

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 9 May 2006

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Joseph Aquilina) took the chair at 2.15 p.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

Mr SPEAKER: I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora nation and their elders. We thank them for their custodianship of this land.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr SPEAKER: I welcome to the Speaker's Gallery members of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, led by Mr Jaroslav Kubera, chairman of the committee. The committee is accompanied by Mr Karel Pazourek, the Ambassador the Czech Republic in Australia, and Mr Jaroslav Dolecek, Consul-General to the Czech Republic.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT

Mr SPEAKER: I report the following message from His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor:

J. J. SPIGELMAN
LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Office of the Governor
Sydney 2000

The Honourable James Jacob Spigelman, Chief Justice of New South Wales, Lieutenant-Governor of the State of New South Wales, has the honour to inform the Legislative Assembly that, consequent on the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir, being absent from the State, he has this day assumed the administration of the Government of the State.

8 May 2006

BEACONSFIELD GOLDMINE RESCUE

Ministerial Statement

Mr MORRIS IEMMA (Lakemba—Premier, Minister for State Development, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.22 p.m.]: Today the bell at the Beaconsfield Uniting Church rang out for the first time in the 61 years since the end of World War II. It rang, of course, to tell the town and the whole world that Brant Webb and Todd Russell's 14-day ordeal had ended and that these two heroes had come home at last. If you did not have a tear in your eye this morning, you must have a heart made of stone, because the pride and dignity of these men was one of the most moving sights any of us will ever see. The nation has been united in hope and perseverance. Those hopes were vindicated beyond all expectations this morning, because not only did Todd and Brant emerge alive, they came out looking strong and healthy—a miracle within the miracle. Of course, our elation and relief is tempered by the sombre knowledge that the funeral of their fallen mate, Larry Knight, is happening as I speak. Our thoughts and prayers remain with Mr Knight's family, who have shown such dignity and patience throughout this terrible ordeal.

As the Tasmanian people start seeking reasons for the disaster, the people of New South Wales can be proud of the contribution of our emergency services and our mining industry to helping our friends in distress. The contribution from the New South Wales Ambulance Service has been particularly distinguished. Six staff from the service went to Tasmania last Tuesday: four paramedics, a retrieval specialist and a team leader. Ambulance officers Paul Featherstone, Dominic Morgan, Peter Croft and Tony Bishenden were actively involved in working with Tasmanian paramedics in clinical and medical support. Dr Richard Morris worked with senior Tasmanian medical officers, and was underground this morning and completed a medical assessment of the two survivors. The New South Wales team was led by Superintendent Keith Williams, who provided logistical and operational support to our team whilst also providing advice to our Tasmanian colleagues.

In terms of mine rescue our assistance began on 27 April, when the Tasmanian authorities requested a New South Wales Fire Brigades entry link camera to assist in the search for the trapped miners. A New South

Wales urban search and rescue expert, Andrew Haag, was flown to Launceston that afternoon with the equipment. Mr Haag provided technical advice to the Tasmania Fire Service urban search and rescue team, which itself had been trained by New South Wales Fire Brigades and the New South Wales mines rescue team. A number of other New South Wales mine rescue experts were also dispatched to Tasmania, and I would like to pay tribute to them: Captain Peter Hatswell, training co-ordinator of Lithgow Mines Rescue; Ken Enwright, manager of Hunter Valley Mines Rescue; Russell Giles, manager of Lithgow Mines Rescue; Seamus Devlin, manager of Newcastle Mines Rescue; and David Connell, training co-ordinator at Wollongong Mines Rescue. The role of these experts cannot be underestimated.

The union movement is fundamental to mine safety in Australia. In New South Wales our rescue organisation, Mines Rescue, is jointly owned by the mining and energy division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union [CFMEU] and the New South Wales Minerals Council. The Lang Labor Government established the first mines rescue stations in 1926 and our eight decades of expertise, jointly developed by unions and industry, helped save Todd and Brant this week. The union-based training provided to Todd and Brant also helps to explain why these two men played such a crucial role in their own survival. In fact, Todd Russell undertook mines rescue training at Lithgow under the auspices of Mines Rescue, which, as I said, is co-owned by the CFMEU. In March this year Todd returned to Lithgow to undertake further specialised training in the use of vertical ropes.

Our focus today is on celebrating the freedom of these men and in honouring the memory of Larry Knight. But let us not forget, amid the rejoicing, that these are union men through and through. The lessons of this tragedy are not only about Australian resilience and mateship; they are about how that resilience and mateship find their expression in the right of free citizens to associate industrially and shape the safety of their own workplaces, especially mines, where the dangers are so costly to life and limb.

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse—Leader of the Opposition) [2.27 p.m.]: We all join the Premier in acknowledging the extraordinary events of the past two weeks. At the outset I acknowledge not only the people of Beaconsfield but everyone involved in the company and the Australian Workers Union, who showed leadership and support for the families of the miners throughout this harrowing experience. This extraordinary event has been everyone's worst nightmare, effectively being buried alive. When hope was almost lost more than a week ago, the rescue of these miners captured the minds of people not only in Tasmania and New South Wales but right around Australia and, indeed, internationally. As we have seen today, the miners walking to safety has been headline news on just about every major newscast on the planet. That is obviously well deserved because it happens rarely. Mining is inherently dangerous, and this event is a reminder of the need to be ever vigilant in regard to safety.

The Premier acknowledged the emergency services not only from Tasmania but also from New South Wales. As we have seen time and again, when there is a disaster in New South Wales the emergency services respond heroically, professionally, and very quickly. We have seen it again in Tasmania. That response is a reminder of the resilience of the human spirit. As we watched the two miners, Brant Webb and Todd Russell, walk out of the minehead this morning, I do not think anyone could believe that they came straight up the mine shaft and walked straight out to greet the crowd. I think we all expected that after two weeks underground they would emerge from the mine either on stretchers or with considerable assistance. The fact that they emerged without assistance shows not only how strong they are as individuals but also the strength of the human spirit.

The rescue also shows the strength of the community spirit in Australia—not only at Beaconsfield in Tasmania but around the nation; during the past two weeks we all felt we were working with the miners to rescue these two men. I fully endorse the words of the Premier. I acknowledge that the two miners are safely home, but I also acknowledge that the funeral of Larry Knight is taking place at this moment. Our thoughts and prayers are very much with his family.

I should say that our thoughts and prayers are also with the family of Sophie Delezio, who is still in a critical condition in hospital. I do not think anyone in New South Wales could believe the sequence of events that put her back into hospital on Friday. Our thoughts are very much with her family.

COMMISSIONS TO ADMINISTER THE PLEDGE OF LOYALTY

Mr SPEAKER: I report the receipt of commissions authorising the Speaker and the Deputy-Speaker to be persons before whom any member of the Legislative Assembly may take the pledge of loyalty to Australia and to the people of New South Wales.

MINISTRY

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In the absence of the Minister for Planning, Minister for Redfern Waterloo, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer), the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship will answer questions on his behalf. In the absence of the Minister for Housing, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health), who is ill, the Minister for Energy, Minister for Ports and Waterways, and Minister Assisting the Treasurer on Business and Economic Regulatory Reform will answer questions on her behalf.

VARIATIONS OF PAYMENTS ESTIMATES AND APPROPRIATIONS 2005-06

Mr John Watkins tabled variations of the payments estimates and appropriations for 2005-06 under section 24 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983 for the Environmental Trust and Department of Environment and Conservation, flowing from the abolition of the former Waste Fund.

Mr John Watkins tabled variations of the payments estimates and appropriations for 2005-06 under section 24 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, flowing from the transfer of funding from the Heritage Office to the Department of Planning.

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Report

Mr Kerry Hickey tabled the report entitled "Report to the Minister for Local Government under Section 14 (2) of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 in relation to Burwood Local Council", dated April 2006.

PUBLIC BODIES REVIEW COMMITTEE

Reports

The Clerk announced the receipt of the following reports:

Report No. 4/53, entitled "Study of Other Jurisdictions 2-16 July 2005", dated May 2006
Report No. 5/53, entitled "Study of Other Jurisdictions May 2005", dated May 2006

Ordered to be printed.

PETITIONS

Bus Service 311

Petition praying that the Government urgently improve bus service 311 to make it more frequent and more reliable, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

East Richmond Railway Station Carpark Access

Petition requesting cancellation of fines imposed on passengers using the East Richmond railway station level crossing to gain access to the carpark, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

Bus Route 215

Petition requesting that bus route 215 be relocated from Canoelands Interchange to Maroota public School bus bay, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

CountryLink Rail Services

Petition opposing the abolition of CountryLink rail services and their replacement with bus services in rural and regional New South Wales, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

Pensioner Travel Voucher Booking Fee

Petition requesting the removal of the \$10 booking fee on pensioner travel vouchers, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

Cronulla Electorate Policing

Petition requesting reinstatement of police numbers at Miranda police station and maintenance of a strong visible police presence in Cronulla, received from **Mr Malcolm Kerr**.

Mount Austin Public School

Petition requesting funding for the provision of a school assembly hall at Mount Austin Public School, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Wagga Wagga Electorate Schools Airconditioning

Petition requesting the installation of airconditioning in all learning spaces in public schools in the Wagga Wagga electorate, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Colo High School Airconditioning

Petition requesting the installation of airconditioning in all classrooms and the library of Colo High School, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

Caritas Mental Health Service

Petition requesting the redevelopment and expansion of the Caritas mental health service, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Breast Screening Funding

Petition requesting funding for breast screening to allow access for women aged 40 to 79 years, received from **Michael Richardson**.

Singleton Hospital Land Sale

Petition opposing the proposed sale of Singleton Hospital land, received from **Mr George Souris**.

Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme

Petition objecting to the criteria for country cancer patients to qualify for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

Newstan-Awaba Mines Extension Project

Petition opposing Centennial Coal Company Limited's proposal to extend the Newstan-Awaba mines for open-cut mining, received from **Mr Jeff Hunter**.

East Darling Harbour Project

Petition requesting design changes to the East Darling Harbour project to minimise the effects of excessive high rise adjacent to the waterfront, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Community-based Preschools

Petition requesting increased funding to community-based preschools to enable them to maintain parity with preschools administered by the Department of Education and Training, received from **Mr George Souris**.

Recreational Fishing

Petitions opposing any restrictions on recreational fishing in the mid North Coast waters, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

Crown Land Leases

Petition requesting the withdrawal of changes to the rental structure of Crown land leases, particularly enclosed road permits, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

CSR Quarry, Hornsby

Petition requesting a public inquiry into Hornsby Shire Council's acquisition of CSR Quarry in Hornsby, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

The Rock/Bullenbong Road Upgrade

Petition requesting funding for the immediate upgrade of The Rock/Bullenbong Road, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Old Northern and New Line Roads Strategic Route Development Study

Petition requesting funding for implementation of the Old Northern and New Line roads strategic route development study, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

Department of Housing Graffiti Removal

Petition requesting that the Department of Housing co-ordinate the removal within 24 hours of graffiti on its property being reported to the department's contact centre and monitor known graffiti hot spots to ensure immediate removal, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Report**

Mr Allan Shearan, as Chairman, tabled the report entitled "Legislation Review Digest No. 6 of 2006", dated 9 May 2006, together with minute extracts regarding "Legislation Review Digest No. 4 of 2006" and "Legislation Review Digest No. 5 of 2006".

Report ordered to be printed.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

BURWOOD COUNCIL INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION REPORT

Mr PETER DEBNAM: My question is directed to the Minister for Local Government. Given that the Minister received an Independent Commission Against Corruption report into alleged corruption at Burwood Council about six months ago, has he or anyone in his office received any representations or had any discussions with the Hon. Eddie Obeid or any of his associates or staff about the Minister withholding the report until today and, if not, why did the Minister delay it until today?

Mr KERRY HICKEY: No. The report went through its normal channels. When the report entered my office I sent it off to the department for consideration and comment. That has happened and I have tabled the report today.

Mr Andrew Stoner: You didn't answer the question. What about the meetings?

Mr KERRY HICKEY: No.

COMMONWEALTH GRANTS COMMISSION GOODS AND SERVICES TAX ALLOCATIONS

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. What is the latest information on community concerns about the Commonwealth allocation of GST revenues to the States?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Tonight Peter Costello will get an opportunity to do two things: First, ease the financial pressure on families and, second, start the process to end the cheating of New South Wales in the GST rip-off.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Murrumbidgee will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: There are huge glaring gaps in the budget largesse that Mr Costello needs to fill tonight—tax cuts for low-income earners, easing the move from welfare to work; relief from soaring petrol prices; start returning the GST to the families of New South Wales; and, importantly, ensuring that the budget does not provide for more interest rate rises. Above and beyond all of that, the Federal Treasurer needs to address the systemic discrimination that lies at the very heart of the Federal budget process—the outrageous GST rip-off, the \$3 billion every year taken out of New South Wales and sent to the other States such as Queensland and Western Australia, which are benefiting from a minerals boom. That \$3 billion would immediately provide tax relief for families in New South Wales and also go towards investing in improved services and infrastructure. That is the challenge before the Commonwealth Treasurer. It has been the challenge also for the Opposition, a challenge it has refused to accept time and again.

[Interruption]

The honourable member for Murrumbidgee has said we should go and see the Grants Commission, a statement that is backed up by the Leader of The Nationals. Even the Grants Commission and the Governor of the Reserve Bank agree the whole process is flawed and illogical. The legislation, which establishes this cheating, provides that the recommendations have to be signed off by the Federal Treasurer. There is no point going to see the Grants Commission because it accepts that it is illogical. There is no point in saying that it makes the determination because it makes a recommendation and the Federal legislation stipulates that the Federal Treasurer has the power to end the maldistribution of the GST dollars. Tonight the Federal Treasurer has the chance to start the process that will end the cheating that has seen New South Wales taxpayers robbed of \$3 billion per annum.

In stark contrast, last week the New South Wales Government announced the abolition of an additional five taxes to continue taking pressure off New South Wales families, such as home buyers. We announced the abolition of stamp duty for first home buyers, abolition of the vendor duty, and indexation of the threshold bringing that land tax threshold indexation forward. These are just some of the measures we have taken to ease the financial pressure on the New South Wales families. Tonight as I have outlined already, Mr Costello will get the chance to start taking financial pressure off families in four areas: interest rates, petrol prices, the GST rip-off and ensuring that low-income tax earners get relief.

SCHOOL ZONE FLASHING LIGHTS TRIAL

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the biggest killer of children is pedestrian injuries involving a motor vehicle and that the Premier still has not released the results of the flashing lights trial, which commenced in February 2003, how many more tragedies will it take before he matches the Liberal-National Coalition's policy to install flashing lights in school zones across the State?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Leader of The Nationals referred to the study and the trial undertaken on the flashing lights. He knows the Government has that matter under consideration. With respect to other matters regarding road safety, the Minister for Roads has already announced a task force to investigate road safety issues. He would be aware also that the terms of reference have been extended to include elderly drivers.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Lachlan will come to order. The honourable member for Baulkham Hills will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Minister for Roads has announced the task force; he has expanded the terms of reference to include elderly drivers. In relation to the flashing lights trial, the Government has the matters relating to that study under consideration.

PARENTS AND CITIZENS JOINT FUNDING PROGRAM

Mr JEFF HUNTER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Can the Minister update the House on the benefits of the parents and citizens joint funding program for New South Wales schools?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I thank the honourable member for Lake Macquarie for his ongoing interest in the role of parents and citizens associations in schools. We all know that these associations play a

very important role in school community life. Through their tireless work and their commitment to a strong public education system, parents and citizens associations are at the centre of school life. Of course, we are all familiar with the fact that a key aspect of what they do is fundraising for their school. The Government recognises the hard work that is done on this front through the joint funding program.

The Government is working in partnership with parents and citizen associations to deliver projects that school communities want. This program has helped deliver hundreds of minor capital projects in recent years with things like covered outdoor learning areas, playground upgrades, air cooling and toilet and electrical upgrades. These projects can make a real difference to the staff and students at a school. Since 1995 the Government has allocated over \$45 million to the joint funding program for capital works projects in schools. Together the Government and school communities have contributed close to \$89 million for projects that have provided enhanced teaching and learning environments in New South Wales government schools.

I am pleased to inform the House that the Government's joint funding program for the 2005-06 year alone has now reached \$6.4 million. That is facilitating more than \$13.8 million in building projects in schools in total. The latest round of funding provides over \$2.9 million to new projects in 114 schools across the State. This is in addition to the 162 schools that have already received funding this year. The Government is investing record amounts in education and training in New South Wales. We are investing in the future of the State.

The joint funding program is part of the Government's \$711 million investment in upgrading and maintaining the State's public schools and TAFE colleges in 2005-06. The Government's infrastructure investment provides for the construction of new schools, school upgrades, information technology infrastructure and work such as security fencing and airconditioning. The joint funding program complements these major projects. Under the joint funding program funds raised by parents and citizens organisations are put towards the project that is nominated by the school community and the fundraising efforts of parents are generally matched dollar-for-dollar by the Government.

The Government will contribute up to \$300,000 for any one joint funding project. We recognise and reward the hard work of school communities and the joint funding program is proof of that. The approach of the Government is clear. It is about working in tandem with school communities. Unlike the Opposition, we believe that we need to work with school communities on their priorities and not act like the Opposition, where it goes into school communities and makes claims about infrastructure that cannot be substantiated, and, justifiably, local parents and citizens associations get upset that their school's reputation is tarnished by the Opposition for its own political purposes.

[Interruption]

Well might the Opposition cackle.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The Auditor-General highlighted a \$116 million backlog that you have not addressed. Why don't you fix that instead of carrying on with this inane stupidity?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst well knows the standing orders. As he is the shadow Minister for Education and Training, I suggest he study them. There is no point of order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Everyone recognises the justifiable role that local members play in representing the needs of their schools but that was quite different with respect to Blacktown Boys High School when the honourable member for Wakehurst and others made claims that the State Government had neglected the school and made claims about rat-infested classrooms, mouldy carpets and broken furniture. Given that \$600,000 had been spent on the school since 2000 on maintenance and minor capital works, the parents and citizen association, not surprisingly, took issue with this public undermining of their school in the local media. In a letter from the parents and citizens association the president said:

We are frequently at the school attending to P and C matters, school functions, panel duties, and helping out anywhere as required. So we are quite familiar with the grounds, buildings, teachers and students, and are indignant at the allegations contained in the article.

But it is not the first time. When the Opposition called Bonnet Bay Public School "shabby" the school's parents and citizens vice-president said, "Far from being shabby, the school is the jewel in the crown of Sutherland shire". I am sure the local member will remember when the Opposition criticised Port Macquarie Public School last year; the school's principal said that most of the problems had been fixed, and had been fixed 18 months

before. The same negativity was addressed at Leeton High School. Once again, the principal disagreed with the Opposition, saying that the school has been well looked after. It is not good enough for political purposes to trash the reputation of good local high schools to undermine public education for cheap political point scoring.

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order: While the Minister is talking about these schools, what is she doing about new toilets at Crestwood Public School?

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

SEAFORTH PEDESTRIAN CROSSING SAFETY

Mr DAVID BARR: My question without notice is addressed to the Premier. Following the tragic events on the pedestrian crossing at Seaforth last Friday, what is the Government doing to make that pedestrian crossing, and pedestrian crossings across the State, safer?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I thank the honourable member for Manly for his interest in this matter. The accident to which the honourable member referred was terrible, and our thoughts and prayers are with Sophie Delezio and her family during this time. This is a fighting family, and they are doing their best for Sophie, as are the staff at the Children's Hospital at Randwick. This girl has entered the hearts of every person in this country. Sophie sustained the following injuries as a result of the accident: multiple broken ribs, damage to the right lung as a result of the trauma, bruising to her skull, a broken chin, a broken collarbone; and small bones in her back have been broken but have not caused any significant damage, fortunately. Sophie's bravery is immeasurable. A thorough investigation of the accident is underway.

In relation to the other matters referred to by the honourable member for Manly, I can provide the following advice. In January of this year the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] raised the installation of traffic signals at the site with representatives of Manly Council and local police. Further, I am advised by the RTA that in July last year council wrote to the RTA suggesting zigzag line markings to improve driver awareness of the crossing. I am advised that the RTA installed the zigzag line markings and pedestrian crossing signs. Further, I am advised that in January this year the RTA and council officers agreed that the zebra crossing should be replaced with traffic lights, including signalised pedestrian crossings at all three legs of the Frenchs Forest Road and Baringa Avenue intersection. The traffic signals and required works are being designed.

I am advised that the Minister for Roads has directed the RTA to accelerate these plans, as well as the immediate installation of other interim measures. I am further advised that, first, on Monday 8 May the school zone around Seaforth Public School was extended by about 200 metres so that it now includes the pedestrian crossing and the nearby intersection of Frenchs Forest Road and Baringa Avenue. Second, "40km/h school zone" signs are now in place where the 40 kilometres per hour school zone starts to the west of the Baringa Avenue intersection. Third, additional reminder "40km/h school zone" signs have been installed within the school zone. Fourth, larger "pedestrian ahead" signs have been installed on the approach to the pedestrian crossing. Fifth, portable variable message signs reading "pedestrian crossing ahead" are in place, and the final measure is that a new "40km/h" marking has been painted on the road surface.

As the honourable member would be aware, the current approach speed outside school hours is 60 kilometres per hour. This speed limit is also being reviewed. It is expected that the extension of the school zone will be a temporary measure until traffic lights are installed at the intersection. The RTA advises that the traffic signals will be installed by the end of October—much sooner if there are no delays caused by factors such as the relocation of utilities. The Minister has directed the RTA to audit the safety of pedestrian crossings over all four-lane roads. We cannot lose sight of the important fact that pedestrians have the right to feel safe when crossing the road at a pedestrian crossing. All drivers have an obligation to ensure that they are at their most alert when approaching a pedestrian crossing.

I reiterate: Our thoughts and prayers are with little Sophie that she makes a speedy recovery. I also place on record our recognition of, tribute to and acknowledgement of the staff, from those who responded to the accident, the ambulance staff, those in the CareFlight helicopter, the doctors, the nurses and the other health care professionals at the hospital who have yet again done an outstanding job for Sophie. It is a tribute they richly deserve for their professionalism, skills and dedication to saving lives day in and day out. No doubt their quick action and professionalism saved Sophie's life following the accident. Of course, Sophie is still in a critical but stable condition, and, as I said, our thoughts and prayers are with her.

GRAFFITI

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN: My question without notice is directed to the Attorney General. What is the latest information on government efforts to further crack down on graffiti?

Mr BOB DEBUS: Graffiti is more than just annoying; it is a crime. It angers the community and it makes people feel unsafe in public places. It also costs tens of millions of dollars to clean up each year. That money comes from our taxes and council rates, and causes financial hardship to private property owners in many instances. The Government has demonstrated a strong and continuous commitment to reducing graffiti vandalism. We have established a graffiti hotline to detect graffiti. We have given local government new powers to remove—

Mr Michael Richardson: Point of order: The Minister is misleading the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The honourable member for The Hills should be aware that a claim that the Minister is misleading the House cannot be the basis of a point of order.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for The Hills will stop his unintelligible babble and resume his seat.

Mr BOB DEBUS: Before that entirely incomprehensible outburst I was saying that the Government has given local government extra powers to remove publicly visible graffiti. That is true. We have assisted local government to acquire machinery—graffiti blasters—to remove graffiti. To confront the problem at its source the Government has banned the sale of spray paint to people under 18 and has announced its intention to restrict the sale of spray cans to adults. The Government has also built up measures to deter offenders, including increased penalties, new offences and a range of crime prevention measures to divert young people from graffiti. That work has paid off. From the year 2000 the number of recorded graffiti incidents began to fall. But the most recent statistics from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research indicate that we must be vigilant in ensuring the incidence of graffiti does not again take hold.

This vigilance led to today's announcement of the next critical phase in our attack on graffiti. At the forefront of this attack is the formation of a new anti-graffiti action team and the establishment of the Rail Vandalism Task Force. The Premier announced the action team this morning, along with a \$500,000 contribution from RailCorp to NSW Police to continue the Operation Chalk crackdown on graffiti vandals who operate within the rail network.

Between October 2005 and May 2006 Operation Chalk resulted in 300 charges being laid, and others are pending. The success of this operation has led to the formation of a Rail Vandalism Task Force to specifically deal with the threat of graffiti on our rail network. This task force will commence operations next Monday and will perform high-level investigative work and pursue offenders. That is to say, this task force will target particular offenders and pursue them. I am sure all honourable members will wish the officers of that task force well in their work.

I believe there is an analogy with the task force called Tronto, which consists of police and fire officers and which has been especially successful in recent years in pursuing arsonists by identifying a pattern of offending and then pursuing the person who is offending. In that predictable fashion task force Tronto has been able to arrest and secure the conviction of a substantial number of the kinds of people who some years ago were systematically lighting bushfires in this State.

While the rail vandalism task force will target the specific threat to our rail corridors, the Government's anti-graffiti action team will set up the co-ordination of existing graffiti actions and drive the new measures throughout the State. The action team will bring together experts from NSW Police, transport authorities, local government, justice agencies, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Housing and the Local Government and Shires Associations together with key utilities and industry representatives.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 137, which says that questions cannot anticipate discussion upon an order of the day or another matter. In question 5663 in today's *Questions and Answers* paper the Minister has indicated to the honourable member for Mount Druitt that since

2004 cases of graffiti have gone up by 50 per cent, including in the Mount Druitt Local Area Command. The Minister is covering an answer to a question in which he has admitted that graffiti is out of control in this State and that this Government is failing.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have consulted the Clerk on this matter. There is no point of order in relation to the issue raised by the honourable member.

Mr BOB DEBUS: That is the second incomprehensible interjection on this question. The Attorney General's Department has already conducted research to determine what works to prevent and reduce graffiti. Evidence shows that the most successful policy to tackle the problem demands a co-ordinated approach that, first, reduces the opportunities and motivations for vandalism; second, improves the level of graffiti removal management at the local level; and, third, increases the enforcement of sanctions that makes offenders take responsibility for the damage they have done. Based upon that evidence, the new strategy will include the following initiatives: Increased use of community service orders to make offenders repair the damage caused by graffiti vandalism; identifying graffiti hot spots and stepping up enforcement and surveillance, especially through closed-circuit television; advising business and property owners about minimising their properties' vulnerability to graffiti; and monitoring new restrictions on access to spray paint in retail premises and sale of spray paint to adults.

Of course, the Government has sensibly acknowledged that any concerted attack on graffiti requires the co-operation and hard work of local government. Local government is a welcome and necessary member of the action team. In coming weeks and months assistance will be provided to councils to develop graffiti management plans that target high graffiti environments. We will develop schemes to accredit community groups and volunteers to remove graffiti in local government areas. That is to say, we will develop schemes that allow private citizens to be accredited by local government to assist in the removal of graffiti at the local level. Although the worth of this initiative is yet to be proved, I set some store in it. I think we will have considerable success in attracting local citizens to respond locally if they are given proper accreditation and protection from liability.

I trust that local government, through the Local Government and Shires Associations, will bring dedication to such a process. It is further evidence that the Government will take whatever action it can to deal with visual pollution and property damage. While State and local governments have a history of working together to reduce graffiti vandalism, it is time also for the Federal Government to take some specific steps of its own. While we have worked hard to ban or restrict the sale of spray paint in stores, we know from our investigations—

[Interruption]

The honourable member for The Hills seems to be asserting that he alone thought of the policy of restricting spray paint sales.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for The Hills will come to order.

Mr BOB DEBUS: The point is that dedicated graffiti "artists"—

Mr Andrew Stoner: They are not artists; they are thugs.

Mr BOB DEBUS: In inverted commas.

