue in this House several times and I will raise it several times in the future. Members opposite will again rue the day that they left that responsibility with the so-called Minister for Transport, who is really the minister for tollways. That is going to be a saga for which he will be sorry.

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [9.27 p.m.]: Give me a moment while I dry my eyes! After that tirade—or whatever it was—almost anything I could say in support of the Government's budget and the bills before the House would be welcome. I compliment the Treasurer and the Government on a reasoned, beneficial, well-distributed budget that benefits the whole of New South Wales and satisfies the post-Olympic promise of restoring the public works budgets to a greater level than we have ever seen. It increases by 50 per cent the public works expenditure outside metropolitan Sydney, where some 42 per cent of the people reside. That is an indication that the Government keeps its promises and will ensure that the community of New South Wales benefits from the additional finance it has been able to secure. It has been a boon in many areas. That money has been used to extinguish debt, to fund election promises and to increase generally the State's asset acquisition.

I refer to the budget documents. Not many people seem to do that these days, but I have read a few. I congratulate the Minister for Education and Training on the efforts that he has made in spending a total of \$425 million on asset acquisition. That is providing us with more than 30 new primary and high schools and improved facilities for teachers and staff. I particularly comment on the \$28 million spent on enhancing information technology, making \$100 million over the past three years. That enhancement will provide a tremendous improvement in the infrastructure of our schools. It also includes the training of teachers in advance programs, the speeding up of e-learning Internet services and the broadbanding of the network within our school system that continues today. The electorate of Maitland covers the shires of Dungog and the city of Maitland. Clarence Town Public School has been in place for about 126 years. It started as a tiny school and is now a fairly significant primary school in that shire. The school was completely bound by its current site. The Government has allocated \$4 million to relocate the school on an expanded site, with \$1 million for expenditure this year to provide a classroom and a hall.

The expansion was not easy. It took some two years to mastermind because it required buying the leasehold schoolyard from the Presbyterian Church, buying the Presbyterian Church, translating the church across the street onto a new property at the State's expense, then commencing the building program for new classrooms, and a refurbishment program for some of the existing buildings that will be retained. I congratulate the Government on that initiative, which was certainly welcomed in Clarence Town. It took a long time to kick off. The town council said that, because of certain problems in the area, zero development applications would be approved. It was necessary to go to the council to seek special approval for the school. Then land had to be purchased from the church, and churches, unfortunately, are notoriously slow in their land transactions. Then the program had to commence.

Everyone involved appreciates the Minister's perseverance. Recently \$70 million was allocated for minor works, almost \$1 million of which was spent in my electorate. Quite a number of schools benefited from that program. Mechanical ventilation has been provided for the Dungog High School assembly hall. After many years of profuse perspiring during speech day, which is always held in the second week of December, we will now have a breeze. It will not be cool but at least the air will move. It is an important initiative, when one considers that it is a major country school with an excellent academic record.

The Health budget has also been of great benefit to the Hunter region. The total capital works budget for the State is \$554 million more than last year's allocation, which brings total budget spending for Health in this State to \$8.9 billion. It is an enormous amount of money. I often hear criticism from the Opposition about how paltry we have been, but that is the most generous budget that this State has ever seen. It encompasses significant increases in a number of areas. The \$35 million allocation for new rural health initiatives is the Government's attempt to provide equal access throughout the State to the very best of facilities, regardless of the remoteness of the area. The provision of an extra 226 mental health beds throughout the State, in addition to the 150 already announced, is significant and a recognition of the problems associated with mental health. It is also a demonstration of the Government's compassion and the Minister's interest in ensuring that those facilities are available as soon as possible.

An additional \$16 million has been allocated for dental health services, which will help to provide an additional 85,000 services per year—an additional 4,000 dentures services for older people and new services in a number of rural areas. That does not compensate entirely for the \$36 million per annum that the Federal Government removed when the Howard Government came to power, but at least the \$20 million increase and a further \$16 million this year will go some way to correcting that imbalance and providing a service for the people in our community who need it. The health program in the Hunter is significant. More than \$3 million has been allocated for the child and adolescent unit to be constructed at the John Hunter Hospital site at New Lambton, with more than \$600,000 currently expended. That program should come to fruition during this financial period because more than \$2.5 million has already been spent on the project.

The project will help to decentralise child and adolescent health units outside of metropolitan Sydney to larger provincial areas. The unit will provide services equivalent to those provided in the facilities in Sydney. It will save families a tremendous amount of intercity travelling. We have not heard much about Fisheries in the budget, but the Port Stephens Fisheries Centre is certainly significant. The centre produces a huge number of fingerlings, carries out a whole lot of experimental work with fisheries, helps to stock dams and rivers throughout the State and makes quite a contribution to the fisheries benefit that we enjoy in New South Wales. I congratulate the Minister responsible on ensuring that the allocation came forward. I recommend that anyone who visits the area call in to the Taylors Beach centre. It is worth seeing and it is a valuable asset to the people of this State.

The Police Traffic Infringement Processing Bureau, which is being relocated to Maitland, is well under way. I anticipate that the building will be fitted out in the next three months. I look forward to its opening and operation. The total allocation for the construction of the building and its outfit is in excess of \$13 million. The relocation will decentralise 160 jobs from metropolitan Sydney. Given the number of staff positions that will have to be filled because of vacancies left by public servants who choose not to relocate to the Hunter, it will be a tremendous boost for jobs in the local region and also provide 160 pay packets at the top end of the central business district, which has not gone unnoticed by the commercial operators of the mall in High Street, Maitland. I understand that, in the next couple of years, that will be followed by the Department of Mines, which will provide 180 additional jobs and another freestanding building.

Decentralisation of that organisation will place the Department of Mines in the middle of the mining fields of New South Wales. It is a much more intelligent location for the facility than St Leonards in North Sydney. We have heard some criticism of the Government's policy on public buses. The purchase of 30 new buses for the Newcastle network will be of great benefit, and the people of Newcastle deserve it. Almost \$11 million has been allocated this year, and well over \$9.5 million has already been expended to ensure that the new buses are in service as soon as possible. With the advent of this Government the buses were purchased for Newcastle, instead of the Newcastle people having to put up with the cast-offs from metropolitan Sydney. The local community has welcomed this decision. It will impact on the elderly, mothers with babies, and schoolchildren. When the new timetable is resolved the result should be a much-improved service and better buses.

