

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 7 September 2006

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Joseph Aquilina) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

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

PAY-ROLL TAX AMENDMENT (SUPPORTING JOBS AND SMALL BUSINESS) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 31 August 2006.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [10.00 a.m.]: I am pleased to support the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill. Indeed, I am pleased to support any measure from either side of this House that will improve the situation for struggling businesses, not only in my electorate of South Coast but throughout New South Wales. The bill provides that an employer is not liable to pay payroll tax for a financial year if the total taxable wages and interstate wages paid or payable by the employer during that year are less than \$850,000. It will mean a significant tax cut for many businesses and no doubt will boost employment in this State. It will eliminate payroll tax for 4,500 New South Wales businesses and will free them from the need to maintain systems and processes used to assess and pay the tax, which are often cumbersome, time consuming and obviously a hindrance to business.

As honourable members would know, businesses in New South Wales are currently struggling—if they do not know, they are simply turning a blind eye to reality. They should support this bill. In many instances, especially in the property and building sector, the situation is dire, and that can be traced directly to the anti-business policies of the New South Wales State Labor Government and its financial mismanagement over the past 12 years. We heard a great deal about the state of the New South Wales economy only yesterday, and today we can read about it in the reputable *Sydney Morning Herald*, which reports that the State's growth trend has declined steadily for 18 months. In the December 2004 quarter the State final demand was 1 per cent in trend terms but has fallen each quarter since.

The weak growth reported yesterday also cast fresh doubts on the State budget, with the Treasurer, Michael Costa, saying that State growth in 2005-06 fell short of the 2.5 per cent predicted in May. That certainly casts doubt on the State budget and all those promises we have heard about. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition was right in saying that the Premier was leading New South Wales towards a recession. Interestingly, also in today's *Sydney Morning Herald* the State chamber of Australian Business Limited is reported as saying that the New South Wales Government should cut business taxes. That is what this bill is about.

Payroll tax, which is the subject of this bill, is one of the issues highlighted to me by businesses in my area as being an enormous impost and a factor that limits the ability to grow and prosper. This State has ground to a halt, and business confidence continues to decline against the backdrop of a Premier struggling to find direction in regard to the economy and a vision for New South Wales. What has the Government done to counter serious concerns about that economic decline and lack of business confidence? Not a great deal, except to blame somebody else! It usually blames the Federal Government; it never looks to its past policies and tries to rectify them and help businesses in New South Wales. We can almost plot where the decline began: with the Government's scurrilous vendor tax. The Government congratulates itself on eliminating the vendor tax, but serious damage was done during the time the vendor tax was imposed on people and businesses in this State. But the Government always blames somebody else.

Ms Noreen Hay: Blame the Federal Government!

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: The honourable member for Wollongong interjects, "Blame the Federal Government"—because she cannot muster the energy to try to find any solutions.

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

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: The electorate of South Coast is facing serious economic problems, and it has one of the highest unemployment rates in the State. Coupled with that is a serious downturn in tourism of \$1.9 million. It is easy to imagine the effect that is having on South Coast businesses. In addition, over the past two years some of the major industries in the Shoalhaven have closed. They include Gates Rubber, Dairy Farmers and one of the mills of Australian Paper. I have been made aware recently of impending closures, of companies in receivership, especially building companies, and of a property sector that is on its knees. The closure of Gates Rubber a few years ago was due, in part, to the anti-business taxes imposed on it by this Government. That is what the company told me. Company people came to me soon after I was elected to Parliament to talk about some of the taxes imposed by this Government on the company, such as workers compensation premiums.

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

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: They had pleaded with the former Labor member for South Coast about the company's workers compensation categorisation having been placed in a wrong category and resulting in the company paying wrong levels of workers compensation. The former member refused to listen to the company's concerns. I pleaded to have the Minister come down to the electorate to look at the factory and to try to save that business. There was deathly silence from the Government. That company, which had been employing hundreds of people, has closed its doors.

The loss of Dairy Farmers at Bomaderry in the Shoalhaven was tragic—this very large business closed. What was the honourable member for Kiama doing about this at the time? He knew his electorate boundaries were to change to take in Bomaderry. But where was he? He was nowhere to be seen. Though we had several meetings with the workers, the unions, the company and the Federal member, trying to seek a resolution, the honourable member for Kiama was nowhere to be seen—except for a 10-minute meeting that he was shamed into having in these precincts. Labor members would not get out of their offices to go down to Bomaderry to see what was happening at Dairy Farmers. Those are the consequences of the imposts placed on business by this Government.

Ms Noreen Hay: Point of order: The honourable member for South Coast is misleading the House, because Matt Brown was actually meeting with Ministers at the time. It is not true that he was not speaking up.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. The honourable member for Wollongong would be aware that the standing orders do not allow her to take a point of order based on an allegation that a member is misleading the House. She can use other forms of the House if she believes that a member is misleading the House. A point of order is not one of those forms.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: I would have expected companies as large as Gates Rubber and Dairy Farmers would be offered incentives to continue to operate in a region where unemployment was high then, and is now even higher and more critical. But no incentives were offered for them to remain there. Though there has been some discussion about payroll tax by the Government, it is entirely discriminatory and is not helping businesses in my electorate. Business is in trouble, and payroll tax is one of the issues raised with me as a major hindrance to business. If this Parliament supports and passes this bill today, thousands of businesses will be relieved of payroll tax. Payroll tax is a tax on the employment of employees, a tax on somebody who takes the risks of putting employees on their payrolls. This is a tax imposed without good reason. It is an insidious tax. Unless we try to relieve New South Wales employers of it, they will continue to go under.

I commend the shadow Treasurer for her commitment and dedication to her portfolio and for her tenacity in bringing forward this bill last year and continuing to raise the concerns of business in this State. Unless the Premier has the foresight and vision to initiate a rescue plan for businesses in New South Wales, their plight will get worse and the budget announced by the Treasurer will be in complete disarray as a result of his predictions not coming to fruition. This is a serious matter—but not for the Minister for Small Business, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for the Illawarra, who continually interjects to make mindless comments. Obviously, he is not taking seriously the problems in my region with respect to business. I have been

pleased this morning to represent the businesses in my electorate. I ask members on both sides of the House to support the bill.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [10.14 a.m.]: The Opposition has no credibility when it comes to economic or financial matters. Last month's Federal Government interest rate rise was yet another slug from Canberra on New South Wales families. Premier Iemma made it clear that the Prime Minister must act to protect New South Wales home owners from the effects of this additional impost on family budgets. And what did the New South Wales State Opposition have to say? Well, the proponent of the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill, the honourable member for Southern Highlands, who apparently is the Opposition's spokesperson on economic matters, said this about Peter Costello's interest rate rise:

Morris Iemma and Michael Costa might try and blame New South Wales's economic woes on changes in monetary policy, but Labor's poor economic management has caused the problem.

I will repeat that, because it is important that this appalling attempt at so-called economic analysis is on the record. The Opposition says:

Labor's poor economic management has caused the problem.

According to the honourable member for Southern Highlands and the New South Wales Opposition, interest rates have gone up twice this year and inflation rose to 4 per cent over the past 12 years because of the New South Wales Government.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: The bill before the House relates to payroll tax, which of course is not affected by interest rate rises. I suspect the honourable member for Wollongong has been provided with the wrong written speech for this debate.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member is drawing a longbow. Payroll tax issues have already been debated by the proponent of the bill, the honourable member for Southern Highlands. That allows other members to range quite widely on financial matters that would have an impact on the economy. At this stage the honourable member for Wollongong is order. However, I appreciate the point made about relevance.

Ms NOREEN HAY: For the benefit of members opposite, jobs and small businesses are affected by interest rate rises. In attempting to blame the New South Wales Government for interest rate rises, the honourable member for Southern Highlands insults the intelligence of New South Wales property owners and reveals her ignorance of economic and fiscal policy. Following Peter Costello's interest rate rises, families in Goulburn with a new mortgage on a median priced house of \$195,000 now have to pay around \$29 in extra interest repayments each month. This is in addition to the \$29 monthly increase from the May interest rate rise.

Up the road in Bowral, where Ms Seaton has her electorate office, families with a mortgage on a median-priced house of \$555,000 now have to pay around \$82 in extra interest repayments each month. This is in addition to the \$82 extra a month they are already paying from May's interest rate rise. And local property owners are bracing themselves for a third interest rate rise before the end of the year, as Reserve Bank comments have confirmed. Yet the honourable member for Southern Highlands remains shamefully silent on the impact that the Federal Government's action is having on New South Wales property owners, and refuses to take a stand against Mr Costello's inflationary policies. Instead, she insults the intelligence of property owners by attempting to blame the New South Wales Government for macroeconomic conditions. As anyone with a modicum of economic knowledge understands, the levers that control the State's economy are, to a large extent, held by the Reserve Bank through monetary policy, by the Federal Government through fiscal policy, and by the forces of international demand for our goods and services and the Australian dollar.

Mr Ian Armstrong: Point of order: I take this point of order to assist the honourable member, because this debate is not about the Federal Government's economic management. It is about payroll tax, which is exclusively the province of the New South Wales Government. I would like to hear how the Government plans to deal with the issue, particularly in the member's electorate of Wollongong. Could the member tell us how she and her Government would handle payroll tax in her electorate?

Mr David Campbell: To the point of order: I point out that the title of the bill includes the words "supporting jobs and small business". Inflation and interest rates are important in supporting small business and in supporting jobs. I argue that the honourable member for Wollongong is in order.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have heard sufficient on the point of order. As I indicated in my earlier ruling, although the bill basically relates to changes to the payroll tax system, reference has been made to supporting jobs and small businesses. Members of the Opposition, including the member who introduced the bill, have made reference to general policies relating to the finances of the State and how those may be impacted upon by other matters. The honourable member for Wollongong is now referring to those matters in her speech. I remind her that the leave of the bill is primarily about payroll tax, and I request her to address that issue.

Ms NOREEN HAY: As I said, the Federal Government's interest rate rises are affecting small business. It is time the Opposition stood up for local families and stopped distorting the facts. John Howard and Peter Costello are trying to play the same old tired game of blaming the State Government for the impact of interest rate rises on home owners and the State's economy. Last week Mr Howard told a Liberal Party function the New South Wales Government was responsible for the increasing burden shouldered by mortgagees. This is in spite of the fact that interest rates have risen seven times since 2002—including two rate rises this year—with another one to come. There has not been one word from members opposite about how this is affecting business in New South Wales.

We are denied \$3 billion in GST through the Federal Government rip-off, and there is not one word from members opposite. The tax burden in New South Wales could be well eased by Coalition members helping us to get back the \$3 billion that the Federal Government has ripped off to subsidise other States. Earlier in the week, Peter Costello said increased spending by the State Government on infrastructure was driving up interest rates. It is always infrastructure spending, State Government budgets, Cyclone Larry or the price of oil. New South Wales families with an average mortgage of \$371,000 are now \$122 per month worse off—or \$1,464 per year—

Mr Daryl Maguire: Point of order: Mr Speaker, I listened intently to your ruling some time ago regarding the thrust of this bill. I note the honourable member for Wollongong has not once mentioned payroll tax. I ask you to draw the honourable member back to the leave of the bill and to your directive, which asked her to concentrate on and refer to payroll tax.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind the honourable member for Wollongong that I have now given two rulings in relation to this matter. The Chair has been extremely patient in granting the honourable member for Wollongong considerable latitude in her preamble. I now ask her to address the major thrust of the bill more directly.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Thank you for your patience with Opposition members, because they have been quite rude. In drawing to a close—and it could take me a while to close if Opposition members do not behave—I say that this bill does absolutely nothing to support small business. There is no assistance to small business from this bill whatsoever. I have spoken to small business people in Wollongong and I can assure members opposite that the bill does not have the sort of support from small business that the Opposition purports it to have. I oppose the bill.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [10.24 a.m.]: I support the Pay-roll Tax Amendment (Supporting Jobs and Small Business) Bill, and commend the honourable member for Southern Highlands for it. There is no such thing as a good tax, but the New South Wales Labor Government's payroll tax is a particularly bad one. Michael Costa's payroll tax applies to businesses with a payroll of \$600,000 a year or more and is charged at a hefty 6 per cent. It, basically, is a tax on jobs and is a major disincentive on business expansion, particularly when the business is hovering around the threshold. The problem is not just the 6 per cent rate, but also the cost of the additional red tape. In my electorate of Clarence, which is close to the Queensland border, the New South Wales payroll tax rate is particularly unfair, because it encourages businesses to shift their operations to Queensland, where the threshold is much higher at \$1 million and the rate is much lower at 4.75 per cent.

In other words, a Gold Coast business with a \$1 million payroll is not liable for any payroll tax. A similar Grafton business with the same payroll is up for \$60,000 a year in payroll tax. How are such businesses supposed to compete, when the Carr-Iemma Government is slugging them \$1,150 a week more than the Peter Beattie Government would? No wonder New South Wales has gone from the engine room of the Australian economy to a dead weight. Where we used to lead, we are now regularly recording the highest State taxes, worst rates of economic growth and lowest levels of business confidence.

In my electorate a number of medium-size companies are having their expansion plans curtailed by their payroll tax burden. Big River Timbers is sluggish about half a million dollars a year. Westlawn Finance is

hit for a quarter of a million dollars a year. Grafton and Casino abattoirs, the *Daily Examiner* and many other small businesses face unfair tax burdens. The obvious solution is to abolish this dumb tax altogether. That would be the obvious thing, but because of New South Wales Labor's appalling economic management and ensuing budget deficit, that is not a viable option.

In government, the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Coalition will offer payroll tax relief to business by raising the threshold from Labor's \$600,000 to a fairer \$850,000. We estimate this will eliminate payroll tax for up to 4,500 New South Wales businesses, including some in the Clarence electorate. This will help New South Wales get back to business but it will not be enough. We have to do a lot more for small businesses, in particular, because collectively they are the big employment and investment drivers, particularly in country areas such as the Clarence.

The Nationals understand small business because many of us are from small business—a bit different from members on the government side. For example, I ran a small sign design business before I had the privilege of being elected to Parliament. Contrast this with the Sopranos economic leadership team opposite comprised of Iemma, Costa, Della Bosca and, everyone's favourite, Joseph Guerino Tripodi. These are the people from the party that brought us the vendor stamp duty, outrageous tax hikes on our registered clubs and a near doubling last year of stamp duty on insurance premiums. Now the Premier and his three accomplices want to take over the GST, so they can adjust the rate—I bet it will not go down! Between them they have over a century's experience of running unions, but zero experience in small business. Therefore, when the Premier says that he means business, one is entitled to ask: Is he talking about small business or big union business?

The Liberal-Nationals Coalition has a plan for small business that goes beyond offering payroll tax relief. Our message is simple: we will get the State Government out of your pocket and off your back! We will exempt businesses from paying WorkCover premiums for apprentices. We will introduce a one-on, one-off approach to new regulation. If we have to bring in a new rule, we will get rid of an old one first. We will cut the amount of red tape businesses have to deal with by 5 per cent each year in our first term in office. In fact, we will have a Minister whose job it will be to slash red tape, and we will teach public service bosses that sometimes more means less, by tying their pay to the amount of regulation they cut rather than the amount they add. Businesses, especially small and medium size businesses in country New South Wales, will have a clear choice on election day next year. A vote for the Labor Party Sopranos is a vote for yet further tax hikes and even more bureaucracy. A vote for the Liberal-Nationals Coalition is a vote to cut taxes and slash red tape. The Premier has turned out to be a double Marxist.

Ms Noreen Hay: On day one you are going to do all this.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: I am reading from the Labor Party bible. They should listen. Karl Marx said, "There is only one way to kill capitalism, by taxes, taxes, and more taxes." Groucho Marx said, "Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies."

Ms Linda Burney: You didn't write that speech.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: But I read it out.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Water Utilities, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for the Illawarra) [10.30 a.m.]: I move:

That this debate be now adjourned.

The House divided.

Ayes, 40

Ms Allan	Mr Gibson	Mrs Perry
Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Ms Saliba
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mr Sartor
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hunter	Mr Scully
Ms Beamer	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Mr Black	Ms Keneally	Mr Stewart
Ms Burney	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Campbell	Mr McLeay	Mr West
Mr Chaytor	Ms Meagher	Mr Whan
Mr Collier	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Mr Corrigan	Mr Morris	
Mr Crittenden	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Daley	Ms Nori	Mr Ashton
Mr Gaudry	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Martin

Noes, 35

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion for adjournment agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Bill: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Water Utilities, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for the Illawarra) [10.39 a.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the resumption of the adjourned debate and passage through all remaining stages forthwith of the Education Amendment (Financial Assistance to Non-Government Schools) Bill.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.39 a.m.]: This motion is further evidence, if anyone needed it, that not only can the Government not run the State; it cannot run the Parliament. On Tuesday we rose at four minutes past nine. Last night we worked much harder: we rose at five minutes past nine! The only reason that private members' business is being interrupted is that the Government cannot co-ordinate its program. This has nothing to do with the ejection of the honourable member for Wakehurst from the House yesterday. This matter could and should have been dealt with on Tuesday night when the honourable member for Wakehurst was more than happy to have the matter brought on.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: This is a lazy Government that is very happy to avoid accountability, to avoid scrutiny—the sort of accountability and scrutiny that occurs on Thursdays when private members are able to put forward legislation and motions to try to hold the Government to account. It is made worse by the alleged

Minister for Regional Development blocking debate on a payroll reduction bill put forward by the honourable member for Southern Highlands. The Government says, "We are open for business" but at the first whiff of grapeshot the Minister closes down debate on a bill that would deliver real benefits to people across this State who are doing business, a bill seeking to reduce payroll tax, a bill that the House has just voted to put off to another day. This is a Nigerian scam. It brings the Parliament into disrepute. It makes a mockery of parliamentary governance.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Murray-Darling will come to order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: At a time when this Parliament is under stress because of work bans due to budget reductions imposed by the Government this again makes it much harder for Parliament to hold the Government to account. The Tuesday before last many of us attended the rally outside this place, where we heard a letter from the President of the upper House expressing her solidarity with the workers in this place against the budget cuts imposed by the Government. We now know that the President of the upper House is in Nigeria participating in an overseas junket. This provides no comfort or support to the workers in this place against the budget cuts being imposed by the Government.

The problem with this motion is that it affects the ability of the Parliament to hold Government to account. It affects the perception of the Parliament. The perception of the Parliament was affected by the actions of the President of the upper House last Tuesday expressing solidarity and outrage at the cuts and then spending tens of thousands of dollars to travel to Nigeria to participate in a conference that has nothing to do with the running of this place. If honourable members opposite want to improve accountability in this place, if the President of the upper House and honourable members opposite want to improve governance in this place, if they want to improve the perception of this House, she ought to be in this Parliament when Parliament is sitting and honourable members opposite should not move a motion such as was moved on this day. It is the latest Nigerian scam and it involves the President of the upper House.

We will oppose this motion for the principled reason that Thursdays are for private members. They are opportunities for all members in this place to put forward motions and legislation dealing with issues of concern to the wider public. We celebrate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of responsible government in this State. The major theme of those 150 years has been the balance between the Executive, the Parliament and ordinary members. This is another example of the Executive overtaking the proceedings of ordinary members—whether Government, Opposition or Independent. The impact of this vote will be felt on the honourable member for Illawarra, whose notice of motion will now be put off.

Government members do not know what they are voting for. When a Minister says to do this they say, "How high?" Opposition members and Independent members understand the significance of this vote. I know that the honourable member for Bligh is supporting me strongly because today I am prepared to stand up again for all members of this place, regardless of political persuasion, in saying to the Government that it has no right to do this. We normally sit until 10.30 on a Tuesday and Wednesday night. We have not done that since we resumed sitting. This is the latest example that the Government cannot run the State. No wonder the President has fled to Nigeria. She should be back here. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 43

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

Noes, 35

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

**EDUCATION AMENDMENT (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS)
BILL**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 7 June 2006.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [10.53 a.m.]: As the shadow Minister for Education, I lead for the Opposition in debate on the Education Amendment (Financial Assistance to Non-Government Schools) Bill. Obviously, the bill is significant because the Government has interrupted private member's business and denied members the opportunity to address the House on a range of concerns to debate it. While the Government denies members of this House the opportunity to speak on private members' business, I note that the Minister for Education and Training is not present in the Chamber for debate on this bill. I draw to the attention of the House and the community that even though the bill is so significant that the Government has moved to prevent members of this House from speaking on behalf of their constituencies, yet again the Minister for Education and Training has arrogantly not bothered to take part in the debate on the bill or to hear what is said in relation to it.

Having said that, and notwithstanding our concerns about the way in which the Government has formulated the bill and the Government's overall approach to education in New South Wales, I indicate that the Coalition will not oppose it. The intention of this bill would appear to be to ensure that a State government will not be bound to provide funding for schools that operate for profit. I emphasise that that appears to be the position. There can be nothing more important than the education of our young people. Education brings knowledge and wisdom and empowers individuals to change their lives. That is the message we need to convey consistently to our young people so that they understand the value of education and the value of their time at school.

The Coalition is committed to ensuring the best possible educational outcomes for all of our students, whether they are in the government or non-government sector. There are approximately 750,000 students in the government sector and approximately one-third of that number in the non-government sector. As a Liberal-Nationals government, our objective would always be the delivery of the best possible educational opportunities for students in both the government and non-government sectors. We recognise and value parents' entitlement to choose a school system that suits their sons and daughters. No matter what system students are in, they are the sons and daughters of New South Wales and we have a duty to ensure that they get the best education possible.

However, it should be said that while we value the role of the non-government sector and the contribution made by the community of the non-government sector, the core management focus of a Liberal-Nationals government would be to ensure that the government education sector works as well as possible and that it achieves to its maximum capacity. The Coalition believes that that sector is not achieving those goals under the current Labor Government. The Liberal-Nationals Coalition will focus on taking the government sector to a point at which more students and parents make the government sector their first choice. The State

Liberal-Nationals Coalition believes that a strong government education system is critical. It underpins our egalitarian society, which Australians value so highly. Like many others in the community, the Liberal-Nationals Coalition is extremely concerned about the failure by this State Labor Government to support the public education sector appropriately.

The New South Wales Labor Government has had nearly 12 years in office, yet the public education sector has seen a diminution in the number of students attending government sector schools—a diminution that occurs each year. A basic analysis of student enrolments shows that over the life of this Labor Government, on average each year there has been a reduction of 0.5 per cent in government school enrolments. I repeat: every year that this Labor Government has been in office—under former Premier Bob Carr and now under Premier Morris Iemma, who was part of the Carr Government for the whole of its life—State schools have experienced a reduction in enrolments at the rate of approximately 0.5 per cent every year. At the same time, there has been a substantial increase in the number of students in the non-government sector. Catholic schools, independent schools and small Christian schools have all had substantial parental support and increases in student numbers.

We can contemplate the difference between the sectors, but the difference in increasing enrolments in non-government schools cannot be about differences in teachers or their capacity. Most teachers in both the government and non-government sector apply themselves diligently and, in many cases, inspiringly. I hope that the more effective use of the Institute of Teachers, which was established by the Government but only following policy initiative announcements by the Coalition, will result in an overall improvement in the professional skills and applications of teachers. I say again that that is meant to lift teachers from a level that is already very good to a level that as a community we would like to achieve for the good of all New South Wales students.

After parents and carers, we should note that teachers have the single biggest impact on the development of a child's life. Inspirational teachers can achieve amazing outcomes and, indeed, change children's lives in the government and non-government education sectors. Emotionally Disturbed/Behaviourally Disturbed [ED/BD] schools, which are sometimes called behavioural schools, have some of the most inspiring teachers I have met. During a recent visit to one of those schools, which had the most appalling physical surroundings one could imagine in a school environment—compliments, of course, of this State Labor Government—a teacher told me that every day she goes to work her students inspire her. I asked her why, and she said that despite their background and the troubles they have at home, they still come to school and achieve incredible things. For a teacher to be able to say that about a behavioural school is a good indicator that we have teachers in the most difficult and challenging teaching environments who can be inspired and inspirational in their everyday teaching lives.

Where are the differences that cause the continued reduction in public school enrolments? To establish those facts we must first understand that over 12 years the State Labor Government has shown very little leadership in public education. There has been a great deal of rhetoric, but not much reality. Labor's approach to education has been devoid of vision in regard to maintenance in and capital work on our schools. It has had a fix-when-fail mentality. It has failed on a range of essential issues of concern to parents and students. We have witnessed knee-jerk policy decisions, a failure to consult professional teaching staff on initiatives that often turn out to be counterproductive and myriad confusing policies that are often in conflict with each other. Honourable members can speak to any school principal in New South Wales and the principal will tell them that under this State Labor Government—because the spin has become more important than the substance—if an issue arises, his or her head is on the chopping block. They live their lives knowing that when something goes wrong they will be—

Ms Marie Andrews: Point of order: The bill before us is the Education Amendment (Financial Assistance to Non-Government Schools) Bill. For the past five minutes, the honourable member for Wakehurst has been telling the House all about the Government and its education policies. My point of order is relevance. I ask you to ask the honourable member to return to the content of the bill.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I appreciate the point of order. However, this is a second reading debate and the honourable member for Wakehurst is leading for the Opposition. He is entitled to take a fairly broad-brush approach in his preamble before coming to a discussion of the bill. However, I ask him to bear in mind that sooner or later he must talk about the bill. He may continue.

Ms Linda Burney: Sooner rather than later.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Parliamentary Secretary knows that she would like to hear more about the failures of her Government before she came into this place. I am sure that she will have the opportunity in the next few minutes to hear more about that, and I will ensure she does.

Ms Linda Burney: Thank you.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is my pleasure. As I was saying, this Government has sadly focused more on the spin than the substance, and it has had a fix-when-fail mentality. School principals know that if something goes wrong in their school it is extremely likely that their head will be on the chopping block. Part of that is the result of this Government's failure to manage its education policies. Every school principal has volumes of policy statements and directions from the Department of Education and Training, many of which are in conflict. It leaves principals to struggle on a daily basis about how to address particular issues. We have seen many instances of principals coming unstuck as a result of this Government's failure to set out clearly what actions it expects of a principal in a variety of circumstances and to let the principals know that they will be backed if they take those actions. The problem with conflicts in policies is that principals have to make professional decisions in the context of knowing that at some point the Government may find that they are a disposable commodity.

