

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 18 October 2007

The Speaker (The Hon. George Richard Torbay) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

CHANNEL 7 FORMER EPPING SITE PROTECTION BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 27 September 2007.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [10.00 a.m.]: On the last occasion I spoke about constituents who had written in response to submissions called for by the Department of Planning about the proposed Channel 7 redevelopment in Mobbs Lane and I said that a massive number of home units and other dwellings were going to be erected on what is largely open space at the present time. I emphasised the traffic problems this development would cause in the very narrow laneway with one lane each way for traffic in an area where considerable flooding had occurred when open space was likely to be aggravated by the erection of lots of buildings. These constituents were not criticising the council; they wanted the power to decide questions on development applications to be returned to Parramatta City Council, which would have approved the erection of a much smaller number of dwellings on this site.

One particular letter requested that Mr Tink introduce a private member's bill, which he did, and I now have reintroduced such a bill. Mr Tink received other letters from constituents reflecting the types of comments of a large number of individual representations, which numbered about 100. Most of the letters were original, not photocopies. In a letter dated 8 August 2006 addressed to the Minister but sent care of Mr Tink, who passed it to me, N. and A. Cartwright said:

I feel quite strongly that the approval power has been taken away from our local Parramatta City Council into your department's hands.

Our local council knows our area and because the Councillors live locally they voice the residents' opinions. They have our interests and what is best for our area at heart. Do you?

That question was directed at the Minister. The letter continued:

How long have you lived in the area, Mr Sartor? I do not believe that you ever have! You cannot be an expert on everything—leave local Councils to deal with proposed developments in the area. They know the local area best.

The Minister visited the Epping electorate a week or so ago, but not to look at the Channel 7 site or the problems being caused by the development—I do not believe he has ever been there—nor to look at the Office Works site on Pennant Hills Road, which is a planning fiasco because a private certifier has gone berserk and that development project is gravely encroaching on residential land. The Minister did not visit Epping to look at the site about which we have raised problems, but to steal the thunder from me, the member for Epping, after I had persuaded the Chamber of Commerce and others at a meeting several months ago about the way to achieve a unified town centre in Epping.

Epping is under the control of two councils, Parramatta and Hornsby, both of which have different planning attitudes to the town. I had persuaded the Chamber of Commerce that it would be best to have a united body, perhaps even along the lines of a county council, for the betterment of development and planning in Epping. What happened? At Maxine McKew's behest the Minister was invited to address the Chamber of Commerce. Of course, I was not invited, which appears to be the customary practice. The Minister proposed all sorts of suggestions and reckoned that he was going to fix everything for the Epping town centre. No doubt that is likely to mean there will be high-rise development on both sides of the railway line casting great shadows over the beautiful parks and gardens where people like to walk—but the developers will be happy. Unfortunately, that is the image of this Government in my area, where it takes over by plonking down some development that it wants and ignoring the comfort of residents.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: In my area too.

Mr GREG SMITH: It is widespread in this State. That is one of the reasons we need the Coalition to stay in power at least in Canberra. In a letter dated 7 August, again addressed to the Minister but sent care of Mr Tink, Mr Eric Bentley said:

Our Council, consisting of local representatives, is in the best position to judge the appropriate level of development on the site and will involve the local community in its deliberations.

It is my view that the current development proposal before you for this site is a gross overdevelopment for the following reasons:

1. Density of units too many and far in excess of Council's planning controls.
2. Height too high and out of character with the surrounding area.

The surrounding areas comprise mainly single-storey dwellings and some of the proposed unit complexes will be four storeys. Mr Bentley continued:

3. Traffic chaos in neighbouring streets never designed to take the levels of traffic predicted to be generated by the development.

Shortly before Mr Tink spoke in this House on 31 August last year, he received an email from Darryl Lance of the Loftus Square Park Committee in Epping, which stated:

We have heard from our Councillors that Mr Sartor has control over this development and that no consultation will be had. If that is the case it is a travesty. What right does Mr Sartor think he has to take control of something that should be under our Council's jurisdiction?

We elected our very capable councillors—

Many of them are Labor members—

and demand that they are allowed to do what they were elected for, look after our interests.

Mr Tink received a large number of high-quality representations from constituents who have considered this matter carefully and are disturbed about it. He sent those representations to the Minister as he received them. He was more than a little irritated that after receiving the letter from the Parliamentary Secretary on 6 January 2006 he did not officially hear anything further, except a repeat of the contents of that letter. Indeed, rather than being given the courtesy of advice from the Minister, he had to read in the local paper that apparently the Minister for Planning had made a decision to declare this land of State significance under part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. The article appeared to suggest that the Minister's decision had been gazetted on or about 16 August 2006.

Not only were constituents, Parramatta City Council and Mr Tink ignored, but also they were not even paid the elementary courtesy of being told the Minister had made a decision. They had to read about it in the local paper. That is typical of the arrogance of the Iemma Government and the Minister for Planning. The Premier needs to look out for the Minister for Planning: Across the State people have had just about enough of not being given the courtesy of being told when a decision was made affecting their areas. Parramatta City Council reflects the views of the major political parties to varying degrees. For many years the council has returned a Labor administration. I do not always see eye to eye with councils of that persuasion and others—neither did Mr Tink—but as far as Mr Tink and I could tell, Parramatta council appears to always try to do the right thing in exercising its powers to assess development applications. Some councils struggle to do that; some councils simply struggle to exist.

Parramatta City Council still has under its control one of the largest central business districts in Australia. It assesses some of the most complex development applications to come before any council anywhere in Australia. As far as I can tell, the council has always conducted itself in a reasonable and professional manner. It is eminently capable of carrying out all the assessments required for the Channel 7 Epping site. There was no reason whatsoever to take away the council's powers over this site. The Minister could have said he had identified certain problems with the council and he could have attempted to make a case that he did not believe the council was capable of determining this development application.

The Minister has not made out such a case, nor has he claimed to do so. I do not believe there is any evidence that would justify the Minister making out such a case. There is no basis for the department taking

over planning in this area. I invite the Minister or his department to itemise and particularise where Parramatta City Council has fallen short to justify the Minister taking this step. What elements, allegations or issues go to Parramatta City Council being considered incompetent, apparently in the Minister's eyes, or unable to properly consider this development application? The council may have approved a far smaller number of dwellings, which would have meant far less return from the development. Channel 7 may have stayed at its former site or may have moved to a location other than the Eveleigh centre, giving the Government, of course, great benefit from the 11-storey office block development.

The Government, in its contribution to debate on this bill, will have to give a pretty good answer to my question. I suspect it will oppose and reject the bill. If it does, the least the Government can do is identify where Parramatta City Council has fallen short in this matter. I do not believe the Government can demonstrate that. If it cannot, why is the Minister taking the power away from the council? On what basis can the Minister justify stripping a council of its power to consider a development application, in the absence of any evidence that the council is incapable of properly undertaking this task?

Parramatta City Council has considered the most extraordinarily complex applications, particularly relating to the Parramatta central business district, which is one of the major growth central business districts in Australia. Like Mr Tink, I have never heard it said that there has been a problem with the council considering such applications. I ask the Minister to provide evidence to warrant his intervention. If a Minister of the Crown in this State were trying to settle upon an outcome that was acceptable to the public, balancing local public interests with developer interests, Parramatta City Council would be the way to go. The Minister cannot possibly assess local concerns from an office in the Sydney central business district, or wherever he is located. That task is, and always has been, best done through local councils and local councillors who are in a unique position to do so. Councillors are both elected representatives and people who exercise considerable executive authority when ultimately voting on these sorts of issues. One of the councillors and former lord mayor of Parramatta is a member of Parliament on the Government side. Why is he not capable of acting in a proper way on Parramatta council to decide on this issue? I ask the Minister for the third and final time to justify his refusal to allow Parramatta City Council to determine this matter. If he cannot, he should withdraw the part 3 order.

As we have seen in recent times in the case of *Gray v The Minister for Planning*, the Minister and his department make mistakes. In that case the Land and Environment Court granted a declaration to the applicant, an environmental group, "that the Director General's view that an environmental assessment prepared by a particular company in respect to the Anvil Hill project adequately addressed the Director General's environmental assessment requirements was void and without effect." The department makes mistakes. The trouble is that apart from environmental groups and developers affected by a decision, people do not have the money to go to court and take on the Minister. He is likely to try to bankrupt them and take them to the High Court.

[*Business interrupted.*]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): I would like to welcome to the Parliament His Eminence Cardinal George Pell, His Excellency Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko, His Excellency Bishop Josef Clemens, Dr Marcello Bedeschi, Monsignor Francis Kohn, Ms Elizabeth Hawkins, His Grace Bishop Anthony Fisher, Danny Casey, Kathy Campbell, Gerry Brus and Chris Bastic.

CHANNEL 7 FORMER EPPING SITE PROTECTION BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

[*Business resumed.*]

Mr GREG SMITH: It is a great honour to be giving a homily in their presence.

Mr Gerard Martin: You had better raise your standard.

Mr GREG SMITH: Despite the chirping from the other side, there is no doubt on the merits of this issue, and on the basis of equity and justice the Epping electorate deserves a break from the Minister, and Parliament should pass this legislation.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Joseph Tripodi and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

ANIMALS (REGULATION OF SALE) BILL 2007

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Clover Moore.

Agreement in Principle

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [10.15 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

Abraham Lincoln said:

I am in favour of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being.

I follow that quotation by Abraham Lincoln with the following facts. Australia has the highest rate of pet ownership in the world. Yet the most recent statistics of the Department of Local Government show that more than 60,000 dogs and cats are killed each year in New South Wales alone. Those numbers do not include animals dumped in national parks where domestic animals die of starvation, are killed by other animals or harm the natural ecosystem. If we want to consider ourselves as a humane society we must take action to prevent the cruel dumping and killing of so many companion animals. That is the basis of the bill I introduce to the House today. I repeat: Australia has the highest rate of pet ownership in the world. Four out of five Australians have owned a pet and almost two-thirds of Australian households currently own pets.

In New South Wales there are about two million companion animals. Pets play an incredibly important role in our society. They give pleasure and teach responsibility. For many people who live on their own pets provide love and security. A recent RSPCA survey demonstrated the degree of emotional attachment to pets by a high percentage of pet owners saying they would choose their pets' company over that of friends or flatmates. Yet there is a disturbing aspect to pet ownership.

In 2005-06 the New South Wales RSPCA received more than 38,000 dogs and cats at its shelters, 18,000 of which had to be killed. As I said, the most recent statistics of the Department of Local Government show that 60,000 dogs and cats are killed each year in New South Wales—a number that equates with the population of a medium-size town. This number does not include other animals such as rabbits, mice and guinea pigs that are put down, nor does it include animals that are dumped in national parks where domestic animals die of starvation or cause harm to our natural ecosystem. If we want to be considered as a humane society we must take action.

A campaign to prevent the sale of animals in pet shops has been initiated by the Say No to Animals in Pet Shops organisation. This body claims there is a link between pet shops and the enormous number of animals killed every year at pounds and shelters. Its claim is supported by other animal welfare and advocate groups and has wide community support. That is because pet shops promote impulse buying and irresponsible breeding for profit. Pet shops create a demand for animals that can only be met by unscrupulous breeders and puppy farms that continue to produce more animals, despite the already oversupply. The Say No to Animals in Pet Shops organisation has collected 5,000 signatures on petitions and my office has received a great deal of phone calls and correspondence on this issue.

The Animals (Regulation of Sale) Bill will protect the lives and wellbeing of dogs, cats and other mammals by prohibiting their sale in pet shops, fairs and markets. It will prevent the impulse purchasing of mammals by restricting sales to registered breeders, pounds, animal shelters and veterinarians where animals will be appropriately matched with buyers, who will be informed about special needs and requirements. Mammals will only be able to be kept at shops or markets and offered for sale if they are kept on behalf of animal shelters and returned to the shelter at night. Mammals cannot be sold at shops or markets. Instead, prospective buyers will be required to attend an animal shelter to make a purchase. This will allow the RSPCA to participate in the Road to Home Program, which increased the recovery and re-homing of abandoned pets in Queensland by 40 per cent.

The bill will make it difficult for the industry to shift to other outlets by preventing the advertising of sale of mammals through printed and electronic material. It will ensure that the pet shop cannot advertise to act as an intermediary for the sale of the mammal unless the animal is at an animal shelter or council pound. The bill does not restrict shops from selling other animals, such as birds or fish, or from selling pet foods and accessories. There are approximately 300 pet shops in New South Wales. Only recently in Australia have pet

shops become major suppliers of companion animals to the public. Previously animals were generally acquired either from breeders or, more commonly, from surplus litters in informal networks.

Pet shops are now part of a large commercial industry that supplies a range of animals. Pet shops can sell a puppy for \$550 or \$600 and make 100 per cent profit, according to industry representatives. Designer puppies or hybrid breeds can sell for as much as \$1,000. Like any commercial enterprise, pet shops exist to make profits. Site location and shrewd marketing are as essential to a pet shop as they are to any other retail business. I cite a pet shop guide produced by the Entrepreneur Business Centre:

The scenario is simple: Someone will walk by, fall in love with an animal and buy it. These sorts of impulse sales can add dramatically to your profits.

First-time browsers in a pet shop will not necessarily jump at the thought of spending \$450 to \$500 to bring a dog home ... However, if your shop is accessible and your sales and service ability is convincing, it will not be long before you convert walk-in traffic into buying customers.

In other words, to maximise their profits, pet shops must encourage potential purchasers through clever marketing of their most appealing products. Puppies and kittens in prominent window displays are especially conducive to impulse buying.

Impulse buying is acceptable for handbags or shoes, but pet shops sell live sentient beings, such as puppies and kittens, which need ongoing care and attention. Unlike most animal shelters, pet shops do not ensure there is a suitable match between animal and purchaser. An inappropriate choice of an animal can result in neglect of the animal. A small cute puppy in a pet shop may develop unanticipated and undesirable behavioural problems as an adult and that can lead to its being dumped. A person who buys a puppy or a kitten on impulse may not be aware of the considerable responsibilities of owning an adult dog or cat. The cost of desexing, annual immunisation, veterinary checks and food can be considerable unanticipated financial burdens for the purchaser, who may also be unaware of the time and effort involved in walking and grooming a dog.

The bill bans the sale of mammals to persons under the age of 16 in line with the recent changes to the United Kingdom Animal Welfare Act. Persons under the age of 16 are unable to understand the responsibilities of owning a pet and purchases could lead to parents abandoning the animal if they are not in a position to take on the new responsibilities. The Pet Industry Association of Australia has a national code of practice based on the Department of Agriculture's code of practice for animals in pet shops. However, it is voluntary. It covers animal housing, care and management, including written information for the purchaser. The seven-day health warranty is encouraged, but there is no provision for returning the animal because of behavioural problems. Even this inadequate warranty is ignored by at least one major chain of pet shops.

Animal behaviourists claim that a pet shop is an inherently stressful environment for an animal. This is because the animal is often too young to be taken away from its mother and is subject to constant handling and lack of quiet times. Animal behaviourists say that this can lead to depressed immune systems and illness. The RSPCA, the Animal Welfare League of New South Wales and the police all have power under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979 to oversee the health and welfare of animals in pet shops, yet the basic standards set by the code of practice are not adhered to by many pet shops. My office receives countless phone calls, letters and emails from people who are distressed about the treatment of animals in pet shops.

The pet industry's national code of practice sets a minimum age of puppies and kittens for sale at eight weeks with some exceptions. It recommends that pet shops advise the purchaser about the advisability of desexing both male and female dogs and cats. Advice from veterinarians is that both dogs and cats can be desexed at eight weeks, although it is not always desirable. Prepaid vouchers to be used when the animal is more mature are used by some animal rescue groups, but rarely by pet shops. The onus is on the purchaser and the community to bear either the financial cost of desexing or the implication of litters. I point out to the House that an un-desexed female cat and her offspring can produce 420,000 cats in seven years.

The sale of mice in pet shops is also a serious problem when some pet shops do not separate male and female mice, and some mice may be pregnant when they are purchased. The quick succession of multiple litters can be dealt with by the purchaser either by killing them or dumping them in the bush or at an animal welfare organisation, or by taking them to animal advocacy groups that either kill them or, very rarely, re-home them. Litters of mice are detrimental to the environment when dumped in either urban or bush environments, and killing them is inherently cruel and unnecessary.

One of the most disturbing issues in relation to pet shops is the lack of regulation with regard to the source of the animals for sale. Animals may come from unregistered backyard breeders, puppy farms or other

pet owners. Purchasers have no guarantee of the pet's genetic history, past treatment or possible behaviour problems. Unregistered backyard breeders and puppy farms breed dogs and cats in large numbers to be delivered to the lucrative pet shop market. They sell animals without identification or microchip and without screening the new owner. Animal advocates allege there are numerous puppy farms in New South Wales where animals are kept in shocking conditions, bred continuously and housed in inhumane conditions, and when they are no longer able to breed, they are killed. Their offspring have little or no contact with either humans or other animals of the same breed.

Say No to Animals in Pet Shops has provided evidence of these puppy farms on its website. As well as the cruelty involved in this form of breeding, animal behaviourists maintain that it can lead to future health and behavioural problems for the animal: it may be unable to socialise properly with a family or it may have problems with other dogs. The result is that the animal may be dumped or surrendered to a pound or shelter where it will be killed. Only a very small percentage of these animals will be re-homed. The Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals published information in one of its magazines and ran a television commercial about puppy farms. They received approximately 1,200 phone calls from people who suspected that there might be a puppy farm in their neighbourhood. Following up every call found that 70 per cent were puppy farms and 18 per cent were unregistered backyard breeders.

The situation in New South Wales is probably similar. There is no reason to suggest otherwise. Animal advocates claim that the organisations given power under the New South Wales Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act do not have the resources to monitor such an extensive underground industry. Even if the numbers were small, a civil society would act to prevent this cruelty and reduce the number of unwanted animals that are killed or die of starvation or disease. It is a sobering fact that the average lifespan of a dog in Australia is two years. Pet shops create a demand for animals. The more companion animals sold through pet shops, the greater is the demand from puppy farms and backyard breeders. Animals must not be bred solely for profit. The tragic implication of the oversupply of dogs and cats in New South Wales must be stopped.

This bill will reduce the oversupply of mammals. It will immediately remove the lucrative market. It will ensure that a person wishing to acquire a cat, a dog or a mammal will have to go to a registered breeder, and/or a pound or a shelter. Debate last year in the United Kingdom Parliament's House of Commons on the Animal Welfare Bill involved an amendment to ban the sale of dogs in pet shops. The Government in reply acknowledged the problems associated with pet shops selling pets and said that the Parliament would consider a ban on the sale of all animals in pet shops when developing regulations. Regulations could also introduce mandatory codes of practice for pet shops and other practices to discourage impulse buying.

Austria has introduced legislation. Belgium and Croatia recently introduced legislation and many pet shops in America re-home animals only from shelters. It can be done here. Many pet shops run profitable businesses selling pet food and accessories. I do not claim that this bill will stop backyard breeders or completely transform the ways that society treats companion animals. However, if people have to consider the real consequences of owning and caring for a pet, the shocking oversupply of dogs and cats may be reduced. As a civil, just and humane society, we must take action to stop the cruel dumping and killing of companion animals.

I note that the following organisations support this bill: the RSPCA, Animal Liberation, Young Lawyers Animal Rights Committee, Saying No to Animals in Pet Shops, World League for the Protection of Animals, Dogs New South Wales, the American Staffordshire Club of New South Wales, Doggie Rescue, the Cat Protection Society and the Humane Society International. I commend this bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Joseph Tripodi and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

ROADS AMENDMENT (LANE COVE TUNNEL FILTRATION) BILL 2007

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Anthony Roberts.

Agreement in Principle

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove) [10.28 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

It is with great deal of pride that I introduce this bill on behalf of my community. The bill is long overdue. The object of the bill is to require pollution filtration equipment to be installed and maintained that will remove particulate matter and toxic gases from the air in the Lane Cove Tunnel and from the air exiting the tunnel. Clause 1 sets out the amendment. Clause 2 provides for the commencement of the proposed Act on the date of assent to the proposed Act. Clause 3 is a formal provision that gives effect to the amendment to the Roads Act 1993 set out in schedule 1. Clause 4 provides for the repeal of the proposed Act after the amendment made by the proposed Act has commenced. Once the amendment has commenced the proposed Act will be spent and section 30 of the Interpretation Act 1987 provides that the repeal of an amending Act does not affect the amendments made by that Act. Schedule 1 inserts proposed section 161A into the Roads Act 1993 to give effect to the object of the bill. The schedule states:

Insert after section 161:

161A RTA to reduce road tunnel air pollution

- (1) Immediately after the commencement of this section, the RTA must install filtration equipment that removes particulate matter and toxic gases from air in the Lane Cove Tunnel and air exiting the tunnel.
- (2) The RTA must maintain the filtration equipment after its installation.
- (3) without limiting the generality of subsections (1) and (2), the RTA must, in complying with those subsections, ensure that the concentration of particulate matter leaving the Lane Cove Tunnel (through the stacks or portals) does not exceed the average daily ambient background concentration of particulate matter for that area (as determined by the relevant air quality standards), except where air quality in the area is affected by a bush fire.
- (4) Any money needed to allow the RTA to exercise its functions under this section is to be provided out of money to be appropriated by Parliament or that is otherwise legally available.

Pursuant to standing orders business interrupted and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

RURAL COMMUNITIES IMPACTS BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 27 September 2007.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [10.30 a.m.]: I support the Rural Communities Impacts Bill 2007. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Leader of The Nationals on bringing the plight of country people again before the Parliament and on behalf of rural communities I thank him for introducing this bill. The object of the bill is to require Ministers to consider the likely impact of certain legislation and other Government proposals on rural communities. That is very, very important to people. Clause 3 of part 1 of the preliminary section of the bill sets out the scope of the proposed Act by defining "rural community" as being part of the State that is outside Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. I have never seen that put in writing but there it is. I do not know what part of the State the rest of us are in.

Mr Gerard Martin: You're about 20 years behind, Thomas.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: Yes, I know that. But it is good to see that finally we are trying to do something for country people. Over the past three or four sessions of this Parliament much has been said to highlight the concerns country and regional people face following everyday decisions made by this Government. Unfortunately, I do not have 24 hours to speak on these issues, although I could go on forever. The Government closed the Casino to Murwillumbah rail link, which took away the independence of many people who needed transport along that rail link. Buses have replaced the train services, but the change has had an impact on older people. They have to climb aboard a bus, unload their own luggage when they get to Casino and put it on the train. It is obvious what people think of that service now: patronage has dropped right off because the changes have created problems for many people, who now make alternative travel arrangements.

Also, the North Coast Area Health Service decided to close the rehabilitation unit at Lismore. A few beds were left in Lismore but the unit was shifted to Ballina. The rehabilitation unit at Lismore was servicing about 67 per cent of people, who were closer to the unit at Lismore than Ballina. It does not sound like such a big move to go from Lismore to Ballina—20 minutes away—but there are many people who depend on the rehabilitation unit who live west of Lismore. It is not just about the 20 or 30 minutes it takes people to get from Lismore to Ballina; it is also about the hour or hour and a half that people have to travel from Woodenbong, Urbenville, Bonalbo, Drake, Tabulam—and two and a half hours from Tenterfield—to get to Lismore, and then another half an hour to get to Ballina. That is the sort of inconvenience caused to the community at large by shifting the rehabilitation unit from Lismore to Ballina.

I know that a number of people do not have access to public transport to get to Ballina and they cannot get to the unit to see their loved ones, their family or their friends. Visits from family and friends are a very important part of rehabilitation. This issue is very close to my heart because I have had family members go through the rehabilitation unit. I commend the people who work at those rehabilitation units for doing such a fantastic job. To create extra anxiety for families in this situation is a disgrace. The impact the change has had on rural communities leaves much to be desired.

Back in 2005 this Government asked a former member of this House, the Hon Garry West, to head up an inquiry into tick fever in the cattle industry. Here we are at the end of 2007 and we still have not had an inquiry. Yes, the Government has started to act—it has disbanded the board—but what has it replaced it with? The cattle industry is suffering as a result of the inaction of this Government in relation to tick fever outbreaks. Also, communities have been hamstrung: people cannot take their horses from one paddock to another because of equine influenza. It is a very important time of the year in the cattle industry because the cows are calving, yet some producers cannot take their horse up the road to another paddock. We have a problem at this time of the year with dog tick and we are losing calves. As well, heifers are calving but they have no-one checking them.

Someone suggested that farmers should use motorbikes to check the cattle. Anyone who has been involved with the cattle industry knows that if someone takes a motorbike into a paddock of cattle that have never been mustered by motorbike and that are only used to seeing horses and dogs it certainly creates chaos. Again, the Government is not rushing to solve these problems, and the impact on our rural communities just goes on and on.

Coming back to health, country towns such as Bonalbo, Urbenville, Kyogle and Nimbin, have had hospital services transferred to Lismore. At Tweed there is the threat of services being transferred to Murwillumbah. Services are being transferred to major hospitals that cannot meet current needs. To top it off the Government is attacking older drivers and seeking to restrict them to driving a distance of only 10 kilometres. A 10-kilometre trip would not get some of my constituents out of their front gate! It is assumed that all my constituents live in the city of Lismore, but some of them must drive for 2½ hours to visit their doctor or three hours to see a specialist—and the Lismore electorate is perceived to be coastal. If older people cannot drive more than 10 kilometres they will be unable to visit their friends in hospital or see their doctor, let alone do their shopping. The Government continues to make decisions on the run without considering their impact on rural communities. I congratulate the Leader of The Nationals on introducing this important bill, which I support fully.

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [10.41 a.m.]: I also support the Rural Communities Impacts Bill. I supported the very same legislation in the previous Parliament and was disappointed when it was voted down. I represent a rural constituency and I know only too well that decisions made in Parliament based in Macquarie Street can often overlook the needs of residents in regional and rural areas. Such decisions often have perhaps unintended adverse effects and must be reversed. This could be avoided if the Government took more care when drafting legislation by identifying the needs of rural residents and considering the likely impact of its decisions upon them.

The object of the bill is to require Ministers to consider the likely impact of certain legislation and other government proposals on rural communities. It is interesting to note that the bill clearly defines the rural community as being that part of the State outside Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong metropolitan areas. That is significant because for too long country residents have always considered the abbreviation "NSW" as standing for those major cities and the conurbation that extends north and south from Sydney. The population of the State is 6.5 million and 4.1 million people reside in the greater Sydney area. However, when making decisions in this place the Government must consider the needs of the remainder, who live in areas that are the breadbasket and the powerhouse of New South Wales. The bill provides:

... that a Minister or Government Member who intends to introduce a Bill into Parliament must ensure, before that Bill is considered by the Cabinet, that a rural communities impact statement has been prepared which provides information about the likely impact of the proposed Act on the rural community and that the Minister or Member has given consideration to that likely impact.

In my brief contribution today I will highlight some recent examples that prove that the Government has yet to appreciate why this bill should be passed. The Premier referred recently to introducing family-friendly sitting hours in this place and made the point that it would allow members to return more easily to their families and constituents in the evenings. I have news for the Premier. It is a six-hour drive to the city of Albury, which is

located on the Murray River, and it would take my colleague the member for Lismore even longer to return to his electorate. There are of course no flights late at night. That statement indicates clearly that the Premier has no idea about the importance of this bill.

Parliament recently passed legislation extending the period of daylight saving. Was there any consultation about that change? There was certainly none in my electorate of Albury. During the Henty Machinery Field Days—which are an institution in our part of the world—people described to me how the extension of daylight saving would impact adversely on their lives. They explained how they would have to rise in the dark every morning—it is darker later as Albury is west of the Great Divide—and children spend an hour on buses in the early morning darkness and then endure the heat late into the afternoon and evening. I appreciate that we require uniformity in legislation but this Government does not consult with, or consider the needs of, all New South Wales residents. That is why this bill is so necessary.

I will give another example. In the past the water tank rebate was available only to those in the cities that I mentioned earlier—Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong—because of the drought affecting Sydney, the Hunter and the Illawarra. The Government took no account of the desperate need to retain water in rural areas. By introducing that rebate for city areas—where, incidentally, rainfall is higher than in inland New South Wales—the Government failed to recognise the needs of country residents. Of course all residents of New South Wales should benefit from that rebate.

Other strange anomalies could be avoided if this bill were passed. The Government made much of its introduction of the salt interception scheme in my region. The scheme worked and the money was spent wisely. But the Government then discovered that the funding had run out so the scheme ended. That decision impacted on farmers downstream who had come to rely on clean, desalinated water. The Government's failure to prepare rural communities impact statements is impacting adversely on people in rural areas. I ask the House to support the Rural Communities Impacts Bill for the benefit of the more than two million people in rural and regional New South Wales.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [10.47 a.m.], in reply: I reinforce the need to pass the Rural Communities Impacts Bill. In 1996 the then Premier Bob Carr promised the people of New South Wales, particularly country New South Wales, that rural communities impact statements would be prepared before the Cabinet and Government took important decisions that had consequences for country communities. Since then the Carr and Iemma Labor governments have taken numerous decisions that have had a devastating impact on country New South Wales. I will mention just a few of them. The first is the conversion of productive forestry land into national parks. I instance the Brigalow Belt South Bioregion, the purchase of Yanga Station and the conversion of many State forest areas on the north and south coasts—the hardwood forests—and red gum forests in the State's south into national parks. These were sustainable forestry areas, where environmental and economic considerations coexisted. However, the Government, in pursuit of Green preferences, closed virtually entire timber communities across the State.

The Government has closed 4 of the 15 grain rail lines in country New South Wales. This decision has had major consequences. The price of grain freight has increased, the volume of traffic on roads has increased and the cost for local councils has increased also. The Government's closure of the Casino to Murwillumbah passenger line, which the member for Lismore mentioned, has had massive consequences for a community that already has too few public transport options. The Department of Agriculture has been attacked: it will be rolled into the Department of Primary Industries. The closure of agriculture research stations and the cuts to the department's budget have had a massive impact on support for farming in this State and therefore on local economies. The Productivity Commission has demonstrated that the Native Vegetation Act has had a massive impact on farmers' incomes and the value of their properties.

The Threatened Species Conservation Act has had a similar impact. In addition, this Government has closed 32 of the State's 67 small maternity wards in rural areas. Expectant mothers are forced to travel long distances—for up to three hours in some instances—to have their babies, and tragedies have occurred as a result. The Government has also dramatically cut the area health service regime. As a result, agencies such as the Greater Western Area Health Service now cater to areas larger than Germany, which, again, has a negative impact. People in the Hunter-New England area have been denied access to health service management because it is now located in Newcastle.