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

Mr BOB DEBUS: The point is that those who do graffiti are increasingly buying their spray cans over the Internet. Apparently the most desirable paint comes from Germany. We need to take action to ensure that the free market of the Internet does not undermine our best efforts, and only the Federal Government can do something about that. I call on the Federal Government to work with us to take the steps needed to make sure that public and private property has a reduced chance of being subject to graffiti attacks. I commend this request and the measures announced today to the House.

ROAD SAFETY

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: My question is directed to the Chairman of the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety. Given the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] will take five months to install traffic lights on Frenchs Forest Road at the crossing where Sophie Delezio was injured and given that the 12-month flashing lights trial at public schools has been ongoing since 2003, does he share community concerns about the RTA's failure to rigorously pursue road safety initiatives?

Mr PAUL GIBSON: I thank the honourable member for South Coast for her important question, which is about an issue that should not be politicised. The statistics show that for the past 50 years more than 500 people have died each and every year on this State's roads. That is our tsunami, our earthquake. Both sides of the House should do all we can to reduce the number of fatalities on the roads. The honourable member asked about road safety initiatives. Back in the early 1980s, 1,300 to 1,400 people were killed on the roads in New South Wales each year. Today, with 1.5 million more cars on the road, that figure has been reduced to about 500 fatalities. That is 500 too many, but the road safety initiatives are working.

The honourable member referred to the flashing lights trial at public schools. The Government is looking at that trial and I am certain that the Minister for Roads will make a decision very soon about that initiative. I have no doubt that the installation of flashing lights at school crossings will be the answer to preventing accidents around our schools. There is another solution, another silver bullet for road safety. That silver bullet is intelligent speed adaptation [ISA]. At a cost of under \$300, this technology can be installed in motor vehicles during production. The speed limit on every street in every locality—whether it is a suburb or a city—throughout the whole nation is entered into a computer, sent off to a satellite and picked up by the ISA. If this system were operating in Australia today—and I am told it will be operative in Europe by about 2020—1,000 lives would be saved in 12 months. No-one would be able to speed through a school zone. We would not need flashing lights or any of the other initiatives.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: What is the RTA doing?

Mr PAUL GIBSON: The safety initiatives do not apply only to the RTA. The project I am talking about would have to be applied right across the nation. This Government has travelled overseas three years in a row to look at trials of this system and we have seen its great benefits. Let me tell you, I have begged, borrowed and nearly stolen to get the Federal Government to go and have a look at this system. Up until today they have not done so.

HMAS CANBERRA ARTIFICIAL REEF

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: My question without notice is to the Minister for the Central Coast. What is the latest information on the Government's efforts to secure the HMAS *Canberra* as a tourist dive wreck for New South Wales?

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: I thank the honourable member for Peats for her continued interest in this project on the Central Coast, which has been an ongoing issue for nearly four years. On 16 March this year the Iemma Government submitted an expression of interest to acquire the recently decommissioned HMAS *Canberra* in order to create an artificial reef off the New South Wales coastline. I can advise the House that New South Wales will strengthen its bid for the HMAS *Canberra* by committing \$250,000 to help with the creation of the artificial reef. That is a quarter of a million dollars to ensure this ship and its boost to regional tourism and small business is delivered to our State. This is just another way the Iemma Government is getting regional New South Wales moving, by injecting millions into the New South Wales economy each and every year. This project has the potential to generate millions of dollars for the New South Wales economy, providing the Commonwealth accepts the State's offer. I am advised that today the Premier has written to the Commonwealth Minister for Defence, Brendan Nelson, to advise him of our strengthened offer.

[Interruption]

The Opposition members, especially the honourable member for Gosford, should get on the phone to Canberra today and support our bid for this boat to go the Central Coast. The honourable member for Gosford should support this good idea for the Central Coast.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Gosford will resist the temptation to interject.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: I am advised that other States, including Victoria, have also expressed an interest in acquiring HMAS *Canberra*. I am also advised that no other State has included any funding in its bid. Leaving aside our natural advantages, this commitment of funds must surely place New South Wales as the absolute frontrunner. It makes perfect sense for HMAS *Canberra* to come to New South Wales. Retired naval ships have previously been dedicated to South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland. The Queensland Government was also given significant financial assistance to acquire HMAS *Brisbane* in 2003. It is only fair that New South Wales is given the same deal. New South Wales has the highest coastal population of any location in Australia.

In the Greater Metropolitan Region, there are 4 million people in Sydney, 300,000 on the Central Coast and 500,000 in the Hunter. The location of the vessel in this area on the New South Wales coast would have an enormous catchment just from local population. However, the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation has advised me that up to 80 per cent of all inbound tourism for Australia comes via Sydney. So this project has enormous potential to attract overseas tourists as well. Tourism is a vital industry to regions outside Sydney, including the Central Coast. The good news for the Central Coast is that I can confirm that it is the intention of the New South Wales Government, should our bid be accepted by the Federal Government, that the HMAS *Canberra* artificial reef will be located off Terrigal on the New South Wales Central Coast.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Hooray for Terrigal.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: Stand up and support us, Chris! Terrigal is the perfect and natural location for the HMAS *Canberra* artificial reef. Only one hour from Sydney, the Central Coast is the perfect location for Sydneysiders and people from the Hunter to visit and for interstate and international tourists. Of course, the natural advantages of Terrigal speak for themselves—a perfect climate and a perfect underwater location for HMAS *Canberra*. Small businesses and tourism operators across the Central Coast and Sydney will benefit from the world-class tourist attraction of an artificial reef. That means more local jobs, in addition to the hundreds created by the Government through relocating WorkCover and the Police Assistance Line to the Central Coast. More than 700 jobs have been relocated to the Central Coast. Today in the public gallery are two ex-servicemen who were a part of the commissioning crew that took delivery of HMAS *Canberra* in Seattle—Mr Ken Jones and Mr Brian Wilson. Brian Wilson was the commissioning Captain of HMAS *Canberra* and Ken Jones is a Central Coast resident and a former coxswain who served as part of the first crew aboard HMAS *Canberra*.

Mr SPEAKER: The Chair acknowledges the presence of Brian Wilson and Ken Jones in the gallery.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: These two men served as part of the first crew aboard HMAS *Canberra*. Both these men have a strong personal interest in the project and would like to see the ship return to the familiar waters of New South Wales. I would also like to acknowledge Sue Dengate and members of the Central Coast Artificial Reef project [CARP] for their role in working with the Iemma Government to acquire the ship for our region. They have made a long and sustained commitment to getting an artificial reef off the Central Coast. This is great news for the group. New South Wales has the best location, the best climate and the infrastructure to support the reef. I trust that the Federal Government, following today's announcement of funding—and through the lobbying of the honourable member for Gosford—will agree with Mr Jones and Mr Wilson and deliver HMAS *Canberra* to New South Wales and the Central Coast.

LAND TAX

Mr ANDREW FRASER: I direct my question to the Minister Assisting the Treasurer on Business and Economic Regulatory Reform.

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

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Can the Minister advise what steps he will take to exempt small business proprietors operating from home being charged land tax on their principal place of residence?

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: Obviously that is a question for the Treasurer. Any question about taxation issues should be directed to the Treasurer.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Opposition will come to order.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: At the moment I am working busily on the red tape review. The New South Wales Government is working very hard to reduce the costs of doing business in this State. That is why New South Wales continues to enjoy the investment boom currently taking place in this State.

FIRST HOME PLUS SCHEME

Ms TANYA GADIEL: I direct my question to the Minister for Western Sydney. What is the latest information on first home buyers assistance, especially in Western Sydney?

Ms DIANE BEAMER: The Iemma Government is helping thousands of young families to take their first and most important step toward owning and living in their own home. Under the New South Wales Government's First Home Plus scheme first home owners are entitled to full transfer duty and mortgage duty exemptions for homes valued up to \$500,000 and partial exemption for homes valued up to \$600,000, and land purchasers are entitled to full stamp duty exemptions on land valued up to \$300,000 and partial exemption for land valued up to \$450,000. The First Home Plus grant is in addition to the \$7,000 First Home Owners Scheme grant. For our young families that is a saving of up to \$26,731 off the cost of their first home.

This Government has helped hundreds of thousands of first home buyers to realise their dreams. That is no more evident than in Western Sydney. From July 2000 to April this year, the First Home Plus scheme helped more than 200,000 first home buyers in New South Wales, and 9 out of 10 first home buyers in 2004-05 did not pay any stamp duty on property purchases. The total benefit to first home buyers since July 2000 from grants and stamp duty savings is more than \$3.1 billion. The Iemma Government is helping young home buyers across New South Wales, including more than 2,500 first home owners in Wagga Wagga and 4,500 in Gosford and Wyong. In March 2004, 7.7 per cent of all new home loans were for first home buyers. In February this year that figure had risen to 15.1 per cent. That is a doubling in two years of the first home buyers' share of the home loan pie.

As they say, Western Sydney is where it's at—where young families are getting the great assistance they need. Of the top 20 areas for first home owners assistance by postcode, 17 are in Western Sydney. In Liverpool more than 46,000 first home buyers have been helped; in Campbelltown more than 3,600 have been helped; in Blacktown more than 3,000 have been helped; in Mount Druitt more than 3,000 have been helped; and in Penrith more than 2,000 have been helped. Baulkham Hills, Kellyville, Quakers Hill, Parramatta and Werrington are all in the top 20 areas in which thousands of families now own their own home. That represents more than \$1 billion of assistance.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will come to order.

Ms DIANE BEAMER: The Iemma Government has spent \$195 million so far this year. This Government is providing real help to people where it is needed most by investing in Western Sydney's future. More than 80,000 young families have been given a helping hand to own their home in Western Sydney. The Government invested \$1.7 billion in infrastructure in Western Sydney in the last budget so that 400,000 new homes will be built and 230,000 new jobs will be created over the next 20 years. This help is on top of the 11 tax cuts the Hon. Morris Iemma has introduced since becoming Premier. This Government is listening to Western Sydney. Next week it will hold a community cabinet meeting in Penrith to hear the views of the people of the west and north-west.

What do we hear from the Opposition about Western Sydney? Nothing. In a speech earlier this year in Parramatta the Leader of the Opposition said nothing about Western Sydney. How often did he mention Western Sydney in a speech just last Friday about delivering infrastructure? He said not a word about the area. The Opposition has only one policy for Western Sydney; that is, to slash 9,000 public sector jobs. I hope to hear more about Western Sydney in tonight's Federal budget. I believe we will hear more in that speech than we will from the Bellevue Hill bunker, but I will not hold my breath.

Questions without notice concluded.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Wednesday 10 May 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Bill: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow for the resumption of the adjourned debate and progress through all stages at this sitting of the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Commonwealth Grants Commission Goods and Services Tax Allocations

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [2.28 p.m.]: This motion is of the utmost urgency and deserves precedence because nothing is more important or relevant to the lives of the hardworking families of New South Wales than pressure on their budgets. That is why I am proud to stand with Premier Iemma and all honourable members of this Government in defence of our way of life. The Iemma Government's commitment to ending the great GST rip-off is unwavering. The Commonwealth cannot justify this scam, which sees New South Wales taxpayers losing \$2 billion of their taxes every year. The Iemma Government is standing up for New South Wales while the Leader of the Opposition and his Nationals lap-dogs are content to let this scandal continue. Today I urge the Opposition to cut the weasel words and to support this motion in its entirety. That means the Viscount for Vaocluse—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: I draw your attention to the standing orders, which provide for members to be referred to by their correct title.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order. I direct the attention of the honourable member for Heathcote to the standing orders in relation to members being referred to by their correct titles.

Mr PAUL McLEAY: New South Wales families face a grim reality—

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: Point of order: I object to being referred to as a lap-dog. I ask you to request the honourable member for Heathcote to retract that statement.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Although I do not condone or support the use of such terminology, we are used to it in the cut and thrust of debate in this place. Had the honourable member for Heathcote used that term to refer to a specific member and had the member taken objection, I would have asked him to withdraw the comment. I caution the honourable member for Heathcote in relation to the use of such language. However, to ask him to withdraw a general comment of that nature would not be in keeping with the conventions of the House.

Mr PAUL McLEAY: The Leader of the Opposition is out of touch with the issues facing families in New South Wales. He will not put New South Wales families first by demanding that Peter Costello act on the inflationary and interest rate pressures and the spiralling petrol costs that are placing extreme pressure on family budgets. The New South Wales Opposition should stand condemned for its failure to stand up for New South Wales families and should give this motion the precedence it deserves.

Police Legislative Protection

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaocluse—Leader of the Opposition) [3.31 p.m.]: That is one of the most pathetic performances I have seen in this House. We really must ask who wrote the honourable member for Heathcote's speech. I assume it was Mark Arbib. Clearly, the important motion to be debated urgently today is mine, and that is:

That this House notes with extreme concern the Iemma Government's continued failure to strengthen legislation to protect front-line police.

The motion is urgent because of events in the past 48 hours. Senior Constable Glenn McEnallay was murdered in April 2002, a little over four years ago. Unfortunately, yesterday we heard about a decision that effectively turned one of his killers free. That decision betrayed every single police officer in New South Wales and every single member of the community. If Labor members were working for their communities they would vote to

debate my motion, because clearly it is the most urgent. The motion is about protecting police, who are putting their lives on the line every single day on our behalf. They are putting their lives on the line in Government members' electorates; indeed, they are so doing right across the State.

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

Mr PETER DEBNAM: It is very important that this House shows its total bipartisan support for police and its total disgust with the judiciary's decision in this case. It goes to an issue, to use the judge's terminology, of joint criminal enterprise. It is absurd to suggest that the person who was driving the car from which the offender—supposedly the only one who murdered Glenn McEnallay—jumped out and shot the police officer at point-blank range through the windscreen, and the other people in the car, who had access to guns themselves and who were involved in a criminal enterprise with the shooter, were not involved in the murder. As I made the point to the Government yesterday, the most urgent thing the Government needs to do is clear up the legislation on this issue. If judges can find a loophole to let this murderous criminal off, clearly we need to close that loophole as a matter of urgency.

Just after Glenn McEnallay's murder four years ago the Opposition introduced a bill to implement life sentences for people who murder police officers. It is worth remembering the response of the Premier at the time. We wrote to the Premier and called for bipartisan support for our bill, which would amend the Crimes Act to provide for a compulsory life sentence, without parole, for any person convicted of murdering a New South Wales police officer. On 9 April the Premier responded to a question from the Leader of the Opposition as follows:

I want those who murder police officers to go to gaol forever. I want those who murder police officers to go to the dingiest, darkest cell that exists in a prison system.

Later he said:

Any one of us today would say that the person or people responsible for the callous murder of Glenn McEnallay should be put away for life.

What did the then Premier do about it? Nothing. We saw the result yesterday, when the driver of that car, who was clearly involved in the murder of Glenn McEnallay, had his conviction quashed. Labor members, including the honourable member for Maitland, who is in the Chamber, may seek to defend that decision, but it is an absolute betrayal of the police of New South Wales. Indeed, it is an absolute betrayal of the people of the electorate of Maitland. I condemn every Labor member who today votes against this motion.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Maroubra will come to order.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The honourable member for Maroubra has already betrayed police by not standing up for his electorate when it was trashed by Middle Eastern thugs on 11 December last year. He has simply defended this Government and its close ties to those Middle Eastern thugs. He should be ashamed of himself!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will comply with the standing orders.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: This motion is about helping police, and that is exactly what the Government has not done for 11 years. I acknowledge that the honourable member for Maroubra has been a member of this place for only a few months, but in those few months he has failed to stand up for his community, to defend them against thugs coming in and trashing the community.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: I ask you to request the Leader of the Opposition to address the reason why the motion is urgent. His abusing people, being rude and calling people names has nothing to do with the motion he has put forward.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Canterbury makes a valid point. I call the Leader of the Opposition to return to the leave of the motion.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: These people are clearly lap-dogs of Mark Arbib. That is the problem—*[Time expired.]*

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 51

Ms Allan	Mr Gibson	Mr Pearce
Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mrs Perry
Ms Andrews	Ms Hay	Mr Price
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hickey	Ms Saliba
Ms Beamer	Mr Hunter	Mr Scully
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Stewart
Ms Burney	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Chaytor	Mr McLeay	Mr Watkins
Mr Collier	Ms Meagher	Mr West
Mr Corrigan	Ms Megarrity	Mr Whan
Mr Crittenden	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Mr Daley	Mr Morris	
Ms D'Amore	Mr Newell	
Mr Debus	Ms Nori	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Ashton
Mr Gaudry	Mrs Paluzzano	Mr Martin

Noes, 36

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton
Mr Armstrong	Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner
Mr Barr	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Ms Berejiklian	Mr McTaggart	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Tink
Mr Debnam	Ms Moore	Mr Torbay
Mr Draper	Mr Oakeshott	Mr J. H. Turner
Mrs Fardell	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Page	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Pair

Miss Burton

Mr Slack-Smith

Question resolved in the affirmative.

COMMONWEALTH GRANTS COMMISSION GOODS AND SERVICES TAX ALLOCATIONS

Urgent Motion

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.46 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Premier for his commitment to delivering a fair deal for New South Wales families under the GST;
- (2) calls on the Federal Treasurer to deliver a fair deal for New South Wales families by reducing inflationary and interest rate pressures, giving New South Wales its fair share of GST revenue; and
- (3) condemns the Opposition for its continuing failure to stand up for New South Wales families.

The GST rip-off is part of a systemic betrayal perpetrated against the people of New South Wales by the Howard Government. The Federal Government takes more money from the Australian public than any other government in our history. Peter Costello takes tens of billions more a year in revenue than when the Federal Government came to office in 1996. He has taken more than \$13 billion in fuel excise from motorists and returned less than \$2 billion of it in roads funding. New South Wales has copped a reduction in Commonwealth general purpose funding of 7 per cent since 2001-02, while other States have had an increase of 8 per cent.

The Commonwealth Grants Commission has reduced funding to New South Wales every year since 2001-02. That includes a \$345 million reduction in 2004-05. And, of course, as everyone in the House knows, he grabbed \$3 billion of GST money from New South Wales. The GST effectively charges the public twice for the cost of grants to the States. Peter Costello kept the money he used to allocate to us in State grants and he hit the public a second time for payments to States by forcing everyone to pay GST. Since the Commonwealth Government decided to help itself to the former State grants it does no more for us than provide a mail box for GST revenue. It sends back a bit less each year than the citizens of New South Wales pay in GST and then washes its hands of essential responsibilities such as health and disability care. It is part of John Howard's ongoing plan to shift the burden of responsibility for services to the States while fattening up his own budget for election time.

The tax rip-off allows Howard and Costello to create an illusion of economic management, while their budget surpluses hide a legacy of missed opportunity and stalled reform. The most urgent reform we need is to align each level of government's responsibilities with a stable income base to support those community needs. The report by Associate Professor Warren of the University of New South Wales Australia Taxation Studies Program found Australia has a very high level of vertical fiscal imbalance compared with comparable federations. In Australia, States' own-source revenues account for only 40 per cent of their own-purpose outlays, which is a lower proportion than any other federation studied.

That means that the big government revenues—income taxes—go to Peter Costello while the biggest responsibilities—Health, Education, Transport and Community Services—lie with the States. We cannot plan properly for a growing State without a sustainable revenue base. The national Government has a responsibility to ensure the Federation is built on stable financial foundations. Each level of government must have income streams commensurate with their responsibilities. The community expects us to provide hospitals, schools, roads, transport and law enforcement, yet all their tax dollars are being gathered up by Peter Costello.

As the Liberals in Canberra throw money at marginal seats all over the country, the services we really need here—hospitals, in particular—are manacled to a miserly funding base. Peter Costello has failed to use his good fortune to make the hard decisions that will secure our ongoing prosperity. The OECD, the Reserve Bank and the Productivity Commission have all raised concerns that our national capacity to generate wealth is being compromised by stagnant productivity. Saul Eslake noted in that fine journal the *Newcastle Herald* that some of the current surplus should have been used to soften the introduction of necessary economic reforms. The most important overlooked issue is ageing. Costello's own Intergeneration Report highlighted the issue, but he has yet to take decisive action. The Hawke and Keating governments had the foresight to address superannuation long before most OECD countries came to address their looming pension crises.

Labor deserves credit for introducing compulsory superannuation but more needs to be done, and it is now the turn of Howard and Costello to step up. Most experts believe retirement funds are not sufficient at the current mandatory rates, which means a dignified retirement is not guaranteed and it means future taxpayers will be funding the gap. The Federal Government has coasted on the resources boom without looking at the long-term security of this country. No solutions have been crafted to the coming demographic shift to an older population. Skills development remains unaddressed. Competition and productivity reforms have stalled. The failure of the Howard Government to address the child-care needs of working families means parents do not have the support to resume work when they are ready but are forced to cross their fingers in the hope of obtaining child care. The OECD has identified low levels of female participation as a challenge for our long-term productivity. We should support mothers so that when they are ready to go back to work access to child care is not holding them back.

In my view a major challenge for the Government in increasing fertility and national productivity is to provide family-friendly workplaces. The Australian Institute of Family Studies and other researchers have shown that work and family balance is a major contributor to the choice families make about the number of children they have. John Howard claims that he is an economic reformer. He claims that he cares about economic growth and that he cares about families. And yet his sole contribution to reform is an ideologically

driven attack on Australian workers that will undermine the ability of Australian workers to put their families first. John Howard's plan for families is to put more of them on the family payments drip. Every year John Howard and Peter Costello take more tax from average families than they need and then force those families to line up and hold out their hand to get some of it back. We have a Federal taxation system that puts everybody on welfare. The family payments system is a disgrace.

The Liberal Party talks about low taxes, small government and dignity for average families but it has created a massive bureaucracy devoted to making all families welfare dependent. If pre-budget reports can be believed, it appears this cycle of dependency is to be expanded. If the Federal Government is not willing to address the big demographic and intergenerational issues, New South Wales will have to face these challenges alone. That is why this House should congratulate Morris Iemma on leading the fight for a fairer share of GST and why this House is calling on Peter Costello to deliver that fairer share. It is why the Opposition deserves condemnation for refusing to fight this continuing neglect. When it comes to caring for families in New South Wales and standing up for them, the Iemma Labor Government is to be congratulated.

The people of my electorate demand that we get a fairer share and I have a responsibility to ask for bipartisan support in this House. I communicate important information to my constituents by way of a newsletter and in a recent edition I attached a petition which, when returned, contained hundreds of signatures expressing outrage at New South Wales not receiving its fair share of the GST, including commentary such as, "Good on you, Paul", "Keep up the hard work, Paul", "Get our fair share", "You're doing a good job and we need to continue it". I become enthused when I realise that the general community understands the GST rip-off and says, "Enough is enough." They demand I come into this place and argue for our fair share. They know we are being ripped off to the tune of \$3 billion a year. They know it is not fair that we pay \$13 billion and only receive \$10 billion back. They know that the Federal Government has gross surpluses of \$17 billion, if it is truly reported, of their money—the voters' money—and that it is not Peter Costello's money for his pork-barrelling or party policies. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove) [3.56 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out paragraph (3) with a view to inserting instead:

- (3) congratulates the Federal Government on its continued support of Australian families; and
- (4) calls upon the Federal Leader of the Opposition to explain how he, if in government, would divide GST revenue among the States.

The people of New South Wales are sick and tired of the litany of excuses that this Government uses to avoid its responsibilities. Labor has been in government for 11 years and it should not try to push its problems off onto someone else. It must accept responsibility for New South Wales. The GST is determined by an independent commission, the Commonwealth Grants Commission. New South Wales was happy to take advantage of this procedure when it delivered a bonus. Former Premier Carr wrote in his diary how pleased he was. He could not get there soon enough to sign on. He pushed people out of the way so that he could sign first. Labor has been in government long enough to start taking responsibility for its own budget. It is an historic fact that interest rates rise under Labor governments because Labor governments spend more than they collect; they drive budgets into deficit. It sounds like New South Wales again and we are waiting to see that. Although we have fiscal responsibility federally, New South Wales is out of control and will end up in a black hole. If interest rates rise—

Ms Linda Burney: They did rise.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: —to what they were under Labor governments, it would add an additional \$960 a month to the average mortgage of an average Australian family. The honourable member for Canterbury should not talk about fiscal responsibility because she is out of her depth. When it comes to fiscal responsibility, it is our jungle and we know it well.

Ms Linda Burney: Interest rates just rose.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! The honourable member for Canterbury will cease interjecting. She can make a contribution to the debate at the appropriate time. The honourable member for Lane Cove has the call.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Members opposite should go and talk to their Labor mates in Queensland—the bludgers who are bludging off us—who signed up for this. The Leader of the Opposition said,

"I'll go and talk to Beattie. Come with me, we'll go and beat them up. Let's get them to agree to our fair share of the GST." The trouble is that all the State Labor governments signed on, and it is up to the Labor States to change this, but the mates of members opposite will not. The Leader of the Opposition offered to lead a delegation to Queensland, but Labor has not taken up that offer. Honourable members should not forget that it was Bob Carr who signed up to this.

Even if we did have the extra money, no-one in New South Wales believes that this Government would have the ability to spend it wisely. I will refer shortly to the level of waste and mismanagement by the Government over the past 11 years. Every budget over the past 11 years has included new taxes. In every budget we get new taxes and charges, secrets taxes that are slipped in, which hurt families in New South Wales. Stamp duty is another double taxation. The Government has agreed to look at stamp duty not at the 2007 election but perhaps the election after that. But who knows! It is off in the never-never.

What hurts families in this State the most is the extra \$100,000 worth of levies for a block of land. It costs families that want to buy the Australian dream and set themselves up \$100,000 in government levies simply to buy a block of land. I refer to what things were like in the past. Under Federal Labor, interest rates for the average family varied between 10.5 per cent and 17 per cent. Under the Federal Coalition the variation has been between 6 per cent and 8 per cent. That has been tested over a long period, and it is true. Let me inform the House of some wise words from the greatest Treasurer this country has ever seen. In March 2006 Peter Costello said:

GST is distributed between the states in accordance with horizontal fiscal equalisation under an agreement between all of the states signed in 1999 ... I might point out that when that was allocated at last year's conference not a word of objection was raised by New South Wales in relation to its entitlement. The then Treasurer, Mr Refshauge, did not object to that distribution. The formula of equalisation between the states administered by the Commonwealth Grants Commission has now been operating since 1933 ...

As everybody in Australia knows, GST was introduced to abolish a whole raft of other taxes—

a raft of taxes that have certainly not been abolished by the New South Wales Government—

Although each and every other state has now agreed to a timetable for the abolition of those other taxes, there is one state in Australia which refuses to name a timetable for the abolition of those other taxes.

Mr John Price: It was announced yesterday.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: It was announced yesterday. I am referring to a speech made on 29 March. Mr Costello further said:

There is one state of Australia which refuses to honour this agreement and which believes that it is entitled to keep in place the GST and the taxes which it was designed to replace.

It was only the Opposition's fight that forced the Government to provide a timetable, at long last, to help the people of New South Wales in respect of the Iemma Government's shameful additional taxes. Mr Costello further said:

The New South Wales Labor government has so mismanaged the state of New South Wales that it now wants to take GST revenue and keep the taxes that the GST was introduced to replace.

New South Wales has received \$45 billion in GST revenue, and it is forecast to receive \$11 billion in GST this financial year. At the most recent ministerial council meeting Michael Costa agreed to continue the horizontal fiscal equalisation. No New South Wales Treasurer has ever opposed the horizontal fiscal equalisation. New South Wales continues to receive the highest amount of GST. That raises the point that New South Wales used to be the powerhouse of the Australian economy. However, under this Government's mismanagement New South Wales has now become the millstone around the neck of the Australian economy. New South Wales is the slowest growing State with the highest taxes, and this has nothing to do with the GST. Mismanagement of the State's finances affect the families of New South Wales. New South Wales is well and truly the highest taxing State in the Commonwealth, and the third highest taxing State in the world. Where has the money gone? We would all like to know where the money has gone. I keep saying, " 'fess up. All is forgiven. Where has all the money gone?"