In addition to the Government's lack of education policies, it has no future plan for capital works. There is no plan for schools in New South Wales, which are generally 50 to 60 years old—and some are over 100 years old. Despite that, this Government has no renewal plan. As long as I have been here I have listened to the Labor Government talk about plans. Former Premier Carr stood in this Chamber day after day, week after week, and month after month talking about his strong and detailed plans. The problem was that we never saw any strong and detailed plans; we simply heard the rhetoric. Now we have his apprentice, Morris Iemma, talking about another plan. This time it is a plan for a plan. The community expects nothing to come of this, except more rhetoric and no reality.

Schools need reality. We need a plan for capital works and a clear statement about infrastructure renewal. The learning environment has changed a great deal in the past 30 years. Newer schools have all sorts of different layouts and structures that are designed for modern learning. They have breakout rooms, where small groups can work together. Where are the breakout rooms in the 50-year-old and 60-year-old schools? Time and again I visit schools and find classrooms that do not meet the required standards for education facilities. Does the Government have any plans to do anything about that? No. In fact, principals repeatedly report that they have children almost piled on top of each other in classrooms if a normal number of students are in the class. That is exacerbated when technology is installed. Some rooms in schools across New South Wales cannot accommodate the technology that we expect our modern students to use.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Especially the smaller schools.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The honourable member for Wagga Wagga says that that is particularly true in smaller schools, central schools and in schools in regional areas. Often the rooms are so small that they cannot accommodate the computer technology that we expect modern young people have as learning tools. The Government constantly talks about the roll-out—

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: In light of your earlier ruling, I appreciate that the honourable member for Wakehurst is leading the debate. However, he has been talking for 15 minutes and he has not mentioned the bill. There is latitude, but it should go only so far, and I ask you to draw his attention to the bill before the House.

Mr Brad Hazzard: The Government's amendment allows me to go until 1.00 p.m. If I know the amount of time—

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst is out of order unless he is speaking to the point of order. Is he speaking to the point of order?

Mr Brad Hazzard: I will not bother.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I uphold the point of order. The Parliament Secretary is correct when she says there has not been any discussion about the bill. I now ask the honourable member for Wakehurst to address the bill.

Mr Brad Hazzard: To the point of order: As you have already ruled—on the one hand it sounds a bit like the policies that school principals have to put up with.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I have ruled on the point of order and the honourable member for Wakehurst should not canvass my ruling. I suggest he continue his speech.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will address the House, and if the issue comes up again I will certainly be seeking your guidance on your two rulings, which would appear to be in conflict. Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary should think about that before she gets back on her feet. This bill certainly deals with "for-profit" schools. The Opposition is endeavouring to ensure, as the Government is seeking to do with the introduction of this bill, that schools are not developed for the purposes of making a profit, but rather in order to deliver sound educational outcomes. That is what I am addressing. The purpose of the bill is to ensure that money is used well. It is the view of the Opposition that the Government is not currently applying either money or commonsense to the management of the State's schools. I was addressing the Government's failings in that regard, and I will continue to do so.

Instead of taking meaningless points of order in an attempt to prevent the Opposition from raising these issues on behalf of her constituency, the Parliamentary Secretary should pay attention to what I have to say and then visit the schools in her electorate and talk to the teachers. She will find that they agree with the Opposition. The principals of schools in her electorate are very unhappy with the State Government. The bill deals with financial assistance to schools. What we are talking about, Madam Parliamentary Secretary, is the failure by your Government to appropriately manage taxpayer funds in order to achieve the best educational outcomes for New South Wales' students. Do you want to pop up again? Feel free to do so.

Ms Marie Andrews: Point of order: The honourable member for Wakehurst, instead of directing his remarks through you, was directing them to a member on this side of the House.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I remind the honourable member for Wakehurst that he should direct his remarks through the Chair and not across the Chamber.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank you, Mr Acting-Speaker, and my thanks to the honourable member for Peats for that substantive interloping and intervention. I am sure it helps the debate immeasurably. Pivotal to these failures by the Government is the failure to properly manage Department of Education and Training funds, the taxpayer dollars that are the subject of this bill. When elected to office in March next year, the Coalition will ensure that taxpayer dollars are applied carefully and appropriately to enrich the lives of students. The issue of funding at appropriate levels is critical to the future of both government and non-government sectors. We understand that independent schools and the Catholic Education Commission have been consulted in relation to this bill, which provides that taxpayer dollars are to be used for the core business of education and not applied to what are defined as "for-profit" schools.

Businesspeople who want to deliver sound educational opportunities should not be dissuaded from doing so. But in times of shortage of taxpayer dollars for educational outcomes—which has certainly been the case under this Government, because it has failed to manage the economy as well as it should have—we believe the community would want government allocated taxpayer funds to be primarily available to government schools and to non-government sector schools that do not have profit as their sole motive. The Opposition sounds this warning to the State Labor Government, however: The process of registration of "for-profit" schools should be facilitated, not obstructed. The Coalition has no philosophical objection to their existence. Such schools could be part of the spectrum of education, as they are in the post-compulsory education area.

However, if such schools wish to establish themselves, the community would expect the Government not to be obstructive, but rather to apply its duty of care to ensure that the students of New South Wales are protected by attending a school that complies with the reasonable regulatory requirements pursuant to the Education Act. This Labor Government must not do what it has done in the post-compulsory education area—that is, put up bureaucratic hurdles to registration. In that regard I specifically point to the culture and conduct of the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board [VETAB]. In the area of registration of private training organisations, this Labor Government's record is abysmal. Private training organisations provide approximately 60 per cent of post-compulsory education, and education for international students is the fourth biggest economic income to Australia.

Why then are private training organisations taking their business to Queensland and Victoria? It is simple. An underperforming State Labor Government is allowing an underperforming VETAB to put up hurdles and obstacles to smooth registration of training organisations. The Coalition will have as a primary policy at the State election a clear path of action to sort out VETAB. VETAB should be on notice to get itself operating effectively and set aside Labor's philosophical support for its deliberate obstructiveness, or a major restructure of VETAB will occur after the State election. Education should be a primary driver of our economy, and the Coalition will ensure sensible regulation without obstruction. The actions of VETAB to date demand that it should be both alert and alarmed if it does not get its act together, because the Coalition will ensure effective educational outcomes from it.

Wise use of taxpayer dollars in delivery of educational services at both the compulsory and post-compulsory level of education will be at the forefront of Coalition policy. There will be myriad educational needs for students in the government and non-government sectors to which funds will have to be applied in order to redress the shortcomings of 12 years of this Labor Government come March 2007. It is essential that taxpayer dollars are used wisely, and focused on those areas that taxpayers would like to be spent on. Of course, that means supporting our government schools and getting them working better, but also supporting our non-government Catholic, independent and church-based schools. If the bill is really about ensuring that there is a focus or target for taxpayer dollars to be used in those areas, and not for "for-profit" schools, there has to be some transparency in the way the Government goes about managing those funds.

All across New South Wales there are schools that have risen above the 500-student enrolment formula that the government has laid down as the pre-requisite to get a school hall. The schools are not being told when they are going to get a school hall. I have a list of schools in the electorates of every member presently in the Chamber and those schools are asking for a school hall. Schools are asking for halls in each of their electorates, and there has not been a bo-peep from any of them.

Ms Kristina Keneally: Name one. Name one school in the Heffron electorate.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will give the honourable member the list. If she comes to my office I will give her the full list.

Ms Kristina Keneally: You cannot even name one school in the Heffron electorate.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I am going to talk to your uncle if you do not keep quiet. When I was in the southern suburbs two weeks ago, I was approached by people from Lilli Pilli Public School, Gynea Public School and Endeavour Sports High School. Endeavour Sports High School is a good example. The Minister knows about this. She was asked about this the other night, so she has had a little bit of warning. Endeavour Sports High School has no gymnasium. It has no sports facilities and yet it is called a sports high school. The teachers are doing a great job but the students are struggling because there are no sports facilities. The Minister for Education and Training has graced us with her presence in the Chamber. Almost an hour after I started to speak she is back to listen to the debate, which is good. Prior to the last election the Minister went down to the southern suburbs and promised each of those schools that they would get certain facilities. Endeavour Sports High School would finally get the sports facilities to which the school was entitled. It is almost time for the next election, but does that school have the sports facilities that were promised? No, absolutely not!

Representatives from more than 20 parents and citizens associations came with a list of the promises that had been made by this Minister prior to the last election. I was told that the promises that had been made have not been honoured. Wheeler Heights Public School in the electorate of Wakehurst has exceeded the 500-student requirement for the past three years. Has it been given any indication as to when it will get its school hall? No. I say to the Minister today that she should have a little think about this: her formula—as much as I disagree with the formulas that she applies—says that when a school has 500 students it should be entitled, and should be on a list, to get a hall. But Wheeler Heights school has not been able to get an answer out of the Minister at all.

If the Minister wants to look after funds as carefully as this bill implies—and we congratulate her on making the effort after so many years in government—she should at least be opening up the process to transparency such that parents and students know what the time frame is for when they are likely to get a school hall. Nobody expects governments to put a hall in every school overnight; that is not part of what is reasonable or can be expected, but the Minister should have a policy where at least schools can look on the Internet and say, "We have got to this level; we are now 442 down the list", or whatever it is, and there is an expectation that over

the next three, four or five years the school will get a hall. Transparency is what is needed, and Wheeler Heights Public School is waiting for an answer from the Minister. Balgowlah North Public School—how long has that school waited?

Ms Virginia Judge: Point of order: With great respect to the honourable member for Wakehurst, I have the bill in my hand, and it says:

The object of this bill is to amend the *Education Act 1990* so as to prohibit non-government schools that operate for profit from receiving financial assistance from the State.

I have been sitting here patiently in the Chamber and I have been reading the bill. For the past 20 minutes the honourable member for Wakehurst has not spoken about our great government schools, which have just received record funding.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! The honourable member for Strathfield is debating the issue. I uphold the point of order because I extended a degree of latitude to the honourable member for Wakehurst when he was responding to interjections. The member was entitled to do that but he is now referring to a list that is totally outside the scope of the bill. I ask him to return to the leave of the bill.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Government has wasted so much money and has so mismanaged its budget in education and every other area for almost the past 12 years that it is absolutely critical that we ensure that legislation makes clear that available moneys will be used for government schools as a first priority, along with non-government, church-based, Catholic and independent schools. We also have to make sure that the private sector are encouraged to establish whatever educational facilities they wish, but that they have to meet the regulatory requirements and they have to understand that they will not be able to seek those funds that are needed more critically in other areas.

These issues are critical. The Minister has had ample opportunity to meet with the various representatives of schools, the Teachers Federation and the principals who form the various groups. The Minister should listen a little more to some of their concerns. Recently, the Minister was due to meet with Brian Chudleigh from the Public Schools Principals Forum [PSPF], but she did not attend the meeting. Members of the forum came all the way into the city to meet with her to discuss these sorts of issues.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: That was back in April.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It was back in April. At least she remembers where she should have been.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: Only because you raised it in estimates.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You did not know you should have been there? Better to keep quiet, that's right.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will address his remarks through the Chair. The Minister should cease interjecting.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Finishing that response to the interjection, I note that the Minister's staffer then wrote to Brian Chudleigh of the PSPF and said, "Meeting with the Minister is a privilege." I find that a strange assertion, as did the principals. The Minister for Education and Training has an obligation to meet the principals and discuss these issues about funding. She has an obligation to look at the issue of her failure to fund appropriate levels of maintenance in schools. As the Auditor-General said last year, currently there is a \$116 million backlog of maintenance in our government schools, yet the best the Minister seems to have worked out is that it is maybe about \$30 million because she has got a program of four years of \$120 million. We will be lucky if we ever see it.

That shows that this Government is utterly insensitive to the needs of our schools. There is no plan for capital works and there is poor expenditure in relation to maintenance. I visited schools in the western suburbs and saw that one school had 16 toilets, but only 8 with doors. If members want me to name the school I will name it; it is in one of the Minister's Labor electorates. I was appalled.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I must draw the honourable member for Wakehurst back to the leave of the bill.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Available funds should go towards enabling government schools to make a better presentation. If that is not done, this Government will continue on the way it is going, utterly incapable of managing State education in New South Wales. It is critical that this Government get its act together. The Minister has an F for fail on her handling of report cards in New South Wales. There is an A to E system, but the Minister has failed. A new category needs to be made for the Minister: F for fail. Not only has the Government not managed school maintenance, capital works, policies, and teacher professional development appropriately, but this Minister has completely mucked up the presentation of what parents want: clearer information for their children.

The Coalition believes there should be clearer information for parents in relation to how their children are going at school. There should be performance scales, but, as we have been saying for quite some time, and as the Teachers Federation and the teachers have been saying, the Minister has completely mucked it up because she took the A to E system as being gospel and it was not gospel; it was A to E or equivalents. The Minister finally admitted that, although at the Small Schools Teachers Federation conference she was busy denying it. The Minister now agrees and says, "Yes, we could have had equivalents but I got it wrong". She did get it wrong and she mucked it up. The Catholic and independent sectors, of course, have got it all done. Meanwhile, the Minister has not managed to get it through her own government sector: she has mucked up also the computer information technology [IT] programs for it.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst persists in speaking outside of the leave of the bill.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I was coming to the funding issue. I was about to say that this Minister has wasted a fortune on the IT system and has failed twice.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I have warned the honourable member for Wakehurst once.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We do not have the spare dollars because the Minister has wasted all the dollars on things like the IT system and that is why it is now necessary to introduce this sort of legislation.

Ms Linda Burney: You haven't got more newspaper clippings!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, articles about the failure of this Government, but I have been directed that I cannot go through the failings of this Government.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! That is correct, the honourable member for Wakehurst cannot do so in the debate on this bill.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The honourable member for Heffron has left the Chamber. She should go out and visit Botany Public School, Pagewood Public School or any of the other schools in her electorate, because what she will hear is the message that she has to get serious about supporting public education. Returning to the issue of finance: The Opposition will not oppose this bill, but in future the Government has got to do a far better job in public education and a far better job in delivering the sorts of resources that public education in New South Wales needs.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! Speaker Rozzoli ruled:

Members leading for the Opposition are allowed some latitude in canvassing matters outside the scope of the bill. The same degree of latitude is not exercised for members following in the debate.

Neither Government nor Opposition members can range outside the leave of the bill in the way the honourable member for Wakehurst was allowed to do as a result of earlier rulings.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Peats) [11.29 a.m.]: Mr Acting-Speaker, your ruling is a good argument in support of changing the standing orders in this place. I support the Education Amendment (Financial Assistance to Non-Government Schools) Bill. I have just listened to the outrageous remarks made by the shadow Minister for Education and Training. I hope that my contribution to the debate makes a lot more sense. The bill is a positive initiative in the best interests of the people of New South Wales. It shows that the Labor Government is not only in the business of governing for today but is looking ahead, identifying and taking a stand on the challenges that we will face in the future. The Government did that with its policy of putting computers into

schools throughout the State. That policy was so successful that we were well ahead of America, the richest nation in the world.

When the Coalition was in government the policy of the then Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Terry Metherell, was for the parents and citizens association of each school to raise money for its school and the Government would match the funding dollar-for-dollar. Consequently, schools in the wealthier areas of the State had computers but many schools in my electorate were without computers. That was an unfair and unjust policy. I am pleased to report that the Labor Government has changed that policy and has brought all schools into the twenty-first century. New South Wales has always been a magnet for investors assessing the Australian market. We have the biggest population and, thanks to our sound economic management, our State is quite rightly regarded as Australia's best investment prospect.

We recognise that companies may wish to pursue business opportunities in the New South Wales education market, and we recognise their right to do so. But we also assert our right as New South Wales taxpayers to determine that education funding is not being used to enhance profit margins of investors. We are particularly alert to the potential for special relationships between not-for-profit and for-profit entities. A school could be established and declared as a not-for-profit entity, only to pass on an agreed surplus to another company, using an excessive rate of payment for goods or services. It is important to emphasise why such relationships should not be supported with public funding.

The key purpose of a school should be to educate children to the best of its ability. We do not want decisions on employing an extra teacher, refurbishing a classroom, buying of the latest technology or providing new reading books to be weighed up against the need to make a financial return or pay a dividend. We want to know that the educational needs of the students will always be the main driver for a school's financial priorities. We should not invest public funds in a school that may have to cut corners, courses or welfare support to meet percentage returns and financial guarantees. When making decisions on the investment of public revenue for the benefit of New South Wales, we should also consider value for money. Would investment in a for-profit school give us value for money or would our taxpayer dollars buy bigger benefits for more students in schools that do not have the requirement to deliver a dividend? Would the management team of a for-profit school have the same educational expertise that we find in our Catholic education system or our not-for-profit independent schools?

The Government is of the view that the taxpayers of New South Wales should concentrate their available resources on those non-government schools that are not in the business of making a profit. The future of this State, its economic and social wellbeing, is substantially dependent upon the strength of its education system. Today we are saying that we want our public subsidy for education to go 100 per cent to the schools that are returning funds to maximise the educational opportunities for their current and future students. That is the value we place on our education system and the value we place on the contribution of the taxpayers of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ALEX McTAGGART (Pittwater) [11.34 a.m.]: I support the Education Amendment (Financial Assistance to Non-Government Schools) Bill. I note that the Opposition does not oppose the bill. The cost to parents of educating their children, in both government and non-government schools, is high. The cost to government of providing public education is also extremely high and resources are scarce. It is incumbent on government to keep the cost to parents as low as possible and to ensure that taxpayers do not subsidise private schools for profit. I would like to make quite clear my commitment to both public education and the other sectors that provide education for religious or cultural reasons.

There are a number of non-government schools in my electorate—Catholic, Anglican, cultural and special schools. I want them to have access to as many public resources as possible. There are also a number of public schools in my electorate that have not had a significant injection of capital funds for some time. Those schools are Avalon Public School, Bilgola Public School, Newport Public School, Mona Vale Public School, Elanora Public School, Terrey Hills Public School, Narrabeen North Public School, Narrabeen Lakes Public School, Barrenjoey High School, Pittwater High School and Narrabeen Sports High School. I do not support

taxpayers funds being used to fund schools that return profits to individuals. I take great heart from the Minister's second reading speech. In relation to subsection 3 (c) of new section 21A she said:

In effect, this subsection prevents situations where proprietors manipulate or otherwise distort a school's commercial arrangements to derive a benefit for themselves or someone with whom they have a connection. The most common scenario alleged in relation to for-profit schooling is when a school leases land or pays for services at markedly inflated prices. Somewhere at the bottom of the arrangement is a connection or relationship of some kind between the proprietor and that entity or service provider. Clearly, under these circumstances it is incumbent on a government to act to protect the taxpayer interest. There is also a consumer dimension—I believe most parents who pay less would want to know if school money is being siphoned off in this way.

I take great heart from her comments with respect to subsection 4 (d). She said:

Religious organisations perform many vital services in our community. Running schools is one of these. It is not our intention to disrupt the financial arrangements they have put in place to further their aims in their schools.

The bill is about protecting education and scarce public funds. I support the Government. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield) [11.37 a.m.]: I support of the Education Amendment (Financial Assistance to Non-Government Schools) Bill. I commend the Minister for Education and Training, her hardworking staff and the department for their efforts in preparing this significant bill. First, I correct some of the erroneous and fallacious statements made by the honourable member for Wakehurst, who said that the Iemma Government was big on spin and short on substance. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is incumbent upon me to inform the citizens of New South Wales that the Government has been proactive, and this bill is a good example of what the Government is achieving.

The honourable member for Wakehurst may not be aware that under the Government class sizes were reduced. On average year 2 classes now have only 22 children, year 1 classes have only 23 children and kindergarten classes have only 22 children. The Government implemented that fantastic policy, which has had a huge impact. I am a former teacher. I have taught children from kindergarten to year 12, and I have tutored older children as well. I know that smaller class sizes mean that teachers can focus their attention more closely on the children and give them better opportunities.

As the honourable member for Peats pointed out, New South Wales was the first State in Australia to connect schools to the Internet. That shows that the Government has been proactive. This is not spin; this is computers, hardware and software in our schools so that children can access information that will enable them to perform better and work more diligently and professionally in the classroom. In terms of substance, the Government established the Institute for Teachers to accredit teachers and help in developing the profession. I note that the honourable member for Wakehurst has rushed out of the Chamber; perhaps he does not want to hear what I am saying. Now he has rushed back in again, and I am glad about that. He is concerned because, obviously, this is an Achilles heel for him.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. Not only am I here, but I am listening to the rhetoric and spin of the honourable member for Strathfield. She should be aware that if she pushes too hard I will call for a quorum, which I am sure she would not want to happen right now. She should be careful.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! There is no point of order.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: I am discussing the Education Amendment (Financial Assistance to Non-Government Schools) Bill.

Mr Jeff Hunter: Have you noticed that there is not one Opposition member in the Chamber?

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: The honourable member for Wakehurst was here but he left. I do not know where the rest of the mob are; they must be in their rooms having a cup of tea or coffee while listening to what I am saying. They do not want to hear the truth: Investment in education has increased from \$4 billion to \$8 billion over the life of the Government. That is a record \$10.7 billion on education. The facts speak for themselves. That is a substantial amount of taxpayers' money put where it should be—in educating our future generations.

The electorate of Strathfield has about 33 schools, both primary and secondary. The government schools are fantastic, as are some of the non-government schools that operate not for profit. They all get a slice of the cake. Homebush Boys High School and South Strathfield Girls High School received new toilet blocks, Burwood Girls High School was provided with playing fields and other schools received new buildings and facilities. If I had an hour I could talk about all the great things the government schools in my electorate have received, but it is incumbent on me to speak about the bill.

The bill aims to prohibit profit-making non-government schools from accessing State funding, and is an example of the Iemma Government's responsible approach to the regulation of non-government education in New South Wales. The bill aims to protect the quality of non-government school education for the benefit of students, their parents and the taxpayers of New South Wales. It does not stop the registration of profit-making schools in New South Wales, but it will ensure that the focus of any taxpayer input to schools is firmly on quality. We want to be sure that there are no mixed motives when it comes to something as fundamental as schooling and education.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Hear! Hear!

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: At last the honourable member for Wakehurst is agreeing with me. That is fantastic. It took a while but we are getting there—just keep chipping away. People must be confident that those to whom they entrust the education of their children are clearly focused on educational outcomes. Without this important legislation, taxpayer dollars could be contributing to the profits of—God forbid—shareholders and speculators, instead of being reinvested for the benefit of our great students. We need to make clear that taxpayer funding for schools is for students and not for shareholders, for profit makers, for lining those silver pockets.

The New South Wales Government respects the right of parents to choose how their children will be educated. Each year the Government ensures the flow of 25 per cent of recurrent costs for government schools to support the choice of parents who opt to have their children educated in non-government schools. In 2005-06 this amounted to almost \$700 million, which is a significant investment and a powerful indication of the Government's support for choice. The New South Wales Government is a signatory to the national principles for school funding, agreed to by all education Ministers in 2002.

These principles identify that our public funds are to provide for development of the individual, a socially and culturally cohesive society, a comprehensive curriculum, the equitable assessment of student needs, a high-quality public school system open to all, and the right of families to choose non-government schooling if that is their wish. This list is about social aims and about sending a clear signal to all those who would be involved in schools about the priorities for school resourcing. There is certainly no suggestion that one of these priorities is to provide a windfall to investors.

This legislation is the latest example of the Labor Government's determination to protect and defend the high quality of education in all New South Wales schools. It has no implication for the vast majority of non-government schools in New South Wales, be they based on a religious faith or a particular educational philosophy. These schools are meeting the diverse preferences of parents without any compromises. We live in a democracy; one principle of democracy is freedom, and freedom implies choice. The New South Wales Government knows that our non-government schools are fully committed to providing high-quality educational outcomes for their students.

When the hardworking taxpayers of New South Wales give close to \$700 million a year to non-government schools they are entitled to know that it is going towards things such as facilities, qualified teachers, technology, curriculum resources, literacy and numeracy education or support for disabled students, to name but a few. They are also entitled to know whether it is being diverted away from these priorities to support an investor's bottom line. We are aware that there is potential interest in the development of schools as private businesses that will deliver profits to shareholders.

The responsible course is to make clear our position on access to public funds for such businesses before they are established. It is in the best interests of all concerned that we flag our intentions right here and now. It is totally appropriate that the Government send clear signals to entrepreneurs and potential investors so that they understand the policy climate and culture they will meet in New South Wales. I commend the Minister for Education and Training for her strong leadership in this matter.

There is no doubt or confusion about the expectations of the New South Wales public. If a person wants to set up a non-government school in New South Wales they will be free to do so. They will be able to apply for registration through the Board of Studies so we know that they can meet all the required standards for facilities, curriculum, qualification of staff, welfare of students and reporting to parents, the community and the Government. These standards are now more rigorous and exacting than ever, thanks to the reforms that we introduced in 2004. I say "Hear! Hear" to the Government, our great Minister and all those who support the Government. Parents and the wider community can be confident that, regardless of a school's governance structures, it must meet the most rigorous quality assurance benchmarks for education in Australia. Then if it meets all these requirements and wants to be eligible for government funding it will have to ensure that its commercial affairs are above board, open, accountable and transparent.

Mr Daryl Maguire: That's not like the New South Wales Government.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: It is exactly like the New South Wales Government. I am pleased that the honourable member for Wagga Wagga mentioned that; he sparked my interest for a second and I thought that that is what we are about. We make no apologies, do we?

Ms Linda Burney: Never!

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: And we are proud that we are open, transparent and accountable.

Mr Jeff Hunter: North Coast land deals, the white shoe brigade—I remember it all between 1988 and 1995.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: The honourable member for Lake Macquarie has made some interesting points. If there is reason for the Minister to consider that a non-government school receiving State funds may be operating for profit as defined by this legislation, there is a mechanism for the Minister to investigate the relevant financial transactions of an institution and determine whether our public funds—our taxes—are being used appropriately. This is a prudent Government working on behalf of our citizens.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Are we in the wrong State?