In relation to roads and transport, the Anderson Drive-Thornton Road link at Beresfield is a significant step forward. The project will start in September of this year. Some \$7 million is the estimated cost of the project, and another \$3.3 million is to be allocated for this year. Although the link road will be completed this year, unfortunately, it will not link with the great separated intersection to the F3 that was proposed by the Federal Government. In spite of its pre-election promise, that project has not materialised in the current budget. So we wait with bated breath to see what subsequent years will bring for that \$27 million project that was promised but so far has been denied.

The other significant expenditure in the immediate region is for the Karuah bypass, with dual carriageways, the Karuah to Bulahdelah dual carriageway, and the Bulladelah bypass. Some of those projects

enjoy joint funding status. All up, current expenditure on the three projects, including construction and planning, exceeds \$49 million. The work will assist to make that arterial highway of this State a safer road to drive on and will reduce the current likelihood of death and accident.

I thank the Minister for Transport for the easy access upgrades of three of the railway stations in my electorate—Beresford, Maitland and Thornton. The total allocation is in excess of \$7 million. Maitland station will be completely refurbished under the program. All three stations should have easy access before the end of this calendar year. The mere sight of the projects has been a great boost. The elderly and people with infirmities will be assisted, and the upgrades will incorporate the usual security features. I look forward to increased passenger traffic as a result of the upgrades.

Another rail infrastructure project is the proposed underpass for the Metford crossing. An underpass will be constructed under the railway line, from Raymond Terrace Road through to Metford Road. It will be a two-lane road with provision for future widening. That will get rid of one of the largest at-level or at-grade crossings in the Hunter region. It currently has six rail lines. Coal traffic on the route will increase by about 30 per cent over the next two years, so it is extremely important that these infrastructure provisions are made in the interests of public safety and to ensure that trains maintain schedule with the coal loaders in Newcastle.

Fourteen new rail cars are proposed specifically for the Newcastle-Dungog, Newcastle-Scone line. The trains are expected to be in service in 2004. We are anticipating that the design and construction order will be signed in September or October this year. Yesterday the Minister said that as an economy measure that project will be linked with the proposed new rail cars for Broken Hill. Between them, those two projects are worth \$160 million. We look forward to the program proceeding to ensure that the people of the Hunter and Broken Hill receive carriages and facilities of a similar standard to those provided in metropolitan Sydney. Victoria Street station and the Martins Creek station will be upgraded.

A number of wooden bridges in my electorate will be improved, costing well over \$1 million. There are six heritage bridges in my electorate. Some go back well over a hundred years. In every case their design is unique. They are still in service and some of them carry 40-tonne trucks, but, of course, 40-tonne trucks cause damage, and the bridges require constant maintenance. Nevertheless, they are picturesque bridges and an expression of the engineering ability of the colony in times past. They are being preserved properly and I look forward to the expenditure on them in the near future.

While talking about heritage, I mentioned the \$1 million allocated to the creation of a rail heritage park at the Maitland railway station. This will link with the steam festival, called Steamfest, at Maitland in May that has operated for the past 17 years. This is a recognition of the success of a local initiative. Steam trains come from several locations and operate around the station at Maitland and travel up and down the line. The passenger service out to Cessnock is reinstated for the weekend of the Steamfest. The heritage park will provide a permanent base for memorabilia and will act as a headquarters for the Steamfest organisation, which is now sponsored by the Maitland City Council.

It will provide a base for the steam trains that are being overhauled and maintained by the Hunter Valley Training Company, which is under the chairmanship of former Liberal transport Minister Milton Morris. Milton is a keen steam enthusiast. He has two trains and they will be put into service and parked from time to time at the heritage park, providing an ongoing static and mobile exhibition that can only add to and embellish the progress already made by the Steamfest and its home at Maitland. I commend the Treasurer and the Premier for this budget. It is a great expression of how well a government can operate when it gains experience and does the right thing. We have done the right thing in many ways, and I look forward to even more Labor budgets in future years. [*Time expired.*]

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Meagher.

POLICE SERVICE AMENDMENT (NSW POLICE) BILL

Second Reading

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Iemma [9.47 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Minister for Police delivered the second reading speech on the Police Service Amendment (NSW Police) Bill on 18 June 2002, as recorded at pages 52 to 55 of the Legislative Council *Hansard* proof. This bill is in the same form as that introduced in the other place and I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tink.

FIREARMS AMENDMENT (PUBLIC SAFETY) BILL**SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT (PUBLIC SAFETY) BILL****Second Reading**

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Iemma [9.50 p.m.]: I move:

That these bills be now read a second time.

Firearm-related crime is a major concern for the police and the community. In July 2001 the Government introduced tougher firearm trafficking laws designed to inhibit the illegal supply of firearms. This bill is a further strengthening of our laws. The Firearms Amendment (Public Safety) Bill will authorise the use of firearm detection dogs by police in public places. Under proposed section 72A, firearm detection dogs may be used in any place or premises that is open to the public or is used by the public, as well as any road. This includes streets, public transport services, licensed premises and entertainment venues. These provisions are based on the Police Powers (Drug Detection Dogs) Act 2001, which commenced in February this year.

Our firearm detection dog teams will increase from six to 26. The dogs will be deployed in metropolitan and regional hot spots to work with local police. They will perform covert detection operations with plain clothes police, and random detection sweeps. The dogs are capable of detecting firearms, ammunition, gunshot residue and explosives. Any licensed firearm user who is detected by a dog will simply need to show his or her licence to police and explain the reason for carrying a firearm in a public place. The Ombudsman will prepare a report to Parliament on the exercise of the powers after two years. Currently there is no specific offence for those who manufacture without a firearms dealer licence.

This bill will introduce a maximum penalty of 20 years in gaol for the illegal manufacture of a prohibited firearm or hand gun. In order to allow sufficient time for consultation with firearm dealers, the bill includes in part 4 transitional provisions to extend existing dealers licences that are due to expire this year. Unless they are revoked or otherwise cease, existing dealer licences that would otherwise expire will automatically continue until 30 June 2003. Proposed sections 11 (5A) and 29 (3A) will allow the Commissioner of Police to refuse firearm licence and permit applications on the basis of criminal intelligence holdings.

This will mean, for example, that if police possess intelligence that a person has committed, or is about to commit violent crimes, the commissioner must refuse any firearm licence application from that person. Proposed section 75 (3) also provides that an appeal may be made to the Administrative Decisions Tribunal [ADT] against any such decision by the commissioner. However, the reasons for the refusal and the criminal intelligence on which it was based will not be released by the commissioner or the ADT, in order to avoid jeopardising police operations. To crack down on possession for the purposes of illegal trafficking, proposed section 51D will introduce an offence of possession by an unlicensed person of three or more unregistered firearms.