Mr Paul McLeay: It's gone down the Lane Cove tunnel.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: The honourable member for Heathcote rightly said that the money has gone down the black hole of the Lane Cove tunnel, never to be seen again. Some \$39.1 million has been wasted

on displaced public servants. That is a lot of money that could have been spent on helping families. The consultants' bill for 2003 and 2004 was \$195 million. Many families could have been helped in various ways with that money. The bill for government employees' stress leave in 2004 was \$51 million; \$189 million was wasted on doubtful debts, recoveries from criminals, under the Victims Compensation Fund; and costs associated with rebranding for Waste Services New South Wales amounted to \$372,000. That money could have been spent on providing a couple of child care centres or at least one decent child care centre. I have pages and pages of waste.

The budget blow-out for the land and projects information upgrade electronic data processing equipment was almost \$11 million. The North West bus transitway blow-out was \$144 million. This money was collected from the families of New South Wales. The Government mismanaged and wasted that money, which should have been spent on services to assist families in New South Wales and was not. The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority devaluation was \$113 million. Some \$348,000 for the Millennium train advertising—that is always a good one—was spent on fridge magnets that families cannot even put on their fridge. The blow-out in Railcorp executive salaries was \$12 million. The list goes on. We are talking about billions and billions of dollars.

Families in New South Wales can thank the Howard Federal Government for its assistance in lowering unemployment and fixing the economy by providing jobs and managing the Australian economy efficiently. With the continued growth in the Australian economy, unemployment is now at its lowest level since 1976. We are talking about millions of new jobs. The 750,000 children still living in jobless households are being addressed by the Federal Government. I put on the record the fine work done by the Leader of the Opposition in unveiling his \$362 million preschool policy, which will be good for the people of New South Wales.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [4.06 p.m.]: At the outset I indicate that the Government will not accept the amendment moved by the honourable member for Lane Cove. It is always entertaining to listen to him speak in the House. It is always great to listen to some of his fairytales. He said that families would pay an extra \$960 per month if interest rates were at the same level they were many, many years ago. Obviously, that will not happen again. The Keating Government brought into play changes to the interest rate rises and the basic economy that allowed the present Federal Government to proceed in the current direction. The honourable member for Lane Cove claimed that the horizontal fiscal equalisation has not been challenged by Treasurers. It has certainly been challenged by Treasurers and Premiers of the State, but it has been held to our heads like a gun. One can challenge all one likes but it gets one nowhere.

It is clear that the Commonwealth Government rips off New South Wales with the GST carve-up. Some commentators have tried to argue that this is a fair reallocation of wealth to needy States. Once again this is another Peter Costello lie. In 2006-07 New South Wales taxpayers will be cross-subsidising other States to the tune of \$2.5 billion. That is about \$960 from every household in the State or \$370 per person. About \$353 million of this \$2.5 billion difference will go directly to Queensland and about \$157 million will go straight to Western Australia. This GST rip-off is hurting families across south-western Sydney. Where is the New South Wales Opposition on this issue? I note that the honourable member for Lane Cove referred to the wise words "horizontal fiscal equalisation". The wise words I use are those of the Reserve Bank Governor, Ian Macfarlane, who said:

At the moment there doesn't seem to be a logical case for taking taxpayers money in NSW and Victoria and redistributing it to Western Australia and Queensland.

The Premier and the Treasurer have said many times that New South Wales has no problem funding the small States. We have no problem helping the genuinely needy. It is ridiculous to expect the people of New South Wales to subsidise Queensland or Western Australia, States that have huge windfalls from the resources boom. They do not require our money to pay for basic services. They use our money for luxury items and flights of fancy. In the 2005-06 budget the Western Australian Government spent \$16.2 million of our money on a herbarium. The Queenslanders spent \$168.7 million of our money to renovate the Queensland Cultural Centre. They spent another \$52 million of our money to build a new State archives facility, no doubt to house all the paperwork they generate spending our money. Queensland tops it off by using our money to subsidise petrol prices. We have the absurd situation of spending money to help our small businesses fight an unfair advantage obtained by Queenslanders. Queensland is using our money to force New South Wales families out of business, hitting us where it hurts most.

Over the past five years the New South Wales economy has achieved an average of 5.5 per cent growth per annum with spending on public health increasing by 7.5 per cent each year and spending on social security

and welfare increasing by 7.6 per cent each year. My electorate of Camden has been hurt by the double whammy of an increase in interest rates and higher petrol prices. First homebuyers and families battling with mortgages will be hit the hardest by the latest rise in interest rates. Those increased interest rates will add another \$64 per month to the average loan for a \$450,000 home in Camden South, where I live.

Petrol prices have also risen dramatically over the past few months. That spike in petrol costs is pushing inflation to the Federal Treasury's projected limits. Family budgets are certainly feeling the bite as petrol prices continue to rise, especially in Camden. It is clear that families need to dig deeper into their own budgets now that Peter Costello has allowed interest rates to go up by one-quarter of 1 per cent. The Federal Government and its buddy the New South Wales Opposition have proved they are no friends to average working families. Last week Bill Evans, chief economist to Westpac, said of interest rate rises:

It seems the case that Western Sydney is paying for the prosperity of Western Australia.

The New South Wales Government is calling upon Peter Costello to use some of this massive surplus to fund relief for motorists in south-west Sydney because every time motorists fill up at a bowser Peter Costello is there taking their hard-earned dollars off them in fuel excise. Last year Australian motorists paid \$14 billion in fuel tax excise to the Federal Government, yet Peter Costello returned under \$2 million for investment in major roads—and that is across the whole of Australia. It is absurd that the Federal Government set aside just 12 per cent of its petrol tax revenue for major roads under the Federal-State AusRoads agreement rather than the traditional 21 per cent. Now that interest rates have risen, the honourable member for Southern Highlands is notably silent. She should explain to landowners in Camden, Currans Hill and Narellan just how she intends to help them now that their interest rates have been jacked up by her Liberal colleague Peter Costello. The State Opposition should pick up the phone and demand that their Federal counterparts return some of its budget surplus windfall to families in south-west Sydney.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [4.11 p.m.]: At the outset I remind the House what a fantastic job the Federal Government has done and continues to do for all Australian families. I am looking forward to hearing the budget. I know that this year it will be special for Australian families. The Federal Coalition Government has given an unprecedented level of support to Australian families, so much so that with the continued growth in the Australian economy, unemployment is now at about 5.2 per cent, its lowest level since 1976. That speaks volumes of the amount of work that has been done by the Federal Government to make sure that our economy grows and that Australian workers have the jobs they need to support their families.

When the Federal Coalition first came to office in 1996 it inherited an \$11 billion budget black hole. No-one in this place should forget that. That incredible sum of money was owed by the Australian people. The Federal Government faced an extraordinarily uphill battle to pay off that huge debt. Should the unthinkable happen and there is a change in the Federal government, one has to wonder what will happen to the reserves in our coffers. We could imagine that there would be a lot of frivolous spending. All one has to do is look at the State Government and the waste that has been revealed since March 2003—waste such as Barrie Unsworth's consultancy and directors fees in 2003-04 of \$0.153 million.

I support the amendment moved by the honourable member for Lane Cove to this urgent motion. The amendment seeks to congratulate the Federal Government for its continued support of Australian families. It is no secret that the New South Wales Government is heading into its own black hole, its own crisis. The Federal Government had a mandate to introduce the GST. It took that question to the people at the election in October 1998 in an open and honest way. What has the State Government done? This year there is the proposed fire sale of Snowy Hydro, which has no mandate from the people. There is unprecedented uproar in my part of the world about the sale of this extraordinarily important Australian icon.

New tax after new tax has been introduced into this place—land tax, vendor tax, increases in stamp duty—hundreds of new taxes. Just before the election in 1995 Bob Carr said that there would be no new taxes. It was right up there with his commitment to halve hospital waiting lists, a note he signed "in blood" with the former Minister for Health, who has since retired from this place. The Government creates more and more financial burdens for New South Wales families. What are we getting? We are getting increased preschool fees and poorer State roads. I have raised in this place before Main Road 241, Main Road 52, Lachlan Valley Way and The Junction Road. They are issues of extreme concern in rural New South Wales.

Hospital beds are closed. Maternity wards and operating theatres are closed, such as occurred recently at Yass. Doctors are at their wits end because of a lack of resources and poor equipment. Recently nurses at Goulburn Base Hospital held a white elephant stall to get more equipment into the hospital. Pedestrian crossings

are poorly maintained. There are poor amenity units in State schools and reduced city and country rail services. Infrastructure, including railway lines, is falling apart. There are no water supplies and water levels are precarious in many rural centres, including Yass and Goulburn. There are water restrictions right across the State. Country timber bridge programs have been eliminated and country timber bridges are falling apart. People are locked out of national parks—their parks. The Government is not fit to hold office. [*Time expired.*]

Mr JOHN PRICE (Maitland) [4.16 p.m.]: The Federal budget will be brought down tonight. In his eleventh budget Treasurer Peter Costello gets a big chance to help New South Wales—to help our families, to help create jobs and to help in a number of other ways. Families in Dungog, Maitland, Lochinvar and Gresford in my electorate are all feeling the pinch because of the present Federal Government's policies. There is pressure on all fronts. My colleagues have raised higher petrol prices before in this place. There is the unfair distribution of the GST, which is what this motion is about. There is also the increase in interest rates, an increase the Howard Government promised would not happen under its administration. So where are we going?

The New South Wales Government is continuing to fight for a fairer share of GST revenue for New South Wales taxpayers. In the 2005-06 budget year New South Wales taxpayers will pay \$13 billion in GST and get back just \$10 billion. Under the current Commonwealth Grants Commission formula every man, woman and child in New South Wales, including those in areas I represent, spends a minimum of \$407 interstate. That is ridiculous, unfair and completely inequitable. It is one thing to subsidise smaller States with limited resources, but it makes no sense at all to subsidise larger, resource-rich States such as Western Australia and Queensland. That means the Queensland Government has enough money to buy a private railway company so that its government-funded Queensland railway operation is able to compete in New South Wales. It operates in the Hunter Valley hauling coal and repairing vehicles.

There is a tremendous amount of concern about a Queensland rail company operating on the New South Wales rail network, albeit now under the control, by lease, of the Australian Rail Track Corporation. Small business owners and wage earners in the electorate of Maitland do not need to send out a slice of their pay packets each week to families in other resource-rich States. Our national taxation system is a mess. The Commonwealth Government collects most of the money and the State governments provide most of the services. State governments collect about 16 per cent of tax revenue but deliver practically all of the services. The GST agreement was supposed to provide the States with a better deal than the old tax and grants system. It was supposed to give us a sustainable funding base to meet our growing commitments to the people of New South Wales. Every State and Territory was meant to be better off than they would have been had the previous arrangements continued.

Some States have certainly done better than others. Since the introduction of the GST the States, in total, have received \$4.3 billion above the amount they would have received under the old arrangements. But those gains have been unfairly and unevenly distributed. New South Wales has received less than 5 per cent of this growth, and that small gain was undercut by the Federal Government ripping out money from other funding streams. New South Wales has experienced a reduction in Commonwealth general purpose grants of about 7 per cent per person in real terms from 2001-02 to 2005-06. At the same time other States have received a total increase in funding of about 8 per cent per person in real terms. The Commonwealth dictates terms to us on more and more issues, but it provides less than we need to get the job done. The system does not work. The cost of health care, transport and education keeps rising. All of our general services are becoming more expensive to provide as time goes on and our revenue stream decreases.

We have an ageing population that requires increasing standards of care. The increase in that standard of care arises from the Commonwealth's requirements for the type of accommodation that we provide for our elderly. We cannot deal with those responsibilities if we retain an irrational disconnect between who raises the revenue—Canberra—and who spends it—the States. It is impossible to plan properly for the future needs of our State when we live hand to mouth, dependent on the capricious whims of Canberra. Let us be clear: there is no shortage of money. The current system is a John Howard stitch-up that guarantees we are overtaxed and underserved. Anyone who wants proof that we are overtaxed need look no further than the \$12 billion-plus surplus that will be announced tonight in the Federal budget. While Peter Costello keeps everyone guessing about who will get a tax cut, the real needs of the country go unfunded.

The Federal Government whacks up the cost of general practitioners, leaving us to support State hospital emergency departments, which pick up the slack. The Federal Government refuses to properly fund aged care and our hospitals again become the accommodation of last resort for the frail elderly. Demographic trends will only serve to intensify the existing pressures. In 2004 55,000 people in New South Wales turned 65. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that in 2012 80,000 people will turn 65. In other words, in the next 20 years the number of people in New South Wales aged 65 and over will increase from 900,000 to 1.6 million. These massive changes in our community's make-up will clearly add to the already existing demands to spend more on health, social security and welfare.

New South Wales's ability to absorb those spending pressures is being undermined by our lack of control over our budget revenues. The State's finances are already under enormous pressure due to the arcane, inflexible and biased operation of the Grants Commission, which I referred to earlier, and the reductions in New South Wales funding. Unless the Federal Government sits down with the States to address the impact of an ageing population on expenses and the impact of the current system of allocating the GST on revenues, we will face a major crisis. Peter Costello has to acknowledge the inequity of the current system, and the horizontal equalisation program that is currently in vogue must be amended. [*Time expired.*]

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.21 p.m.], in reply: I thank all honourable members who participated in the debate. At the outset I indicate that the Government will not agree to the amendment. I note that the Opposition sought only to delete paragraph (3) from the motion. Obviously, it agreed with paragraph (2), which calls on the Federal Treasurer to deliver a fair deal to New South Wales. Although that endorsement was not in words—

[*Quorum formed.*]

Thanks to the Hawke-Keating Government we live in an open economy. The honourable member for Burrinjuck talked about thanking John Howard. We should thank Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. In an open economy governments do not control the major levers of investment and growth. Our prosperity is due to the hard work and creativity of Australian workers and businesses. John Howard likes to take his cut of that prosperity through the tax system—and he is able to do that. But he is not a key investor in our future growth. Lord Roberts said that the Commonwealth Grants Commission decides each State's share of the GST. The Grants Commission makes recommendations. The power to decide how much each State gets lies with the Federal Treasurer. In 2004 the Grants Commission said in its review of State revenue-sharing relativities:

The Commission's advice on per capita relativities is considered by the Ministerial Council for Commonwealth-State Financial Relations. Following that consideration, the Australian Government Treasurer determines how the revenues are to be shared.

Section 9 of the GST legislation, A New Tax System (Commonwealth-State Financial Relations) Act 1999, states:

The relativities factor for a state for the GST year is the factor determined in writing by the Treasurer.

The relativities factor determines the share of the GST funding allocated to each State. The honourable member for Lane Cove talked about Labor budgets. I remind the Opposition that when the Carr Government came to office in 1995 the budget had been in deficit for six out of the seven years the State Coalition was in government. After lowering the deficit in its first year in office the Labor Government produced nine consecutive cash surpluses. That is our record. That is why we—not John Howard and Peter Costello—should be trusted with a fairer share of the GST. The people of New South Wales demand security in our budget and our financial planning so that we can provide better services. We should decide those matters, not the Federal Treasurer or the Prime Minister.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

Ms Allan	Ms Gadiel	Ms Nori
Mr Amery	Mr Gaudry	Mr Orkopoulos
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Mr Pearce
Mr Bartlett	Mr Greene	Mrs Perry
Ms Beamer	Ms Hay	Mr Price
Mr Black	Mr Hickey	Ms Saliba
Mr Brown	Mr Hunter	Mr Shearan
Ms Burney	Ms Judge	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Ms Keneally	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Chaytor	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Collier	Mr McBride	Mr Watkins
Mr Corrigan	Mr McLeay	Mr Whan
Mr Crittenden	Ms Meagher	Mr Yeadon
Mr Daley	Ms Megarrity	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	Mr Ashton
Mr Debus	Mr Morris	Mr Martin

Noes, 33

Mr Aplin	Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner
Mr Armstrong	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Ms Berejikian	Mr McTaggart	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Tink
Mr Draper	Ms Moore	Mr Torbay
Mrs Fardell	Mr Oakeshott	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Page	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire
Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton	

Pair

Miss Burton

Mr Slack-Smith

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Amendment negatived.****Motion agreed to.****AUSTRALIAN TECHNICAL COLLEGES****Matter of Public Importance**

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville—Minister for Education and Training) [4.40 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a matter of public importance: Australian technical colleges. The New South Wales Government is giving the highest priority to reducing industry skills shortages, particularly in traditional trades. According to the Australian Government's National Skill Shortage List, Australia has entrenched shortages in a range of trades, including the engineering, vehicle, electrical, construction and food trades. We are short of welders, panel beaters, plumbers, electricians, hairdressers and chefs. Skills shortages are one of the key threats to the strength of the New South Wales economy. The Iemma Government is investing in New South Wales's future and working on practical solutions to the skills shortages.

The skills shortages we are facing are a result of the Howard Government's mismanagement of the training system. This is seen in its handling of Australian technical colleges. In his address to the Coalition campaign launch in September 2004, Prime Minister John Howard promised the establishment of 24 Australian technical colleges at a cost of \$289 million over four years. He called them "the centrepiece of our drive to tackle skill shortages". The colleges were to be located in regions that were supported by a significant industry base but which were suffering skills shortages and high rates of youth unemployment. New South Wales was promised eight of these Australian technical colleges.

In his press release of 13 January 2005 Minister Hardgrave said, "The first colleges will open their doors in 2006 with all of them up and running by 2008." But so far the Federal Government has announced only five colleges, in Western Sydney, the Hunter, the Illawarra, Port Macquarie, and on the Central Coast. The rest—in Dubbo, Queanbeyan and Lismore-Ballina—have not yet been announced. These communities have been left without a technical college—a college that was promised to them more than two years ago.

New South Wales submitted applications to run Australian technical colleges in the regions of Lismore-Ballina, the Hunter, Dubbo, Queanbeyan and Western Sydney. The public school and TAFE submissions were strong bids with extensive industry and community support. The New South Wales applications proposed the delivery of the colleges within the existing governance and human resources framework of New South Wales public schools to ensure that public school students would be able to take up the opportunities they will offer.

The Commonwealth rejected all the New South Wales Government's bids on the basis of their inflexible, ideological industrial relations agenda. The Commonwealth placed greater priority on pursuing a

reduction in staffing conditions than on developing real training opportunities for school students. In fact, the Howard Government has rejected proposals from Ballina High School, which won the Australian National Training Authority Best VET in Schools Award in 2004, and from the North Coast Institute, which won the Australian National Training Authority Best Large Provider Award in 2004. These are national awards endorsed by the Federal Minister.

Even the honourable member for Ballina told the *Northern Star* newspaper on 27 March 2006, "The bid from Ballina High School and TAFE North Coast was excellent." Clearly, Australian technical colleges are not about resolving skills shortages; they are about the Commonwealth's narrow industrial relations agenda. In an article in the *Australian* on 25 April 2006 Minister Hardgrave is quoted as saying that "three colleges in New South Wales at Dubbo, Queanbeyan and Lismore-Ballina on the far north coast—could be scrapped within weeks" unless he received a clear indication of local support from the community. Minister Hardgrave said, "In the case of those communities—if they don't take up the offer we will have to look at other regions." I ask: Where are these other regions? Will they be in New South Wales, or will they be in other States and Territories? Why are the communities that were promised these three Australian technical colleges now being denied access to a college?

The honourable member for Ballina knows what I am talking about. He has written to me suggesting that the New South Wales Department of Education and Training modify its application for a technical college in Ballina. In his letter the honourable member for Ballina lists "sticking points in relation to the tender as far as the Federal Government is concerned". One of these sticking points, according to the honourable member for Ballina, is "the requirement for AWAs to apply to the proponents' teachers". What is the honourable member for Ballina suggesting? Is he suggesting that the New South Wales Government modify its application to offer schoolteachers Australian workplace agreements [AWAs]? This is not in line with the New South Wales Government's approach or policy. The approach of the shadow Minister for Education and Training exposes the shallow political opportunism of the Opposition. Members opposite claim to be the "friends of teachers". On 7 March 2006, during the debate on the Public Service Amendment Act, the honourable member for Gosford, the Coalition's spokesperson on industrial relations, said:

The Coalition in New South Wales is pledged to support the public servants of this State. We stand by them, believe in them and have confidence in them.

If Coalition members were friends of teachers, why would they want to employ them on Australian workplace agreements? The Iemma Government supports an industrial relations system that is equitable, accessible and fair. The honourable member for Ballina appears to be willing to risk the award conditions of teachers in his electorate and other parts of New South Wales. If the honourable member wants to find a solution to this issue and serve his constituents he should lobby his colleagues in the Federal Government to move away from their ideological industrial relations requirements for technical colleges. He should urge them to come back to the original proposals, which were strong and decent proposals, from the New South Wales Department of Education and Training. But I will not hold my breath, because I do not believe the State Opposition members are willing to stand up to their Federal counterparts. I do not believe they will stand up for New South Wales teachers and the needs of students.

This is not the first time the Federal Government has used bullying tactics in order to impose its industrial relations agenda. In 2005 New South Wales signed the Commonwealth-State training funding agreement. As part of the funding agreement the Federal Government required New South Wales to offer Australian workplace agreements or individual agreements to TAFE staff. It is regrettable that the Commonwealth used this agreement to pursue its ideological industrial relations agenda rather than focus on the skills shortages critically impacting on both the New South Wales and national economies. The Iemma Labor Government is committed to the New South Wales training system, and we are working hard to improve outcomes for our students and train the skilled workers our employers are crying out for. That is why the Department of Education and Training is currently in discussions with the relevant industry partners, employer groups and unions to encourage them to facilitate school-based apprenticeships.

Currently, more than 1,600 Higher School Certificate students are in school-based, part-time traineeships. In fact, one of the most successful national, school-based traineeships programs, T3, in the automotive industry, originated here in New South Wales. The latest figures show that overall 52,500 New South Wales school students enrolled in high-quality vocational programs as part of their Higher School Certificate in 2005. That represents more than one-third of all students in years 11 and 12 in New South Wales. These courses provide credit towards the Higher School Certificate whilst the student is at school, and then count towards a higher-level vocational education and training course, an apprenticeship, or a traineeship, once

the student leaves school. In addition, this year alone New South Wales TAFE is training more than 500,000 people. These numbers are in stark contrast to those for Australian technical colleges, which were to train only up to 7,200 students across Australia.

The New South Wales Government's approach to vocational education and training in schools is to keep students' options open. Under our approach, students can work towards gaining an industry qualification, the Higher School Certificate, and a Universities Admission Index score. This provides maximum opportunities for students once they leave school. Under the Labor Government, the New South Wales vocational education and training system continues to receive recognition for its high standards and excellent outcomes. A recent independent national report on employer's use and views of the VET system 2005 found that TAFE New South Wales has the highest level of employer satisfaction in Australia. Additionally, TAFE New South Wales achieved an employer satisfaction rate of 78 per cent in relation to the quality of training for apprentices and trainees.

It is an outrage that three communities in New South Wales are being threatened with losing their access to an Australian technical college. I call on the honourable member for Ballina to lobby the Federal Government to put aside its divisive industrial relations agenda and to come back to the New South Wales Government's proposals for Australian technical colleges. It should have a look at the proposals and put them in place, because they are strong and they have community and industry support.

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [4.50 p.m.]: Firstly, may I say what a disappointing contribution that was from the Minister for Education and Training in New South Wales, given that we have some genuine issues with skills shortages in this nation and in this State. I am particularly disappointed with the political nature of her comments. The Minister accuses the Federal Government of being narrow and ideological, but she is just as narrow and ideological in relation to Australian workplace agreements [AWAs]. The Federal Government set out the criteria for these Australian technical colleges at the very beginning of the exercise. The New South Wales Government can be under no illusion as to what the criteria were.

Essentially, the sticking points are threefold. Firstly, the Federal Government rightly insists that there be local control and local influence in relation to the governance of these Australian technical colleges and that the business community in particular, but also the local community, will drive the agenda. The New South Wales Government knew that right from the start and yet the applications that came forward from the New South Wales Government were from the Department of Education and Training, which was never going to meet the criteria because it is not the local business community. Let us have some honesty in the debate.

Australian technical colleges [ATCs] have had to be set up largely by the Federal Government because of the failure of the States to deliver what the market requires in relation to skilled labour. There are widespread skills shortages right across the range: in automotive, building construction, electrotechnology, manufacturing, commercial cookery and engineering. The Federal Government has committed \$343.6 million until the end of 2009 to establish 24 colleges across the nation. Eight Australian technical colleges are proposed in New South Wales. Far from the situation being a crisis, nationally four colleges are already open and another is due to open in August this year. The remaining colleges will open in 2007-08, as originally planned.

In New South Wales we have only one funding agreement out of a possible eight, and 11 funding agreements have been signed off nationally. The issues in New South Wales revolve around three points. The first is governance. As I indicated, the Federal Government wants, justifiably, a strong local business capacity for control of governance on the board and does not want the Department of Education running the show. Secondly, the Federal Government wants to see school-based apprenticeships conducted in our schools. I want the Minister for Education and Training in New South Wales to acknowledge that she has the capacity to enable school-based apprenticeships, certificate III level, to be conducted in schools. In fact, the Minister signed up to it under the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] arrangements. Students in New South Wales do not have that opportunity, unlike students in every other State. If the Minister is serious about supporting our students, instead of playing politics she should adhere to the COAG agreement that has to be put in place by the end of this year—in fact, she does not have to wait until the end of the year to do that. If the Minister does that she will remove one of three impediments.

The third impediment is this difficult issue of the AWAs. I hope we can find a way through this impediment, but certainly nothing the Minister has said gives me any confidence whatsoever. It is true that the Ballina bid was a very good bid. It was put in by TAFE North Coast, which won the national award for a large

provider of technical education in 2004, and Ballina High School—an excellent high school—won the national award for the best vocational education training [VET] high school in Australia. There is no question of their ability to deliver. In her comments the Minister implies that I am suggesting we have got to have AWAs through our secondary schools. That is not the case. But we do have to have AWAs with the proponent—the TAFE college in this case.

My understanding was that when the Federal Government put the weights on the Minister last year in relation to the funding of \$300 million from the Federal Government across to the State Government—and a condition of that money coming across was that the State Government would at least offer AWAs—the New South Wales Government indicated it was prepared to have AWAs within the TAFE system. No-one is arguing that we have to have AWAs within the secondary system. In the case of Ballina, it is bloody-mindedness on the part of the State Government that it is not prepared to move to an AWA within the TAFE system or at least to offer that, knowing full well it is the major sticking point in relation to these ATCs in New South Wales.

Going back to the first sticking point, the issue of governance, it is my strong view that if the New South Wales Government were serious about trying to get these ATCs established in New South Wales, the first thing it would do is back off in relation to the governance issue and accept the fact that the criteria do not allow the Department of Education to control the show. A board could be set up where the Department of Education could be represented, but the controlling vote—should it come to a vote—would be with the local business community and the local education community. The Federal Government is saying it does not want the Department of Education to be running the ATCs because traditionally the State Government is supply oriented in relation to the skills shortages issue whereas the Federal Government is demand oriented—it is looking to meet the demands of the business community. The Minister for Education and Training has the capacity to pick up the ball and say, "Okay, we do not have to have the Department of Education running the show but we can have a board where it has representation and the local and business communities will have a controlling interest in relation to these boards that govern the colleges."