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: The honourable member for Wakehurst might think he is in the wrong State. We all know where we are: in the great State of New South Wales, the engine room of the nation. The bill protects our existing non-government schools, the parents who send their children to those schools, current and future students and all New South Wales taxpayers. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.49 a.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Peats, the honourable member for Strathfield and the honourable member for Pittwater for their contributions. I thank the honourable member for Wakehurst for his erudite contribution and I will address some of the points he made in his speech. Had the honourable member for Wakehurst behaved himself in question time yesterday we would have had this debate last night and there would have been no need for his nonsense this morning about the whereabouts of the Minister. The Minister was in the Chamber for the bulk of his contribution. The honourable member for Wakehurst was in and out, in and out, during the contributions of other members. That is not the way the honourable member for Wakehurst would allow a child to behave in the classroom, but he thinks he can behave that way in the Chamber.

The honourable member for Wakehurst claimed that the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board [VETAB] is the body that registers schools in New South Wales. As the shadow Minister for Education and Training he should know that the body that registers schools in New South Wales is the Board of Studies. It is alarming that the shadow Minister does not understand that fundamental point. The honourable member spoke at great length about capital works funding for schools. In this debate I put on record, as has been done before—particularly as the honourable member for Wakehurst thought he would be able to speak about it at length although it had nothing to do with the bill—that funding by the Iemma Government for the 2006 school year is \$844.9 million. That is record spending. I thank the Opposition for supporting the bill. I have great affection for the honourable member for Wakehurst, but he was particularly out of line during this debate; his remarks were not to the point. Be that as it may, the Opposition supports the bill and I thank the Opposition for that.

This is important legislation. It provides parents and the wider community with an assurance that New South Wales government school funding is for the benefit of students. In his speech the honourable member for Pittwater said that he does not believe taxpayer funds should support for-profit schools that benefit individuals. In essence, that is much of what this discussion has been about. It has also been about setting some ground rules for the future so that anyone wanting to open a non-government school in New South Wales will be absolutely clear about what the Government will and will not fund.

As a matter of principle, the Government has no intention of preventing the establishment of profit-making schools. It is clear to the school community, to the education community and certainly to the taxpayers of New South Wales that the Government supports parents being able to make a choice about where they send their children to school. The bill leaves no ambiguity: the Government will not financially support schools that are established to make a profit. Those schools will still have to meet the full range of standards and requirements for registration. I remind the House, particularly the honourable member for Wakehurst, that it is the Board of Studies, a board on which I spent seven years, that registers schools.

Parents will ultimately decide whether this type of school has a future role in our education system. The bill allows non-government schools and school communities to structure themselves in such a way as to best meets their needs, as long as they meet one fundamental principle: schools receiving State funding must not pass profits to a for-profit entity. This bill makes that crystal clear. The bill requires all transactions with for-profit entities to be at market value to ensure that profits are not taken out of schools. The bill will be supported by an audit and certification process that will ensure that those rules are met. That reflects the point the honourable member for Strathfield made about accountability and transparency.

The Government's approach to this issue is measured and appropriate. It is based on a balanced assessment of the broader public interest. The bill will make for a more transparent and accountable system, a move that will be welcomed by parents and the wider community. I reiterate that we support parents' capacity to choose where their children go to school, but our position in relation to for-profit schools is clear. Again, I thank all honourable members for their contributions and for their support of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

LAKE ILLAWARRA SOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOL FENCING

Ms MARIANNE SALIBA (Illawarra) [11.57 a.m.]: I move:

That this House congratulates the Minister for Education and Training and the Government for:

- (1) listening to the concerns of parents and teachers at Lake Illawarra South Public School;
- (2) promptly responding to those concerns by providing almost \$200,000 in funding to fence the school grounds; and
- (3) recognising the importance of public education and child safety in New South Wales, particularly in regional areas such as the Illawarra.

It is appropriate that my motion follows debate on a bill relating to education. The motion seeks to congratulate the Minister for Education and Training for listening to the concerns of parents at the Lake Illawarra South Public School and for responding promptly to those concerns. Initially I was contacted by the parents and citizens association about a problem at the school. The school was on the list for fencing at a future time. On 11 November 2005 a parent at the school, Natasha Lowe, who was also the school's parents and citizens association secretary at the time, contacted my office seeking assistance. There had been an attempted abduction of a child from the school grounds.

A meeting of the parents and citizens association took place on 17 November at the school. I was unable to attend as I had other commitments but I sent a representative from my office. At this meeting the importance of student and teacher safety was stressed and some discussion took place about the fact that fencing the school would make it a safer place. The parents then began a letter-writing campaign, and numerous representations were made by me to the Minister for Education and Training. When Cabinet visited Kiama on 28 November 2005, local members were given the opportunity to address Cabinet.

I took the opportunity to raise this important issue with the Minister, who took prompt action. On 9 December 2005, less than two weeks after the meeting, the Minister advised me that funding of \$187,000 had been approved for security fencing at the Lake Illawarra South Public School. I announced that allocation to the delight of the school community. Principal Lorraine Bradwell wrote to me expressing appreciation on behalf of the parents and students. Some buildings at the school had been vandalised and there were four arson attacks between October 2005 and January 2006. The school managed exceptionally during this time even though the damage was disruptive to teachers and students. Work on the perimeter fence was completed in April 2006. I thank the school's parent community for bringing their concerns to my attention. I was really pleased to be able to assist. The school has experienced no further troubles and I hope this position continues into the future.

The New South Wales school security fence program has been shown to lead to a dramatic reduction in crimes involving fire, trespass, vandalism and breaking and entering. At the schools surveyed in 2004-05 fires were reduced by 100 per cent, trespass was reduced by 100 per cent, vandalism was reduced by 75 per cent, and break and enters were reduced by 68 per cent. The estimated repair bill for the schools surveyed was reduced from \$89,000 to \$18,000 after security fences were installed. I am sure Lake Illawarra South Public School will see equivalent benefits. In 2005-06 the Iemma Government invested about \$9.3 million in security fencing around New South Wales. Installation of the security fences at more than 400 schools has been highly effective in deterring the opportunistic criminals that visit and damage the schools. A further 67 school security fences are to be erected in the next 12 months.

Before the election of the Labor Government no schools had security fencing. During the four school terms of 2005 the number of school vandalism incidents was 2,439 compared with 2,870 in 2004, a 15 per cent reduction in just 12 months. The Iemma Government's proactive Safer Schools Strategy is working and our public schools are better protected than they have ever been. We are sending a very clear message to the community that senseless vandalism at our public schools will not be tolerated and that children's safety is paramount. The Illawarra benefited from the record education budget this year with \$10.7 billion invested in education and training, an increase of \$519 million. As a result of this unprecedented investment in New South Wales public education, public schools in the Illawarra will receive an estimated \$89.2 million in recurrent funding over the coming financial year. In fact, since 1995 the New South Wales Government has boosted annual funding to our local public schools by more than 105 per cent. New projects in my electorate include security fencing at Figtree High School and Farnborough Road Public School. Figtree High School will get a new hall.

It is unfortunate that the electorate of Illawarra is losing Figtree but am very pleased, as are the students and parents, that we have managed to secure that funding. I welcome contact from the new parents and citizens association secretary, Stephanie McLeod. I will continue to work with the association and public schools in my electorate to ensure students safety and to prevent vandalism. I congratulate principal Lorraine Bradwell on her leadership and dedication to ensuring the safety of students and teachers. She has been a strong advocate for the school and the safety of its students. Before the security fencing was installed students had been encouraged to go to the bathroom in pairs rather than alone. The school is now a much safer place. I am pleased that the Minister acted so promptly to provide funding for the fencing. I am very pleased to be part of this Government. I thank the Minister for her commitment and I look forward to continuing to work with her until the next election.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [12.07 p.m.]: The Coalition acknowledges the concerns of the honourable member for Illawarra about schools in the Illawarra, particularly her comments in relation to Lake Illawarra South Public School. School fencing and capital works across New South Wales are a huge issue. It is particularly disturbing that in some areas the State Labor Government has failed so appallingly to address the needs of local communities. Many local school communities are desperately crying out for fencing but the Government has been largely deaf to the problems. The Coalition shares the satisfaction of the honourable member in relation to the Government response on this occasion, although it is usually characterised by a failure to respond.

Lake Illawarra requires much more focus from the Government. I will address this issue shortly. The Liberal and National parties add our congratulations to the principal and parents who managed to finally get the Government to focus on the needs of the school. It is always very difficult to get this Government to focus on the needs of government primary schools. Many times principals and presidents of parents and citizens associations have told us about their frustrations with the Government. Having said that, members on this side of the House do not see any reason to be congratulating the Minister for Education and Training for doing what she should have done and what the Government should have done years ago. For that reason, we propose to move an amendment.

Mr Paul McLeay: Ha!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Thank you for your interest. I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "That " with a view to inserting instead:

"this House condemns the Government for:

(a) its failure to maintain schools in New South Wales,

Ms Marianne Saliba: What garbage!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Shush, you have had your little go. Now be very quiet.

Ms Marianne Saliba: Don't you "shush" me.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Come on, shush now. My amendment continues:

(b) its failure to plan for capital renewal, and

(c) its failure to provide adequate facilities for behavioural schools."

The honourable member for Illawarra is moving. Unfortunately, she has been a victim of the—

Ms Marianne Saliba: What a load of garbage! Don't you dare bring up my private life!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: She is a victim of the State Labor Government's behind-the-scenes, dirty preselection deals.

Ms Noreen Hay: Point of order: I suggest that not only is the honourable member for Wakehurst not talking to his amendment or, indeed, to the motion, but that he is also stating untruths. The honourable member for Illawarra is clearly saying that he is stating untruths about her.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What is the point of order?

Ms Noreen Hay: I believe he should be asked to withdraw those statements and to apologise to the honourable member for Illawarra for casting aspersions on her good works.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I uphold the point of order and—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Under which standing order?

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): —ask the honourable member for Wakehurst—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Can I address the Chair on the point of order?

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will not debate—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do I not get the right to address the Chair on the point of order?

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I am in the chair and I am ruling on the point of order.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Under the standing orders I have a right to address you before you make your decision.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Yes.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: To the point of order: First, I have the right to address the Chair on the point of order. Second, I think the honourable member has misunderstood. I was talking about the continuation of Labor's dirty deals behind the scenes. It was not meant to reflect—

Ms Noreen Hay: Further to the point of order—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Do I not get the right to finish?

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. A point of order has been taken and I—

[Interruption]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order. The honourable member for Wollongong will continue her point of order.

Ms Noreen Hay: Further to the point of order: I suggest that because he cannot defend himself the honourable member for Wakehurst is seeking to canvass your ruling, prior to your even finishing it. There is no question about the bad taste he has displayed today.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What is the point of order? What standing order are you talking about?

Ms Noreen Hay: I am talking about misrepresentation of a member of this place. The honourable member is misleading the House and he should be asked to withdraw and apologise. If he had an ounce of decency he would not have to be asked repeatedly to apologise.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What is the standing order, Madam Acting-Speaker?

Ms Noreen Hay: The honourable member is clearly out of order and he should have to apologise.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What is the standing order?

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst should know better than to behave that way in the Chamber. The point of order is upheld. I ask the honourable member to address the motion before the House and not to stray from it.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will not withdraw anything I have said. The honourable member for Wollongong should think about what she did to Col Markham. She comes in here and carries on. It was not meant to reflect personally on the honourable member for Illawarra.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order for the second time.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I was reflecting on the Labor Party, which allows this sort of dirty backroom deal to go on.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order for the third time.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Having said that, I have no problems with the honourable member for Illawarra. I know she tries.

Ms Noreen Hay: You shouldn't be doing that. Withdraw your statement!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The honourable member for Wollongong is a very trying person.

Ms Noreen Hay: Withdraw your statement!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will not withdraw anything.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will address the Chair.

Ms Noreen Hay: Point of order—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Go away!

Ms Noreen Hay: I will not go away! The honourable member should sit down and do what he is told.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The honourable member for Wollongong had better have a standing order this time. If she does not have one she will face a quorum call.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): What is the point of order?

Ms Noreen Hay: As he does constantly, the honourable member for Wakehurst is ignoring the rules of this place. He has now cast aspersions on me as well. I ask that he withdraw his unwarranted statements and behave himself.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Wollongong has pointed out that the honourable member for Wakehurst is not speaking to the motion. The honourable member for Wollongong can deal with the remarks of the honourable member for Wakehurst when she addresses the House. The honourable member for Wakehurst will confine his remarks to the motion before the House.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is a motion and an amendment to the motion, to be precise. The honourable member for Illawarra congratulated her school, as do I. However, if the residents of that area think they are getting fair representation from Labor, they can forget it. The Illawarra-South Coast is the only region in which figures for school vandalism increased in 2004-05. The incidence of vandalism has risen by 20.5 per cent since 2003. Let us look at the big picture. Only seven schools in the Illawarra-South Coast are on the list to be fenced in 2006-07. If the honourable member thinks that is a good record, she is wrong. Her Labor successor will be tested on precisely that issue. Only 37 of the 232 schools in the region have security fencing. That is 15 lousy per cent.

The honourable member for Illawarra wants the voters to support her successor. They should hold her in contempt, as they should hold her Government in contempt, because 37 schools out of 232 in the region having security fencing is utterly ridiculous. That means that 85 per cent of the schools in the honourable member's electorate have no security fencing. She comes into this place and pats herself on the back because she thinks she has done a good job. She has not! She should have forced this Labor Government to acknowledge that school fencing is required across the board in her region. In 2005 there were 278 cases of vandalism at Illawarra-South Coast schools—they are only the incidents reported—and since 2002 there have been 19 school arson incidents. That is second only to south-west Sydney. Yet this member seeks to congratulate the Minister for doing what should have been done years ago.

Those figures demonstrate that this Government has a pathetic record on getting infrastructure right in schools. Last year the Auditor-General highlighted a \$116 million backlog in maintenance. The head of security acknowledged that two months after the budget was handed down there was not enough money to install any more fences. This Government is next to useless when it comes to providing school infrastructure, maintenance and renewal. Security fences are right at the bottom of the pile. The honourable member should not be congratulating this Minister; she should be backing the Opposition in calling for better maintenance of and capital renewal in schools in New South Wales, particularly in the Illawarra.

[Interruption]

Those schools are hopeless. The honourable member should consider the school at Woniora on the South Coast. That school was promised new buildings prior to the last election. What happened? Like many other schools in the region, that school has been absolutely dudded by the honourable member for Illawarra, and it will be dudded by another Labor member. *[Time expired.]*

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [12.17 p.m.]: Having heard the honourable member for Wakehurst—

Mr Brad Hazzard: You didn't have to, but you still waffled on.

Ms NOREEN HAY: I think everyone inside and outside the Chamber heard the honourable member. I hope that he will be able to settle down for a few minutes. I support the honourable member for Illawarra in

her congratulations of the Iemma Government and the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt. It is interesting that the honourable member for Wakehurst screamed and shouted about how many schools across the Illawarra-South Coast need fencing and said that that has been the case for years. I remind him that his party was in government, albeit a long time ago—and hopefully it will be a long time before it is in again. These schools have been around for a long time. In fact, the Cringila Public School has just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary.

I wonder how many schools had any kind of security fencing installed, any increase in capital works funding or serious investment when that lot opposite were in government. I suggest none. I suggest that, as usual, honourable members opposite have pointed the finger incorrectly. The Leader of the Opposition has promised to fix everything for everyone on day one. Their behaviour today exposes them once again as spoilers: Spoilers they are and spoilers they will stay. They should join honourable members on this side of the House in congratulating the Minister for Education and Training and the Government on their commitment to the public education system, their serious injection of funds into the system for school security and their investments such as that which produced Illawarra High School's new state-of-the-art gym. This Government has allocated \$10.7 billion in this year's Education budget, an increase of \$518 million. In the 2006-07 financial year an additional 11 schools in the region will have security fences erected as part of the New South Wales Government's \$10 million expenditure on school security.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The honourable member was concerned to bring me back to the leave of the motion. I point out that the motion she seeks to debate relates to parents and teachers at—

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Wakehurst was allowed a degree of latitude during his contribution to the debate.

[Interruption]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will not debate my ruling. He will resume his seat.

[Interruption]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. The honourable member for Wollongong may continue.

[Interruption]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat.

Ms NOREEN HAY: In fact, 16 per cent of the security fences to be installed in the coming 12 months will be at Illawarra and South Coast schools. Wollongong West Public School and Warrawong High School in my electorate have had security fencing erected, resulting in fewer instances of vandalism. Since 1995 the New South Wales Government has boosted annual funding to our local public schools by a record 105 per cent. It is simply a joke for members of the Opposition to claim that they will do great things for New South Wales public schools. Under the Iemma Government and the Minister for Education and Training teachers in New South Wales have received significant pay increases—unlike what they will get should the Coalition's 29,000 public servants job cuts ever eventuate. As a result of the New South Wales Government's commitment, teachers' salaries in this State are now the highest in the country.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: Standing order 137 requires that the honourable member be relevant. She is telling lies. She opposed an increase in teachers' salaries.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is no point of order.

Ms NOREEN HAY: I support New South Wales teachers and public education, as does this Government and the Minister. *[Time expired.]*

[Debate interrupted.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): I acknowledge a delegation of 30 judicial officers from Thailand, led by Justice Jakis, Chief Judge of Region V Thailand. I extend to them a warm welcome to the New South Wales Parliament. They are listening to a feisty debate this morning. I hope they enjoy their visit to Australia.

LAKE ILLAWARRA SOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOL FENCING

[Debate resumed.]

Mr STEVEN PRINGLE (Hawkesbury) [12.22 p.m.]: I strongly support the amendment moved by the honourable member for Wakehurst, which states:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "That " with a view to inserting instead:

"this House condemns the Government for:

- (a) its failure to maintain schools in New South Wales,
- (b) its failure to plan for capital renewal, and
- (c) its failure to provide adequate facilities for behavioural schools.

The House probably does not need much reminding that the Auditor General has noted that there is a maintenance backlog of \$116 million for schools across New South Wales. Hawkesbury schools are suffering as a result of that maintenance backlog. One of the major priorities is airconditioning. This Government has failed to install airconditioning in New South Wales schools. The Hawkesbury electorate is located in one of the hottest regions in the State and all schools in the electorate are affected by the heat. This Government said that it would introduce the Schools Hotspot Program. After many questions were asked and after plenty of letters were written to the Minister for Education and Training, we have found out that only two schools in Sydney can apply under that program—Richmond High School and Richmond Public School. Students of Colo High School, Hawkesbury High School, Windsor High School and Galston High School, not to mention the primary schools, are not getting airconditioning, despite the fact that they are located in one of the hottest parts of the State. That is plainly a disgrace!

The Government is good at wasting taxpayers' money. Colo Heights Public School is a lovely school with a relatively small population. It has a very involved parent body and a good school principal but, of course, it is not fully sewered. It is in a rural area, surrounded by Wollemi National Park, and it has a septic system. The Government has taken more than six months to get its act together so that we have safe and healthy conditions for the students. The septic system has to be pumped out. This Government is so hopeless it has had to spend thousands of dollars each week to get the school's toilets pumped out, when it could have fixed the problem quickly. What a disgrace! Surely, that would not have been too much to ask.

I refer to Windsor South Public School. A number of honourable members have referred to the need for security fencing at schools in their electorates. Windsor South Public School has been crying out for security fencing for a long time. In addition, the school toilets are still lousy, but the Government is not interested. With regard to Wisemans Ferry Public School, it took a visit from the shadow Minister for Education to get the major health problems at that school fixed. This Government neglects Wisemans Ferry Public School, just as it neglects so many other schools. I remind the House of the basic issues that are not being addressed by this Government.

The parents and citizens associations in a number of schools in my electorate have ensured that there is airconditioning in primary schools and that the computers are up and running. However, the electrical supply to the schools is not able to cope when the airconditioning and the computers are switched on at the same time. What a joke! Surely the Government could have fixed that situation long ago. I refer to demountable classrooms. Galston High School is a terrific school. It has had a demountable art classroom for 20-odd years. It has been on the site for so long that it is regarded as a permanent fixture, but the Government wants to take it away. In fact, it is so old that I doubt whether the demountable will be able to be moved without it falling apart. The Government should leave that demountable building where it is.

I refer to Annangrove Public School. The school pleaded with the department not to take away its demountable classroom. The Government ignored that and, at the end of last year, the demountable classroom was taken away. At the beginning of this year it was brought back again because the number of students had reached the required level. I understand that it cost approximately \$40,000 to take the demountable classroom away and then bring it back. That money should have been spent on education, where it belongs, not on stupid bureaucracy. These sorts of rules need to be changed, and changed quickly. [*Time expired.*]

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [12.27 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Illawarra on all the work she has done in her electorate. I know that many of her constituents were sad when she announced that she would not contest the seat at the next State election. I am aware of her passion and her dedication to her constituents. I will miss her. However, I support the amendment to her motion, which states:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "That " with a view to inserting instead:

"this House condemns the Government for:

- (a) its failure to maintain schools in New South Wales,
- (b) its failure to plan for capital renewal, and
- (c) its failure to provide adequate facilities for behavioural schools.

When I was elected to the New South Wales Parliament in 2003 there was an enormous problem at Ulladulla High School. I began teaching at that high school the year it was opened: 1976. At that time the school was planned for 300 students. There are now more than 1,200 students at that school. During the intervening period some minor capital works upgrades have taken place. But for the past 10 years of this Government no major capital upgrades have been undertaken. So I have to bring to this House, as did the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph* and other newspapers, the fact that sewerage infrastructure was so poorly maintained that the sewerage pipes were broken and had been overflowing onto the playground. This is raw sewage flowing onto the playground of a school in the electorate of Bega—attended by students from my electorate of South Coast as well.

I have spoken before in this House on the School Assets Register Bill, which was proposed by the shadow Minister for Education, and I talked about the need to strategically plan for our capital infrastructure upgrades. If assets are allowed to run down, similar situations to that at Ulladulla High School will occur. Milton Public School had been promised a major capital upgrade for years because of its problems with high growth in the South Coast area: students crammed into classrooms, totally inadequate facilities, and leaking demountables which had been there for many, many years—decades.

Finally, we had to drag the Government kicking and screaming on both issues—Milton Public School and Ulladulla High School—to do something about the inadequate facilities faced by students and teachers in those schools. The teachers were fed up, and the teachers are still fed up, with the recalcitrance of this Government on capital infrastructure upgrades. I chaired a committee in Milton regarding an independent inquiry by Professor Tony Vinson. That inquiry revealed that there is a \$116 million backlog, and the Auditor-General confirmed the need for infrastructure upgrades. Instead, the Government has a paltry four-year plan, which will still see the deterioration of classrooms and school conditions for our students.

It is all very well to come into the House and talk about security fences—and I have said before that that is a good issue for the honourable member for Illawarra to raise—but with the current expenditure rate on schools in the Illawarra and South Coast there will still remain a number of schools without security fences and there will still remain high levels of vandalism that are occurring in our schools in the Illawarra and South Coast. The Government has a poor record in regard to school upgrades. Just last week Vincentia Primary School council representatives and parents and citizens representatives came to see me about the dangerous situation faced by teachers, students and residents in the area because there are no parking or drop-off facilities and no bus facilities. It is a nightmare every afternoon at that school and it is threatening the safety of the children. We are talking about babies: young kids in kindergarten who do not have the peripheral vision to cross a road carefully. But there are no solutions coming from this Government. I raised this issue more than three years ago and still nothing has been done.

Similarly, Culburra Public School has extremely dangerous car parking facilities. The school has an unsealed car park with no configuration for traffic or cars, and kindergarten students wander in and out because

the school has no formal entry and exit points. Schools all over my area are concerned about infrastructure and maintenance. [*Time expired.*]

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Gosford) [12.32 p.m.]: I speak to the amendment moved by the honourable member for Illawarra. There is great concern in the community, especially in my own community on the Central Coast, about the lack of maintenance for schools. The \$116 million backlog in maintenance means that many school maintenance programs have fallen below a reasonable standard, especially in relation to school toilets. School toilets at Terrigal Public School are an ongoing problem and the Government is simply failing to address it. I have been out to Terrigal Public School and I have seen the toilets there. They are too small, too crowded, and they have not been kept clean. It is an excellent school, but the present State Government has neglected it.

Terrigal High School has been seeking a performance space for arts and drama for many years, and that request has been ignored. I have raised the matter in this House on a number of occasions—as far back as when Mr Aquilina was Minister for Education. He had the courtesy to reply to the request and visit the school, but, while we had kind words from Mr Aquilina, we saw no action. For more than 10 years the request for a performing arts space at Terrigal High School has been ignored, just as Terrigal Public School has been ignored and neglected in its request for its young students to have decent toilets.

Kariong High School on the Central Coast, in the future electorate of Gosford, has not happened. Despite promises made by a number of people, including the honourable member for Peats, that there would be action to build a high school at Kariong, nothing has happened. In relation to behavioural schools, the only behavioural school operating in my electorate is the school sponsored by the Christian Brothers and by the parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea at Terrigal called Terrigal Haven, which is a behavioural school for young people. This is a State Government facility, but the only funding that Terrigal Haven school receives is in the normal course of funding. It needs and has asked for additional funding but it receives no more.

The State Government walks away from problems such as school maintenance; it walks away from the issue of school toilet facilities; and it walks away from proper and adequate funding for young people who have behavioural problems. The Government has no vision for education. Witness its attitude towards Gosford Public School, on the waterfront at Gosford, that has asked what its future is and what plans the Government has for the school. The school is around 50 years old and it lacks proper facilities and a vision. But it can get no reply from the Government as to its future. The whole educational system on the Central Coast lacks an adequate number of counsellors; there is an average of one counsellor to 1,000 students at a secondary level and one counsellor to 1,500 students at a primary school level. Yet the Central Coast has a serious problem with youth suicide.