This will mean that criminals warehousing illegal guns for sale on the black market will be liable to up to 20 years in gaol if the firearm is prohibited or is a hand gun. To avoid confusion for collectors of pre-1900 breach-loading firearms, who have only recently been required to licence and register their guns, there will be a 12-month licensing and registration amnesty. An offence is also to be created of "knowingly supplying materials or information to illegally modify firearms". Proposed section 63 (3) will ban the unauthorised conversion of a non-prohibited firearm to a prohibited firearm, and proposed section 63 (4) will prevent the illegal trade in information which teaches people to perform such conversions.

Schedule 2 to the bill makes a number of miscellaneous amendments to the Firearms Act to clarify the operation of existing penalties. Schedule 3 to the bill will ban so-called brass catchers, which police are concerned are being used by criminals to prevent police detection and investigation of expended cartridges at crime scenes. Those legitimate licensed shooters who use these devices will be able to possess them under their current firearm licence. The Firearms Amendment (Public Safety) Bill builds on the 2001 firearm trafficking reforms to provide increased public safety in relation to illegal firearms. Legitimate licensed shooters can be assured that this bill is aimed fairly and squarely at criminals and the illegal firearm market.

More reforms to the Firearms Act were flagged by the Review of the Firearms Act, which was produced in June 2000 by the Director-General of the Ministry for Police. To date the Government has concentrated on reforms in relation to illegal firearms. However, the Minister for Police intends to form a

ministerial firearm licensing advisory council in the near future. That council will provide advice on the way forward in relation to the remaining recommendations of the review and on other licensing matters. Whilst the exact make-up of the council has yet to be determined, it will include broad representation, including shooter, regional and primary producer organisations.

Cognate to the Firearms Amendment (Public Safety) Bill is the Summary Offences Amendment (Public Safety) Bill. The objects of that bill are to increase the maximum penalty for having a knife in a public place without reasonable excuse to \$2,200 or gaol for two years; and to clarify the operation of the directions power in section 28F of the Summary Offences Act by making it clear that a police officer can proceed to the second direction and warning if a person fails at any time to follow an earlier direction; and police may give a reasonable direction to a group of persons in a public place. These laws will allow police to use their directions powers more efficiently in the interests of public safety. They are intended to be in place before New South Wales Police restructure officially begins on 1 July. The Government is working closely with New South Wales Police to ensure that officers have what they need to increase safety in public places. I commend these bills to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tink.

RADIATION CONTROL AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Debus [9.55 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Minister for Juvenile Justice delivered the second reading speech on the Radiation Control Amendment Bill on 12 June, as recorded at page 3,038 of the Legislative Council *Hansard*. The bill is in the same form as that introduced in the other place and I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tink.

LEGAL AID COMMISSION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Debus [9.56 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Hon. Ian McDonald delivered the second reading speech on the Legal Aid Commission Amendment Bill on 18 June, as recorded at page 57 of the Legislative Council *Hansard* proof. The bill is in the same form as that introduced in the other place and I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tink.

WITNESS PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Debus [9.57 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Minister for Police delivered his second reading speech on the Witness Protection Amendment Bill on 6 June, as recorded at page 2,767 of the Legislative Council *Hansard*. This bill is in the same form as that introduced in the other place and I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tink.

APPROPRIATION BILL**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL****APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL****GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL****PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION SCHEMES FUND) BILL****PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING) BILL****STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL****Second Reading****GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY****Take-note Debate****Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.00 p.m.]: I congratulate the Carr Government on its eighth budget. This is the Carr Government's seventh surplus budget in a row and, as stated in the *Daily Telegraph* editorial of Wednesday, 5 June, "Labor has done so against a backdrop of worsening economic conditions internationally." It is also worthy of note that no other Government has delivered two surpluses in a row, let alone seven. It has paid for the Christmas-New Year bushfires and emerged \$168 million in the black. Ross Gittins, the economic editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, said:

Mr Egan has managed to hang on to 15 per cent of the increased revenue that has come his way (while still allowing his spending to grow by a comfortable 72 per cent).

And that saving has allowed the Treasurer to significantly reduce the Government's net liabilities and boast that the State's finances are well managed—which they are.

The article goes on to state that this budget bears no comparison with the mean and nasty effort delivered by Peter Costello last month. It is certainly true that this budget does not involve the blatant fudging of figures that Mr Costello's did. My electorate of Cabramatta wins a healthy share of the record \$6,350 million being spent on new and upgraded schools, hospitals, roads, policing and other infrastructure across the State. This budget will help Cabramatta get ahead, with increased investment to improve our community services and tax cuts to help families and small businesses. Young people will get ahead with this budget, as payroll tax has been abolished for employers of apprentices. This will help 31,000 young people around the State. Local residents and businesses will also benefit with insurance tax cuts reducing household insurance bills by an average \$40 each year. Small business insurance costs are to be cut by an average \$150 per year.

New South Wales now has the lowest tax rates in Australia. The Carr Labor Government will halve stamp duty on 33 types of insurance, including home and contents, travel, strata unit, boat, business interruption, burglary, bad debtors, stock and property damage. Key areas of local expenditure this year are \$17 million on roads, \$3.77 million on transport, \$8.74 million for local police and \$1.38 million on local education and training. Specific funding for projects in the Cabramatta electorate include \$10 million for the Liverpool to Cabramatta transitway, the first in a network of bus-only routes across Western Sydney to be opened next year, and \$8.74 million of \$12.78 million for the new Cabramatta police station, scheduled to be completed by September next year.

Mr Whelan: Hear! Hear!

Ms MEAGHER: I thank the honourable member for Strathfield for his contribution to ensuring that the project went ahead. Other specific projects in Cabramatta include \$700,000 of \$4 million for the upgrade of Canley Vale Public School and \$686,000 of \$843,000 for a new administration building at Lansvale Public

School. There are also significant improvements to major roads, including \$530,000 towards the \$1.7 million widening of Cowpasture Road to four lanes from Liverpool Road to Mount Street, and \$5 million towards the \$8.4 million widening of Cowpasture Road between Mount Street and Elizabeth Drive. There is also \$1.4 million for the Easy Access upgrade of Cabramatta railway station and \$220,000 for the redevelopment of the bush shelters at Canley Vale railway station.