In relation to the second of the three sticking points, the Minister has the capacity and the obligation to allow certificate III level apprenticeships to be introduced into New South Wales schools. Students in New South Wales do not have that opportunity because the State Government will not move to fix the problem. Instead of the Minister coming in here and bagging the Federal Government, why does she not do what she has to do to introduce apprenticeships within the school system in New South Wales?

Third is the issue of industrial relations where, again, some progress could be made if there was enough goodwill on both sides of government. The Minister for Education and Training asks why I do not talk to the Federal Government. I have been talking to the Federal Government. I wrote not only to the State Minister for Education and Training about the issue but also to the Federal Minister, and I have been talking to his staff about how some of these things might be sorted out. I have probably done more than the Minister for Education and Training to try to get some sort of solution in New South Wales. New South Wales is dragging the chain with one college out of eight operational. There were 70 expressions of interest. There is a lot of interest nationally for these Australian technical colleges, with 70 expressions of interest, yet the Minister for Education and Training comes into the House and plays politics at the expense of the students.

I suggest the Minister puts on her thinking cap and thinks about how she can meet the Federal Government's criteria, because those criteria were set out right from the beginning, and the Minister knew what the rules were. The Federal Government is providing the money; there is not a State dollar in this. Given the fact that the States have failed to meet the demand to overcome skills shortages and the Federal Government is putting up \$345 million, why should it not have the right to set the criteria?

Knowing the criteria, the Minister has an obligation to put up proposals to meet those criteria. She did not do that because she is driven by an ideological, narrow focus that is driven by the unions to not have an AWA, come hell or high water. Last year the Minister said she would have an AWA in order to attract \$300 million from the Federal Government under the TAFE system. She has a big credibility issue with respect to apprenticeships in schools. She will not allow certificate III level apprenticeships in New South Wales schools because teachers do not like it. The Minister must grasp the nettle and show leadership. I have given her a solution to governance. She should set up a board to enable the local community and the business community to have control. If the Minister was fair dinkum she could do much to solve this problem. *[Time expired.]*

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro) [5.00 p.m.]: Once again the Coalition is selling out rural communities. The areas of Dubbo, Queanbeyan, Lismore and Ballina are victims of the Federal Government's unwillingness

to deliver on its election promise. The Federal Government has let down the honourable member for Ballina, but he still lacks the courage to criticise it. He still sounds like he is reading from a speech prepared by it. These communities have been threatened with the removal of their Australian technical colleges.

[*Interruption*]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Ballina will take a point of order or resume his seat.

Mr STEVE WHAN: On 22 September 2004, before the last Federal election, the Federal member for Eden-Monaro put out this press release, which stated that a technical college "would be established in Queanbeyan to train apprentices in skilled vocations". He did not say "might be established in Queanbeyan"; he said "would". It was a definite promise, which the Federal Government is now backing away from. The Federal Minister had the hide to say recently that colleges in Dubbo, Queanbeyan, and Lismore-Ballina could be scrapped within weeks unless he receives a clear indication from the community of local support.

The community has given a clear indication of that support and has worked together to put up proposals that offer the best chance of being accepted.. In the Queanbeyan example the Department of Education and Training, together with two local high schools, the local TAFE, the local community and local business, including the Master Builders Association, Country Energy, Woden Construction and Electro Optic Systems, put in strong submissions. That strong private sector involvement shows that the honourable member for Ballina has no idea what is happening in other areas of New South Wales, and probably not even in his own. There is strong private sector involvement in this proposal and the Federal Government has decided to knock it back for probably only one reason. The honourable member for Ballina referred to three sticking points. The Federal member for Eden-Monaro was slightly more honest in his comments to the *Queanbeyan Age* recently when he said:

The problem is the (NSW Education) submission wasn't able to be accepted, because they weren't accepting of individual contracts.

There is only one sticking point and it comes back to the Federal Government's ideology of AWAs and its determination to use its financial muscle to push through an unfair industrial relations agenda. The Federal Government does not want to give people a choice; it wants to drive down the incomes of teachers. It wants to drive them out of the award system and on to lower wage agreements. Queanbeyan has an excellent proposal involving Queanbeyan High School, Karabar High School and the Illawarra Institute of TAFE.

Those two high schools are already doing an excellent job with training and skills development but, in conjunction with the college, they probably could do more. To be successful they need to be involved, otherwise more people will be away from years 11 and 12 and that will place one of the high schools in jeopardy. The Federal Government has taken a totally unrealistic position. In the *Queanbeyan Age* the Federal Government indicated that if New South Wales did not toe the line on this it would ask a private sector association to take it on, favouring the Capital Region Business Enterprise Centre, which in the same article stated:

However, CRBEC manager Steve Jamieson said that the college could not survive in the proposed form without the department's assistance.

This has to be a co-operative process, but the Federal Government has nearly broken its election promise to the people of Queanbeyan based on its ideological obsession in driving down working conditions and insisting on AWAs. The people of Queanbeyan and Opposition members should ask what is the aim of the Federal Government? Is it seeking skills development or pursuing its industrial agenda? One could assume that its aim is to pursue its industrial agenda, otherwise it would work with the Department of Education and Training, which has put forward an excellent proposal. The Federal member, Gary Nairn, six years ago promised a connecting road to Jerrabomberra and defence force headquarters for the area. Neither has happened and yet again the Coalition is letting down rural communities. [*Time expired.*]

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville—Minister for Education and Training) [5.05 p.m.], in reply: With respect to the issues raised by the honourable member for Ballina, I state that both the New South Wales Government and the Department of Education and Training have always accepted that it is a Federal Government scheme, funded by that government. We put forward proposals in good faith and it was always the prerogative of the Federal Government to reject those proposals, and that is what it did. However, one would have to question its commitment to skills development when it rejected proposals and it has no others in those areas. It does not have a proposal in Ballina—

Mr Donald Page: They do. They have got another one.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I would like to hear about it. To date the Federal Government has not provided any information about a proposal for Ballina, Dubbo or Queanbeyan. The whole point of this debate is that in circumstances where the Federal Government does not have proponents offering to run technical colleges in these areas, and has in fact threatened those communities with withdrawing a technical college offer, it and the State Opposition should have a look at our proposals, which are strong. The issue that our proposals did not address industry involvement is a furphy. New South Wales Government applications involve industry advisory committees and members of the local business community. They propose the delivery of colleges within the existing governance and human resource framework of New South Wales public schools to ensure that the widest possible group of students would have the opportunity to participate. We already have some experience in running similar types of arrangements with strong collocation between TAFE and public schools—and they work. The New South Wales Government was well placed to put forward proposals that would have been effective and would have delivered technical colleges and an opportunity to deliver skills development in those three communities. However, the Federal Government has not considered those appropriately.

I turn to school-based apprenticeships because, yet again, the honourable member for Ballina trots out the argument which the Federal Government trots out on many occasions and which is simply false. The New South Wales Government does not stand in the way of school-based apprenticeships. It is not a legislative impediment. The honourable member for Ballina displays his ignorance of the way the system works. The Government will not stand in the way if employers want to establish part-time or school-based apprenticeships, and we have written to employers to encourage them.

Mr Donald Page: Fix the award.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The honourable member for Ballina says, "Fix the award." He knows full well that the New South Wales Government is not a party to the award. Therefore, the ball lies fairly and squarely in the court of the employers to negotiate school-based apprenticeships if that is what they want to do. In fact, as I have already indicated, we have one of the most successful examples of a school-based traineeship in Australia—the T3 school-based traineeship program in the automotive industry originated in New South Wales, although it is now national. Students are undertaking the program. They are employed in part-time traineeships while still at school. They are involved in both on-the-job and classroom-based commitments to the traineeship, which usually takes about one day a week. Typically, they complete their Higher School Certificate in the remaining four days a week. It is no mean feat; these students make a substantial commitment.

It must be recognised that one issue in the take-up of school-based apprenticeships is the load it places on students and, therefore, the requirement that students be fully committed to undertaking both an apprenticeship or traineeship and the Higher School Certificate. The New South Wales Government is not standing in the way of school-based apprenticeships. We will certainly be working carefully and diligently towards fulfilling our obligations under the Council of Australian Governments agreements. The concern is that three good proposals were put forward in good faith by the New South Wales Government, and the only thing standing in the way of the Federal Government looking at the proposals and adopting them is its ideological commitment to Australian workplace agreements and its determination to use the training system to promote its industrial relations agenda.

Discussion concluded.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! It being almost 5.15 p.m. the House will now deal with General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices).

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Private members' statements, by concurrence, taken forthwith.

SALVATION ARMY RED SHIELD APPEAL

Mr KEVIN GREENE (Georges River) [5.12 p.m.]: Honourable members would be well aware of the annual Salvation Army Red Shield appeal. As honourable members would be aware, this year the appeal will take place on Sunday 28 May. The Salvation Army does an enormous amount of good work in our community.

It is looking to raise approximately \$59 million through its Red Shield appeal throughout Australia and about \$11.5 million in Sydney. A major part of that will be through the doorknock appeal on 28 May, when it is looking to raise approximately \$2 million throughout Sydney. To assist in this process, it is looking for the support of approximately 20,000 volunteers to ensure that the doorknock appeal in Sydney works effectively.

The Sydney campaign has been organised by Major Paul Kinder. I have had a lot to do with Paul and his work with the Salvation Army, particularly the Red Shield appeal, with which I got involved last year. I am pleased that again this year I will be chairing the appeal for the Hurstville area. For the past five years Mr Trevor Fearnley has chaired the appeal throughout Sydney. The appeal has reached its target each year and, hopefully, the Salvation Army will achieve its target of \$2 million this year. In the Hurstville area we hope to collect approximately \$30,000. To do that effectively, we are marshalling the support of between 200 and 250 collectors and drivers. To achieve that, again this year I have enlisted the support of a number of generous people to look after various districts throughout Hurstville.

In that regard I mention Mrs Michelle Stevens, Councillor Stephen McMahon, Mr Alan Heighway, who has been involved in looking after his district for many years, Alex Yam from the Salvation Army, and Mr Reg Walker from Lugano Lions. Lugano Lions is supporting the Red Shield appeal this year, as it did last year, supplying many drivers to look after the Lugarno and Peakhurst South areas. I also thank Hurstville Rotary Club for its support. In particular, last year Dorothy Dixon did an enormous amount of work collecting donations in the Peakhurst industrial area, and she will do the same this year.

Because they make it all work perfectly on the day, we thank our volunteer collectors by putting on a barbecue at our major collection point. In that regard we are fortunate to have the support of Bresnahan's fine foods of Mortdale, which again will provide the sausages that the Lugano Lions will cook. Hopefully, we will get a lot of support from our local schools. Brett Gallagher, who is our local Salvation Army co-ordinator, is visiting schools as I speak, enlisting the support of teenagers as volunteers to help in the collection process. This year we are also hosting a business function to be held on Wednesday 24 May; a business breakfast will be held at the Illawarra Catholic Club at Hurstville.

We have enlisted the support of well-known media personality and former State of Origin footballer Mr Darryl Brohman. We also have support from the St George Illawarra Dragons and their coach, Nathan Brown. They will be speaking at the business breakfast. I hope that the Hurstville business community supports the function at 7.00 a.m. on 24 May. The Salvation Army has a long and proud history of service in the community. It is well recognised for assisting many individuals. It does not simply help for a short period; it looks at changing people's lives with its support. It assists 1.5 million people annually. That is one person every 20 seconds, so for the duration of my speech the Salvation Army will have assisted 15 people. The Salvation Army services include child care, family welfare, emergency services, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, helping the homeless, money and budget counselling, and assisting street kids. There is a multitude of diverse services. The Salvation Army is all about assisting people and trying to improve their lives. I fully support, as I am sure do all honourable members, the Salvation Army Red Shield appeal on Sunday 28 May.

SPIT ROAD CLEARWAY

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore) [5.17 p.m.]: I have brought the matter of traffic on Spit Road and Military Road to the attention of the House on numerous occasions. These roads have been declared among the 10 worst roads in the metropolitan area by the traffic reporters who were commissioned by one metropolitan newspaper to nominate the worst roads in the State. What is particularly alarming is that on Friday last week the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] issued a press release in which it declared that work will start this month on the installation of a clearway on Spit Road in Mosman, which will operate on weekends and public holidays from 3.00 p.m. until 7.00 p.m. This south-bound clearway will operate between Medusa Street and Ourimbah Road. It is alarming because this proposal was floated back in January 2003.

I had a meeting with the RTA, the local mayor and councillors, and a number of residents because the clearway will remove 70 car parking spaces from residents of the area, where parking in that part of the world is as scarce as hen's teeth. The proposal was rejected in 2003. The RTA saw the rationale of the argument and the proposal was rejected. Now we have a media release announcing that the clearway will proceed. There has been absolutely no consultation with me as the local member, the mayor and councillors, or residents who will be affected by the clearway. The first I knew about it was when the press release was drawn to my attention and appeared in the *Manly Daily*. It is astonishing that the announcement appeared in the *Manly Daily*, because it will happen in the electorate of North Shore, and the staff of the *Mosman Daily* knew nothing about the

announcement until I alerted them. I am very grateful for their interest. They took a great deal of interest in it when it arose on the last occasion. At very short notice I was able to get some local residents, particularly Mr Terry Farrell, to join us on this stretch of road to protest about the proposal.

What is more alarming than anything is that the press release put out by the RTA was followed immediately by one put out by David Barr, the so-called independent member for Manly. Obviously, he is nothing but a Labor stooge, because he is getting the help of the RTA to put out a press release. A photograph appeared in the *Manly Daily* in which the honourable member is shown holding the sign that is destined for my electorate. The irony is that he somehow thinks this is going to help his constituents. If the Government proceeds with its harebrained idea to put extra lanes on The Spit Bridge, it will create a bottleneck further into my electorate, up Spit Road, onto Military Road—one of the worst-affected roads in the State—and the constituents of the honourable member for Manly will be stuck in that traffic jam along with all those other people coming from the northern beaches.

They will not thank the honourable member for Manly for his idea to create a second drawbridge at The Spit, to widen the road and to funnel the traffic onto the already choked roads in the electorate of North Shore. If he thought this would win him some brownie points, he should think again. The RTA has demonstrated it knows nothing about these streets. It says at the bottom of its press release:

Alternative parking will still be available on side streets when the clearway is in place.

Anyone who goes anywhere down that road will know there is not a single parking space there, particularly on weekends. The residents are being fair-minded about this. The clearway is already in place during peak hours midweek and they understand this assists people commuting to work, driving their children to school, and so on. They draw the line on weekends. They are not going to be told they cannot park near their houses simply because people are driving to the northern beaches for leisure activities. The RTA needs to come up with alternative parking arrangements for the 70 houses that no longer have a parking space. These are not young people who can hike up hills carrying their shopping; these are older people who have great difficulty walking the hilly streets of Mosman. The RTA is derelict in its duty. It has put forward this clearway proposal as an election stunt to try to shore up its Labor stooge in Manly and it has not taken into account the needs of the people of my electorate. [*Time expired.*]

ANZAC DAY COMMEMORATION

Ms MARIANNE SALIBA (Illawarra) [5.22 p.m.]: Tonight I bring to the attention of the House Anzac Day services that took place in my electorate, as I am sure they took place in many electorates across Australia. I congratulate the organisers of the Anzac Day services in the Shellharbour City area. The services were so well arranged that people could attend more than one; they did not clash with one another. They were well thought out, reverent and a terrific opportunity to commemorate the people who have given their lives for us and for our freedom. After I attended the Shellharbour City memorial service in the city centre, organised by the Warilla subbranch of the RSL and the Albion Park subbranch of the RSL, I went to McDonald's to have breakfast with my family. While I was there the manager and I talked about the large number of people who had turned out this year for the Anzac Day services.

There were a lot of young people and extensive involvement by young cadets. There were the naval cadets from TS Albatross, the Twenty-sixth Army Cadet unit and the 338 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force cadets—I know them fairly well because my son Dennis is a member of that squadron. As I said, the Warilla and Albion Park subbranches of the RSL and the Salvation Army band were involved, but a lot of young people were involved. It was a pleasure to be part of a service that not only remembered those who had gone before us but who also gave hope for the future. The manager of McDonald's and I talked about the large turnout of people. He said he thought it was because people are searching for an identity—that as a nation we are searching for an identity. I thought about what he said. I then went to the Warilla Bowling Club's service. Pastor Brian Pember from the Baptist Church gave the Anzac Day address, at which he said:

This year, when there are no more Anzacs to march, we continue to gather in ever-increasing numbers to honour their memory. Again, this year thousands of Australians will gather at Gallipoli to commemorate a staggering defeat and to honour those who fell in battle—and rightly so. But I believe we are here for something more. I believe we are here to try to re-find our identity; I believe we are here because we have forgotten who we are and we are looking to something that will help us to identify ourselves, both as individuals and as a nation.

As a nation we are multicultural, the Australian way of life is no longer the British way of life.

As a nation we sing in our anthem that we have boundless plains to share yet we lock the door on refugees.

Brian talked about other issues that we as a nation have to face. They include world poverty and high rates of unemployment. It was a real challenge. For me the real challenge was that that was the second time in one day that someone had said that they believed the large turnout of people on Anzac Day was because we are searching for identity. I believe that is the case—that people are looking for an identity and that individuals coming together as a community form that identity and are part of it. I thank everyone involved in the Anzac Day services. Shellharbour City Council, in particular, managed to ensure that we had the proper facilities and that the services did not clash. RSL members worked hard. I have seen them in a number of schools since that day celebrating Anzac Day with young school students. Coming together as a nation and working to find our identity is something we may continue to do for years to come. Anzac Day is a day for drawing people together from different backgrounds. It is an opportunity for us to remember what has gone before and to set our sights on our future.

WILLOUGHBY ELECTORATE HISTORY

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [5.27 p.m.]: In less than two weeks this Parliament will celebrate its sesquicentenary, or its 150th anniversary, of responsible government in New South Wales. This unique historical milestone is a good opportunity for me to inform the House of the history of the Willoughby electorate and of the people who have served as members for Willoughby. According to the electoral maps issued in 1893, the electorate of Willoughby stretched from Sydney Harbour to the Hawkesbury. It covered a huge area. The first member for Willoughby was Mr Joseph Francis Cullen. He was born in Mount Johnstone near Jamberoo in New South Wales. He became member for Willoughby in 1894. He was a member of the House prior to that, but assumed the new seat in 1894. He resigned shortly afterwards to become a journalist, becoming the proprietor of the *North Sydney* newspaper.

He was succeeded by Mr Edward Mann Clark, who was elected in 1894 and who was born in Hobart, Tasmania. He was a former timber merchant, an alderman and mayor of St Leonards and North Sydney, and assisted in establishing Taronga Park Zoo. The next member was Mr George Howarth, who was born in Kent, England. He became the member for Willoughby in 1895. He arrived in Sydney in 1883. He was a former master mariner, surveyor and butcher. He was an alderman in Willoughby from 1892 until 1895, and then periodically until 1901. He was succeeded by Sir Charles Gregory Wade, who was elected member for Willoughby in 1903. Sir Charles was born in Singleton, New South Wales. He was a Kings Counsel. Following his career as member for Willoughby he was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

Next was Mr Edward Rennix Larkin, who was elected member for Willoughby in December 1913. I have made mention of Mr Larkin in the Chamber before. He was one of only two members of Parliament who died at Gallipoli. His name is on a plaque behind me in the Chamber. Interestingly, before he served in Gallipoli Mr Larkin was the first full-time rugby league official in New South Wales. He was killed in Gallipoli in May 1915. Mr Larkin was succeeded by Mr John Haynes, who was elected member for Willoughby in 1915. Mr Haynes, who was born in Singleton, seems to have been an interesting character. He was largely instrumental in forcing a royal commission on lands administration. He was then succeeded by Mr Reginald Walter Darcy Weaver, who was elected member for Willoughby in 1917. Mr Weaver, who was born on the Liverpool Plains, was a former stock and real estate agent and was in local government at Condobolin and Narrandera prior to becoming a member of Parliament.

Mr Edward Lloyd Sanders was elected member for Willoughby in 1927. He was born in Burwood and prior to entering Parliament was a customs agent and a farmer. He was succeeded by Mr George Brain, who was elected member for Willoughby in 1943 and, to date, remains the longest serving member for Willoughby, having served in the Parliament for 25 years. Mr Brain was born in Picton in New South Wales. He was a councillor on Willoughby council prior to his election and a keen sportsperson. I believe he was president of the parliamentary bowling club for a number of years. I met with Mr Brain's grandson only last year to go through some historical records, which will take pride of place in Willoughby City Library. Mr Brain was succeeded by Mr Laurence McGinty, who was elected member for Willoughby in 1968. Mr McGinty was originally from Orange and was an interesting and colourful character in local politics. He served for 10 years in this House.

Mr Eddie Britt was elected member for Willoughby in 1978 and served for a term. Eddie was a councillor on Willoughby council prior to becoming a local member and following his term, and is still very involved in community activities. My predecessor, Peter Collins, was elected in 1981. He is the second-longest serving member for Willoughby, having served for 22 years with distinction in this place. Peter was born in Lismore. Apart from his local contributions, he was a very distinguished Minister of the Crown and Leader of the Liberal Party. On the occasion of the sesquicentenary of this Parliament, I place on record the historical

significance that members of the Willoughby electorate have made to this place and I ask all members of the House to take note of their significant contributions.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.32 p.m.]: The honourable member for Willoughby has provided a fascinating dissertation of the history of members who have represented her electorate. It is entirely appropriate on the occasion of the celebration of 150 years of responsible government in New South Wales that members take the opportunity to research and discover the unique history of their electorates and local members. They may face the challenge thrown down by former members, such as Mr Brain who served as a member for Willoughby for 25 years. That is a task for the current member, and I wish her all the best in achieving that goal. I encourage other members to take this opportunity to look at the history of their electorates. As has been famously said, for those who do not study history it is bound to repeat itself.

MISS SOPHIE DELEZIO ACCIDENT

Mr DAVID BARR (Manly) [5.33 p.m.]: Last Friday afternoon an appalling event took place on a pedestrian crossing on Frenchs Forest Road, Seaforth. A motor vehicle struck a stroller in which five-year-old Sophie Delezio was being pushed. She was thrown 18 metres onto the road and has suffered life-threatening injuries. This is the second time this beautiful little girl has been the victim of a catastrophic misfortune. In December 2003 a car crashed into the Roundhouse Child Care Centre where she was sleeping, causing her horrendous injuries. Her fight for survival galvanised not only the Manly community but also the entire country. There was an outpouring of community support to share the gut-wrenching anguish of Sophie's parents, Ron Delezio and Carolyn Martin, and her brother, Mitchell. In January 2004 more than 2,000 people turned out for a charity event called "The Journey". They walked from the Roundhouse Child Care Centre to Manly Wharf and 100 paddlers paddled on to Parramatta Wharf. Ron and Carolyn launched the Day of Difference Foundation on 15 December 2004, which was the first anniversary of Sophie's tragic accident. On the evening of the launch \$498,000 was raised for the Burns Unit at the Children's Hospital, Westmead, and much more has been raised since.

There is nothing more precious to any of us than our children, and Sophie's misfortune brought home the vulnerability we instinctively feel about their safety and wellbeing. It is an understatement to say Sophie won our hearts with her incredible courage and her will to live. She has been inspirational and her recovery from the Roundhouse accident was nothing short of miraculous. In a perfect world events such as this would never happen, but they do and did. Thankfully, most of us do not experience the vicissitude of such outrageous misfortune. We can only imagine what it would be like. Now it has happened again. Sophie is in intensive care at Sydney Children's Hospital and is being kept under sedation for pain management. Her paediatrician has stated that she is the sickest patient he has looked after in his 13 years' experience, but he expressed optimism about her pulling through.

The community will rally behind Sophie and her family as they did before. Whilst we cannot undo what has happened, we can all work together to support them in their ordeal. As representatives of the people of New South Wales, all members of this House will want Sophie and her family to know that we will do all we can to assist them. Sophie has endured more than anyone should ever have to, let alone a five-year-old child. She has revealed a strength of character and an inner beauty that makes her very special. I have no doubt that when these travails are over and Sophie has mended, she will flower into an extraordinary and beautiful adult human being. With luck we will all be there to cheer her on. The Government has announced a review of all pedestrian crossings. There is a risk element with all crossings. If we can improve pedestrian safety, then at least something productive will have come out of this dreadful accident. In conclusion, I wish to make mention of the outstanding work done by the ambulance crew, police and emergency workers for their rapid and effective response in getting Sophie to hospital.

DRIVERS LICENCE RETESTING

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [5.37 p.m.]: Tonight I speak on concerns of many constituents, particularly over the last week following the accident involving young Sophie Delezio. Our hearts go out to that little girl and her family, and we pray that she will get well. The driver in that accident was an 81-year-old man. Unfortunately, the driver in the first accident that Sophie was involved in was also a senior man. Recent surveys and figures provided to the Staysafe committee last year show that motor vehicles are the most common form of transport for men and women over 65 years of age—for 70 per cent of men and 62 per cent of women in that age group—particularly in the greater metropolitan region. There are relatively high death and injury rates for older road users. Whilst approximately 17 per cent of the New South Wales population is aged 60 or more, in the last five years they made up 39 per cent of pedestrian fatalities and 22 per cent of all road fatalities.

There has been a call for mandatory retesting of senior drivers. The Staysafe committee, which is a bipartisan committee of Parliament that examines road safety in a very thorough fashion, decided some time ago that mandatory testing was not the way to go. A driver's licence is the last bastion of independence for many older folk. The preferred approach is to retest according to need. That means that the medical profession should play a greater role in road safety in this State and the nation. Retesting should not take place only when a person turns 75. Retesting should be done on a needs basis, whether a person is 20, 30, 40, 50 or 70 years of age. As we get older in many cases our eyesight deteriorates. Dementia and cognitive decline are major problems in today's society. Physical changes due to wear and tear or accidents could render many of us a danger behind the wheel. Doctors should be under an obligation to report such cases to the Roads and Traffic Authority, and that is when retesting should be undertaken. Families come into the same category. They should be encouraged to request retesting if they are worried about the driving capabilities of mum or dad or a young person in the family.

People should be tested on a needs basis rather than on a mandatory basis. We could introduce testing every 10 years, but people might suffer ailments shortly after they have been tested and then not be retested for another 10 years. It would be far better to have a system under which a doctor who notices major changes and who believes that a motorist could be a danger on the road should be obliged to report that motorist to the RTA so that it can conduct a further testing. In many cases the life that motorist saves may be his or her own, not to mention the lives of other people.

Because of their fragility and slow recovery rate, 50 per cent of elderly people involved in motor vehicle accidents die. I am sure that much grief could be avoided if families and doctors were to voluntarily report those people they believe need to be retested. Mandatory retesting is discriminatory and I do not know whether it would achieve the desired outcome. Last year Joanne Wood, PhD, from the School of Optometry at the Centre for Health Research at the Queensland University of Technology gave a paper detailing her studies of older drivers. Her conclusions included findings that older drivers are the fastest growing segment of driving population, they have a high crash rate for distance travelled, driving is important for maintaining independence, and driving cessation is linked with isolation and depression and associated functional impairment. It would be far better to retest on a needs basis rather than a mandatory basis. The outcome would be more beneficial.

CESSNOCK GREYHOUND RACING TRACK

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock—Minister for Local Government) [5.42 p.m.]: The Cessnock greyhound racing track is 79 years old. It is the second oldest track in the country and the lifeblood of dishlickers in the Cessnock area. Sadly, 47 days ago the governing body, Greyhound Racing New South Wales, told Cessnock track officials that it plans to axe TAB meetings at the track from 1 July. That is disgraceful. If the board believes that the track is not viable and it must be closed, the Cessnock showground will be sold and the profit will go to charity. If the track loses its TAB status, the local community will lose the facility. The Cessnock track is one of the biggest TAB earners in country greyhound racing, but the board is planning to move the race dates to a track that is not as profitable—in fact, it is losing money. This is a poor decision.