This Government neglects schools. It neglects the schools in my electorate—Gosford Public School, Terrigal High School and Terrigal Public School. Kincumber Public School has put in an urgent request for flashing lights so that young children can cross the road at Avoca Drive with safety. What has happened to that application? Nothing at all. Only yesterday I presented to this Parliament a petition signed by the parents and teachers of Kincumber Public School asking for flashing lights so that young children can cross the road with safety. We await a reply from the Minister for Roads.

Why do people have to pressure? Why do people have to take up petitions for obvious acts of child safety like the necessary flashing lights on a very busy public thoroughfare such as Avoca Drive? The Government is simply lacking interest in the safety of children. It took eight years to get the bridge across York Street at East Gosford so that the children from St Patrick's Primary School could cross the road with safety. Once again, the Government has walked away from the problem year after year. [*Time expired.*]

Ms MARIANNE SALIBA (Illawarra) [12.32 p.m.], in reply: First of all, I thank the honourable member for South Coast for her kind words. I also acknowledge the commitment of the honourable member for Wollongong to the schools in her electorate. While I am talking about members of Parliament, I recommend that the honourable member for Wakehurst visit some of those behavioural schools mentioned by the honourable member for Gosford. Perhaps he might learn a thing or two on how to behave in the Chamber with other people. The commitment of this New South Wales Government to public schools has been shown time and time again.

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order: My point of order is that the honourable member is misleading the House. She is speaking about the commitment of this Government with respect to public schools.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Illawarra has the call. The honourable member for Baulkham Hills will resume his seat.

[Interruption]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I call the honourable member for Baulkham Hills to order.

Ms MARIANNE SALIBA: The Opposition should stop wasting the time of the House. In 2005-06 an additional 11 schools in the region have received security fencing, part of the New South Wales Government's \$10 million investment in school security. In fact, 16 per cent of the security fencing to be installed over the coming 12 months will be undertaken on Illawarra and South Coast schools. This extra investment will bring the total number of local schools with security fencing to 68. I repeat that public education and child safety is very important to the Government. Indeed, this year's budget is an increase of \$518 million on the Government's record investment of \$10.7 billion in education and training. As a result, public schools in the Illawarra will receive an estimated \$89.2 million in recurrent funding over the coming years.

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order: What about Crestwood Public School?

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I call the honourable member for Baulkham Hills to order for the second time.

Ms MARIANNE SALIBA: In my electorate alone two new schools have been built in the time that I have been the local member, Unanderra Public School and Dapto Public School. Also in close proximity to me are Shell Cove Public School and Flinders Public School.

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order: The honourable member for Illawarra is introducing new material to this debate and she is not entitled to do so. She has not mentioned Crestwood Public School.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Illawarra has the call.

Ms MARIANNE SALIBA: I wish Opposition members would stop wasting the time of the House. Indeed, they are wasting our time being in the Chamber in the first place. Since 1995 the Government has boosted annual funding to public schools in the Illawarra by approximately 110 per cent and we are seeing improvements to our schools. Opposition members have spoken about problems within the local schools, but they seem to forget that when they were in government they did nothing for local schools.

Mr Wayne Merton: We fixed up your mess.

Ms MARIANNE SALIBA: Let me start with airconditioning. Those schools needed airconditioning when they were in government but they did nothing about that.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The Auditor-General pointed out that it is this Government that has a backlog of \$116 million. The Auditor-General did not feel it necessary to chastise the former Coalition Government because it was looking after schools through cyclic maintenance.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. The honourable member for Illawarra has the call.

Ms MARIANNE SALIBA: The honourable member for Wakehurst is a naughty little boy and should be suspended. He was suspended yesterday and if he keeps pushing it, he will be suspended again today. Within two weeks of me raising this with the Minister and Cabinet we had a decision. The Minister took seriously the safety and security of students at Lake Illawarra Public School. Again I congratulate the principal, Lorraine Bradwell, the parents and citizens association and the school community on their commitment to the school. I look forward to continuing working with them until the next election.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

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

Noes, 33

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

[Mr Speaker left the chair at 12.53 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

PETITIONS**Bus Services 326 and 327**

Petition asking that the Government urgently reinstate the former timetables of bus services 326 and 327, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pets on Public Transport

Petition requesting that pets be allowed on public transport, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

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**.

Same-sex Marriage Legislation

Petition opposing same-sex marriage legislation, received from **Mr Ian Armstrong**.

Newnes and Ben Bullen State Forests Trail Bike Activities

Petition requesting trail bike activities be moved from Newnes and Ben Bullen State Forests to Sunny Corner pine plantation, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Gardens of Stone Reserve

Petition requesting the reservation of the Gardens of Stone stage 2 park proposal to preserve the area's outstanding scenic, historic, scientific and recreational value, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Rural and Regional Police Resources

Petition calling upon the Iemma Government to allocate more police resources to rural and regional communities throughout New South Wales, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Police Resources

Petition requesting increased police resources for New South Wales, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

National Art School

Petition opposing proposed changes to the National Art School, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

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**.

Parkinson's Disease Funding

Petition requesting funding for Parkinson's-specific support services for people living with Parkinson's disease, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Bega District Hospital Theatre Complex

Petition calling on the House to upgrade the Bega District Hospital theatre complex to ensure the retention of surgical services until such time as a new regional facility is built, received from **Mr Andrew Constance**.

Sutherland Hospital Management

Petition requesting the retention of a full-time general manager and the re-establishment of a local community based hospital board of management, received from **Mr Malcolm Kerr**.

Private Native Forestry

Petitions requesting a review of the draft code of practice for private native forestry, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell** and **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

Tathra Aquatic Reserve Proposal

Petition opposing the proposal by the South East Marine Protection Group to establish an aquatic reserve in the Tathra area, received from **Mr Andrew Constance**.

Recreational Fishing

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

Grafton Bridge

Petition requesting the construction of a new bridge over the Clarence River at Grafton, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Bells Line of Road

Petition requesting improvements to sign posting, sealing of road shoulders and removal of dead and overhanging foliage on the Bells Line of Road, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

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**.

Cross City Tunnel

Petition requesting government decisions concerning the Cross City Tunnel to be based on the public interest, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

BUDGET DEFICIT

Mr PETER DEBNAM: My question is to the Premier. Given that his own budget papers say, "State Final Demand ... provides a more timely and accurate picture of the health of the New South Wales economy than GSP" and that Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show State final demand collapsing, why will he not acknowledge that he is leading New South Wales towards a recession and a billion-dollar budget deficit?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Leader of the Opposition is pretending to predict a downturn. He is really hoping for a downturn. That is what he wants to happen, so he sweats on the monthly figures. Fairly soon he will be sweating on fortnightly figures or weekly figures to attempt to drag New South Wales down.

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: He makes \$20 billion of unfunded promises without the foggiest idea of how he is going to pay for them and then he pretends he has some credibility when it comes to running an economy.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point of order: This is what the Premier has done to the economy. They are the ABS figures.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will stop flouting the rules of the House. I direct him to resume his seat. I warn all honourable members that the Chair will not take kindly to the use of props during question time.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: There are a few Opposition graphs we can show if the Opposition wants to play graphs at 20 paces. Final demand grew at a healthy 2.2 per cent annual pace in the 2005-06 financial year. Over the year to the June quarter of 2006, which got the Leader of the Opposition so excited yesterday, compared with the June quarter of 2005, State final demand grew by 1.1 per cent, the same as in Victoria. The Leader of the Opposition has repeated yesterday's effort today, giving the activity to June 2006 and asking about the implications for the 2006-07 financial year. I should have said yesterday that the 2005-06 budget delivered a \$650 million surplus. The answer to the other part of his question, which was about the effect of yesterday's

figures on this year's budget, is that they will have absolutely no effect because they relate to the 2005-06 financial year, when the budget delivered a surplus of \$650 million.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Southern Highlands will cease calling out.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I now come to how the Leader of the Opposition sweats on a quarterly figure, a monthly figure or a weekly figure, hoping that New South Wales will soften.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point order: I find that offensive. They are the ABS figures. Since Morris Iemma became Premier—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! If the Leader of the Opposition wishes to make a personal explanation, the forms of the House enable him to do so at the appropriate time. He cannot debate the answer raising further issues.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: With \$20 billion of unfunded promises he asks about budget deficits. In the highly unlikely event that he ever gets elected to this side of the Chamber and in the even more unlikely event that he keeps his promises, he would send New South Wales bankrupt on day one, not to mention the effect he would have on employment with his promise to sack 29,000 workers.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: With the Peter meter running at \$20 billion he says yes to everyone, but there is one group of people in New South Wales he never says yes to—that is the ordinary workers. He has no barrel of money for them. He only has the sack for the ordinary workers of New South Wales. That is what is in store for ordinary workers who cannot be protected by our legislation, and that is what is in store for 29,000 State workers whom the Leader of the Opposition would sack. These are his policies. He then asks about State final demand, State activity and the budget.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease calling out.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: As I mentioned yesterday, and I am happy to repeat it today, the gross final demand figures do not mean that the New South Wales budget estimates will not be met. There are two reasons.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point of order: Mr Speaker, did the Premier say "State final demand"?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. He is deliberately flouting the standing orders. The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The House will come to order. The Premier has the call.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: There are also the cuts—because of the narrow tax base—to property-related taxes, which are only a part of what State final demand figures measure. The second reason—I am happy to repeat it again—is that the figures referred to activity through to June 2006, and the budget growth estimates begin from the commencement of the new financial year. As I said yesterday, I cannot help the Leader of the Opposition. He will have to go back to the drawing board with his policies starting with the Peter meter and the 29,000 figure.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS WORKCHOICES LEGISLATION

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: My question is to the Premier. What is the latest information on the Government's efforts to protect injured and vulnerable workers from WorkChoices, and related matters?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: What about workers compensation?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Yes, there are reductions in workers compensation premiums. Stay tuned.

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

[Interruption]

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The \$36 million injected into the benefits for catastrophically injured workers at the end of last year passed without mention by the honourable member for Murrumbidgee. Why would anyone not applaud the injection of \$36 million into benefits for workers? At the same time there was a reduction in workers compensation premiums for business. That also passed without mention from the honourable member for Murrumbidgee. As members of this House would know all too well, the Howard Government's WorkChoices regime is having a devastating effect on hard-working families and businesses across New South Wales. Since the introduction of these unfair laws in March, the Office of Industrial Relations, for the benefit of the honourable member for Murrumbidgee, has received more than 82,000 calls from workers and businesses distressed by the changes.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will come back to order and stop calling out.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: As reported last week, small-business software provider MYOB found WorkChoices is overwhelmingly viewed as unfair and damaging. Last week the *Australian Financial Review* reported that WorkChoices is tying bosses' hands, giving them less control over issues such as annual leave. Under WorkChoices small businesses can no longer request that staff take all their leave during the year, manage unused leave, or refuse leave without a good operational reason, or deem staff to be on leave without a good operational reason. The Liberals' WorkChoices is simply bad for workers and businesses. As we have demonstrated time and again, WorkChoices is bad for business, bad for workers and bad for New South Wales.

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Let me list the efforts that we have made to protect workers. Last week we announced new legislation to protect young workers from the ravages of WorkChoices. Last month we announced our plans to strengthen the powers of the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission. Last year we introduced new laws to protect front-line public servants such as nurses, TAFE teachers and ambulance officers from WorkChoices. Today I can announce that the Government will introduce more new legislation, this time to protect injured workers in New South Wales. The New South Wales Industrial Relations Act protects workers from being sacked if they are injured at work. But these protections are under threat from WorkChoices.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will cease calling out. The Premier has the call.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: They are under threat from the Liberals' unfair and overly complex industrial relations changes. There is no provision in the 1,388 pages of legislation and 400 pages of regulations that make up WorkChoices that replicates our protections. There is nothing in the Liberals' scheme to guard the most vulnerable from opportunistic employers. There is nothing to protect them from being targeted and nothing to ensure they do not miss out.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will stop calling out.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: To retain these provisions for injured workers we will transfer those detailed powers to our workers compensation legislation, and we will keep them in place. Workplace injuries in New South Wales are at an 18-year low, but still each year 49,000 employees suffer some form of injury in the workplace. New South Wales laws—section 99 of the Industrial Relations Act—ensure workers can come back to their old jobs within two years of the injury occurring. Not only do the New South Wales laws give job security; they are also fundamental to the rehabilitation of an injured worker. The sooner an injured worker is reintroduced into the workplace the better the prospect of a complete recovery. But under WorkChoices injured employees are left out in the cold with no prospect of ever returning to their job.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will stop calling out.

[Interruption]

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: These are important protections for workers and they build on the recent measures to form a suite of additional safeguards.

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: We are saying to the Commonwealth Government that we will do whatever it takes in the courts, in legislation, and in the workplace to protect hardworking people and their families from the Liberals' WorkChoices attack. We will protect their pay and working conditions. The risk is greater when there is a combination of a cold and heartless Commonwealth Government and a docile State Opposition that sits silent and allows the Federal Government a free rein, riding roughshod over the hard-fought-for entitlements of workers—and the State Opposition plans to sack another 29,000 workers!

The simple fact is not only that the economic policies of the Leader of the Opposition do not add up but that he will never stand up for nurses, ambulance officers, and TAFE teachers. Nor will he stand up for the workers we cannot protect with State legislation; he will hand them over to the mercy of WorkChoices. The Leader of the Opposition will do everything his friends in Canberra want him to do. When it comes to industrial relations, they want him to stay silent and hand over industrial relations powers, in the unlikely event he ever gets to this side of the House. Just as he has with petrol prices, interest rates and the GST fraud, he will be silent on WorkChoices and refuse to stand up for the interests of the people of New South Wales.

Mr Alan Ashton: He is spineless.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: As the honourable member for East Hills says, he is spineless. There is also silence from the Leader of the Opposition about the Government's generous offer of the amnesty for his \$20 billion Peter meter. We are happy to edit the Peter meter if he wants to back away from some of the commitments that he has already made, and at the same time help him to adjust the meter. The offer is there, and I have the Peter meter here. I lay it on the table for the information of members. I note that already one commitment has been removed from the Peter meter, that is, the Spit Bridge tunnel commitment. It is an oldie but a goody. We are already entering the realm of core and non-core promises. The Leader of the Opposition should go through it because in just over 24 hours we will be locking in all the commitments at \$20 billion plus.

LANE COVE TUNNEL SURFACE ROADWORKS

Mr ANDREW STONER: I direct my question to the Premier. How can the Premier justify his decision to spend taxpayers' money to merely delay, not to change, surface roadworks for the Lane Cove Tunnel when no-one knows what the impact of those changes will be before they are made? Will he now admit that he is corruptly buying electoral advantage for the Labor Party?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The joint select committee inquiry into the Lane Cove Tunnel recommended that it might help to reduce confusion with future tunnel projects if major changes are delayed for a reasonable time until after the tunnel is open. That was a parliamentary committee on which the Government did not have the numbers—members opposite controlled the numbers.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: The point of order is relevance. The Premier knows that the contract allows the contractor a six-month period to implement those road changes.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Premier is responding explicitly to the question. The Premier has the call.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The committee report went on to state:

A staged approach to the proposed Epping Road changes might reduce the potential for traffic congestion, and allow the RTA time to monitor the capacity of the narrowed Epping Road, through the agency of the newly announced Lane Cove Tunnel Transition Working Group.

The joint select committee also recommended that the New South Wales Government consider reviewing the current proposal for one general traffic lane and one 24-hour bus lane on Epping Road. They are the recommendations of the committee on which the Opposition and the Independents had the numbers. However, the Leader of The Nationals asks why the Government is implementing a recommendation—

Mr Andrew Stoner: The contract allows six months to do that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals has asked a question and he will listen in silence.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The transition group will work through the issues on the Lane Cove Tunnel. What proposition is the Leader of The Nationals advancing? Would he rip up the Lane Cove Tunnel contract, just as he proposed to do with the Cross City Tunnel contract? Perhaps he would change his mind 48 hours later, just as he did with the Cross City Tunnel contract. The Leader of the Opposition wanted the Government to rip up the contract for the Cross City Tunnel and imperil the taxpayers. For about 48 hours the Leader of The Nationals was on side, and ever since then he has been backtracking.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Coffs Harbour will cease calling out.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: He said, "No, I wouldn't support that." The Government has established a transition group to work through the road changes at Lane Cove, which was recommended by the parliamentary committee on which members opposite had the numbers; but the Leader of The Nationals says that the Government should not follow that path. What would he do? Would he rip up the contract or would he have the Lane Cove Tunnel open on day one? That is what we saw with the Cross City Tunnel, with the work on William Street—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will stop calling out.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Leader of The Nationals wants maximum inconvenience for motorists, or taxpayers to be exposed to a massive payout. That is his proposition. He has a hide to ask a question like that when the Government is considering the sound and reasonable recommendations made by a parliamentary committee on which honourable members opposite had the numbers. If he thinks the Government's proposal regarding the transition group is so bad, why did he not say so during the inquiry? Why did he not provide a dissenting report? No wonder Steve Price called him stupid, ignorant and an idiot.

CITYRAIL SAFETY

Ms TANYA GADIEL: I direct my question to the Deputy Premier. What is the latest information on improving safety and reliability on the CityRail network and related matters?

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The travelling public of New South Wales deserve safe, clean and reliable public transport, and some encouraging improvements have been achieved over the past 12 months. On-time running has increased from about 65 per cent to 91.3 per cent. That has attracted an extra 118,000 commuters a week back to rail. However, more work needs to be done. We must make these changes sustainable, especially in the afternoon peak, which is the real challenge.

During the morning peak on the western line last year, the average on-time running was 91.9 per cent. However, in the afternoon, that rate dropped to 88.4 per cent. That is why the Premier's service delivery unit is working with RailCorp to grind out further improvements, particularly during the afternoon peak when people are anxious to get home to their families at the end of a long working day. The service delivery unit is putting RailCorp under the microscope and bringing fresh eyes to this large and complex organisation. The unit has the skills to drill down into the detail to identify small problems that might be resolved, with resultant considerable improvement to on-time running.

This morning the Premier and I visited RailCorp's maintenance depot at Mortdale to inspect one of the results of the efforts of the Service Delivery Unit. The Government is investing \$13 million to provide new door motors in more than 900 rail carriages. Each day train doors open and close about 600,000 times, and they cop their fair share of wear and tear. Door failures have had a major impact on on-time running. For example, 22 per cent of train delays in August were due to mechanical problems, and one would expect that in a large engineering outfit. Of that 22 per cent, 46 per cent of the delays related to doors.

Door problems are having an overwhelming impact on on-time running, particularly in the PMP. The Government is spending \$2.5 billion on new trains, but in the intervening period we are looking at the door motors to see what we can do to improve performance. We have trialled new door motors on the Illawarra line and the trials show results up to 10 times better than with the old door motors. We are now installing the new

door motors on 900 rail carriages and we expect that to improve on-time running. Commuters have also told us that they want more information about rail services.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat and cease calling out.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: That is why they will notice a quarterly CityRail newsletter tailored to each line. Commuters on the western line who have already received it have returned very favourable feedback. The newsletter will be seen on lines throughout the CityRail network over the coming months. We have come a long way in rail since the dark days of 2003-04, but there is more work to be done. These reforms will further improve the conditions that the one million passengers or so per day enjoy. On a related matter of improving conditions, I applaud the Premier's announcement regarding the Iemma Government's protection from WorkChoices legislation for injured workers. I applaud those changes; we all do.

We are looking after injured workers. However, I wonder whether the definition of "injured workers" also covers workers with hurt feelings, especially those in the office of the Leader of the Opposition. The workers in that office have been hit by WorkChoices. If your choice is to work for the Leader of The Nationals, you get your 4 per cent across-the-board pay rise; but if your choice is to work for the Leader of the Opposition—you would be deranged if that were your choice—your 4 per cent pay rise is in someone else's pocket.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order relates to standing orders 138 and 139. Some 1.6 million Googlers think that John Watkins is boring.

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

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is debating the issue. The Minister for Transport has the call.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I am hurt. It was a vicious personal attack and I am close to tears. But workers in the office of the Leader of the Opposition are much closer to tears than I am because their hard-earned award increase has been pilfered from their pockets because of the decision of that man over there.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Blacktown will cease calling out.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: As the *Daily Telegraph* reported today, the Leader of the Opposition has taken the 4 per cent salary enhancement that was intended for all staff and has paid it to his top brass only. A string of people in the office of the Leader of the Opposition, who are watching now, got nothing. They got nothing whilst the Leader of the Opposition handed the pay rises to those at the top of the tree. You will recognise them. They are the ones over there with the smiles and the new suits. We must not forget that this is taxpayers' money. The union negotiated the deal and the Premier's Department agreed to it. However, if he did not agree with it, he did not have to accept the escalation.

The Leader of the Opposition is responsible for managing his office budget, but he should also be responsible for telling his members of staff that he has ripped them off; that they will not be getting the pay rise they were expecting and to which they were entitled. It is left to me as the Deputy Premier in the Labor Government to defend the workers in the office of the Leader of the Opposition. It is hard to believe, but they are workers and they deserve their increase. It is a vile act that the money has been ripped out of their pockets. Under his management, the Leader of the Opposition has decided to give their pay rise to someone else. Interestingly, The Nationals passed on the pay rise to every staff member. I congratulate the Leader of The Nationals on doing so.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order is that the CountryLink staff in Tweed want their jobs back.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Do not be ashamed about doing the right thing. We congratulate you on doing that. The Nationals also expressed some shock at what the Liberals had done in the office of the Leader of the

Opposition. I congratulate him on that. Perhaps they are the socialists to whom the Leader of the Opposition was referring to this morning. The Leader of the Opposition said that he does not care about his workers' concerns; that he will pay them based on performance. It is lucky for the Leader of the Opposition and lucky for his bank balance that he does not apply the same rules to himself.

The Leader of the Opposition has accepted rises this year, in his salary, in his leader's entitlement, and in his expenses. He was not calling anyone a "socialist" then. Given that the office of the Leader of the Opposition is the only part of the public sector that he controls, he has managed to inflict a secretive, unfair class regime on his own staff. Imagine what he would do if he ever got into office, if that is what he will do to his own staff. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition would never have done that. Can you hear those slamming doors? That is on level ten. It is the sound of the Leader of the Opposition's staff leaving. If not, that is what they should be doing.

Mr Donald Page: Point of order: Standing order 138 requires an answer to be relevant to the question. The question was about rail and related matters. The Minister has been rabbiting on for 10 minutes about industrial relations. We want to know when he is going to put the Casino to Murwillumbah rail service back on the track? When are you going to do that? You talk about rail. Give us back our rail service.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: It is relevant to rail. Because these workers have been ripped off, the only way they can afford to get to work is by train, because train fares are so reasonable in this State. The story today is not all negative. After all, while ripping off his own staff, the Leader of the Opposition has also today achieved the impossible. He has made the Leader of The Nationals look like a good bloke.

MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS ELECTORATE OFFICER

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I direct my question to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. His electorate officer, Gillian Sneddon, wrote to the Newcastle *Herald*, saying, "I am ashamed of the Labor Party", and called on the people of Newcastle to "show the Premier—and head office—that we, the public, are not to be treated like fools." Will the Minister now explain to the House whether he supports the Premier, or his electorate office staffer, or the people of Newcastle who want Bryce Gaudry?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! A number of members have been called to order. I now deem those members to be on three calls.

Mr Carl Scully: Point of order: I am sure the Minister is capable of answering the question, but we have decorum to maintain and the standing orders to uphold. The honourable member for Gosford knows that that question has no bearing on the Minister's portfolio responsibilities.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: To the point of order: Government members today are wearing badges with the notation "Your Rights At Work". What about Bryce's rights? What about the rights of the Minister to defend his staff? Did, in fact, the Minister write that letter and have his staff sign it?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The honourable member for Gosford well knows that his question was out of order as it did not relate to a matter associated with citizenship or Aboriginal affairs.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point of order: If the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is going to answer to the Minister for Police I want him to answer to the entire House. Answer the question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I place the honourable member for Gosford on three calls to order. I remind members that a number of them are on various calls to order. Those members are all deemed to be on three calls. Question time will continue in an orderly fashion. The honourable member for Wollongong has the call.

[Interruption]

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

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms NOREEN HAY: I address my question without notice to the Premier. What action is the Government taking to better support people with mental illness?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The New South Wales Government is proud to have taken the role it did in the development of a new national action plan for mental health. We have joined beyondblue; opened new mental health units in Dubbo and Katoomba; started construction at Concord, St Vincents and St George psychiatric emergency care centres; committed to the St Vincents Caritas redevelopment; and provided funding towards research at the University of New South Wales and the Brain and Mind Research Institute at the University of Sydney.

A draft exposure bill for the review of the Mental Health Act has been released for public comment and, most importantly, the New South Wales Government has backed its commitment to mental health with an extra \$939 million over the next five years, and, in a new direction for mental health, some \$338 million in brand-new funding, of which more than 75 per cent will be directed towards community-based care. The accelerated beds program has delivered more than 320 beds since it commenced in 2001.

[Interruption]

The honourable member for Willoughby can make a submission to the review of the Act; she can make a start. In 2004 the Government announced an additional \$241 million injection of funds into mental health.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Willoughby will cease calling out.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I can now provide the honourable member for Wollongong and the House with an update on the progress of that extra money. Readmission rates within 28 days of release from a mental health facility have decreased from 13 per cent to 10.5 per cent.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: What about hospitals? The Government does not publish that figure.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: We have mental health facilities in hospitals, that is right, in case you did not notice. Comparing readmissions between July and December for 2004 and 2005—

[Interruption]

Improvement? Of course we would recognise and acknowledge improvement. The Opposition never will.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Willoughby will stop calling out.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Comparing readmissions between July and December for 2004 and 2005, there were 86 fewer readmissions, despite an increase of 1,168 inpatient admissions. Regarding emergency department access, the number of mental health patients accessing emergency department services and experiencing access block—that is, those waiting more than eight hours for admission—has reduced from 32 per cent to 27 per cent. Importantly, 93 per cent of inpatients are now treated within their own area health service, which shows that increasing capacity in the system is helping patients to access services locally.

