

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 25 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.

ROADS AMENDMENT (LANE COVE TUNNEL FILTRATION) BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 18 October 2007.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove) [10.00 a.m.]: As I said previously in this House, the object of the Roads Amendment (Lane Cove Tunnel Filtration) Bill 2007 is to require pollution filtration equipment to be installed and maintained that will remove particulate matter and toxic gases from air in the Lane Cove Tunnel and air exiting the tunnel.

I place on record the fine work of an individual, Dr Ray Kearney, OAM, Associate Professor in the Department of Infectious Diseases and Immunology at the University of Sydney and community advocate for the installation of filtration systems in traffic tunnels to remove noxious exhaust pollution. Dr Kearney is one of the greatest men of our times, a great personal friend of mine, a great friend of our community, and a champion of the vulnerable. Dr Kearney's help and support to the local community and the people in metropolitan Sydney with respect to this has been invaluable. I also thank the members of the Lane Cove Tunnel Action Group, Lane Cove Council and its councillors, and Mums and Dads Against Stacks. I will mention individual members of that group in my contribution to the agreement in principle debate.

I also place on record the wonderful work of the Hon. Joe Hockey, the Federal Member for North Sydney, who has committed \$10 million of Federal money towards the filtration of this tunnel. Joe's work on this has been absolutely fantastic and he should be commended. My colleague, Gladys Berejiklian, the member for Willoughby, has been a strong advocate and supporter from the very start. Gladys, together with Joe Hockey and me, has stood up for the health and wellbeing of our local constituents. I also thank the Leader of the Opposition, Barry O'Farrell, who has been a great supporter and advocate in making sure this becomes coalition policy. I must also mention John Turner, the member for Myall Lakes, who introduced a similar bill in 2002.

If we were assembled to deliberate on such life and death issues as capital punishment and abortion the process of discourse and the elements of reason would be different. The issue before us is also about life and death. Indeed, it is perhaps quite ironic in this so-called age of science and materialism that probably never before have ordinary men and women, including scientists as well as politicians, been confronted with so many moral and ethical problems. Scientists stress and seek objectivity. In arts, religion and philosophy, by contrast, the emphasis is upon subjectivity. Thus, whether something is good or beautiful or right in a moral sense, for example, cannot be determined by scientific method. Science is thus limited to what is observable and measurable. Theories about precisely how pollution affects health and wellbeing may be shattered, but with additional knowledge, new theories are found. However, recorded observations endure. Moreover, such observations are used over and over again. The extensive literature documents that episodes of air pollution are positively associated with enhanced mortality and acute-chronic illness in urban populations.

Because of the emphasis on objectivity value judgments cannot be made in science in the way such judgments are made in religion, philosophy and the arts. However, in a moral sense whether it is right to install filtration systems in a stack—any stack—is a problem solved not only by a value judgment; this decision can be greatly assisted in this case by the scientific method. Therefore the question is asked, and the problem that now confronts us in this forum can and should be solved both by value judgments and by scientific method. The issue then is one, I believe, that transcends party politics. There is no difficulty, in my view and as one who is familiar with the stack filtration issues during the last few years, for any person of integrity in telling the good guys from the bad guys, especially in the saga of events recounted.

The regulatory authorities, in particular the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Environment Protection Authority, have isolated and quarantined new filtration systems and technologies which have arisen abroad, especially when such technologies have been contrary to the prevailing political points of view. These technology decisions it would appear have also been assisted by comments, without proof or evidence, from the associated regulatory authority, the Health Department. Despite all the posturing about new engine designs and better fuels, the combustion engine continues to belch out pollution and fill the air with noxious particulates and chemicals. It is clear that for some time an organised campaign has been orchestrated, I believe principally through the Minister's Office and the Roads and Traffic Authority, against filtration technology. This was evident in the Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry on the Ventilation of the M5 East Stack when the Chairman, the Hon. Richard Jones, wrote in the foreword:

The single stack as currently planned will concentrate the tunnel emission into one source and add to the pollutant load of the valley. The adverse health effects of this increased pollution on the surrounding community must be acknowledged, but the RTA fails to do so.