More recent decisions made by this Government demonstrate that rural communities impact statements have not been prepared. TAFE fees have increased by 9 per cent—which is 6.5 per cent greater than the CPI

increase—which has had a massive impact on country communities. Many residents of country communities do not have access to universities or other forms of higher education, so TAFE is crucial to them. The member for Lismore mentioned older drivers and the nonsensical 10-kilometre driving limit. On many properties in the far west the front gate or the neighbour's property is much more than 10 kilometres away. That proposal is yet another demonstration that this Government is not considering rural communities.

The member for Albury mentioned the extension of daylight saving. There has been no consultation about that proposal, and the impact on western communities—the communities at the margin—would be considerable. The scandal being played out about public health in New South Wales has revealed that this Government has closed accommodation provided for patients and their families travelling from country areas to Royal North Shore Hospital or Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Those people must now jump on a bus and go down the road to a motel. When did this Government consider the impact on country people who are forced to travel away from home and family because of illness requiring attendance at a major Sydney hospital? Being virtually cast to the wind and having to make their own accommodation arrangements is causing more problems for these already stressed people. This Government's reputation as the most Sydney-centric government in the history of New South Wales is well deserved on the back of that raft of anti-country decisions.

A couple of weeks ago the Premier and the Minister for Roads announced that \$7 billion would be spent on more road works in Sydney. That is in addition to the work on the Lane Cove Tunnel, the Cross City Tunnel, the M7, the western Sydney orbital and so on. There are plenty of road works in Sydney, but this Government is dragging the chain on the Pacific Highway and people are being killed. Banora Point and Sextons Hill—which are in the electorate of the member for Tweed—are the most dangerous spots on any road in New South Wales but this Government still has not repaired them. The Bells Line Expressway has been proposed to provide a decent, safe route to the food bowl of the Central West, but this Government refuses to fund it. Despite the fact that it is a State road, the Commonwealth Government has stepped in to fund the studies required for the project to be undertaken. The Princes Highway to the South Coast is another case in point.

This Government has only one Cabinet member who genuinely hails from outside its version of "NSW"—Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. I refer to the Hon. Tony Kelly, who is from Wellington. He is not a bad fellow, but his colleagues are going to bump him out of the Parliament next year and bring in the Premier's chief of staff, disgraced former Queensland member of Parliament Mike Kaiser. He will hardly go in to bat for country communities. This is a Sydney-centric Government and it needs help to consider the impact of its decisions on country New South Wales. Although "NSW" might stand for Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong for the Labor Party; for The Nationals it stands for North Coast, South Coast and west of the Divide. That is what this bill is all about.

Most country-based members have made a contribution to this debate. I thank the members for Hawkesbury, Burrinjuck, Monaro, Bega, Port Stephens, Tamworth, Dubbo, Murray-Darling, Barwon, Bathurst, Ballina, Lismore and Albury. They offered almost unanimous support for the bill. I say "almost" because two of them have let the side down and effectively betrayed country people and the people they represent. I refer to the member for Bathurst and the member for Monaro.

Mr Thomas George: Country Labor!

Mr ANDREW STONER: They are the two so-called country members in this place. Two Country Labor members departed at the last election because this Government continues to ignore country people. The two remaining will soon be heading in the same direction if they do not support this bill. I know that they risk disendorsement if they cross the floor, but is it not more important to be able to look at themselves in the mirror or to sleep well at night? I suggest that the members for Bathurst and Monaro buck the system and the Labor Party and support their country brethren—the Independents, The Nationals and the Liberals. After all, this bill is simply a codification of Bob Carr's 1996 promise. It is necessary to force State governments of either persuasion to consider the interests of country New South Wales. The concept of the bill is simple: it will ensure that impact statements are prepared. It represents democracy in action and it will also ensure that State governments govern for the entire State. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 39

Mr Aplin	Mr Humphries	Mr Smith
Mr Baird	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Mr Baumann	Mr Merton	Mr Stokes
Ms Berejiklian	Ms Moore	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Oakeshott	Mr Torbay
Mr Constance	Mr O'Dea	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr Page	Mr J. D. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Piccoli	Mr R. C. Williams
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Provest	
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	Mr George
Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner	Mr Maguire

Noes, 42

Mr Amery	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Ms Andrews	Ms Hornery	Mrs Perry
Mr Aquilina	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Mr Brown	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Shearan
Ms Burton	Mr Koperberg	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr McBride	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Dr McDonald	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Ms McKay	Mr West
Mr Costa	Mr McLeay	Mr Whan
Mr Daley	Ms McMahan	
Ms Firth	Ms Meagher	
Mr Greene	Ms Megarrity	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Harris	Mr Morris	Mr Ashton
Ms Hay	Mrs Paluzzano	Mr Martin

Pair

Mr Fraser

Ms Keneally

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****Bill not agreed to in principle.****GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY CONTROL BILL 2007****Agreement in Principle****Debate resumed from 7 June 2007.**

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.07 a.m.]: If there were any need for this bill the Auditor-General would have recommended it in his recent report into government advertising. In contrast to the Federal Government's party-political use of taxpayer-funded advertising to promote WorkChoices, the Auditor-General recently found the New South Wales Government has introduced greater rigour into the process of approving government advertising. To quote the Auditor-General:

The Government has improved guidance for agencies and introduced a more robust framework for approving advertising campaigns.

Greater rigour has been introduced into the process by requiring campaigns to be peer reviewed and approved by Cabinet.

The Opposition has introduced a bill that is almost identical to one introduced into the Federal Parliament by the Democrats and opposed by John Howard. A number of bodies have discussed the subject of political advertisement at length over the years. The Howard Government's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters found the type of legislation proposed by the Opposition would be unwise and unworkable. If the Opposition had bothered to do any research on this issue, it would know that a large part of the advertising expenditure for 2006-07 was on important but routine government business. I am advised that \$30 million was spent on such things as the recruitment of nurses, teachers and police, as well as tender advertisements and public notices.

On advertising campaigns, I am advised that the government agency with the largest expenditure was the Cancer Institute of New South Wales, which spent \$13 million in 2006-07 on important campaigns such as breast cancer awareness and encouraging people to quit smoking. The breast cancer awareness campaign has contributed to a record 400,000 women in New South Wales having regular mammograms. The Auditor-General has specifically acknowledged the success of the Quitline program, which resulted in 48,000 calls last year—well over double the number of calls received in the previous year. I am advised that New South Wales now has one of the lowest rates of smoking in the developed world.

The second biggest spending government agency was the Roads and Traffic Authority, with its important road safety awareness campaigns, which have contributed to the lowest road toll in New South Wales since the Second World War. Another example is Sydney Water's water conservation campaigns, run in response to the drought. I am advised that these have contributed to Sydney homes using the same amount of water now as they did in 1974, despite an extra one million people living in the city. This is a remarkable achievement, of which the people of Sydney should be proud. Other advertisements saw public transport patronage increase and police recruit numbers surge. Which of these advertisements would the Opposition not have run?

These are legitimate public awareness campaigns with clear benefits for the people of New South Wales. The Auditor-General found that New South Wales spent \$81.5 million on advertising campaigns in the past financial year. Various media reports have put the cost of the Federal Government's WorkChoices advertising and supporting campaigns alone at \$100 million. That is more than the New South Wales Government spent on all advertising campaigns for the whole of the past financial year. If the Opposition is really concerned about the use of taxpayers' money, and if it is interested in anything more than cheap political point-scoring, it would attack the Federal Government's blatantly political promotion of WorkChoices. The Government opposes the bill.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [11.11 a.m.]: This bill strikes at the heart of integrity in this House. In my inaugural speech I spoke strongly about the way the community no longer trusts this institution and the people who constitute it. One key factor I spoke about was government advertising. Clearly, there is a trend of this Government using advertising purely and solely for the promotion of itself and its services. ACNielsen media research shows that last year the Premier and his merry men and women were the seventh largest advertisers in Australia—up from tenth in 2005. Indeed, it spent a lot more than companies such as Proctor and Gamble, which is one of the biggest spenders on advertising in the world, Coca-Cola even more so, McDonald's, the Commonwealth Bank, Toyota, Myer, Kellogg's, David Jones, Ford, Cadbury, Qantas and Westpac. We could be here for a long time debating how much this Government has spent.

The member for Wallsend provided a flimsy defence, referring to the Federal Government. Yes, the Federal Government has spent money on advertising, but it has spent less than \$30 million on average across the States and Territories. The Premier and his merry men and women have spent more than \$110 million in the past financial year. This is not just us saying that, and it is not the Leader of the Opposition simply calling for some integrity to be returned to the process. The bill has many supporters. Indeed, I refer back to the Auditor-General, who said that the existing process is fine. The process is not fine. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 30 August 2007 stated:

The NSW Auditor-General has criticised the State Government for having insufficient control over government advertising, saying some of it may have been party-political in nature.

...

The Auditor-General wants more rigorous guidelines than those put forward by the Department of Commerce for judging "whether material may inappropriately serve party-political interests".

...

Existing guidelines are still not sufficient to prevent the use of public funds for party-political purposes ...

The Auditor-General has called for reforms, and clearly this bill will give him what he wants. In addition, other people come to mind, and one of them is the leader of the Federal Labor Party. Time and time again members opposite talk about Kevin Rudd's credentials. On this particular point Kevin Rudd got it right. He said:

When it comes to a government using taxpayers' money to unfairly fund party political ads, I think that's a cancer in our democracy and that is the cancer which should be eliminated.

The Premier of New South Wales is the king of that cancer. Expenditure of \$110 million is simply not acceptable. To take it further, time and time again we hear about the lack of resources, and members opposite point their fingers at the Federal Government. That \$110 million could have been spent on fixing many problems the State now faces. The Auditor-General made some interesting comments. In his report he stated that the Director General of the Department of Commerce, Robyn Kruk, admitted that:

The Department of Commerce does not have details of actual costs for research, development and production costs, and nor does it have estimates for these costs for some advertising campaigns.

We should explore the financial implications in other debates. The reality is that the Government does not understand its own costs. Indeed, if the Government had not dabbled in the superannuation of its public servants, if it had not manipulated the discount rate, and if it had not made a spurious claim to the Federal Government for a tax on Sydney airport, the State budget would have a deficit of \$1.5 billion. It is no wonder we have an underlying deficit. The Government and the Department of Commerce need a shake up. But it is not just the Department of Commerce; it is every department. The Department of Commerce does not have the details of the actual costs for research, development and production costs. How can a government run a budget if it does not know how much it is spending?

That \$110 million only applies to the media space that has been booked. Production costs could take that figure to 30 per cent, 40 per cent or 50 per cent higher. We could be talking about \$150 million, \$160 million or, indeed, almost the entire amount the Federal Government has spent over the past year. The costs must be clear, and we should put a framework in place. However, before we get to that we must return some integrity to the process. For those who can remember, Kevin Rudd made a big point about the need for reform. I refer to Bob Carr who, in 1995, sought to introduce a publicity control bill. On 18 February 1995 he told the Labor caucus that he would introduce a publicity control bill to regulate government advertising to prevent the use of taxpayers' money for party promotional purposes. What are we doing? Members opposite should come to the party and change.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: How can you say that, considering what the Federal Government is doing?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Members opposite have nothing to be ashamed about. Clearly, they need to embrace their Labor Government heroes, including Bob Carr, who was one of the key architects. He wanted to introduce a publicity control bill, but over the past 12 years the Labor Government has not had the courage to bring it on. The Leader of the Opposition has integrity and is prepared to tackle the issue. He will reform the political process. I encourage members opposite to come forward. The Government has spent \$110 million plus all the hidden costs, which cannot be identified by the Department of Commerce. What is \$30 million or \$40 million? It is just costs and other stuff. That \$110 million spent on the media, plus costs which could increase that figure to \$150 million or \$160 million, should be spent on our schools and hospitals. Could the Royal North Shore Hospital use \$110 million or \$160 million at this time? Of course it could!

This Government has spent more than \$1 billion for these purposes. It needs to admit that it has got it wrong and needs to reform, and it needs to support the Leader of the Opposition in his push to return some integrity to the governance of this State. It is time the Government came on board, endorsed the Leader of the Opposition and used the available funds not for promoting itself but for providing infrastructure and services to support the community it is supposed to serve.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [11.20 a.m.], in reply: I thank members who have participated in this debate, particularly the member for Manly, who clearly understands the importance of this issue. I regret the speech provided to the member for Wallsend. I ask my colleagues opposite what do they fear about a process that would simply enable the State's Auditor-General to require a public authority to submit a report detailing expenditure on government publicity? What do members opposite fear from a bill that will enable members of the public who have complaints about government publicity in advertising to lodge those complaints? What do they fear about a bill that would allow the Auditor-General to conduct an inquiry into those complaints? The bill requires the Auditor-General to report annually to Parliament

on those matters. What is fearful about that? The bill sets guidelines for government publicity, and those guidelines are realistic and simple. The guidelines state:

1 Government publicity should be accurate, factual and truthful

Factual information should be outlined clearly and accurately. Comment on and the analysis of that information, to amplify its meaning, should be indicated as such.

2 Government publicity should be fair, honest and impartial

The material should be presented in unbiased and objective language, and in a manner free from partisan promotion of Government policy and political argument.

3 Government publicity should be lawful and proper

The material should comply with the law.

What is fearful about that? What is fearful for members opposite is that last year \$112 million was spent on government publicity, up 21 per cent on the previous year. Why was there a 21 per cent jump last year? Clearly it was because of the State election campaign. What members opposite fear about this bill—which, as the member for Manly said, was the very bill promised prior to their election in 1995—is that they would not have access to the millions of dollars they spent in the lead-up to the March 2007 election in order to have themselves re-elected.

I will address issues that seem to restrain the member for Marrickville from supporting this sensible bill. I single out the member for Marrickville because I know that her Federal member of Parliament is a strong supporter of this type of legislation. The argument advanced by the member for Wallsend asked how this bill applied in relation to Federal matters. The House should know that the Federal Government's per capita expenditure on advertising in the past financial year was \$8.35, that is for every man, woman and child across Australia. The member for Marrickville should understand that in New South Wales the per capita expenditure on advertising in the past financial year was \$13.09. The level of expenditure of taxpayers' funds that goes unchecked to government publicity under this State Government is outrageous.

As the member for Manly said, and as I said in my introductory speech, this money could and should be used for other pressing needs across the community. Since this Labor Government was first elected it has spent \$1,088 million on publicity: that is a scandal. As the member for Manly said, that expenditure has put the New South Wales Government in the top league of advertisers across the nation. Harvey Norman Holdings spends between \$115 million and \$120 million on advertising each year. The Government has put us in that league and above Woolworth's. I regret that the State Government will oppose the bill.

Mr Gerard Martin: We have a bigger turnover than Woolworth's.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Does the member for Bathurst have shares in Woolworth's as well as in Telstra? He should declare an interest; he is the Parliament's largest Telstra shareholder. My final point is that on 19 May the Federal Labor leader, Kevin Rudd, argued that the Federal Auditor-General should have these exact powers over expenditure on government publicity at a Federal level.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: Did you come out and support him? Did you back him up?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: They are matters that I supported at the time when I introduced the bill. They are matters that I am at one on with the Hon. Anthony Albanese. I would have thought that members opposite who may have closer relationships to the Labor Party generally, and the Hon. Anthony Albanese in particular, may come and join the Opposition in this debate. This will set the bar for Federal Labor candidates across the State. Labor says one thing and does another. The leader of the Federal party has argued for this legislation, he wants this legislation. Here is a chance for Labor members in this Chamber to support Kevin Rudd legislation to limit and provide the Auditor-General with powers over government publicity. I seek their support for the bill.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 39

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Mr Baird	Mr Humphries	Mr Smith
Mr Baumann	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Merton	Mr Stokes
Mr Cansdell	Ms Moore	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Mr Oakeshott	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Dea	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr O'Farrell	Mr J. D. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Ms Goward	Mr Piccoli	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Piper	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Provest	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr Maguire
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	

Noes, 46

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Ms Beamer	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Brown	Ms Hornery	Mr Rees
Ms Burney	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Ms Burton	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr Koperberg	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Lynch	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Dr McDonald	Mr West
Mr Costa	Ms McKay	Mr Whan
Mr Daley	Mr McLeay	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms D'Amore	Ms McMahan	Mr Ashton
Ms Firth	Ms Meagher	Mr Martin
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity	

Pair

Mr Fraser

Ms Keneally

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****Bill not agreed to in principle.****Pursuant to standing orders business interrupted.****BELLS LINE EXPRESSWAY****Mr ANDREW STONER** (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.33 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) welcomes the Federal Government's commitment of \$10 million towards a planning and engineering study of the Bells Line Expressway; and
- (2) calls on the State Government to contribute matching funding so this much-needed transport link to the Central West can progress.

The Nationals have long championed a new and safe expressway over the Blue Mountains. Over the years Ian Armstrong has continued as chair of the Bells Line Expressway Group. The member for Orange is strong in his

support for this route, as are the member for Upper Hunter and former Leader of the Nationals, the Hon. George Souris, and John Cobb, the current member for Parkes, who is seeking election in the electorate of Calare. John Cobb has represented Dubbo for quite some time and is familiar with the stretch of road. Yesterday I was surprised when the Government agreed to this motion being given precedence.

Mr Gerard Martin: You are about to find out why.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The member for Bathurst should refrain from interjecting as there are schoolchildren in the gallery and he is setting a very bad example. He will have an opportunity later to contribute to debate on this motion. Yesterday I spoke about the many benefits of this proposal, not the least of which is road safety. The Great Western Highway and the current Bells Line of Road are amongst the most dangerous roads in this State per kilometre of highway. The Great Western Highway adversely affects the amenity of the villages it traverses in the Blue Mountains area and beyond. Clearly, the current road is simply not up to the task.

Economic issues also have to be addressed. Currently there is no B-double route for road freight to come from the Central West and the Western Plains to the container port in Sydney. Unlike the State's other highways, individual semitrailers are being forced to bring that freight into the city at a massive additional cost to producers. Fletchers International is just one of those producers. Manildra flour mill exports a lot of flour and flour products out of the Port of Sydney but many other businesses would benefit from having a safe and faster route for road freight. It is scandalous that in the twenty-first century there is no B-double route to the west of the State. In an economic sense it would bring other benefits, including tourism. Tourists would visit the Central West and other delightful parts of the State if they were made much more accessible, which they would be if there was an expressway instead of the long and tortuous route they currently have to traverse.

Decentralisation would occur. Over the decades we have witnessed the benefits of the F3 with the expansion and growth of the Central Coast and the Hunter, and businesses, industry and families taking advantage of this transport route. Those same benefits could be achieved with a new expressway to the Central West and the Western Plains. Land would become more available—currently we have a land shortage in Sydney—we would have more affordable housing and there would be an industrial expansion into the Blue Mountains and beyond. So there would be massive benefits for the State as a whole, benefits that are recognised by the councils affected by this proposal. They have all indicated their strong support for the proposal for a Bells Line Expressway put forward by the Bells Line Expressway Group. It is obvious that communities support the proposal. In a recent contribution even the member for Bathurst stated that 99 per cent of people in his electorate and in western New South Wales wanted this road.

Mr Gerard Martin: It is 99.5 per cent.

Mr ANDREW STONER: It has gone up by half a percentage point. There is every good reason to support a proposal that is estimated to cost in the order of \$2 billion. To put that into context, the Premier and the Minister for Roads recently announced that they want to spend \$7 billion on more road works in Sydney, including on the M4 east, and that is on top of many other recent road projects—for example, the Lane Cove Tunnel, the Cross City Tunnel, the M7, et cetera. Country New South Wales is calling on the Government to heed a number one priority for infrastructure investment. This motion calls on the State Government to contribute matching funding of \$10 million for an important planning and engineering study following the Prime Minister's announcement on 25 May of \$10 million in funding. However, we have not heard a peep in response from the State Labor Government to match that funding, even though it has responsibility for this State highway. After some outcry from the community the Government's official position was disingenuous, to say the least. It said:

Not enough details have been provided from the Federal Government.

The truth is that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, Mark Vaile, had written twice to Eric Roozendaal providing all the details. On 26 September Mark Vaile announced that the Federal Government will provide the other \$10 million because the State Government will not. The State Government has been hiding, ducking and weaving, so it is up to the Federal Government to get this planning and engineering assessment underway. It is clear that The Nationals at Federal and State level are absolutely committed to this project, but Labor is not. The member for Bathurst, a member of the Bells Line Expressway Group, keeps pooh-poohing the project, saying that it cannot be funded, and he keeps trying to shift the entire responsibility to the Federal Government despite the project being a State responsibility.

The Labor candidate for Macquarie, Bob Debus, has offered only criticism of Kerry Bartlett, the current member for Macquarie, for seeking strong support from the communities in the redistributed electorate that he seeks to represent. Mr Bartlett is in a better position than Bob Debus, who will not even support the project. Neither Bob Debus nor Bundy Bear have taken the Minister for Roads to task for refusing to back an essential road project that even the member for Bathurst says 99 per cent of people want. I anticipate that the member for Bathurst will get back to his usual blame shifting: trying to shift responsibility for funding the project, saying that it cannot be funded, and using every reason not to fund it. But let us talk about cooperative federalism, that is, the State and Federal governments working together. The Federal Government has shown an interest in the project, but what level of interest has the State Government shown? Has the member for Bathurst knocked on the Minister's door and said, "Why don't you go and talk to Mark Vaile and Jim Lloyd? Let's work out a way to fund this project cooperatively—State and Federal government funding—and private sector funding."

Mr Gerard Martin: Jim Lloyd thinks its pie in the sky, but it's in here.

Mr ANDREW STONER: That is a very old document the member for Bathurst has in his possession; he should not be so disingenuous again. The Federal and State governments and the private sector have worked together to fund and construct major roads projects. For example, the Western Sydney orbital, the M7, which is a magnificent piece of road, was achieved as a result of cooperation between government levels and the private sector. That same approach can apply to the Bells Line Expressway proposal at considerably less cost than the M7. So why does the member for Bathurst not lobby his Minister to get behind this project instead of ducking, weaving and playing politics as he has? I know he is in a difficult position, but he needs to do more than play politics on this issue. The member for Bathurst should not start blame shifting and buck-passing again today. Instead, he should tell his community what he is doing to make this project happen. The Federal Government has \$20 million for a State road project. What is the State Government doing? The engineering and planning assessment that is required to enable the project proceed is essential.

Mr Gerard Martin: It will be 2009 before you start the money coming.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The member for Bathurst is already pooh-poohing it all. Why not get behind it and support this motion.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [11.43 a.m.]: I should have about two days to speak in the debate, which is the time I would need to rewrite all the untruths we have just heard. I move:

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

this House:

- (1) welcomes the Federal Government and the Federal Opposition's commitment to fund planning and engineering studies into a second road crossing of the Blue Mountains; and
- (2) requests the agreed crossing be funded from the Federal Government's AusLink program.

I have moved the amendment for a number of reasons. The first is to correct the Leader of The Nationals, Mark Vaile. The \$10 million, \$20 million, probably \$30 million bail out Kerry fund is not exclusively for a study into the Bells Line of Road. It is for a second crossing of the Blue Mountains. The Leader of The Nationals should go back to square one. In a letter of 30 August 2007 that those opposite claimed had been sent to our Minister in June—an absolute lie—Mark Vaile said to the Minister:

Unlike the SKM study in 2003/04—

which was jointly funded by the State and Federal governments—

this undertaking will examine all options, not just the Bells Line of Road.

We should make that clear from the start. Mark Vaile now wants to start again all that good work done by the Bells Line Expressway Group relating to the Bells Line of Road. Of course, conveniently, that will miss any opportunity to fund it under AusLink2. When the Prime Minister bowled up to Bathurst on 25 May, the first time in his prime ministership that he had visited Australia's most significant and oldest inland city, he made the statement that \$10 million is needed for extra studies for the project. Nobody in the Federal Government

Department of Transport and Regional Services had any idea what the \$10 million was for. In fact, \$10 million is not needed. It took Kevin Rudd to come along, have a look at it and say, "I'm with Martin Ferguson. We'll commit to a study into the second crossing of the Blue Mountains as part of the AusLink program." That will probably involve about \$5 million or \$6 million. Not to be outdone, Federal members again tried to put up a bit more support for Kerry Bartlett and said, "Oh, \$20 million."

Let us just look at the support the other side of the House supposedly has for the project. Jim Lloyd is running from this project at 100 miles an hour, as are most Liberal members on that side because they have their own pet projects, whether it is the Pacific Highway, the Princes Highway or some other highway. There is not a Liberal body that really wants to support this project. As for Mr Bartlett, he has crossed borders and now is in a redistributed electorate. In 2005 when the Sinclair Knight Merz [SKM] report was released, Mr Bartlett, supposedly now a fervent supporter of this program, was quoted in the *Hawkesbury Gazette*—a newspaper I am sure the member opposite reads studiously—of 9 February 2005. The article began:

Macquarie MP Kerry Bartlett said statements by a western NSW National Party member that the new report found the project feasible, were unfounded.

That National Party member was the Hon. Ian Armstrong. The article quoted Mr Bartlett as saying:

"There is no basis in this new report to support (Lachlan MP) Ian Armstrong's statement that the project—"

The Bells Line of Road—

"—is viable."

He continued:

"I've been advised by the federal minister's office, who have spoken to the RTA, that the only substantial difference with this new report is that the cost has gone up to \$3 billion."

Mr Bartlett continued:

"Ian Armstrong is just trying to raise some interest ahead of a report which won't do him much good."

The article then stated:

Mr Bartlett was incredulous this new report had been commissioned at all, considering the findings of the previous report by consultants Maunsell McIntyre—

which was paid for by this Government—

—four years ago.

"The last report showed (the plan) was not even in the ballpark," Mr Bartlett said ...

From that we can see that Mr Bartlett has had a sudden conversion on the way to political oblivion. The article quoted him as saying:

"It [the report] was way short of justifying the proposal.

I've made it very clear in the past that I'm opposed to any superhighway that's going to involve compulsory acquisition of land in the Hawkesbury, or have an adverse affect on a world-heritage-listed area."

So much for Mr Bartlett! To reinforce his great support for this project, on 20 April when the report into the proposed north-south rail line was released, Mr Bartlett was again quoted in the same newspaper as saying:

"I consider the superhighway is pie-in-the-sky."

This proposal was the railway running north to south, or wherever they wanted to run it. He was supported by Bart Bassett, the Mayor of Hawkesbury, who I believe was a failed Liberal Party candidate at the last election. They are all in there together looking after their parochial politics. He did not give a stuff about the people west of the mountains. The member for Orange suddenly has been whipped into line. We saw the farce at the last election when Sue Williams and Greg Matthews from Dubbo were on a billboard supporting the project. They had the sod-turning ceremony near Lithgow, about which everyone is still doubled up with laughter. No money was given to fund it, but they were pushing it! That put the kiss of death on the project. Members opposite will

put the kiss of death on the Bells Line Expressway project. There is no credibility on that side of the House for the project.

On 25 May the Prime Minister said in Bathurst that he would provide the funding for the study. What he did not say in the fine print was that the money will be available in 2009—this is the \$10 million, now \$20 million, for the study. So now we are going to wait until 2009 for the study to be conducted. Everyone agrees that an environmental impact statement would be a comprehensive document, but it will probably take two years to complete. Guess what happened? They were rolling all the money out for AusLink 2—\$2.4 billion for the Pacific Highway and \$2 billion for the Bruce Highway to try to shore up some Queensland members of The Nationals—and it sped out the door. By the time the studies were done, AusLink 2 funding was spent, and the next capital allocation coming from the Federal Government would not be until 2014. It will be seven years before the Federal Government again will have to put its hand in its pocket. We all know that in seven years time, Kevin Rudd will still be the Prime Minister of this country. Kevin Rudd, Martin Ferguson and Bob Debus are committed to this project. The money is available. They came to Bathurst and made a statement.

Mr Ray Williams: Where is it?

Mr GERARD MARTIN: The money is there for the study to be done on an alternative route. Currently Jim Lloyd is pushing the Penrith to Dubbo option for AusLink 2. The New South Wales Opposition said that the New South Wales Government had not put in its bid for AusLink 2. That is an absolute lie. Ian Armstrong also said it, as did all the other members of the Coalition. I will again cite what Mark Vaile stated in a letter of 30 August to Eric Roozendaal:

Premier Iemma, in his letter to the Prime Minister on 1 May 2007, which identified AusLink 2 priorities for NSW—

For the benefit of some members of the Coalition who are a little slow on the uptake, I repeat that the letter states, "which identified AusLink 2 priorities for New South Wales"—not that we had not done it, as alleged by the Coalition. This is what was said by Mark Vaile:

... highlighted the "need to investigate alternative routes to the existing alignment of the Great Western Highway on the western escarpment of the Blue Mountains in order to provide safer and more efficient access from western NSW to the Sydney area."

That was stated in agreement by our leader, Premier Morris Iemma, to the Prime Minister. Now the Federal Opposition, which in five weeks will be the Federal Government, has agreed to fund the studies. If members of the Coalition want to waste their money, they should phone Kerry Bartlett. But before members of the Coalition have any truck with what Kerry Bartlett says on this matter, they should acknowledge that he has done an absolute back flip, and the member for Hawkesbury knows that. He is not happy about the proposal because he does not want the route to go through his electorate.

Mr Steve Whan: He wrote a speech in favour of it.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: I know. He had his arm twisted, but privately in the corridors of Parliament House he says the opposite. It will be interesting to find out whether he participates in this debate and talks about how he feels about the proposal. He sings from the same song sheet as Kerry Bartlett. They spend all their time rubbishing Ian Armstrong. I am on the executive of the Bells Line Expressway Group with Ian Armstrong and I know more about this project than anybody else in this House, including the member for Orange, who still pulls up at Mount Victoria Pass, stands there as if in some sort of fantasy land, and dreams about a great big tunnel from Mount Victoria to Penrith. Of course, tunnels will be no good for this project.

If there is one thing said by Leader of The Nationals that I agree with it is that we need a B-double route. There are many restrictions on what heavy vehicles are allowed to carry through tunnels, and prohibited goods include fertilisers and fuels. That is why the Government, in the SKM study, went away from the idea of tunnels. The engineering studies have been done and we do not need \$10 million or \$20 million to undertake studies. We need money to do an environmental impact statement. The Federal Government, the colleague of the New South Wales Opposition, has plenty of money to put on the table. Why would we want \$20 million to do more studies? There has been no consultation with departmental officers in Canberra. This was a Nationals sham in the lead-up to the State election. No one bought the Coalition's empty promises. The very same thing will happen at the next Federal election. The project will not save Kerry Bartlett's neck. On this issue he is a hypocrite.