Most encouragingly, with World Suicide Prevention Day this Sunday, the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that the suicide rate in New South Wales has been the lowest in the country for two years, and is now the lowest in 50 years. We all hope that this trend continues and more lives are saved. The mental

health work force is our most precious resource, and I am pleased to advise the honourable member for Wollongong of the Government's initiatives in this area. New funding of \$1.2 million will be provided to train ambulance officers to increase their awareness of mental health illnesses and issues; improve assessments for mental health presentations; increase their engagement of other services in the early intervention and management of mental health presentations; and increase safety awareness in managing people with a mental illness.

The proposed changes to the Mental Health Act include giving ambulance officers the authority to transport involuntary patients, which will provide a better service for patients and free up police resources. This training will ensure our ambulance officers are well prepared for the commencement of the legislative changes following the review of the Act. The Government also recognises the important role that non-government organisations play in the delivery of effective mental health services. On 2 June 2006 Mr John Mendoza of the Mental Health Council of Australia said:

The New South Wales Government is putting real money into developing community-based mental health services in New South Wales.

Funding for the non-government sector has almost tripled in three years, and will continue to grow with the expansion of successful programs such as the Housing Accommodation and Support Initiative and the Family and Carers Program. Having a well-trained and supported non-government work force is essential to our public mental health services. That is why the New South Wales Government will go to tender for a new non-government organisation development and training program. The Government is seeking to develop training programs for the non-government sector; develop and implement a mental illness and substance abuse training package; establish a certificate traineeship in mental health work; and establish a registered training organisation.

New South Wales will need approximately 1,200 nurses to staff all the mental health beds we are opening over the next three years. While the Commonwealth continues to refuse to open sufficient places in our universities to train Australians to become mental health nurses, we will get on with the job of recruiting more nurses into our mental health services. That is why today I am pleased to announce \$1.3 million for another 250 mental health nursing scholarships to be offered in 2007. These will be advertised throughout the area health services seeking enrolled nurses and enrolled nurses to enter the scholarship program and post-graduate scholarships, which will open on 1 December. These are just some initiatives the Government is undertaking to improve the quality of health services for the mentally ill.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING FAIRFIELD OFFICE LEASE

Ms PETA SEATON: My question is directed to the Minister for Energy. When did he first know that the Department of Housing wanted new Fairfield offices and approved commerce to proceed? Did he, any staff member or any person known to him meet, call or otherwise communicate with Mr Frank Carioti or Royce Spagnalo to alert them to this deal?

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: I had no involvement whatsoever in the Department of Housing selection of property for its Fairfield office. I was never briefed on this matter, and I never gave any instructions in relation to it. In fact, I learned the location of the Department of Housing's new Fairfield office only recently.

Ms Peta Seaton: Point of order: My point of order is that the Minister has not answered the question. He was not asked about his role in selecting. He was asked about whether he had called or communicated with Mr Carioti or Mr Spagnalo to alert them to this deal.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order, as the honourable member for Southern Highlands well knows. She will resume her seat.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. What is the Government doing to improve natural resource management and how are Aboriginal communities involved?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: The Iemma Government is getting on with the job of implementing a new direction in natural resource management. We have introduced new native vegetation regulations and a raft

of new measures following extensive consultation with all stakeholders, including the farming community, conservationists and Aboriginal communities. The system of property vegetation plans introduced under the new system last December is already working well, with more than 60 approvals lodged and another 74 awaiting sign-off with landholders.

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

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Catchment management authorities have been set up around the State, giving local people a direct say on local issues. That is the cornerstone of government policy—giving a voice to the people of regional and rural New South Wales and it is indicative of the new direction the Government is taking. But we are not content to rest on our achievements in this important area. As honourable members would know, the Minister for Natural Resources has ordered a review into the operation—

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: Mr Speaker, you saw fit to rule out a question from me on the basis that it did not relate to the Minister's portfolio. This question does not relate to his portfolio, as he does not represent in this House the Minister for Natural Resources. The Hon. David Campbell represents the Minister for Natural Resources. Using the same principle that you applied to me, that question should be ruled out of order.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That was a good try by the honourable member for Gosford but, unfortunately, he is dead wrong.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Or just plain dead. As members would know, the Minister for Natural Resources has ordered a review into the operation of the innovative native scrub rules under the new system. In keeping with our approach on these matters, this review is being conducted with extensive stakeholder consultation. The mighty member for Murray-Darling has been vocal on this issue for the people of western New South Wales and has been actively involved in these consultations.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will address the question.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I understand that the Natural Resources Commission is now assessing the review and final recommendations are expected shortly. Natural resource management is about listening to people, and that is what we are doing. Unlike members opposite the Government has a coherent, balanced policy. I point out that the Leader of the Opposition, despite his bleating about the issue on his rare visits to the bush, refuses to say what his natural resources plans would involve. For example, the *Land* of 24 August, that great newspaper of record, reported his evasive and content-free approach to policy as follows:

... Mr Debnam said he would not be specific about the changes the Coalition would make to the native vegetation legislation or regulations if it wins Government next year, and would not answer questions on whether he would reverse the Government's bid to end broad scale land clearing.

That is yet another example of an empty vessel of Opposition policies. Unlike the Debnam-Stoner Coalition, the Iemma Government does have policies and ideas to help our rural and regional communities to implement both good environmental outcomes and to make productive use of our natural resources. I am pleased to update the House on recently approved natural resource management grants across the State valued at nearly \$500,000.

The Minister for Natural Resources has advised me that 17 sponsorship and project grants have been made under the first round of our innovative Forging Partnerships Program. This is a joint initiative of the Government and the Natural Resources Advisory Council, which was established under our landmark natural resources reforms to enable all stakeholders to have a voice in advising the Government on aspects of policy and implementation. Under the Forging Partnerships Program individual projects are now being distributed, ranging from a few thousand dollars to \$60,000. These projects are especially focused on assisting young people and, for the information of the honourable member for Gosford, Aboriginal communities to be actively involved in natural resource management at the local level.

The key to all these projects is the fostering of partnerships. The central idea behind the Forging Partnerships Program is that people have a lot to learn from each other and that by working together we can have a much greater impact on natural resource management. The program is run by the Natural Resources Advisory Council, which is convened by my friend the honourable member for Canterbury, who is doing a

fantastic job assisting stakeholders to formulate advice to guide the Government's policies. This advisory council plays an invaluable role in keeping stakeholders informed and engaged. It is not about imposing edicts from on high.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Tell Bryce Gaudry.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Tell Steven Pringle.

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

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: It is about good, community-based government. One need only look at some of the worthwhile projects that are funded under the program. Up in the area of the honourable member for Tweed, Wetland Care Australia has received \$60,000 in partnership with local groups, including the Yaegal, Tweed Byron and Bogal local Aboriginal land councils, to carry out local wetland care projects. In the region of the honourable member for Lake Macquarie the local Landcare group, in partnership with Lake Macquarie City Council and schools in the Lake Macquarie area, also has received a grant of \$60,000 to educate the next generation of land carers by bringing together school communities to undertake a range of projects.

Also, the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority, in partnership with the Wanuarah Local Aboriginal Land Council and Muscle Creek, will receive \$40,000 for Wanuarah common environment and cultural management plan. In the region of the honourable member for Murray-Darling, Indij Readers in the Dareton region has been granted \$48,000 for its community writers kit to help increase understanding natural resource managing through stories, audiovisuals and improved literacy levels. This is real money distributed to local communities to be spent on the ground by local people. The Government congratulates all those who have received grants, and I look forward to seeing the results of the projects. I understand that applications for a second round of funding under the Forging Partnerships Program will be called for within the next few months, and I encourage community organisations to apply for funding to support more worthy local projects.

RURAL HEALTH

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that two weeks ago a Lightning Ridge mother went into labour and a midwife could not be found for five hours, that on Monday at Cobar a baby died en route to Dubbo hospital, and that today at Dubbo a mother was asked to leave hospital eight hours after a complicated birth due to a bed shortage, will the Premier now admit that rural health is in crisis?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Leader of The Nationals has done today what he usually does: he seeks to exploit a tragedy, in the case of the first two examples, or he asks a question and provides very little detail—

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: As for the mother at Dubbo, I will refer the matter to the Minister for Health to provide the information to the Leader of The Nationals. In relation to health in general, the Leader of The Nationals blindly, without any thought, simply believes we can pluck out of the air specialists in all places and in all hospitals across the country. I do not recall the Leader of The Nationals ever saying a single word about training a sustainable work force to provide health services in this State or this nation. He always jumps to conclusions; he always says that it is the fault of someone in the health system. In an accusatory tone, he automatically says that people in the health system have been negligent or lacked professional standards. That is his modus operandi.

Not once has the Leader of The Nationals made representations on behalf of the people of New South Wales to Canberra, which provides—or does not provide—university places to train nurses and doctors in this country. Not once has he said a word in support of the practising clinicians in our system. Not once has he supported the people of New South Wales to get, for example, more training places through universities or incentives in the Medicare benefits scheme so that more doctors will stay in obstetrics. He simply seeks to condemn in his accusatory tone. He has not read the budget papers, which provide \$3.4 billion for rural and regional health. He will never stand up for rural and regional constituents in this State and argue for more places to train doctors and specialists through our university system so we can provide more sustainable health services in areas outside the major metropolitan centres.

The Leader of The Nationals did not say one word in support when the physician training network was established. When the New South Wales Government was negotiating with the Royal College of Surgeons to get more training places for surgeons, did the Leader of The Nationals offer any support? Not at all! During negotiations with the College of Physicians for an increase in physician training places in rural New South Wales, did the Leader of The Nationals offer any support? Not at all! The training system we established gives rural hospitals first pick of the brightest and best doctors training to become specialists. He has been silent during negotiations with the College of Surgeons and the Federal Government to provide more university places for doctors and nurses. It is simply another example like the GST, WorkChoices, industrial relations—everywhere you look. The Leader of The Nationals will never stand up for the people of New South Wales.

KINGS CROSS NIGHTRIDE BUS

Ms CLOVER MOORE: My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport. Given that the Government has identified Kings Cross as a 24-hour entertainment zone, with large numbers of tourists and visitors leaving licensed premises after public transport has closed, placing them at risk of crime and antisocial behaviour, when will the Government provide an after-hours NightRide bus service as provided for in other parts of Sydney?

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I am happy to receive from the honourable member for Bligh representations about the issue, and I will then look at it carefully.

WILD DOGS

Mr STEVE WHAN: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for the Environment. What is the latest information on the Government's plans to tackle the problem of feral dogs in the Monaro region?

Mr BOB DEBUS: Unlike his Nationals predecessors, the honourable member for Monaro has been a highly effective advocate on this issue. Following his effective lobbying, I was pleased to announce last year an expansion in aerial baiting for wild dogs in southern New South Wales. Now, one year on, I can report to the House on the success of that program. During June, aerial baiting runs were undertaken in the Adaminaby-Yaouk area of Kosciuszko National Park, the Snowy Plains area and other reserves near Bombala, and finally in the South-East Forests National Park and Wadbilliga National Park east of Cooma.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Mr BOB DEBUS: In total, more than 3,300—

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: Point of order: If the honourable member for Monaro is such an advocate of this program, why was he not at the launch? He did not even attend the launch of this program.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Burrinjuck knows better than to flout the standing orders in that way.

Mr BOB DEBUS: These programs involved the distribution of 3,300 baits laced with 1080, which were dropped over a distance of 333 kilometres. The aerial bait runs follow on from those successfully conducted in late 2005, when monitoring showed a significant reduction in the abundance of wild dogs. This successful aerial baiting program complements our successful ground baiting, and trapping and shooting programs for wild dogs. Together, they help to better protect farmers' livelihoods from that scourge. Officers from the Department of Environment and Conservation meet regularly with landholders from the Snowy Plains and Rock Plains Wild Dog Association and the Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board to plan how and when the runs should take place in the area.

As a result of those meetings, I am pleased to announce today that another aerial baiting run will be conducted in October this year. It will target areas around Kosciuszko National Park. The Government will continue to work hard to drive down stock losses. These wild dog programs are funded from the Department of Environment and Conservation's record pest control budget. Indeed, we will be spending about \$18 million across New South Wales on the control of feral animals and weeds. That is to say that we will spend 18 times more than any Coalition Government in the past. To me, and I am sure to all Government members, it is obvious that one needs to employ people to eradicate wild dogs—or, indeed, to effectively control any feral animal.

The Department of Environment and Conservation has 20 trappers out in the field working on behalf of landholders to better protect their valuable stock. As I have been demonstrating, their efforts are paying off. Today stock losses are significantly down on levels we have seen in previous years. In the Brindabella and Wee Jasper valleys, for instance, stock losses have fallen by 80 per cent in the past four years; there are similar kinds of reductions in other parts of the State.

That will all come to an end if the Leader of the Opposition gets his way. His plan to slash 29,000 staff from the New South Wales public service will devastate front-line services in country communities. We know that his plan to slash front-line services will mean fewer nurses, teachers and police. That has been demonstrated time and again in this House. It has been less obvious that our ability to control feral animals, including eradicating wild dogs, will be similarly affected. Trappers in southern New South Wales would lose their jobs. Other support staff would also lose their jobs. More than 90 people who now work for the Department of Environment and Conservation in southern New South Wales would disappear.

Mr Michael Richardson: Point of order: I assure the House that the Minister is talking through his hat. We will not be cutting these programs—in fact, we will be increasing them.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Minister for the Environment has the call.

Mr BOB DEBUS: To the contrary. Bombala, Jindabyne, Khancoban, Queanbeyan and Tumut will all be hard hit if the Leader of the Opposition gets his way. If the jobs are slashed and the trappers are forced out, the number of stock lost to wild dogs will go up. That is inevitable.

Questions without notice concluded.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Tuesday 19 September 2006 at 2.15 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Interest Rates

Ms DIANE BEAMER (Mulgoa—Minister for Western Sydney, Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [3.32 p.m.]: There is no doubt that the motion of which I have given notice needs to be considered with the utmost urgency. Earlier this week the Premier had a question put to him by the honourable member for Blacktown in regard to growth and development in Western Sydney. He identified the three major threats to the continuing growth and prosperity of Western Sydney. The first of those threats is rising petrol prices. Of course, the second threat is the warning from the Leader of the Opposition that he will slash 9,000 jobs in Western Sydney, thus crippling, stalling and even totally eliminating vital State Government services in Western Sydney. The third threat to the continued growth and prosperity of Western Sydney is the John Howard-Peter Costello interest rate rises—there have been seven since 2002.

The House needs to send an urgent message to Mr Howard and Mr Costello in their bunker: They need to put the brakes on interest rate rises. In 2004 John Howard promised families in Western Sydney that he would keep interest rates low. We need to send this message urgently to the Federal Government for many reasons. Rising interest rates are threatening home buying for the hardworking families in Western Sydney. Rising interest rates are threatening future investment in Western Sydney's employment lands, thus threatening our jobs and growth. The other reason we need to send this message urgently to the Federal Government is that the Leader of the Opposition will not. As always, the Leader of the Opposition remains silent. He will not get on the phone to his mates in Canberra. He will not represent the people of Western Sydney—the families and businesses—and say to John Howard, "Honour your election promise." Why will he not do that? Because the Federal Government has made it very clear to him that it does not want to speak to him. Therefore, it is up to this House to urgently send a message to the Prime Minister telling him to put the brakes on interest rates.

Rural Health

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [3.34 p.m.]: The motion of which I have given notice is urgent because this week alone there has been a raft of tragedies across country New South Wales. This incompetent and inept Labor Government's answer is to shut its eyes and bury its head in the sand, as we saw when the Premier tried to answer a question on this matter. My motion is urgent because country New South Wales deserves better. It deserves better than third-world public health facilities. Country people deserve better from the former Minister for Health and member for Lakemba.

Honourable members will recall the *Four Corners* program that aired in June in which a doctor said that the quality of health services in rural New South Wales is worse than in Africa and the Third World. In that program the interviewer asked a local person, "And do you think it's going to take a death?" That person responded, "Well, you would hate to think so, of the death of a baby. Yeah, you would hate to think it would come to that." To any reasonable person, this would have constituted a warning, a call to action, a cry for help, but not to this arrogant, Sydney-centric Carr-Iemma Labor Government. As a Premier, a former health Minister and a father, Morris Iemma has managed to show a complete lack of concern on this issue.

Nothing has been done since that *Four Corners* program aired. Nothing was done, even three weeks ago, when the former Mayor of Cobar wrote to the health Minister begging for help. She said that Cobar hospital had been run down so badly over the past 12 years that things were better in her grandmother's day. That warning has now become a reality. On Monday morning a Cobar baby died after the mother was forced to give birth in an air ambulance. The mother and the baby were never given a proper chance because this mean-spirited, Sydney-centric Labor Government closed the Cobar maternity ward in 2001. What has been the response of this Government? Push a bureaucrat out into the firing line and duck for cover!

Ms Diane Beamer: You are just disgraceful!

Mr ANDREW STONER: You might not care about rural health, and you might not care about country hospitals that have been run down under your watch, but I do.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Today the front page of the *Dubbo Daily Liberal* reads that the Dubbo medical fraternity is threatening to resign because they are at the end of their tether with the lack of resources. They are sick of the Carr-Iemma Government's centralised bureaucratic management. If the Premier had a ticker he could solve this crisis with two clicks of a mouse. He could go to The Nationals web site and download our nurses and hospital board policies for a start. He could tell the House that he has seen the error of his ways and that he will now accept The Nationals policy for rural health. The solution is staring him in the face.

For mean Morris it is not about the people of New South Wales: it is not about better health services; it is about politics and hanging on to power whatever it takes. Instead of fixing the problems, the Premier wastes \$100 million on government advertising to promote himself and his plan for a plan. While this government has been pouring taxpayers' dollars and its energies into spin doctoring instead of rural doctors, strike three has occurred. The latest is news this morning in Dubbo that a new mother was asked to give up her hospital bed just eight hours after a complicated birth. Why? Because the Iemma Labor Government has starved Dubbo of resources. It is squeezed so hard there are simply not enough beds at Dubbo Base Hospital. New mothers are being turned out because local doctors do not have the resources to give them the support they deserve.

My motion is extremely urgent to the one-third of people who live outside the metropolitan parts of New South Wales. It is urgent because, while the Iemma Government plays politics, country people are dying. While the Premier buries his head deeper and deeper in the sand, babies in country New South Wales are dying. This motion is urgent because country New South Wales deserves better. The people of country New South Wales will not continue to tolerate being treated like second-class citizens by this Sydney-centric Labor Government.

Mr Steve Whan: That is why they are throwing you out of the seats.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I would like to see how the honourable member for Monaro votes on this issue. If the so-called Country Labor faction members vote against my motion, country New South Wales will know once and for all where their loyalties lie: with their city Labor mates.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

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

Noes, 32

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

INTEREST RATES

Urgent Motion

Ms DIANE BEAMER (Mulgoa—Minister for Western Sydney, Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [3.49 p.m.]: I am pleased to move:

That this House condemns the Federal Government for its broken promise on interest rates.

I am glad to support the Iemma Government's call on Prime Minister John Howard to act on his three interest rate rises since the last Federal election. The Federal Treasurer and the Prime Minister went to the last election with a promise to keep interest rates low. We all know that Peter Costello likes to have a bet each way. When the sun is shining he likes to grin and smirk about being a better economic manager than his opponents. But when things get a bit gloomier, when the clouds start to rise on the interest rates horizon, he blames everyone but himself. He is now blaming the States for investing in essential long-term infrastructure. Not only have hardworking New South Wales families paid more on their mortgages since late 2004, they now need to brace themselves for yet another interest rate rise before the end of the year.

On 4 August the Reserve Bank of Australia's Statement on Monetary Policy confirmed what the Iemma Government has been saying since May: Peter Costello's 2006-07 budget has added to inflationary pressures. In its statement the Reserve Bank cited strong domestic demand and higher than average global growth as posing further inflationary risks to the economy. In his May budget Peter Costello had an opportunity to confront long-term structural issues, such as real tax reform and investment in infrastructure. Instead, he dabbled in short-term populism and demonstrated that he is not across the details of the structural issues facing the economy.

The August interest rate rise was bad news for hardworking families in Western Sydney already sluggish by the May interest rate rise and skyrocketing petrol prices. In my electorate of Mulgoa, the median price for a house in Glenmore Park is \$467,000. With the August 0.25 per cent interest rate rise, families in Glenmore Park with a new mortgage on a median-priced house will have to find an extra \$69 in interest repayments each month. This comes on top of the \$69 hit from May's interest rate rise. The Reserve Bank has all but confirmed a third rate rise by the end of the year. As a result, families with an average-size mortgage in my electorate could be up to \$2,484 a year worse off. Local families are being forced to revise their monthly budgets as the repayments on home loans become more difficult to meet. First home buyers helped by this Government are now having to find an extra \$3,000 a year to keep their homes.

This round of interest rate rises is also bad news for the booming economy in Western Sydney. Businesses, both small and large, are thinking twice about borrowing for expansion. There are serious flow-on consequences for business investment, employment, manufacturing and exports. The housing market in New South Wales is showing signs of recovery. The last thing families and businesses needed is an interest rate hit on their mortgage. The Federal Treasurer is now shifting the blame to increased levels of infrastructure spending by the Iemma Government. The New South Wales Government will undertake record investments in infrastructure for the four-year budget period as a matter of priority.

Honourable members on this side of the House are proud of that. Increased investments in infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, public transport facilities, and water and energy infrastructure are vital for the State's future economic growth. In my electorate alone, the New South Wales Government is investing more than \$37 million in infrastructure this year. That, in itself, is not a major problem because State infrastructure investment has long-term economic benefits. In late May the New South Wales Government released its 10-year State Infrastructure Strategy, which includes a \$41.3 billion commitment over the next four years to key infrastructure priorities. This Government is spending \$10 billion a year on infrastructure. That is \$27 million a day being spent on roads, schools, hospitals, electricity, water and the rail network. However, it is remaining financially responsible and is maintaining the triple-A credit rating.

An estimated \$17.4 billion of the \$41.3 billion in capital expenditure over the next four years will be funded through borrowings, including \$5.4 billion in 2006-07. This increase in debt funding has been possible because of the State's strong balance sheet and the debt reduction policies of the last decade. I remind honourable members opposite that the Labor Government has paid off \$10 billion in government debt left by the Liberals. This has now put New South Wales in a strong financial position, allowing it to borrow for investment in vital infrastructure. However, the Commonwealth Government chose to ignore the inflationary impact of its discretionary spending in the May budget. These measures have now led to a likely further interest rate rise before the end of the year.

The New South Wales Government is committed to assisting first home buyers and improving housing affordability through the First Home Plus and the First Home Owners Grant schemes. The Iemma Government provides the most generous package of first home benefits in Australia, giving thousands of first home buyers the opportunity to realise the dream of home ownership. More than 90 per cent of first home buyers in New South Wales do not pay any stamp duty on the purchase of their property. The First Home Plus Scheme has provided assistance to more than 215,000 first home buyers in New South Wales. Stamp duty savings are averaging \$6,130 a home—savings that are being eroded by the Howard-Costello interest rate rises. By June this year, first home buyers accounted for 15.2 per cent of housing finance.

From time to time members opposite will jump on the affordable housing bandwagon. Their hypocrisy is breathtaking. The Productivity Commission conducted an inquiry into first home ownership in Australia three years ago. Where was the Opposition then? The commission received 340 submissions, but there was no sign of a submission from the Liberal Party or The Nationals. Where is their voice now, when housing affordability is under threat from rising interest rates? They are silent. The honourable member for Vaucluse claims to be the Opposition spokesman for Western Sydney. Unfortunately, the Baron of Bellevue Hill has become the Silent Shadow from South Head. He is as far from Western Sydney as he can get.

It is clear that the Howard-Costello Government will play games with the lives of hardworking New South Wales families and the hardworking families of Western Sydney. It will play games with the future of people from places such as Glenmore Park. That Government's mismanagement of the economy has led to three interest rate rises since the last election. There have been seven interest rate rises in a row, and housing affordability is now beyond a record number of people. We are experiencing the lowest ever level of housing affordability. Given the increasing interest rate and housing prices, people must now borrow more than ever before to get into their first home. As a result, housing affordability in this State is at an all-time low.

Given that we have 26,000 serviced lots ready to go but the developers are unable to put them on the market because housing affordability is so low, we in New South Wales have a problem with the Federal Government. I call on the Prime Minister to consider the plight of hardworking families in Western Sydney who are feeling the strain of high mortgage repayments and skyrocketing petrol prices. I call on the Prime Minister and the Treasurer to make good their promise. We have had seven interest rate rises in a row, and three since the last election. They should make good on their promise and keep interest rates low. *[Time expired.]*

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [3.59 p.m.]: I cannot understand how naive and almost politically inept the shadow Minister for Western Sydney—

Ms Diane Beamer: I know how inept the shadow Minister for Western Sydney is.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: The Minister will be the shadow Minister for Western Sydney next year—if she is lucky. She may not be here at all. Let me move on. It is an absolute joke that the Minister for Western Sydney moves a motion relating to interest rates, given the Labor Party's antecedents of being serial offenders and imposing the highest interest rates Australia has ever seen. You have been given a lemon, kid! You must be sillier than I thought you were to take the bait. You should have said, "Pass the chalice to someone else." But you have taken it, and you are going to sink on it, too. Let me refer to the motion.

[Interruption]

Listen, and I will read the motion to you. The motion condemns the Federal Government for its broken promise on interest rates. Let us just analyse what that promise was. The Prime Minister said, "At no stage in the last election campaign did I give a guarantee that interest rates would never rise." He did not give a guarantee that interest rates would never rise.

Ms Diane Beamer: It was a non-core promise.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: I know you do not like this, because you can remember the Paul Keating days and the Hawke days when interest rates hit 21 per cent. People were paying 21 per cent. Families were ruined, unemployment was at 11 per cent, the inflation rate was up to the sky, unbelievably bad, and the country was on its knees. That is the Government you are attempting to support. You were stupid enough today to bring this motion before the House. I cannot believe that. I mean, I like you but I do not appreciate your political judgment. John Howard gave a robust defence of the Government's economic credentials and said that interest rates averaged 12.75 per cent under 13 years of the Hawke-Keating Labor Government and 7.25 per cent under the Coalition Government. Well, what do you say about that? He also said that every homeowner in Australia over a certain age and their children, and in some cases their grandchildren, know that under the former Federal Labor Government housing interest rates reached the astronomical level of 17 per cent.