The predominant culture of any society or political system is not a conspiracy; it is a taken for granted acceptance of many spoken and unspoken precepts. The Roads and Transport Authority states, without objective proof, that filtration systems have not been shown to be effective. NSW Health declares there is no risk to health or wellbeing, I understand, without objective evidence of proof. The Environment Protection Authority oversees a monitoring program that fails to disclose the size and number of ultra-fine particles generated locally but resorts to irrelevant averages of Sydney's regional air shed. This all helps to underestimate exposure by up to 35 per cent and possibly more. Such a prevailing political and patronising culture is more powerful than any conspiracy. A conspiracy can be tracked down, found out, divided and broken. The deep weave of cultural and political patronage that I believe currently exists among the regulatory authorities is difficult to unpick. No single individual or group of individuals can be easily bought to book or held responsible for the collective representation. No single statement or set of statements outlines their code.

This cultural and political patronage does not have an easily identifiable beginning or end. It simply is engrained within the consciousness of each individual: the senior advisor, the project manager, the political spokesperson or even the consultant. It goes on largely unquestioned, however bizarre its consequences, and with an indifference to the objective analysis of scientific and medical evidence. My observations over the years confirm that the Roads and Traffic Authority managed workshops and taxpayer-funded reports have little to do with a search for the truth and a great deal to do with the confirmation of prejudice in this case that tunnel stacks do not require filtration, the technologies do not work and there is no risk to health. It is my understanding, and it is the understanding of the extensive scientific community throughout the world, that nothing could be further from the truth.

In addressing this bill and the question of filtration in stacks and tunnels there is clearly a need for Government to apply honesty, as well as objectivity, to the appraisal of the technologies as well as to the scientific and medical evidence for health risk. This should not be, as it is at the moment, a dickering by the Government, its Minister and the statutory authorities, on the margins of a duty of care and an endless and irrelevant discussion about whether more research should be undertaken. The latter was a patronising do-nothing recommendation by Mr Arnold Dix, a facilitator of the Roads and Traffic Authority workshop. I must say that Mr Dix will be dealt with further in this debate.

I believe the totality of the evidence is beyond reasonable doubt in favour of installing filtration and makes it obligatory for Government to unanimously endorse the installation of filtration technology in tunnels and stacks as a responsibility and a duty of care. Three hospitals are affected by the emissions, pollutants and cancer-causing particulates from this stack in the local area of the member for Willoughby, the member for North Sydney and in my electorate: Royal North Shore Hospital, North Shore Private Hospital and Mater Misericordiae Hospital.

It is well known that these particulates cause problems and issues for unborn children. They cause asthma in young people and prevent the normal development of healthy lungs in children. In my electorate of Lane Cove and the electorate of Willoughby are the following schools: Artarmon Primary School, Boronia Park Public School, Chatswood High School, Chatswood Public School, Currambena Primary School, Greenwich Public School, Lane Cove Public School, Lane Cove West Public School, Holy Spirit Primary School at North Ryde, Hunters Hill High School, Hunters Hill Public School, Mercy College at Chatswood, Mowbray Public School, Naremburn School, North Ryde Public School, Our Lady of Dolours Primary School at Chatswood, Our Lady Queen of Peace School at Gladesville, Ryde East Public School, Ryde Public School, Ryde Secondary College, St Ignatius Junior School, St Ignatius College, St Joseph's School at Hunters Hill, St Leonards Catholic

Primary School, St Michaels Primary School at Lane Cove, St Philip Neri Primary School at Northbridge, St Pius College at Chatswood, St Thomas Primary School at Willoughby, Villa Maria Parish School at Hunters Hill and Willoughby Girls High School.

These schools are within the active and dangerous polluting zone of the east vent stack and the west vent stack of the Lane Cove Tunnel. I hope that this bill will go forward to ensure that all tunnels and emissions from those tunnels are filtered throughout metropolitan Sydney. It is now world's best technology to filter tunnels. The Madrid tunnel has just been filtered. The Japanese filter their tunnels. Norway filters its tunnels. It seems that the only place in the western hemisphere that ignores the overwhelming and significant medical evidence about the danger of particulates from these tunnels and the significant health problems they cause young people and older people is New South Wales, and it is something that needs to be addressed.