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [11.53 a.m.]: It gives me pleasure to speak to the motion moved by the Leader of The Nationals welcoming the Federal Government's \$10 million commitment and

acknowledging—owing to the failure of the State Government to commit—that the Federal Government has increased its contribution from \$10 million to \$20 million so that a planning and engineering study can be undertaken. A great deal of rhetoric has been heard from the member for Bathurst. He is confused. In this House he rubbishes the project, yet in his electorate, where he knows that 99 per cent of his constituents support it, he tries to pretend he is in favour of it. In the *Mudgee Guardian* on Friday 2 March the member for Bathurst is quoted as saying:

The Expressway group has put forward a compelling case, and State and Federal Governments need to give a funding a high priority.

Where is the State Government's funding? Where is the evidence that the State Government is giving this project priority? Let me detail some of the positive aspects of the proposal. We have heard all the negative points and we have heard a number of accusations that have been made by the Government. Some of the project's positive aspects are revealed by reference to the development that occurred between Gosford and Newcastle after construction of the F3, which was then known as the Newcastle Expressway. When the F3 was opened extensive development became possible.

The Government can rubbish this project as much as it likes and come up with traffic numbers to show that the cost of the project does not justify its construction, but The Nationals believe that the better view of the project is that, quite apart from improved safety, improved perception of distances and time-saving benefits, it represents a vision for the area. The Nationals' vision for this project is that investment in construction of this highway will bring benefits similar to those that accrued to the Central Coast, Gosford and Newcastle areas after construction of the F3. The prosperity and development of that area could not have occurred without construction of the F3, so let us debate this project from the point of view of the project's positive features.

I have often remarked about the inhibiting effect on development of the perception of distance. People who live west of Parramatta, an area that accounts for roughly half the population of Sydney, think nothing of driving to the Hunter Valley for the day or for the weekend to visit the wineries. Despite the district being roughly equidistant from the centre of Sydney—the Hunter Valley, Mudgee, Orange and the Cowra vineyards—people would not even think of travelling to Sydney for the day because they have the perception, from that goat track of a road they have to travel on and the traffic that queues for kilometres from Sydney to home on their return drive, that Sydney is an undesirable tourist destination.

While there are many benefits generally to be derived from this highway project that The Nationals support, its benefits for the freight transport industry are not limited to the reduction of costs. Electrolux and Fletchers cannot use B-doubles to transport goods over the mountains and at best may be able to use A-doubles. I know that Westoil uses A-doubles to pick up fuel from Clyde for the Central West. Even though Westoil uses an A-double, the tanker cannot be filled entirely because of weight restrictions. There are not only length restrictions applying to the use of the current route in respect of B-doubles but also weight restrictions.

The road was built in 1814. That shows how out-of-date the current route across the mountains is. In many respects the Great Western Highway is a highway in name only. It follows the original route discovered by Cox when he pushed through to Bathurst. The Government stands condemned because it insists on upgrading the Great Western Highway. There is a huge conflict raging about the route the highway will take through the Hartley Valley. On many occasions in this House we have heard that the Great Western Highway's speed zone restrictions, especially through school zones, reduces its function to that of a local road. Let us show some vision, let us make a commitment, let us get a decent highway over the mountains!

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.58 a.m.]: I am pleased to endorse the comments made by the member for Bathurst on a new road crossing of the Blue Mountains, and I support the amendment he moved. The people of the Bathurst electorate and areas lying farther west know that they have a very strong advocate in the member for Bathurst for meeting their needs. In a short time they will have another very strong advocate for having their needs met, including another road crossing of the Blue Mountains, when they elect Bob Debus as their Federal Parliamentary representative. Unlike Mr Bartlett, the Liberals Federal candidate, Bob Debus has a consistent position on this matter. The member for Bathurst outlined Mr Bartlett's flip-flops on this issue and pointed out that Mr Bartlett's position changes depending on whom he happens to be talking to on any given day. With the exception of a couple of members, such as a former member of this House, Ian Armstrong, the Opposition's attitude to the proposal has been wildly inconsistent and subject to the effect the proposal is likely to have on voting in an electorate.

There was strong council and community support for a second crossing of the Blue Mountains during hearings of the Premier's rural and regional task force held in the west of the State. The message came through

loud and clear: The Federal Government must take seriously the investigation of crossing options. The current proposal is simply a pre-election ploy. Let us face it: John Howard has form on this. Shortly before a Federal election the Howard Government promised my electorate that it would commission a feasibility study and planning work on a very fast train project. What happened after the election? The idea was quietly dropped. The Government said, "It's not feasible so we'll cancel the study." No doubt Treasurer Costello pocketed the money set aside for the study and declared it to be a saving resulting from his good economic management. The Howard Government failed to deliver that promised service.

In this case a promise made during the election campaign will quickly become a non-core promise after the election. This proposal is designed to tide the Government over. We need committed Labor members who will carry the study through and pursue real and viable crossing options. As the member for Bathurst has pointed out consistently to Country Labor members and to caucus, a second crossing of the Blue Mountains would be an absolute boon for regional development in western New South Wales. The project has a very strong advocate in the member for Bathurst.

The Leader of The Nationals moved this motion. In his reply to the recent budget the Leader of The Nationals said that he would sell retail electricity to fund the road. But just a few weeks ago he told the ABC in Wagga Wagga that selling retail electricity would be devastating for rural economies. His comments change from day to day. Let us consider The Nationals' record on roads. The Barton Highway is a Federal responsibility but the member for Burrinjuck only recently and belatedly began to criticise the Federal Government for its failure to upgrade that highway. I recently had the awful and tragic experience of talking to the grandfather of a person who was killed in an accident on the Barton Highway and of hearing the terrible regret in his voice. The Federal Government has failed in its duty to maintain that highway, and for many years The Nationals and the Liberals have been reluctant to criticise its inaction. Turning to the Murrumbateman bypass and road funding, I recently attended the Murrumbateman field day—

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: The member for Monaro seems to be somewhat distracted from the substance of the motion before the House, which is about the Bells Line Expressway. He has talked about Murrumbateman and the Barton Highway—everything but the Bells Line Expressway.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I note the point of order. I ask the member for Monaro to return to the specific nature of the motion before the House.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have spoken at great length about the need for a second crossing of the Blue Mountains. Let us consider the history of the promises that have been made. The Nationals are all over the place on this issue. This proposal is an election stunt. As the Leader of The Nationals said, "Rhetoric is no substitute for substance", and rhetoric is all we hear from members of The Nationals.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [12.03 p.m.]: I must put the following information on the record immediately. I think the member for Bathurst called someone a hypocrite but I have noticed that in the 1998 Australian Railway Historical Society newsletter it is stated clearly that, while Blue Mountains City Council opposed the super road plan, the then Mayor of Lithgow, Gerard Martin, called for an expressway using the alignment across the Bells Line of Road.

Mr Barry Collier: Point of order: Is it appropriate for the member for Hawkesbury to read from his BlackBerry in the House?

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! Members will be aware that they are able to refer to notes and other written material. In the circumstances, and as it is 2007, I consider that there is no difference between referring to a newspaper article and referring to a BlackBerry.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Well chaired once again, Mr Acting-Speaker. That was quite a vexatious point of order by the member for Miranda. As to the member for Bathurst, it is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. I am glad that I put that on the record. It is now clear that the member for Bathurst will reject his amendment and support the motion moved by the Leader of The Nationals.

Mr Gerard Martin: Point of order: I remind the member for Hawkesbury that I have moved an amendment to the motion. There is no hypocrisy from me on this issue. I have been consistent on this issue from day one: I have always supported the Bells Line of Road.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Bathurst will resume his seat. The member for Hawkesbury has the call.

[Interruption]

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): The member for Bathurst will resume his seat. I call the member for Bathurst to order.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: The central western areas surrounding Bathurst have for years been constrained by the lack of a decent road across the Blue Mountains. While there has been some work on the Great Western Highway, there is potential for a better road to be constructed via the Bells Line of Road. While much has been said about this issue, the simple fact is that good roads and transport links are the foundation of prosperity for the State and our nation as a whole. Because New South Wales is so large we must always give priority to new and improved transport links between the cities and our country cousins. The economic longevity of the west depends on vital road and transport links that allow businesses to grow, and which in turn will provide employment for people in rural areas.

We often talk about the decentralisation of people from our cities to the country. The question is: Who would want to live in the Central West and be forced to travel on a dangerous, slow road such as the Bells Line of Road? There is enormous potential for increased growth in these areas, where people would not have to live in the high-rise apartment blocks that have proliferated under the State Government's urban consolidation policy. People who wish to move to the lovely towns of Bathurst, Orange and Mudgee have the opportunity to live on small acreage lots, which are great places for families to raise children. Unfortunately, the State Government is again ignoring the potential of developing a better road across the Blue Mountains by upgrading the Bells Line of Road.

Consider how the new road between Lithgow and Bathurst has benefited the residents of those towns. The road cut 30 minutes off the trip between the towns. Motorists who were forced to use the old concrete road that wound its way around Lake Wallerawang now enjoy a safe, quick trip between Lithgow and Bathurst. This obviously aids employment and improves the quality of life of residents in these rural towns. Unfortunately, the return trip from Lithgow to the city is slow and dangerous. Heavy vehicles are reluctant to use the Bells Line of Road and instead travel on the Great Western Highway. This impacts on towns from Katoomba to Penrith, with unwanted pollution and gridlocked traffic in towns such as Lawson, where the road narrows to a single lane.

The Bells Line of Road is the preferred route, but it can be perilous and has cost many lives. The upgrade of this road is vital to the health and survival of the rural communities that depend on the road not only for transport but also to sustain and maintain businesses in those areas. At a time when rural towns are suffering the worst drought in history it is amazing that the Government has rejected this proposal outright. I would have thought members who represent country electorates would do all they can to benefit their communities. This motion is about providing important roads and transport links in rural communities. But the State Government does not want to spend money on vital projects. I commend the Federal Government for allocating \$20 million for the construction of a link to Richmond Road, the Bells Line of Road, the M7 and country areas.

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [12.08 p.m.]: I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the motion. As an Independent, I have prepared my own speaking notes—unlike the member for Hawkesbury, who read a prepared speech. But I know what I am talking about and who will benefit from any upgrade to the Bells Line of Road.

Mr Andrew Stoner: We get less resources than you.

Mrs DAWN FARDELL: The Leader of The Nationals is interjecting rudely. Yesterday when he was giving reasons for bringing on this motion for debate today—which I welcome—he said that the Federal Government was allocating \$20 million to the project. He then added the throwaway line that if we did not hurry we would lose the money. Has the Federal Government made a commitment to provide that \$20 million? The immediate costs of building the expressway will be easily balanced by the long-term benefits of safer and more efficient travel times to Sydney and income generated from increased tourism and business opportunities. No government, State or Federal—no matter who is in office—should deny the regions past the sandstone curtain the right to a safe and secure highway.

Mr Ray Williams: I thought you weren't going to read?

Mrs DAWN FARDELL: These are my thoughts, not somebody else's. Mr Duncan Gay in the upper House wanted to know what my stand was. Clearly he is not up to speed: I have always supported the proposal and congratulated Ian Armstrong and the member for Bathurst on their stand and their involvement. I have not yet heard Mr John Cobb, the Federal member for Parkes, who has not been very visible for the last 12 months, express his support for the project.

On 15 November 2005 Mr Jim Lloyd, the Federal roads Minister, rejected the Bells Line proposal in a radio interview on 2BS Bathurst. It is nice to know that, all of a sudden—surprise, surprise—there is great interest in the Bells Line of Road, not only from Mr Bartlett: other members from the area are also raising their hands. I would not be surprised if very shortly the Leader of The Nationals proposed in this House discussion of the inland rail forum, which also needs to be debated. It is an opportune time, five weeks out from the election, to be gathering momentum on that as well. What firm commitment do we have from Government on that at this stage?

In 2005 many mayors came to the launch in the foyer of this House. We looked at the plans and all the mayors and general managers from the area supported the proposal put forward. Mr Russell Turner was there as well. We all welcomed the announcement. Members of Parliament of different political ilk and mayors and general managers of different political persuasion welcomed the announcement on the Bells Line of Road. We firmly believed that the State and Federal Governments were going to be working on this proposal to get it through—and the sooner the better. I have family members who travel the road very often and safety aspects are of concern.

The Leader of The Nationals mentioned Mr Roger Fletcher. People other than Mr Fletcher depend on this road. Many trucking companies and transporters in our area are doing good work. Mr Fletcher employs a lot of people in Dubbo and beyond and he is a very community-minded citizen, but many other transporters are looking for an alternative route. At the moment transporters can only go to a certain point—to Lithgow or down the Golden Highway to near Cessnock. They cannot go into the port of Botany.

This proposal is very important for our industry. It is also very important for safety reasons. One ratepayer approached the former mayor of Forbes, Alistair Lockhart—a very good man—following the hurricane disaster in Louisiana. I am on record as questioning, if a disaster were to happen in Sydney, whether governments are prepared for evacuation of the population? How would we get people out over the goat track or north and south of Sydney? How would we deal with that? We would not be able to do it. We need good highways to do that. We are concentrating on upgrading the Pacific Highway but we need to concentrate on the area over the sandstone curtain, past Penrith, out west and down to Parkes and Forbes where we could handle those people. Louisiana could not handle it with four lanes of highway going either way. That is an aspect that not many other people have considered, but it is a very important one: What avenues are there to move that population?

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [12.13 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members for Bathurst, Orange, Monaro, Hawkesbury and Dubbo for contributing to this important debate. The member for Bathurst moved a predictable amendment, essentially proposing that the Federal Government fund the project entirely from AusLink funds. The amendment is all about shifting responsibility, which has been the consistent position of the member for Bathurst from day one. It is also confirmation that the Iemma Labor Government will not stump up one red cent to make the project happen, despite this project being a State responsibility. The member for Bathurst criticised the Federal Government for seeking to examine in its study all options, not just the Bells Line Expressway proposal. The Federal Government would be irresponsible if it did not seek the best route; the safest road and the maximum benefit to the community. But if the Bells Line Expressway proposal stacks up—and I am confident that it will—of course that would receive some preference in the assessment.

The members for Bathurst and Monaro were fairly strident in their criticism of this project and the Federal Government. They constantly sought to shift responsibility for the project and point fingers, but we did not hear a word from either of them about what the State Labor Government is going to do. The member for Bathurst and the member for Monaro talked about a 2005 position of the current Federal member for Macquarie, referring to a 2005 piece of fish and chip wrapping. The newspaper is that old—

Mr Gerard Martin: The Premier has told Mark Vaile what we are doing. Get Mark Vaile to show you the letter of 30 August—that is if you can read.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The position of the member for Macquarie post-redistribution—in case you did not know, Macquarie has been redistributed—has changed because his seat has changed. Are you suggesting that he should not strongly represent the people in his new electorate?

Mr Steve Whan: He is obviously a man of great principles.

Mr ANDREW STONER: All we heard from both of those members who seek to interject is more political game-playing, but not a word about why they have, despite being members of this Government, failed for nine years to get one dollar for this crucial project. All they did was pooh-pooh the Federal Government's interest in the project, saying that funding would not start until 2009. But the question is: When will the State Government's funding start? It is a State road. We have seen nothing in nine years with Mr Martin as the member for Bathurst, so we should not hold our breath for funding out of the State Government.

The people that the members for Bathurst and Monaro are supposed to represent would be disgusted at their performance here today. Those people do not care about political gains, excuses and point scoring; they want to see governments cooperating, working together to make it happen. So we do not support Labor's blame-shifting amendment. It is a transparent attempt by the State Government to duck its constitutional responsibilities. It is also a pathetic attempt by country-based members to disguise their inability to get their city-centric Labor colleagues to spend any money outside of Sydney. People will be disgusted at the negativity the two Labor members have displayed here today. This project can and will happen, but it needs a positive approach and cooperation, in contrast to their negative, carping performance today. They have shown themselves to be nothing more than political hacks instead of the visionaries that the Central West needs, visionaries like Ian Armstrong and Russell Turner.

Mrs Dawn Fardell: Point of order: I have heard enough. This is clearly a blatant attempt to get Kerry Bartlett over the line.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Again the member for Dubbo has revealed her Labor bias by that point of order, not to mention her contribution to the debate, which was all about continually attacking the Coalition. At no stage has she asked the State Government what it is doing. She asked whether the \$20 million would be withdrawn. Answer: No, it will not. The only worry is if Kevin Rudd and Federal Labor get in. Then the project is in trouble because State Labor does not support it. State Labor does not support it; Federal Labor will not.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Ms Beamer	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Brown	Ms Hornery	Mr Rees
Ms Burney	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Ms Burton	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr Koperberg	Mr Stewart
Mr Collier	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Coombs	Mr McBride	Mr Terenzini
Mr Corrigan	Dr McDonald	Mr Tripodi
Mr Costa	Ms McKay	Mr Watkins
Mr Daley	Mr McLeay	Mr West
Ms D'Amore	Ms McMahan	Mr Whan
Ms Firth	Ms Meagher	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Ms Moore	Mr Martin

Noes, 37

Mr Aplin
Mr Baird
Mr Baumann
Ms Berejikian
Mr Cansdell
Mr Constance
Mr Debnam
Mr Draper
Mrs Fardell
Ms Goward
Mrs Hancock
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard

Ms Hodgkinson
Mrs Hopwood
Mr Humphries
Mr Kerr
Mr Oakeshott
Mr O'Dea
Mr O'Farrell
Mr Page
Mr Piccoli
Mr Piper
Mr Provest
Mr Richardson
Mr Roberts

Mrs Skinner
Mr Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Stokes
Mr Stoner
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr J. D. Williams
Mr R. C. Williams

Tellers,
Mr George
Mr Maguire

Pair

Ms Keneally

Mr Fraser

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Question—That the motion as amended be agreed to—put.

Division called for and Standing Order 185 applied.

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

Mr Amery
Ms Andrews
Mr Aquilina
Ms Beamer
Mr Brown
Ms Burney
Ms Burton
Mr Campbell
Mr Collier
Mr Coombs
Mr Corrigan
Mr Costa
Mr Daley
Ms D'Amore
Ms Firth
Ms Gadiel
Mr Gibson

Mr Greene
Mr Harris
Ms Hay
Mr Hickey
Ms Hornery
Ms Judge
Mr Khoshaba
Mr Koperberg
Mr Lynch
Mr McBride
Dr McDonald
Ms McKay
Mr McLeay
Ms McMahon
Ms Meagher
Ms Megaritty
Ms Moore

Mr Morris
Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Pearce
Mrs Perry
Mr Rees
Mr Sartor
Mr Shearan
Mr Stewart
Ms Tebbutt
Mr Terenzini
Mr Tripodi
Mr Watkins
Mr West
Mr Whan
Tellers,
Mr Ashton
Mr Martin

Noes, 37

Mr Aplin
Mr Baird
Mr Baumann
Ms Berejikian
Mr Cansdell
Mr Constance
Mr Debnam
Mr Draper
Mrs Fardell
Ms Goward
Mrs Hancock
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard

Ms Hodgkinson
Mrs Hopwood
Mr Humphries
Mr Kerr
Mr Oakeshott
Mr O'Dea
Mr O'Farrell
Mr Page
Mr Piccoli
Mr Piper
Mr Provest
Mr Richardson
Mr Roberts

Mrs Skinner
Mr Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Stokes
Mr Stoner
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr J. D. Williams
Mr R. C. Williams

Tellers,
Mr George
Mr Maguire

Pair

Ms Keneally

Mr Fraser

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Motion as amended agreed to.****PORT STEPHENS ELECTORATE POLICING****Debate resumed from 27 September 2007.**

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle) [12.31 p.m.]: The area in which I live borders the Port Stephens electorate. I thank the member for Port Stephens for his history lesson and note the valuable contribution that the Port Stephens area makes to the amenity and prosperity of the Hunter region. I am well aware of the arson attack on the Mallabula Community Centre and its effect on the local community. The Government is taking steps to investigate the concerns of the community within the lower Hunter police command, which is why the Government opposes the motion moved by the member for Port Stephens. An examination of the broader Hunter area has commenced with the establishment of the Greater Hunter Workforce Planning Project, which will consult widely with local stakeholders, including local area commanders and police association branches.

That examination presents an opportunity to investigate the current and future policing needs, not only of the Port Stephens and Lower Hunter areas but also of the Greater Hunter policing area. It provides for a balanced assessment of community and policing needs now and into the future. The Greater Hunter Workforce Planning Project will use key analysis indicators of customer service, crime, the impact of technology, staffing and demographic composition. I commend their efforts and believe that this issue cannot be dealt with in isolation, as any modifications to policing in one command will have a domino effect throughout the region. The member for Port Stephens will know that the region integrates with all areas and there is an expectation of planning. We look at issues such as policing, health, roads and education on a regional basis, not just on a particular area basis.

I remind the House that the former Deputy Commissioner, Field Operations approved three additional police positions to be allocated to the Lake Macquarie local area command. The allocation of new detectives will provide extra support for the hardworking officers of the Lake Macquarie command. I remind the House also that the Iemma Government has committed to providing numerous resources for the region, including a mobile police station for Lake Macquarie and for Newcastle, the area I represent. I report that that mobile police station will arrive in the Newcastle local area command early in the new year. I know the command is looking forward to that.

The inner-city area of Newcastle has had problems with antisocial behaviour. A number of new initiatives have been put in place, one of which is the mobile police station that will arrive early in the new year. The Lower Hunter command will also be provided with a mobile police station. The Port Stephens area will have a new police station located on the site of the existing police station at Raymond Terrace. The Minister for Police, David Campbell, visited Raymond Terrace on 10 August 2007 and took pleasure in announcing that the new police station will be built on the current site. The member for Maitland, Frank Terenzini, and Jim Arneman, who both have been strong campaigners for the new police station, joined the Minister. This year \$700,000 has been allocated to start the preliminary planning and scoping work for the new police station to be built at Raymond Terrace, which is scheduled to be completed in 2010.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Three years to build a police station?

Ms JODI McKAY: I note the earlier comments by members opposite in that regard. The Iemma Government continues to place more police on the streets. I am pleased to announce that 225 students graduated from the constable education program on 28 August 2007. That number is in addition to the 799 police who graduated from the New South Wales Police College on 30 January 2007, which boosted the New South Wales Police Force authorised strength to a record 15,206. Those additional officers have strengthened the current commands and have supported new initiatives to reduce the incidence of violent crimes and community fears.

I am particularly aware that the Lower Hunter area command received 12 new probationary constables from the January graduating class, three officers in May and a further three officers in August. As at July 2007

the authorised strength of the Lower Hunter Local Area Command was 229, and the actual strength was 250. In opposing the motion moved by the member for Port Stephens I acknowledge his commitment to his local area. I acknowledge the valuable work of all police in the Hunter region. I remind the House of the current review underway into policing in the Hunter in general. I commend the Government for its commitment to the Hunter region through this initiative.

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [12.38 p.m.]: It was interesting to listen to the contribution by the member for Newcastle, who is obviously well accustomed to reading things that other people write. If the member wants to walk into the Chamber and talk on an issue that touches a raw nerve in the community, such as policing and crime, I will give her one piece of advice: Do not read what the Government gives you! For years there has been a real problem in her area with crime, youth crime and antisocial behaviour. If she keeps reading in the House the rubbish that her so-called friends give her she will be out of here after one term.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Vaucluse has the call.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The last people who stood up in the House and read the rubbish-type speech that she just gave were Neville Newell, the then member for Tweed, and John Bartlett, the then member for Port Stephens. They were the last ones who stood in this place as apologists.

Mr Frank Terenzini: Point of order—

[Interruption]

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! If the member for Maitland has a substantive point of order it will be welcomed and dealt with fairly.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: We had the decency to listen in silence to the rubbish that the member for Newcastle put on the record. Somebody in the Government wrote this rubbish and gave it to the member for Newcastle, a former newsreader, to read. I suggest to the member for Newcastle—

Mr Frank Terenzini: Point of order: The member for Port Stephens moved this motion and the member for Newcastle contributed to debate on the motion. We are still waiting for the member for Vaucluse to make a contribution to this debate.

Mr Chris Hartcher: What standing order are you referring to?

Mr Frank Terenzini: My point of order relates to relevance under Standing Order 76.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Maitland has the call. If he intends to take a point of order he should proceed with it, and I invite him to do so.

Mr Frank Terenzini: My point of order relates to relevance.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! In the circumstances I do not believe the remarks of the member for Vaucluse could be objectionable on the ground of relevance. However, I ask him to return to the leave of the motion.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: This motion refers to all the things that this Government has not done for 12 years. The member for Newcastle played right into the trap: she read onto the record rubbish that was written by her colleagues and by bureaucrats who should no longer serve the people of New South Wales. The member for Newcastle should get out and talk to people, which is exactly what the member for Port Stephens has done. That is why so-called Labor member Jim Arneman—who once again is trying to represent the people of New South Wales—said that anyone wanting anything done in that region should talk to the member for Port Stephens. That is what this motion is all about.

On 18 October an article in the *Port Stephens Examiner* reported Jim Arneman as stating that the Labor Party had failed and that anyone who wanted anything done about policing and police stations in that region should talk to the member for Port Stephens, which is why he is the local member. That is why John Bartlett is not the member for Port Stephens and it is also why Neville Newell is not the member for Tweed.

Mr Barry Collier: Point of order: The member for Vacluse is misleading the House. He well knows that John Bartlett retired.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! There is no point of order. I ask the member for Vacluse to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: Over the past four or five years I do not know how many times I have visited the Port Stephens electorate and surrounding electorates to talk about crime and antisocial behaviour. I visited Port Stephens on many occasions throughout 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and three or four times earlier this year during the election campaign. In August this year, when I again visited Port Stephens, the same issue came up—the fact that the Labor Party has failed the Hunter region in law and order, and policing. Labor members of Parliament, for example, the member for Monaro—the joker seated to the left of the member for Newcastle—are apologists for the worst government in Australia.

If the new member for Newcastle wants to research this issue she should go through the *Hansard* to establish the number of occasions on which members of the Coalition, including me, have spoken in debate about crime in Newcastle and about the fact that people in Newcastle do not have a voice through their Labor representatives. That is why Jim Arneman, a Labor candidate in the current Federal election, said, "Anyone wanting anything done should go to the member for Port Stephens." I congratulate the member for Port Stephens. His reputation as a fighter and as a local representative led to his election in March. Today he is taking up another issue of concern to people in the community and he will deliver for them. He will deliver despite the best attempts of apologists such as the member for Newcastle, who tries to pretend that the Labor Party has any interest in this issue whatsoever.

Mr FRANK TERENZINI (Maitland) [12.43 p.m.]: The Iemma Government continues to put more police on the streets. Since the Coalition was last in government the combined authorised strength of police officers in Lake Macquarie, Waratah, Newcastle and the Lower Hunter has increased from 581 to 728—an increase of 147 officers, or more than 25 per cent. Furthermore, the local area command that I share with the member for Port Stephens increased by more than 30 per cent—from 175 to 229. I am pleased to announce that on 28 August 2007 225 students graduated from the Constable Education Program.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: That statement has already been made.

Mr Steve Whan: Let him say what he wants to say.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Terrigal will proceed with his point of order.

Mr Chris Hartcher: My point of order relates to tedious repetition. The member for Newcastle has already made these statements. She delivered the same speech that was written for her by government bureaucrats. That same speech has been given to the member for Maitland and it refers to the same number of officers who graduated on 28 August. Under the standing orders it is tedious repetition. The member for Maitland should do some research. He should not go to the Minister's office, which is what the member for Newcastle did, and obtain a pre-written speech.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I do not believe the circumstances are exactly as the member for Terrigal put them. However, I ask the member for Maitland to move on so that we can deal with all the issues and complete the debate.

Mr FRANK TERENZINI: I am aware of issues raised today in the local papers between the Police Association and the Lower Hunter Local Area Command. Clearly, some work must be done if both parties are to reach a deal in relation to a first response agreement. As the member for Maitland I will not make any irresponsible or inflammatory comments and I will not try to score political points at the expense of the community. This issue will be addressed through the normal processes. However, the dispute might escalate if it is not resolved. It is irresponsible for the member for Port Stephens to play on the fears of the community and manipulate the police because he is trying to help his mate get elected into Federal Parliament. That is what this is all about. The normal processes should be followed.

I remind the House of the work being done by police in the Hunter to address the current and future policing needs of the community. An examination of the broader Hunter area commenced in June this year with

the establishment of the Greater Hunter workforce planning project, which will take its course. The group will consult widely with local stakeholders, including local area commanders and branches of the Police Association. The group will have an opportunity to investigate current and future policing needs not only in Port Stephens but also in the Lower Hunter area. What happens in one local area command can affect an adjacent command. I am advised that work is progressing and several meetings have already been held.

This is an important project for Maitland residents, who are seeing a rapid population growth in areas such as Thornton, Rutherford and Aberglasslyn. They will be interested to see the results of that review. In particular, the project will deal with previous demographic studies conducted by the region. It will take into account planning and infrastructure and the Lower Hunter regional strategy, which has just been released. It will also take into account unemployment trends, traffic management, local government boundaries and other relevant census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I support the work that is being done. An overall review of policing in the Hunter Valley is the right way to go.

Opposition members can carp, whinge and whine all they like, but the commonsense way to go is to conduct a review of the use of our present resources. We have record police numbers in this State. I remind all members that the Iemma Government is committed to providing resources in the region, including mobile police stations—an issue referred to by my parliamentary colleague the member for Newcastle. I campaigned very hard for mobile police stations and the Minister is already honouring the State Government's promise. So far, \$700,000 has been allocated to fund a brand new police station in Raymond Terrace which, along with mobile police stations, will make for an even stronger Police Force. I look forward to the establishment of that new mobile police station. We must ensure that our police are able to operate as efficiently as possible, given the population demands of the region. I commend the move by the Government to ensure that police get the best resources to provide the best service for the people of New South Wales. *[Time expired.]*

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Gosford) [12.48 p.m.]: If ever there were a cry to bring back Bryce Gaudry we heard it today—not just from branches of the Australian Labor Party but also from the Newcastle community. We just heard the ultimate classic speech from the member for Newcastle, who used every buzzword. She said that there would be an "examination", which was the first buzzword. She then said that the examination would "consult widely" and it would then investigate. She also said that there would be "key performance indicators" and it would "integrate". Every little buzzword was used, but there has been no action. All she did was read out the usual speech written for her by bureaucrats, and she referred to key words such as "integrate", "investigate", and "key performance indicators".

Mr Steve Whan: Point of order: I bring to your attention that the member opposite is casting aspersions on the member for Newcastle, which is out of order in this Chamber. And it is highly irrelevant to the debate. I ask that you bring him back to the debate.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I do not think that the member for Monaro has established a point of order. I ask the member for Terrigal to proceed.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: In his debate he had a speech and she does not like it. She really reacts badly. Did you not? Did you not react? As soon as the member for Vacluse got up to debate, you really reacted.