Funding for new homes and improving government-subsidised housing in Cabramatta is an important part of this budget, with \$6.1 million being allocated to improvements. That represents a \$6.1 million investment to build or buy 20 new homes and to modernise existing homes for people in the Cabramatta area. The New South Wales housing budget will increase by \$16 million to \$631.7 million in the 2002-03 budget period, helping more than 500,000 needy and vulnerable people with a range of housing assistance across the State and creating more than 7,000 jobs.

Another major focus of the budget is policing which will result in extra spending on law and order in the Cabramatta area. Apart from the \$8.7 million for the construction of a new police station, residents of Cabramatta will also welcome \$8 million to be spent statewide to recruit and train more front-line police; \$12.1 million for the final stage of the administration civilianisation program, which will release another 350 police for work on the beat; and \$6 million to improve DNA testing, IBS digital ballistics systems and the Livescan fingerprint database.

Another \$443,000 will be spent to trial civilian managers at police and citizens youth clubs, allowing police to concentrate on working with youth at risk, \$2.6 million for the completion of the cell improvement program and \$6 million for upgrade of the New South Wales police radio network. The Carr Government's policing budget this year is worth \$1.758 billion, an increase of 62 per cent on the last Coalition budget. The people of Cabramatta will also win with an increase in the amount being spent on education. Education and training are key priorities for the Carr Government. This budget provides a record \$8.1 billion for education and training, with the Cabramatta electorate to receive \$700,000 for the upgrade of Canley Vale Public School and \$686,000 for the administration building development at Lansvale Public School. The budget focuses on improving facilities, resources and programs for more than two million students in schools, vocational education and training and adult education. Since 1995 total funding for education has increased by more than \$2.3 million, an increase of nearly 40 per cent.

As well as repeatedly reducing State taxes, the Carr Government has approved the largest capital works program ever undertaken by a State Government. This year an extra \$800 million will be spent. That is 8.5 per cent more than the \$5.56 billion in last year's budget. Since 1995 the Carr Government has cut the State's net debt and liabilities by \$10.8 billion. This means savings of about \$900 million in interest payments compared with 1995. They are vital funds that can now be spent on local hospitals, schools and police. The Carr Government's sound financial management means that the Treasurer could repeatedly cut taxes, increase spending on vital services for our community, and still deliver budget surpluses year after year.

Despite continuing Commonwealth cuts, the State has increased funding across the board. This budget delivers the biggest investment by any State Government with increased spending in areas such as education, health, roads, transport and police. The Carr Labor Government is well on the way to completely eliminating this State's net debt, remembering that when the Government took office in 1995 the State debt stood at \$12 billion. That amount has now been reduced by \$7 billion. This State is paying its way while protecting the future of men, women and young people across the State. I commend the bills to the House.

[Debate interrupted.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Extension of Sitting: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to vary the resolution of the House on days and hours of sitting to permit the House to sit beyond 10.30 p.m. at this sitting.

APPROPRIATION BILL**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL****APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL****GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL****PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION SCHEMES FUND) BILL****PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING) BILL****STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL****Second Reading****GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY****Take-note Debate**

[Debate resumed.]

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [10.07 p.m.]: In this House on 4 June the Leader of the Opposition described this budget as one that fails the real test of compassion and economic responsibility. I want to take up those themes. Much has been said by Government members in this debate about the increase in the health budget, as though that by itself is sufficient to address all the ills of the health system in New South Wales. The reality is that the health budget has increased every year since time began. That by itself is not an answer to the problems in the health system. As to the comment of the Leader of the Opposition that this is a budget that fails the test of economic responsibility, I refer to a comment made by the rating agency Standard and Poor's a couple of years ago when it said that the Carr Government had a perennial problem in forecasting in portfolios such as health. This budget again demonstrates just that.

One has to look at the budget figures carefully because they are difficult to read; one almost requires a doctorate. To track what has been spent and overspent in the budget, one needs to look at the amounts budgeted in the budget figures, the revised amounts that are reported in the annual reports of each department and the actual figures that are also repeated in the annual reports. As a consequence of the time lag, there is always a slight delay in getting the outcomes. Looking at the differences between the actual figures and the revised figures in the health budget—the revised figures being those amounts that include supplementary funding—since the Carr Government came to office in 1995 until 2001 a total of \$1.491 billion has been spent over budget. That clearly demonstrates what Standard and Poor's found, that is, that the Carr Government has a perennial problem in forecasting in portfolios such as health.

The reason the Carr Government has been able to get away with that is the windfall gain through property taxes. Only last year a bail-out of \$900 million was provided through taxpayers from that source. The other disappointment in the budget, particularly in view of the windfall, is the failure of the Carr Government to show any compassion. That is demonstrated by the failure of the health budget to deliver on the core concerns of most people. Members of Parliament and members of the public know that for seven years I have highlighted some of these concerns—and they are getting worse. Those concerns include increased waiting lists, with more than 52,000 people waiting for elective surgery, compared to 44,000 when the Carr Government came to office. More than 8,000 people have been waiting for more than 12 months, compared to 2,000 when the Carr Government came to office, with an extra 11,000 people waiting for elective medical treatment.

Emergency departments are clogged. Available figures show that in the past few months more than 35,000 people are waiting longer than they should to be treated in emergency departments. Others are waiting far longer than the required eight hours to be admitted to ward beds for treatment. Everyone knows the consequences of that. We have read stories in the newspapers and heard individual patients, doctors and nurses speak about it on radio. I am sure if members are honest they will admit that patients, families and general practitioners have asked them to make sure hospitals in their electorates do better. The Government has been told through many reports it has commissioned that the problems with emergency departments are caused by access block, that is, where patients cannot be admitted to ward beds because the beds are not open.

Since the Government came to office more than 4,300 hospital beds have been closed. The beds are physically available but they cannot be used because there are not enough nurses to look after them. The clogging of emergency departments because of insufficient ward beds creates hardship for patients waiting for treatment and for the doctors and nurses. They are tearing their hair out trying to do the right thing and they are exhausted. A couple of weeks ago the Leader of the Opposition and I spent several hours in the emergency department of Nepean Hospital after many patients had rung radio stations complaining about long delays at the hospital. On that occasion we met two nurses who had been working double shifts, 16 to 18 hours in emergency, with very sick patients. On that night the doctor in charge of the emergency department said that not one of the patients could be treated by a general practitioner because they all had serious conditions.