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

TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (COUNTRYLINK PENSIONER BOOKING FEE ABOLITION) BILL 2007

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Gladys Berejiklian.

Agreement in Principle

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [10.12 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to introduce the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill in my capacity as the shadow Minister for Transport and on behalf of the Liberal-Nationals Coalition. I hasten to add that this bill should not have been necessary, but the mean-spirited and arrogant approach of the State Labor Government and the Minister for Transport has necessitated it. The objective of this bill is to abolish the pensioner booking fee tax that was introduced in March 2006 by the New South Wales Labor Party. Labor's booking tax is charged when senior citizens use what are supposed to be free pensioner travel vouchers on CountryLink services. The booking tax is either \$10 or 15 per cent of the full adult fare for the equivalent journey, whichever total is the highest.

Item [2] in schedule 1 makes it clear that an order fixing charges for RailCorp services cannot impose a CountryLink pensioner booking fee, that is, a fee however described charged for or in relation to a New South Wales or Australian Capital Territory pensioner booking a railway service provided by CountryLink using what would otherwise be a free travel pass, a concessional travel pass for a pensioner travel voucher. Item [2] also provides that RailCorp must not charge any pensioner booking fee for travel on a railway service provided by CountryLink. All members of this House would agree that our senior citizens deserve respect and dignity. Labor's unfair booking tax has effectively rendered the so-called free travel voucher system meaningless by pricing such a large proportion of pensioners out of the CountryLink market.

It is already a matter of fact that New South Wales is the highest taxing State in Australia and not even pensioners are exempt from Labor's taxation addiction. In the first eight months of this unfair tax the Labor Government raised \$2.6 million, which equates to or is \$10,500 per day contributed by New South Wales senior citizens who use their free travel vouchers when booking a CountryLink fare. The State Government likes to deny the impact that this is having on patronage. The reality is that 53,000 fewer vouchers were used in the period from March to October 2006 than were used in March to October 2005. Some 53,000 fewer vouchers were used in the months after the tax was introduced, compared with the months before the tax was introduced.

According to documents provided under freedom of information legislation, 235,512 pensioner travel vouchers were used from March 2005, before the booking tax was introduced, compared with 182,397 vouchers used in March to October 2006, after the booking tax was introduced. Again, this drop of 53,000 vouchers used represents a massive drop of 22.6 per cent over those comparable periods. The 2005-06 RailCorp annual report shows that 1.74 million people made a journey on a CountryLink service last year—a fall of 30,000 passages compared with the year before. The 2005-06 figure is nearly 800,000 passengers below the figure posted in 1996-97 and the lowest CountryLink patronage figure recorded since Labor came to power. This represents a massive drop in patronage of 30 percent since 1996-97. We need to give people an incentive to use public transport, not put barriers and new taxes in their way.

Facts and figures aside, the lives of many pensioners have been detrimentally impacted by the tax. Many pensioners, especially those in rural and remote areas, rely on CountryLink to make important medical appointments. Many pensioners, whether in the city or the country, rely on CountryLink to visit family and friends and make it to important occasions. Families are being denied precious time together because grandparents can no longer afford to travel. The impact of the tax has meant that many senior citizens who have earned their right to use their vouchers have suddenly found their mobility restricted and their quality of life severely compromised. Lower patronage on CountryLink is undoubtedly also having a detrimental impact on regional tourism and the growth of small business in regional and more remote communities. Therefore, it is of concern that the Minister for Tourism has not raised these concerns with the Minister for Transport.

I thank the many community organisations, such as the New South Wales branch of the Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation [APSF] and the Council on the Ageing, which have been strong advocates for pensioners and their families in this debate. I also thank the thousands of concerned people who have sent letters and emails, and signed petitions highlighting their personal opposition to the tax. I am sure many members of this place will bring examples of what their constituents have said to them. Some of the stories that have been communicated are truly heart wrenching. Again, I am sure all members of this place can attest to that, and members opposite can attest, whether or not they like to admit it. However, it is alarming that, in addition to the Minister for Transport, the Minister for Ageing appears to be totally oblivious to these concerns.