The chairman of the board, Mr Percy Allan, has just completed a report about the financial sustainability of councils across New South Wales in which he suggests running them as businesses. If that is his position, why is he supporting the closure of a viable business and moving the race dates to a track that is not viable? The board should reconsider what it is doing. Greyhound Racing New South Wales has been forced to dump 96 race meetings. I understand why it is rationalising, but why do it this way? It just does not add up; it is not good business.

According to official figures, no other non-metropolitan greyhound racing venue comes anywhere near Cessnock's appeal as far as the punting dollar is concerned. At the close of nominations last Monday the Cessnock club had received 156 entries compared to its neighbouring track, The Gardens, which had 92. That demonstrates the loyalty of those involved with the Cessnock track. Anyone who read the article about the track in the *Sunday Telegraph* would have noted the passion voiced at Cessnock. The facility, which is located at the sports ground, is the largest greyhound track in operation. It has an 8.41 metre radius and is claimed to be the greatest greyhound racing track in the country.

To appease the board the Cessnock club has just spent \$120,000, which was provided by the board, on kennelling facilities, but the race dates are now being moved. I am concerned about the threat to this community facility, which will be lost because of a board decision. It could be argued that the decision to rationalise the industry, which was based on a business case, is inappropriate. A subcommittee comprising three board members was formed to examine the rationalisation and it reported back to the board, which has six members.

The procedure appears to be unfair and unjust. It should be re-examined taking into account social responsibility and social facilities. Such a profitable and effective club should be supported. The only difference between the Cessnock club and the other clubs is that the Cessnock club is independent; it is not a member of any association. That concerns me. It is making money—it is the biggest money taker in country New South Wales—and it is doing very well. I ask the board to reconsider this decision and to address this anomaly.

CRONULLA ELECTORATE TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [5.47 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to the need to upgrade traffic management and traffic safety at a number of intersections in my electorate. I refer to two intersections: the horror intersection of The Kingsway and Gannons Road, Woollooware, and the intersection of The Kingsway and Port Hacking Road. I have previously drawn attention to the need for pedestrian safety measures at the traffic lights at the intersection of Port Hacking Road and The Kingsway. Pedestrians crossing The Kingsway with the traffic lights are at risk because they are in conflict with motorists turning right from Port Hacking Road and there are no right-turn arrows. Sadly, as I told the House on 16 July 2005, a 77-year-old woman was killed when a truck making a right-hand turn from Port Hacking Road collided with her. I have raised this matter on a number of occasions and I received a response sent on behalf of the Minister for Roads in November 2005, which states:

I am advised the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) has arranged for the installation of a right turn arrow at the intersection for north to east movement out of Port Hacking Road South as soon as practicable.

We are still waiting and it is now May. Much was said today during question time about road safety. The honourable member for Blacktown, who is the chairman of the Staysafe committee, stated that road safety matters must be dealt with to ensure that no life is lost needlessly on New South Wales roads. That is certainly true in this case. The intersection of The Kingsway and Gannons Road, Woollooware is also dangerous for pedestrians. I have previously mentioned the need for a right-turn arrow for motorists turning from the Gannons Roads approaches into The Kingsway. The former Minister for Roads, the Hon. Carl Scully, refused to install that essential safety feature due to circumstances and limited funds. Given the way funds are spent in other areas, one wonders about the Government's commitment to road safety.

The other aspect of road safety that has been referred to, and which is pertinent in my electorate, is the need for flashing lights. I was pleased that today during question time the honourable member for Blacktown informed the House that the Government will install flashing lights at school intersections, which is welcome. The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] has produced an outstanding report in relation to flashing lights. Under the Freedom of Information Act I requested a copy of the RTA's report into the trial of flashing lights in school zones. In its response dated 24 February 2006 the RTA wrote:

The document is being prepared for submission to the Minister for Roads. It is anticipated that the report should be finished in May 2006. Once it is completed I will examine it and advise you of my determination.

It is now May. Hopefully, the House will be advised when that report will become available. As I have said in this House on another occasion, the honourable member for Blacktown recently returned from Great Britain. Indeed, I think he referred to that in the House today. Once again I draw attention to an article in the *London Times*. It reads:

The relentless advance of speed cameras across Britain is to be halted under government plans to restore confidence in traffic policing ...

Cameras will no longer be used as revenue-raising devices ...

As I said on the last occasion, old Labor in New South Wales could emulate what new Labour is doing in Great Britain.

REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR NEWCASTLE AND HUNTER REGION

Mr JOHN MILLS (Wallsend) [5.52 p.m.]: I want to report to the House the launch of the Regional Advisory Council for Newcastle and Hunter Region, which is another significant initiative of the Community Relations Commission of New South Wales. The Regional Advisory Council [RAC] was established by the Community Relations Commission in 2005 as a subgroup of the New South Wales Council for Pacific Communities. The RAC represents Pacific communities from the Newcastle and Hunter regions. The RAC was launched on a Saturday morning last month at the Hunter River Foreshore Park in Newcastle. The launch was

part of the strategy being implemented to serve Pacific Islander communities throughout New South Wales by informing all people in the region that a forum for Pacific Islander people to have their say in building a positive future was now available.

At the launch the RAC executive and RAC State representatives were introduced to the community, the community was formally advised of the work plan that has been endorsed, and the RAC was promoted across the community. The theme of the event was, appropriately, "Say NO to Drugs and Crime". Since 2003 the Community Relations Commission has been working to establish the New South Wales Council for Pacific Communities to facilitate both government and community approaches in response to strategic issues affecting Pacific communities. There are eight regional advisory councils throughout New South Wales, and each RAC elects three representatives, one of whom must be under 30 years of age, to the State council. Pacific Island born people include people from the three major groups in the Pacific Ocean. These groups are Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia.

In the current year the Community Relations Commission provides support to the New South Wales Council for Pacific Communities under the terms of the New South Wales Partnership with Pacific Communities. As part of that partnership the Community Relations Commission recently entered into a funding agreement with the council under which it provided \$45,000 for the council to employ a worker to assist in pursuing its objectives. A further \$93,500, including GST, will be made available to the council in the next 12 months.

The senior office bearers of the Regional Advisory Council for Newcastle and Hunter Region are Hector Purcell, as chairman, and Roxanne Suba, as secretary. At the launch we received an Aboriginal welcome by Bill Smith, an elder of the Mimagawajaar tribe. Setu Amosa of the Samoan Presbyterian Church read the prayer. Bill Purcell, the chairperson for the New South Wales State Council for Pacific Communities, addressed us. Hector Purcell, the chairperson for the Newcastle Regional Advisory Council, also addressed us. We were treated to a Tongan cultural performance. The masters of ceremony were Roxanne Suba and Ofeina Sikahele. Also present were Abdul Bari from the Ethnic Communities Council, Suzanne Riley, and Pacific Islander officers from the Department of Community Services.

The focus of the event was Pacific Islander youth. There was a barbecue and Kava ceremony, a tattoo workshop and a wood carving workshop. It was a great day. It was exciting, colourful, friendly and, indeed, swinging. The Secretary of the Regional Advisory Council for Newcastle and Hunter region wrote to me recently to thank me for attending the launch to represent the Premier. The council appreciates all the help and support provided to make the launch day a success.

At the launch I presented a message from the Premier. It was in 2003 that the New South Wales Government, responding to the concerns of community elders regarding the marginalisation of their young people, established the Partnership with Pacific Communities. Following extensive consultations the Premier's Department and the Community Relations Commission, in co-operation with the Pacific Island and Maori communities, established the New South Wales Council for Pacific Communities as a peak consultative body. Regional advisory councils have been formed and delegates elected from those councils to the peak body. It is through this mechanism that consultations at the grassroots level are communicated to the peak body and to government.

The Regional Advisory Council for Newcastle and Hunter Region will continue to provide members of the Pacific Island and Maori communities in our region with the opportunity to discuss issues, co-ordinate events, and draw matters of interest or concern to the attention of the peak body. All members of those communities are encouraged to participate in this important democratic process, which provides an opportunity for direct communication with government. I applaud the commitment of all people associated with the Regional Advisory Council for Newcastle and Hunter Region. I extend my best wishes to the council, and to all community members, as they demonstrate the strong viability of the Pacific community that is proud to call the Hunter region its home.

MOTOR VEHICLE INDUSTRY REVIEW

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [5.57 p.m.]: I wish to raise several issues in relation to the operation of small businesses in this State. Yesterday I had the pleasure of spending some time with Chris and Angela Albertini, who run Chris Albertini Automotive. Chris and Angela sent me a copy of a letter they wrote to the Minister for Small Business, the Hon. David Campbell. The letter is one of the most detailed documents I

have seen compiled by such a small business operation. Angela and Chris have certainly put a lot of thought into the document, which is their submission to the review of the motor vehicle retailing and services sector.

In their letter to the Minister, Angela and Chris Albertini point out the problems associated with running a small business in this State. I will list the headings commented upon in the letter, and if I have time I will detail the matters referred to. The headings include workers compensation, occupational health and safety, new regulations, regulatory controls, ridiculous regulations, recordkeeping, State government taxation, capital gains tax, and vocational training. Some of the matters referred to relate to the Federal sphere but most relate to State problems associated with running a small business. Other headings include recruitment of staff; skills shortage; small business advocate; commercial developments, including residential land developments; and no more welfare services to be administered by small business. I will touch on a few of those items. Under the heading "New Regulations", Ms Albertini stated:

I recently found out that apprenticeship incentives paid to employers is no longer subject to GST. This information was discovered by me buried in an article in "My Business" magazine which I am sure not every small business operator has the time or inclination to read. Where was my direct mail from DETNAC, with whom I currently have an apprenticeship indenture, to inform me in an accurate and timely manner that I will not have to pay GST on future apprenticeship incentives. It might possibly arrive in a couple of years when we are ready to complete the apprenticeship. Incentives are a big factor in our decision to employ more apprentices at present. This lack of communication and information is not helpful for small business at all.

In this House we continually hear Government members speak about the GST this State is missing out on. Under the heading "State Government Taxation", Ms Albertini makes the comment:

In relation to the State of Queensland obtaining a larger slice of GST revenue from the Federal Government, I would argue that the State Government of New South Wales should also ensure taxes levied in the northern region of New South Wales are returned to the northern region and not to the greater Sydney metropolitan area. The northern region of New South Wales is set for major population growth in coming years (many baby-boomers relocating from Sydney), and the infrastructure necessary to support these new people is sadly lacking.

I agree that the taxes should be returned to the northern region. I could go on but, sadly, my speaking time does not allow me to do that. However, I congratulate Chris and Angela Albertini on the work they are doing in their business. More important, I commend them for taking time out of their busy schedule to put together this detailed submission. I trust that the Minister for Small Business will review and address the problems they have raised.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.02 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Lismore for drawing the attention of the House to the important review by the Minister for Small Business of red tape in small business, particularly the automotive industry. I thank the honourable member's constituents for providing a detailed submission to that review. The Minister for Small Business spoke to Jim Bisset of Engadine Auto Spares in my electorate, who raised similar issues regarding regulations, red tape and recordkeeping. The automotive industry is important to the people of New South Wales. This review is particularly important to those involved in small business, as are most of those who work in the automotive industry. I encourage all members to take advantage of the review conducted by the Minister for Small Business.

MR BRIAN READ HOUSE RESUMPTION

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [6.03 p.m.]: This evening I speak on behalf of Brian Read from Hunter Close, Sapphire Beach, who moved to the beautiful electorate of Coffs Harbour some years ago, I believe from Broken Hill. He purchased a beautiful home at Sapphire Beach overlooking the ocean. As members are no doubt aware, for a long while we have been pushing for an upgrade of the road from Coffs Harbour, or Sapphire Beach, through to Woolgoolga.

Mr Paul McLeay: Pushing?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Yes, pushing. Mr. Read's house is on that route. I will read onto the record a letter he sent me. He says that in early 2005 the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] made an approach him to soundproof his home. I believe he has the date wrong; the initial offer was made in June 2004. Mr Read states:

This approach was instigated by the RTA. They sent out two lots of people to provide them with quotes, one being for glass and the other for air conditioning. I was told that there would be over 30 homes sound proofed and that the work would be completed by Easter 2005. We were sent consent documents for the work to commence which we signed and returned. After 5 months I contacted the air conditioner people to find out how much longer it would be before work would commence only to be told that my home had been taken off their list of homes to be sound proofed. I then contacted the RTA to be told that they would not

sound proof my home as they wanted to resume it. The other homes on their list would have the sound proofing carried out. At no time did the RTA write to me about changing their plans to sound proof my home, they just left me in the dark.

Last week I once again contacted the RTA to find out how much longer it would be before they would resume my property, the reply was. "It could be some years". They then suggested that under the act I could apply for hard ship. I don't want to sell my home I just wanted my family not to suffer with the rapidly increasing noise levels which are making life very difficult, and why should my family be discriminated against only because the RTA wishes to purchase my property. They are prepared to leave my family in a noise environment that exceeds the government standards for years due to the fact they wish to resume my property at some time in the future.

I find it strange that they can find money under the hard ship act to purchase homes but have no money to resume them. I know of three homes close to me that have been purchased by the RTA through the hard ship clause in the act.

I tried twice to sell my property when the housing boom was on only to have prospective buyers turn away when they found out about the high way upgrade and that the RTA wanted to resume the property some time in the future This I believe has cost my family thousands of dollars.

My property has great sea views and the only devaluing of my property has been the continuing upgrading of the pacific high way, which has greatly increased the number of trucks and cars which in turn increases the noise levels.

Living in Coffs Harbour there is need to have good ventilation and air flow but find we have to close all windows to try and restrict noise levels. It would be impossible to sleep with windows open.

I believe that the RTA should have a moral obligation to sound proof my home and that I should have the same rights as the other owners of homes that have been sound proofed along the pacific high way. If the RTA wishes to purchase my property that is their problem and my family should not have to suffer, we should have the same rights as the others and not be victimized.

Please find enclosed all relevant documents.

This man has a family. The RTA has clearly indicated the property has to be resumed, yet there is no money in the bank to resume it. In the budget last year about \$2 million was allocated to soundproof homes in this particular area, but this man's home has not been soundproofed. If the road construction is along the lines of that at Bonville, we could not expect this particular project to commence for another three to five years. This poor fellow's house is now severely devalued because it is earmarked for resumption, and he has to live with the ever-increasing number of B-doubles and heavy transport vehicles coming down the highway. I believe about 30,000 trucks a week use the highway and these trucks pass literally within six metres of this man's house. His house stands on a slight rise but the noise travels up to the house.

It is deplorable that the Government and the RTA have stooped to the level of telling this man to apply on hardship grounds, because under the hardship provisions claimants have to pay their legal and valuation costs and do not get a solatium. That is about \$18,000, but it should be around \$30,000; when the Act was brought in in 1992 it was \$15,000 and by now it would have to be at least \$30,000. Mr Read and his family are being victimised. I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to raise this issue with the Minister for Roads. I ask the Minister to be compassionate and to at least provide the soundproofing this man needs or to provide a valuation for this house at the time it was not encumbered by a highway going straight through the middle of it.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.08 p.m.]: The honourable member for Coffs Harbour can be assured that I will take Mr Read's case to the Minister and ask him to explain what is planned for the area and to give an appropriate response to the member.

BAHA'I NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF DUBBO

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [6.09 p.m.]: Today I bring to the attention of the House concerns held by the followers of the Baha'i faith living, working and raising their families in the electorate of Dubbo. Recently I had the pleasure of meeting members of the Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly of Dubbo, who hold grave fears for the safety of family, friends and loved ones living in countries in which they suffer persecution. This diverse group of people has been actively contributing to my electorate for almost 40 years and, like other Baha'i communities around Australia, is proud of its faith and this country. The people work throughout the electorate hosting exhibitions, raising funds for other non-profit and community groups, and organising multicultural and other festivals to celebrate their faith and that of others.

Followers of this faith come from different religious and cultural backgrounds. As I mentioned, some are from overseas while others are not. Representatives from the Dubbo assembly proudly tell of members who came to this State and country seeking a new life for their families, meeting like-minded followers along the path to a fresh start. When they moved here they wanted a better future and the freedom to practise their faith peacefully. They are not alone in these beliefs, with many millions of people, it is estimated, following these

same teachings the world over. The representatives sought a meeting with me so that they could bring to my attention their concerns regarding developments with followers who have not been fortunate enough to find the same acceptance. Such events are not isolated; history books are filled with similar religious struggles. For the most part, modern society has progressed to a point where in most countries people can freely practise their beliefs without fear of persecution.

Freedom of religion is a fundamental principle of the democratic system. However, a few remaining countries have taken active steps to repress followers of this religion in the face of enormous progress made on the human rights front over recent years. It is disheartening and alarming to learn that this persecution still exists in our modern world. An example of this is obstacles placed before those followers simply seeking an education. There have been well-documented cases of not only outright denial but brutal oppression in some countries where people of the Baha'i faith have asked for equality with educational opportunities, as education is highly regarded in that religion and is deemed a right and blessing for every human being.

Throughout the decades Baha'is were able to carry out this work for themselves, founding schools even in the most impoverished corners of the globe; these schools were open to all without discrimination. The early days of this religion were marred by repressive actions throughout the late 1800s. This opposition continued throughout the early 1900s and even to this day. Authorities failed then, and fail even now, to recognise the peaceful gesture of opening a school to all. I have been told that several countries issued government decrees forcing these schools to close.

My discussions with members of the Dubbo assembly also touched on the frequency of this discrimination. Regimes commonly target the faith through repressive laws and regulations. There appear to be active campaigns and policies developed in some countries aimed at denying Baha'is a place at university or even a substantial job. Followers tell me that authorities also turn a blind eye to attacks on important religious buildings and, worse still, people. There are cases of outright violence, arrests and imprisonment. As recently as December last year, the ongoing abuse of the Baha'is was highlighted by the humanitarian group Amnesty International. They estimate that in one particular country, 66 Baha'is were arrested during 2005. Of those 66, nine remain in custody, and their crime was just following the Baha'i faith. Amnesty International queried also the suspicious death in custody of a follower who had been behind bars for 10 years before allegedly dying of a heart attack just before Christmas 2005.

Questions raised by Amnesty International and by members of the Dubbo Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly have gone unanswered. Members of the group were at pains to point out the execution of 10 Baha'i women. Every religion has its own form of spreading the message through regular prayers, services and schools. The Baha'i faith is no different. However, for teaching this religion and for refusing to denounce it, they were publicly hanged. During my talks, members of the Dubbo assembly highlighted the fact that pleas from around the world for such systematic abuse and discrimination to end were being constantly ignored, despite international pressures.

It was easy to understand their distress. Family, friends and loved ones are subjected to this treatment every day. I spoke with these concerned people and agreed to raise this matter in the House to assist them to bring this victimisation to public attention. Followers in some countries live in hostile societies. It certainly brought home to me the grim reality that even a harmonious region like the electorate of Dubbo can be touched by conflicts, civil and religious, happening throughout the world. There is genuine concern the world over about the treatment of these followers and I was troubled by what I heard. Members of this peaceful community in my electorate are doing all they can to inform us of this disdainful treatment.

Private members' statements noted.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Marie Andrews) left the chair at 6.13 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

APPROPRIATION (BUDGET VARIATIONS) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 May 2006.

Ms PETA SEATON (Southern Highlands) [7.30 p.m.]: The Opposition is disappointed that the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill is yet another Iemma Government pre-budget cash raid which was

slipped in at about 4:30 p.m. last Thursday. The Government hoped that in the quiet of the evening everyone would have gone home, journalists would be busy doing other things, and no-one would notice this \$1.3 billion raid on the taxpayers' cheque book. But the Opposition is alive to what the Government is up to. Indeed, it was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* the next day with the headline "Spending in State blows out by \$1.3 billion". The Government cannot get away with it, but it continues to try because it is ramming this bill through tonight so that it can get its hands on that \$1.3 billion.

The bill contains a number of items that any responsible government engaged in responsible management of the State's finances should have planned and budgeted for a year ago and included in the original 2005-2006 Appropriation Bill. We have become accustomed to seeing the Government do this time and time again, in the dead of night at the end of the financial year, within a few days of its annual budget, coming back to Parliament to get a quick \$1.3 billion while it hopes no-one is looking. The Government is a serial offender in this regard. The Government has a pattern of additional appropriations that it has ripped off New South Wales taxpayers, starting in 1996-97.

In that year the total was \$1.07 billion; in the next year, \$690 million; then \$792 million; \$1.234 billion; \$885 million; \$1.395 million in 2001-02; \$878 million in 2002-03; and \$603 million in the following year. The grand total since Labor has been in office, since 1995-96, is \$10.6 million. So roughly every year since Labor has been in office it has come back for another quick billion dollars at the end of the financial year simply to tidy up its overruns and poor management and financial performance. The Government has come back simply to get that extra \$1 billion from the taxpayers to pay for its costly spending overruns.

The purpose of the Treasurer's Advance is clear: It is meant to be used by the Treasurer to cover emergency and unforeseen expenses. The Opposition is of the view that the Treasurer's Advance would cover such things as unprecedented levels of bushfire threat, an unprecedented drought or a natural disaster. If we were in a wartime situation it would cover expenditure for that. The Treasurer's Advance is not meant to cover day-to-day cost overruns like luxury fit-outs on government offices and hiring additional bureaucrats to do specific projects that should have been planned for and allocated in the budget a year ago. This is simply sloppy, lazy, incompetent Labor Government management.

In recent years the Government has got used to expecting that every year there will be property-related windfalls, and that has been the case for most of the past 10 years because the property market has been strong. As a result of the Howard Government's strong national financial management, windfall revenues have come into the State Government coffers for most of the past 10 years. Instead of being a responsible government that reins in expenditure and ensures that it makes savings in good years for a rainy day in a bad year, the Government has got used to spending all of the windfall every year it has been received. So the Government took its eye off the ball. It managed a number of government services on a cost-plus basis. One need only look at the material that has come out of Treasury under freedom of information requests by the Opposition to see evidence of that.

The Minister for Transport, along with the chairman of RailCorp, made a regular practice of going to Treasury every year or a couple of times a year and saying, "Oops, we've run out of money. We've spent everything you've given us. Please, sir, may I have some more?" They have gone to Treasury with cap in hand and said, "Just give us a whole lot more of taxpayers' cash so that we can fill the gap and cover up the evidence of our mismanagement." Treasury has not endorsed this process. I think the Treasurer, Michael Costa, was the prime suspect because he and the chairman of RailCorp went cap in hand to Treasury on numerous occasions.

Treasury briefing notes to the then Treasurer said, "This is an appalling situation. RailCorp is acting on a cost-plus basis. We have given them something like a 55 per cent increase in cash advances over the past couple of years. They are not making any attempt to improve the performance and outputs of staff they employ. They are simply treating Treasury as a cash cow, a place to come when things get tough to bail them out and it is simply not good enough." Having had all that advice from Treasury, what happens? The Labor Government—the Premier and Treasurer at the time—simply caves in and writes another cheque. This is the sort of thing we are often seeing, and again tonight in the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill. It is incompetent, irresponsible, dangerous financial management. This is why we have a paper-thin surplus this year of only \$21 million and a looming deficit next year of \$533 million.

Mr Daryl Maguire: How much?

Ms PETA SEATON: More than half a billion dollars—\$533 million. After 10 years of an extremely strong national economy under the Howard Government and 10 years of property revenues, one would have

thought the State Government would have got its house in order and put some away for a rainy day. We would have had perfect infrastructure in New South Wales and services second to none, whether it be policing, health, education or whatever. One would have thought all those areas would have been accommodated, but that is not the case. We are facing some of the worst services in Australia. We are facing shortfalls. We have transport congestion and a health system in crisis. After all of those cash windfalls over the past 10 years we are facing a budget deficit of more than half a billion dollars next year. The Government simply cannot be trusted. In the good times it spends it all; in the bad times it continues spending and sends us into deficit.

No business or family in New South Wales can run its finances in this way. Each business or family in New South Wales sets itself a budget and a plan each year or a couple of times a year. Most people include a contingency in that budget because they know that in the course of a year something unexpected will happen or something will go wrong. Most people also make savings for a rainy day. That is to make sure that if something goes wrong with the house, it can be fixed or if some unexpected business expense occurs, there are some savings for a rainy day. Families and businesses also invest in sound assets. For example, they invest in a home or in industrial premises or in their children's education. If there is a disaster or some unexpected call on their finances—and from time to time these things happen—

Mr Daryl Maguire: Such as land tax—

Ms PETA SEATON: —if they do not have the money to pay for it they rearrange their priorities. This is something families and businesses do all the time. For instance, they might make the decision to eat out less or to holiday in New South Wales rather than overseas. That is a good idea, and we want to see more and more people making that decision. That unexpected call on their finances, as the honourable member for Wagga Wagga points out, could be the land tax bill that lands in the post box unexpectedly, as part of the Labor Government's property-related cash grab. So, families and businesses are constantly reviewing their finances and priorities to make sure they can accommodate these unexpected things that happen from time to time without going into massive debt.

What does the State Government do? Unlike businesses and families, who have to be disciplined and responsible managers of their finances, the Lemma Government sets out a budget, which is really just a fantasy, once a year and then spends and spends and blows the budget. It fails to invest in infrastructure. It makes no real savings, and now we are facing a deficit next year of \$533 million. There is no restraint in its spending, poor planning and poor forecasting. This bill is the result of that financial vandalism and poor management of the State's finances. Yet again the Government is coming back for a \$1.3 billion cash grab.

A number of different types of expenses are outlined in this budget variations bill. Some of them should have been forecast and planned for in any budget. For example, luxury office fit-outs for drug policy bureaucrats; additional bureaucrats for World Youth Day; Premier's Department administration, \$100,000; more ICAC hearings, \$400,000; the mini budget, \$1.682 million; the World Masters Games bureaucrats, \$660,000; and the Premier's Department information centres, \$1.065 million. I would love to know what these Premier's Department information centres are. Then there is the Parliamentary sprinkler system, \$146,000, and the Queens baton relay, \$380,000. The thing that galls most people in New South Wales is that in this cash grab we are also being asked to stump up \$636,000 for central media monitoring for the Premier's spin doctors.

Mr Daryl Maguire: How much?

Ms PETA SEATON: It is \$636,000. We would all love to have that amount of money to allocate to our local schools, to upgrade essential infrastructure or airconditioning. I can think of many schools that would like that money on a recurrent basis to afford some additional teaching resources. Recently one of my local schools had to struggle and fight tooth and nail to keep the second teacher in a very small school because student numbers dropped by two, which meant sudden death for the second teacher and she was going to be out the door.

Today we are all enjoying a \$4 million Sydney Water advertising campaign, which is trying to tell people that all is well and things have been sorted out. We know that is not true. This is more glossy propaganda—\$4 million worth of spin—as well as \$636,000 for media monitoring for the Premier's spin doctors. I would like the Minister for Energy and his ministerial colleagues to tell us what level of media monitoring they now enjoy. I am hearing stories about how Ministers are constantly being texted with SMS messages about what other people might be saying about their portfolio areas. They are dying to hear their own names, so whenever their names are mentioned on radio or television they receive another SMS.

The amount of money being spent on spin and media monitoring by this Government is appalling. Next year we are heading into a deficit of \$533 million. The Government is spending \$4 million to try to convince people that it has our future water security under control, which is not true, and is spending money on things like luxury office fit-outs for drug policy bureaucrats—additional bureaucrats in this already bloated bureaucracy. The first of these categories includes things that should have been planned for and forecast in the budget a year ago but because of the Government's sloppy and irresponsible financial management that was not done.