The budget fails to address the real problem, which is attracting nurses back into the hospital system. The Government undervalues nurses, who are still struggling with pay packages that do not measure up to those of equivalent trained health professionals. Nothing has been done to address the issues that are keeping more than half of our registered nurses out of public hospitals. As a result waiting lists will continue to grow and people's health needs will go unattended. Last weekend the Premier and the Minister for Health attended a garden party at Government House with 460 nurses who had re-entered the hospital work force through a retraining program. I found it distressing that the Government could use the goodwill of those nurses to try to suggest to the public that there is no longer a nursing shortage or a problem in our hospital system.

The Minister knows that is not true. His department's web site indicates that active recruitment is taking place to fill 1,600 nursing vacancies throughout the hospital system. Before I came to the Chamber I printed a document from the web site. It indicates where nurses are required— which area health service, rural or metropolitan—and what specialty of nursing. The recruitment and retention of nurses progress report of September 2001 by the chief nursing officer also contains relevant information. The report states that of the 91,515 nurses currently registered or enrolled with the Nurses Registration Board, approximately 32,000 full-time equivalent nurses are employed in our public health system, which is about 35 per cent.

Therefore, any suggestion that the problem is simply a matter of nurses not being recruited into nurse training and universities does not wash. Nurses are available but they are not happy about working in our public hospitals because of the conditions. The Minister is also aware of that, because he commissioned a survey of nurses not working in public hospitals. That survey, the results of which are also on the Government's web site, shows that a total of 10,089 nurses returned. An analysis reveals several reasons for dissatisfaction with the public hospital system. The first reason was suitable working hours, the second was better pay, the third was support in education, the fourth was improved working conditions and the fifth was management and work process changes.

In the press release about the garden party at Government House last week the Government conveniently left out the most important reason identified by the Nurses Union why nurses are staying away from public hospitals. That reason is pay. The Government knows that is important. In fact, the Industrial Relations Commission is presently hearing a special pay case for nurses. It may come as a surprise to some members of the House to learn that I have attended some of those hearings when I have had the time. When I have been unable to attend, I have had someone attend in my place. It is clear that nurses are unhappy with their salary rates. They keep referring to the 1991 commission ruling, which was a landmark decision in relation to nurses' salaries. At that time the Coalition Government was in office and the Nurses Union has frequently told me of its admiration and respect for the former Minister, Peter Collins, who gave nurses in New South Wales professional rates of pay for the first time ever in Australia. The commission found that the work of nurses was equivalent to that of other health professionals.

That is what this current special hearing is about. Nurses are about 8 per cent out of sync with other health professionals and this case seeks to bring them more in line. The Coalition has indicated it is sympathetic to the call by nurses for extra pay and will give them a pay rise. The Government has said it is not, and it will not. As long as the Government has this bloody-minded view about the value, or lack of value, of nurses, we will continue to have a problem in our health system. It is scandalous that this budget provides nothing to make working in public hospitals more attractive to nurses. Indeed, it demonstrates that the hospital system will be even more difficult for nurses. Figures show that in emergency departments for the next financial year the Government expects an additional 18,000 attendances, yet the number of extra staff is expected to rise by only 56—not only nurses but extra staff, because the figure is not broken down for nurses.

For overnight acute care, which is where the bulk of patients are treated, the Government expects an extra 7,000 patient separations—that is, occasions of treatment—with an extra 527 staff. For same day acute

care, the Government expects an extra 3,000 patients with no extra staff. Hospitals must bear an added burden with no comparative increase in staff. The Industrial Relations Commission heard evidence from several sources, including Dr John Dwyer, that highlighted a particular problem. The Government recruited 460 nurses through its retraining program, and I welcome their return. I am interested in nursing partly because I am the daughter of a nurse. I have a great deal of respect for nurses, who I think are the heart of the hospital system—and almost all doctors agree with me on that score. However, the hospital system is unable to recruit nurses as fast as it is losing them, and the retraining program will not address that nursing shortage.

The Government thinks it can grab front-page headlines on the day of the Budget Speech because people do not have time to read the small print. Thus the Government sought kudos from its claim of funding of \$504 million on health capital works. However, when we examine the details we discover that only \$40 million of that budget will be spent this year. Since Labor came to office it has underspent on health capital works by a total of \$116.5 million. Last year was a particularly bad year. When I did a spreadsheet of last year's projects that had carried over from the previous year, I discovered that the Government had underspent on the budgets of 35 out of 45 projects. Nearly all of those projects have been delayed—in some cases, the expected completion date has blown out by two or three years.

I will detail a few of those projects. Government members have talked in this place about the fantastic capital works taking place in their electorates but they should look a little more carefully at the budget papers and read them with a little more discernment. Ambulance infrastructure has been a big problem—the Auditor-General released a most scathing report about it—and last year the budget for that project was underspent by \$713,000. The budget for the Blue Mountains acute inpatient unit was underspent last year by \$1.6 million and its completion was delayed by a year. The Blue Mountains hospital hydrotherapy pool project was underspent by \$262,000 in 2001 and its completion date has blown out by a year. The budget for the Central Coast was underspent by \$799,000 last year and completion dates were blown out by a year. Completion of the Central Sydney Area Resource Transition Program, which is the big Royal Prince Alfred Hospital redevelopment, has blown out by two years and its budget was underspent by nearly \$10 million last year.

The acute psychiatric inpatient unit at Dubbo was underspent last year by nearly \$3 million and its completion date has blown out by a year. The hospital redevelopment was underspent by \$267,000 and its completion has blown out by a year. The neonatal emergency transport service, which is very important for sick babies, was underspent last year by nearly \$2 million. The budget for the Prince of Wales Hospital spinal, medical and rehabilitation facility was underspent last year by nearly \$7 million. The Queanbeyan ambulance station relocation project was underspent by almost \$700,000. The Government has identified the Royal North Shore Hospital as its big project this year. However, if we look at the details, we will see that it has been allocated only \$3.7 million for new works this year, and the project will not be completed for eight years. This is ludicrous. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

An independent consultant engaged by the Department of Health found in November 2000 that, of the 47 hospital buildings he examined, 27 should not be used. A number of the buildings did not comply with building codes and fire standards. The report was the same for every hospital in the Northern Sydney Area Health Service, but the Royal North Shore Hospital was the worst. My constituents use the hospital and I have attended it with my family on occasion. It is a disgrace and it is nothing short of scandalous for this Government suddenly to attempt to take credit for initiating a capital works projects that will not be completed for eight years.