I was most disappointed to read part of the transcript of the Ageing, Disability Services estimates hearing held this week. When the Minister was asked about the impact of the booking tax on our senior citizens her response demonstrated a total disregard for the impact the tax is having on the very people on whose behalf she is supposed to advocate. It is alarming to think that either she has not consulted a number of stakeholders and key organisations within her portfolio or she has ignored the concerns that have been raised since the imposition of this tax.

The State Government has driven CountryLink Services into the ground. If the booking tax were not enough, the State Government has also axed the Casino to Murwillumbah passenger rail service—I note the presence in the Chamber of the member for Tweed—sacked CountryLink travel centre staff at Tamworth within days of their receiving an award for outstanding service, closed 11 CountryLink sales outlets across the State and sacked 100 CountryLink staff. Further, the Government has insulted North Coast commuters by advertising train services to Byron Bay, even though Labor axed them more than three years ago. It is also a matter of concern that the remaining services are less reliable than ever. In 2006 CountryLink trains met the weekly on-time running targets for only 15 weeks. For the first six months of 2007 the situation was much worse, with trains meeting targets for only two of 25 weeks. That fact is of even more concern when one considers the Labor Government requires only 78 per cent of CountryLink trains to run on time and that a train is deemed to be on time if it arrives at its destination within 10 minutes of the scheduled arrival.

It is evident from CountryLink's long-term performance that Labor has continued to neglect regional rail services throughout New South Wales. CountryLink services have not met the yearly on-time performance targets since 2003. It is a disgrace. These poor on-time running figures are a direct consequence of the Labor Government's neglect of rail services in country New South Wales. Labor has shown time and again that it is running CountryLink into the ground rather than fostering regional rail services and encouraging commuters to use CountryLink throughout rural and coastal New South Wales. As to CountryLink's performance over the past four years, the picture is even grimmer. Again, CountryLink has not met its yearly on-time performance targets since 2003. Yet in this climate of declining services and the imposition of an unfair booking tax New South Wales Labor has the audacity to increase CountryLink rail fares. CountryLink fares rose by 4.8 per cent from 1 September this year, resulting in standard economy one-way travel from Sydney to Dubbo costing an extra \$3.60, from Sydney to Albury an extra \$4.70 and from Sydney to Coffs Harbour an extra \$4.34.

In addition to the fare increases, the Minister for Transport is reducing the discounts offered by CountryLink for travel during the shoulder and low seasons. That will be a further disincentive to use CountryLink trains. The rise in fares will also result in an increase in the unfair booking tax charged to pensioners when booking "free" train travel. This bill aims to eliminate that tax. At a time when the Government should be promoting public transport as a viable alternative to car usage and increasing transportation between city, rural, regional and remote areas of this State, the Minister for Transport is going out of his way to ensure that regional New South Wales turns its back on CountryLink. This is evidenced, as I described, not only by the imposition of this unfair booking tax but also by the number of CountryLink services that have been slashed by the State Government over the past decade.

Public transport options in regional New South Wales are already limited. The Government's failure to support CountryLink—often the only form of transport linking metropolitan areas to country New South Wales—has resulted in a further decline in the provision of public transport services in the country. By closing sales centres, sacking CountryLink staff and reducing rail services to regional towns the Labor Government is directly impacting upon the vitality and livelihood of regional New South Wales. Regional areas require and deserve a high-quality rail service that provides an efficient and reliable service linking the country with the city. Through years of neglect and mismanagement, however, rail services to rural New South Wales are in serious decline. It is a matter of particular concern that pensioners in rural and regional New South Wales are now required to pay a tax when booking "free" travel on CountryLink services. It is common knowledge that regional New South Wales does not enjoy the services offered in metropolitan areas. Often, elderly persons are required to attend larger centres to access medical care not offered in their country town. By imposing this pensioner tax the Minister for Transport has ensured that to receive such care pensioners must pay more. That is an injustice no matter how you look at it.

The utter hypocrisy of the Labor Party on issues relating to pensioners is breathtaking. Pensioners deserve to be shown respect and dignity. They deserve to have their rights preserved, not eroded. They should not face the indignity of a callous State Government that has the nerve to impose such a mean-spirited and unnecessary booking tax. I suggest Government members look deep into their consciences and question why they allowed the Minister for Transport, the Deputy Premier, to impose such an unfair tax. They now have the opportunity to redeem themselves by supporting this bill. It is the right thing to do.