Other items in this bill could have been avoided if the Government had managed other issues properly. I point particularly to the \$8 million of expenditure on the Cronulla riots and related issues. Time and again in this Parliament we have said to the Government that the softly-softly approach of policing has created an environment where crime has spun out of control in several parts of Sydney. In addition, since 2003 the Government has cut approximately 600 police officers from police ranks. In the Camden Local Area Command that is 15 police officers. That is why at the moment people in villages like The Oaks are complaining to me that there is not sufficient police presence and that hooligans and others are getting the upper hand in some of those places. It comes back to the fact that there are 600 fewer police officers as a result of the Iemma Government's cut.

If the Government had abandoned its softly-softly approach on policing and had not cut those 600 police officers, as it did immediately after the election in 2003, our hardworking police officers would have been in a much better position to crack down on some of the problems when they were small, instead of watching them get out of hand as we all saw at the end of last year—leading to \$8 million being spent on the Cronulla riots.

Poor forecasting is another reason why we are in the current situation. I point to items such as additional bureaucrats for various events and projects, and the additional public sector salary increases that had to be accommodated during the year. Every member in this place understands the value of the work done by teachers and nurses and many of the other public sector employees who were the beneficiaries of public sector wage increases during the past 12 months. However, we want to know why the budget forecast an upper limit of public sector wage increases of 3 per cent when the reality was closer to 4 per cent and, in some cases, 4.5 per cent and more. That is the reason we have a budget black hole and are heading into a deficit next year.

I would describe the last category of items in this bill as an election slush fund. The Government is appropriating more money now so it can give people the impression that it is cleaning up the problems that have been at the forefront of many people's minds in New South Wales. I particularly refer to elective surgery waiting lists and the lack of sufficient police numbers. The Government has allocated money in this bill in a last-minute attempt to clean up its appalling record on elective surgery waiting lists. Having starved the system for years and having told people who have extremely painful conditions that they will be on waiting lists for one and two years, the Government is now trying to push the idea that it has solved the problem and has increased the throughput of people on elective surgery waiting lists.

From the beginning the Government should have addressed this problem consistently so people did not have to wait three years for hip and knee replacements and cataract surgery. People should have had access to those procedures much earlier. I believe people will see through the Government's actions. The Government has allocated money for police recruits. Since 2003 it has cut 600 police. Now the Government, by throwing money at the problem, expects us not to notice that it cut 600 police over the past three years. People, particularly in my electorate, who understand the consequences of police cuts will see through these pre-election slush fund cash grants. We have become used to this annual event from the Iemma Government.

Mr Joseph Tripodi: The rough and tumble of Bowral.

Ms PETA SEATON: I note that the Minister for Energy has tried to cast aspersions on the concerns of the good people of Bowral. He joked about the so-called rough and tumble of Bowral. I defy him to talk to the Chamber of Commerce in Bowral and the Southern Highlands and the people of Bundanoon, The Oaks and other areas in my electorate who are very concerned about crime in their local areas. If they knew that the Minister was making a joke about it and belittling their concerns they would be very angry.

The priority items in the bill ought to have been forecast a year ago. As I have said already, police numbers are a priority item. No-one would argue that public sector wage increases to our essential front-line nurses, doctors, teachers and many other public sector employees are not well deserved. We argue that the Government has spent above forecast regularly and consistently over the past 10 years. The growth in general

government sector spending has outpaced growth in revenue. Now the taxpayers and citizens of New South Wales are paying the price with a deficit next year and some of the most dramatic service shortfalls in New South Wales they have ever experienced. This bill is further evidence of economic vandalism by the Iemma Government.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [7.54 p.m.]: The Labor Party brand stands for many things in the minds of the electorate. One of them is financial incompetence and mismanagement. That is a well-earned reputation, as exemplified by the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill. Every year the Carr-Iemma Labor Government comes back prior to the budget to seek about \$1 billion of extra money for unbudgeted items, which should have been factored into the budget. The real purpose of the Treasurer's Advance is for unexpected events such as natural disasters—not for extra spin doctors or office fit-outs, as listed in the bill.

When managing a State the size of New South Wales, one would expect the Government to make a variation each year. Sometimes it would be up; sometimes it would be down. However, with this Labor Government the variation is always up. It is always spending more than it planned, particularly this year when it is spending more than it earns. The Government keeps on raiding the cookie jar year after year. It is a serial offender with lots of form. As the honourable member for Southern Highlands said in her contribution, since 1995 the Government has gone back to raiding the cookie jar to the extent of nearly \$1 billion each and every year. That is unforgivable laxity in budgetary management.

Why do we need this budget variations bill? Why does the Government want an extra \$1.2 billion on top of the budgeted amount? As the honourable member for Southern Highlands rightly said, it is a last-minute budget raid to pay for costly extra media monitoring, luxury office suite renovations, extra bureaucrats and events, and numerous unbudgeted government extras that should have been factored into the annual budget. It includes media monitoring for the Premier's Department: an extra \$636,000 on spin doctors. It includes a luxury office fit-out for drug policy bureaucrats and additional bureaucrats for World Youth Day, costing \$560,000, another \$100,000 for Premier's Department administration, more Independent Commission Against Corruption hearings at \$400,000, nearly \$1.7 billion on the mini-budget, World Masters Game bureaucrats at \$660,000, information centres in the Premier's Department costing \$1.065 million, a sprinkler system for the Parliament at \$646,000—that is a lot of water—management of the Perisher Range resorts at \$380,000, \$8 million for the Cronulla riots, the Queen's baton relay at \$380,000, and the abolition of the Department for Women at a cost of \$1.06 million. That is a lot of money.

Country people, whom The Nationals represent, want basic services. We would like to see that money made available for basic services, such as police, ambulances, teachers, nurses and more operations in our hospitals. We would like to see safer roads in country New South Wales. All we have seen from this Labor Government is a series of cuts and moves aimed at centralisation. I refer to cutbacks to business enterprise centres, area health services, Roads and Traffic Authority offices, Department of Community Services offices and Department of Health area offices. All these services have been centralised under this Labor Government. While there is a reigning in of services to local communities throughout country New South Wales, more and more money is being spent in the city.

As I have maintained, basic services are being neglected by the Government in its profligate spending in what it regards as NSW—Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong. In the Tweed the upgrades to Banora Point school remain unfinished and that school does not function as it should. Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School at Tamworth has no airconditioning. It has boarders and through the long summer months they require reasonable accommodation with airconditioning. It is not happening. The timber bridge replacement program has been cut. The Nundle bridge, which is a major economic contributor to that district, is in need of upgrading or replacement. A hospital at Parkes was promised during the by-election campaign but it has not been delivered and the Minister for Health is going cold on the whole idea.

The road between Wellington and Dubbo is dangerous and needs more overtaking lanes, but it remains neglected. Large sections of the Silver City Highway going north from Broken Hill to Tibooburra remain unsealed, which is dangerous. A great deal of money has been spent on the Carrathool bridge but there has been no improvement; it is still a one-lane bridge. I travelled across it just a couple of weeks ago. Promises were made about a ring road at Queanbeyan, but it still has not been delivered. These are basic services. The \$1.2 billion that is the subject of this bill would go a long way towards delivering the things that the citizens of this State really want, as opposed to more spin doctors and luxury office fit-outs to help this Government in its quest to retain power.

The Queanbeyan hospital has still not been upgraded despite yet another promise. The good people of Queanbeyan deserve a better facility, as do the nurses and doctors who work there. The privatisation of Snowy Hydro Limited is a very hot topic of conversation throughout country New South Wales, particularly in the Monaro district. People are asking why the Government is selling it. It is selling it for the same reason that we are debating this bill: it is trying to deal with its profligate spending. The Labor Government is spending beyond its means and it is now forced to sell assets to make up a budget shortfall.

Mr Joseph Tripodi: Why is the Federal Government selling its share?

Mr ANDREW STONER: Simply because this Government, with its majority shareholding, has proposed the sale. Why would the Federal Government, which has a very small shareholding, hold on to it when the majority shareholder has divested itself of its shares? Last year 520 people were killed on New South Wales roads—not the 504 mentioned by the Minister for Roads. That is far too many. Of those, 60 per cent were killed on country roads. This \$1.2 billion would go a long way towards removing black spots and upgrading major highways throughout country New South Wales. On average, one person is killed on the New England Highway every month. It has numerous well-known black spots that are not being addressed because \$1.2 billion is being scooped by the Government late in the financial year to pay for fripperies such as spin doctors, bureaucrats and office fit-outs.

Bonville, on the Pacific Highway, has been a topic of conversation because far too many people have been killed in the area. If it were not for the Federal Government's contribution to upgrading projects nothing would be happening. We would simply have extra speed cameras and a lower speed limit. That is not good enough. These head-on accidents are occurring at low speeds because Coffs Harbour is in the middle of a fatigue zone. Only a divided dual carriageway will eliminate accidents. A number of truck accidents have recently occurred just north of the antiquated Maxville bridge, which is in my electorate. The traffic bridge at Kempsey is also the site of far too many accidents and fatalities. In 1989, 35 people were killed at Clybucca, but there is still no divided dual carriageway. This \$1.2 billion, which is being gouged to pay for unbudgeted items, would go a long way towards reducing the road toll and improving those highways. The people of New South Wales want the basics.

Drought funding was recently cut by the Minister for Primary Industries. Just as New South Wales took a turn for the worse with the drought, the Government cut transport subsidies for stock and fodder. The citizens of this State want basic services such as CountryLink maintained. It is the only form of public transport for many country people, but staff numbers have been cut and a \$10 minimum booking fee has been introduced for so-called free pensioner travel. That fee may be up to \$30 for the longer trips taken by the pensioners of this State. I assure the Government that people are not happy about that, especially when they see vast sums of money being spent on fripperies such as mini-budgets, bureaucrats travelling to the World Masters Games, and so on. This Government is effectively stealing from pensioners by imposing this booking fee and pumping it into non-essential services such as more bureaucrats in Sydney, more spin doctoring, and more attempts by the Government to retain power. Country people will not cop it.

People want these resources spent on employing more police officers. Many categories of crime are increasing throughout country New South Wales. On the mid North Coast the local area command establishment is down by three officers when the incidence of some serious violent crime has increased by up to 300 per cent. We also want country hospitals in New South Wales improved. A number of hospitals were built in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and are reaching their use-by date. The hospitals at Kempsey, Wauchope and Maxville are old and in need of urgent attention. We also need better facilities for our police officers to tackle law and order issues. The Nambucca shire has no 24-hour policing facility. We need a new 24-hour station in that area. Kempsey also needs a new police station because the existing facility is falling apart. People want this money allocated for those services, not for these niceties for the Sydney bureaucracy.

School communities are suffering with substandard schools and a \$116 million backlog in school maintenance. They want local schools fixed, covered outdoor learning areas provided, and toilet blocks made hygienic and usable, even if only temporarily. The citizens of this State also want better public dental health services. People whose teeth are in a terrible state are waiting years for treatment in public hospitals in New South Wales. People need urgent elective surgery because they are in pain with hip conditions, cataracts and so on, but they are told to wait for years. How can this Government justify a last-minute budget raid of \$1.2 billion to pay for things such as media monitoring, office renovations, extra bureaucrats, events and other unbudgeted extras? This \$1.2 billion should be directed towards the provision of basic services throughout country New South Wales. It is no wonder regional and rural communities feel disenfranchised by this Government and are waiting until 24 March next year to finally get rid of the Carr-Jemma Labor Government.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [8.09 p.m.]: I speak to the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill. It is the prerogative of Governments to introduce this type of legislation on an annual basis. However, the custom is that such legislation deals with expenditure that was not foreseen when the budget was crafted, such as natural disasters. The Government has made an absolute mockery of introducing the legislation at this stage. As my colleagues said, in addition to listing unforeseen items of expenditure the legislation lists items that clearly could have been foreseen had the Government been a more prudent a manager of the economy and more responsible in its budget, and had it put public policy ahead of other political considerations.

Regrettably, we now have a situation whereby, amongst other things, this budget variations bill refers to budget items such as an allocation of more than \$600,000 for even more media monitoring in the Premier's Office, an additional \$100,000 for administration in the Premier's Office, and \$646,000 for a parliamentary sprinkler system. I do not suggest that the Parliament does not need a sprinkler system, but it is embarrassing that the Government has had to include that allocation in its budget variations bill. Why cannot items such as that be foreseen and planned for, instead of being itemised in legislation of this type?

Although the bill does not go into a lot of detail about this item, it refers to an allocation of \$380,000 for the management of Perisher Range resorts. Ironically, it refers to the abolition of the Department for Women at a cost of more than \$1 million. As I said, it is the prerogative of governments that they utilise budget variations bills to account for unforeseen circumstances that might arise and that therefore require a variation in the budget. However, clearly, some of the items listed in the bill are the result of nothing more than the Government's bad management, bad economic policy and loss of direction after more than a decade in power.

I wish to place on record that this budget variations bill does not include budget items that have recently been announced or that the Government has forced to admit. I suspect that other pieces of legislation will follow the appropriations bill, which will be passed next month or thereabouts. For example, recently the Minister for Community Services, although she could not admit it in the House, abolished the Commission for Children and Young People. She also abolished the Office of the Children's Guardian. The Minister has set up a new department, called the Office for Children, to replace those two departments. Yet, clearly, the cost of setting up that body is not reflected in this legislation, so where is it reflected? That is but one of many examples.

The Minister for Community Services has failed to explain to the House why she has made that decision. Indeed, she says it has nothing to do with cost. However, we know from this bill and other major examples that many Ministers do not have control of their departments, they do not have control of their policy areas, and they do not have control of how they manage the part of the economy for which they are responsible. Clearly, the Minister for Community Services has failed to explain to the community why she has abolished those two departments. If it is purely on the basis of cost, the Minister needs to explain that. She also needs to explain the cost of establishing the new department and how it is in the interests of the public and children who are in the protection of the State.

By putting forward a bill such as this, which includes items such as those to which I have referred, the Government fails to address serious issues in our community that are at crisis point. One issue I feel very strongly about, as I am sure many members of this House do, is mental health. Why did not the Government take this opportunity to address the current mental health crisis in New South Wales? If the Government sees fit to increase funding for spin doctors in the Premier's Department, the management of Perisher Range resorts and other administrative matters, why does it not see fit to include in this bill funding for mental health? According to figures taken from the national mental health report for 2004, which analysed a decade of data and evidence, in the past decade New South Wales has had by far the lowest per capita growth in mental health funding of all the States and Territories, at just 23 per cent. This is something we need to be ashamed of.

If the Premier, the Minister for Health and the Assistant Minister for Health were serious about mental health, if they really wanted to address the issue without simply providing lip-service to it, they would have included in this bill a measure to address the State's mental health crisis. I do not think any member of this place has not been confronted by a family or individuals who simply cannot get access to the New South Wales mental health system. This bill exemplifies the Government's lack of vision, lack of priorities and lack of direction. The Government does not know, and does not care about, what the community wants. It is simply covering its tracks in relation to expenditure which is not explained and which, on balance, does not seem to equate with other priorities that are required.

According to the February 2005 Productivity Commission figures, New South Wales has 14.3 mental health beds in public hospitals per 100,000 people, which is the worst ratio of any Australian State or Territory

bar one. Last year community organisations providing critical mental health services received only 2.4 per cent of the total mental health budget. Mental health organisations such as Lifeline and the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill, which support people with a mental illness and pick up the pieces where government services stop, received only 2.4 per cent of the total mental health budget, which is the worst level of assistance to community organisations in the country.

Last year's Auditor-General's report into emergency mental health services found that up to 9 per cent of mental health patients who present to emergency departments are forced to leave prior to seeing a doctor. That figure does not even include those who do not receive appropriate care because of the backlog. It is appalling that 9 per cent of mental health patients who present to emergency departments leave without being seen by a doctor. According to the most recent figures, mental health patients comprise approximately 12 per cent of patients within the New South Wales health system, yet this financial year mental health will receive only 7.7 per cent of the total health budget.

The Government has deemed it necessary to include in this budget variations bill items that in my view are not as important as many other issues for which the community is crying out for funding. Not only is there not enough funding for mental health but the Government is closing down community-based mental health facilities. Indeed, in my electorate the Chatswood Mental Health Community Centre was closed. I note that the honourable member for Wagga Wagga is in the Chamber. Projects such as Sunflower House in Wagga Wagga have been denied funding because the State Government does not deem them fit to receive funding. Projects such as those I have mentioned can save lives, yet the Government turns its back on them. Instead, it sees fit to increase its ability to media monitor. That is a disgraceful outcome.

Another example I bring to the House's attention is that of Lifeline. Over at least the last four years Lifeline has been knocking on the door of the Government for funding for its telephone counselling service. Lifeline is the only 24-hour, seven-day-a-week counselling service in this State, and yet the Government does not deem it fit to receive funding. However, the Government deems fit to provide in this bill funding for other things which, I am sure no-one would disagree, certainly should not be given priority over the projects and services I have referred to.

I conclude my remarks by repeating that it is the prerogative of the Government to bring forward budget variations from time to time but that should be done on the basis of unforeseen circumstances. Budget variations should not include expenditure for items that should have been foreseen and planned for. If the Government deems fit to include items such as these in its budget variations, it should also deem fit to address major issues we have in our community, such as mental health, child protection and other issues.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [8.19 p.m.]: The object of the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill is to appropriate additional amounts from the Consolidated Fund for recurrent services, capital works and services for the years 2005-06 and 2004-05 for the purpose of giving effect to certain budget variations required by the exigencies of government. I also express alarm and concern that this is a sneaky pre-budget raid on finances to fund items, the emergency nature of which is extremely questionable. Later in my contribution I will refer to services in my electorate that obviously have been neglected for years and are in dire need of expenditure.

This \$1.2 billion variation wipes out a \$21 million surplus, and it is certainly questionable when amongst the extras being paid for in this pre-budget cash raid are \$636,000 for media monitoring for the Premier's spin doctors, a luxury office set up for drug policy bureaucrats, \$560,000 for additional bureaucrats for World Youth Day, \$100,000 for Premier's Department administration, \$400,000 for more Independent Commission Against Corruption hearings, \$1.682 million for the mini budget, \$660,000 for the World Masters Games bureaucrats, \$1.065 million for Premier's Department information centres, \$646,000 for a parliamentary sprinkler system, \$380,000 for management of Perisher Range resorts, \$8 million for the Cronulla riots, \$380,000 for the Queen's Baton relay, and \$1.06 million to cover the cost of abolishing the Department for Women.

In my electorate there are many places where money should have been spent during the 11 years of Labor Government mismanagement. I am distressed to think that the children at Berowra Public School are using a makeshift hall that is falling apart and that they have been putting up with those substandard conditions for a number of years. Since I was elected four years ago the school community has been calling on the Government to provide the children at the school with the type of facilities that are enjoyed by many others around the State: a comfortable hall that will accommodate the entire school population, rather than a draughty,

run-down, disgraceful building. The school also needs a redevelopment of sorts, but over the past four years it has been swindled with promises of a master plan that has gone not much further than a piece of paper.

In regard to other expenditure, it seems that the Clearways project at Berowra and Hornsby stations, which totals a massive \$106 million, does not include any extra parking at those two stations. I am puzzled as to how more trains can start and finish at Hornsby station, yet there is no additional parking to cater for that. If people who come down from the Central Coast or from the suburbs around Hornsby do not get to the station by 6.30 a.m. they have to swing by Hornsby station and go further down the line into other electorates to find parking—if they are able to do so at all. That obviously adds to the number of cars on the roads, and increases the wear and tear on those roads.

Since I was elected, and for many years before that, there has been an issue relating to intersections at Mount Colah. There have been two public meetings. I have made many written representations to the Minister for Roads and I have called on a number of Ministers to visit the area. I am now seeking another meeting with the Minister for Roads to discuss this matter in light of the tragic accident involving Sophie Delezio, who was hit by a car on a pedestrian crossing. People in the Mount Colah area do not even have a pedestrian crossing to get from the west side of the Pacific Highway to the east side to catch a bus. The Government has not seen fit to provide a few hundred thousand dollars to install traffic lights at one of the intersections at Mount Colah, and that is an extremely poor show. Hopefully, it will not take a serious accident involving a pedestrian, particularly a child, being hit while trying to cross three lanes on either side of the median strip to catch a bus for the Government to take action.

The bill provides funding for police, but in my area I want to see more police on the ground. The rostering is such that bike police, who were promised in October 2004, have never eventuated. That has been attributed to the fact that the rosters cannot cope with any extra police beyond the base cover at the Ku-ring-gai Local Area Command and the needs of that local area command are such that there is no cream on the milk to provide for bike police. Because 37 per cent of all crime in the Ku-ring-gai area occurs around the Hornsby mall, bike police would be a great asset, but we have yet to see them there.

For the safety of our children flashing lights are needed at all schools. Waitara Public School is the only school in my electorate that has flashing lights, which indicate the peak times at which children and parents are arriving at and leaving schools. It has taken the Government three years to decide whether flashing lights indicating 40 kilometre zones are necessary. I do not believe there is any argument that flashing lights will make a big difference to the safety of children around our schools and, therefore, they are essential.

The redevelopment of Hornsby hospital is under way. There is a mental health unit and there will be an intensive care unit for mentally ill people. However, there is a desperate need for a child and adolescent unit. Young people are being placed in adult wards. I have spoken about this issue for the past four years, but it seems that has been to no avail. The Government, after seemingly giving a small amount of money for the planning of a child and adolescent mental health facility, has taken that money away. It has been reallocated for general child and adolescent needs. Obviously, that is important but a child and adolescent mental health facility in the hospital grounds is desperately needed to complement the existing mental health unit and the intensive care unit that is to be built.

The people of Brooklyn and Dangar Island are last on the priority one list for sewerage connection. However, they are extremely happy: there are now sheds and a bulldozer on the old dairy site so they can see progress. Last Saturday morning I was at the oval in Brooklyn Road where young people play, and it is basically a dust bowl. The oval was returfed last year, but one would not know it now as most of the grass has died. It would not take much more funding to connect a recycling facility to ensure the outfall does not go under the Brooklyn Bridge and into the Hawkesbury River. The water could be used for industry, parks and other recreation areas, including the oval. That is an essential area that needs attention.

Lifeline has three shops in Asquith. As the honourable member for Willoughby has said, it is an absolute disgrace that the Government has the audacity to publish Lifeline's after-hours number on health brochures but it will not give Lifeline enough funding to conduct its business. Lifeline is therefore forced to run shops, and it does a fantastic job. Lifeline at Gordon organises a book sale once a year, as well as sundry other fundraising activities to top up its coffers so it can provide the 24-hour, 7-day-a-week service that is so well regarded and so essential to society.

More front-line services are needed in the electorate. We have a continual lack of nursing staff and other essential staff in hospitals. I have already said that we desperately need more police, and the Government

would do well to think of ways to keep nurses in our hospitals. Obviously, nurses are feeling the pressure. The more nurses who leave to follow other careers, the more stress is left behind. It is a vicious circle. The Government has not placed enough emphasis on nurse recruitment. I shall conclude by restating the Opposition's alarm at the \$1.2 billion pre-budget cash raid, which has pushed New South Wales into deficit this year. I express my continuing concern at the considerable strain it places on an already shaky financial management plan. I could talk about many other matters affecting my electorate, but I will leave that for a future budget debate.

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [8.31 p.m.]: I have been a member of this place for 15 years. Ten of those years have been under the Labor Government, and every year it has introduced budget variations bills. In the past the Treasurer from the other place has delivered the budget and one could be forgiven for thinking that he did not know what went on in the real world. However, during the 11 years of the Labor Government, the sum total appropriated under variations bills has been \$9 billion. The Government brings down the budget, and the Treasurer makes a speech in this Chamber saying that he has committed himself to a surplus and that the Government is wonderful.

In previous years New South Wales had excess revenue, until the Government introduced the botched vendor duty, which ruined business in New South Wales. With the extra money Ministers had to spend, they increased their bureaucracies across the board. The Government sat on record revenues, yet infrastructure has fallen down around our ears. That is a disgrace. Members opposite should not crow; they should ask in caucus where the money has gone, why hospitals are not being upgraded, why roads such as the Pacific Highway have not been completed and why departments are not accountable.

Ms Virginia Judge: Where is our \$3 billion GST?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: The honourable member for Strathfield says, "Where is our \$3 billion GST?" The Government has received \$9 billion over 12 years. Every cent of the GST has been a bonus to the Government, because every cent has been sent back via a preordained formula between the Premiers and the Federal Treasurer. Despite that, members opposite gripe even though, yet again, a week or two before the State budget is presented, we have the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill. That shows waste and a Government that is out of control and out of touch with the people of Sydney and regional and rural New South Wales. The bill refers to \$36 billion additional funding for the improved disability services.

[Interruption]

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! Government members will come to order.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: The honourable member for Bankstown should speak to parents of disabled kiddies in his electorate and ask them how much extra funding they have had during the term of this Government to assist their children in the classroom. They will say, "None." They are losing increments of 15 minutes per child. When one child has four 15-minute increments they can be handed over to another child and they say, "We want another place". They know full well that the aides who come in to assist those kids will work with the extra 15 minutes free of charge. The bill states that \$36 million has been allocated for additional funding for improved disability services, post-school programs, and the trial of an integrated service project for persons with challenging behaviours. Honourable members opposite should talk to their constituents to learn about the real problem because those services do not exist or, if they do, they are underfunded. Government has cleverly improved and fattened the bureaucracy, which is soaking up funding in New South Wales. There is no real service.

Home care providers state that 52 per cent of funding goes into bureaucracy and the remaining 48 per cent does not meet community needs. The bill refers to increased elective surgery activity for low-complexity procedures of \$5 million, which sounds fantastic. Indeed, for those people with cataracts, it is fantastic, but these days cataract surgery is like a sausage machine. On the North Coast people are rolled into Macksville Hospital and 20 to 30 procedures are done each day. People are waiting for elective surgery such as a colonoscopy. The people of this State understand—and this will show up at the next election—that a colonoscopy is a diagnostic procedure, but for someone who has returned a positive test under Rotary's BowelScan program it will now be regarded as elective, non-urgent surgery. People who have had positive test results and attend the local hospital for a colonoscopy will be told they will go on the waiting list. Bowel cancer is a life-threatening disease but when Andrew Refshauge was the Minister for Health he changed the rules. Because the waiting list was burgeoning, the Government put \$5 million into increased elective surgery activity for low-complexity procedures.

Advances in eye surgery have been fantastic and \$5 million will go a long way towards removing many cataract patients from the elective surgery waiting list. When the Opposition criticises the Government about its waiting list, we are referred to the increased activity and the number of people who have undergone elective surgery. However, the Government fails to mention the bloke who is waiting for a colonoscopy or the woman waiting for a hip or knee replacement, because that type of surgery is expensive and \$5 million will not go as far in removing patients from the waiting list. This is smoke and mirrors.

Nurses in all hospitals agree that extra doctors and nurses cannot be found to assist in accident and emergency departments or in other trauma areas because it takes six months to advertise the positions. In comparison, it only takes about two weeks to get replacement or additional staff if another bureaucrat is needed to provide figures to the Minister to ensure that the elective surgery list is hidden or disguised. Hospital administrators are puppets of a Government bent on bending the figures and not providing the services we expect from a health care system in a country such as Australia.

The bill also refers to \$13.2 million for timber restructure initiatives in the Brigalow and Nandewar region. The Government locked up that area as a payoff to the Greens. In local terms, the productive area of forest in the Pilliga is like hairs on a cat's back. Because of changed management conditions, some areas of the Pilliga are covered in cyprus. Yet the Government has seen fit to lock up these areas on the basis of claims by Green extremists. Eventually the area will be covered by cyprus, which will burn, koalas will die, and the environmental benefit will be nil.