Let us consider the ongoing projects at that hospital. In 1998 the Government allocated funding to upgrade the hospital's emergency, paediatric and maternity departments. Anyone who has visited the hospital's maternity department will know that it was built at the turn of the century. It is a museum. Mr Deputy-Speaker, I heard you refer to the heritage buildings in your electorate. The Royal North Shore Hospital maternity department is also heritage listed, and I am sure that you would not want your wife or daughter to deliver a baby there. It is disgraceful. The nurses, doctors and other staff do a fantastic job in appalling conditions. Work on the department was supposed to begin in 1998 and finish in 2002. The completion date has now blown out to 2004 and the \$8 million allocated for the work last year was not spent. That is what this Government thinks of Royal North Shore Hospital: It pays lip service to its problems. Some \$600,000 was allocated to upgrade lifts in the hospital but that money was not spent. The consultant's report found that in some buildings there was no lift access to particular floors. That is scandalous in a modern, tertiary level hospital.

Last year's budget allocated funds for several ongoing capital projects under the Rural Hospitals in Smaller Towns Program. That program was underspent by \$355,000. The St George Hospital procedural centre

project was underspent by \$1.7 million and the budget for Tamworth hospital emergency department was underspent by \$1 million. The Tweed Heads stage three redevelopment was underspent by \$2 million and the Westmead Hospital ambulatory procedural centre project was underspent by \$3.5 million. The New South Wales Westmead Hospital breast centre was underspent by \$722,000. Only yesterday the Minister for Health spoke in this place about the Government's fantastic achievements with Westmead Hospital. But there we have it: The budget figures speak for themselves. This Government has underspent on the funds that it has allocated for capital works. That is disgraceful.

Turning to my electorate of North Shore, I mentioned that my constituents and I have sought treatment at Royal North Shore Hospital. I have nothing but the greatest respect and admiration for the hospital staff, who I believe are among the best clinicians in this State. However, the condition of the buildings in which they work is nothing short of scandalous. I will give honourable members a snapshot of Royal North Shore Hospital and the conditions facing those clinicians. As I speak, 1,344 people are awaiting elective treatment, 291 of whom have waited for more than a year. In the emergency department in the past month 38 per cent of patients classified as suffering from eminently live-threatening conditions were not seen on time, and 52 per cent of patients classified as suffering from potentially serious conditions were not seen on time. This is the situation confronting my constituents, yet there is no relief in sight for that hospital.

The Treasurer's advice to me about expenditure in my electorate reveals the spin doctoring par excellence of this Government. His pamphlet suggests that \$28.8 million will be spent on capital works in North Shore. However, this funding comprises \$113,000 for Department of Housing asset management—where that is one would not know; \$1.3 million for work at the Department of Mineral Resources at St Leonards, which is not even in my electorate and certainly does not offer any particular benefits for my constituents; \$5,000 for computers for the State Emergency Service, which is gratefully received but hardly what one would call a generous gift to the constituents of North Shore; and \$22.3 million for upgrades to Taronga Zoo.

Taronga Zoo is a fabulous place. I am proud that it is in my electorate. But it is a place for the people of Australia; it is not just a place for the people of North Shore. To suggest that that is somehow a gift from this Government to the people of North Shore is absolute nonsense. However, these projects do not address one major problem in our area, that is, roads. We urgently require a solution to the traffic congestion on Military Road and Spit Road. I know, and everyone who drives through my electorate knows, that this is a major problem. The Labor Party has acknowledged that it is a major problem. The Labor candidate at the last election and at the election before that identified it as a major issue.

I remind honourable members that the Minister for Roads said shortly after the last election that the Government would find a long-term solution to this problem and implement it immediately. We are still waiting for a solution. I am afraid that we will have to wait until next March when the Coalition is elected to government before we have a solution to that problem. The Opposition has identified its preferred option. Local Liberal members of Parliament have stated that their preferred option is a tunnel starting at the Gore Hill section of the Warringah Freeway and exiting at approximately the northern end of the Burnt Bridge Creek deviation. That would reduce local traffic, which currently streams down Military Road and spills onto alternative shortcut routes in residential streets or commercial areas.

That proposal would make a huge difference to people in my electorate. At the moment Military Road is like a scar across the middle of the area. It divides the community; it makes it difficult for those who are trying to operate small businesses and retail outlets in the area; and it creates a problem for pedestrians trying to cross the road and motorists trying to get from one side of the road to the other. Only today I wrote a letter to a number of chambers of commerce, the police, the Roads and Traffic Authority and councils inviting people to a meeting to try to resolve problems that are getting worse and to try to prevent pedestrian accidents. Sadly, a number of fatalities have occurred in the area in recent months. The only real solution is a long-term one such as a tunnel or something that eases the traffic gridlock, which is a cause of tremendous frustration to motorists and pedestrians.

As a short-term measure I am trying to see whether we cannot come up with some kind of strategy. In 1994, not long after I was elected as a member of Parliament, the then Coalition Government implemented a community awareness strategy involving a partnership between various providers in the area and me to try to raise community awareness of the need for pedestrians to be alert and vigilant when crossing busy roads. I have witnessed accidents in that area. People standing at the traffic lights or just up from the traffic lights see that the traffic is gridlocked, they think they can dart across the road without waiting for the lights to change, but when they try they are hit. I was standing beside an older woman who did just that. She was hit right in front of me

and she was killed. Something else that makes my blood curdle is the site of young mothers with children doing exactly same thing. Not only are they setting a bad example for their children, they are also putting the lives of their children at risk. I and a group of people will try to come up with some ideas to address that issue in the short term.

This Government has provided no money to solve traffic problems in my electorate. To add insult to injury, this Government, through the Minister for Roads, located a speed camera at the bottom of Spit Hill. The honourable member for Wakehurst, whose constituents use that route, and I made that suggestion to the Government. However, we stressed that the speed camera should be located on the bend of Spit Hill—the most dangerous stretch of road where accidents and fatalities are occurring. The Government rejected our advice and the advice of the police and located the speed cameras at the base of Spit Hill. Those speed cameras are now the largest revenue raisers in the State. However, not one cent of that money has been ploughed back into the electorate to provide local solutions. To add further insult to injury, the Government installed a second camera in the location suggested earlier by the honourable member for Wakehurst and me. Quite apart from the road infrastructure that is required in my electorate, the last time any real money was spent in that area was under a Coalition government.