Mr Steve Whan: Point of order—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are a very brittle speaker. You are a very brittle new member because you have been caught out today.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Terrigal will be seated.

Mr Steve Whan: My point of order is that the member opposite has to refer to the member by her correct title and electorate. I ask that you stop him from badgering the member across the table, and pointing and carrying on with his usual loud and intimidating behaviour.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Terrigal will take note of the point of order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The member for Newcastle has been caught out today but let us move on. Let us look at the former member for Port Stephens. He had a lot to say in this House about the way the Labor

Party was treating policing in his area. Just before he retired he made this speech about Raymond Terrace. He said:

There is a functioning police station at Raymond Terrace due to the professionalism of its officers, but it is a most dysfunctional building. The Carr Government has not promised any capital works funding for the station between 2003 and 2007.

That is what John Bartlett had to say about policing in Port Stephens and at Raymond Terrace. We heard today from the member for Newcastle, who read her pre-written speech by the bureaucrats, that Port Stephens will get a police station which will not be ready for another three years, and only \$700,000 has been allocated for it. What a pathetic response. Even more significant is what Jim Arneman said today. He said that the Government had made a promise to set up a local area command. An article today in the *Port Stephens Examiner*—I am happy to table it—said:

FORMER ALP ... candidate Jim Arneman has confirmed a pledge by the NSW Government of a police command for Port Stephens was made on the eve of the March election.

Mr Steve Whan: Point of order: The previous Opposition speaker actually quoted this exact same article.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I do not think that is a point of order, unless you can convince me otherwise.

Mr Steve Whan: I would suggest that it is, under Standing Order 59—tedious repetition.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! There is no point of order. The member for Terrigal may proceed.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The article continued:

Mr Arneman, who is now campaigning for the Federal seat of Paterson, stated that he was aware that the former police Minister John Watkins promised a Local Area Command during a visit to Raymond Terrace earlier in the year.

The confirmation makes nonsense of the claim by the current police Minister, David Campbell, that no such commitment was ever made by the NSW Government.

"The commitment was made and I stand by that commitment," Mr Arneman said.

Mr Arneman conceded there was little he could do to hold the NSW Government to its promise.

The New South Wales Government has made promise after promise. The member for Newcastle told us that it was all a matter of history, but going back over the past 10 years this Government has made promise after promise to the people of Port Stephens and to the police of Raymond Terrace, but it has not honoured them. Jim Arneman delivered nothing; he admits now that he can deliver nothing. The only person who can deliver anything and who has maintained a campaign has been the newly elected member for Port Stephens. One reason John Bartlett was only too happy to get out of this place was that the New South Wales Government had pulled the rug out from under him. The New South Wales Government has failed the people of Port Stephens. I commend the motion.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [12.53 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Maitland and the member for Newcastle for their contributions to this debate, although I am not sure their constituents will. It should be pointed out that Newcastle is around 48 square kilometres and has two local area commands. I do not know where Waratah is in Newcastle, but one could walk very easily between the Newcastle Local Area Command and Waratah. The member for Newcastle mentioned the Raymond Terrace police station, which has been promised by the Government for the last three elections. I was not present at the announcement by the Minister for Police simply because I was not invited. This Government does not invite Opposition members to anything.

Ms Jodi McKay: You were there the other day for the announcement. Don't you dare go there, Craig!

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: I was not invited.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Port Stephens has the call and he will proceed without interjections.

[Interruption]

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I call the member for Newcastle to order.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: The member for Newcastle spoke about mobile police stations. In Port Stephens we call them police cars, and a few of those on the roads would be handy. I thank also the member for Vacluse and the member for Terrigal for their contributions. Since 27 September, when I moved this motion, there has been no positive change in policing arrangements in the Port Stephens electorate. However, in the ensuing three weeks we have had some significant backward steps. The Minister for Police continues to deny that his Government ever committed to the establishment of a dedicated Port Stephens Local Area Command. Our local community newspapers continue to request comment on this turnaround from the Minister and his predecessor. Today saw a stunning revelation from the Federal Labor candidate for Paterson, Jim Arneman, who had earlier reiterated the Government's commitment on radio. Arneman has confirmed that the former Minister for Police, John Watkins, promised a local area command on a visit to Raymond Terrace during the election campaign, which was mentioned earlier in the debate.

Mr Barry Collier: What's the margin in Port Stephens? It is 68 votes. That's smaller than my margin.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: The commitment was made. The Government refused to live up to its commitment and the people of Port Stephens are very angry.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Port Stephens will continue uninterrupted.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: It is not the Minister for Police who has been banging on the door of an empty police station at midnight. It is not the Minister for Police who is left on hold trying to report a crime in progress. It is not the Minister for Police whose community is under siege from arsonists, vandals and thieves. It is the people of Port Stephens who are suffering from this Government's ignorance and they were angry enough at the March poll to punish the Government for its neglect. It might have been 68 votes, but it was a 7.2 per cent swing.

When I asked a question of the Minister for Police about this matter, he referred the House to the charter of budget honesty. What a joke! An honest answer to a question that is crucial to the safety and security of the people of Port Stephens has not been forthcoming. We are waiting for work to begin on a promised Raymond Terrace police station. As I said earlier, it has been promised three times in the last three elections. We are still waiting on the final report of the supposed working party into policing requirements in the region. As I mentioned previously, Port Stephens is part of the Lower Hunter Local Area Command. The member for Maitland should know that after two hours two police cars patrol an 8,000 square kilometre region, not 48 square kilometres.

Arson is a major problem in Port Stephens. Community facilities frequently are victims of attacks by firebugs. On the first day of the bushfire season, the Labor Day long weekend, Port Stephens fell victim to arsonists again when bushfires raged out of control for several days, at one stage seven fires raged at the same time. At a dawn meeting with volunteer rural firefighters they told me of watching as these reprehensible crimes were being committed. One volunteer described seeing a suspected arsonist escape from a newly lit fire on a quad bike but he could not give pursuit in a fire truck. Police in this region are not a phone call away; they could be hours away. Police could be attending the scene of another crime 100 kilometres away.

As I travel throughout my electorate I am informed continually that local residents know the perpetrators, yet it seems the police are powerless to intervene. This morning I was informed that local area command police might consider industrial action over staff shortages. One official from the New South Wales Police Association says that 30 more officers are needed for the region. How many did the State Government commit to the region during the election campaign? Four. How many have been delivered since? One. How many police have left the local area command since February? Eight. The obligation is on the Government to provide for the protection and safety of the people they represent. The New South Wales State Government, through mismanagement and neglect, has failed rural and regional New South Wales in this responsibility. The people of Port Stephens are sick of being lied to and ignored. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.**Ayes, 38**

Mr Aplin	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Richardson
Mr Baird	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Roberts
Mr Baumann	Mr Humphries	Mr Smith
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Stokes
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	Mr Stoner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr O'Dea	Mr R. W. Turner
Mrs Fardell	Mr O'Farrell	Mr J. D. Williams
Ms Goward	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Mrs Hancock	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Piper	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Provest	Mr Maguire

Noes, 47

Mr Amery	Mr Gibson	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Greene	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Aquilina	Mr Harris	Mr Pearce
Ms Beamer	Ms Hay	Mrs Perry
Mr Brown	Mr Hickey	Mr Rees
Ms Burney	Ms Hornery	Mr Sartor
Ms Burton	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr Khoshaba	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Koperberg	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Dr McDonald	Mr Watkins
Mr Costa	Ms McKay	Mr West
Mr Daley	Mr McLeay	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Ms McMahan	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Firth	Ms Meagher	Mr Ashton
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megaritty	Mr Martin

Pair

Mr Fraser

Ms Keneally

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.**

[The Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 1.06 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

REPRESENTATION OF MINISTER ABSENT DURING QUESTIONS

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In the absence of the Minister for Ageing, and Minister for Disability Services, who is ill, the Minister for Community Services will answer questions on her behalf.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of Motion**

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) and Business with Precedence Notice of Motion given.

QUESTION TIME

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ROYAL NORTH SHORE HOSPITAL

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Why was Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile pressured by the Government to shorten the length of the parliamentary inquiry into Royal North Shore Hospital to just seven weeks, when Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile told the media on Monday that it should report in February next year? Is this another case of the Minister for Health saving her political skin, not looking after patients in our hospitals?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I have had no contact with Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, except that on Monday evening I left a message for him indicating my full cooperation and the cooperation of my department. But I am advised that the terms of reference, including the time frame for the committee, were passed by both Houses last night.

AMBARVALE CHILD'S BODY

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier update the House on the latest information on the police investigation into the discovery of a child's body at Ambarvale yesterday?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Upon hearing about it everyone—no matter which side of politics they represent and no matter what their status in the community—could only be appalled and shocked by this distressing incident, as I was when I was informed of it last night. I think it would be fair to say that on getting up this morning we all felt sicker when we learned what has occurred at Ambarvale in Sydney's south-west. The horrific discovery by a group of young children has understandably sent shockwaves through the local community, and I am sure everyone joins me in extending their sympathy to the local community and to the children who made the horrific discovery. The death of a child in any circumstances is devastating; one simply cannot understand anybody killing a child.

Before I go any further I want to make it clear that police are investigating this case and I will be careful about what I say. The basic facts of the case, as they are known thus far, are that children playing in a park discovered a suitcase in a duck pond. They dragged the case to the edge of the pond and opened it and what they found can only be described as traumatic: the body of a young boy who had died some time earlier. Local police and the homicide squad were called to the scene and I am advised that they have established Strike Force Eber. I am also advised that staff from the Department of Community Services have been in contact with the police and will be available to provide any assistance required.

I am advised that a massive investigation is underway. I am further advised that police have been scouring nearby bushland and will leave no stone unturned in their efforts to track down the person or persons responsible. I am also advised that police divers are continuing to search the duck pond for further clues, a process that could take some days, and that police have been contacting local schools to ascertain if any students have not returned from school holidays. I want the police to know that they have the support of everybody in the community in their efforts to unravel what has happened and who is responsible because, put simply, this is one of the most monstrous acts imaginable.

I encourage anybody in the Ambarvale area or anywhere else who can provide any information, no matter how trivial they think it might be, to contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 and to assist the police with their inquiries. The pond is close to homes. If you saw someone with a suitcase, if you saw the suitcase in the pond, do not hesitate to contact the police. As I say, no matter how trivial you might think it might be, any information could be crucial in determining what happened and, more importantly, who is responsible for this monstrous act. I again extend my best wishes to nearby residents, the local community, who have been devastated by this horrific discovery, to the children who made the discovery, who are obviously traumatised by it, and their families. I urge anyone who might know anything, who might have any piece of information, to come forward.

HEALTH SYSTEM REFORM

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Now that Professor John Dwyer has joined the long list of senior doctors speaking out against Labor's mismanagement of Health, stating

that reforms that the Premier introduced as health Minister have resulted in clinicians losing control of the hospital system and a disconnect between management and clinicians, will the Minister listen to the advice of the experts and return control of the health system to local communities and local doctors?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: In the time that I have been health Minister I have visited hospitals, community health centres and ambulance stations all over New South Wales, and I have spoken with many doctors in many circumstances. I most recently met with Professor Dwyer—

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Opposition will cease calling out.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: —and other members of the New South Wales Medical Board only two weeks ago. It was an opportunity to listen to their concerns, because health is always an evolving process. There are always examples of how we can do things better. That is the commitment I give to doctors and nurses in New South Wales: We will work together to make the system work for patients in New South Wales. The amalgamation process in New South Wales, reducing the number of area health services from 17 to 8, has had many, many advantages.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Bega to order. I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order. I call the Leader of The Nationals to order. I call the member for Willoughby to order.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The first advantage is that we have been able to reduce the size of our bureaucracy.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Myall Lakes to order.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: When we went from 17 area health services to 8 area health services, we were able to remove more than 1,000 people from bureaucratic jobs in New South Wales Health. What did that mean for front-line services? It meant an additional \$70 million for front-line services in New South Wales. We must find those savings. We must always examine the way we are using our resources so that we can make the health dollar go as far as possible to treat as many people as possible.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Bega to order for the second time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: There is great pressure to find those savings because the Commonwealth Government has completely abrogated its responsibility.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The question specifically asked the Minister: will she listen to the experts and return control to the local community and local doctors, yes or no?

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The point I was making is that one advantage of area health services has meant that we have been able to achieve savings so that we can put money into front-line services.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will cease injecting. I call the member for Willoughby to order for the second time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Another advantage of area health services is that we are able to make our hospital system work cooperatively. We have been able to anchor the smaller rural, regional and outer metropolitan hospitals with the major teaching hospitals. That means that we are able to share our expertise across the State and develop more equitable access to good-quality health care.

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

Mr Andrew Stoner: Do you believe this?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Leader of The Nationals should believe this because it has been vital to lifting the standards for rural and regional hospitals.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of The Nationals to order for the second time.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: I call the Leader of The Nationals to order for the third time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Another advantage of the amalgamation has been to develop clinical networks so that our doctors will work across the system and share their skills throughout our hospitals.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The ultimate advantage is lifting the standard of care available to people in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: But there is a sting in the tail for the Leader of The Nationals with his question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Clarence to order for the second time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Essentially, the Leader of The Nationals is asking me whether I support Tony Abbott's plan to reintroduce boards for hospitals. The answer is no, because it will not add one doctor, one nurse or one extra service to the New South Wales health system. It is about adding bureaucracy. It would add 2,000 bureaucrats to hospitals across New South Wales. The net effect is that the Federal Government dresses it up as a concept of local ownership. However, it is about forcing hospitals into a bidding war against each other, and the major teaching hospitals will win that war. What will happen?

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Rural and regional New South Wales will miss out because they will not be able to have the first pick of the medical training graduates, as happens now.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Clarence to order for the third time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The outer metropolitan hospitals will suffer because they will not be able to compete in paying the increased fees for the medical workforce. The introduction of boards will not add one doctor or one nurse; it will simply drive up the cost of a scarce resource—our medical workforce. So Tony Abbott's plan is one of back to the future: not one extra dollar for the health system but 1,000 bureaucrats who he has said should be doing it for the love of it.

The SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Clarence for the last time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Or perhaps we will pay them up to \$10,000 each. It is ridiculous to think that a community board of well-minded people could run a hospital such as Royal North Shore Hospital.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: A hospital with an operating budget of \$357.5 million, 3,800 staff and clinical governance imperatives that will be left to a board of well-minded people completely misses the point.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Tony Abbott's policy is back to the future, the survival of the fittest. Only the big hospitals will survive under that plan.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Hawkesbury to order for the second time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: So when I am asked whether I stand by amalgamations, the answer is yes because the alternative is to fracture the system and rob it of any chance of equity that we are able to achieve

through amalgamated services. So the answer to the question is yes, I stand by our amalgamations, because they are the greatest chance we have of ensuring greater equity in access to good quality health care.

NURSE SHORTAGE

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: My question is directed to the Minister for Health.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order so that members can hear the question.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: Will the Minister inform the House of the latest initiatives to support and increase the nursing workforce in New South Wales?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bathurst will cease injecting.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: It is a pleasure to be able to inform the House of the ongoing investment this Government is making in recruiting and training nurses in New South Wales. Nurses are the backbone of our health system. They are the front line in our public health care delivery, working hard every day with best patient care in mind. But it is not an easy job. As I move around the health system, visiting hospitals in the community health care system, I am continually impressed by the professionalism, dedication and compassion shown by our nurses.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I have listened to the nurses across our health system, and they have told me of the challenges they face. They talk about the pressure of the increasing demand for services and the pressure of every shift. I know that their job is tough and at times it is extremely stressful. That is why I am committed to ensuring that they get the support they need to get on with the job. One thing every nurse mentions is the fact that we need more nurses. That is why we are continually working to develop strategies to increase the workforce and overcome the shortages that have been created by Commonwealth underinvestment.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Minister has the call.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Iemma Government's strategies and incentives for recruitment, retention and training are giving nurses greater opportunities to gain employment, enhance their knowledge and develop new skills by providing the people of New South Wales with quality care.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Our nurses are the best paid in the country. Since 1999 we have increased their pay rates by 47 per cent. We have also improved their conditions by increasing maternity leave, introducing more flexible rostering and investing significantly in scholarships and professional development. This year's budget included \$35.8 million over the next four years for recruitment, retention and training initiatives. A further \$46 million has been allocated for the Investing in Nurses Program, including 30 new nurse practitioners and 1,600 scholarships for registered and enrolled nurses. We are delivering on our commitment to recruit an additional 80 clinical nurse educators, bringing the total number to 420. We have vigorously pursued the Nurse Reconnect Program, which, by August 2007, had brought more than 1,600 nurses back into public hospitals.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Strathfield will cease interjecting.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: We are training nurses in our schools and in TAFE colleges. More than 1,100 nurses will graduate from TAFE this year. We have increased the total nursing workforce by 8,051 nurses in the past five years, bringing the total to more than 42,000 nurses. We have also protected our nurses from John Howard's unfair industrial relations laws.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I am keen to ensure that question time is concluded in the appropriate way. I ask members to observe the protocols by which members of the community judge the conduct of this House.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The alternative for nurses working under WorkChoices is pretty bleak, and the figures are in. Nurses working in the private hospital aged care sector in New South Wales earn up to \$120 a

week less than their colleagues in the public system. This erosion of pay and conditions would make it even harder to attract nurses to NSW Health. Already our ability to recruit nurses is constrained by chronic underinvestment in our universities overseen by John Howard. Today New South Wales is attempting to recruit 1,200 fully funded nursing positions, but we undertake that recruitment program in an environment in which John Howard has failed to provide the right number of university places. Last year alone 2,500 applicants for a Bachelor of Nursing course were turned away from Australian universities.

Earlier this year the States and Territories were invited by the Commonwealth to provide input into the allocation of additional Commonwealth supported higher education places, which will be made available to Australian universities for 2008. In seeking input from the States and Territories the Commonwealth indicated that the new places would be targeted to areas of workforce shortage, such as Health, and where there was a student demand. However, that turned out to be just another Howard stunt, one that will exacerbate workforce shortages for nursing in New South Wales. After extensive work by NSW Health to project the number of nurses we would need next year, it was decided that we would require 1,769 additional university places to meet the demand for registered nurses. And what was the Commonwealth allocation? A measly 200! In the face of demand for 1,769 additional university places the Commonwealth allocated only an additional 200 places. Before we even start there is an immediate shortfall of 1,500 nurses in the system.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: With the Federal election looming the Prime Minister attempted to indicate that he was in touch with health workforce needs around the country.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Willoughby to order for the third time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Prime Minister came out with his great solution for the nursing shortage workforce.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for member for Murray-Darling to order.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The grand plan from the Prime Minister was to train 500 nurses in our hospitals.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: I think we have been tolerant for long enough.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on the Government benches will remain silent.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: My point of order is under section 129—relevance. WorkChoices will not affect nurses working in government hospitals. They are on State awards and the Minister is responsible for the terrible conditions in the hospitals where they work.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. However, I ask the Minister to conclude her comments.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: It is important for people to understand that the difficulty in recruiting nurses is linked directly to the number of nurses, and that is linked directly to the education places available. Underinvestment in our universities is underinvestment in our hospitals—500 nurses have been trained in our hospitals for the country.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: That is 500 for the country while today in New South Wales we are attempting to recruit 1,200 nurses.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Federal Government stands condemned on its investment in the medical workforce. I take this opportunity to contrast that to Kevin Rudd's plan for nursing. Not only does Kevin Rudd have a \$2 billion national health reform plan with a vision to improve Commonwealth-State relations—

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: —he also has a workforce plan of \$81 million for the training of 9,200 nurses for the State's public hospital system.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Murray-Darling to order for the second time.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: Mr Speaker, you know my reluctance to take a point of order on relevance, but clearly an answer somehow related to Kevin Rudd is in no way related to the question. You have already asked the Minister to conclude her comments.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bathurst will remain silent.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: You talked about raising the standards of this House in an earlier ruling. I see people in the gallery shaking their heads. When Ministers refuse to answer questions, there will be noise from this side. I ask you to direct the Minister back to the question or get her to sit down.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I conclude my comments by saying that there are workforce pressures in New South Wales affecting the health system, as there are right across the country. Those workforce pressures are the result of the Commonwealth Government underfunding our universities for the past 10 years. It is important that people understand that an alternative vision in this country begins with additional money for public hospitals and with creating needed workforce places in our universities. That vision moves on to wanting to inform and work with the States and Territories, and to improve Commonwealth-State relations so that we can build a public health-care system across the country that will meet our demands into the future.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ROYAL NORTH SHORE HOSPITAL

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Given that Professor Greg Fulcher, the immediate past Chairman of the Medical Staff Council at Royal North Shore Hospital, and a member of the Clinical Reference Group, said "the proposed timeframe will not allow an appropriate review of the situation and may leave a number of issues inadequately addressed", will the Minister now join the Opposition in calling for the parliamentary inquiry into the Royal North Shore Hospital to be extended to February?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: This is the first question that Opposition members asked today. I cannot understand why they do not change tactics when they do not get the answer they want. First, the reporting date is in the terms of reference. Second, last night this House unanimously passed those terms of reference. Opposition members agreed to the terms of reference. I refer also to comments by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile in another place, who said:

The original date was 14 December, but after I spoke to the Opposition leaders I changed it to 15 February. In retrospect, I believe 14 December is the best date for the committee to have as a target date for the inquiry so it is not seen that we are delaying the inquiry.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked the question. The Minister is answering the question. Would it be possible to hear both the question and answer?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: We are just shocked at the answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee should not be too shocked or he will find himself outside the Chamber. I remind members that many of them are on two or three calls to order. If they offend again I will not hesitate to remove them from the Chamber.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I make the point again. Last night the House unanimously passed the terms of reference of this committee. If Opposition members have difficulty with that perhaps they should have raised it then.

GRAFFITI REMOVAL PROGRAM

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS: My question is directed to the Minister for Juvenile Justice. Will the Minister inform the House what programs are in place to address reoffending by juvenile graffiti vandals?

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: The Iemma Government is working hard to fight the scourge of graffiti vandalism and it is delivering on its commitments to the people of New South Wales. Graffiti-tagged buildings and trains are an eyesore for the community, and it is a costly exercise to clean it up. We are determined that young offenders take responsibility for their behaviour, and they need to face up to the consequences of their crimes. Only then will young offenders understand and repair the hurt and harm that their actions have caused. It is essential that young offenders undertake programs to stop them from reoffending. By helping to integrate young offenders back into normal daily routines and changing their behaviour and attitudes hopefully we will steer them away from life of crime.

The Department of Juvenile Justice runs the Graffiti Removal Program to help young offenders face up to the consequences of their actions and the harm it causes to our community. Under this innovative program, young offenders are ordered by the courts to clean up graffiti in their local area. Directing offenders to perform community service work is working as an effective deterrent against graffiti vandalism. Members might be interested to know that since 1999 the use of these orders has resulted in the completion of 60,000 hours of graffiti removal work by young offenders. They can also be required to pay compensation towards repairing the damage that has been caused. Feedback from different localities around our State shows that the program is working on the ground.

I visited Newcastle and spoke with officers from my department about the Graffiti Removal Program. They referred to a very successful program in which young offenders who have committed graffiti crimes are ordered by the court to clean up graffiti that they have helped to create. Officers at the Newcastle Juvenile Justice Community Service told me that they are working hard to teach young offenders the cost of their action and how to be responsible for their behaviour. They are also making sure that young offenders pay back their debt to our community. In the past financial year alone the Newcastle Juvenile Justice Community Service office has supervised young offenders completing 1,119 hours of graffiti removal.

The Newcastle Juvenile Justice Community Service Graffiti Removal Program is currently operating in the Lake Macquarie local council area. The department is working in partnership with Lake Macquarie council to facilitate this program, in particular, in the provision of supervisors who oversee juveniles involved in the clean-up jobs and who provide paint and equipment to remove graffiti. By working in partnership with local councils and the community we are delivering better results for everyone. Staff at the Newcastle office said that their experience shows the program is having a positive impact on targeting offending behaviour in young people. The department's success in Newcastle is just one of many examples of the great work being undertaken in the delivery of this program throughout New South Wales.

Successful graffiti removal programs are taking place from Campbelltown to the city and the Central Coast to Fairfield. They are being run through Juvenile Justice Community Service offices and they are clocking up thousands of hours of young offenders being made to clean up graffiti. In Campbelltown in the last financial year the Juvenile Justice Community Office supervised 1,832 graffiti removal hours. In Fairfield the figure totalled 1,425 graffiti removal hours. Sydney supervised 1,092 graffiti removal hours and the Central Coast office supervised 435 graffiti removal hours. These examples equate to almost 6,000 hours of graffiti removal work for the past financial year alone. It helps young offenders directly see the negative effect graffiti has on their community, and families have a right to live in a safe and clean environment. If someone leaves an unsightly tag he or she must be made to clean it up.

Young offenders across New South Wales are being made to right their wrongs, and we make no apology for that. It is a mundane and time-consuming job that serves an important purpose. For starters, it helps to act as a deterrent to young people engaging in graffiti and helps them to see just what damage their actions cause to the community. The removal of graffiti also eliminates the recognition and satisfaction that young people seek from such criminal behaviour, which is one of the key reasons for young offenders defacing property. The successful Graffiti Removal Program had its roots in an initiative trialled in the lead-up to the Sydney 2000 Olympics. The current program builds on that initial trial, but it is being developed further by the Department of Juvenile Justice to most effectively challenge this type of offending behaviour.

The removal of graffiti is conducted primarily from bus shelters and clubhouses of community sporting facilities. This program builds on other strong action the Iemma Government is taking to fight back against graffiti vandalism. We have a long record of implementing strong and effective anti-graffiti measures. In 2006 the Premier announced a comprehensive strategy in the ongoing fight against graffiti vandalism, which included the establishment of the Anti-Graffiti Action Team to drive new measures in reducing graffiti throughout our State; increasing the use of community service orders to make offenders repair the damage caused by graffiti

vandalism; identifying graffiti hot spots and stepping up enforcement and surveillance, especially through closed-circuit television; assisting councils and government utilities with the development of graffiti development management plans targeting high graffiti environments; and allowing local councils to accredit community groups and volunteers to remove graffiti.

In June 2006 the Government also passed the Summary Offences (Display of Spray Paint Cans) Act 2006, which requires retailers of spray paint cans to keep their stock in locked display cabinets. All members would be aware that the scheme came into force on 1 November 2006. These initiatives, which are fantastic, come on top of the tough penalties that already exist for graffiti-related offences. These offences continue to apply to both adults and young people, and include damaging and defacing property with paint under section 10A of the Summary Offences Act, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 units, or six months imprisonment; possession of spray paint with intent to use it to damage or deface premises or other property under section 10B of the Summary Offences Act, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 units or three months imprisonment; sale of spray paint cans to juveniles under section 10C of the Summary Offences Act, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 penalty units; and malicious damage to property under section 195 of the Crimes Act, which carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment. These are pretty tough penalties and we are not ashamed to say that we are the instigators of those penalties. All people who deface private property and community property need to be made to pay the price.

A number of sentencing options are available to the courts to deter graffiti vandalism, including community service orders and reparation orders requiring the offender to pay compensation towards repair of the damage, and restrictions and non-association orders. Our community values the reduction of unsightly graffiti, while young persons benefit from community participation. Of course, this success may stem from the benefit of community participation offered to the young person through this project. Through these initiatives the Government demonstrates its determined efforts not only to reduce the number of juveniles committing graffiti crimes but also to provide a safe and clean community for everyone. The Iemma Government is working hard in fighting graffiti vandalism and ensuring that young offenders take responsibility for their crimes. In fighting against graffiti vandalism we are delivering on our commitments to the people of New South Wales.

RESIDENTIAL TENANCY LAWS

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Parramatta.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: It's my turn.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition did not seek the call.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: I did seek the call.

The SPEAKER: Order! We will study the video. The member for Parramatta has the call.

Ms TANYA GADIEL: My question without notice is to the Minister for Fair Trading. Can the Minister provide an update on the review of residential tenancy laws?

Ms LINDA BURNEY: I acknowledge the member for Parramatta for her advocacy on behalf of tenants and landlords. The New South Wales Government is overhauling residential tenancy laws to strike a better balance between the rights and responsibilities of tenants and those of landlords. We are undertaking the first major reform to these laws since they were introduced 20 years ago. New South Wales has 750,000 rental properties, so this topic is relevant to all members of this House.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Don't shout.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: I just have a big voice, sorry. On 22 September I released a consultation paper setting out more than 100 proposed amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act in New South Wales. These amendments will see greater protection for tenants and a more efficient system for landlords. Christine Castle from the Real Estate Institute told Channel 9 news on 22 September that these reforms will cut red tape and encourage property investors across New South Wales.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Well done, Minister.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: It is well done, Swampy, because this will really help.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: Mr Speaker, I am sure that you are aware, as the member should be, that the standing orders require members to be referred to by their electorate titles. "Swampy" is hardly befitting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member's point of order is upheld.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: I guess that such major reform is a bit hard for some people to cope with. The Federal Government, of course, has done nothing to help homeowners in New South Wales. Although the Prime Minister has said, famously, that Australian families have never had it so easy, we know that since March 2005 there have been five interest rate rises. The Federal Government's effort in housing has been nothing short of P-A-T-H pathetic. Absolutely pathetic.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: That is not pathetic.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: E-T-I-C, Barry. It is overkill. I can spell it.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: If the Minister is going to try to spell things she should spell the whole word.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: I just did, Barry. Are you deaf? I cannot say it but I can spell it. What the Federal Government has done with housing in this country is outrageous. Mal Brough has ripped \$13 million out of the Aboriginal housing system in New South Wales. I reckon Mal Brough should stop drinking red cordial in the morning. These residential reforms in New South Wales have attracted an unprecedented response. Since the release of the discussion paper there have been 11,000 downloads from the Fair Trading website, in just three weeks. Submissions are very important and will be accepted until the end of the year. I urge all members to read the paper and to let their constituents know about the proposed changes.

The Office of Fair Trading will hold community information sessions across New South Wales. Forums will be held at Orange and in the Illawarra. I am not sure that one will be held in the Clarence area; I do not think that is a good place in which to hold a forum about residential tenancies. Just yesterday the Premier mentioned that the member for Clarence spent all of question time sketching a portrait of the Premier. It did not look much like him. You have to be focused at these residential tenancy forum sessions; you cannot be drawing during them. However, the member for Drummoyne will have a forum in her electorate, as will the member for Newcastle. That shows how hard working some of the members on this side of the House are. If the Leader of the Opposition is really nice I will permit a forum to be held in Ku-ring-gai.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: But you say only some of the members.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: Most of them. Getting to the heart of the reforms, I will mention quickly just three of the 100 reforms. We will legally recognise for the first time ever co-tenant relationships.