Ms Linda Burney: What about the structural adjustment?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: As a result of the Government's actions, there are now only four mills. Baradine will end up as a ghost town. We have lost the mill in Dubbo; the fellow in Dubbo has just shut up shop. The only ones left are in Gulargambone and Gunnedah, and there are two other small mills.

Ms Linda Burney: That's right, Narrandera.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: There is one mill in Narrandera. What happened to Bingara? The jobs in Bingara disappeared. Those people are now out of work because of the Government's need to pay back Greens preferences. I hear the little parrot from Monaro saying, "What about the Greens?" We know how the honourable member for Monaro got elected. He was elected on a promise of locking up productive forest in Eden-Monaro, which has now been done. The Greens candidate—I think the woman's name was Brown—said to the Premier, "You do this or do that". I note that the previous Minister for Forestry is sitting in the Chamber. He knows as well as I do that the then Premier, Bob Carr, wrote to Bob Smith in the middle of an election campaign and asked him to stop logging in these particular compartments. Those compartments have now been turned over to the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

I referred the matter to the Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC]. ICAC said, "We can't find any proof of it." I said, "Have you looked at the schedule of operations?" ICAC said, "What's that?" ICAC had not been near the schedule. I asked ICAC to go back and look at the schedule. I never received one letter of correspondence. The honourable member for Monaro is running on a thin knife's edge on this matter because he has burnt the forestry industry in his electorate for the sake of his political career. On the noises I am getting from his electorate about his lacklustre stand on the sale of the Snowy, the honourable member is "one-term Whan". He will be just like his dad; he will be a member for only one term because his electorate has worked him out quickly.

Mr Steve Whan: He had two.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: The honourable member will not get two terms. He is gone! David Madew has his mark. The honourable member will not stand up for his electorate. He has not spoken in this debate. He has not stood up for his electorate in relation to the sale of the Snowy, and he will pay for that. I will take great pleasure in visiting the Monaro electorate and working for David Madew and against the honourable member, enlightening people to the honourable member's factional attitudes in this place. He stands up for his faction and does what he is told to do, but he will not stand up for his constituents who elected him. Schedule 1 to the bill contains an allocation of \$500,000 for Synchrotron project contribution.

Ms Linda Burney: What's that?

Mr ANDREW FRASER: That is what I want to know. The bill contains an allocation for expenses associated with the transition of administration in the Premier's Department. Can someone tell me why \$512,000 is necessary for expenses associated with a transition of administration? God almighty! I think the people of this State deserve—

Ms Linda Burney: Don't take the Lord's name in vain.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: I am pleading with him. God tell us, because the Government will not. We need an explanation of this expenditure. Deaths are occurring on North Coast roads and the budget is overrun by 100 per cent—\$2 billion budgeted over 10 years and overspent by \$1 billion. I have appealed to the Federal Government to audit this Government's roads expenditure, but it is unable to do so because of contracts with the State. Today we sat in the House and listened to the Premier reading statistics relating to an intersection that was identified some 12 months ago for upgrade and improvement. It is the intersection where little Sophie was cleaned up last week. Even today the Government told us that it will take five months to design traffic lights for an intersection. Five months! What the hell is going on in the Government? Why does the Roads and Traffic Authority have the Government so conned that it will have a \$1 billion overspend on the North Coast and then say that it will take 12 months to install a set of traffic lights. Even after this little girl was severely injured last week, it will take another five months to finish the design and start the installation of traffic lights. That is bizarre.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: I am absolutely offended by the use of the words "cleaned up". What a way to describe that dreadful accident! I ask the honourable member for Coffs Harbour to withdraw that comment.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! Regrettably, bad taste is not a valid basis for a point of order. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour has the call.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: I seek an extension of time. The honourable member for Canterbury is offended because she is trying to defend a Government that has an absolutely appalling record on road safety in this State. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Telling us during question time that since 2003 we have had a trial on flashing flights to be used at school intersections in areas such as where Sophie was hit last week says to me that we have a—

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. What does this have to do with the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill?

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The problem I have with that point of order is that technically it is probably correct, but regrettably every other speaker in this debate has been allowed latitude to stray well beyond the leave of the bill. Whatever my personal preference might be, it seems unfair to constrain the honourable member for Coffs Harbour in a way that other speakers have not been constrained.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Members opposite know damn well that the RTA has got away with billions of dollars in the past 10 years. I want an explanation—I do not want glib answers like the Premier gave today—as to why last January it was agreed that this set of traffic lights would be installed, yet the money has not been found. I put it to the House that these tragic accidents occur as a result of budgetary measures and the waste of money in the RTA and other government departments. Although the intersection was identified in January as requiring traffic lights, today we were told the work will not be completed until November. That is a disgrace. It is all because of the Government's mismanagement, both financially and morally, over the past 11 years. As I said, the Treasurer will deliver the budget a week late, in June. What opportunity will honourable members have to debate the budget? We are not coming back until September. The Government is hiding from the scrutiny of the Parliament.

Mr Brad Hazzard: He is ripping millions out of Snowy Hydro.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Absolutely! The honourable member for Wakehurst made a point about the honourable member for Monaro. I have already raised that in the debate. The billions of dollars the Government will get out of the Snowy will go straight back into overspending and mismanagement. The people of New South Wales are awake. We will be out there telling them, and we will be telling the constituents of the Monaro electorate about the Government's mismanagement, and the honourable member for Monaro will not be re-elected.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: You won't be back either.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Labor members will be sitting on the Opposition benches in scarce numbers, and I doubt whether the honourable member for Camden will be here. We know about him and his WorkCover clients. We know they went to him and he did nothing about it. We know the blokes out there who went broke, and we know all about the honourable member for Camden. We will be making sure that his constituents know about his lack of spine in not standing up to his Government.

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [8.49 p.m.]: Once again this Government's financial ineptitude is totally exposed. Where has the money gone? That is what the dividend holders of the Cronulla Workers Club used to say.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: You are not being fair dinkum.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I am being fair dinkum. Nobody could be more fair dinkum on this. I say this with more of a heavy heart, more in sorrow than in anger at the financial management of this State. It has become that bad that the Government will sell not only the Snowy River; it will sell Monaro.

Mr Steve Whan: The Snowy River is very healthy and will be getting all its water.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: That sounds like a salesman's pitch. I take honourable members to page 15 of the bill, to the appropriations in relation to the Minister for Police. We see there Operation Seta and Strike Force Enoggera. We see that \$8 million has been expended there. Why? We all know what happened in Cronulla in December. Why did it happen? Because policing had not been sufficient in the lead-up to the events of December. If the investment had been made in policing in Cronulla before December 2005, this appropriation would not have been required. What happened there was an absolute scandal.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: What did you do about it? What is your position?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: My position has been very strong since 1995. The honourable member can read the record.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst and the honourable member for Camden will resume their seats and maintain a degree of decorum.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: What was his position? He is a disgrace.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The honourable member for Cronulla has the call.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I apologise for interrupting the honourable member's interjections with my speech but I would like to proceed. It is important that the people of Cronulla understand what the Government is doing and what it has failed to do about what happened. The honourable member for Camden asked what I had been doing. Since 1995 I have been saying that Cronulla police station should have been fully manned. I invite the honourable member for Camden to look at how Cronulla police station was manned in 1995 and how it has been manned since his Government came to office. The lack of police visibility resulted in that disturbance in December. It would be nice if in this appropriation funding was being made available for the businesses of Cronulla that were hard hit through no fault of their own. But where is the relief for them? Where are the jobs that can be preserved in Cronulla?

Mr Geoff Corrigan: When was the last time you had a coffee in Cronulla?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I would say yesterday. I am glad the honourable member mentioned that. I ask the honourable member for Camden when he had his last coffee or meal in Cronulla?

Mr Geoff Corrigan: Three months ago.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: Three months ago? He is due for another cup of coffee after three months. He is entitled to that. I invite the honourable member for Camden to come down, bring all his friends—both of them—and sit down and have a meal in Cronulla.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: Point of order: I bring my family to Cronulla to have meals.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! That is not a point of order. The honourable member for Camden will resume his seat.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: No, it is not a point of order; it is a personal explanation.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: I understand you have been very lenient on whether honourable members are speaking to the bill. I know leniency is important but at this point I feel honourable members need to be drawn back to what they should be talking about.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The amount of coffee drunk by the honourable member for Camden or the honourable member for Cronulla is not relevant to this debate. The honourable member for Cronulla should remain within the leave of the bill.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I refer back to page 15 of the bill, and the allocation to Operation Seta and Strike Force Enoggera. The great pity is Operation Beach Safe is due to end at the end of May, however we have not heard of any strategy by the Government about the future policing of Cronulla. We have not heard how many police will be allocated. No doubt the honourable member for Camden has his copy of today's *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*, which on the front page speaks about a "Red-faced MP". It talks about the honourable member for Miranda not having—

Mr Geoff Corrigan: Point of order: I have seen that article. It is scurrilous and defamatory. The honourable member for Miranda has looked after his constituents. He is a wonderful member. I appreciate what the honourable member for Cronulla has been saying—

Mr Brad Hazzard: To the point of order—

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! I do not believe there is a point of order. The honourable member for Cronulla has the call.

Mr Brad Hazzard: There is no point of order. The honourable member for Camden should consider leaving the Chamber and exercising some caution.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: The point of order was about policing at Cronulla. Cronulla was promised 10 police but only six were there. I am glad the honourable member for Camden has seen that article and he should, on behalf of the Government, be embarrassed about that. Once again, this shows the Government's lack of commitment to policing at Cronulla. The most fundamental task of any government is to ensure an orderly society. The events of December were brought about by a lack of commitment by the present Government and now the taxpayers have to foot a bill of \$8 million. It is a great pity that \$8 million was not expended on Cronulla police station over the past 10 years. That is a pity because the human tragedy that occurred was foreseeable.

Ms Linda Burney: On both sides.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I am not exactly sure what sides the Parliamentary Secretary is referring to. The Government is responsible for law and order and there is a criminal element. It is the duty of the Government, any government, to contain lawless behaviour. The best way of preventing lawless behaviour is for uniformed officers to be highly visible. That is what was lacking. That is why the police need additional powers. Part of the problem is the repeal of the Summary Offences Act and the test that has developed of what a reasonable person would find offensive. Amendments are required to ensure an objective standard of behaviour. The Premier has talked about respect and honourable members seem to be talking about objective rules. People want equality before the law.

Up till now police have arrested people for urinating on the street or for swearing at police. They have gone before courts and the courts have found that the objective standard is formulated by people like Pat O'Shane. I suggest, if honourable members read the judgments of Pat O'Shane and what the *Daily Telegraph* says, her standard of reasonable behaviour does not accord with what the general public expects on the streets. If we return to a prohibition on what people regard as offensive behaviour, nobody—and I hope no member of this Chamber—would say that people should be able to swear at a police officer with impunity and have charges dismissed when they go before a court. I am glad there is support for that proposition.

A total failure of law and order occurred in the years prior to the disturbances in December. The situation could have been avoided, yet now the taxpayer has to pay \$8 million. Businesses in Cronulla have lost millions of dollars as a result of what occurred last December. The history of Strike Force Enoggera is an interesting one. The disturbance occurred on the Sunday in December. A convoy of cars came into Cronulla and Maroubra. There was no intervention by police to prevent the convoy coming in. People were savagely attacked in Maroubra and Cronulla. People were arrested for the disturbances that occurred in Cronulla. People rang me to say that arrests were made for offences that were alleged to have been committed in Cronulla on the Sunday. More serious offences were committed on the Monday and Sunday nights. People were stabbed. I well recall at the rear of Woollooware golf club a person had been stabbed in the back and the knife was still visible. Hundreds of cars were smashed. Yet no arrests were made. The explanation given time and again by the Minister for Police and the Commissioner of Police was that there was video evidence of the events at Cronulla but there was no video evidence of the events on the Sunday and Monday nights. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

For weeks there were no arrests and the explanation given was that no video evidence was available. As a result of investigations carried out by Jason Morrison of 2GB, it was found that a video existed which showed an incident taking place outside the youth hostel in Cronulla. When that occurred Dennis Bray, the officer-in-charge of the Enoggera task force, was removed. Then a strange thing happened. The police commissioner said that Officer Bray had not told him that video evidence was available. I ask: Did the police commissioner ask Dennis Bray whether there was video evidence? If so, was he lied to? In any event, the police commissioner believed that was sufficient grounds to remove Dennis Bray as officer-in-charge. Then Dennis Bray, following the officers of Task Force Enoggera complaining that he was being made a scapegoat, was reinstated as the second-in-charge.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: I understand members being given latitude. But this is a debate on the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill 2006, not an analysis of the Cronulla riots. I ask that the member be drawn back to the bill. The bill is about money.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: To the point of order: I am addressing the \$8 million that was spent on Operation Seta and Task Force Enoggera. The personnel, the expenditure and the history of the matter are germane to the bill.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The point I made when a previous point of order was taken still pertains. It seems invidious to restrain one speaker when no other speaker has been restrained. I ask the honourable member for Cronulla to deal with a number of issues rather than only one.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: This is very important to the people of Cronulla and to the investigation of the matter. No explanation has been given as to why the convoy of cars was not stopped and whether the police commissioner was ever told about the video before he gave the reason for no arrests as a lack of video evidence.

Ms Linda Burney: That relates to the budget?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: That relates to the budget because a large part of the investigation was at the cost of the taxpayer. The activities of Strike Force Enoggera were at the taxpayers' expense.

Mr Alan Ashton: How much did it cost the taxpayers to find a weapon of mass destruction in Iraq?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: That is outside the leave of the bill, otherwise I would answer the interjection.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! I suggest the honourable member for Cronulla not do so or it may be used against him.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I am still at Cronulla and not in Iraq. So long as I stay in Cronulla I am within the terms. It may well be that the Minister for Police is able to answer some of the questions I have raised here tonight.

Mr Carl Scully: I will answer them.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: He has given an undertaking that he will answer them.

Mr Carl Scully: Start the questions. What is the first one?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: The first question is: Did Dennis Bray tell the police commissioner about the video evidence?

Mr Carl Scully: Stop bagging him. He is a good inspector. I have answered those questions. I did about three press conferences on this issue. Why have you not seen the transcripts? I have answered all of those questions.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: You have not answered any of those questions.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! I suggest that all members apart from the honourable member for Cronulla resume their seats, despite the invitation extended to the honourable member for Cronulla by the Leader of the House to ask questions. The honourable member for Cronulla may continue.

Mr Carl Scully: Ask me some hard ones.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: What day is it? I have mentioned the \$8 million. It would be great to see funding in this bill for businesses in Cronulla and the \$8 million consolidated by a strategy. It would be interesting if the Minister for Police told us what policing would be available for Cronulla.

Mr Carl Scully: Another question?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: Yes, another question: What policing will be available for Cronulla in the future?

Mr Carl Scully: I am happy to take that question. We have promised 10 officers at Miranda. They are getting 10. An Operation Seta mark II will be available next summer. There will be plenty of cops down there. Stop bagging your local cops. They hold you in absolute disgust and contempt. You should feel lucky that you get invited to the functions. That is the second question. What is the next one?

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! If the honourable member for Cronulla keeps asking questions of the Leader of the House he will answer them. I suggest that the honourable member for Cronulla continue his speech.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I am happy to take the answers. I am waiting for him to get them right. The third one is: How many additional beat police will be made available after the 10 officers for the rest of the year up until the election? He can speak only up to the election.

Mr Carl Scully: I am happy to take that question. The authorised strength of all commands is a matter the commissioner and I will discuss in the next few weeks.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I take it that was a "pass". We are still no closer to getting information. Once again, the people of Cronulla have not been given the answers about the protection that will be provided. Number four: Will you make available the full advice from Bret Walker?

Mr Carl Scully: I will take that on notice.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: The Minister will take that on notice? Is there any reason why that advice should not be made available to the public?

Mr Carl Scully: I am happy to say—shock, horror—the advice is that you need evidence before you proceed to a prosecution.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: That does not answer the question. I do not think that fairly summarises the advice the Minister received from Bret Walker. However, I am pleased that he will consider making it available to the public. On that note, I conclude.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [9.09 p.m.]: Perhaps the Leader of the House could also address whether we are going to get a second police officer at Boorowa.

Mr Carl Scully: I don't answer your questions, only Malcolm's.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: I forgot, I have to come from Cronulla. Of course, I am a rural member of Parliament and the Government totally ignores anything west of the Great Dividing Range. Once again we are faced with an Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill providing for about \$1 billion of extra funding for unbudgeted items that should have been factored into the 2005-06 budget. The shadow Minister for Finance has expressed very clearly and very well the Opposition's concerns about this bill. Year after year we come into this place prior to the budget to debate legislation allocating additional funding that the Government should have thought about previously. This is another example of its fiscal irresponsibility to the taxpayers of New South Wales. They are justifiably outraged about the Government's antics. It does not care about the taxpayers of this State. Surely it should have considered teacher salaries and these other ancillary items before now. It is extraordinary that year after year the Government comes into this place to seek Parliament's support to deal with its budget ineptitude.

This legislation highlights how much the Government is spending on media monitoring. About \$636,000 is being spent on the Premier's spin-doctors. I have heard that Ministers get SMS text messages every time their name is mentioned on any regional or metropolitan radio station. That must be an extraordinary expense. I shudder to think how much the media monitoring company is charging the taxpayers to provide that service.

Ms Linda Burney: Text messages are really cheap.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: It is not only the cost of the texts, it is also the cost of the service and the wages. That is a large sum when one considers that the country timber bridges program has been scrapped and that bridges are falling apart in many rural electorates. The Gundaroo Bridge is a classic, beautiful, old timber bridge, and it was recently closed to any vehicle weighing more than about five tonnes. That means drivers of heavy vehicles had to travel an extra 32 kilometres along Dicks Creek Road and various other gravel and dirt roads to get to their destinations.

Mental health workers are overworked and bed allocations are in dire straits across my electorate. Mental health workers have told me and have spoken at public forums about their workloads. They are chronically overworked and many are working on double the appropriate number of cases. Funding is urgently required to address this very serious problem in rural New South Wales, particularly to treat depression and to stop rural worker suicides. It appears that access to mental health service workers and beds is a luxury in rural areas. Although people in the cities have access to beds, mental health services and doctors, that luxury is not afforded to rural New South Wales. This Government desperately needs to address that issue. Rural disability services also need funding.

We have already heard about the many accidents and fatalities occurring on country roads. It is reassuring to hear that the incidence of road fatalities on metropolitan roads is declining. Unfortunately the incidence of fatalities on rural roads is increasing. I note that the Roads and Traffic Authority web site expresses its concern about the increasing incidence, but it does not suggest that the answer might lie in funding for better roads; it lays the entire blame on driver education. I dispute that. I accept that on some occasions accidents are caused by driver error. I was driving along a road between Boorowa and Crookwell known as Main Road 248 the other day in a four-wheel drive vehicle. I was not speeding, but the car slid on the ruts to the edge of the road. It is extraordinary how quickly those unsealed roads deteriorate if they are not regularly graded.

For a State road linking two such important tourist areas like Boorowa and Crookwell to be unsealed in 2006 is a slight on this Government. It must be fixed urgently. Lachlan Valley Way is the site of too many fatalities. The Gocup Road needs additional funding, as do the Goulburn to Oberon Road and the Junction Road to Bathurst. Main roads 241, 48 and 52 also need upgrading. Many State roads in rural areas only a couple of hours from Sydney need upgrading to ensure road safety. Road safety on rural roads cannot be underestimated. We are still waiting for a second police officer to be appointed at Boorowa. The police officer there must cover a very large area. If there are two incidents and that officer is on the road or at another station for the day, police services can not be provided. The appointment of a second officer at Boorowa is urgent.

This bill provides for luxury office fit-outs, and additional bureaucrats on events such as World Youth Day. It is much more important to continue to provide drought subsidies for fodder and water transport for drought-affected farmers. The Minister for Primary Industries recently announced the end of drought subsidies. We still do not have exceptional circumstances payments for horticulturalists such as apple growers at Batlow or

potato farmers at Crookwell. Horticulture is just as important as any other primary production. Why they are left out of the equation is anyone's guess. It is not fair. I continue to receive representations from constituents who are very concerned that horticulturists are not eligible for exceptional circumstances payments. They think the Government sees them not as second-class citizens but as third-class citizens. That is very unfortunate because they are great contributors to the economy of this State.

We still need an Aboriginal education assistant in Yass. I have been calling for that position for the almost eight years that I have been in this place. The position was withdrawn in 1998, before I became a member of this place, and despite the many representations I have made to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs nothing has happened. There was great fanfare and the Minister was shown Canberra's WIN *News* announcing the funding for an Aboriginal education officer for Yass, but as soon as he left town he said that he had made a mistake and that it was not available. I have had many dealings with the Aboriginal people of Yass and they have told me that they are not happy about the Minister's performance. We are still waiting for funding for a higher education needs analysis for university places in Goulburn. I have written to successive Ministers for Education and Training and I have met with the current Minister for Education and Training about that issue, but despite her commitment I am still awaiting a formal response.

Surely any budget variation should include funding for water sustainability programs to allow for development in rural areas. Yass is again on water restrictions. A pipeline between the Australian Capital Territory and Yass is under consideration and a second dam in Yass is also being considered by council to allow for industrial and property development to occur in the town. That dam is needed because last year several hundred development applications in Yass were rejected by council simply based on the water issue. The town wants to grow, but because of water non-availability it is absolutely stifled. The Government has a lot to answer for in relation to that. Goulburn is on level five water restrictions. I have raised in this place on many occasions the urgent need for the Government to step in to ensure the sustainability of water supplies in rural areas, not just in Sydney. Time and again we are seeing the utter rejection of rural and regional New South Wales on the part of the Government, and it is just not good enough.

My colleague the honourable member for Cronulla raised the very important issue of policing, particularly in his electorate. The bill makes reference to funding for policing. I accompanied the honourable member for Cronulla in his electorate at the time of the riots last December, and I chatted with many tourist operators. They were, and continue to be, very concerned about the decline in tourism. The Minister for Tourism, Sandra Nori, said she would organise some advertisements, and a few advertisements were run locally. However, I do not believe that any action has been taken to get tourists back from London, the rest of Europe and Singapore, where the negative imagery of the riots in Cronulla was shown. Where in the bill is there mention of funding to address the loss of tourism that is now being felt so strongly in Cronulla? Last year the State Government ripped \$4 million from the tourism budget. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

New South Wales is absolutely at the bottom of the tourism barrel now. It is often commented to me that New South Wales is seen very much as the tourism laughing-stock of the nation. It scored the bottom of the barrel in the recent tourism awards—the absolute wooden spoon. It is consistently put to me by tourism operators and convention organisers that we need an updated convention centre in the Sydney central business district if we are to have any hope of winning major conventions in the future. We are now simply out of the league compared with the other States and parts of Asia. We must make sure that we have the facilities in place to attract major conventions, which will in turn create major tourism dollars. Those much-needed dollars are desperately needed in New South Wales because tourism could be a great money-spinner for the State and for businesses throughout New South Wales. Sydney is the gateway for regional New South Wales. If we get the visitors into Sydney in the first place, we have a chance of getting them into the regional centres where the tourism dollars are desperately needed.

Tourism is an untapped market in New South Wales at the moment. Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and even the Northern Territory are all outdoing us in the tourism stakes. We are simply not hitting the mark at the moment. Reducing tourism funding is not the way to go. We must inject more money into our convention market and into attracting conventions to come to New South Wales in the first place. But is there any mention of that in this Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill? Of course not. The Government simply does not see the picture here. It should be as obvious to Government members as the noses on their faces that tourism is a major potential money-spinner for this State. Yet, time and again the Government totally overlooks tourism, preferring instead to spend money on things such as more bureaucrats and a parliamentary sprinkler system.

I note that the cost of abolishing the Department for Women was \$1.06 million. The sorts of things on which money is being spent are simply extraordinary. It is extraordinary that the Government seeks to justify this spending with the sale of Snowy Hydro—something the Government did not even take to an election and has no mandate to do and is upsetting thousands of people right across rural New South Wales, regardless of whether they have ever had anything to do with the Snowy in the past. The level of frustration and anger that is being felt by people in rural and regional New South Wales about the sale of this great icon, which the Government has no mandate to sell and has never expressed any intention of selling until just a few months ago, is enormous. It is no wonder that people in regional and rural New South Wales are upset about it.

We know that a significant amount of money will be raised from the sale, but where will the money go? Will the sale of Snowy Hydro simply fund the Government's \$1.2 billion blow-out, to pay for increases in bureaucrats' wages? I think it will, and that is very sad. If every cent of that money is not spent on infrastructure, I do not think there is any justification for the sale in the first place, let alone for the money not to be spent on assets for the State. It is absolutely outrageous that it be spent on public service wages. This budget variations bill is simply another example of the Government trying to justify, pre-budget, the spending of an additional \$1 billion of non-budgeted items. That funding should have been factored into the budget, but it was not. The bill is just another example of the Government's inability to manage its fiscal responsibilities.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [9.26 p.m.]: It is incredible that, in the eleventh year of this Government and as it approaches a period when it will ask the people of New South Wales whether it can have 16 long years of government, we have an Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill that makes extraordinary changes to the budget. Yet again we see that the Government is utterly incapable of lifting its standards when it comes to the financial management of this State. It surprises none of us who have been members of this place for a while that this Government is incapable of managing a budget and incapable of lifting its standards. That sad indictment of the Government's capacity is reflected in this bill, not only in the extent of the changes in the budget but in what has been left out of it. As the shadow Minister for Education and Training, I looked at the changes to the Education budget. The first change that leapt out at me was the Priority Action Schools Program, to which \$8 million has been allocated. Perhaps the more interesting question that the House has not addressed tonight is: Why are some of these changes taking place? An analysis of the Priority Action Schools Program highlights the utter incompetence of the Government.

Last year the Priority Action Schools Program suddenly found itself on the chopping block. It was not to receive funding, as had previously been promised. For the benefit of those who are not familiar with the Priority Action Schools Program, it does good work in schools of high need, where there is considerable disadvantage. The program is particularly targeted towards literacy, numeracy and welfare programs. The cut to the program was avoided only as a result of the Liberal-National party raising this issue publicly—I might say, joined and ably supported by others in the community, including the Teachers Federation—and finally the Government was forced to back off. It just shows that when this Government established the budget prior to the supplementary budget it had an evil intent: to remove the Priority Actions School Program. That program has been recognised as being worthwhile in addressing literacy, numeracy and other social disadvantage in schools of need across the State.

While I am talking about education, it would be remiss of me to fail to express disappointment that, yet again, there is no provision in the supplementary budget to address what the Auditor-General has highlighted on a number of occasions: the massive backlog of maintenance under this Government. If one visits any school in New South Wales the chances are—unless there has been amazing creativity on the part of the teaching staff, supported by the parent body—that one will find a substantial backlog of maintenance. The Auditor-General has identified that the \$116 million requires a major boost from the Government. It had an opportunity—but, yet again, nothing!

Last week I attended Blacktown Boys High School with the local Federal member, the Hon. Louise Markus, and the Federal Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon. Pat Farmer. We announced a \$150 million payment to that school. Blacktown Boys High School has major needs that this Government is currently not addressing. The Government, of course, has denied that there are any major problems at the school. The principal, staff and pupils are doing the best job they can in trying circumstances. However, much of what was reported in the *Sunday Telegraph* was entirely true, and I have seen it with my own eyes. Currently one of the big issues the school awaits to be addressed is the upgrading of the library. The library is quite hot during summer and the ventilation is appalling.