I am proud of the fact that all the schools in my electorate were upgraded by a Coalition government. We now have a totally new school building for North Sydney Girls High School. There was a major upgrade of Mosman High School. Bradfield College was opened. A new school hall was built at Neutral Bay Primary School—a hall that I was proud to open. It was a particularly honourable moment for me because 10 years earlier I had been a member of the parents and citizens association of that school and I worked with a group of parents who were agitating for the construction of that school hall. I am now a member of the council of two of my local public primary schools—Neutral Bay Primary School and Beauty Point Primary School. I love Neutral Bay Primary School; I do not seem to be able to leave it. That school needs money spent on infrastructure. Beauty Point Primary School, a small but fabulous school with a caring community, does not have one permanent building. Every building at that school is portable, and the youngest of those buildings is 50 years old. I am working with that community to ensure that the school is upgraded.

North Sydney Boys High School, a fantastic school in a heritage building, has sought funding from the State Government to upgrade its school hall. I have attended presentation days at that school every year since I have been the member for North Shore. Visitors sit in the hall with air from fans weakly wafting across them while everyone on the stage swelters. The Government has not provided a cent towards upgrading that school hall. The parent body and the community have raised the money that has been required so far. I assure honourable members that this is a high priority for me. Labor members in this House often say how fantastic this Government is and how it is always allocating money for projects in their electorates. This Government provides money only for its own members. It does not provide money for all the people in this State, unlike the former Coalition Government.

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [10.37 p.m.]: I will put a different light on this budget from that of the honourable member for North Shore, who just delivered a carping, whingeing contribution. She has such a grim outlook on life that one could be forgiven for believing that her staple diet was laxatives. The Carr Government's eighth budget is built on a great Labor tradition. It is the Government's seventh consecutive surplus budget, an achievement unmatched by any government in any jurisdiction in Australia. This Government, which has in place a major capital works program, will be rebuilding the State's infrastructure. The Treasurer has got the large economic picture right—a hallmark of all great Labor governments.

When one thinks of great Premiers one thinks of McKell, McGirr, Renshaw, Cahill and Wran. We can now add Bob Carr to that list. Michael Egan, as Treasurer, has played a vital role in the development of this State. Most Treasurers, because of their occupations and positions, are not the most popular people around. They spend a lot of time saying no. I am sure that the Deputy-Speaker and the honourable member for Cabramatta, the Parliamentary Secretary who is in the Chamber, would agree that the Treasurer has said no to many of their projects. But we do have some wins, and the projects that are subsequently funded are of value to our electorates.

New South Wales has been able to hold on to its triple-A rating, with a big tick from the rating agency. The Carr Government, during its term of office, reduced State debt by \$7 million, which means that each year an additional \$1.6 billion is available to spend on other services. The Government has a sensible fiscal strategy of paying as we go. A classic example of that was its funding of the Olympic Games. Billions of dollars were spent on the Olympic Games. This State now has first-class playing facilities, transport and other infrastructure that was developed as part of the Olympics. All this was achieved without the State being one red cent in debt, and that is tremendous.

It has also been in stark contrast to the previous Coalition Government. The honourable member for North Shore whinged about what this Government was not doing but she forgot to mention the problems with the Spit Road in the seven years that the Coalition was in government. For some extraordinary reason the money was not spent. The Coalition had a very irresponsible fiscal policy. Like some demented credit card holder it could not control its spending. It spent, spent, spent and it racked up a great deficit. It has taken Treasurer Michael Egan to correct that and leave us in excellent financial shape.

Over the next four years public works spending will be a record \$26 million. About \$6.4 million of that will sustain some 96,000 jobs. That underpins how important a Government capital works program is. We are rebuilding the State infrastructure, updating our schools, hospitals, roads, et cetera, and also having a big impact on employment. We are going to see improved schools, hospitals, roads and transport. Contrary to the comments made on health by the honourable member for North Shore, I can and will point to great capital works that are going on in my electorate and which add to the work that has been done over the past seven years.

It is interesting that the Opposition opposes the Sydney Harbour Bridge toll increase of 80¢. That money is being spent in Western Sydney and in country New South Wales. National Party members of the Coalition secretly agree with it but they are not prepared to stand up to the Liberal Party and say that it was a wise decision by this Government. The Government policy on road spending is in direct contrast to the Federal Government, which last year had the much-trumpeted Roads to Recovery program, a four-year campaign to invest \$1.6 billion in rural roads. There was some thought that the Coalition Government is now listening to the bush, but in the first budget after that, the money was gone. So all those councils out there have had their expectations dashed after one year of a four-year program. That has caused consternation. Evans Shire Council and Rylstone Shire Council in my area had their works team set up to do this four-year project and they are now faced with getting rid of staff because the Federal Government has welshed on that deal.

The health expenditure in this budget is a record \$8.9 billion with \$35 million going into new health initiatives. There is \$2 billion on new or refurbished health facilities in the 2002-2003 budget. I highlight a couple of the important health expenditure items in my electorate. There is the continuing funding of the million dollars for the Blayney District Hospital and health service, known as multi purpose services [MPS], and that project is well under way. The extra \$8.2 million is going to rebuild Blayney District Hospital and add extra services. The Rylstone area hospital is being redeveloped in the same way as an MPS; it is a \$3 million project. Both these projects have been developed with community consultation. Those communities are looking forward with some excitement to having upgraded and enhanced health facilities in their town. There are some 34 of these projects around the State and, the shadow spokesman for health ought to get out around country New South Wales and find out how impressed rural people are by the new facilities they are getting.

Also there is \$500,000 to radiology equipment for Bathurst Base Hospital. This picture archival communications system is the latest technology and allows doctors to have instant access 24 hours a day seven days a week to all their radiology records. It means that they can transmit this to the teaching hospitals in Sydney and get diagnoses from specialists. It is defeating that tyranny of distance for health in country areas. That is a wonderful initiative by the Minister for Health. There is also \$400,000 for additional services for people in my electorate with chronic conditions relating to cancer, cardiovascular disease and respiratory illness. Half a million dollars for additional elective surgery procedures in ophthalmology, ear nose and throat and orthopaedics. Bathurst will be getting its fair share of that.

Bathurst electorate has done well in health and I am pleased that there is additional money to go with the half a million dollars that was in last year's budget to continue the planning process for a new program of clinical services for the Mid Western Area Health Service and also the planning processes for the capital needs and particularly for Bathurst Base Hospital. The community there have developed an excellent program in conjunction with the Minister and I am confident that towards the end of this year that planning money will put us in a position to announce what is needed in capital expenditure for a new base hospital for Bathurst. Health has done very well out of this budget right across New South Wales, but particularly in my electorate.