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

Ms LINDA BURNEY: New measures will enable co-tenants to resolve disputes, which is an important reform given the growth in shared households.

Mr Anthony Roberts: Give us the 100.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: You could not cope with 100, Anthony. We will also streamline the process to evict chronic non-paying tenants, but there will be protection for tenants who fall behind in their rent and can catch up. One major issue we are examining is when a landlord defaults on the mortgage and the premises are repossessed. This is a serious issue and it happens quite often. At the moment there is no requirement to give the tenants notice. The reforms require that tenants be given 30 days notice to vacate the premises. I am sure members understand that this is major reform encompassing 100 proposed changes on serious issues. The modernised tenancy laws will strengthen protection for tenants and make it easier for landlords to manage their properties. It is another example of the Iemma Government's reformist nature and the hard work we are doing.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ROYAL NORTH SHORE HOSPITAL

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Minister for Health.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Monaro that he has already been called to order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: As it has been three weeks since commencement of the Jana Horska miscarriage investigation and there has been no report into her treatment, how does the Minister expect a parliamentary inquiry into the whole of Royal North Shore Hospital to report in just seven weeks? Or is the Australian Medical Association right when it says that "the deadline of 14 December is a rush for cover to bury the issue before Christmas"?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Professor Walters and Professor Hughes, who are conducting the independent investigation, made it very clear that they would report back to the Government on 26 October. That is public information. That is also stated in the terms of reference tabled in this Parliament. I think the Opposition needs to do more homework.

STREET-SAFE POLICE TASK FORCE

Ms CLOVER MOORE: My question is addressed to the Minister for Police. Following his recent late-night visit to Oxford Street—

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I will allow the question—I cannot wait to hear the rest of it—and the Leader of the Opposition will contain his excitement.

Ms CLOVER MOORE: As Oxford Street has large numbers of late-night and 24-hour venues, more than 10,000 young people in the precinct on Friday and Saturday nights, and frequent incidents of crime, violence and antisocial behaviour, will he introduce a street safe task force similar to one that exists in Victoria which provides 50 officers to patrol inner-city entertainment zones, enforce licensing conditions, and respond to crime and antisocial behaviour?

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I thank the member for inviting me to accompany her and George Newhouse, the Labor Party candidate for Wentworth, on a visit to Oxford Street. During that visit we discussed a number of issues, one of which was WorkChoices and the impact that WorkChoices will have on people who work in the hospitality industry—a very important industry along with the retail industry for the Oxford Street strip.

The purpose of visiting the area late at night was to listen to issues related to public safety being expressed by people who work in that area. Something that the Opposition has no understanding of or capacity for is listening. Our purpose in taking a walk along the Oxford Street precinct, listening to what people were saying, visiting a couple of nightclubs and having a bottle of water was simply to gain an understanding of the issues related to public safety. One of the outcomes of the visit is that in a couple of weeks the New South Wales Police Force will host a forum that will consult and listen to people from the gay, lesbian and transsexual communities. As we undertake development of policing policy in that area we will conduct a forum to listen to people who are representative of those communities.

As the Government and the police continue to work to improve policing in New South Wales we will expand our policies related to street violence. I might say that one of those will be an expansion of the crime prevention partnerships, which are part of a highly successful initiative of the Iemma Government in reducing violent assaults that occur on our streets and in our suburbs. Crime prevention partnerships bring together local police, transport authorities, licensing officers and other local agencies to find new ways of cracking down on street violence and alcohol-fuelled antisocial and hooligan behaviour.

Six crime prevention partnerships are already in place and are showing impressive early results. Since the crime prevention partnerships were set up last year assault rates have decreased by 9 per cent in the Canobolas Local Area Command and by 7 per cent in the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command. In Parramatta, which I visited to launch the new partnership only three months ago accompanied by the member for Parramatta, street crime has decreased by 10 per cent. That is why on Monday of this week the Premier announced expansion of this highly successful program to 10 new areas: Blacktown, Campbelltown, Richmond, Kings Cross—which is where I was again this morning with George Newhouse—Lake Illawarra, Tuggerah Lakes, Penrith, Lower Hunter, Orana and Wollongong.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister does not require any assistance.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: All of the communities in those areas will see the benefits of the Government's crime-fighting plan. This is evidence of the Government's demonstrated commitment to introducing initiatives to crack down on violent behaviour on our streets. The Government will continue to work with at the member for Sydney and other stakeholders in the inner-Sydney area to build on the strong work of officers in the local area commands—officers who are working late at night on the streets. During our visit to the Oxford Street precinct we saw a couple of constables walking along the street.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I am aware of another term formerly used in police circles, and perhaps by the member for Mount Druitt when he was a police officer, but I decline to refer to it in this context. We also saw some police officers dealing with a very aggressive individual in the back of a police van. The presence of police during our visit demonstrated that police are out and about on our streets and are working late at night while carrying out their duties. The second group of police officers we saw were still working after 1.00 a.m. My answer demonstrates that the Government has given effect to its commitment to crack down on street violence and antisocial behaviour. We have a commitment to do so in consultation with specific interest groups and in conjunction with hardworking local members, such as the member for Sydney.

HEALTH RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA: My question is addressed to the Premier. What are the latest initiatives for strengthening the New South Wales health system?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I can best describe our latest initiatives as a stark contrast. The New South Wales Government, through its budget, made a record investment in health resources to train record numbers of health staff, such as nurses and other health professionals, to open acute care beds. At the same time we are moving to new models of care to manage the treatment of those in our community who are chronically ill and to prevent hospitalisation and hospital readmissions. That is the policy framework for the health budget. In stark contrast, the policy prescription advanced by Opposition members and promoted by their Canberra colleagues—their silver bullet or magic solution to the nation's health issues and the challenges that this nation faces in relation to health—is boards. In other words, the Opposition's initiative is another layer of bureaucracy. Therein lies the contrast.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order relates to standing order 129. Does the Premier mean boards such as the Westmead children's hospital board?

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: That proves my point: the Opposition's attitude to health is politics, not policy. It is about winding back the clock 25 or 30 years and returning to hospital boards. That is it. The Leader of the Opposition waited for the leadership for so long. He had one hand in the air for the leadership and the other hand plunged into the back of the then Leader of the Opposition—one out, one back. Having waited so long and having responded to the invitation from his party—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will stop calling out. I call the member for Burrinjuck to order for the second time.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: When the Leader of the Opposition was made leader his party room presented him with the challenge to come up with a policy vision. The words from the party room were, "Barry has got to fire up." He has been fired up all right. Seven months down the track and the vision is there. It is a vision of boards—another layer of bureaucracy and more bureaucrats. That is his policy vision. It all sounds so familiar.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition is being disorderly.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Leader of the Opposition has been obsessing about structures, bureaucracy and boards. His policy prescription to meet the health challenges of this State and this nation is boards, another layer of bureaucracy—not one extra nurse, bed or doctor. That is the solution. The board policy comes from his friends in Canberra and from his colleague the member for Vacluse, who took that policy position to the election on 24 March. It was Peter's policy. Another policy of recent times also involving structures and bureaucracy is, as reported in News Limited newspapers of a week ago, the proposal by the

Leader of the Opposition to reduce the number of government departments from 33 to 9 or 10. Guess what? That is another policy borrowed from Peter. The Leader of the Opposition got the boards policy from Peter and the public service restructure from 33 to 9 or 10 departments from Peter. Those policies and visions were stolen from Peter. Who knows, next the Leader of the Opposition might scrub off the Speedos and return to the aquatic team. It is no wonder our old friend the member for Terrigal has been riding in recently to assist the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I assure you that this is as boring for me as it is for everyone else.

The SPEAKER: Is there a point of order?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: I refer to Standing Order 129—relevance. The question was about what the Government is doing to improve health services. I am sure that we would all love to hear the answer to that question but the Premier's response has nothing to do with it. The Premier talked about the former Leader of the Opposition and everything except what he is doing. There have been many disasters in health. Every member and every person in the gallery wants to hear—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. The Premier has made some introductory remarks and I am sure that he is aware of the standing orders.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Leader of the Opposition has no understanding whatsoever of the health system but contends simply that there is a magic solution. The silver bullet is boards. Boards will deliver a massive improvement in health services: nurses will rush back to the health system and young Australians will race to universities to enrol in nursing and medical courses just so they can work in a hospital run by a board. That is the Opposition's solution instead of offering a policy prescription that attempts to tackle the challenges facing the health system—challenges such as our rapidly ageing population. The Government has invested in managing people with chronic disease outside hospitals through initiatives such as HealthOne, which brings health professionals together to provide healthcare outside hospitals in order to relieve pressure on emergency departments.

The New South Wales Government is making an effort to tackle a national workforce shortage. We have made a massive investment in training nurses through our TAFE system. Some 1,100 nurses are in training. We are also providing additional places to train more medical graduates—the few who are allowed into university these days after 11 years of cutbacks at tertiary institutions that train Australians to be doctors. They are some of the initiatives that the Government has taken. That is our contribution to tackling the challenges facing our health system.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Myall Lakes will remain silent.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: That contrasts with the Opposition's one big policy. The Leader of the Opposition waited so long to become leader and after seven months he has signed up to a policy prescription that his predecessor took to the election and that was imposed by his friends in Canberra—boards.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: It is another layer of bureaucracy. It is not more nurses, more doctors or more beds. It is not about thinking outside the square to attract, train and retain more health professionals. There is no new thinking to provide health services outside hospitals to take pressure off our hospitals.

[*Interruption*]

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lismore should ask a question if he wants to say something.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: No, the Leader of the Opposition wants more boards. Establishing some 238 boards across New South Wales will solve all the problems of access and sustainability. That is his solution seven months after coming to the leadership. No wonder they say that Leaders of the Opposition resemble the wives of Henry VIII: head number five is about to roll.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will remain silent.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I do not always agree with the *Daily Telegraph*, which referred unkindly to the Leader of the Opposition as the "invisible man". That is not correct. The Leader of the Opposition is more like the corpse from *Weekend at Bernie's*.

Question time concluded.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of the former member for Monaro, Peter Cochran. It is good to see him back in the House.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing Orders: Motion of Censure

Motion by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That standing orders be suspended to allow the consideration forthwith of the motion of censure of the Minister for Health, notice of which was given this day, followed by the routine of business and private members' statements.

MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Motion of Censure

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.27 p.m.]: I move:

That this House censures the Minister for Health for her incompetence in dealing with her portfolio responsibilities, her mismanagement of the health system and in particular:

- (1) her refusal to acknowledge the extent of systemic problems at Royal North Shore Hospital;
- (2) her failure to address problems raised by doctors, nurses and patients, including claims the hospital is overcrowded, underresourced, has too few clinicians but too many bureaucrats, staff work within a culture of bullying and is poorly managed;
- (3) her attempts to stop the headlines by setting up reviews and committees that medical staff have dismissed as ineffectual; and
- (4) her failure to provide answers to inappropriate patient treatment at hospitals throughout New South Wales.

New South Wales deserves a competent, compassionate and caring Minister for Health, not a person who is inept, incompetent and who fails to inspire any confidence in her handling of health. Reba Meagher specialises in denial and spin—and even then she is inept. We saw again in question time today—as we saw during question times earlier this week—the complete inability of this Minister for Health to understand a couple of things. She is unable to admit that problems exist not just at Royal North Shore Hospital but in hospitals and emergency departments and clinics across New South Wales. She lacks any sympathy for, or understanding of, the consequences of the problems within the hospital system for the patients and their families and for the people who work in those places. Above all, despite the Minister's words today, she refuses to sit down and talk to those within the system—the people who know where the problems lie, the people who know where the solutions are available and the people with whom she should work in order to resurrect what was once a great hospital system.

The Premier says there is no silver bullet while launching an attack upon the Opposition and the Federal Government in relation to hospital boards. But during his dissertation a few moments ago the Premier refused to engage in discussion of the fact that there is one hospital in this State where an effective board is operating. It is the board of Westmead Children's Hospital. When the former Liberal Government established Westmead Children's Hospital it had an effective board, but under this State Government, like effective boards across the State, it disappeared and became simply an advisory committee. A couple of years ago a former health Minister—I will let you guess which one—approached Roger Corbett to chair what was an advisory committee. Mr Corbett insisted that he would only chair a committee that made decisions. So the Westmead Children's Hospital board, the sort of board that the Federal Government is talking about, the sort of effective board that we have spoken about in the last two election campaigns, makes decisions under the leadership of Roger Corbett.

Last Friday night I sat next to one of the clinicians at that hospital who said that it was an extraordinary board because it not only made decisions, it enthused the staff and the staff understood that what they were doing at that hospital was supported by a board that met on a monthly basis within the hospital. That is the sort of approach that is needed in New South Wales Health. That is the sort of approach that is lacking. The silver bullet that is required in this place, the silver bullet that is required in the Department of Health, the silver bullet that is required, quite frankly, across the State is accountability—a word absent from the lexicon of Labor for a dozen years, missing from a regime where Premiers and Ministers are never responsible for their decisions and the consequences of those decisions. Is it any wonder that after 12 years in office bureaucrats in departments have copied their behaviour?

That behaviour has resulted in a system where bureaucracy is focused on the need of government and not on the needs of the public. It has produced a health system, a hospital system, where health professionals struggling with limited resources in our hospitals are subject to enormous pressures and a culture of bullying and harassment. Injecting accountability into the health system could help solve one of the many problems that have resulted in episodes that we have seen so frequently coming to light about Royal North Shore Hospital and across the State. Accountability requires people to take responsibility, to see decisions through and to accept the consequences; ensures that those charged with decisions finally get on with the job; ensures that reports into bullying at Royal North Shore Hospital commissioned in 2003 and received by the then health Minister, Mr Morris Iemma, are not only received after the media storm has passed on but that recommendations are implemented and do not require a new Minister for Health in 2007 to commission another report that discovers that bullying has become endemic, that there is a culture of bullying at Royal North Shore Hospital and that nothing was done between 2003 and 2007. There is no accountability within the health department, within the Ministry or within the Government of New South Wales because those opposite simply do not understand what that word means.

I emphasise that those of us on this side of the House share an enormous degree of confidence in the skill, commitment, courage and compassion of those who work within the New South Wales health system. There are two tragedies of the current disastrous state of our hospital system. The first is the dreadful human cost to the patients and the impact upon their families; the second is the additional stress it imposes upon dedicated health care employees who work long hours only to come home and see media reports about continuing problems, and Ministers refusing to accept responsibility and blaming others, and who belittle clinicians when they raise their concerns publicly.

One person is responsible for both of these tragedies. It is not a nurse; it is not a doctor; it is not a health care professional—it is the Minister for Health, Reba Meagher. Over the past four weeks we have seen report after report about serious failures in health care at Royal North Shore Hospital and we have seen failures that have serious and extraordinary consequences, not just at this hospital but also across the State. Over and over again we have heard from angry people, bitter people, desperately sad people telling us what is really happening in what used to be one of the jewels in the crown of the State health system: women miscarrying in hospital toilets—Jana Horska and Mark Dreyer are completely distressed and angered at the way in which this Government has sought to manage that issue over the past four weeks; people and patients bundled into storerooms; old diggers forced to hire private nurses; a culture of bullying of staff; and ambulance crews kept waiting for hours. The list goes on and on.

In relation to Jana and Mark, the first response was the Minister being forced into announcing an inquiry. But the terms of reference of that inquiry were limited to the Horska affair and the inquiry was internal—within the Department of Health—because this Government will never allow independent inquiries as that offends its aversion to accountability. When Jana Horska's husband, Mark Dreyer, took up the Premier on his promise in this House to extend the terms of reference if he was unhappy with them, he was knocked back. That does not reflect only a misleading of the House by the Premier, it is also a kick in the teeth not just to Mr Dreyer and Ms Horska, but to every patient across the State looking for some hope of confidence that things are going to change. The Premier and the Minister will say anything to get them through the media moment, to get them out of trouble. But getting them to do what they promise is another thing.

Since then the pattern has been clear. Over and over again the Minister for Health has prevaricated, dodged or simply refused to answer question after question in this House, in the media, about the problems at Royal North Shore Hospital and elsewhere. Her television appearances have gone from the tragic to the ridiculous. Over and over again she has denied claims that people have been adversely affected or damaged by a health system for which she is meant to be responsible. Over and over again we have seen the feebleness of the response of this arrogant and deceitful Minister. She has simply brushed aside the responses of clinicians with disgust.

When Dr Tony Joseph, not only the leading emergency specialist at Royal North Shore Hospital but also the head of emergency care in this State and the head of Royal North Shore Hospital's spinal injury unit, is prepared to risk censure by speaking out publicly you know that there is something rotten happening within this hospital. What is the response of those opposite? The response of those opposite is to do little; the response of those opposite is to threaten; the response of those opposite is to cast aspersions on the motives that bring those people forward.

A month ago a nurse told the press that when the emergency department was busy patients were squeezed into treatment rooms that were also used for storage. The Minister for Health came out and denied it. But last week, when confronted by the photograph of a 91-year-old woman, Edith King, being housed in a storage room where oxygen, syringes and other medical supplies were stored and a power cord was across the bed, it was claimed that placing the woman in that room was a clinical decision. Hiding behind nurses. Clinical decisions involve the condition of the patient and the resources available to attend to the patient. The reality is that, as the Minister slipped through on radio a day or two later, the unavailability of what are described as PIC beds meant that it was the only place in which Edith King could get some treatment.

On Monday, when Ms Meagher brought in Shirley Hooper, the granddaughter of Ms King, Shirley Hooper said, "I don't know why she bothered. She wasn't listening to what we said." It is all about media management. It is all about spin. This is a State Government that refuses to accept accountability. This is a State Minister who refuses to admit to problems within her hospital department, refuses to take any accountability and fails to inspire any confidence in the public that things are going to get better. The message again today was: blame our Federal colleagues. Notwithstanding the fact that nurse training places have increased by one-third—those under training for nurse positions across Australia have increased by one-third—it is always someone else's fault.

Last month a former Royal North Shore Hospital staff member said the hospital's funding was reduced because the Minister's policy was that people in the region could afford private health care. First response: deny. Second response: be exposed by Channel Seven as to not actually knowing what was the truth. Third response: fail to admit that what was said was true. It was true, because she has answered questions on notice from members in this House in the past few weeks where she has admitted as much. We have seen reports about bullying and harassment. We have heard statements from the Minister that she acted swiftly when these reports were brought to her attention. But as I said earlier, a 2003 report into the same matter had already been received by her predecessor, Morris Iemma, and not acted upon.

Reba Meagher was elected to this place in October 1994 after an undistinguished career as a Labor staffer and an industrial officer for the Transport Workers Union. Her preselection was a reward for her success with her colleague the current Minister for Small Business in ousting the Australian Labor Party left from Young Labor. Members will understand that this factional battle made no difference at all to the welfare of the people of New South Wales and certainly none to the people of Cabramatta. For the Australian Labor Party right, however, it was so significant that both people involved were rewarded with safe seats.

The member for Cabramatta was appointed to the ministry in 2003. She served briefly in Fair Trading and other portfolios before becoming the Minister for Health in April this year. Despite the Premier saying during the State election campaign that he was determined to fix the problems of New South Wales, and despite health being at the top of the list, he put into the portfolio someone who clearly had no ability for the job and who after six months has proven that she is not up to the job. She spent five weeks on holiday during her first five months in the job. It was four months after her appointment before she took time to meet the Australian Medical Association. She squeezed in a meeting with the Royal Flying Doctors Association three months after her appointment but was, according to the association, "late and inattentive" and the meeting was "a waste of time". That echoes Shirley Hooper's meeting with the Minister on Monday of this week.

By September the Minister had not even met the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. This is a woman who, in question time after question time, mouths words about working with doctors and nurses but did not see fit to meet with them until the hospital crisis made the front page of the city's newspapers. It is clear in her dealings in health that her experiences from Young Labor have not been left behind. She engages in conflict, not conciliation. She does not seek to win over her opponents; she seeks to take them out. She hears what she wants to hear; she ignores the views of health professionals and the complaints and concerns of patients and their families. She will do whatever it takes to get through the immediate crisis, and ignore the need to tackle the underlying problems, which are creating the real issues for the public and staff alike in our hospitals. That behaviour is simply negligent.

During the Minister's term in the Health portfolio the system has been rudderless. The essential ministerial attention it needed has gone missing. When the Minister should have been living in Cabramatta among the people who sent her here to vote, the people who experience the hospital crises, she was in Coogee. When she should have been burying herself in the portfolio she went on holiday overseas. In the midst of the human tragedy of the Horska affair she found some crocodile tears and announced an inquiry. But when Mark Dreyer took up the Premier's offer to enlarge the terms of reference, she rejected the proposal. This House can have no confidence in the ability of the Minister for Health to undertake her duty. It is time she went. It is time this House sent a strong message about her incapacity to understand the crisis in hospitals, her lack of sympathy to those affected and her apparent unwillingness to sit down with those whose help we need to get us through.

Ms REBA MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Health) [3.42 p.m.]: It has been said a few times over the past couple of weeks that being health Minister is a tough job. I say this: it is no tougher than the job that is done by our front-line staff every day, seven days a week, 24 hours a day. As I visit the hospitals, community health centres and ambulance stations throughout New South Wales—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition was heard in silence. I want to point out early in the Minister's contribution that if members start howling out and interjecting when she is making an important response, I will deal with them accordingly. The Minister has the call.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Our staff are dedicated and compassionate, and they work hard to deliver good quality patient care. That is their priority. That is why they entered the medical profession. But the New South Wales health system is not perfect. No system is perfect, and it is unreasonable to expect perfection. But it is reasonable that we continue to strive for perfection. That is the commitment that I bring to this role. I want to work with our doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to constantly build on the strengths in our system so that we can deliver the best quality care possible. When somebody has been let down by our system, I will apologise for it. I will apologise, I will acknowledge it and I will ensure that the matter is investigated, that we learn from it and that we use those lessons to build a stronger system so that we can prevent those mistakes from happening again. I think that is what the people of New South Wales want. They do not expect perfection but they expect us to strive for it.

The New South Wales health system is bigger than any one episode of care or any one person. About 90,000 people work in New South Wales Health, and millions of people are treated by our health system each year. The overwhelming majority of those people are impressed with the level of care they receive. I want everyone to have that level of confidence in our health system. That is why I have taken action from the beginning to deal with the circumstances as they have arisen. When I became the Minister for Health I was concerned about the performance of management of North Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service. I made that clear and I acted immediately. Management was changed. When we learned of the distressing circumstances that occurred at Royal North Shore Hospital on 25 September I immediately took action in the morning and commissioned an independent investigation.

I apologised to Jana and Mark for the standard of care they received. I said that it was unsatisfactory, and I commissioned an investigation to find out what went wrong so that we can learn from those mistakes and improve our system so that it does not happen to other people. That investigation is ongoing and will conclude on 26 October. When it became apparent that our system can and should perform better I acted immediately. On 28 September I announced our intention to move to a new model of care that would afford women more privacy and more compassion when they present to hospital threatening a miscarriage. I did not wait for the conclusion of the inquiry; I saw a need to improve our system and an opportunity to do that, and that is exactly what I did. I look forward to being able to work across our health system to implement that new model of care because there is an opportunity to do things better, and we should. After I announced the investigation into the distressing circumstances of Jana and Mark at Royal North Shore Hospital—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: It's called a miscarriage in a public toilet.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has the call.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I visited our staff in the emergency department that night because there are two sides to these stories. While Jana and Mark were very distressed, the staff involved were also distressed. I also see it as my role as Minister to support them through these distressing sets of circumstances. The list goes on. When it was brought to my attention that there were allegations of bullying at Royal North Shore Hospital I commissioned an investigation in July. That investigation was concluded, the report was made available to me

and to the staff, and it was released publicly. The new management of North Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service is working through those recommendations with our doctors and nurses to create a more supportive environment in our hospital. We have commissioned the services of Professor Waring of the University of Newcastle to work through those recommendations with our staff. There was an allegation, an immediate reaction, and there is a solution. We are working to overcome these problems and put Royal North Shore Hospital back on the front foot.

It is also important to acknowledge where the systems can be improved. That is why we announced the establishment of the Professional Practice Unit, which will ensure that we have the right mechanism within our hospitals to encourage people to come forward and to make known their concerns and grievances, so we can act on them. This will give staff the confidence they need to bring forward their concerns and have them addressed—and that is in place. The Professional Practice Unit, headed by Mary Dowling, is in operation. She has impeccable credentials in mediation and experience in dealing with bullying within the New South Wales health system. She is working to ensure that we can create the kind of environment at Royal North Shore Hospital that allows doctors and nurses to focus on what they do best—patient care—so that patients get the care that they deserve and that we believe they deserve.

I have met with the doctors at Royal North Shore Hospital and the clinical reference group, and I am impressed that they want to work with our new management team. Their commitment and cooperation is impressive. I have met with the nurses and they want to work with the new management. Their commitment and cooperation is also impressive. It is that kind of collaboration that will put the hospital back on the front foot. These were the right decisions to improve the performance of a hospital that was not performing well.

When I became Minister for Health I identified the problem and acted swiftly, and we are moving towards a solution. I meet with my new chief executive weekly. I have demanded from him improved performance in very tight time frames because it is reasonable for the people not only of North Sydney but also of New South Wales to know that as Minister I am committed to working through these problems with competent management and with our doctors, nurses and front-line staff to put what is one of our most important hospitals, one of our most important teaching institutions, back onto the front foot. That is my commitment as Minister.

However, while we do that we are not taking our foot off the accelerator with the rest of the reforms that are required across New South Wales. There are enormous challenges on the horizon that will require constant work and dedication with our doctors and nurses to meet those challenges. The New South Wales Government has delivered a record \$12.5 billion budget, and we are undertaking the biggest capital works program ever undertaken by NSW Health; \$2.4 billion over the next four years, which includes the \$700 million redevelopment at Royal North Shore Hospital. Importantly, we are also moving to shift the way we deliver care. If we are to meet the demand for public health care in New South Wales we have to think about how we are going to do it differently.

We cannot build and staff an endless number of acute facilities to deal with the demand. We have to think about how to do it differently—a trend that is happening right across the country and internationally. We have to develop innovative strategies to commence health care in the community. We have to ensure that people are educated in making decisions about their own health to prevent them from becoming ill. But when people become ill we have to look at better primary care in the community, a better front-line response, so that we can keep people out of hospital. We need to develop better strategies so that we can change the way people view health care. Hospitals should be the end of a program of health, not the beginning of it. But it is not easy, because we have a Commonwealth Government that sees no value—

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Commonwealth Government sees no value in early intervention and prevention. That is made very clear by the terms of the Australian Health Care Agreements.

The SPEAKER: Order! I place the member for Terrigal on three calls to order. I remind members that the calls to order from question time stand.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Australian Health Care Agreements remunerate the States on the number of hospital bed days; it does not reward the States for keeping people healthy and out of hospital. It actually

remunerates the States for how many people are put into hospital. When I chaired the Australian Health Ministers' Conference in July I called on Tony Abbott to engage in discussion with the States and Territories on changing the nature of the Australian Health Care Agreements to take account of these new imperatives in delivering health care to our community. The response from Tony Abbott was, "Don't talk to me about that." He did not want to know. The States and Territories were so keen to get a commitment from him towards intervention and prevention that we were prepared to talk about the scope of the Australian Health Care Agreements without talking about the quantum.

We said to him, "All right, we won't talk dollars, you may find that political. But what we do need from you is a commitment to incentivise early intervention and prevention." He did not want to talk about that. We require a genuine partnership from the Commonwealth Government if we are to meet the health care needs of our communities in the future. That is something we do not have from Canberra right now. Yes, there is pressure across the New South Wales health system and I am the first to admit that, because I see it every day.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Epping is on his final warning.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I see the pressure across our system and the pressure under which our staff are working. However, I say also that we are committing nearly one-third of the New South Wales Budget to Health, and by 2037, unless there are changes, it will consume the entire State budget. We need vision from Canberra. We need a constructive and collaborative partnership to meet the challenges so that we can meet the health needs of our communities. And I make no apology for saying that at every opportunity, because it is my responsibility as health Minister to voice those concerns. Every day I see the challenges on the horizon and I am concerned about how we are going to meet them.

What did we get from the Commonwealth when its underinvestment and lack of commitment was demonstrated recently? The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare pointed out that the Commonwealth Government was underfunding the States and Territories by \$2.2 billion a year; \$750 million for New South Wales. That equates to 9,000 year 8 registered nurses just for New South Wales. And what did Tony Abbott say when confronted with that? He said, "Yeah, I know." He gave no commitment to increasing funding, to sharing the burden, to building the future for health care in New South Wales or, indeed, across the country. Why? Because he knows he will not be health Minister after the Federal election. He just does not care. However, there is a real need for a Federal vision for health. I hope that health care is at the front and centre of this election, because both major parties really have to come up with constructive solutions if we are to meet the challenges into the future.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask members not to applaud. The standing orders do not provide for it.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.57 p.m.]: Reba Meagher was appointed Minister for Health in March 2007. Since that time the public outcry about the state of our hospitals has been deafening. Clinicians have spoken out. On 16 September a number of peak health organisations took the extraordinary step of speaking out about the invisibility of the Minister for Health. The Australian Medical Association said that it waited almost four months to meet the Minister after she was appointed. The Rural Doctors Association said that a meeting with the Minister was a "waste of time" for doctors who had travelled from regional New South Wales to meet her. They said that she spoke to one health adviser and told him that rural health was not important, and then walked out.

Over the winter months the Minister left the country for a five-week holiday to Africa. Yes, as the Minister said, health is a complex portfolio. Therefore, one would think that she would stick around and learn about it. One would think that the Minister would meet with the important peak organisations and speak to doctors and nurses about what was happening in our hospitals. The clinicians have been speaking out about the desperate need for State Government support. On 24 August the Australian Medical Association was reported on the ABC as saying that it was up to the New South Wales Government to provide more training opportunities to enable medical graduates to become qualified physicians. On 24 September an Australian Medical Association media release quoted President Dr Andrew Keegan as stating:

The shortage of emergency physicians in NSW cannot be attributed to a decline in the number of medical graduates but is the result of the NSW government's failure to ensure an adequate number of trainees and teaching time for senior clinicians.

This is an important issue because it goes to the heart of what is happening in our emergency departments. I will deal with that issue later. On 2 October Doctor Keegan said:

Patient care will continue to be compromised if fundamental changes are not made to the public hospital system.

Ambulance officers, sick of being blamed for delays in responding to calls to hospitals such as Gosford and Royal North Shore, are also speaking out. I refer now to the Minister's response, which has ranged from denying problems to about-faces, replies to allegations that have been made, justifications and rehearsed statements that did not answer the questions that had been asked. Last Sunday, Linda Silmalis of the *Sunday Telegraph* wrote:

Ms Meagher did not create the problems in health, but she can't even start to fix them when she has lost the confidence of those she is meant to represent.