If the Government is going to start addressing budget issues such as this, I call on it to ensure that schools such as Blacktown Boys High School get a fair go. The Government should give the school money for

ventilation. There are other issues at the school, including the heaters, which have asbestos in them and require special attention. That is not atypical; many schools across the State have that sort of problem. The heating requires special attention. It should not have taken this long to be attended to. However, again, no special funds have been provided in the budget to address those sorts of issues for the many schools in similar situations across the State.

I turn now to local issues on the northern beaches. I recently saw an announcement about our new hospital—it will now apparently be built at Frenchs Forest. As this is the first opportunity the Government has had to present a budget to the House since that announcement, I had expected to see additional money put aside to accelerate the establishment of that hospital at Frenchs Forest—effectively, to be the new Manly hospital—and, indeed, substantial funds to upgrade Mona Vale Hospital. It appears that the Government has ignored Mona Vale Hospital. In the last budget there were some funds allocated because it had been anticipated for quite some time that there would be an upgrade of the accident and emergency department but, again, there is nothing to address the poor state of the physical surroundings of Mona Vale Hospital. It has excellent medical staff, nursing staff and support staff—as has Manly hospital. It is doing an amazing job in trying circumstances. But where is the money in this budget to carry through with the promise?

Three years ago the honourable member for Manly cosied up with his Labor Party mates. Prior to the last election he told us in a newsletter that there would be a new hospital at Brookvale. He said that with much authority. He was shown to be wrong when last year he announced, while standing next to the current Premier, that the new hospital's preferred site was at Dee Why. So we had Flip-flop Barr going from Brookvale to Dee Why, all the time busily arguing against the quite rational debates of the former member, John Brogden, about the need to give due regard to the needs of the people on the northern end of the peninsular. The honourable member for Manly provoked an aggressive stance. In effect, there was a split in the community. He engaged in some very hostile words about the current honourable member for Pittwater, which does not help the issue of getting appropriate hospital services—that is, an upgrade of Mona Vale Hospital and a new hospital on the southern end of the peninsular.

But where in this budget do we find any sense that the Government is not telling us porkies again? Despite the fact that quite extraordinary amounts of money have been advanced and are being advanced as part of a supplementary budget, there is nothing for Manly and no additional funds for Mona Vale. One would have to seriously doubt whether the Government is fair dinkum or whether it is just another vote winning exercise that it has engaged in before with the honourable member for Manly. Of course, we recollect the efforts of the honourable member for Manly in relation to The Spit Bridge in August 2002, prior to the last election. He presented the now rather dusty photograph that occupies the front of his office, showing us the wonderful new Spit Bridge. Most of us on the peninsular—from Palm Beach to Manly—know that two extra lanes on The Spit Bridge will do absolutely nothing to address the traffic issues. However, the honourable member for Manly stood with the former roads Minister, now the Minister for Police, and told us that this would happen. He said that it would be finished by 2006. Of course, that has not happened.

Is the hospital issue another rerun of the issue that the honourable member for Manly tends to trade on in regard to his local community issues—that is, talks big and delivers nil? I call on the State Government to put some money in. In the June budget we need to see some fair dinkum money going into the new hospital at Frenchs Forest—effectively, the new Manly hospital—and there has to be substantial money for Mona Vale Hospital. The people of the peninsular cannot continue to suffer the poor hospital physical surroundings they currently suffer.

It is fascinating that there are no variations in the roads budget. However, prior to the last election—without reflecting on the current honourable member for Pittwater, because I think he was probably duped in the same way that others across the community have been duped—former Minister for Roads Tripodi did a rerun of the Minister Scully announcement on The Spit Bridge. But this time he stood on Mona Vale Road and promised an upgrade. That election took place late last year. Seven months down the track there is no money for Mona Vale Road, so do we believe the State Government? That money is not contained in this bill, but it better be in the June budget. If it is not, I think the people of Pittwater would say that this Government has duded them, doubtless in an effort to support the honourable member for Pittwater. I understand the position of the honourable member for Pittwater on that, but the Government has to be little more honest in its dealings with the people of the peninsular.

Mona Vale police station, which is in the electorate of the honourable member for Pittwater but which services my electorate as well, needs to be upgraded. The Dee Why Local Area Command headquarters, which

serves my electorate and the electorate of Pittwater, also needs upgrading. It is abysmal that in this budget we see substantial amounts of money put into saturation policing for Operation Enoggera and Operation Seta and so on, but we do not see any additional money for day-to-day policing. We see high-profile policing getting additional funds in this budget. The latest figures I have for the local area command that affects both Wakehurst and Pittwater indicate that in February the number of break, enter and steal offences went through the roof: they are up to 200. Police sources have told me that we have the highest figures of any local area command in the north-western region.

We have the highest number of break and enter offences of any local area command in the north-western region, yet we have the poorest staffed local area command. At the moment we have an authorised strength of about 203. Officially, we are five or six officers below that figure. However, in reality that number is higher. The Government is busy trying to push police into other areas and to get greater numbers through the college. However, I am told that quite a few of the police from the northern beaches have been taken out of the region and sent to perform special duties or sent to Goulburn police college.

That is an appalling indictment of the Government's disinterest in Pittwater, Wakehurst and the northern beaches generally. It has a moral obligation to ensure that we have the police to do the work. I remind the House that about 40 to 50 police are on light duties. For example, they might be on maternity leave, on educational courses or in other parts of the State and they are, in effect, not there. Local police have great difficulty doing the job they need to do and when the northern beaches LAC is the worst in the north-west region for break and enter offences—and I understand the particular areas being targeted are around Collaroy, Narrabeen and Newport—where are the police to do the job? [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I conclude with the general state of dissatisfaction about the Government's state of finances, but it would be remiss of me if I did not make one final point. This is the first time I have spoken in the House since last Friday. Last Friday at 4.00 p.m. a little girl, Sophie Delezio, was hit by a driver in Frenchs Forest Road, Seaforth. Little Sophie and her family again have been put in the most tragic set of circumstances. Sophie and her brother, Mitchell, and her parents, Ron and Carolyn, have been through the sort of hell that none of us should ever have to go through in our lives; they have lived through it once and they are living through it twice.

On behalf of the northern beaches community I wish Sophie all of our best energies, thoughts and good wishes. Our prayers are with Sophie and her family. To say that she is very much part of the heart and soul of the northern beaches is probably an understatement. Last year Sophie attended a little school just up from where I live, Arranounbai School, where she was much loved. In fact, I remember Sophie and I had a few chats there. She is a very mature little girl; she has an indomitable spirit that I hope will carry her through this. As I said, I do not understand why this has happened; none of us understands, but I say to the family: Please know that the thoughts and prayers of all of us in New South Wales are with you. We hope that Sophie comes out of this well and that she gets back to the very positive way she was approaching her life after the very difficult circumstances she has experienced.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (The Hills) [9.43 p.m.]: I, too, am rather astounded that the Government should be appropriating as much money as it is. We are talking about something like \$1.28 billion this year, plus a further \$263 million for the 2004-05 financial year, making a total of \$1.5 billion. Perhaps that should not be so surprising when one looks at the cumulative total of the amount of additional money the Government has appropriated over and above its budget since 1995-96. The sum total, excluding extraordinary, comes to \$10.657 billion over that time; it is almost a budget in itself. One wonders, as everyone in New South Wales is asking: Where has the money gone?

So far as this year's Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill is concerned, much of this money is going on things that most people in New South Wales would regard as frivolous or extraneous, such as additional bureaucrats for World Youth Day, \$460,000; the World Masters Games bureaucrats, \$660,000; Premier's Department information centres, \$1.065 million; a parliamentary sprinkler system—no doubt to hose us down when we get too excited—\$646,000; and the Queen's baton relay, \$350,000. The cost of abolishing the Department of Women—and the honourable member for Canterbury would support the Government's actions in this regard—was \$1.06 million. That is reminiscent of the \$17 million that the Government wasted on setting up regional waste boards and then abolishing them without reducing the amount of waste going to landfill by as much as a single solitary tonne.

When it comes to wasting money over the years the Carr-Iemma governments are past masters. I do not think anyone in the history of Australia has been able to hold a candle to the way in which they can waste

money. Every year the Government comes back for another slice of taxpayers' money to pay for its cost overruns, averaging something like \$1 billion a year. That is made possible by the money that is coming in the door. During the past 11 years the Government has received something like \$8.4 billion in unbudgeted revenue. Instead of that money going to rebuild New South Wales, being spent on new infrastructure or helping to create new wealth for the people of New South Wales, it has been largely squandered.

The people of New South Wales are entitled to ask: Where has the money gone? Much of it has gone on public servants' wages. The last four budgets show that the share of the budget outlays occupied by wages has increased from something like 45 per cent to around 50 per cent. Wages in that time have grown by an average of 9.1 per cent per year, that is, 36.4 per cent over that four-year period. That is a greater wages growth than virtually any company that one could name, apart from one that is on a very high growth trajectory and on a very high sales trajectory as well. For New South Wales the reverse is true.

The New South Wales economy has been slowing significantly. We have the highest unemployment rate in the country and the lowest rate of growth, at around 2 per cent. These figures are nothing to be proud of, and the reason for much of that can be found in this bill. I notice in schedule 1 to the bill under extra appropriations for the Attorney General, Minister for the Environment, and Minister for the Arts, that \$380,000 has been allocated for management arrangements for the Perisher Range resorts. I assume that this money is being taken from the increased visitor charges to the Kosciuszko National Park. The winter surcharge will take the daily entry fee from \$16 to \$22 this winter and will increase to \$27 a day in 2007. An all-parks pass used to cost \$85. That will increase to \$145 this winter, and will rise to \$190 next year. I note that the \$380,000 is to be spent exclusively on the Perisher Range resorts. Skiers, perhaps those who have a share in a lodge at Thredbo and ski Thredbo regularly, will be paying this extra entry fee and getting absolutely no benefit for the money that they are outlaying.

A significant number of people have written to me complaining about that issue. If the money needs to be raised—I do not think the case for that has been particularly well made out, despite the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal inquiry into the issue—there should be a fairly equal distribution, and a lot of the money should also be spent at Thredbo. All people who enter and use the park are entitled to believe that they will get a fair go. The operator of Mount Selwyn, which is a family resort—it is not a big downhill resort; it is a daily resort without accommodation—has written to me expressing concern about the impact of this increase on visitor numbers to Mount Selwyn because, once again, no extra benefits will flow from the surcharge to Mount Selwyn. It is simply an additional tax on families and skiers who enter Kosciuszko National Park during winter.

It is certainly not the case that everybody who visits or skis Kosciuszko is a silvertail. Skiing, particularly at Mount Selwyn, is a sport that is enjoyed by a wide range of people, including people who by no stretch of the imagination could be described as being well off. The Government's grab for cash—yet another tax increase by this Government; one of 15 in the past six or seven months—will impact adversely on businesses in Kosciuszko National Park.

Another issue that has been brought to my attention is the fact that a discount applies to people who live in a fairly broad area around Kosciuszko, including Queanbeyan, but it applies only to vehicles registered as residential vehicles. So it also becomes a tax on business. For example, a tradesman who has a vehicle that is registered as a work vehicle and who carries out work at Perisher or Thredbo will also pay that additional tax and, once again, will get nothing back in exchange for the money that he has outlaid. So there are issues relating to this tax, and the Government has not sufficiently explained itself with regard to those issues.

I am also interested in the outlays for the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Transport. Something like \$540,000 has been outlaid for the bus industry for a new accreditation system for bus operators. About 18 months ago the Government nearly left my electorate with no public transport whatever. I represent the only electorate in Sydney that has no government-run public transport. The Government, through Michael Costa's reform process, nearly sent every one of my bus operators broke. At one stage it looked as though we would be left without any public transport, government or private. The Government introduced the bus industry reform package. As honourable members would know, Harris Park Transport has gone out of route services. Now we have only Westbus, operating also as Hills Bus, in my electorate of The Hills. At the beginning of this year users of the Hills city express bus service were extremely frustrated. I might add that the Coalition Government started that service, which is now used by about 1.5 million people a year. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The Government has taken it upon itself to approve the purchase of new buses by private bus companies. It was dragging the chain so far as Westbus was concerned. There was a significant increase in

demand for the service into town. People simply found that buses, particularly those along Oakes Road, Carlingford, would drive straight past them. Bus after bus would go straight past them because the Government did not get off its backside and allow Westbus to buy buses to provide a public transport service. That shows the Government's idiocy. We are talking about the Government putting in place artificial barriers to prevent people from using public transport. It is no wonder people have turned away from the government-run public transport system in droves.

Also relating to my electorate, I note that the Minister for Transport's allocation includes \$4.825 million for the metropolitan rail expansion program. That is exciting news indeed—\$4.825 million to carry out yet another study—presumably into the mythical Epping to Castle Hill rail link that I dubbed the ghost train some years ago. And so it has proved to be. This is a railway that in a pre-election gimmick in 1998 the then Minister for Transport promised would be built by 2010. If this \$4.825 million includes additional moneys to carry out studies into that rail link, that will be the first item of progress made on it since the Maunsell McIntyre report of 1999-2000. It certainly is not a government priority, despite the fact that we have enormous population growth in The Hills electorate.

My electorate has more voters than that of any other member in this place. My electorate has an enormous amount of growth but no government-run public transport whatever. The Government's latest announcement relating to the ghost train was that it would be linked in some way to a railway line out to Leppington, and it was pushed back to 2017—so we have gone from 2010 to 2017. Construction of the rail link is dependent not only on the line to Leppington being completed but also on a new tunnel being built underneath the harbour. So one can understand why my constituents and I are sceptical about the Government's bona fides in this regard. We are also sceptical about the Government's bona fides relating to the widening of Showground Road, which has become the biggest bottleneck in The Hills electorate. There is a short section of about one kilometre that is a single lane each way. There is sufficient width in the road corridor to widen it to three lanes each way, if the Government was so minded, without having to acquire any private property. It is an opportunity for the Government to get maximum bang for its buck.

There may well be a requirement to have three lanes each way. Certainly we need two lanes each way for general traffic, and the Government's T-way program includes buses running up Showground Road. If it simply puts a dedicated bus lane on either side and runs the buses along the road and does not allow cars to travel along there, we will be little better off. It astounds me that in this bill there are no appropriations whatsoever for the Minister for Roads. I do not know whether the Minister believes sufficient money is being spent on roadwork in New South Wales, but I would think there is not one member in this place who would not like to have more money spent on roads in his or her electorate.

The only thing the Government seems to be good at is spending money on spin doctors. I mentioned before that the bill refers to \$636,000 for media monitoring for the Premier's Department. Recently the Government advertised for two highly paid spin doctors on 12-month contracts. One was to look after the Lane Cove tunnel and propaganda relating to it and the other was to look after the Pacific Highway. One can understand why last year the honourable member for Coffs Harbour became so aerated over the lack of progress on the Pacific Highway, considering the paucity of money the Government is putting into that dangerous road and the number of people being killed on it. The best the Government can do is pay an operative to make it look good. That seems to be the Government's solution to every problem facing the State. That is why it is so enormously unpopular and why on 24 March next year it will be voted out of office. After this bill, the Government will have one more budget to go.

Mr ALEX McTAGGART (Pittwater) [10.02 p.m.]: Are budget variations a prudent form of management? Where I come from we have five-year management, an annual budget, a three-monthly review and a monthly reporting process. Variations are a way of life, so from my point of view they are reasonable. What is at issue here is the content of the variations. Are they reasonable? I have not been here long enough to know whether the items that have been listed as spent are reasonable, so I cannot make a value judgment. For the past hour and a half I have listened to a lot of carping about infrastructure and about no spending in various electorates. In the variations there is nothing for Pittwater. After 30 years of Liberal representation in Pittwater, four years by the previous member, who was the Leader of the Opposition, no money is spent on Pittwater in these variations. That indicates to me that either the Liberals in Pittwater made no representations to the Government for the delivery of money for infrastructure or they lobbied for it and were lousy lobbyists.

Let me discuss some of the issues and what is not in the budget for Pittwater. We have heard a lot about policing. Avalon police station has been closed for eight years. Collaroy police station has been closed for 10

years. Mona Vale police station has one person on roster for the 24 kilometres from Palm Beach to Dee Why. That is shameful. If the previous local member was any good, these issues would have been raised and funds would have been budgeted. We heard a lot about the riots at Cronulla. As shameful as they were, I bring to the attention of the House that at 6 o'clock in the afternoon of the Sunday after the riots at Cronulla three 14-year-old cadets from the surf club pulled six Afghani visitors out of the surf by themselves. There was no fanfare, no carry-on, none of the rubbish that has been going on—just our people doing their jobs. There are 60,000 people in Pittwater and only one officer, other than police in car patrols who come from Dee Why. It is shameful that the previous member for Pittwater and the honourable member for Wakehurst have not been able to lobby the Government hard enough or have not raised the issue.

Mona Vale Hospital was a significant issue for Pittwater. It is run down, but it has been the point of focus and community attention for six years. But nothing was delivered and there is nothing in this budget. I take exception to the honourable member for Wakehurst saying that the honourable member for Manly, with whom I did have significant disagreements and aggravation, was running a divisive campaign. One should remember that the former member for Pittwater, the honourable member for Wakehurst and the honourable member for Davidson signed an accord with the honourable member for Manly to cut the Pittwater people out of their hospital. So it was not the honourable member for Manly who was being divisive; it was the honourable member for Manly, the honourable member for Wakehurst, the honourable member for Davidson and the former member for Pittwater.

Four years ago the Avalon ambulance station was closed. We have not heard much about that. The previous member and the Liberal Party did not defend the people of Pittwater. That ambulance station has now been sold, and when the lease runs out it will be shut. We will have no emergency services. The honourable member for Hornsby spoke about sewerage on Dangar Island. On Scotland Island 350 properties need water and sewerage but they are not even on the list. So the previous member and the Liberal Party have not been able to lobby for the people of Pittwater for basic essentials such as water and sewerage. That is a disgrace.

There is no money in the budget for Pittwater roads such as Mona Vale Road or The Wakehurst Parkway. The previous member did get some money pumped into The Wakehurst Parkway but the barricade was placed on the wrong side of the road and the road still floods. That is a disgrace. Our roads are an absolute disgrace. The previous local member and the Liberal Party have not been able to lobby hard enough to get infrastructure for the people of Pittwater. The honourable member for Wakehurst is the shadow Minister for Education and Training. Newport school has more demountables than classrooms. Mona Vale school has old buildings and needs refurbishment. Both of those schools have had significant increases in the number of students because we are a growth area for young people, yet there is no money in this budget for our schools.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Point of order: I think the honourable member is confused with the terminology of a budget and an appropriations bill. Budget variations are extra expenditures that occur in the Government's financial year. They do not refer to the programs and initiatives that were announced in the budget. It is budget overexpenditure. I think the honourable member is confused. I ask you to draw him back to the leave of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I thank the honourable member for Wagga Wagga for his thoughtful point of order. Given the latitude that was given to the previous two speakers, the honourable member for Pittwater is in order.

Mr ALEX McTAGGART: I am not confused. I have noted the method the debate has followed and I have endeavoured to follow those lines. I sum up as I opened my remarks, that appropriations and variations are a responsible way of doing business. Whether the appropriations before us tonight are responsible, I do not know. I am not able to make that determination at this time. I do know that a government plans and budgets on policy. If it does not have policy, it cannot plan and budget. In the five months I have been a member of this House I have not seen a great deal of policy from the Opposition.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [10.09 a.m.]: Much has been said about the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill. We have had a wide-ranging debate and I do not want to go over territory that has already been covered. I do want to point specifically to items contained in the bill. In schedule 1, paragraph C, "Minister for Commerce, Minister for Finance, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services and Vice President of the Executive Council", an amount of approximately \$5 million was allocated for the post school programs. This amount was not budgeted for and the Government has made this variation because of the embarrassing situation it found itself in when it withdrew or cut back services for people with disabilities who were accessing post school programs. Following the outrage expressed by families and community members and the protests outside this House, that amount was expended but not budgeted for. I would like to hear the response to my accusation about that item.

I also refer to item K of schedule 1, "Minister for Police", which shows an amount of \$10.6 million for training costs for additional police recruits. Again the Government has shown its inability to plan a budget. I would be interested to hear from the Minister for Police whether the \$10.6 million was planned. It appears in this bill as an extra expense. It seems it is a part of the Government's cycle to build police numbers for the next election, but it forgot to plan for it in its budget. So it hurriedly included this extra expenditure in the bill to try to correct its miserable record on policing. In no way do I blame the marvellous police men and women of this State. They are dedicated people who deserve support, but the Government should have planned for that expense to allow the Police Service administrators to plan properly. Instead it comes to the House cap in hand at the end of the budget year and says, "Oh, my goodness, we need to provide for these extra training places that we always intended to provide for but did not include in the budget."

In schedule 2, item G, "Minister for Police", the \$10.1 million for additional police officer numbers deserves an explanation. I also refer to item H, "Premier, Minister for the Arts and Minister for Citizenship", which shows an amount of \$636,000 for the costs of a centralised media monitoring unit. If ever there was a disgraceful figure in the appropriation bill, this is it. It is money expended over the Government's budget. I want to make that point clear. It is not an amount that was planned for. It was not enunciated in the budget last year. It is extra money that the Government has expended on the Stasi, the machine it has to listen to every word that is spoken in the electronic media, to read every page of print in voter land. It is extra money that the Government has expended so that its spin doctors can counter every word of criticism and try to help them hang on to government.

This figure is disgraceful because for the past two years community groups, particularly the Schizophrenia Association, for which the Minister for Health will host a lunch here on Thursday, has been lobbying for \$250,000 to help people with mental illness and to develop a clubhouse model. In Wagga Wagga the community has worked together to refurbish a derelict building that was obtained from the Minister for Lands. I thank the Minister. He is the only Government member who has supported this wonderful program for people with mental illness. In this bill we see that an extra \$636,000 has been expended on media monitoring, when \$250,000 could have been allocated to mental health care. That is a disgrace. Holbrook school is screaming out for air conditioning. Budget announcements are made, but it is appalling to see a figure of \$636,000 over and above the budgeted amount being expended on media monitoring to stop members from complaining and to let the Government spin its way out of its problems.

I will not make a long contribution tonight, because Opposition speakers have raised many issues about the bill and I understand that the upper House is waiting for it. In schedule 2, item I, "Special Minister of State, Minister for Commerce," under the heading "Department of Commerce", I would like to know what the additional claims paid by the Fair Trading Administration Corporation are; they total \$2.911 million. What were those expenditures for and who were they on behalf of? What does that variation mean to Johnny public? I am sure that the public would be interested to know that an unbudgeted amount of money has been expended on their behalf. The bill has a one-line item and no other form of explanation. The problem with the Government is it claims it is transparent and that it is doing the right thing for the people of New South Wales. Yet here is a budget variations bill with little substance that has line entries such as \$5 million for the post school programs and \$2.9 million expended with no explanation.

There is a grant of \$1 million to the Maitland City Council for the establishment of a heritage steam park. I have no doubt that is an important project, but I believe the public would like to know what that item means. Was the Government required by legislation to provide that \$1 million or is it a theme park for some interested people to ride around on steam trains? Does the project preserve heritage or a rail line? The bill needs more transparency. That is sadly lacking under the Iemma Government, as it was under the Carr Government. We see time and again that the Government is incapable of running its budget. When we get to this time of year it comes cap in hand to the Parliament with little explanation and certainly no apologies for its cost over-runs. The Government has enjoyed rivers of gold. It sat on the Treasury benches whilst many billions of unbudgeted dollars flowed in.

I point to the amount of money, \$1.5 billion, that has been received by the Treasury above its budgeted figures. The Government has managed to spend all of that. Sadly, the bill is not transparent because it does not contain the details that the voters of New South Wales want. I predict that on 24 March 2007 they will give their opinion through the ballot box. I know there is a budget forecast when many announcements will be made. A straw poll on both sides of Parliament would result in a finding that many of the promises made in the past have not been honoured and many of the promises being made now, such as the removal of stamp duty for projects up to 2012, will not be honoured. They are only promises and, like this budget, they lack detail.

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.20 p.m.] in reply: I have made copious notes about the contributions of the many honourable members opposite in this debate on the

Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill tonight. I have decided not to respond to every speaker. The honourable member for Burrinjuck used the word "ineptitude", which is a very telling word. I only wish that every person in New South Wales could have been sitting in this Chamber tonight to witness the ineptitude of honourable members opposite in debating this legislation and then make a judgment on 24 March 2007 based on their performance. If they had been here they would not have a difficult decision to make. I have not heard such rubbish and silliness in the three years that I have been in this place. We should reflect on the history of New South Wales budgets. We have heard much criticism of the Government and individual programs. However, we should remind ourselves of the budget position when honourable members opposite were in government. Treasury advises that over the period the Coalition was in office there was a cumulative deficit of \$5.5 billion.

Mr Daryl Maguire: When was that?

Ms LINDA BURNEY: When the Coalition was last in government.

Mr Daryl Maguire: That was when Keating was in power in Canberra.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: That has nothing to do with it. The honourable member for Southern Highlands led this debate for the Opposition on 4 April. Heaven help us if she is ever Treasurer. I cannot believe her pettiness and the mean-mindedness apparent in her speech. Many honourable members of the Opposition focused on how dreadful it is that the legislation includes an appropriation for World Youth Day. I did economics in only years 11 and 12, but I know about basic economics. Honourable members opposite have criticised the fact that \$460,000 of recurrent funding and \$100,000 of capital funding will be expended on World Youth Day. I believe that young people are important and that World Youth Day is significant to this country. The mean-minded members opposite have focused only on the initial outlay. The Department of State and Regional Development estimates that the economic benefit to New South Wales from holding this event will range from \$65 million to \$112 million. Surely an outlay of \$460,000 in recurrent funding and \$100,000 in capital funding is not bad given a projected economic benefit of between \$65 million and \$112 million. The honourable member for Southern Highlands is a decent person, but it worries me that the Opposition spokesperson for finance does not grasp the economics of such a small outlay producing such a large return for the State.

A number of honourable members, including the honourable member for Coffs Harbour, relied on personal attack and did not make much impact. I have been a public servant and I am appalled about the way in which honourable members opposite attack public servants. If they thought about it they would realise that members of this House are also public servants. Public service is a decent and honourable pursuit. Where would we be if we did not have a well-resourced, competent, professional public service to provide the services we need for the people of New South Wales? I do not understand the logic of constantly attacking the wages, salaries and conditions of public servants. If it were not for public service and public servants in New South Wales or anywhere else, where would we be? How would we implement government programs and provide services to the community? There would be no police officers, nurses, teachers and ambulance drivers. They are public servants. Public servants are not a nebulous group of people hiding away; they deliver the services that we need to provide good governance.

The honourable member for Southern Highlands and subsequent speakers have a very poor grasp of budgets and what is involved in the provision of services in New South Wales. They have no grasp of the governance of this State and the way in which the decisions of this Parliament are enacted. The inexperience and ineptitude of honourable members opposite in this debate should be highlighted so that the people of New South Wales can take it into account on 24 March next year. They have a decision to make between the Opposition's ineptitude and this Government's experience. I am confident about and happy with the way in which this Government is administering this State. Heaven help us if honourable members opposite ever sit on this side of the Chamber. It will be terrifying. They will be incompetent and their ineptitude will be there for all to see. I am happy the honourable member for Burrinjuck used that word.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

JURY AMENDMENT (VERDICTS) BILL

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AMENDMENT (WASTE REDUCTION) BILL

Messages received from the Legislative Council returning the bills without amendment.

The House adjourned at 10.27 p.m. until Wednesday 10 May 2006 at 10.00 a.m.