I think the Prime Minister was being conservative, because I saw interest rates touch 18 per cent. HomeFund was successfully lending money at 17.5 per cent. HomeFund was not all that flash, but people were borrowing the money because it was cheap in the current market. The Minister for Western Sydney is now saying that we have had high interest rates. Look, the current average interest rate is something like 7.5 per cent. Under your great leaders Bob Hawke and Paul Keating, gurus of the Labor movement, interest rates averaged 12.75 per cent over the 13 years. Under the Howard Government the average is 7.25 per cent. Now, you are not all that bright, but I think you can understand the difference in those figures.

Mr Barry Collier: He is insulting her.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: No, I am telling the truth. I am not insulting her, I am telling her the truth. This is what Peter Costello said.

Ms Diane Beamer: You remember the advertisements.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: No, no. You do not like this, but you have invited the whole lot. I will tell you. Let us just get the facts right. On 2 March 2005 Peter Costello said:

Paul Keating had inflation at 9.3 per cent. On 2 March 2005 it is 2.6 per cent. Paul Keating had mortgage interest rates at 13.5 per cent. Today it is 7 per cent.

So, what are we doing with this? An inflation rate that is one-third and an interest rate that is half. We have had seven surplus budgets, and \$73 billion of Keating's debt has been repaid. Having said all that, I think that ends the argument. Labor left office with interest rates traditionally high. They are something like half what they were when Labor was in government. We have paid back \$90 billion of your debt. You left the country in a mess and you have the gall to be critical of the Federal Government. Let us face it. The only reason the Labor Government is in office in New South Wales is because of the economic policies of the Howard Government.

[Interruption]

Oh, yes, the goods and services tax [GST]. What a big slug it is when the cheque for \$10 million is written out. What a big impost that is.

Ms Diane Beamer: We give them \$13 billion.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: Do you know why you get \$10 billion? Because that is what your famous little Macquarie Banker signed up for. Right? That is what he signed up for and that little bloke could not get his hands on the money quickly enough. He did not ask any questions. Someone offered him \$10 billion and Bob said, "Where do I sign? Can I sign somewhere else?" And you are defending him! If your Labor mates were to agree, it could be changed. But they will not agree. Beattie will not agree to have the money reduced because he knows it is going to help him to get re-elected. You cannot complain about that and you were part of the action then. You have been on this road a long time so you cannot claim to be Johnny-come-lately.

Ms Diane Beamer: I never did.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: You are trying to absolve yourself of the blame, are you? I do not think you are. Let me say this: look at the positive situation. Look at what we are going to do. The Opposition has a program for recovery, an economic rescue plan that is going to rescue New South Wales from recession. Every day that your Government remains in office—

Ms Diane Beamer: What about the 29,000 jobs?

Mr WAYNE MERTON: You are lying again. You are lying again. You are almost a serial offender, you are. You know, I did not think you were like that.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! I draw the attention of the honourable member for Baulkham Hills to the standing orders and the possible consequences of allegations of lying.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: I will withdraw that so that I can continue. I withdraw it. Let us just have a look and see what we are going to do. We are going to get rid of your waste and your duplication to free up funds for services.

Ms Diane Beamer: Yes, 29,000 jobs worth.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: That is a lie. That is a lie.

Ms Diane Beamer: How many then?

Mr WAYNE MERTON: We are going to get rid of the fat cats through natural attrition. That is what is going to happen. There are not going to be mass sackings. We have never said that; you are the people who are saying that. We will do it through natural attrition and that is going to save money. We will abolish the Senior Executive Service, 25 per cent, abolish the Cabinet Office, which has an annual allocation of \$37.6 million, and reduce the size of the Premier's Department, which has an annual budget of \$148.7 million. Do you know why the Premier's Department budget is so high? It is to keep you galoots in office, because you

need someone like that to help you. That is why you have to spend all the money. We will give it to the core services, to the nurses, to the police officers, the teachers and other people who deliver core front-line services. That is what it is about—the people that you have let down.

We will get those 600 police officers that you have removed, we will employ the 1,300 that you cannot employ, or will not, or have not got the money to employ. That is what is going to happen. That is going to be the difference. And we propose to reduce workers compensation. We will exempt employers from WorkCover premiums for apprentices and we will cut the cost and burden of regulation by 5 per cent. In other words, we are going to make New South Wales an attractive, positive place to do business.

[*Interruption*]

Let us hope you leave the State, because I tell you that you will not be a worry. The Opposition is going to introduce stamp duty concessions of \$4,000 for investors providing rental accommodation, increase the First Home Owners Grant from \$7,000 to \$10,000, exempt 4,500 businesses from payroll tax, and reduce payroll tax by up to \$15,000 for each of the 22,000 New South Wales businesses liable for payroll tax. The Opposition has a positive plan while you have the old worn clichés, the old class struggle.

[*Interruption*]

Oh, you talk about the five taxes. Thank you very much. You introduced two of them. What about the vendor tax? That was a little gem. That was a beauty. It stuffed up the property market overnight. It was really good. Little wonder you reduced it. Do you want to talk about more of your taxes now? Which ones would you like to talk about? You impose taxes and withdraw them, and think it is wonderful. Just have a look at the figure here, the State final demand figure. In New South Wales that figure has gone down from one and is rapidly approaching zero. From December 2004 to March 2007 it will be less than zero. That is what is happening in New South Wales. Just as people are leaving New South Wales to go to Queensland, your figures of demand and growth are going into negative. New South Wales is virtually in a depression. I move an amendment to omit all words after the word "House" and insert instead— [*Time expired.*]

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda) [4.09 p.m.]: I am pleased to support the urgency motion and to speak up for the many families in the Sutherland Shire affected by the Federal Government's economic mismanagement. Despite what the honourable member for Baulkham Hills says, the Federal Government promised at the last Federal election—in the minds of Australian voters at least—to keep interest rates low. We have had three interest rate rises since then, and the commentators have, unfortunately, predicted another interest rate rise by the end of the year. The Federal Government cannot have it both ways. It cannot claim credit for low interest rates and then say it is nothing to do with the Government if interest rates increase. It cannot claim credit for low interest rates and then blame the Reserve Bank for high interest rates.

Mr Howard made an election promise to the Australian people that he would keep interest rates low. This broken promise is hurting hardworking families and business owners right across New South Wales, including the Sutherland Shire. It is perhaps no secret that the economic role of the Federal Government is to create conditions of full employment, price stability, external balance and economic growth. These objectives of sound economic management were laid down in the Vernon report in 1965, commissioned by the Menzies Government, and they are also set out in the Reserve Bank Act. Clearly, the Howard Government is failing the Australian people with inflationary pressures rearing their ugly heads, and a ballooning foreign debt. These, of course, put pressure on cash rates and domestic interest rates—the rates that families have to pay on their mortgages.

While Mr Howard can crow about his economic management credentials, the truth is that Australia's sound economic performance during the Federal Government's time in office—for which it is all too ready to claim credit—is based on the foundations laid by the Hawke-Keating Government. But now, as inflationary pressures emerge and interest rates are on the rise, the Howard Government says, "It is not our fault, it is the Reserve Bank. They are the bad guys. We had nothing to do with it. The Howard Government keeps interest rates low. It is the Reserve Bank that puts them up." But every high school economic student knows that the four tools of economic management, designed to achieve those economic objectives, are fiscal, monetary, wages and external policies.

Those same high school economic students will tell you that under the Reserve Bank Act monetary policy is the responsibility of the Reserve Bank. The management of the money supply and interest rates are key

elements of monetary policy. And who has responsibility for interest rates? It is not the smirking Federal Treasurer or his boss the Prime Minister, it is the independent Reserve Bank. So here is the lie that is apparent to any high school economic student in the State of New South Wales: the Federal Government simply cannot control interest rates. It cannot promise lower interest rates; it cannot deliver lower interest rates; and it cannot set interest rates. All it can do is attempt to create the economic conditions under which interest rates remain relatively low. And with two interest rate rises this year and another on the way the Howard Government has simply failed to do so. The Howard Government has effectively lied to the Australian people: it made a promise it knew it could not keep.

Last month's interest rate rise in the Reserve Bank is bad news for Sutherland Shire families already sluggish by the May interest rate rises and, of course, rising petrol prices. I note the March sales figures released by the Real Estate Institute of New South Wales indicate the median price of a house in the Sutherland Shire is now \$585,000. Following the August rate rise, local homeowners in the Sutherland Shire with a new mortgage on a median price house will have to find an extra \$86 in interest repayments a month. That is in addition to the slug they have already had following the May interest rate rise.

If there is another interest rate rise, as foreshadowed by the commentators, thanks to Mr Howard and Mr Costello families with an average size mortgage in the Sutherland Shire could be more than \$3,000 a year worse off. Families in my area are having to go over their monthly budgets looking for ways to save as the repayments on home loans become harder and harder to meet. Add the inflationary impact of skyrocketing petrol prices across-the-board and the result is families increasingly have to cut back on some of the essentials of life, as well as the little extras such as movies, holidays and a meal out with the family at a restaurant.

As the New South Wales Government has repeatedly said, Mr Costello's 2006-07 budget added to inflationary pressures, and these were a direct contributor to the interest rate rises. The expansionary impact of the Howard Government undertaking tax cuts instead of spending the same money on infrastructure has added to inflationary pressures. The result is we are seeing the impact on families in the Miranda electorate. In the middle of all this we had the Federal Member for Wentworth, Mr Turnbull, saying, "I think the interest rate rise has been overstated. It was one-quarter of 1 per cent." It is all very well for Mr Turnbull to say that, but Mr Turnbull is more likely to be a lender than a borrower. That is the height of arrogance and demonstrates how out of touch the Liberal Party is with the people of this State.

Mr STEVEN PRINGLE (Hawkesbury) [4.14 p.m.]: I move the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "That" with a view to inserting instead:

"this House commends the Federal Government for keeping interest rates low and maintaining a strong economy."

We certainly know that interest rates under the last Hawke-Keating Government were the highest they have been in Australian history: 17, 18, 22 per cent interest rates were absolutely unconscionable. Instead, under the Howard Government we have had interest rates at historic low levels. But, more importantly, what we need to focus on in the House today is what the State Labor Government should be doing to rescue New South Wales.

New South Wales has the highest mainland levels of unemployment and one of the lowest growth rates around the nation. Those are facts this State Labor Government needs to focus upon. The State Government has conveniently forgotten, of course, that over the past few years we have had a massive increase in State taxes. Indeed, the matter of public importance that is to be considered after this debate is about housing and insurance costs and how they are impacting upon the average, everyday New South Wales resident.

Our side of the House promotes a rescue plan that will improve the living standards of residents of New South Wales. It particularly looks at land tax issues and cutting business taxes to create investment and jobs, with around 4,500 businesses to be exempted from paying payroll tax—that is a huge number—and savings of around \$15,000 each for 22,000 businesses. These are the things that will make the real difference; things that will turn the New South Wales economy into what it ought to be: the premier economy in the nation. As soon as the Labor Party was elected to government, it ruined the economy.

The Minister for Western Sydney talked about housing affordability. Housing affordability in Western Sydney has been wrecked by the failure of the Government to supply land.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted and motion lapsed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! It being 4.15 p.m. business is interrupted for the giving of General Business Notices of Motion (General Notices).

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CENTRAL COAST PODIATRIST AND GENERAL PRACTITIONER SERVICES

Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN (Wyang) [4.22 p.m.]: I am pleased to inform the House that next year a three-year degree program in podiatry will commence at the Ourimbah campus of the University of Newcastle. I am happy to admit that this has been facilitated by the provision of Commonwealth-supported places in this discipline. The new program will be conducted with the same care-based learning philosophy as other health science degrees offered by the University of Newcastle. It is deemed that this method of delivery equips graduates with knowledge, confidence, patient-centred focus and ability to work effectively in multi-professional teams. Podiatrists are needed on the Central Coast because it is no secret that it has a large demographic of aged people, the ones most in need of podiatry services. It is interesting to note that on average we walk 10,000 steps a day, which, in a lifetime, is the equivalent to walking four times around the world. At some time in their lives 75 per cent to 80 per cent of the population will experience foot problems or lose the ability to walk.

In 1999 the national average of podiatrists was 10.7 per 100,000 population. In South Australia the figure was 16.4, in Victoria it was 14.1, in Tasmania it was 13.3, in Western Australia it was 10.3, in the Australian Capital Territory it was 9.5, in New South Wales it was 8.8 and in Queensland it was 7.0. I am pleased that these podiatry services are available but one must ask the question: What has the Federal member for Dobell been doing, because the Central Coast also needs more general practitioners? I am sick and tired of new residents ringing up or visiting my electorate office asking how they can access a general practitioner because the books for existing general practitioners are closed.

The member for Dobell has done nothing to ameliorate that situation, nor has he offered any meaningful suggestions. As a result, there has been cost shifting to the area health service, which is a State Government responsibility, with people attending the accident and emergency departments of Wyong and Gosford hospitals. I have been generous enough to congratulate the Federal Government on the podiatry program, but it should be extended to include the training of general practitioners and doctors, preferably to attract students from the Central Coast who meet the academic qualifications and who desperately want to be doctors.

A former school captain of Wyong High School, Donald Cawthorne Junior, was dux of the school. He received a university admission index well in excess of 90 but he missed out on a place as an undergraduate at the University of Newcastle. Fortunately, he now has a good degree in medical science and this year has commenced first year medicine at the University of Sydney. There are many young people on the Central Coast who would gladly become doctors if sufficient places were available—and we need them urgently. However, it is the responsibility of the Federal Government to ensure that Commonwealth-supported places, not domestic fee paying places, are available so that Central Coast kids have the chance to become doctors and the needs of our rapidly growing population can be met. The Federal member should do the right thing and represent the people of his electorate and the Central Coast generally. So far he has simply ducked the issue. Today I sent a letter to Mr Ticehurst, the third I have sent in about two weeks. I hope he responds because it is important that we keep the unique lifestyle that the Central Coast enjoys for future generations.

NSW POLICE ADMINSTRATIVE STAFFING

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [4.27 p.m.]: For those who are not up to speed with the situation in their police local area commands, it has been brought to my attention that the New South Wales State Treasurer, Michael Costa, has undertaken a corporate services efficiency review within the NSW Police

administration sector. As a result he intends to cut \$15 million from this year's budget, \$15 million next year and \$18 million the year following, that is, if the Government is re-elected in March 2007. This so-called efficiency review has resulted, and will result, in forced redundancies within the administration arm of NSW Police.

In the Shoalhaven Local Area Command two positions have already been lost, with more to come. The current administration sections in all area commands are certainly not overresourced and a loss of two positions will result in significant pressure on staff already struggling to fulfil their obligations and duties. Administration positions were originally created to reduce the amount of paperwork undertaken by sworn officers whose duties should be the investigation of crime and apprehension of offenders. Administration officers undertake a number of essential clerical tasks relating to finance, human resources, occupational health and safety and leave.

Without their efforts, front-line police may have to be returned to desk duties. We all realise that the paperwork already undertaken in relation to each and every incident is excessive and time consuming for sworn officers. A corporate services efficiency review is just another name for job cuts, just as the Treasurer has recently slashed the positions of hardworking staff who work in the New South Wales Parliament in Macquarie Street. These actions of the Treasurer highlight the absolute and stunning hypocrisy of this State Labor Government, which attacks the Federal WorkChoices legislation, claiming jobs will be lost and workers exploited, whilst at the same time sacking workers throughout the State.

The Government proclaims loudly that it will protect its workers and, at the same time, it is busily and hurriedly slashing jobs within the NSW Police administration sector and, in some cases, ruining the lives of those who have dedicated years of service behind them. In my electorate it is not a simple matter of finding alternate employment as the Shoalhaven has one of the highest levels of unemployment in the State. Those working at the Shoalhaven Local Area Command have established themselves in the area, have homes and mortgages, and their children are settled into local schools.

At recent Police Association meetings, discussions were held regarding possible industrial action, and motions were carried to support such action. One administration officer has informed me that officers at Lake Illawarra command have lodged a dispute, and are also seriously affected by the Treasurer's job cuts. This administration officer has also relayed to me his disappointment with the honourable member for Kiama, who, firstly, did not return his calls and then proclaimed that the job cuts were simply not happening. Perhaps the honourable member should wake up to the issues affecting the workers in his electorate and work with them, or at least listen. I turn to one of the many letters I have received on this issue. One sworn officer at Nowra police station said:

My concern is that reduced support to frontline police will lead to a decrease in operational policing hours and therefore a reduced level of service to the community ...

Nowra or the Shoalhaven cannot afford to lose any staff. The police and administration staff have already much work to cope with. There is no room for minimalisation.

Petitions are now circulating within the Shoalhaven Local Area Command calling on this House to retain all support positions and cease the corporate services efficiency review until a guarantee is in place to retain jobs and ensure that operational police are not required to perform any duty that is currently performed by administrative staff at the Shoalhaven Local Area Command. I have spoken many, many times in this place about the overworked and underresourced Shoalhaven Local Area Command. I have called for more police in the area. Four years ago the local area commander at the time called for an additional 20 police, that is, above authorised strength. So far nothing has happened except the latest promise of three probationary constables. My community realises that three probationary constables will do little to alleviate the levels of crime and antisocial behaviour in the South Coast electorate at the moment. I call on the honourable member for Kiama to stand up for the police employees in his electorate and cease his usual role of simply being an apologist for the Government, rather than a committed advocate of those who, regrettably, elected him.

BINGE DRINKING

Mr PAUL PEARCE (Coogee) [4.31 p.m.]: Today I draw the attention of honourable members to binge drinking. On Tuesday honourable members had the opportunity to view the excellent production *Brink*, hosted by the honourable member for Hornsby, and I congratulate her on that. I take this opportunity to compliment all those involved, particularly the young people, in the production. The approach adopted recognised the reality of the issues facing young people and the social pressures often exerted by their peers when it comes to alcohol consumption. It recognised that young people, often below the legal drinking age, are

confronted with access to alcohol within a social setting. To bring to the attention of young people that there are choices which can be legitimately made is, I believe, likely to lead to a more responsible approach to alcohol consumption and lessen alcohol abuse.

However, it cannot be left to young people to deal with these issues alone. Clearly, they need the support and understanding of, amongst others, youth workers, teachers and parents. There is also the need for the liquor industry to behave in a responsible fashion. Binge drinking as a problem is not confined to those under 18 years of age. A casual visit to many hotels and bars will see the active encouragement of young people in potentially dangerous levels of alcohol consumption. The marketing industry targets various forms of alcoholic beverages directly at particular genders or age groupings, and thus effectively encourages dangerous patterns of consumption. The onus in the public debate is all too often put on the young person, whereas I consider that the responsibility for dangerous drinking behaviour should be sheeted home to where it properly lies, that is, those who are making the profits from the manipulation of young people.

For example, a major hotel in my electorate of Coogee, by its own admission in a submission to the Liquor Administration Board in a section 104 hearing, effectively targets the 18 to 24 age group. This same hotel, which operates until 3.00 a.m. currently, seeks to extend its hours to 5.00 a.m.. It vigorously opposes any proposal to limit entry or re-entry in the early morning. Yet evidence from the local community, both residents and businesses, indicates that there are significant and ongoing problems of drunken behaviour and associated street offences as a result of the existing opening hours. Non-domestic assaults, usually alcohol related, in the Coogee basin are higher than the State average. They are significantly higher than in Bondi, which has a similar social and visitor profile. In my opinion the reason for the difference is obvious. Bondi is the subject of a rigorous and effective liquor accord that sought to wind back the opportunities for binge drinking.

Waverley Council also recognised that ancillary traders, such as takeaway food outlets, by trading till early in the morning, were providing points of focus for drunks to gather and fights to break out. Profit and the opportunities to increase the rate of profit have clearly taken priority over social responsibility among some hoteliers. The cost of their profit is being borne by the broader community. Despite increasing evidence of problems developing over the past couple of years, Randwick Council has failed to confront and acknowledge the inter-related problems of excessive alcohol consumption in the Coogee basin. It is to be hoped that the current crime prevention partnership initiated by the Government will cause all parties to seriously consider how to address the issues. The starting point has to be no extension of existing trading hours and lock down provisions to discourage movement, in the early hours, between the liquor outlets in the basin.

LOWANNA PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.35 p.m.]: It is fortuitous that the Minister for Education and Training is in the Chamber because the issue I raise is the removal of demountable buildings from Lowanna Public School. Lowanna is a lovely little area in the hinterland of the Coffs Harbour electorate. The small community, which supports itself fantastically, is about a 40-minute drive from Coffs Harbour. The area is growing because of the sea change attitude of people in Sydney who are moving to the North Coast. Many of them are moving into the hinterland area; they are not right on the beach. These people are now finding that a magnificent school that has existed for who knows how many years—it is probably more than 100 years—is to be severely downgraded by the removal of two demountable buildings. In an email I received Valerie Clay of Lowanna said:

I am contacting you regarding the planned removal of demountables from Lowanna Primary School. Although the Departments standpoint is clear, I would like to express further concern about the fact that we are losing 2, not 1 building. As you are aware this places a huge impact on students and the wider community. I have done a little research and find that the policy on demountable buildings includes that the buildings must stay if they service a specific educational purpose. Surely such activities as reading/research, and the students ability to have access to an area conducive to learning is within the aims of the education department.

If both buildings are removed, the school faces cramping in all remaining structures because all books, computers, etc must be relocated, and students will not be afforded space to work and learn without distraction. This is not to mention the strain on P & C to buy the shelving and fixtures that will be lost as they are fixed to the building.

At this point, I am voicing my opinion and dismay and would like to reach out and offer backup to your argument. I understand that trying to keep both buildings would be unwise and think that we need to push the issue to save 1. It is a good compromise for both given the cost involved in such a venture and the high possibility that the school will have sufficient numbers to warrant the return of the building within 3 or 4 years.

I would like to add, however, that backbiting locally has resulted in division between parents and the planned removal of 3 students to larger schools because the facilities here are being further compromised.

I hope I can help in any way as I have a 10yo that has been schooled at Lowanna and a younger baby who I would like to see do the same. We are a small community and the environment and atmosphere is what we enjoy, help us keep it.

Thank you for your time.

We know that there is a surplus of demountables in Sydney; they are stored here somewhere. I believe that the cost of removing one demountable is about \$75,000. The loss to the school of these demountables will be immense. The local Lowanna community will do anything necessary to save the buildings. As Ms Clay said, a compromise is to keep one of the demountables. The *Coffs Coast Advocate* of 1 September ran an article titled, "How dare they do this to the 'future of Australia'". People have pointed out to me that even if the demountables are removed, the remaining buildings have been classified as under code. So not only is the school losing the demountables; old buildings are being retained. Lowanna Public School is a great school. I would like the Minister for Education and Training to visit the school. I thank her for visiting two schools in my electorate in the past; they were impressed.

The Lowanna community is smaller than the Dorrigo community. These people are telling me that children in classes from kindergarten to year 6 will have to be schooled in one room. It has been pointed out to me that students undertaking the Premier's reading challenge will have no library for books and no suitable environment for them to be taught. These demountables are also used by this small community. I ask the Minister to have the department investigate this issue and, if nothing else, try to retain one demountable and give the school the opportunity to have its computers, its library and learning area in one section and the teaching area in the other. It is sad that these small communities are shrinking, but they will grow. When I became a member of this place it was believed that a lot of these small schools would close. Schools like Upper Orara Public School, Karangi Public School, Coramba Public School and Bonville Public School are expanding because of sea changers. More children are coming in to the area. The shifting out of both of these demountables, purely on a numbers basis, is shortsighted. The school will be left severely disadvantaged.

MOTOR VEHICLE EMISSIONS

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Bligh) [4.40 p.m.]: Tonight I wish to raise concerns about the high level of vehicle emissions in the densely populated city of Sydney, and the significant effect this has on the health and environment of inner Sydney residents. I have raised concerns about vehicle emissions on many previous occasions in this House. I have called for better public transport, for the filtration of tunnel ventilation stacks and for air-quality monitoring stations. While the Government continues to give priority to cars, I would like to focus on individual car emissions contributing to the air pollution of inner and also wider Sydney. It is estimated that 80 per cent of nitrogen oxides and 90 per cent of carbon oxides are the result of vehicle emissions. Vehicles also emit poisons such as sulphur dioxide, suspended particles, benzene and formaldehyde. Due to Sydney's growing population and inadequate public transport, there is increased reliance on private vehicle use and increased concentrated levels of toxins emitted. Reports from the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] confirm that levels of nitrogen oxides are increasing, while ozone and fine particles from vehicle exhausts remain serious concerns.

On 11 March 2003, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported that the National Environment Protection Council found that Sydney was the only city in Australia to breach air pollution goals in the previous year. Benzene levels increased by 100,000 kilograms between 2004 and 2005 and carbon dioxide levels have continually increased since 1996. Motor vehicle use is on the rise, with vehicle kilometres travelled throughout Sydney increasing at twice the rate of population growth. In 2003 the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 75 per cent of people in Sydney travel to work or study by motor vehicle. Households with two or more vehicles increased from 42 per cent in 1996 to 50 per cent in 2003, with 44 per cent of New South Wales households having two or more motor vehicles. This is unsustainable.

Short-term exposure to the gases that make up vehicle exhaust causes headache, nausea, coughing, wheezing, dizziness, weakness, chest pain, eye irritation, and confusion. Long-term exposure can cause tissue damage, anaemia, respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, leukaemia, hypertension, pneumonia, lung disease, asthma attacks and many other conditions. Associate Professor Ray Kearney from the Department of Infectious Disease and Immunology at the University of Sydney reported the shocking fact that twice as many people die in Sydney from air pollution than in road accidents, and estimated that the annual health cost is \$2.3 billion.

Under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1979, it is an offence to sell or own a vehicle that emits excessive air impurities. However, breaches under the Act are not policed and vehicles are not subject to routine tests for emissions. This lack of enforcement adds to the increasing level of air pollution, affecting the

health of those living and working in the Sydney basin. Regular emission tests for all vehicles as part of annual registration renewal would reduce air pollution and improve Sydney's living standards.