The headline states, "It is time to cull her", which is what everyone is saying. Other newspapers are saying the same thing. An editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 12 October states:

NSW's health system demands a minister who understands its people and its predicament and, moreover, one who has the ability and the confidence to set things right.

This is plainly not acceptable from the minister in charge of the state's single biggest budget item, health.

I could refer to many similar editorials. Doctors have also spoken out about the Minister's mismanagement and incompetence in handling the health system. Dr Tony Joseph, head of trauma at Royal North Shore Hospital, has spoken many times about the problem of getting patients seen in the emergency department, patients such as Jana Horska who got stuck in the waiting room, because there are not enough ward beds to admit patients who need to be admitted. When Dr Joseph had the gall to speak out the Minister said he was wrong; the Minister contradicted him. So much for her saying that she speaks to and listens to doctors! Yesterday Professor Bill Sears, a neurosurgeon, spoke out because he was so worried about the care of his patients. Professor Stephen Hunyor, a cardiologist, wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* complaining about the shortcomings of the Minister's inquiries.

Let us get it right: There are 100,000 nurses in New South Wales but only 30 per cent of them choose to work in our public hospitals. One of the registered nurses at Royal North Shore Hospital also had the nerve to speak out. She said that nurses at the hospital are bullied and nobody is listening to them. Patients at Royal North Shore Hospital such as Mark Dreyer and many others have spoken out. I do not have the time today to mention the litany of complaints about what is happening at Royal North Shore Hospital, but everyone who has spoken to me—doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, patients and their families, and members of the media—is saying, "This Minister is out of her depth. She is incompetent, she does not care about listening to and acting on behalf of doctors and their patients, and she should go."

Ms VERITY FIRTH (Balmain—Minister for Women, Minister for Science and Medical Research, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer), Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water (Environment)) [4.02 p.m.]: The Opposition based its attack on Minister Meagher on the claim that the New South Wales health system is not capable of delivering the highest quality of care to the community. In the area of cancer care and control, in which I assist Minister Meagher, I reported to the House yesterday that the New South Wales health system is a world leader, delivering results equal to or better than almost any comparable jurisdiction worldwide. Our five-year survival rate is 63 per cent—better than Victoria, better than Australia as a whole and better than the United Kingdom.

These remarkable results could not have been achieved without decisions taken by the New South Wales Labor Government to increase funding for cancer care and control to \$1 billion annually, the decision to increase our investment in early detection with breast screening up 7 per cent and cervical screening up 21 per cent, the decision to invest substantially in prevention, reducing our smoking rate to amongst the lowest in the world, and the decision to expand access to radiotherapy services in New South Wales by 34 per cent over the past decade to the point where we now have more machines to deliver radiotherapy per head of population than almost any comparable jurisdiction worldwide. These are the right decisions to strengthen our public health system and the care that it provides to patients.

As Minister for Health, Minister Meagher has continued to take and implement these key decisions. Under Minister Meagher the New South Wales Government recently opened new state-of-the-art integrated cancer care centres at Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, providing a service to a region that has never seen such a service before. Minister Meagher is now overseeing the major redevelopment of Lismore and Orange hospitals, which will bring similar state-of-the-art cancer services to those communities.

One of the things that is lost in this debate is an acknowledgement of the scale of what is regularly achieved by the health system. The New South Wales health system manages 1.5 million hospital admissions

and performs over 200,000 elective surgery procedures every year. The overwhelming majority of these patients walk away from our public hospitals happier and healthier than when they arrived. Minister Meagher has demonstrated her commitment to a strong public health system, but the same cannot be said of her Federal counterpart. As the Premier noted on Tuesday, when John Howard came to office, the Commonwealth's funding share sat at 50 per cent. It has now declined to just 45 per cent. Do members know what that represents? I am advised that the current annual shortfall in health funding from the Commonwealth would fund an additional 4,000 nurses in the New South Wales system, complete the entire Lismore hospital redevelopment, or run Grafton hospital for 11 years.

Let me give members another example of the effect of that funding shortfall. In 2002 the then Commonwealth health Minister was initially willing to work with the New South Wales Government to expand radiotherapy services on the mid North Coast of New South Wales. After a request by the Government for a capital contribution to the \$40 million centre she advised us in a letter that the Federal Government's contribution would be through the Medicare benefits schedule. We received no capital or recurrent funding to establish that centre, for which the New South Wales Government has allocated \$4 million per annum. Despite this record of disinvestment by the Coalition parties we would be happy to consider constructive suggestions from them as to how the public system could be strengthened. However, we have never heard any suggestions; all we have heard is carping criticism. Kevin Rudd will act where Tony Abbott has not and return money to the States so that it can be invested in front-line public services. Kevin Rudd will put \$2 billion back into public hospitals where Tony Abbott has taken money away.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. This is a motion to censure the State Minister for Health; it is not about Kevin Rudd's policy. I ask you to draw the Minister back to the leave of the motion.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The Minister's remarks are within the ambit of the discussion that is taking place, given comments that have been made earlier.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I have found one area where Minister Abbott increased funding: the health bureaucracy. The Federal Government does not employ one nurse or doctor or run one hospital. The only Minister that this Parliament should be censuring is Tony Abbott.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [4.07 p.m.]: In almost 13 years of the Labor Government we have seen some appalling health Ministers and a litany of blunders, scandals and tragedies in public health, starting with Andrew Refshauge, who, along with Bob Carr, promised to halve elective surgery waiting lists or resign. Those lists have doubled and those two have left the scene. Craig Knowles' legacy was a burgeoning bureaucracy, closed hospitals beds and a lot of spin over substance. He, too, has departed. Morris Iemma cut the number of area health services, promising that the savings would be directed towards clinical services. All he has achieved is disenfranchisement of doctors and communities from their local hospitals, continuing growth in waiting lists and a more centralised and remote health bureaucracy. Reba Meagher, the subject of this censure motion, the former Young Labor hack, has been promoted beyond her level of competence.

The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister for health already have spoken about the mess at Royal North Shore and other metropolitan hospitals. As Leader of the Nationals I shall talk about rural health. The systemic problems caused by Labor's mismanagement are felt nowhere more deeply than in regional and rural New South Wales. Local hospital boards, which once enjoyed the strong support of their communities and health professionals, have been sacked and replaced with bureaucratic structures. Services gradually have been downgraded, particularly at local district hospitals, and patients and their families have been forced to travel long distances to access even basic treatment.

The member for Murrumbidgee gave the example of the Federal Labor candidate for Riverina being forced to travel 1,400 kilometres for treatment to a broken arm. Other examples include the 32 small country maternity wards that were closed by the Government, resulting in expectant mothers being forced to travel for up to three hours to a hospital to give birth; equipment paid for by hospital auxiliaries and other community groups being removed from district hospitals and sent away, usually to other base hospitals; children's wards being closed in country hospitals, as happened at Kempsey recently; and often tragic consequences such as the young mother from Cobar whose premature baby was born mid-air on the air ambulance en route to Dubbo last year. Sadly, the baby died.

Rural health services such as the Greater Western Area Health Service administer areas larger than the nation of Germany and the hospitals are managed by bureaucrats totally remote from those communities. The

Minister has shown absolutely no capacity to deal with any of these issues, effectively treating country patients like second-class citizens. In this House in May I asked the Minister about the young Aboriginal woman from Forbes who was forced to travel three hours three times a week to Orange because there were not enough local dialysis chairs. The Minister said, "The Leader of The Nationals is wrong. We are providing a dialysis chair for her and we will help her with transport in the meantime."

Four months later I asked the Minister why this poor woman still was travelling long hours on country roads up to Orange for dialysis treatment. The Minister then changed her story and said, "Oh, she needs special care, which can only be provided at Orange." Not only has the Minister no idea about that particular case, but she did the Young Labor thing: she attacked me for raising this travesty and then misled the Parliament. Last week I asked the Minister about Therese Mackay from Port Macquarie, whose husband died following what Therese said was an unnecessary operation in squalid conditions that led to the infection that killed him. Again the Minister had no idea of this particular case and added insult to injury by refusing to widen the terms of reference for the inquiry to include country patients.

Yesterday I asked the Minister about accommodation for country patients at Royal North Shore and Royal Prince Alfred hospitals. The accommodation wards in those hospitals have been closed by the Labor Government. The Minister again had no idea that these people, already under a great deal of stress, are being forced to catch buses to motels at costs that often are beyond their budgets because Labor has closed Rotary Lodge and Queen Mary House, which now sit dormant and vacant three years later.

On no occasion has the Minister properly addressed these or other rural health issues or given long-suffering country patients an assurance that there is any plan to fix the worsening problems. All we hear is the same old blame shift and see the pointing fingers at the Federal Government. She is the Minister for Health. She is responsible for hospitals in this State and she is accountable. But when it comes to accountability the Minister is missing in action. She will not listen to patients, health experts or the community at large. Her unsustainable pathetic response has been, "They are all wrong. I am doing a good job." The Minister is beyond her level of competence. She should do the honourable thing and resign. If not, the Premier should show some leadership and sack her.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health)) [4.12 p.m.]: I say to the Leader of the Nationals, "That is not going to happen." This cynical and opportunistic rhetoric should be rejected, as should this cynical and opportunistic tactic. The motion also should be rejected. There was a time in this place when a censure motion meant something, but this exercise today has cheapened that currency. The censure motion today was not about anything happening in this place. These motions have nothing to do with what was going on because the people on the other side were outside running around with journalists saying, "We are going to do this and we are going to do that." But what did they do? They moved a censure motion to replace a matter of public importance at a time when standing orders said the motion could not be called on. It was merely an opportunistic cynical attempt to try to cause a bit of mischief. The difficulty for the Opposition is that the Government called on the debate, despite attempts by members opposite to give notice of the motion without actually having to debate it.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: You are outrageous.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: For the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for North Shore, after her performance, to accuse anyone else of being outrageous—talk about the worst case of the pot calling the kettle black!

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Blood pressure!

Mr PAUL LYNCH: As to the interjection of the Leader of the Opposition, I make the point that he decided to attack the Minister for being a hack. What a terrible thing coming from a former general secretary of the Liberal Party. What is the offence? The Minister was not a big enough hack! The hypocrisy running through the Opposition in this debate is extraordinary. Attention should be drawn to three characteristics in particular regarding the attack. The first is that implicit in their attack is that the Minister the Health is allowing health care of an inadequate standard. It follows logically that implicit in that must be a claim that doctors regularly are ignoring the Hippocratic oath and that nurses regularly are not providing adequate care—that is, the people in the hospitals are not doing their job. That must flow from everything members opposite have said.

Opposition members cannot say that health care is inadequate, which is what they have been saying, unless they are also attacking the doctors and nurses. That flies absolutely in the face of the reality of what is happening in our hospitals. To quote the words of a health professional with whom I spoke today, "Every health professional in our system spends every day waging a battle to improve the standard of health care." They wage that battle because they are professionals. The second characteristic of the Opposition in this debate is its rank hypocrisy. There are a number of issues relating to the health system, without a doubt, but one key component is the workforce. A keen generator of that problem is the Federal Government. Based on workforce projections and predicted demand for services, this State identifies the need for an additional 1,769 nursing places at universities next year.

Mr Thomas George: Nurses in the North Coast Area Health Service can't get jobs.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: We need 1,769 nurses next year at universities and your mates in Canberra gave us 200! There has been a chronic, pathological underfunding by the Federal Government of university places for medical and nursing education and training. The Opposition does not concede one word of that because its entire approach to this debate is cynical and opportunistic. Members opposite are not prepared to acknowledge any of the realities of the debate. Not only is the Federal Government not allowing us to train enough nurses and medical professionals, it is not allowing us to get enough of them into the country.

The Department of Immigration and other Federal authorities expect medical professionals wanting to come to Australia to do quite extraordinary things. If I had the time I would fill in some detail about the case of Dr John Bastian, the current Chief Psychiatrist of New South Wales and Director of the statewide Forensic Mental Health Service, who had to go through extraordinary hoops to come to Australia. No leadership at all has been demonstrated by the Federal Government immigration elements on this issue. An incredibly eminent child and adolescent forensic psychiatrist experienced extreme difficulties coming to Australia to work in the health system simply because of Federal Government immigration barriers. The third characteristic of this debate is the complete failure of the Opposition to actually propose any solutions. In the face of a Government that is spending \$12.5 billion on health—a massive expenditure on health, the largest proportion ever of the State budget—and has a \$2.4 billion capital works program, the best alternative the Opposition can propose is local health boards. The Opposition has cheapened the currency of censure motions by its stunt today.

Ms REBA MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Health) [4.17 p.m.], in response: It would be fair to say that over the past couple of weeks I have come under something of an attack. But I am a politician and it is my job to stand up to that criticism, to listen to it and to get on with the job of being Minister and delivering good care. One of the things that has really distressed me over the past couple of weeks is when our staff come under attack. I find it distressing when the reputation of a hospital or of individual nurses and doctors is attacked in the media.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

[*Interruption*]

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra will cease interjecting.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I will stand up for them and defend them because I am the Minister for Health but, more importantly, I will stand up for them and defend them because it is the right thing to do. The debate in recent weeks has distressed me also because it completely ignores the excellence within our system. Sharp focus has been directed to the negatives, and we acknowledge that everything cannot be perfect. But I say this: Celebrate the excellence, because there is a lot of it. As recently as last Friday evening I had the opportunity to attend the New South Wales Health Awards. It was a real eye-opener. I wish the media and the Opposition would take an interest in it.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: I was at the College of Nursing. Where were you?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I was at the New South Wales Health Awards.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The awards celebrate the innovative projects across our New South Wales health system, where our staff go to work every day and deliver above and beyond the call of duty. They

identify areas of their system requiring improvement and they get on and develop an innovative project to make the system better. Why do they do so? They are passionate about delivering better patient outcomes. That is what we need to focus on and encourage because it is that type of human endeavour that gives New South Wales one of the best health systems in the world. As the Minister for Health in New South Wales, I am proud to say every day that we have one of the best health systems in the world. We will continue to strengthen it as best we can.

I will provide the House with some examples of innovative strategies that have been undertaken by staff over the past 12 months. This year's Minister's Award for Excellence was presented to Hunter New England Health for its project, "Australian Medical Council Graduates—Setting Them up to Succeed". This project provides medical council graduates with professional development programs to support their transition into the Australian clinical setting. It means that the project gives better language understanding to foreign doctors who support and supplement our system. In this country we experience chronic work for shortages and we rely on support from foreign graduates. This innovative strategy teaches doctors Australian slang that they are likely to hear in an emergency department or in a ward. The strategy is all about improving the quality of patient care for patients in our health system.

That is just one example of an innovative strategy but they are ideas that should be celebrated. Instead the Opposition attacks me. That is part of my job and it is not a problem for me, but in doing so they drag the reputation of the health system through the mud. The Opposition has done more to undermine the confidence in our public health system than is imaginable. That disturbs me because if I thought the Opposition would make the slightest contribution to improving the system, I would be prepared to listen, but all we receive from the Opposition is grubby political opportunism. When I was questioned at a press conference I was prepared to answer that I had been a patient at the Royal North Shore Hospital and I was prepared to also say that I was happy to have my family treated there. However, I do not think we are seeing the same standard of honesty from members opposite. What disturbs me is the extraordinary level of hypocrisy in this debate. The question that must stand is: Would any member of the Opposition be happy to be treated at the Royal North Shore Hospital or have their family treated at the Royal North Shore Hospital?

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Yes. I have been treated at the Royal North Shore Hospital. Absolutely!

Ms REBA MEAGHER: That begs the question: How can the Deputy Leader of the Opposition turn up to this debate and allege that that hospital delivers Third World care? How can she use the system, enjoy the system and derive benefit from the system, yet undermine the system to achieve political opportunistic results? It is a disgrace.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Members opposite have not added one policy idea or suggestion to the debate on how we should deal with increasing demand, the changing nature of demand, our ageing population and the increase in the number of frail and aged people, and the increasing demands of managing chronic disease in the community. What I find most galling is the demand for additional resources. The State is doing what it can and will continue to do so, but will members of the Opposition raise the issue with their mates in Canberra?

Mr Alan Ashton: No!

Ms REBA MEAGHER: No! I have had an opportunity to go through the records and I was reminded that it was the Leader of the Opposition in 2003 who urged the New South Wales Government to sign the Australian Health Care Agreement, the very same agreement that is now ripping off New South Wales by \$750 million a year. The New South Wales Government did not want to sign that agreement but, as members opposite know, Canberra put a gun to our head and a knife to our back and the signature was there. A Federal election is looming and it presents an opportunity for members opposite to demonstrate that they will stand up for the people of New South Wales. But the Opposition has not done so before, and I really do not expect it will do so now. I am expecting deafening silence from Canberra on the issue of health funding. That is what disturbs me most.

Sure, I am happy to take the sledging that goes with politics, but when members of the Opposition attack staff, undermine confidence in the health system and are not prepared to contribute to policy debate or to lobby their colleagues in Canberra who could actually make a difference to the New South Wales funding position, they stand condemned. People are not silly, but the New South Wales Opposition is treating them as

though they are. I can tell members of the Opposition that the people of New South Wales do not want the Opposition's grubby political stunts. They want to hear a sound and reasonable policy debate about how their State and Federal governments will deal with the pressing issue of health care in the future. I rest my case. The New South Wales Opposition has demonstrated that it is not interested in anything other than a cheap political hit.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [4.27 p.m.], in reply: I admit that I was impressed. I may have disagreed completely with the argument advanced, but I have to acknowledge in all honesty the breadth of knowledge displayed, the fluency of her words and argument, and indeed an understanding of the need for an effective hospital system for communities across the State. It is just a pity that the contribution was from the assistant Minister, and not Reba Meagher.

The only defences offered in this debate have been the predictable ones. The first is that highlighting concerns about the health system constitutes an attack upon staff. Earlier during question time we observed the Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Youth, and Minister for Volunteering fail a spelling lesson. Let me spell out a word: H-Y- P-O-C-R-I-S-Y, which means "Reba Meagher". The only person who on every occasion has put staff between herself and the media when problems in our hospital system have been exposed is the Minister for Health. She did that in relation to Edith King. When a staff member, Dr Tony Joseph, dared to speak up, she sought to slap him down. If there is one person who does not respect the hardworking doctors and nurses in our hospitals system it is Reba Meagher. This has been demonstrated by her performance over the past three weeks. The second point is that, time after time, Government speaker after Government speaker pretends that all the blame for these problems lies with the Federal Government. There is a letter in today's newspaper from a man who described the care and treatment that his 84-year-old mother is receiving in isolation in hospital. He writes:

A week ago, the nurse-call button in her room broke. The Health Service could not provide a replacement, so she has been given a bell if she needs assistance. This cannot easily be heard at the nurse station, so there are times when her calls go unanswered.

Is that Tony Abbott's fault? Is it John Howard's fault? I continue where I began: on the question of accountability. Some \$12.5 billion of the State's budget—almost a third—is allocated to our health system. But no amount of money will make a difference if the Minister for Health is not prepared to accept responsibility. No amount of money allocated to our hospital system will give hardworking doctors and nurses the backup they deserve, or offer confidence to the patients who present at hospitals that they will receive the care they need if our health system is riddled from top to bottom with people who will not take responsibility and, if the bean counters and the bureaucrats are in control, not the hardworking health professionals.

The Minister's initial response revealed all that is wrong with her approach to running the Health portfolio. In relation to Jana Horska and Mark Dreyer and the terrible crisis of the miscarriage that occurred in a public toilet with the foetus born live, the Minister for Health said, "There are two sides to the story." She attempted to imply that somehow that appalling circumstance, which should be defended by no-one in this House, had another side. I thought about it and, although I do not think this is what the Minister meant, there clearly was another side. If more doctors and nurses had been at work and if more beds had been available there would not have been an issue. On that night every bed in the emergency department was occupied. Sixteen people were waiting to get into a hospital bed in a ward at Royal North Shore Hospital, and eight of them had been waiting for more than eight hours. That is a direct consequence of the absence of beds in that hospital and the closure of beds at that hospital by this Government.

The Minister for Health talked about a bullying report that she commissioned and said that she had released it to staff. I remind the House—and I point out to Mr Deputy-Speaker—that the Minister misled the House. That bullying report was leaked to the media. It was not made available by the Minister and is still available to staff only through the website of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The Minister for Health cannot get straight even things that are a matter of public record.

One of the Minister's responses to the Jana Horska-Mark Dreyer scandal is the establishment of a performance practice unit within the hospital. On three occasions during the past two sitting weeks the Premier has said that, because of reforms that he undertook when he was Minister for Health as a result of the Camden and Campbelltown inquiry, the Health Care Complaints Commission was overhauled. Performance practice units would not need to be established in separate area health services if what the Premier said is true. This is spin over substance; it is putting politics ahead of the interests of those people across the State who rely on our hospital system. It offers no support to those doctors and nurses and other health professionals in our hospital system who are crying out for the resources and funding to enable them to do their jobs better.

The Minister for Health comes into the Chamber and mouths platitudes about collaboration. Yet this Minister is prepared to pit nurse against nurse and doctor against nurse simply in order to protect her hide and

defend herself against the media. The public and the hospital staff want to see improved performance. The Minister said that she is about improved performance. She said that she has put new management in the hospital to improve performance. But the Minister's contribution on that point demonstrates why nothing will change because she does not understand that improved performance has to start with her. The people of New South Wales deserve to have a compassionate and competent Minister for Health, and they clearly do not have that. The people of New South Wales deserve to have an independent judicial inquiry into the problems at Royal North Shore Hospital not just so that those problems can be resolved but so that the lessons can be learnt across the State. That would help communities across New South Wales and provide the relief that doctors, nurses and other health professionals in hospitals elsewhere are seeking.

But what has happened? The Premier has resisted that course of action because he is concerned about two things. Reba Meagher is his mate and he does not want to knife a mate and expose her to an independent inquiry. But, more importantly, he does not want to open up an inquiry into decisions made at a hospital when he was Minister for Health. That is why on Monday a week after we proposed an upper House inquiry he agreed to have a joint select committee inquiry chaired by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile. As Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile said on Monday, that inquiry should have been able to report in February. But it will not report in February; it will—

Mr Michael Daley: Why didn't you vote for it?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: We did vote for it. We moved an amendment and we lost the vote in the only House in which we have a chance of winning a division. Why did the Premier overturn Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile's suggestion? Why is the Premier insisting that the inquiry report on 14 December? This State Government is determined to ensure that the parliamentary inquiry reports before the Vanessa Anderson matter is finalised. This State Government is running in fear of the death of Vanessa Anderson at Royal North Shore Hospital and of the blow-out and the consequences if the parliamentary inquiry were able to examine that issue.

This is an outrageous Government that puts the interests of its politicians ahead of the public interest. This is an outrageous Government that puts the interests of bureaucrats ahead of those of health professionals. This is an outrageous Government that, whilst allocating almost a third of the State budget to Health, takes no action to ensure that that money finds its way to the front line to support front-line doctors and nurses in providing front-line services to communities across the State. This is a Government in which it is possible to fail upwards: Do badly in a minor portfolio and a Minister can end up in the biggest portfolio in the State. A bureaucrat can run the second-biggest department in the State without ever having to sit for a job interview. Reba Meagher should go because the public has no confidence in her.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Reba Meagher should go because she does not understand the problems that she is creating for communities across the State. Reba Meagher does not understand that she is undermining hardworking health professionals.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 33

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Mr Baird	Mr Humphries	Mr Souris
Mr Baumann	Mr Kerr	Mr Stokes
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Merton	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr O'Dea	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Constance	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Ms Goward	Mr Piccoli	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Mrs Skinner	Mr Maguire

Noes, 53

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Ms Beamer	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Brown	Ms Hornery	Mr Piper
Ms Burton	Mr Iemma	Mr Rees
Mr Campbell	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Mr Collier	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Shearan
Mr Coombs	Mr Koperberg	Mr Stewart
Mr Corrigan	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Costa	Mr McBride	Mr Terenzini
Mr Daley	Dr McDonald	Mr Tripodi
Ms D'Amore	Ms McKay	Mr Watkins
Mr Draper	Mr McLeay	Mr West
Mrs Fardell	Ms McMahon	Mr Whan
Ms Firth	Ms Meagher	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Ms Moore	Mr Martin

Pair

Mr Fraser

Ms Keneally

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****PETITIONS****South Coast Rail Services**

Petition opposing any reduction in rail services on the South Coast, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

South Coast Rail Line Facilities

Petition requesting that train carriages be fitted with toilet and luggage facilities on the South Coast rail line, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee

Petitions requesting the removal of booking fees charged to pensioners on CountryLink services, received from **Mr Greg Aplin, Mrs Shelley Hancock and Mr Rob Stokes**.

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 **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Hornsby and Berowra Railway Stations Parking Facilities

Petition requesting adequate commuter parking facilities at Hornsby and Berowra railway stations, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access

Petition requesting improved access to Hawkesbury River railway station, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Bus Services 272 and 273

Petition requesting that the Government reinstate bus services 272 and 273 to ensure reliable services in both peak and off-peak times, received from **Ms Gladys Berejikian**.

Shoalhaven Mental Health Services

Petition requesting funding for the establishment of a dedicated mental health service in the Shoalhaven, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Lismore Base Hospital

Petitions requesting funding for stage 2 of the Lismore Base Hospital redevelopment, received from **Mr Thomas George** and **Mr Donald Page**.

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

Petition praying that the House support the establishment of a satellite renal dialysis service in Tumut, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Breast Screening Funding

Petition requesting funding for breast screening to allow access for women aged 40 to 79 years, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Hornsby Palliative Care Beds

Petition requesting funding for Hornsby's palliative care beds, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Shoalhaven Local Area Command

Petition requesting additional resources for the Shoalhaven Local Area Command, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

School Bus Safety

Petition praying that seatbelts be provided for all students on school buses, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Tomerong Traffic Arrangements

Petition requesting an upgrade of the Island Point Road and Princes Highway intersection, Tomerong, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Termeil Bridge Realignment

Petition requesting that the Princes Highway and Termeil Bridge be realigned to the east of the existing road, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Licence Laws for Older Drivers

Petitions asking for an inquiry into licence laws for older drivers and the implementation of a suitable licensing system for senior citizens, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**, **Mr John Turner** and **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

School Crossing Safety

Petition requesting that all school crossings be upgraded to improve safety, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

Lake Tabourie

Petition requesting that the current height constraints of Lake Tabourie be re-evaluated to allow the lake to be opened to the sea, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Pet Shops

Petition opposing the sale of animals in pet shops, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Shoalhaven River Water Extraction

Petition opposing the extraction of water from the Shoalhaven River to support Sydney's water supply, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Galston Sewerage Services

Petition requesting that Galston residents be connected to sewerage services, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Public Housing

Petition requesting that the Government not sell any inner city public housing stock and that it increase funding for public housing maintenance, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Shoalhaven City Council Rate Structure

Petition opposing a 27 per cent rate increase proposed by Shoalhaven City Council, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Liquor Licensing Process

Petition asking that the liquor licensing process be amended to encourage and promote the development of small, local venues and a diversity of venues, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of Motions**

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON BROADBAND IN RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**Membership**

Motion, by leave, by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That Geoffrey Keith Provest be appointed as a member of the Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities in place of Katrina Ann Hodgkinson, discharged.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROVER MOTORS BUS SERVICE AND MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [4.51 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of members the concerns of Mr Aaron Lewis, the proprietor of Rover Motors bus company in my electorate of Cessnock. Two years ago Mr Lewis streamlined his business and redirected resources towards community needs in a responsible manner. As a result Rover has achieved a real saving for the Ministry of Transport of about 150,000 kilometres per year. Members would be aware that on 9 May this year I raised the issue of the transport network and the need to improve services with existing service providers. Implementation of a Cessnock to Morisset service would reduce a trip to Sydney by three hours.

Considering the amount of tourism in the area, with almost two million visitors to the vineyards in the Cessnock electorate, that service would allow for greater utilisation of existing services and better utilisation of the State rail service. These are issues that the proprietor of Rover, Mr Lewis, is also keen to address. Indeed, he is so keen that he has made an application to the Ministry of Transport and is ready to implement the service as soon as he is given the okay. The problem is that the Ministry of Transport is now requesting that any services in the area with poor patronage must be cut in order to implement a new service to Morisset. A letter from the Ministry of Transport stated:

I refer to our recent OMBSC contract management meeting held in this office on the 5th September 2007. In relation to your proposal to introduce services from Cessnock to Morisset it was my understanding that you were going to undertake an analysis of your current services to identify poorly patronised services with a view to using the service kilometres to offset some of the additional kilometres connected with the proposal.

As I said at the outset, this company undertook a massive streamlining of its business two years ago and saved the Ministry of Transport 150,000 kilometres per year. Now the ministry is seeking a further reduction that will affect services in the region that are necessary in small village areas. The ministry wants a second free kick. Mr Lewis told me that the failure to approve the proposed Morisset service puts into perspective the futility of attempting to improve public transport in his contract region. In addition, Mr Lewis is concerned about the paperwork, especially as it relates to replacement of the fleet. The company's owners must provide a set schedule for replacement of the fleet, including what fleet needs to be replaced and when, et cetera. The urgent replacement of any part of the fleet outside the schedule involves a massive amount of paperwork.

For example, a tree fell on one of the fleet, another one had occupational health and safety issues, and one had rust in the framework around the motor which, according to the Roads and Traffic Authority, had to be replaced within six months. This was outside the schedule. When Mr Lewis told the ministry that he had to replace the fleet he asked what had created the paperwork. The bureaucrat told him, "The paperwork is due to you working outside the schedule. You have a schedule, you have to work to it." That is bizarre. The industry needs bureaucrats who understand the industry. Mr Lewis also pointed out the constant need to revamp the paperwork and provide business plans. This family business has been operating and providing a good service in this area for 100 years. Yet it must provide business plans and many other plans to the Ministry of Transport—plans that the company does not have time to prepare. The Ministry of Transport needs to be more flexible when dealing with these operators.

KU-RING-GAI STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [4.56 p.m.]: On 8 September I was pleased to be present at a dinner commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service [SES]. The dinner was led by the guest of honour, Brigadier Philip McNamara, CSC, the Director General of the New South Wales State Emergency Service. Others present included the local regional officer, Marnie Hillman, Andrew Beattie, controller of the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service unit, representatives of Ku-ring-gai Council led by Mayor Nick Ebbeck, and many other local community groups. Also present were four former unit controllers: the first, appointed in 1957, was Flight Lieutenant Stuart J. Doyle, someone whom I am proud to call a friend and who is a tireless worker for the Ku-ring-gai community to this day; Mr Stoyan Rogleff, OAM, who held the position between 1978 and 1987; Lieutenant Colonel C. J. Smith, ED, the controller from 1987 to 1991; and Mr Bruce Angus, the controller from 1991 to 1993.