Roads are always a very important feature of budgets and particularly for those living in rural and country New South Wales. The Bathurst electorate has picked up \$42 million in this budget and I thank the Minister for that. Some of the projects are ongoing projects to do with the redevelopment of the Great Western Highway. There is \$3 million of a \$6 million project for the extension of a dual carriageway to Lake Lyell Road at South Bowenfels, just near Lithgow. A \$28 million project has got its first planning funding in this budget of some \$200,000 is the Great Western Highway River Lett Hill realignment. This is a very steep area coming up

out of the Hartley Valley approaching Lithgow from Katoomba, an area where there have been many truck accidents over the years and finally this Government is doing something about that project.

Another project that is under way is a \$14 million project for the realignment of the Mid Western Highway at Kings Plains between Blayney and Bathurst. We have been agitating for this project for a number of years. It is a real black spot on that highway, a highway that is taking increasing numbers of large trucks out of the largest inland container terminal in Australia at Blayney. That project is very welcome. Also allocated for that road is \$2.5 million of which \$50,000 will be spent on planning this year for a replacement bridge at Spring Creek Bridge at Evans Plains. There is further money for the Castlereagh Highway which runs between Lithgow and Mudgee and reconstruction between Lidsdale and Coxs River. This \$14.5 million project adds to the \$10 million that was spent in the last year, and the allocation this year for the project is another \$3.2 million.

Provision is made for realignment of the Castlereagh Highway north of Capertee. A very important initiative by the Government—although I will give John Anderson his due for following up Minister Scully in providing funding, and I notice the member for Hawkesbury sitting opposite will obviously have some interest in this—is the proposal for the Bells Line of Road investigations to see how that can be upgraded as an alternate crossing from the Blue Mountains so that we can have a quicker access to the West. That excellent project is long overdue and I am pleased that the National Party at the Federal level is joining with the State Labor Government.

Let us have the study. Already the sceptics out there are saying it cannot be done, that it will ruin the environment. All that is rubbish. What we need to do is have a proper engineering study to lay it out and just show how that can work. I congratulate Minister Carl Scully for having the courage to show the lead on that. An allocation of \$15 million of the road budget is being made on upgrading and reconstruction. There is \$4 million for pavement reconstruction to the Great Western Highway and half a million dollars for the Mitchell Highway pavement reconstruction. The Hampton to Oberon Road pavement \$500,000 reconstruction is very important because heavy transports are coming out of the important timber industry in Oberon and that means that the road needs extended maintenance.

An allocation of \$4 million has been provided for Great Western Highway pavement reconstruction and \$500,000 has been provided for Mitchell Highway pavement reconstruction. An allocation of \$500,000 has been provided for the Hampton to Oberon road pavement reconstruction, which is welcome because heavy transport generated by the Oberon timber industry means that the road needs continued maintenance. Funding has also been provided to widen the Castlereagh Highway-Jews Creek Bridge. An allocation of \$1.2 million has been provided to strengthen the Goulburn to Bathurst road Abercrombie Creek Bridge. Whilst this is an impressive list, not all the projects in my electorate have been funded in this budget. I am still seeking funding for the sealing of 44 kilometres of road from Oberon to Goulburn.

The sealing of 40 kilometres of road along the Bylong Valley Way would provide an all-weather road from the central west right through to the upper Hunter, and connect the New England Highway and the Pacific Highway. In the lead-up to the last Federal election the Federal Minister for Transport, John Anderson, as part of an election stunt, offered \$3 million for the establishment of a bridge on basically a four-wheel-drive track between Orange and Mudgee. However, the Minister neglected to say that a further \$40 million of roadworks needed to be done on either side of the bridge. In any event, the people did not fall for that. The funding would be much better spent on the Bylong Valley Way.

I am particularly pleased that town fire brigade services have been continually upgraded. Over the last couple of years brand new stations have been established in Portland and Kelso and new fire tenders have been provided for Kandos and Blayney. The current budget provides funding for new fire tenders at Lithgow and Lithgow west. Those tenders cost well over \$250,000 each. The continued upgrading of fire services in the town brigades is very welcome.

Once again, there is record expenditure for Rural Fire Services. Because of the terrain of the Bathurst electorate, it is subject to very dangerous bushfires. The hundreds of volunteers who man the 60 or 70 Rural Fire Services brigades in the electorate are receiving additional services. I am pleased that State Forests has allocated one of its new supertankers to Black Springs. Just in the last week the department completed the construction of a helipad at Bathurst. During fire seasons the department's squirrel helicopter, with its 600-litre bucket, will be based there. As an intervention measure, the helicopter will help facilitate the very important firefighting services.

One of the important government organisations in Bathurst is Land and Property Information New South Wales, which was one of the first State Government departments to be decentralised, about 30 years ago.

It was formerly known as the Central Mapping Authority, and it comes under the portfolio of the Minister for Information Technology. I am pleased that this budget provides for capital expenditure of \$5.8 million for the department, \$2.3 million of which is for a new high-tech printing press. Paul Haysom and his team worked very hard to put up a submission and convince Treasury that the new printing press was needed. It provides state-of-the-art technology and gives the department one of the best printing facilities in the State. The organisation does a lot of work for State Government departments and also for the private sector.

An allocation of \$1 million has been provided for a "common land cadastre", and a further \$2.5 million has been provided for spatial maintenance and delivery system replacement. The funding ensures that Land and Property Information now has high-tech equipment. Last year the Government provided funding for the establishment of a supercomputer at the department, ensuring that Bathurst is able to provide and develop a technology centre. I am pleased that Mary Macintosh, the council, and the computer division of Charles Sturt University have become involved in the project. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

This injection of capital funding ensures that Land and Property Information is able to provide a very important technology centre for Bathurst and rural New South Wales. The new technology provides the opportunity to attract software companies to the area, so they can use the supercomputer and all the other facilities and, in conjunction with the university, the Bathurst TAFE college. It is pleasing that the Treasurer's eighth budget has delivered a surplus. There has been responsible spending across a range of government facilities. The money has been targeted to areas where it is needed, and the people of New South Wales will see their infrastructure being continually upgraded. Whilst the Government is allocating record amounts of capital funding, it is also reducing its indebtedness and making more cash available to finance much-needed projects. I commend the budget to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Stoner.

MINING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (HEALTH AND SAFETY) BILL

Second Reading

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Woods [10.56 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The second reading speech is the same as the speech delivered in the Legislative Council by the Minister for Mineral Resources on 18 June 2002. I refer honourable members to pages 3 to 5 of the Legislative Council *Hansard* proof for that day. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Stoner.

The House adjourned at 10.59 p.m.