The EPA states that Sydney will struggle to meet ambient air-quality national environment protection measure standards for ozone in the future because of the pressures of population growth, urban expansion and the associated increase in motor vehicle use. The EPA says that Sydney needs to tighten vehicle emission allowances for both heavy and light vehicles to reduce the increasing levels of ozone pollution in the Sydney basin. Emissions testing is recognised globally as a way to significantly reduce pollutants caused by motor vehicles.

In the United States of America [USA] the Clean Air Act sets out air-quality standards. Locations failing to meet these standards are required to undertake vehicle emissions testing. Each USA State incorporates emission testing every second year as a part of a licence-plate renewal system, and vehicles over five years old require testing within 45 days after registration by a new owner. Sweden has applied testing and limits on exhaust emissions since the middle of the 1970s, with requirements gradually tightened. As a result of these measures, the level of total emissions from road traffic has decreased, and will continue to go down over coming years.

In New South Wales, vehicles over three years old are required to undertake roadworthy safety inspection tests when their registration is renewed, because the Government and the community recognise the potential harm of driving unsafe vehicles. Excessive vehicle emissions are a very real danger to our health and the environment. Regular vehicle emissions testing is the responsible action for a government committed to community health and wellbeing. I call on the Government to include regular vehicle emission testing with roadworthy pink slips.

POLLIES FOR SMALL BUSINESS DAY

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [4.45 p.m.]: This afternoon I draw the attention of the House to Pollies for Small Business Day, which was held in my electorate on Thursday 24 August and in which I enthusiastically participated. The President of the Hornsby and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Greg Bepper, had organised a list of businesses that I visited, along with his son Jason. Chamber photographer, Darren Hart, and chamber member and executive officer Peter Kirkwood accompanied us. The first business I went to was Thyme Square Cafe, which is owned by Brian and Di Endycott. It was a good start to the day and it was great to see a small business humming along at that early hour of the morning. I then went to Tender Value Meats, which is owned by Adam Stratton. It is a successful and award-winning butcher shop. I learned the intricacies of bagging chicken and sausages and the importance of correct food handling.

The next stop was Double R Recruitment, where Robyn Rundle is the manager. I underwent a test for employment and learned about the many barriers people face when they are applying for jobs and the ways in which that agency can assist. The next stop was Active Health Chiropractic. At the business we spoke with Rebecca Stokes and Renée Mason. This is a very successful chiropractic practice. The person on the table with a few back problems was Greg Bepper. It was interesting to see a health business in action. We went then to Hornsby District Locksmiths, a generational business that has been in the family for some time. Mat Slatts, the owner of the business went through all the processes, particularly those relating to keys, and indicated new technology that assists with the more complex nature of security.

Ultra Tune Hornsby was the next on the list. Bruce Hewitt and his team were busily looking into problems under the bonnets of various vehicles. I got to tighten a few bolts at the rear of one of those vehicles. Signwave Hornsby, a business owned by Ivan Finlay, was a place I learned quite a lot about the skills required for sign writing, sign making and all the other aspects of modern communication. Scott and Sons Plumbing was visited after a luncheon taken at Asquith Boys High School, where a fantastic art display and the Higher School Certificate major works were shown not only to parents and school students but also to other interested members of the public. I had the privilege of making sure a sewer pipe was rid of its lining, a wonderful experience, and I learnt the importance of proper clothing. I am also well aware of the dangers of using high-powered sprays.

The next stop was an enjoyable one. I have done a responsible service of alcohol course, so I was quite entitled to stand behind the bar of Hornsby Inn and pull some beers. All the clientele thought it was fantastic because while I was first doing that, the hotel had a happy Happy Hour with free alcohol. Michael Bradshaw is the proprietor of the Hornsby Inn. The last shop I visited was the Telstra shop in Hornsby, which is managed by

Graham Simpson. He was very instructive in modern communications and issues associated with business and staff management.

Small business is the backbone of our economy. I call on the Iemma Government to improve small business confidence. Small business blames State Labor policies for lowering small business confidence. It is extremely important that we do everything we can to support small businesses so that they are able to continue and to grow. I thank Greg Bepper for organising the day. It was a privilege and an honour to accompany him. I am honoured to hold the record for the most businesses visited under the State Chamber of Commerce project.

PARLIAMENTARY ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF

Mr JOHN BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [4.50 p.m.]: One of the delightful aspects of my being an out-of-town member of Parliament starts at the beginning of each day: walking from my unit through Hyde Park, past the Art Gallery, past Mrs Macquarie's chair, through the Botanic Gardens, around the Opera house, back through the Botanic Gardens to Shakespeare's statue and thence to Parliament House. It is a magnificent walk, unparalleled anywhere in the world I would suggest. No wonder I always had a smile on my face when I arrived at Parliament House. Most people have breakfast, lunch and dinner with their families, but out-of-town members of Parliament develop friendships and relationships with a whole variety of parliamentary staff. Those relationships have made my stay in Parliament in Sydney most delightful.

Breakfast was usually shared with Jenny, Anong and Joseph, whose hospitality I enjoyed each morning. Then I would head upstairs to work on level 12. I acknowledge the great work done by Di Storr and Helen Bennett. I thank them for their friendship and chats, as well as the work they did for me during the day. I usually had lunch down at the canteen with Stefan and Nikki. I often shared a joke and a laugh with them. I have enjoyed working with Greg Kelly, the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms, and his staff, particularly our chats at the back of the Chamber during question time. We always got on very well. Perhaps that is why I have never been chucked out. I thank David, Maureen, Santiago and the other staff at evening meal time for the setting and their wonderful running of the catering organisation. They were always so very friendly, with their staff helping them along.

I thank Russell Grove and his staff in the Procedure Office for their cheerfulness and helpfulness over the time that I have been in the Parliament. It was always nice to have a hot chocolate with Jan from the Whip's office. Speaking of hot chocolate, honourable members can see what a big part food plays in my life—and that of the honourable member for Miranda as well. I thank people in the building for making my stay in Sydney the delight it has been. My electorate office staff, Lue and Sandra, have done a wonderful job looking after constituents in the Port Stephens electorate. They are knowledgeable about the electorate of Port Stephens and know who they need to talk to at the various ministries to solve problems for constituents. They have done a wonderful job and I acknowledge that in Parliament as well. In all, it has been a wonderful work environment. I sincerely thank those that contributed to making my work possible.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville—Minister for Education and Training) [4.54 p.m.]: I will respond on behalf of everyone here, and everyone who cannot be here, to the comments of the honourable member for Port Stephens. He is a popular and well-respected member around this House. I place on record our appreciation of his commitment to his electorate. The way he has conducted himself has raised the tone of this place. Not everyone can leave this place having made that contribution. The honourable member for Port Stephens certainly has. My first encounters with him were when I had responsibility for the Youth portfolio. He was totally committed to young people and providing opportunities to them. He is also a great conservationist and has a high regard for and dedication to the schools in his area. Everyone who has come into contact with John in his electorate or in this place will attest to the fact that he has made a wonderful contribution. He has represented his electorate with honour and with passion, and he will be greatly missed.

GROUND WATER STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROCESS

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [4.55 p.m.]: I join others in this Parliament in congratulating the honourable member for Port Stephens on his contribution to the Parliament over the past eight years. It is difficult being a member of Parliament at the best of times, let alone being an out-of-town one with the additional time taken away from one's family. To have the support of friends, and the great vista he has on his way to work, makes a difficult job that little bit easier. I thank him very much for his contribution to this place.

I raise a very important issue for the Murrumbidgee electorate: the ground water structural adjustment process that has been undertaken over the last couple of years relevant to the Murrumbidgee, Murray and

Lachlan rivers, which are part of the Murrumbidgee electorate. I will raise some particular cases. The first is that of Mr Ian Clark of "Yurdyilla", Hay. When the family bought the property it had a 1,000 megalitre entitlement. Following the structural adjustment process the entitlement was reduced to 186 megalitres. Water is vital to an irrigation property, yet the allocation of the property has been reduced to about 20 per cent of the former amount.

It is difficult for any business to operate with an 80 per cent cut in its most important asset: it would be like asking a company to operate with only 20 per cent of its electricity supply. It is a very difficult situation for such businesses. The \$200,000 spent on drilling bores mostly will have been spent in vain because it may not be viable, or only marginally so, to pump the water allocated. An anomalies committee process applies. I ask the anomalies committee in the lower Lachlan to reconsider the case of Mr Ian Clark. Jon and Naomi Vagg, who are also in the lower Lachlan area, wrote a letter stating:

Sir, the result of the Government's current proposed Water Sharing Plan will financially cripple our business. We have fulfilled every requirement on our bore water licence ... stating our annual entitlement as 2671 ML. We have always expected that entitlement cuts as the aquifer has apparently been over allocated [through no fault of ours]. Through the crippling drought years post 2000 we have set up an irrigation scheme to supplement our grazing operation. This scheme is based on an allocation of two thirds of our entitlement, that is 1780 ML. The irrigation system has cost us in excess of \$456,000. Under the Government's proposed Plan our entitlement will be cut to 1100 ML with zero share of the Structural Adjustment funds ...

That property which relies on irrigation for the farm business will suffer a 60 per cent reduction in available water. Very few businesses can suffer such a cut to their most important asset. Certainly Jon and Naomi Vagg cannot sustain such a cut. Again I ask the anomalies committee in the Lachlan Valley, through the Minister for Natural Resources, to consider the case of Jon and Naomi Vagg. The third case I raise is that of Eric Bergemeister, who has a property south of Narrandera. He had an allocation of about 1,000 megalitres. He did the right thing and moved to horticulture and the high-value irrigation crops that have been talked about as the salvation of irrigation agriculture, with drip irrigation systems and the like.

He has now planted about 150 acres of grapes and he has been slowly increasing the amount of water that he uses out of his 1,000 megalitre allocation as the vines have matured. He thought he would get access to at least 50 per cent of his entitlement. However, the Government has changed the rules mid way through the reform process and he is now left with about 180 megalitres of water to irrigate 150 acres of grapes that will need a minimum of 450 megalitres. He cannot say that he will not grow grapes next year because they are already in the ground and it has cost him about \$10,000 an acre to plant them. He is certainly deserves special consideration by the Murrumbidgee anomalies committee. I urge the Minister for Natural Resources and the anomalies committee to reconsider this case.

TAOUK CONSTRUCTIONS PTY LIMITED

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.00 p.m.]: I wish to inform the House about significant concerns relating to the activities in my local area of Mr Kashlar Taouk of Taouk Constructions. In particular, I wish to focus on Mr Taouk's role in the construction of a major residential building at 3 to 5 Featherstone Street, Bankstown. The site at 3 to 5 Featherstone St, Bankstown has 64 units that are the subject of a strata plan. Of those 64 units, 60 are residential and four are commercial. The majority of the residential lots are owner occupied and many of the owners are of non-English speaking background, with some possessing only limited English speaking skills and no real understanding of the legislative framework within which an owners corporation functions, and the responsibilities and protections enshrined in the Government's strata schemes legislation.

I am advised that almost immediately following Kashlar Taouk's transfer of the management and control of the building to the owners corporation—the former body corporate—in February 2004, the owners corporation started receiving a steady stream of complaints from the unit owners about significant building defects affecting both the common access areas and their own units. Complaints included defective plumbing, missing or inoperative fire safety and other essential equipment, substandard fixtures, poor workmanship, structural cracks, loose and collapsing balconies and so on. Police have also been involved in a number of drug raids on the building. It is extraordinary that one building has attracted so much attention from police officers searching for drugs. During a raid on an apartment on the top floor of the building to apprehend the owners of a hydroponic drug crop, an officer leant against the railing on the balcony and it fell off. That is a clear example of Mr Kashlar Taouk's workmanship.

The owners corporation has raised these issues with Kashlar Taouk, but he has consistently refused to co-operate. In January 2005, the owners corporation appointed WT Newey and Company—a long-standing and credible real estate agency in Bankstown—as the strata management agent. The agency wasted no time in commissioning an engineer's report, which stated that there was an appalling lack of workmanship in the buildings and a number of safety concerns. In March 2005, Bankstown Council served an order to cease use of building because of fire safety breaches. Those concerns were largely ignored by Taouk, and he claimed that they were not his responsibility. In August 2005, the owner's corporation took legal action in the Supreme Court against Kashlar Taouk to remedy the building defects. It has been confirmed that the repairs will cost approximately \$1.2 million in total.

Since then, Kashlar Taouk has called three extraordinary meetings. He is using his muscle as the owner of 18 of the units in the block. His objective in calling the meetings has been to roll WT Newey as managing agents and to replace them with what he has described as his own agents. They would obviously be more amenable to his management approach. However, the owners corporation has said that that is not good enough, that it wants a credible agent and that WT Newey fills that bill. Taouk was unsuccessful in having WT Newey removed at all three meetings. From April onwards, the owners corporation members, executive committee members, individual owners and WT Newey personnel have been subjected to intimidation and threats. That culminated on 30 August when one of the management principals of WT Newey, Mr Edward Selman, was attacked in his home by two baseball bat-wielding men who shattered both of his knees in front of his wife. That is what has been going on. I will be talking seriously to police and the Minister for Fair Trading about what can be done about the involvement of this man in this very serious matter. He has used opportunity and muscle to clearly intimidate, if not threaten, the rights of those involved.

PARENTS OF YOUNG ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES ALBURY

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [5.05 p.m.]: A few days ago I received a letter from Pauline Harbick, representing Parents of Young Adults With Disabilities Albury [POYAWDA]. This group of families has been meeting over the past 18 months because they live day in and day out the crisis that has been allowed to develop in unmet needs for child and adult disability services in Albury. The group's mission is to source respite and supported accommodation for young adults with disabilities in the Albury region. Albury is acknowledged as an area with unmet needs. Acute services have been allowed to close and there has been no expansion to meet the needs of the present, let alone the growing population. As a result, there are huge service gaps. The parent group has pointed out the main issues to the Minister for Disability Services and sought his support in working together to provide family carers the services they deserve before they reach breaking point. The three main issues continue to be: respite service, supported accommodation and community participation programs.

As the Minister is well aware from my repeated representations and questions, there is no centre-based respite service for young adults aged 18 years and over. The closest service is in Deniliquin, some 200 kilometres away. The Minister had no shame in suggesting parents could also access services even more distant in Cootamundra and Griffith. Families need respite because the constant caring for a young adult with disabilities is a huge strain and all too often leads to family breakdowns. Travelling to a different town two to three hours away is hardly the type of break families are seeking. A centre-based home in Albury is the real need.

The second requirement is for supported accommodation. The parent group advises me that there are more than 30 adults on official waiting lists for supported accommodation in Albury, and they expect that there are many more not on the lists. There are also families who have had their child in supported accommodation at the Mercy Centre, but this is funded only until the child leaves school. Some of these families live in country locations and will, therefore, be unable to take up community participation places because they do not have accommodation in Albury and their family home is too far away for daily travel.

One such family is the Bruce family of Savernake, a farming area 100 kilometres west of Albury. In 2004, Ken and Kathryn Bruce told me of the plight of young Rachael, who has a severe intellectual disability and attends Wewak School in Albury, resides in a home run by the Mercy Centre during the week and returns home for the weekend. Two years on, the family's fears are just as strong that their daughter and others in the same house will have no accommodation when they finish school. This will mean that the girls will have to return home full time, and Rachael will not be able to access the services and support network she needs, nor the social contacts established during her schooling years. She will be unable to continue the activities that give her independence and allow participation in the community. This is not an acceptable situation.

It is even worse to learn from the Minister that no additional supported accommodation places were created in the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care's entire western region during the 2005-06 year and that no existing places were allocated to young adults during that 12-month period. When these children turn 18 their needs do not change. They may be adults in age, but they are not in their capacity to live independently. They need the stimulation and activities of the community participation program five days a week. Without this support, families have to be carers, teachers, therapists and social mentors—all of which leads to extreme pressure and family breakdown.

The third requirement is for five days per week community participation programs. The parent group has recognised that the Government's policy identifies the need to expand the range of accommodation options, but it does not deliver any detail on how or when this might be achieved in Albury. Therefore, the parents of young adults with disabilities developed their own model for supported accommodation and submitted it to the Minister and to the regional director of the western region in April 2006. This model is for a five-bedroom house with three additional two-bedroom flats at the rear of the dwelling to allow for 11 people to be accommodated at any one time.

Each person would have supported accommodation for three or four nights a week. This would allow for 22 people to have some days of supported accommodation each week. The house will be fully supported with services and facilities appropriate for people with high physical needs. The flats would allow for a secure environment for clients with mild to moderate levels of intellectual disability and relatively low support needs. Details of costs, staffing, programs and other details were all submitted with the original proposal. There has been no response and no suggestions. The parents of the Albury region deserve a response from the Minister. Their families deserve some action on supported accommodation.

CORNERSTONE MORTGAGES AUSTRALIA PTY LIMITED

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [5.10 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to the problems encountered by my constituent Jenny Silva and her partner in their dealings with Cornerstone Mortgages Australia Pty Limited, a mortgage manager. In March 2005 Ms Silva and her partner wished to refinance the loan on their family home. My constituent has written to me in the following terms:

We heard from Cornerstone Mortgages Australia Pty Ltd through friends and because my daughter was working there as a secretary. We needed to refinance our family home and we were offered the loan at what we were told was a good rate. The rate was 6.5% with Firstmac. Mr Michael Diab, director and owner of Cornerstone Mortgages told us that he was offering this rate to us because he liked us, that he was not entitled to trailer commission but just one-off commission. He offered this to us, we did not ask for it. Later on, increases as per the Reserve Bank came into effect. At the present time, we should be paying 7% interest.

Various documents I have sighted confirm these facts. The mortgagee is First Mortgage Company Home Loans Pty Limited. The loan agreement summary refers to Cornerstone Mortgages Australia as the manager of the mortgage. The interest rate is 6.5 per cent, but is admittedly referred to as variable. Another document in May 2006 from Cornerstone Mortgages reads in part:

As you know, home loan interest rates are occasionally adjusted to reflect current market and economic conditions. This week the Reserve Bank lifted interest rates and as a result, the interest rate applying to your variable rate loan will change to 7% pa from 9 May 2006.

However, on 24 July they received a letter from Cornerstone Mortgages dated 18 July 2006 in the name of Michael Diab, described as director. In part it reads as follows:

We thank you for choosing Cornerstone Mortgages Australia for your home loan. It has recently come to our attention that when your loan was first settled in March 2005 the interest rate assigned to your loan was below our funder delivery rate. Consequently Cornerstone Mortgages Australia has been paying a percentage of your monthly interest rate charged against your loan, to your loan provider, Firstmac, ever since your loan settled. As a result Cornerstone Mortgages Australia has been losing money—

I note the use of a double "o"! It continues:

We are writing to inform you that we will no longer subsidise this loan and in line with current rates an increase in your interest has now become necessary. The new interest rate commencing as of the 9th August 2006 will be 7.27%.

My constituents have reacted with considerable anger to this situation. In Ms Silva's words, this conduct is "short of ethical, it is unprofessional and negligent". More specifically she said:

We know for a fact that at no time did Cornerstone or Mr Diab himself subsidize our loan, neither did he pay part of the interest. We were paying the interest and in excess of the same. We also know for a fact that Firstmac delivery rate at that time was lower

than the interest we were paying when we first took out the loan. I can prove that. Regardless of this, if he was losing money, as he is arguing in the letter, it is not our fault, but his own.

Ms Silva also said:

At this time, where work conditions are not the same as some years ago and prices in general have increased and when most families, like us, are struggling to pay our mortgage and all the family bills and still maintain a decent life, this increase is unjust and unfair and actions like these should be stopped.

Ms Silva then proceeded to have this matter resolved by contacting the appropriate authorities. She complained to the Office of Fair Trading, but got what was largely a black letter law response, suggesting a trip to the Consumer Trade and Tenancy Tribunal [CTTT]. She also complained to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission [ACCC]. The ACCC said it was not its responsibility and that she should go to the Australian Securities and Investment Commission [ASIC]. Ms Silva had already done that. She had received a letter from ASIC saying it would not investigate the complaint at that time and it referred her to the Mortgage Industry Association of Australia [MIAA]. Ms Silva had already contacted the MIAA. In the letter to me she said:

I was instructed by MIAA to report this matter to the local member of Parliament because there is no legislation at the moment in regards to the mortgage industry. It seems that, although very unfair, mortgage managers can do what they please in regards to increasing interest rates in order to obtain a higher commission at any time. In this tough and very competitive market, mortgage managers, in order to obtain the business, charge a lower interest at the beginning and then they increase because they realise that they are not making as much commission as they should.

This is all fairly unsatisfactory. My constituent has been trying to get someone to seriously assess her complaint and to resolve the problem. That does not seem to have happened as yet. Fair Trading said go to CTTT, the ACCC said to go to ASIC, ASIC said to go to the MIAA, the MIAA said to go to her local member of Parliament! I ask the Minister for Fair Trading to investigate these issues and, in particular, to determine whether a new regulatory regime is needed to avoid problems such as this. I ask the Minister to determine whether there is some way of resolving what is clearly a real problem for Ms Silva in relation to the amount of interest she is paying.

BAULKHAM HILLS BUS-ONLY LANE

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [5.15 p.m.]: Residents in the area of Baulkham Hills bounded by Old Northern Road, Windsor Road, Cook Street and Edward Street have expressed outrage at the proposal of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] to create a bus lane along Old Northern Road and to close Railway Street at its intersection with Windsor Road, causing chaotic traffic conditions in these narrow streets that are already congested due to increased housing density. Shopkeepers from the Baulkham Hills shopping strip are vigorously opposed to the RTA's proposal, which would result in the removal of customers' parking spaces and have the potential to ruin those businesses. Many residents living in Windsor Road would also be disadvantaged with the closure of Railway Street as they would have extreme difficulty accessing their homes when travelling from Parramatta or from Seven Hills. I point out that Railway Street contains the Baulkham Hills library, which is utilised by more than 400 people per day, as well as a medical centre and other businesses, including Baulkham Hills Bowling Club, whose clients would face extreme difficulties with access should Railway Street be closed at Windsor Road.

I attended a briefing by the RTA for Baulkham Hills shire councillors on 1 August. At that time I expressed my concern about the lack of consultation by the RTA with residents and shopkeepers who would be affected by the proposal. I approached the mayor of Baulkham Hills, Sonya Phillips, with a request that a public meeting be held to allow local people to have a say on what the RTA was proposing, a request that the mayor agreed to. I was extremely concerned that the RTA appeared to be pushing to have these changes implemented, which would have the potential to impose further congestion on our already congested local roads and ruin many small businesses. I urged the RTA to investigate alternative proposals to the one that had been presented. At the Baulkham Hills traffic meeting held on 21 August and attended by my representative, the RTA provided correspondence containing 13 additional options. The traffic committee resolved that details of what was called "option 6" should be presented to the public meeting along with the RTA's preferred options. Option 6 was to utilise Olive Street for the buses.

The public meeting was held on 31 August, with nearly 200 people in attendance. The overwhelming feeling of those present was that Railway Street should not be closed at Windsor Road. Disturbingly, the proposal for option 6 presented by the Roads and Traffic Authority representative at the meeting appeared to be

dramatically different from the one that had been put forward at the traffic committee meeting. The new RTA option had not previously been seen by me, the councillors or the traffic committee prior to the public meeting. It involved land being resumed from Stockland Mall to turn Olive Street into a six-lane road. To make things worse, the RTA had dumped this proposal on Stockland Mall in the afternoon of the day of the public meeting. I can fully understand the dismay of the management of Stockland Mall, who had just started a \$44 million development of their site only to be faced with the RTA wishing to resume part of its land. A cynical person might infer that this proposal was one that the RTA wanted to see fail.

Option 6, proposed by the traffic committee, involved using Olive Street for city-bound buses only, whilst buses making the return trip would come from Windsor Road straight onto the Old Northern Road. Under that plan no land would need to be resumed from Stockland Mall. The RTA representative told the meeting that the proposal was impossible, stating, "The RTA is governed by the Ministry of Transport and they will not allow us to split the bus routes." That is something I refute. Also present at the public meeting was a representative from the Ministry of Transport. When questioned as to whether inbound and outbound bus routes can be split, he responded, "The rule is not fixed in stone. The option could be looked at." The RTA obviously is seeking a quick-fix solution on the cheap with little or no regard for the effects on local residents and shopkeepers.

A number of other worthy options were put forward. However, option six was the only one presented by the RTA within its budget that would allow Railway Street to remain open and also save the parking spaces outside the shops. It is regrettable that the Government is not prepared to make adequate funds available to provide a more substantial long-term solution to the transport problems in Baulkham Hills. The people of Baulkham Hills deserve better than this stunt that was pulled by the RTA. However, the RTA is a serial offender. The Cross City Tunnel and the Lane Cove Tunnel are both recent cases in which the RTA and its political masters failed to put the interests of local residents first. This is what is now intended for the residents of Baulkham Hills and business owners. I believe it is an absolute tragedy that this proposal, which is going to take parking away from the shops and impose additional hardship to people with the congestion on side streets, should be inflicted on the people of Baulkham Hills. I ask the Minister to look into the matter urgently and rectify the situation.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [5.20 p.m.]: Tonight I bring to the attention of the House concerns from my constituents in relation to organ donations. There is a need to improve organ donation rates to address the shortage of transplantable organs. Many people die on the transplant lists before an organ becomes available. We need to look at a range of medical, organisational, financial and legal approaches to improve donation rates. As there is a serious shortage of transplantable organs we need to look in detail at different strategies to improve donation rates. I have suggested that one means of improving organ donation rates is to offer discounts on drivers licence fees. I am not talking about selling organs but a more ethical, responsible scheme that gives a financial benefit to those who are prepared, in the tragic event of their death, to make their organs available to assist and to save the lives of others.

Another means of improving organ donation rates is to clarify the consent process. We need people to indicate on their drivers licence that they are prepared to donate organs, but then we must ask the next of kin to give consent in the tragic circumstances of imminent death. I believe if a person has indicated on their drivers licence that they wish to donate organs there should be what is called "presumed consent". It is a very difficult situation to request a family to agree to an organ transplant when they are faced with the shock and grief of a loved one dying.