Regrettably, on too many occasions my community has had to call on the services of the volunteers who make up the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service unit. In recent times those events have centred on storms and fires: the January 1991 storm that wreaked havoc over the upper North Shore, especially around Wahroonga and Turramurra, and the storm of 2001 when both suburbs were again subjected to the force of nature, with homes again affected by falling trees and branches. The 1993-94 and 2001-02 fires that affected Ku-ring-gai also saw the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service provide a wide range of support services for the New South Wales Fire Brigades and the local Rural Fire Service. As regrettable as these types of events may be, it is fortunate that my community has a strong and dedicated team of volunteers called the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service to call upon at such times.

Like people in communities across the State, when disaster strikes the men and women of the State Emergency Service, including the Ku-ring-gai unit, respond. These volunteers, employed in a variety of jobs, drop everything to ensure that the lives and property of others are protected in times of emergency. That was brought home to me when I visited Maitland following this year's storm that wreaked havoc in the Hunter,

Newcastle and the Central Coast. When I visited Maitland with the Prime Minister and the member for Port Stephens on the weekend the storm struck I met and spoke to volunteers from across the State—ordinary men and women again engaged in extraordinary activities in support of communities that had suffered from or were threatened by natural disaster.

Once again, members of the Ku-ring-gai unit were present, as they have been at other major emergencies that have threatened New South Wales communities throughout the unit's history. These include the Granville train disaster in 1977, the Newcastle earthquake in 1989, the Nyngan floods in 1990, the Thredbo landslide in 1997 and the eastern suburbs hailstorm in 1999. The impetus for the establishment of the State Emergency Service was the 1955 Maitland floods. So it is appropriate that in a year in which Maitland was again threatened by floods but spared we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service. It is one of the State's 227 units, and with 92 active members it is one of the State's largest. Over the 50 years it has come a long way. Starting out with little more than a few individuals and little equipment, it now boasts five vehicles and one flood boat. It also used to boast a fine headquarters, but the unit is now without a permanent home.

On the night we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service, the Mayor, Nick Ebbeck, reiterated council's determination to again ensure the unit has a workable and permanent home, something I am pleased to place on the public record to ensure that it actually is done. That is a task that I hope the State Government can be counted upon to assist in delivering. I acknowledge the efforts of Ku-ring-gai Council and its support of the State Emergency Service unit over the past five decades. As with other units, that service works only because of the support of both the local and State governments.

At the dinner, Brigadier Philip McNamara presented 21 of Ku-ring-gai's 92 State Emergency Service volunteers with medals, recognising their services to the unit. Those honoured were Andrew Betty, Fay Burrell, David Caterall, Harry Cramer—who has served in the unit for 44 years—Harm Drenth, Crispian Eaton, Michael Ford, Michael Jennis, Murray Lennon, James Loxton, Robin Mackenzie, Liz Mitchell, Ann O'Donovan, Lis Olsson, Phillip Palargas, Kim Robinson, Robert Sim, Jennifer St Quintin, David Stuart-Smith and Rex Willard. I congratulate them all and thank them on behalf of the wider community for their efforts.

I especially congratulate Sue Catterall and those involved in the production of the unit's history that was given to those who attended the dinner. It confirms the outstanding service provided by the men and women who have made up the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service over the past 50 years. I pay tribute to Andrew Betty, the unit's longest serving controller, who has held the position since 1993. No organisation, especially not one made up of volunteers, will survive and remain vibrant without good leadership. There is little doubt that Andrew provides great leadership to the unit and I hope he takes pride in all its achievements.

Volunteers shape so much of the Australian way of life. So much of what we take for granted is only possible because people such as those members of the Ku-ring-gai unit give freely of their time to offer protection to the community. Those efforts should never be taken for granted. That is why I attended the dinner and why I speak about these men and women this evening. The community I have the privilege to represent in this place is indebted to the Ku-ring-gai State Emergency Service and on the community's behalf I acknowledge their service.

BRAIDWOOD SEWERAGE SCHEME

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.01 p.m.]: The fact that Braidwood was the first town in New South Wales to be heritage listed is a great attraction for tourism, and offers a great future for the expansion of businesses. Over the past couple of years it has faced a looming problem with its sewerage works. The town had antiquated sewerage works that, unfortunately, had not been maintained for many years. Consequently, the Palerang Council was faced with replacing the system at a cost of about \$6.6 million. Palerang Council is a small council and Braidwood is a relatively small town. Therefore, the residents were facing massive water and sewerage rate increases to pay for a new sewerage works. Unfortunately, previous councils—especially those just prior to amalgamation—had not put aside any funds for maintaining or replacing the system.

The residents faced that rent rise with some trepidation and, naturally, have asked for help. A couple of weeks ago I received news from the Minister for Water Utilities, Nathan Rees, that he had secured Cabinet approval for a \$3.3 million grant from the State Government. I was pleased to go to Braidwood to announce the

news, and the people were very appreciative of receiving that grant. On their behalf I thank Minister Rees and Premier Morris Iemma for their support of the people of Braidwood. Because the sewerage works needed replacing it was not eligible for the Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Scheme funding. Fortunately Braidwood is part of the Sydney catchment and the Government is able to provide funding to ensure that the outflow into the Shoalhaven River is clean and fit for consumption by Sydney residents further down the track.

On my visit to Braidwood to announce the allocation of that \$3.3 million I was pleased to be accompanied by the Federal Labor candidate, Mike Kelly. I know the residents of Braidwood had lobbied him about that sewerage system, as I had, because they felt that the Federal Government should have contributed to its replacement. I am pleased to advise that Federal Labor did not say, "Oh, that is someone else's problem, someone else's fault." Federal Labor said, "Yes, we would be happy to provide the \$3.3 million in matching funding if a Rudd government is elected." It was a good news day for the people of Braidwood—a commitment of \$6.6 million, which will ensure that their rate increases need not be as high as foreshadowed.

I pay tribute to the people of Braidwood who lobbied very heavily, particularly the Mayor, Jim Maclachlan, who has had numerous conversations with me over the past couple of years to make sure that the State Government knew what was going on and that we were heading in the same direction in trying to overcome some of that blame game and blame shifting that sometimes goes on. I pay tribute also to the Braidwood Residents Association, known as BRASS, which was heavily involved in lobbying for Government assistance for replacement of the sewerage works. The association's tourism body—headed by Cheryl Raper—pointed out the impact that residents and the tourism businesses would experience if the rates were increased by the amounts foreshadowed.

I acknowledge also the lobbying by the Save Braidwood Group, whose members have not always got along with me all that well. On this occasion, we were on the same side and pushing for the same outcome. A great result has been achieved for the area. I am pleased to say that a few days after Federal Labor announced through Colonel Mike Kelly and Anthony Albanese, the Federal shadow Minister, that it would provide assistance the Federal member, Gary Nairn, matched the announcement. He said that funding would be provided for Braidwood's water and sewerage works. That was very welcome because it means that the funding is now guaranteed for the people of Braidwood, regardless of the outcome of the Federal election.

I am pleased that, belatedly, the Federal Coalition matched the earlier announcement. That is a great example of how Labor members can work together to produce a good result for a community; an example of the sort of cooperation we need to see from State and Federal governments to improve the facilities of our regions—cooperation on a matter that is very important to my region. I know that in some other electorates cooperation is not as great. Recently in Hume, The Nationals and the Liberals could not manage to share a stall at the Murrumbateman Field Day, contrary to the way Labor cooperated. Of course, we know there is a lot of hostility there. It is important that we work together in regional matters. The outcome for Braidwood in the past few weeks has been terrific, a great example of the way that I, as the State Labor member, can look forward to working with Colonel Mike Kelly, if he is successful in being elected at the forthcoming Federal election.

Mr Daryl Maguire: He is not a colonel, he is retired.

Mr STEVE WHAN: He retains the title.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.06 p.m.]: I congratulate the member for Monaro on recognising the efforts of the people of Braidwood in what was obviously a very successful lobbying campaign. I congratulate also the Save Braidwood Group. I acknowledge that it is an achievement to have been allocated \$3.3 million by the Premier and Minister Rees. It is interesting to note that the Federal Labor candidate was successful in obtaining a commitment from Federal Labor to match that funding. I add my voice to the congratulations to the people of Braidwood.

EWINGSDALE SPEED CAMERA

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina) [5.06 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House my concerns about the Ewingsdale fixed speed camera located on the Pacific Highway. I have received more phone calls and correspondence from people questioning the accuracy of the speed camera than any other issue during my 19 years as the member for Ballina. The speed limit at that camera is 60 kilometres per hour. In no way do I condone speeding, however, I believe there is a strong case that this camera was faulty earlier this year. To date I have received 546 letters from individuals involving 859 infringements dealing with infringements from

28 March 2007 to date. However, the majority of infringements that have been disputed occurred between the end of March and the middle of July.

My constituents are adamant that they were not speeding. Many of the complaints come from local residents who drive past the camera on a regular basis and who are very familiar with its location. The speed camera warning signs are very prominent. Many people who have written to me after receiving infringement notices have excellent driving records: they have never had a speeding offence before. Some of the alleged offenders had witnesses in their car who attested to the fact that the driver was not speeding. The drivers and witnesses say they had their speed confirmed at the time by a roadside monitor at the southern approach to the camera giving a readout of the speed of each passing motorist.

I have made hundreds of representations to the Government regarding this matter, but the Government's response has been to rule out any question of the camera's accuracy. I am not satisfied with that response. The thing that convinces me that the camera was not accurate is information I have now obtained from the Office of State Revenue under freedom of information legislation. According to that information the average number of offences in the three days between 16 October and 18 October 2006 was 13. That number spiked to 906 offences recorded in the week between 25 April and 1 May 2007, or 129 per day. The average number of infringements issued per day between 28 March and 24 July, the period when the camera's accuracy is being questioned, was 97. There is a huge difference between 13 offences a day in October 2006 and 97 offences a day on average throughout the questionable period.

The Ewingsdale camera operates in two directions. It became operational in the southbound direction on 22 September 2006 and in the northbound direction on 29 March 2007. Some people might think that this two-way camera explains the increase, but one would have expected a twofold increase in infringements, not an eightfold to tenfold increase. Despite the fact that this camera was operational in both directions for only a quarter of last financial year, it was ranked number eight in the State's top money-earning fixed-speed cameras, raising \$1.1 million in revenue for the State Government. While this camera has proved to be extremely lucrative for the Government, it is causing a great deal of hardship for many of my constituents. I have a number of examples of people who have lost or will lose their licences, and who have lost or will lose their jobs as a result of losing their licences, and who have others who depend on them for transport to vital services.

One young fellow who is employed full time as a tradesperson has a young family whose sole source of support is his income. He stands to lose his licence. From 25 May to 18 June he received four infringement notices. His employers told him that he would lose his job if he lost his licence. He is adamant that he did not speed above the allowed 60 kilometres an hour on any occasion. Between 20 April and 21 May—a one-month period—another lady was issued with 15 penalty notices and the total of her fines comes to \$1,617. Not only will she lose her licence but the cost of the fines will cause her financial hardship. Another lady, this time a single mother who lives out of town, received 11 penalty notices between 16 April and 31 May. She lives in an area with no public transport and will now be completely isolated with her children. These people and others knew that the camera was there so it simply does not make sense that one of them would speed past a camera 15 times in one month.

Many locals are planning a protest to express their anger and some are challenging the fines in court. However, a large number do not have the financial resources or ability to take time off work or to take court action. I am extremely unhappy with this situation. In light of the abnormally high number of infringements, around 97 per day in the late March to mid-July period compared to an average 12 per day normally, and based on the information that I received from the Office of State Revenue under freedom of information, I call on the Minister for Roads and the Treasurer to place a moratorium on the payment of infringement notices for three months. That will enable constituents to gather together evidence and facts and to challenge the accuracy of the camera in court.

A moratorium will also give the Government an opportunity to reconsider the issue in light of the information I placed before the House today. Finally, I note that there are precedents for inaccurate cameras in this State, and this Ewingsdale camera appears to be the latest case in point. This is a serious issue for my constituents. They stand to lose their licences and their jobs. I believe the evidence is fairly compelling that the abnormally large number of infringement notices issued—97 a day compared to 12 normally—indicates that there is a problem with the camera.

TRY-A-TRADE HUNTER COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Mr FRANK TERENCE (Maitland) [5.11 p.m.]: On 24 August I attended the Try-A-Trade Hunter Community Partnership event held at Maitland showground, which was sponsored by the Hunter Institute of

TAFE and WorkSkill Australia. Maitland showground houses a large pavilion where 40 different trades were represented. They comprised hairdressing, fitting, motor mechanics, police, sign-writing and bricklaying—all the sorts of trades that should be considered by year 9 and year 10 students. When I arrived Maryka Gibson, Try-A-Trade Hunter Coordinator, year 9 and year 10 students from local high schools, and the Mayor of Maitland greeted me.

An interesting aspect of this event was that students were able to view the tools and equipment that were used and they were also given a chance to participate in each trade in a practical way. Students were able to participate in a mock hairdressing set-up, strip down an engine in the motor mechanic trade, and lay bricks in the bricklaying area. They were instructed along the way. This daylong event gave them practical training or experience in a number of trades. It was a fantastic hands-on initiative that gave them an opportunity to establish whether they liked a specific trade. Students made signs, tested diesel engines, disassembled engines and made items in the metal fabrication section—something solid and tangible to take home and show to their parents, for example, plumbing pipes or steel pipes for the boiler making trade. It was a practical way to establish whether they would be interested in pursuing different trades.

As a former motor mechanic and TAFE teacher I state without a doubt that the trades are a great way to go. We need all the tradespeople we can get. These young people who might not be suited to university or academic studies might want to pursue a trade such as bricklaying, installing plumbing equipment, or fixing cars. As I said earlier, 40 different trades were represented at Maitland showground, which was a fantastic initiative. I take this opportunity to congratulate Maryka Gibson and her group, and Rotary, which sponsored the event. I thank the TAFE teachers who attended on that day to assist in different trades, students and teachers from local high schools who attended, and the Mayor of Maitland for supporting this great event. Yearly events such as this assist in increasing the number of tradespeople who go through TAFE colleges.

Members would be aware that the Iemma Government is allocating funds to establish trade schools. Try-A-Trade events that offer hands-on experience are a wonderful way of introducing the trades to young people. Maitland TAFE has become an engineering trade school, which is another great initiative. I am proud to be the member for Maitland—an area where practical initiatives assist in introducing students to the trades. I congratulate all those concerned on organising this event, a novel initiative and a topic well worth mentioning in this House. The trades are all about working with one's hands to build houses, fix cars and install plumbing and electrical fittings and fixtures. It is great to see initiatives such as these. On behalf of the people of Maitland I am proud to announce the Try-A-Trade initiative and I again congratulate all those involved.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.16 p.m.]: I add my voice to the voice of the member for Maitland in acknowledging the Try-A-Trade event. Events such as this can only lead to encouraging young people to work in the trades. Recent statistics show that we have a lack of skilled tradespeople, so young people must be given incentives and they must be encouraged to try out the trades. The Try-A-Trade event gives young people an opportunity to play a hands-on role. I add my voice to the voice of the member for Maitland in congratulating Ms Gibson, the TAFE teachers and students. I look forward to hearing further good things from the member for Maitland about his electorate and his constituents.

M2 TRAFFIC NOISE

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [5.17 p.m.]: Tonight I refer to the problems being suffered by residents of Forester Estate and Grosvenor Court in Nile Street, Marsfield, near the M2. For some reason, despite the fact that trees and forests were among the areas protected by anti-noise fences when the M2 was built, houses in the Marsfield area, which is approximately a kilometre west of the tollgates past Macquarie University heading west, were never protected by noise barriers. The problem has become more acute and insufferable since the widening of the M2 West to three lanes. In March and May and subsequently members of the Forester Estate Committee wrote to the Minister for Roads, Eric Roozendaal, and apart from an acknowledgement they have still not received a reply. I wrote to the Minister in June and all I got was an acknowledgement. Members of the committee conducted their own noise level tests and found that the noise level was greater than the recommended level of noise for these areas.

The noise level was 57 decibels both at night-time and daytime, which is more than the recommended maximum noise level. Residents should have the benefit of anti-noise fences erected along the 160-metre border. The fact that the fence has not been erected shows that this Government does not care about the hundreds of people who live in the estate and who are who are affected by the noise generated by increased traffic volumes. On 10 September I, together with the shadow Minister, Duncan Gay, attended the area to

examine the situation. Transurban had installed a noise meter, but it was placed in the quietest place in the estate on ground level where hardly any noise could be heard. A number of units on the second and third floors of nearby buildings that would have experienced much louder noise would have been the more appropriate spot to place the noise meters.

The residents, Duncan Gay and I pointed out this defect to the Minister and the M2 Hills Motorway representatives, but so far the problem has not been resolved. Unfortunately, this is one of the sad features of living in the north-west. Our area was a beautiful forest area. The M2 services much of Sydney but not this area because it is too difficult to get on to the motorway and the \$4.40 toll is too much to pay to travel from Beecroft just up to North Ryde. Not many people in the Epping-Marsfield area use the M2 to travel to the city. Not many people use the motorway to leave the city because of the slow flow of traffic, especially with the reduced speed limit. Much of the motorway, which now has a third lane, permits travelling at only 70 kilometres per hour when the speed limit on Epping Road is 80 kilometres per hour. This part of Sydney is being disadvantaged because the State Government and the M2 Hills Motorway controlling body have not demonstrated a reasonable attitude towards the 300 to 400 residents of Forester Estate and Grosvenor Court. In an interesting article published on 3 October 2007 in *The Northern District Times* entitled "Noisy nightmare" I was quoted as saying:

They [the residents] now have to live with not just a motorway but one which is busier than ever before with the advent of the Lane Cove Tunnel and the M7.

A lot more traffic comes through from the north-west. I mentioned that the noise meters had not been positioned in the best places to measure the noise levels. In that same article I said that the residents had said:

Whether it is on the patio of a Grosvenor Court townhouse or on the balcony of top-floor apartments in the Forester Estate, conditions are deteriorating ...

The quietest place in the complex is where noise receptors were set up to monitor conditions nestled between bushes and a wall.

I plead with the Minister for Roads to put pressure on Transurban to fix the problem by installing soundproofing to give these residents some peace and quiet. They live in expensive properties that have been landscaped beautifully and now they are being driven away by traffic noise.

SOUTH WESTERN SYDNEY INSTITUTE OF TAFE CAMPBELLTOWN CAMPUS

Mr PHILLIP COSTA (Wollondilly) [5.22 p.m.]: Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten. The South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE and, in particular, the Campbelltown campus is a vocational education and training institution that has built a reputation for excellence in learning, industry responsiveness, quality student services and accessibility to the best quality training for all members of the community. The institute underpins the skills base of one of the fastest growing and most dynamic regions in Australia. To demonstrate the high calibre of education and training, Campbelltown campus has won the Western Sydney Industry Awards Tourism Industry Education Award four times.

Many excellent learning and training opportunities are available at Campbelltown campus, such as tourism and hospitality, which are two of the fastest growing industries in Australia. The Iemma Government has seen the importance of education keeping up with this growing industry. On 28 September I had the privilege of opening the newly redeveloped hospitality and tourism facility at the Campbelltown campus in my electorate. The hospitality and tourism faculty provides training through the availability of many great courses and also hands-on experience by employing students at Restaurant Macarthur, a training restaurant for students to learn on the job at the campus.

This wonderful opportunity is the result of \$1.6 million in capital funding provided jointly by the New South Wales Iemma Government and the Federal Government. Along with the hospitality and tourism faculty other faculties provide training for all areas, and create the opportunity for members of the community to have a diverse range of quality training services. The institute gives a high priority to meeting the special needs of the south-western Sydney region where there are more disadvantaged people on socioeconomic indices than those residing in other metropolitan regions. Specialist staff assists and support students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, indigenous students and women accessing training in TAFE.

The campus has a clear sense of identity with a strong team focus. Staff at all levels across the institute collaborate on projects to achieve the best outcomes for students and business partners. As at the end of 2006 Campbelltown campus received 6,942 enrolments. Of these 4,707 were for the hospitality, tourism and arts faculty. Hospitality training at Campbelltown includes hospitality management, commercial cookery, food and

beverage training, club management and compliance training for the industry. Students can study full time or part time for one day or up to two years. Graduates from the tourism and hospitality section have career opportunities that include professional managers, supervisors, and operational positions in a wide range of establishments for the hospitality industry locally, nationally and internationally.

The restaurant, Macarthur, now has a seating capacity for 160 guests. As a training restaurant it offers students the opportunity to learn their craft and skill before being employed by the local industry. The restaurant has hosted many community and industry functions for faculty partners, which provides opportunities for the institute to showcase its training, students and facilities. Many students in hospitality are offered their first work opportunity from industry and community guests who support the restaurant on host evenings.

These wonderful new facilities will give local students the opportunity to acquire their skills in learning environments that are attractive and reflective of today's hospitality culture. Students will benefit from working with state-of-the-art equipment and the local community will benefit from having a highly skilled workforce at their fingertips. As I said when I commenced my contribution, education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten. Campbelltown has an outstanding education facility. I extend our appreciation to members of the teaching and administrative staff at Campbelltown for their dedication and commitment to the high standard of education and training and to the nurturing of young people in the Macarthur community.

TWEED HOSPITAL

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [5.27 p.m.]: I am 100 per cent for the Tweed and for the Tweed Heads District Hospital. Therefore, I am disappointed to once again advise the House of a case of Labor Government neglect of the Tweed hospital. It is amazing that this hospital treats so many patients so well, considering its lack of funding and inept management by the embattled Minister and her painfully loyal Lismore bureaucrat, North Coast Area Health Service chief executive, Mr Chris Crawford. The Tweed hospital still saves many lives, due only to the dedication of its outstanding medical professionals.

The Tweed doctors and nurses, like the Tweed police, ambulance personnel, and schoolteachers do an amazing job considering what they have to put up with from this awful Labor Government. In my short time as the member for Tweed I have alluded to the problems of the Tweed hospital. These include patients dying in ambulances when they were turned away from the hospital as part of a bypass strategy; patients needing life-saving surgery being turned away; patients waiting in corridors for up to two days because the Labor Government never provided the beds it promised; frightened, sick children being forced into adult wards; patients waiting four years for dental treatment; and cancer patients remortgaging their homes to pay for private radiotherapy treatment that should be available to Tweed cancer sufferers just as it is to those in Sydney.

A sad medical case associated with the Tweed Hospital that I wish to mention today concerns young Kai, who is just three months old. He was born at the Murwillumbah District Hospital and in that respect I suppose he is lucky because the Government has the Murwillumbah District Hospital in its cost-cutting crosshairs. Unfortunately, Kai was born profoundly deaf. Advances in medical science mean that he could have a near-normal life if he is able to obtain what are known as bilateral cochlear implants. The procedure must be done very quickly to maximise his chances of success.

Kai's parents, Thomas and Samantha, are just 19 years old. Thomas receives a low wage as a casual waiter and Samantha receives benefits from the Federal Government. Thomas also has the same health problem as has his newborn son, and he too has cochlear implants. After diagnoses at Murwillumbah and Tweed hospitals, little Kai went to the Mater hospital in Brisbane. I will read a letter from Kai's grandfather, Paul Barwick, which states:

The family were then requested to attend Tweed District Hospital for further testing where it was found that Kai had minimal hearing levels and immediately he was referred to the Mater Hospital in Brisbane for extensive testing.

So far, so good. However, the family was told subsequently that because they live in New South Wales, they cannot have the operation carried out at a Queensland hospital and they will have to travel to Sydney. Brisbane is one hour's drive from Tweed Heads whereas Sydney is 10 hours drive away. The family also has been told that when they go to Sydney, all the tests will have to be done again because the two States' systems have different protocols for deciding whether this particular treatment should be made available. The letter from Paul Barwick also states that Dr Que-Hee, one of the leading specialists in this field, said:

They may not accept the Mater's findings and they may have different protocols for diagnosing the extent to which they need to go in relation to Kai.

The letter goes on to state:

We certainly hope this is not the case, as we have already made six trips north to Brisbane.

The family has also been told that the Government may fund only one of the implants. The implants cost \$50,000 each so the family will be expected to come up with the remaining \$50,000. This family cannot even afford travel and accommodation expenses associated with receiving treatment in Sydney, let alone pay \$50,000 for half the required treatment. The New South Wales Minister for Health has all this information on her desk because Paul Barwick wrote to her on 8 October. However, the family has had no response from the Minister. This is an extraordinarily serious situation, and action needs to be taken now.

Kai's grandfather also posed a credible question in his letter, "Why are we discriminated against because of where we live?" After all, all people should be treated fairly in the state of New South Wales. I appeal to the Minister to show some heart. Young Kai is 12 weeks old. He deserves a chance to have a normal life in the great State of New South Wales. I implore the Minister to allow the operations to proceed at Brisbane, at no expense to the family.

STRATHFIELD ELECTORATE STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.32 p.m.]: Last night I had the great pleasure to host a dinner at Parliament House with the State Emergency Service volunteers from my electorate of Strathfield. The generous nature of our volunteers reminds us all that society's needs come first. They really are our modern-day superheroes. These State Emergency Service volunteers are great models for future generations. On behalf of the New South Wales Government and the people of this great State of ours, the Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon Nathan Rees, took time from his hectic schedule to join us for part of the dinner to express appreciation to the State Emergency Service volunteers for their outstanding work in the community.

Among those who attended from the Ashfield-Leichhardt State Emergency Service were Deirdre Affleck, Gavin Bale and partner Francoise Bale, Andrew Bokor and partner Narelle Haken, Trevor Christie, David Hull, Peter Kaye, Nicholas Dixon-Wilmhurst, Stephen Sanson, Paul Keogh, Sharon Buckley, Jamie Kennedy, Claudine Kimber, Pilar Lorenzo and partner Carlos Barra, Chris Sulter, Denise Tierney and Inspector Graham Cope, Yvonne Brake, Alexander Bailey, Malcolm Little and Gerrie Little, Bill Garside and Sue Szabo and Mike Pinter. Also in attendance from the Strathfield State Emergency Service were Stan Wall, Rhonda Sclanders, Clinton Wright and June Khaw, Alex Todd and Megan Bussing, Leonie Latimer and Jacob Macklin. The Burwood State Emergency Service was represented by Stephen Anderson.

The greatest strength of the State Emergency Service is the combined effort of the 10,000 volunteers who make up the organisation's ranks. The fact that these men and women are always willing to turn out in times of natural disasters and emergencies—usually in terrible weather, often in traumatic conditions, and at some risk to their own safety—is truly remarkable. The fact that they do this for no reward, except the thanks of those they help along the way, is testament to their community spirit and dedication to volunteering. I believe everyone should take every opportunity possible to echo the gratitude of those who are helped by the State Emergency Service. Our community would be far poorer without these volunteers in bright iridescent orange overalls and the contribution they make to our safety and protection.

Over the past 52 years New South Wales has come to need the State Emergency Service in times of crisis. This has included many of the worst natural disasters to affect this State. The Newcastle earthquake, the Thredbo landslide, the Sydney hailstorm and the recent Hunter and Central Coast floods come to mind. As well as responding to the calls for help in my own local area, the members of the Strathfield, Ashfield-Leichhardt and Burwood units have taken part in providing assistance during all those disasters. In the past eight months, the members of the Burwood, Strathfield and Ashfield-Leichhardt units have devoted almost 13,000 hours of their time in responding to storms, taking part in community events and other activities.

The willingness of these volunteers—and, indeed, all the members of our emergency services—to help those in trouble in our community is in the best tradition of Aussie mateship and Aussie willingness to lend a hand in time of need. However, an effective and responsive emergency service does not rely only on its volunteers. To be able to meet the needs of the community, volunteers need appropriate accommodation,

training, equipment and vehicles. Our State Government has provided the State Emergency Service with unprecedented levels of funding totalling more than \$365 million over 13 years. This year's budget allocation is a record \$51.5 million, which includes \$2.4 million for upgraded communications and paging systems for volunteers; \$1.7 million for rescue equipment, including new motorised hydraulic cutters for road crash rescue units; \$542,000 for 20 new flood boats; and \$800,000 to assist with the cost of purchasing emergency response vehicles for units around the State.

This is part of an ongoing program to upgrade the State Emergency Service vehicle fleets to ensure the volunteers have quick, safe and reliable transport so they can travel to places they need to go to safely and efficiently. Therefore, last night I was absolutely delighted to present a cheque for \$30,000 to members of the Strathfield unit towards the cost of their latest vehicle—an Isuzu truck, I believe. I understand this truck has already given invaluable service as part of the Hunter and Central Coast response operation by transporting a team of volunteers and necessary equipment, such as ladders, tarpaulins, chainsaws and ropes.

In conclusion, I once again thank from the bottom of my heart all of our volunteers, particularly those in the Strathfield electorate, which I am very honoured and privileged to represent, for their incredible hard work and commitment. I often fondly refer to them as the orange angels, albeit angels without wings. I wish them all the very best for the coming summer storm season. Hopefully, they will not need to be called out too many times and be taken away from their families. As I said earlier, they often place themselves in danger while rendering assistance to others. I ask them all to keep safe and return home safely to their beloved families and friends because they are indeed our wonderful proud and selfless volunteers.

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Youth, and Minister for Volunteering) [5.37 p.m.]: I thank the member for Strathfield for her private member's statement on volunteers, which reflects the pride, respect and gratitude we have for volunteers in New South Wales, in particular the State Emergency Service. An important point made by the member for Strathfield is that State Emergency Service volunteers often provide assistance at their own risk in extremely difficult circumstances. The Strathfield, Burwood and Ashfield-Leichhardt State Emergency Service teams are volunteers of whom we can be justly proud. I acknowledge that the member for Strathfield has a personal commitment to and experience in volunteering. I thank her for bringing important points about volunteers to the attention of the House.

COROWA SOUTH AND LOWESDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS YOUNG ARTISTS

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [5.38 p.m.]: The young students of Corowa South Public School and Lowesdale Public School are consistently among the most recognised artists in our State. Their success in state-wide and national competitions has much to do with their talent and even more to do with the inspiration and guidance they receive from their art teacher, Pam Fredericks. Visitors to one of the small schools are immediately impressed by the range of brightly coloured murals which adorn the walls and compel people to stop, admire the artwork and reach for a camera. The murals and signs around the schools span several years, so visitors quickly realise that these are not the works of one or two gifted students, but the cumulative creations of many young primary school children. The striking colours, the range of flora, fauna and other subjects never fail to impress, both as an introduction to the schools and as a legacy of past students.