The Staysafe Committee has talked to many people in this regard and many families have told us that at the time of an accident to a loved one they could not even think about organ transplants, although the person who died may have given his or her consent to be an organ donor. Then we spoke to these people two or three months later and they have all agreed that if they had their time over again they would have honoured the wish of their loved one who had passed away and let that person become an organ donor.

On the application form for a drivers licence we tick the box indicating we would like to be an organ donor. Maybe we should have a look at doing the reverse and only tick the box if we do not want to be a donor. We need to look at medical issues such as expanded donor criteria and new techniques, and organisational issues such as increasing the awareness of medical staff that organ donation is an option, and improving the

request process. We need to look also at financial issues such as licence discounts or reimbursement of funeral expenses, and legal issues such as the presumed consent policy, which I mentioned.

With the right combination of new approaches we should be able to increase the organ donation rates and make it possible to achieve a better quality of life for many people facing incapacitation and death due to lack of available organs for transplantation. It is very interesting to look at last year's figures. Although there are millions of people in New South Wales who have indicated their choice to be an organ donor on their drivers licence or who carry a donor card or who may have recorded their intention with the Australia and New Zealand Organ Donor Registry, last year there were only 103 kidney transplants, 41 liver transplants, 15 heart transplants, no heart and lung transplants, only 19 lung transplants and only 10 pancreas transplants.

In the whole of Australia there were 373 kidney transplants, 164 liver transplants, 72 heart transplants, no heart and lung transplants, 78 lung transplants and 33 pancreas transplants. One can see from those figures that we need to do more than we are doing in order to get the donation rate up. As I said, it is very traumatic for people when they lose someone to have to make that decision and without presumed consent there is no other way around it. The organs at the moment that can be transplanted are kidneys, heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, skin, bone and cornea. More recently, there have been transplants of complex tissues: skin, nerves and bone, and also hand transplants. In November 2005 the first face transplant was carried out. At the end of the day, the greatest gift that any of us can give anyone in this world is the gift of life, and that is what organ donation is all about. I ask the Parliament to have a look at the situation to ensure that we give more people that gift of life than has happened in the past.

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.25 p.m.]: I endorse everything that the honourable member for Blacktown has said. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition also raised this issue in the Chamber during the week. There is an absolute need for a more co-ordinated effort from all parties involved, including the Roads and Traffic Authority and the public, to make everyone understand the importance of organ donation. I endorse also the statements of the honourable member for Blacktown in relation to consent and the way in which that could be approached.

BROGO RIVER SYSTEM

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [5.26 p.m.]: Water and river management remains a high priority for all communities in the electorate of Bega, from Ulladulla in the Shoalhaven, with residents concerned about Labor's extraction plans, to the dairy farmers in the Bega Valley dependent on the Brogo. I have joined forces with the Federal member for Eden-Monaro, Gary Nairn, in calling on the New South Wales Government to reject proposed increases in the cost of water pumped out of the Brogo River system. We both believe that the increased fees could result in dairy farmers being forced out of business. That concern is not exclusively ours; it is also a concern of the management of Bega Cheese, which takes 40 per cent of its milk from farmers on the Brogo system.

Mr Richard Parbery, the Deputy Chair of the Bega Co-operative Society Limited, has written to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal saying that over four years Brogo River users will have to absorb massive increases in the cost of water. The Federal Member for Eden-Monaro and Special Minister of State, Gary Nairn, said he was astounded that any industry would be expected to wear such a massive cost increase over such a short space of time, and I agree with him. He makes it clear that the national water initiative commits to more accurate pricing of water, and it also provides that water pricing be implemented in a manner that avoids perverse or unintended outcomes. That is the case in the Brogo system. Pricing is designed to facilitate water trade and the efficient, economical use of water resources. The New South Wales Government should not hike up the prices so that industries in small rural communities are undermined.

Brogo River water users are rightly opposed to New South Wales using the national water initiative as a justification to raise prices on the Brogo River system. I have information from farmers who currently pay \$6,500 annually for water taken from the Brogo River that they will soon be paying up to \$14,000. This is an outrageous 115 per cent increase. Another farmer paying \$20,000 annually will be looking forward to an increased cost for water of \$43,000 annually. How could any business be expected to absorb that sort of cost increase over such a short space of time and still remain viable? The State Government also needs to explain why it is that Brogo River water users pay \$35 per megalitre compared with the State average of only \$9.15. That could result in the closure of dairy farms, the loss of jobs on those farms, and less milk to Bega Cheese, which could in turn affect other employment. It means potential losses all round for the far South Coast.

I turn now to the Shoalhaven, which is in the northern part of the Bega electorate. Ulladulla residents depend on the Shoalhaven for their water supply. They have expressed ongoing concern about the ridiculous nonsense we are hearing consistently from the Government and the chief advocate for the Government's plan in the Shoalhaven, mayor Greg Watson. Last week I questioned why we have not seen from the Labor Party a return in the form of infrastructure investment for the Shoalhaven community in exchange for the billions of litres of water being extracted from the river. I suggested that the Government could return to the region \$200 million in Princes Highway infrastructure. Such a return would benefit everyone to the Victorian border. I do not think that is an unreasonable proposition.

I call on the mayor to stop his antics and to accept that Labor has lied and misled South Coast residents by saying that aquifers are the answer to drought-proofing Sydney when clearly it was the plan all along to use the Shoalhaven River. The mayor has no obligation to take the political heat for what the Labor Party has done and said on this. I question his reason for doing this. Mayor Watson has been playing the "poor precious me" line in the local media for long enough. He should admit his error on this. I call on him to join with the local community, the honourable member for South Coast and me to fight for the Shoalhaven River and work to extract some major dollars for the Princes Highway in return.

Just last month 76 per cent of Sydney's water supply was extracted from the Shoalhaven River. One week later 82 per cent of Sydney's water supply was transferred from the Shoalhaven River. There are major questions as to the effect this will have on the river system. In conclusion, I draw the attention of the House to another river system on the far South Coast that is suffering damage as a result of the actions of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, that is, Freshwater Creek, which adjoins the Kiah River. A number of months ago the State Government decided to dam Freshwater Creek to create a wetland. The flow-on effect has greatly damaged the river system. The Government must come clean on the environmental impact statement that was undertaken as part of the process and the costs associated in cleaning up the mess created as a result of that action.

STRATHFIELD MUNICIPAL COUNCIL RAINWATER TANK POLICY

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield) [5.31 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House a serious matter that has occurred in the electorate of Strathfield. I am very concerned that residents who live in the municipality of Strathfield may be suffering as a result of the actions of Strathfield Municipal Council under the leadership of the current mayor, and I am one of them. Members may be aware of my longstanding interest in water and how passionately I believe it is one of our most precious resources, particularly when we live in a continent that is one of the most beautiful but driest in the world. Water is a finite, not an infinite, resource. We all need to remember and respect that.

I had the privilege and honour of serving my local community for a number of years as a councillor and then as mayor of Strathfield for four terms before entering this place. During that time, with the support of my colleagues on council, I made it mandatory to install a rainwater tank when a new building was being built in the municipal area or when someone was undertaking major renovations. That was in 2002, well before water restrictions or recycling were being discussed as much as they are today. I believe we were the first council in a metropolitan area to take that initiative, not just in New South Wales but in the whole of Australia. That is something local residents can indeed be proud of and it is an achievement that I am very proud of.

Looking back, it was not an easy task. I came under a lot of attack and criticism. People said that I could not make it compulsory, but I felt it was something small that we could do to contribute to the preservation of our unique environment. As a result of this action, today many new dwellings in Strathfield have a rainwater tank for outdoor use. Indeed, many other councils have followed our example, and I hope it becomes even more widespread. I am proud of the Strathfield community for showing great leadership in this important area.

To literally put my money where my mouth was I decided to pay for a tank and have one installed on my own property, which is not a new home but a little Federation cottage. The rainwater company checked with council and, after being given the go-ahead, the rainwater tank was installed for outdoor use, using stormwater. Honourable members can imagine my shock and horror when I received a letter from council in July 2004 in respect of my rainwater tank, which stated:

In accordance with Council policy, breaches of the planning legislation result in the issue of an infringement notice (\$600 on the spot fine) which is enclosed.

I was shocked by this action. I wondered whether this motivated political action by council against me. Then I thought that council did not know the current planning laws pertaining to rainwater tanks. I wondered whether it was going back to the so-called bad old days prior to when I was mayor and residents were actively discouraged from putting in rainwater tanks. I wondered whether the mayor and the council were out of touch with planning laws. Indeed, I could not understand why they were not supporting people like me to do their little bit by installing rainwater tanks.

I felt that Strathfield council should be encouraging people and thanking them for taking a proactive approach to preserving rainwater. I also wondered whether the current council had subjected other residents to the same treatment that I had been given and whether those residents had had to pay fines incorrectly and wait for months for a refund of their hard-earned money. I decided to pay the fine of \$600, even though I knew my knowledge and understanding of the planning laws of this State and the planning codes of council was correct. Strathfield Municipal Council was notified of this position and my objections to what I considered to be a fine that was incorrectly issued.

The process took many months—from 12 August 2004, when I wrote that cheque, to the end of January 2006—to finally get back my \$600 from council, of course without interest and with considerable effort on my part. I am also waiting for an apology from the current mayor. I am trying to be charitable, but this action by the current council leaves many important questions unanswered. I sincerely hope that other hardworking local residents have not had to endure the same processes that I have had to sustain over this long period of time. Strathfield Municipal Council and its mayor should be proactive and have respect for the environment and water preservation. Fining people for legally installing and complying with regulations and State planning laws is an absolute disgrace. I urge any residents who feel that they have been incorrectly fined by Strathfield Municipal Council to immediately notify me.

KEMPSEY ELDERS DEBUTANTE BALL

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [5.36 p.m.]: I share with the House a very special event that took place recently in the electorate of Oxley in beautiful Kempsey on the mid North Coast. I referred to the Aboriginal Elders Debutante Ball, which was held on the evening of 29 July. My wife, Cathy, and I were honoured to receive the debutantes on that wonderful night. These ladies are admired and widely respected in their communities. They arrived wearing their best dresses, with their hair beautifully done, with big smiles—and, in some cases, tears—as they were presented in the traditional way. They were partnered by men, many of whom were also elders.

I would like to mention the people involved in that wonderful Elders Debutante Ball, which was a marvellous event for the Aboriginal community on the mid North Coast and for people throughout Australia. It was covered by the ABC program *Message Stick*, and I am sure it was a wonderful program. My wife and I were honoured to receive those debutantes, who included a number of elders from mainly the Dunghutti people from the Macleay Valley, the Thunghutti from the Upper Macleay area, the Gumbangirri from the Nambucca Valley, but also as far away as the Kamilaroi people from Moree and the Wiradjuri people from western parts of New South Wales.

I shall mention specifically some of the debutantes who attended. Most of these ladies are referred to as "Auntie" as they are elders in their communities. They are Tanya Roberts, partnered by Keith Roberts; Melva Wright, partnered by Robert Silva; Lillian Greenup, partnered by David Kelly Junior; Cheron Murray, partnered by Luke Donovan; Elaine Fernando, partnered by Dave Fernando Junior; Rosemary Vale, partnered by Edward Vale. I am sure the honourable member for Canterbury knows many of these wonderful people.

Also presented were Jeanine Sines, partnered by Neville Kyle Cohen; Jacqui Welsh, partnered by Paul Davis Jnr; Kerry Wade with Shaun Wade; Ruth Dunn with Noel Dunn; Kathy Cox partnered by Alex Cox; Gladys Quinlan from Bellbrook partnered by Douglas Ridgeway; Roseleen Dungay partnered by Fredrick Dickson; Mavis Davis from Kempsey with Cyril Davis; Mary-Lou Buck, with whom I have had a long association, partnered by Clarrie Hoskins; Jessie Vale with Gary Mcleod; Lionell Donovan with Martin Ballangarry, who is on the council in the Nambucca shire; Sandra Dungay with Timothy Dungay; and Ethel Hoskins with Sam Hoskins.

Also presented were Enid Wright partnered by Victor Dixon; Elaine Widders with Richard Widders; Helen Dargin with Arthur Slade; Iris McCudden with Bo McCudden; Amelia Cavanagh partnered by Michael Foxwell; Noela Donovan with Lindsay Donovan; Betty Faulkner with Fredrick Kennedy; Yvonne Roberts with

Joshua Donohue; Cecilia Flanders partnered by Ellis Bradshaw; Shirley McManus partnered by Mathew Ostler; Winifred Kelly with Lewis Kelly; Phyllis Mosley with Uncle William Allen; Marjorie Ritchie with Scott Ritchie; Margaret Ridgeway with William Walker; Zona Moran with Lance Moran junior; Janet Smith, a wonderful lady, with David Scholes senior; Frances Donovan with Raymond Donovan; Marjorie Vale with Tyrone Smith; Grace Quinlan with Lyle Quinlan; Zella McLeod with Stephen McLeod; Kathleen Morris partnered by Corey March; and Cinderella Callaghan, who is well and truly in her 80s, along with Dane Callaghan.

I congratulate those debutantes and their partners. In particular I congratulate the organising committee comprising Tammy Newman, Adela Vale, Angela Roberts and Kerry Wade. I congratulate also the Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corporation, which assisted on this wonderful night. It touched my heart to see these wonderful ladies being presented as debutantes.

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.41 p.m.]: I join the Leader of The Nationals in congratulating the debutantes. I attended a debutante ball in Kempsey about three or four years ago. Debutante balls are a great tradition in Kempsey, and the significance of what the Leader of The Nationals said is that many of these people were not even recognised as citizens when they were young. To see them being presented is wonderful. I thank the Leader of The Nationals for bringing this to the attention of honourable members.

NORTHERN BEACHES POLICING

Mr ALEX McTAGGART (Pittwater) [5.42 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of honourable members the situation regarding policing in Pittwater and on the northern beaches. In doing so I acknowledge that the statistics indicate a low level of major crime. However, there has been a 122.7 per cent spike in the incidence of break and enter to dwellings, and while there has been a 13 per cent increase in malicious damage to property in the Northern Beaches Local Area Command, in Pittwater the increase is 35.8 per cent. There appears to be a clear anomaly in the allocation of resources. According to the NSW Police web site, the Manly Local Area Command mirrors the Manly local government area, with a population of 38,886, an area of 15 square kilometres and a police strength of 102. The Northern Beaches Local Area Command includes the local Government areas of both Warringah and Pittwater, with a total population of 196,980. Of those, 139,626 are in Warringah and 57,354 are in Pittwater.

The command covers an area of 241 square kilometres, 150 in Warringah and 91 in Pittwater. Yet the command has a police strength of only 198. So Manly, with a population of fewer than 40,000, has 102 officers, and the northern beaches, with an area 16 times greater and a population that is four times greater, has 198 officers. That does not make sense in terms of law enforcement on the peninsula. Then there is the issue of infrastructure. Earlier this year the Department of Commerce announced that it was disposing of Frenchs Forest police station, which houses the highway patrol; Collaroy, which had been closed for 10 years; and Avalon, which has been unmanned for approximately eight years.

The proposed sale of the Avalon police station has caused considerable consternation and anger among Pittwater residents as it is seen as an abandonment of policing at the far northern end of the peninsula. I have had a number of meetings with ministerial officers, local area commanders and officers from the Government's assets section, and I have toured Mona Vale police station with a senior officer from that section and a representative of the Minister for Police to show them first-hand the poor condition of the station. It is worth noting that Mona Vale police station, although a 24-hour station, is manned by a single officer only. The premises are also used on a part-time basis for activities such as tactical response training and gun handling, and there is a large holding yard for vehicles, which includes a forensic investigation facility used for vehicles involved in accidents and needed to be held for evidence. In addition, there are facilities for the Broken Bay water police, who have an office at Church Point but require storage on the Mona Vale site.

I have put a proposal to the Minister's office that the highway patrol located at Frenchs Forest be relocated to Mona Vale, and the detectives and forensic unit at Dee Why be relocated to Mona Vale, thus freeing up valuable space in the overcrowded Dee Why station and increasing the viability of Mona Vale. There should also be a reallocation of uniformed resources from the combined Manly and northern beaches local area commands to provide a greater police presence in the northern beaches villages and more rapid response times at the northern end of the peninsula. A relocation of resources would service the rapidly growing Warriewood Valley, the new Ingleside land release announced last week by the Minister and the villages of Terrey Hills and Duffys Forest, easily accessible up Mona Vale Road.

Preliminary discussions with assets department officers and ministerial advisers indicate that the ample land size at Mona Vale would be sufficient to facilitate not just a new police station but a multifunctional police precinct. The community is also very much opposed to the sale of the Avalon station. As a north ward Pittwater councillor I initiated a rezoning application for it to be rezoned from Residential 2a to Essential Services, but the application was opposed by the police Minister. The community has identified the Avalon station site as being of immense value as there is no surplus government land in Avalon and a drastic shortage of community land and facilities. The community wants it retained in public ownership and for public use.

While the Government wants the site to be sold, it should be pointed out that the police Minister has never made a case for the closure and sale, nor the removal, of a permanent police station at the northern end of the peninsula. In summary, there is a need for a serious review of policing at the northern end of the northern beaches. The current resource allocation needs to be addressed, with serious consideration being given to a greater allocation to Pittwater. Serious consideration also needs to be given to the situation at Mona Vale, which cries out for an upgrade. I must acknowledge the support I have received from Superintendent Doreen Cruickshank, the local area commander, Inspector Dave Walton and the uniformed officers of the Northern Beaches Local Area Command.

NEW SOUTH WALES RAPE CRISIS CENTRE

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [5.47 p.m.]: Tonight I acknowledge the fantastic work and services undertaken by the staff at the New South Wales Rape Crisis Centre, which is located at Drummoyne. The New South Wales Rape Crisis is a statewide 24-hour telephone and online crisis, support and referral service for women who have experienced sexual violence. The centre is committed to upholding the rights of women to live in a socially just, equitable and non-violent society. Counsellors work in partnership with women to expand their choices, facilitate healing and encourage personal growth. The fundamental service principles on which the centre operates are that all forms of sexual violence are a crime, all women have the human right to live free of violence, sexual assault is an extreme act of violence, and perpetrators of sexual violence aim to terrorise, degrade and humiliate their victims and place themselves in a position of power and control.

The New South Wales Rape Crisis Centre was established in the early 1970s by a group of volunteer women. These women would travel all over Sydney to pick up women who had been sexually assaulted and bring them to the centre for counselling and medical help. In 1974 the Whitlam Government provided funding to the centre and workers were employed for the first time. The centre is now funded by the New South Wales Department of Health but remains a non-profit community group managed by a group of committed community women. I am also happy to note that, as part of the celebrations for International Women's Day 2006, I nominated Karen Willis, Manager of the New South Wales Rape Crisis Centre, for the award of New South Wales Woman of the Year for the electorate of Drummoyne in recognition of the wonderful work she undertakes.

The fact is that any woman can be raped, regardless of age, race, class, religion, occupation, education or physical ability. Rape is a violent assault that is acted out, in part, sexually. Through psychological, verbal and physical abuse, rape violates a woman's personal integrity and her sense of safety and control over her life. Most rapes occur at home. More often than not the offender is a relative, friend, neighbour or acquaintance. Most rapists look perfectly normal. They can be any age, race or colour, have any occupation and be from any socioeconomic class. Most victims of sexual assault are female, although Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show 17 per cent of rape victims are males, with over half of those being under 15 years of age. In 70 per cent of sexual assaults the rapist is well known to the victim.

The New South Wales Rape Crisis Centre responds to approximately 3,500 calls per annum. In 2005 9,465 sexual and indecent assaults were reported to New South Wales police. The Australian Bureau of Crime Statistics estimates 20 per cent of sexual assaults are reported. Females aged from four months to 92 years have been reported raped, which shows that rape is an act of violence that can happen at any time in a person's life. The Rape Crisis Centre works in partnerships and projects that have statewide benefits.

In December 2004, as a result of representations by New South Wales Rape Crisis Centre and Dr Anne Cossins from the Law Faculty of the University of New South Wales, the Attorney General, Bob Debus, established the Criminal Justice Sexual Offences Task Force. The task force met for 12 months and reported to the Attorney General in December 2005. The task force was charged to evaluate models for the prosecution of sexual assault offences, evaluate proposals for legislative and procedural change in sexual assault prosecutions in New South Wales and identify areas of possible reform in relation to the provision of services for sexual

assault victims. The New South Wales Rape Crisis Centre is also working in partnership with the New South Wales police force to enhance protocols such as management of complaints of sexual assault, training for frontline police, debriefing for police who have responded to a sexual complaint and sex crimes squad mentoring of local area command detectives.

The rape crisis online service was launched on the 19 December 2005. A \$10,000 grant was provided in 2005 by the State Government to assist in the establishment of the online service. Via the centre's website people can make one-to-one contact with a counsellor for information and basic support. This online service is also valuable in reaching out to our rural and remote women, who often do not have services close by. I extend my thanks to Minister Scully for personally attending the Rape Crisis Centre with me earlier this year to view the online service and I thank the staff of the centre for their dedication and service to the community. In market research to identify the viability of Rape Crisis on Line, one respondent said, "You can't cry and talk, but you can cry and type."

The sexual ethics project is a research project working to understand how young people make decisions about sexual intimacy and aims to encourage ethical sexual practices. By understanding how decisions about sex are made in one's youth, we can then work to encourage better practices. The New South Wales Rape Crisis Centre is working closely with the National Rugby League to encourage ethical sexual practices amongst players. This is the first time in Australia that a large male-dominated organisation has taken these steps and backed up its position with money and resources. There is still a long way to go, but it is a step in the right direction. I consider sexual assault of women as one of the most disgraceful crimes against women. I have extremely strong views on this issue. At least we are going in the right direction. I commend the work of the women of the New South Wales Rape Crisis Centre in helping women in the community.

NUNDLE COMMUNITY FIRST RESPONDERS PROGRAM

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [5.52 p.m.]: Tonight I wish to highlight an innovative program initiated in the electorate of Tamworth that will have positive implications for the wellbeing of residents in small communities across the State. In June I attended the graduation of five members of the Community First Responders Program of the State Emergency Service [SES] in Nundle, a rural village located approximately 70 kilometres to the east of Tamworth. The program is the first of its kind in New South Wales, and it trained members of the local SES to deliver pre-hospital care for emergency patients in areas which do not have ambulance stations. The importance of this initiative was reinforced by the attendance of State Emergency Service Director General Philip McNamara and New South Wales Ambulance Service General Manager of Operations Mike Willis at the graduation celebrations.

After undertaking a six-day training course run by the New South Wales Ambulance Service, the graduates obtained skills in advanced airway management, diagnosis and treatment of respiratory illnesses, and management of cardiac complaints, including early defibrillation and treatment of severe trauma. These skills are utilised to treat patients in the Nundle area until fully qualified ambulance officers arrive on the scene. The value of having SES members with such skills is very high for small communities like Nundle. The two areas of emergency response closest to Nundle are located at Tamworth and Quirindi. On average it takes 50 minutes for an ambulance crew to travel under lights to Nundle from Quirindi, and 70 minutes for a crew travelling from Tamworth.

The Community First Responders can be on the scene of an emergency in the local area from their headquarters within minutes. As most in the House would know, it is critical for an emergency patient to be treated as quickly as humanly possible. In emergency crew jargon, the first hour in which a patient is treated is referred to as "the golden hour". Emergency crews clearly view this period as crucial to the survival and recovery of the patient, so in the case of small communities it is vital that services are available to respond within that period. The Community First Responders provide such a service in the absence of a local ambulance service.

According to the SES regional controller for the north-west area, Peter Higgins, Nundle was chosen to host the pilot program because of its isolated geographic location, and the minimal emergency services located in the town. It was also in a unique position as the local SES volunteers have been operating in a similar medical response role for the past 18 years. Such is the success of the program that it is soon to be rolled out in other small communities across the State. Programs are being initiated in the villages of Sofala and Turon in the Central West, Goolgowrie in the Murrumbidgee and Captains Flat, which is south-east of Canberra. The

program is also earmarked for Tambar Springs, a village that will also be located in the electorate of Tamworth following the 2007 electorate boundary redistribution.

The graduates Joy Carr, Tony Taylor, Nathan Peacock, Craig Fleming and Charlie Adams are all residents of Nundle, and are wellknown in the local community. Tony Taylor has been a volunteer member of the SES in Nundle for the past 15 years and is also the supervisor at Nundle pool. He said the local branch of the SES has been working towards a program such as the Community First Responders for a number of years, and it is very exciting to be a part of the pilot program. Fellow Community First Responder Craig Fleming is also proud to be associated with the program. Craig is keen to see the program rolled out to other small communities across the State and hopes he and his fellow responders provide a positive example for other communities to follow. Coming from a nursing background, SES volunteer Joy Carr took to her new role as a Community First Responder with great vigour. Already serving a first aid role with the SES, Joy is appreciative of the commitment from the New South Wales Ambulance Service and the SES in training the responders, and for providing them with the necessary equipment to conduct their role.

I was honoured to be invited to attend the graduation ceremony for the five volunteers, and I congratulate each and every one of them for showing the initiative to help address an area of great need in their community. I commend the Community First Responders Program to other members of the House, and I am sure the Nundle volunteers will provide a positive example for other like-minded community members in New South Wales. Nundle is clearly a terrific small community with dedicated and talented people who are prepared to help others. We may well need these people more, unless the Government stops sitting on its hands and provides funds to replace the Nundle bridge. I have raised this issue with various roads Ministers, and I would warn Minister Roozendaal to expect me to be haunting his office until I get the right result.

Nundle is a major tourist destination, attracting a great many people to our entire district. It is under threat because of inaction by various levels of government, and the safety and wellbeing of the community is being compromised. It is under threat because of this disgraceful piece of very badly neglected infrastructure. Thank goodness for the Community First Responders, because that bridge is a disaster waiting to happen. I do not want the day to come when we have to call in our Community First Responders to avert a tragedy.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 5.57 p.m. until Tuesday 19 September 2006 at 2.15 p.m.