Over the past ten years or so art teacher Pam Fredericks has inspired many primary school children to develop as individuals, to express themselves through different materials and, in creating art works, to find self-confidence. She describes the process as "self-esteem through creative expression", and the number of awards gained by the schools proves conclusively that enthusiastic, motivated students in small country schools can certainly hold their own against all-comers in New South Wales. Corowa South Public School last month won the Dymocks Golden Paw Award for the third year in a row.

I congratulate Bethany Thornber for her artwork of an Australian rock wallaby, which came first in the State out of an enormous 5,500 entries. Not only did this small school take out the first prize, but out of the 12 finalists, 6 were from Corowa South Public School. The other five finalists who must also be commended for their achievement are Bronson Thornber, Nathan Pavey, Kellie Lofthouse, Thomas Webb and Joshua Ost. Cody Kuschert from the Lowesdale Public School was also one of the talented finalists. You would think there was something in the water in the Corowa area. However, it is more likely that the success of students from Corowa South at the Golden Paw Awards is evidence of their teacher's commitment to developing talent in the students and fostering a love of nature at the school.

The Golden Paw Awards were initiated by the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife to raise awareness of Australia's threatened species amongst primary school children and the general public, and

Corowa South has excelled in this field. In the lead-up to the competition Pam Fredericks teaches the students about Australian animals, particularly those that are vulnerable, threatened or endangered. In doing so, she encourages observation and artistic skills. The school's commitment to encouraging the children's love of nature goes even further, as the students help raise funds for threatened species. The students aimed to submit as many artworks as possible, with every artwork generating a dollar donation from Dymocks to help to save Australia's frogs from extinction.

The school's success is not limited to the Golden Paw Awards. Last month schools all over the world celebrated World School Milk Day, and Dairy Australia ran the *Make Mine Milk* art competition for primary students across the country. Corowa South's talented Bethany Thornber once again took out first place, with her drawing deemed to be the most creative and best-realised entry in the New South Wales-Australian Capital Territory section. In the same month, the work of Corowa South was again showcased when students created an informative poster to form part of the Living River Unit, a new curriculum based on educating students about local water. The students' colourful poster was then sent to primary schools along the Murray River. Lowesdale Public School has also achieved success in a number of competitions at national, regional and local levels. Students' artworks have received recognition at the Children's Nagoya Art and Calligraphy Exhibition, been selected as the Taronga Zoo banner, featured at the Director's Choice awards in the Riverina Region, and won Corowa District Garden Show awards and the Bunnings Sunsmart competition.

Under the inspiring leadership of Pam Fredericks, the students from Corowa South Public School and Lowesdale Public School have undertaken imaginative and creative pursuits whilst contributing to the local community and school events. The children of Lowesdale created headpieces for the school's *Lion King* concert and last year constructed metre-high masks representing different cultures for the school's end of year concert. Pam has developed art programs to suit the needs of individuals at both schools for around ten years. As a result of her work, many of her students have become highly motivated artists and have been able to develop a strong appreciation for creative expression. Even the judges at the Golden Paw Awards noticed something special about the work from Corowa South, stating:

It is remarkable that each of the drawings from Corowa South are different, showing the students' unique creative styles.

The principal of Lowesdale Public School describes Pam Fredericks as:

...a brilliant teacher, a wise and thoughtful person, a keen observer of nature, a wonderfully warm grandmother and mother and a kind and supportive friend.

We are indeed fortunate to have her working in two New South Wales public schools. I thank Pam for her tireless work with her students and I commend to the House the excellent work done by the staff and students at Corowa South Public School and Lowesdale Public School.

WOMEN EDUCATING EACH OTHER AND WOMEN IN SAFE AND EQUAL RELATIONSHIPS PEER EDUCATORS GRADUATION

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [5.43 p.m.]: Governments have a clear responsibility to make sure that domestic violence is not tolerated. Everybody is entitled to the right of safety. As a paediatrician, I know that much domestic violence remains unreported. For this reason it was with great pleasure that I attended the Women Educating Each Other and Women In Safe and Equal Relationships [WEEO WISER] peer educators graduation at John Edmondson High School in my electorate in July in the presence of the Minister for Women, the Hon. Verity Firth. WEEO WISER is a young women's peer education program developed by the Liverpool Women's Health Centre with funding from the New South Wales Government's Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme.

The aim of WEEO WISER is to equip young women with knowledge, skills and attitudes to reject abusive relationships and to expect healthy, safe and equal relationships. The WEEO WISER graduation day was a special day. WEEO WISER uses a program of five workshop sessions targeted at year 9 students. These are facilitated by trained peer education workers who have nine full days of education. The sessions reflect and build upon the year 9 curriculum. There is a network of specifically trained support people who are themselves experienced local professionals. These support people provide support and debriefing to the peer educators. There is also an evaluation framework through the University of Sydney. Peer education has been validated as an approach to reducing domestic violence and it helps young women to support each other.

Auntie Norma Shelley, an elder from the Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council, opened the day. The John Edmondson High School choir sang beautifully, conducted by Danielle Craig with Christian Shaw on

the piano. Eden Markna and Jaimey Burgess were the soloists. Margaret Hickie, the centre co-ordinator of Liverpool Women's Health Centre, is to be congratulated for driving this project. Sonia Hoffmann, the project co-ordinator, is a wonderful role model for our community and has done a fantastic job for our people. Angela Barker, who had travelled from Victoria, spoke of the impact of domestic violence on young women's lives. This was a brilliant speech. Angela was severely injured as a result of domestic violence when she was aged 16. She spent nine months in a coma and is now wheelchair dependent. Angela is the star of the DVD that is used in the peer educators program to commence discussion on domestic violence. She hoped that by building self-esteem and teaching young women about the cycle of violence that she could make a difference to the lives of many in our community.

Rosemary Hamon, the counsellor from Ashcroft High School, also spoke about the benefit of the program. Ashcroft High School piloted the program and the dancers from Ashcroft High School accompanied the presentation with a dance that they had developed that morning. Rosemary Hamon spoke about the evaluation and especially about the increased confidence of those that did the project. Many thought that every year 9 student should do it. As Hanna Brown, one of the students said, "There is always a way out of the maze", and this fitted the experience of those who had done the WEEO WISER course.

The Minister, Verity Firth, repeated the message of the day, which was that the Government's clear view is that domestic violence will not be tolerated. The New South Wales Government is providing \$28 million over four years for the victims of domestic violence. Police can now impose a 24-hour interim apprehended violence order and can apply for an apprehended violence order on behalf of those who feel too intimidated to do so. The views of peers are central to the way young people live. The WEEO WISER program costs \$80,000 annually and funding is available only for the next six months. I look forward to working with my community in obtaining any funding to make it sustainable in the longer term, as WEEO WISER is a brilliant program for our future. I commend WEEO WISER to the House.

BOVINE JOHNE'S DISEASE

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [5.48 p.m.]: This evening I speak about an important issue relating to my electorate of Burrinjuck, particularly the complete mismanagement by the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer in a suspected case of bovine Johne's disease involving two of my constituents. Mark and Mandy Wales operate an Angus cattle stud based at Yass. They currently manage a stud herd of around 350 and, given the drought, have been using lease and agistment arrangements throughout New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory to keep their herd fed in these lean times. Whilst on agistment in the Australian Capital Territory one of their herd returned a false positive enzyme linked immunosorbent assay [ELISA] blood test. Whilst they were informed by Australian Capital Territory authorities that a test had been conducted, they were not at any stage notified by New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the Australian Capital Territory administration of any changes in the status of their herd or any obligations, responsibilities or restrictions placed upon it.

During the time it took to return confirmatory test results the Wales were informed that they had to vacate the agistment property or risk their cattle being impounded and force sold. Given less than 24 hours notice of the need to move, the Wales contacted the Australian Capital Territory Chief Veterinary Officer and Dr Ian Roth and Dr Sally Spence of the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries to confirm the restrictions on the movement of their stock. Staff from neither the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries nor the Chief Veterinary Officer of the Australian Capital Territory sought to stop the movement of the cattle from the Australian Capital Territory back into New South Wales. Issued a permit to move the cattle from the Australian Capital Territory to New South Wales by the Australian Capital Territory authorities, Mark and Mandy took the logical step and relocated their herd back onto their New South Wales property after seeking permission from the New South Wales authorities and verbally receiving such permission from the two aforementioned Department of Primary Industries veterinarians.

Sometime later the Wales received a letter from the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries informing them that the ELISA test was a false positive and that their herd, being clean of bovine Johne's disease, had changed status from "suspect" to "non assessed." The letter went further to warn the Wales that but for the benevolence of the Director of Animal and Plant Biosecurity within the New South Wales Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer Mark and Mandy would be liable for breaching the Stock Diseases Act 1923 by moving their stock without a permit and moving their stock whilst on 'suspect' status.

The actions of the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries in this matter is concerning for a number of reasons. We have a situation where a mum and dad business did everything in its power to comply

with the regulations of both jurisdictions, including actively seeking information from the authorities so that the Wales could comply totally with their obligations. There were failures on both sides of the border to inform the Wales adequately of what they needed to do to be compliant. Yet at the end of it all the New South Wales authorities turned around and displayed a dismissive "but for" attitude to the whole mismanaged saga. This is completely unacceptable.

It has been discovered subsequently through freedom of information provisions that considerable communication flowed from the Australian Capital Territory Chief Veterinary Officer and the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer. If both sets of regulatory authorities were aware of the situation with the Wales how come neither sought to adequately inform them of the current status of their stock and any restrictions placed upon it? While my party, the Coalition and, I am sure, all members of the House recognise the need for strict adherence to the State's disease control measures for the betterment of primary industries and the community as a whole, I am concerned about the lack of accountability by the State authorities for their mismanagement of the situation. Had the Wales's cattle returned a confirmatory positive result for bovine Johne's disease it is clear from the communication from the New South Wales Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer that the Wales would now be facing legal consequences for the authority's lack of communication.

The story of Mr and Mrs Wales's dealings with the Office of the New South Wales Chief Veterinary Officer is, I fear, not uncommon. Whether it is due to a lack of resources, poor corporate culture, or a combination of the two, the lack of transparency and poor communication from the regulatory authority definitely needs to be addressed. I have retold this story in the House to put on notice to the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and the Australian Capital Territory Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer that their mismanagement, miscommunication and malfeasance in this situation has not gone unnoticed. Given the recent attention drawn to the management of contagious diseases in the equine industry, I trust that the Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, MLC, will view this situation as I do and do everything he can to get his house in order to ensure that proper regulation, with a good flow of communication to stakeholders, occurs throughout the primary industries portfolio so that a situation similar to that of Mr and Mrs Wales never happens again.

CANTERBURY BOYS HIGH SCHOOL PREFECTS INVESTITURE

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Youth, and Minister for Volunteering) [5.53 p.m.]: I speak tonight as the member for Canterbury but also in my capacity as Minister for Youth. On 12 September I attended the investiture of school prefects at Canterbury Boys High School, which is an event that I attend every year and which I look forward to the most of any of my engagements. The ceremony fills everyone present—officials, parents, teachers and students alike—with a great deal of pride in the vitality, diversity and identity of the Canterbury area. Lesley Mitton is the Principal of Canterbury Boys High School, and she provides fantastic leadership and instils a great deal of pride in the boys at the school. David Springbett has been the prefects coordinator for several years and does a wonderful job. He obviously has a great rapport with the many prefects who have passed through Canterbury Boys High School.

The evening was made particularly special by the contribution of Feras Kareem, who was school captain in 1995. He made a touching speech to the outgoing 2007 and the new 2008 prefects. The outgoing school captains, Joel Campbell and Manaf Al Momani, headed an outstanding prefect body. They spoke about teamwork and the inspiring individual journeys of the 2008 prefects. These young men who are about to enter adulthood also spoke to their parents, teachers and peers about truth and honour. That bodes well for the future. They explained to the assembled young gentlemen that the experience of being school captains, vice-captains and prefects will change them forever. Matthew Brown, a year 10 student representative council member, made an inspiring speech about worthy leadership.

The 2008 school captains, Saif Al Momani, who is the brother of Manaf, and Mark Healey also made inspiring speeches. They told the story of a donkey that was knocked down seven times and got to its feet each time and used that as an analogy for leadership in the school. The Canterbury Boys High School prefects for 2008 are Mark Healey, Saif Al Momani, Brenald Kumar, Shane Lo, Shahzad Jamal, Nikola Saisau, Osamah Anwer, John Lagounaris, John Kortikis, Vi Van Sze, Roger Amacha, Peter Pham, Zack Tran, Michael Perelini, Sonny Satuala and Cang Huynh. The evening concluded fittingly with a wonderful musical item by Sonny Satuala, Nikola Saisau, Taumara Aukino, David Palu and Tesimoni Taufa.

KATHLEEN ANNE CONLAN CORONIAL INQUEST

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [5.58 p.m.]: I wish to draw to the attention of the House concerns raised by Mr B. Conlan about the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of his wife and the subsequent coronial inquiry. When Mr Conlan raised these matters with me I was alarmed. The coroner in her findings said:

Kathleen Anne Conlan died on 28 November 2003 at 3.26 pm in the Gold Coast Hospital.

Mrs Conlan was admitted to the Gold Coast Hospital on 26 November 2003 with severe epigastric pain and nausea. Over that period she was in hospital she was attended principally by Drs Lawn, Hogan and Washaya. Tests including an abdominal CT scan were carried out. No diagnosis was ever made and on the morning of 28 November 2003 she was thought to be stable enough to be discharged. She stated a wish to go home. It was considered that she should have a follow-up gastroscopy and colonoscopy in her home town of Wagga Wagga.

She was in fact leaving the hospital with her husband when recalled due to Dr Hogan noting a vastly increased white blood cell count in particular from her morning blood tests.

She was readmitted.

Dr Rutherford, the consultant, and Dr Washaya, the surgical registrar, were in surgery that day.

At around 2 pm Mrs Conlan started vomiting.

At 3.10 pm Mrs Conlan was found collapsed on the floor and unresponsive. A Code Blue was called and the intensive care registrar, the medical registrar and the emergency registrar attended. Resuscitation attempts failed.

A Life Extinct Certificate was issued by Dr Ben Close on 1 December 2003.

A Post Mortem was performed by Dr Ken Levy.

In the proceedings is the Post Mortem Examination Certificate.

The Certificate states that Kathleen Anne Conlan aged 70 years died on 28 November 2003 at the Gold Coast Hospital.

Dr Ken Levy states that the cause of death was cardiac arrest due to or as a consequence of gastric haemorrhage, coronary artery disease being noted as another significant condition.

Dr Levy had retired by the commencement of this Inquest and despite several and extensive enquiries he was unable to be located to be questioned during the inquest.

The coroner's formal findings were:

1. The identity of the deceased was Kathleen Anne CONLAN.
2. Kathleen Anne CONLAN was born on 1 July 1933.
3. Her last known address was 9 Gardenia Street, WAGGA WAGGA, NSW.
4. At the date of her death her occupation was that of retired person.
5. On the state of the evidence and in particular the brevity of Dr Levy's post mortem report, the inability of this inquest to question Dr Levy and the opinions of other medical doctors involved querying the stated cause of death, I am unable to make a finding as to the formal cause of death.

She went on to say:

I do not consider the evidence which has been heard has been sufficient to put any person or persons upon any trial. No person will be committed for trial.

I ask the Premier, Attorney General and Minister for Health of Queensland to reopen this inquiry to ensure that Dr Levy testifies in this matter. There are questions that must be answered. Upon reading a file that was shown to me by Mr B. Conlan I was alarmed at the information and the accusations that needed to be dealt with. The fact that the coroner produced a brief report from the inquest is, in itself, unacceptable. A woman died after lying in a hospital for two days undiagnosed. The blood test results should have rang alarm signals, yet they were not acted upon. I understand that the lady was given Mylanta and allowed to go home. It was only when the doctor saw the results of the blood test, which should have been ordered earlier, that it was suggested that she be brought back to hospital. She was not diagnosed and Mr Conlan has not had the opportunity to ensure that every question is asked of the medical physicians. I urge the Premier of Queensland to ensure that this inquest is reopened and give Mr Conlan the opportunity he deserves. I do not care if the examiner has to be taken out of a hospital bed, wheeled in on a wheelchair, subpoenaed, summonsed or arrested. He must testify to ensure that all the matters are fully examined.

KURNELL DESALINATION PLANT

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.03 p.m.]: I recently visited Malta as part of an approved Commonwealth Parliamentary Association study tour. My reason for choosing Malta was simple. Having been involved in seawater desalination for more than 100 years and having played a major role in the development of the technology, the Maltese are the experts. Desalination provides around 60 per cent of Malta's drinking water supplies and each of its three desalination plants uses reverse osmosis, the same technique to be used at the Iemma Government desalination plant at Kurnell. Like Australia, Malta is highly vulnerable to global warming and climate change and faces enormous water supply challenges. Malta has had serious water deficit problems in the past. Up until the late 1980s water shortages and water restrictions were so severe and frequent that one official vividly recalls residents out in the streets of the nation's capital banging pots and pans with wooden ladles demanding more water. That is something we do not wish to see in Australia.

Desalination proved to be Malta's water saviour, bridging the gap between supply and demand. The parallels between the water supply problems in Sydney, Australia, and those in Malta are obvious. We are in our worst drought in 100 years, with climate change and global warming upon us and a rising population. We need a new source of water that does not depend on rainfall. Clearly, that source is desalination. The simple truth that the critics of the Kurnell desalination project refuse to accept is that without water we die. During my visit I toured Malta's largest desalination plant at Pembroke and spoke to numerous officials, including the Minister responsible, the Hon. Dr Austin Gatt. The officials I met were very interested about our plans to build a desalination plant in Sydney. I provided them with copies of documents about our Kurnell desalination plant, which are available on the Sydney Water website. On 1 September I received the following email:

I read through the papers on Sydney's desalination project and I am pleased to note the high level of innovation which will be applied, possibly for the first time, to seawater RO. Of particular interest is the running of the plant on green energy—quite a unique feature knowing that the plant will be 1.5 times the size of Pembroke ... Hence I am sure that the Sydney RO plant will become a showcase for desalination operators and environmentalists in the coming years.

I also note that Sydney Water has assessed carefully all the environmental and social impacts both at the construction stage and at the operational stage. Design features of the plant (such as the intake) will protect marine flora and fauna whilst special measures will be taken to protect endangered species in conservation areas. This is very positive as it will prove to be a good example how modern technology can operate whilst respecting environmental constraints ...

Overall, this is a project that should be lauded and I wish the NSW Government success with this exciting venture.

Yours truly

John Mangion
Director, Water
Malta Resources Authority
Water Directorate

That is high praise from an overseas expert. When I told local Maltese people I met that some people in Sydney were opposed to the desalination plant they looked at me with amazement and said, "What? Are they crazy?" What has happened to the Liberal Party's opposition to a desalination plant down in the Sutherland shire in the Federal electorate of Cook? In his September newsletter the retiring Liberal member of Parliament Bruce Baird endorses a new Liberal candidate, Scott Morrison, on the front page. He says: "Bruce and Scott will continue to speak out against the desalination plant." Last week this second-string Liberal candidate wrote to 82,000 voters in the electorate of Cook and said, "With your support I will fight locally" and then lists a number of State issues. But guess what he leaves out? Scott Morrison does not mention the desalination plant at Kurnell—not one word. Five weeks out from the election campaign and the fight has gone out of the local Liberal candidate. His heart is not in it. What has brought about this change of heart between Baird's newsletter in early September and Morrison's newsletter to voters last week? His enthusiasm has been shattered by the immortal words spoken on an ABC radio program on 21 September:

We have a situation where our capital cities are running out of water and I think we should have a desalination plant for every capital city in Australia.

These are the immortal words of the man who would be king, Mr Moneybags himself, the Liberal Federal Treasurer, Mr Peter Costello. The State Liberals have gone quiet and federally they have shut up too. Mr Morrison's opposition to the desalination plant has evaporated like water from a shallow rock pool. So much for a man who stands up for what he believes in! This blow-in from The Hills with no connection to the shire will simply do what Federal Liberal members for Cook have done for past 30 years, that is, blame the State Government for everything, commit the Federal Government to nothing and achieve zero for our shire. My

commitment to the construction of the desalination plant at Kurnell remains and, having visited Malta, it is stronger than ever. As I said, without water we die.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [6.08 p.m.]: Today I shall update the House on recent activities and issues regarding the important issue of mental health in the Willoughby electorate. At the outset I would like to highlight the enormous contribution made by a number of non-government organisations which provide essential information and services for local residents regarding mental health issues. On Tuesday 9 October I was pleased to attend a forum, Understanding Adolescent Mental Health, organised by the combined North Shore Rotary clubs and held at the Chatswood High School auditorium. This was the fourth public community mental health forum organised by the clubs in the past two years.

The forum brought together mental health professionals, consumers, carers, representatives of mental health organisations, such as Lifeline and Club Speranza, and members of the community to focus on the vast and complex issues regarding mental health issues in adolescents. I was heartened by the openness of the panel participants, who were able to provide critical information to many in the audience who had specific areas of interest or concern. Full congratulations must be extended to the local Rotarians who work so hard to raise awareness of mental health issues, reduce its stigma and provide information about it to local residents. The Rotary clubs on the North Shore are already in the process of organising the fifth forum, which will take place next March.

I was also pleased to be present during the opening of the Willoughby Community Men's Shed in Northbridge in July. As many members would be aware, the Men's Shed Program offers a wonderful opportunity to promote positive mental health and to reduce the incidence of isolation and depression amongst men by providing a place to meet and contribute to projects such as furniture restoration, carpentry and metalwork. Often the result of these projects is returned to the community in some way. The Willoughby Community Men's Shed was the result of the combined efforts of the Northern Sydney Region of Uniting Care Ageing, the Federal Department of Veterans' Affairs, North Shore Rotary clubs, Willoughby Legion Sub-branch and Willoughby council. I express my heartfelt congratulations for their combined effort. I know the shed is already a huge success.

Regrettably, the same cannot be said of community-based mental health services in the electorate, which fall within the responsibility of the State Government. The sorry saga of the issues surrounding mental health services in Hercules Street, Chatswood, are symptomatic of the major health crisis within the Northern Sydney Area Health Service. In October 2004, exactly three years ago, the State Government made the terrible decision to move community-based mental health services from Chatswood to the Royal North Shore Hospital site. This decision was made without consultation and without an adequate clinical reason. It resulted in 300 consumers and their families experiencing enormous stress and concern, which continues today.

I cannot help feeling angry and upset when we track the series of events and the sorry excuses given by the State Government and the bureaucrats in the Northern Sydney Area Health Service regarding this myopic decision. We are lucky to have excellent clinical staff, mental health professionals, who are so passionate about assisting consumers and families to deal with the devastating impact that mental illness can have on quality of life. However, they are let down by a State Government which, regrettably, does not put patient care at the centre of this equation. If it did, this decision would never have been made in the first place.

Following community outrage at the decision, the State Government, under the auspices of the area health service, arranged a workshop a few days before Christmas 2004. When my colleague the member for North Shore and I complained about having the workshop a few days before Christmas we were told the issue was so urgent it had to be held then to determine the future of mental health services in the North Shore. I believe the real reason was that the State Government believed that the outcome of the workshop would be different to the outcome reached.

The workshop overwhelmingly determined that community-based mental health facilities in both Cremorne and Chatswood should remain in the community and not be transferred to the Royal North Shore Hospital site. Fortunately, the Cremorne mental health clinic remains open and continues to provide outstanding care. However, three years later the future of mental health services in Hercules Street, Chatswood, is still unclear. After being told the issue was so urgent that we had to have a workshop at Christmas 2004, which overwhelmingly determined that the best outcome for consumers, carers and health professionals was to retain

the community-based mental health teams, the State Government refuses to implement this recommendation. Consumers, carers and the community deserve much better. After three years of causing so much angst for so many families, the State Government must commit to reinstating mental health services in Chatswood.

DOMESTIC SOLAR POWER INVESTMENT

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [6.13 p.m.]: I speak on a matter referred to me by Lake Macquarie constituents who have expressed a view that I am pleased to support. It is a small but significant aspect of a principled response to climate change. The Commonwealth Government funds the Photovoltaic Rebate Program, providing rebates for the installation of solar photovoltaic systems on homes, schools and community buildings. Homes are eligible for rebates of up to \$8,000 to offset installation costs, while schools and community buildings can apply for up to 50 per cent funding via competitive grants. The Commonwealth Government provides this encouragement, but participation could be increased with assistance from the New South Wales Government in the form of appropriate feed-in tariffs for grid-connected photovoltaic systems.

According to the Alternative Technology Association, a not-for-profit organisation promoting sustainable technology, energy efficiency is one of the cheapest and best ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Installing photovoltaic systems is one of the ways people can take personal action against climate change. In October 2003 the Alternative Technology Association's publication titled "Renew" reported that the majority of domestic photovoltaic systems are grid-interactive, so that they can draw power when they need it and then supply it to the grid when there is a surplus. The rates paid for this are determined by electricity retailers and vary across Australia. The New South Wales Government has yet to announce a policy on feed-in tariffs.

The cost of a typical 1.3-kilowatt domestic photovoltaic installation is \$18,000 and the Commonwealth subsidy is limited to \$8,000. It seems obvious that this combination of cost and subsidy does not provide a financial benefit. The combination of capital costs and the low feed-in tariff for the sale of surplus electricity provides a huge disincentive for people who would like to support the use of domestic photovoltaics, but find it unaffordable. A key element of this financial barrier is the feed-in tariff paid by energy retailers. The typical price paid by electricity retailers is only equal to their normal tariff. That is, the green energy produced is not acknowledged, paid for and sold as such. In New South Wales one retailer even pays less for green power produced in peak hours by domestic photovoltaics than it charges for off-peak power.

Comparatively few Australians have chosen to install domestic photovoltaic systems, the current total capacity being nine megawatts. This compares very badly with Germany where there is less sunshine but the total production rate is 1,500 megawatts, roughly 50 times the per capita rate of Australia. The main difference is that in Germany and more than 40 other countries governments have set a premium tariff for surplus photovoltaic electricity fed into the grid. The South Australian Government has announced its intention to adopt a feed-in tariff worth twice the standard retail price.

A private member's bill has been introduced into the Australian Capital Territory Parliament which would introduce a 44¢ per kilowatt-hour tariff. I am advised that the bill has in-principle support from the Government in the single-Chamber Parliament and is consequently most likely to become law. The Alternative Technology Association recommends an initial feed-in tariff of 60¢ per kilowatt-hour payable for the entire output of a photovoltaic system payable for 15 years, by which time the cost should have been recovered. To adjust for the reducing cost of new systems, the 60¢ per kilowatt-hour starting rate should then reduce by 5 per cent annually until it reaches parity with the normal retail rate in approximately 15 years.

I support this as a vital encouragement for householders to act now, rather than later, in making their own contribution to the energy needs of New South Wales. This would also further encourage investment in developing and improving this and related technology. I encourage members of this House to adopt the Alternative Technology Association's recommendation as a fair, progressive and effective incentive for solar electricity microgeneration. I bring this matter to the attention of this House, in particular to the attention of the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water.

PLUNKETT STREET, WOOLLOOMOOLOO, PUBLIC SCHOOL

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [6.18 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about the Plunkett Street Public School in Woolloomooloo, a small school that provides an amazing range of learning opportunities for its 54 students. I commend the excellent work done by the principal, teachers, volunteers and the community to give young

people a good start in life. Plunkett Street offers programs for children from preschool to year 6, with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy. Approximately 20 per cent of students are indigenous, reflecting the small but significant Aboriginal community in Woolloomooloo.

Plunkett Street Public School has a strong focus on quality teaching and learning and student welfare, and aims to create a caring, supportive, safe and structured environment that provides opportunities for all students to develop to their potential. The school is well resourced and has excellent access to technology. Programs include small group instruction and intensive support with an emphasis on hands-on learning. I appreciate the significant extra staffing from the Department of Education and Training until the end of 2008, which allows a non-teaching principal, a full-time senior administrative manager and a teacher's aide special for five days per week. Extra staffing means that the students can receive close attention, either individually or in small groups, to cater for individual needs, and allows principal John Quinn to focus on strategic and active leadership.

Small schools with teaching principals such as Plunkett Street and Darlinghurst, also in my electorate, face special needs, with classroom and community leadership responsibilities added to the normal administrative requirements of principals. I acknowledge and appreciate the additional resources provided through the Priority Schools Program, which results in additional funds and staffing to support literacy, numeracy and participation programs. Over \$15,000 per year for the past three years has provided additional support for student learning, extra teaching and support staff, regional consultancy support, and literacy and numeracy resources. This year Families First has supported the preschool Transition to School Program with a grant of \$3,000. About 80 volunteers, coordinated through Macquarie Bank, work as readers to help students, and Books in Homes Australia donates books. Red Cross and Malleson Stephen Jaques contributes to a breakfast program that ensures students are focussed on learning rather than being hungry.

A wide range of other bodies support and work with the school community, including the City of Sydney's Juanita Neilson Centre, the Sydney Opera House, Musica Viva, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Australian Museum, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney Grammar School, Sydney Roosters Rugby League Club, Variety, Hopestreet, Walla Mulla Family and Community Support, Woolloomooloo Police and Community Youth Club and Adopt-a-Cop. Local businesses also help, and I acknowledge the Frisco Hotel, Bell's Hotel, James Stack, Charlie's Cafe, The Fitzroy Hotel, The Santa Maria, Puntino Trattoria, Glendinnings, Woolloomooloo Bay Hotel, Russell Crowe and Nick's 'Til Midnight Supermarket.

Plunkett Street Public School is a vital resource for disadvantaged families in the area, helping to break the cycle that leads to anti-social behaviour and crime, and giving its students hope for the future and a better life. There has been a long history of social problems in Woolloomooloo that involve a small number of young people who have fallen through the support systems, and I believe that education offers one of the most powerful vehicles to prevent this continuing. Plunkett Street aims to be a community hub by inviting the local community inside the gates to make the most of the facilities and resources and working with local organisations and families to improve life in Woolloomooloo.

I am concerned about the future of Plunkett Street, because some students from the local area do not attend this school, and its small numbers put it at risk in these days of "bigger is better". I call on the Government to ensure that the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Community Services work together to help the school increase its enrolment so that it remains viable. More young families are staying in the inner city, and the number of children under 10 is expected to increase from 267 in 2006 to more than 300 by 2011.

It is vital that the Government continues to provide resources to Plunkett Street that recognise its services in an area with many disadvantaged families. The research evidence shows overwhelmingly that early intervention with young children can prevent disadvantage being passed on to the next generation and it breaks the cycle that may lead to illegal drug use and criminal careers. I congratulate the school community on its success to date, and ask that the Government provide the support to enable this school to continue its vital work with children and families in Woolloomooloo.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 6.22 p.m. until Friday 19 October 2007 at 10.00 a.m.