I want to put a human face to this issue by showing the impact of the imposition of this tax on ordinary people. It has had a huge impact in rural and regional areas, where older persons and pensioners rely on CountryLink services to attend medical appointments and visit family and friends. They need these services for a better quality of life. This tax has also impacted on pensioners in the city. I am amazed at the number of pensioners living in metropolitan Sydney who have contacted Coalition members to tell them of the angst the imposition of this tax has caused them. I bring to the attention of the House some examples. One of the most heart wrenching examples is an elderly couple in their seventies who previously visited relatives in the southern part of Queensland via CountryLink services. After the imposition of the booking tax, they did their sums and determined it was too expensive for them to use CountryLink services. Following the birth of a new grandchild they were forced to drive the journey to visit their family. For a couple in their seventies that is a long and perhaps unsafe journey, but it was their only option.

Another example is of a woman in her late sixties who was asked to attend a reunion for a friend for whom she had been bridesmaid. She made the booking with CountryLink. Later she discovered she had cancer and had to stay in Sydney for treatment. She rang CountryLink to change the booking. CountryLink charged her not only for the initial booking but also for the change in booking. That is not acceptable. We cannot tolerate an unfair booking tax that impacts on and hurts potentially the most vulnerable in our community. Not only has it been detrimental to rural, regional and city rail services, it has cruelly impacted from a social perspective on the lives of so many senior citizens. I ask the State Government to explain why the booking tax should continue, given the worsening reliability of CountryLink services. Trains are few and far between, services have been cancelled and staff have been sacked. In the current environment, the Government should be boosting public transport patronage. The booking tax is proving to be a further impediment to that end.

I call on members on both sides of the House to read the correspondence they have no doubt received from pensioners and pensioner organisations in their communities. I call on them to look to their conscience when considering the merits of this bill. The bill will simply remove the booking fee, a booking tax that should never have been imposed in the first place. If members are not persuaded by the letters, emails and representations from concerned constituents, they should look at the figures. In the first six months following the introduction of the tax, 53,000 fewer vouchers were used. The figures on patronage speak for themselves. The figures on the decreased mobility of pensioners speak for themselves. An audit of small businesses in rural and regional communities who have been impacted by fewer people using CountryLink services would show that the economic loss to the State is significant. The Government has absolutely no basis to continue this tax. I urge the Minister for Transport to contribute to this debate. He has a bad habit of not debating public transport issues.

In the estimates committee hearings the Minister chose to take every single question on notice; he refused to answer questions in that forum. He now has an opportunity to come to the Chamber and explain to the people of New South Wales, to pensioner groups and to the broader community, why he imposed that tax and why it should continue. The Minister and his Government now have the opportunity to redeem themselves by

abolishing the booking tax. I urge all members to support the bill, for the sake of their pensioners, for country and rural rail services and for the future public transport needs of the State.

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

Pursuant to standing orders business interrupted.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS (INFRASTRUCTURE REGISTER) BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 27 September 2007.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.30 a.m.]: The Government opposes the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007. It is no secret that this is not the first time that the Opposition has pursued this bill in Parliament. The Leader of The Nationals admitted as much when he introduced the bill. What is it? A recycled idea, an old tired idea and an impractical idea. Indeed, the register would be a shameful waste of time and resources that would be better spent on delivering the Iemma Government's maintenance program. I hope Opposition members are listening.

[Interruption]

Members opposite might laugh; they do not think that maintenance in schools is important. However, I can tell them that many people, including teachers and parents, think that that is a very important program. So, please listen to what I have to say. I acknowledge the Leader of The Nationals' moment of honesty, albeit sparse. At least he is not trying to pass off this bill as all his own work. I would prefer if he had a bit of imagination and had a few ideas of his own.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Opposition will remain silent.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for asking members opposite to show a bit of decorum in this Chamber. I would prefer it if the Leader of The Nationals at least gave up his old bad habit of talking down public education in this great State. The proposals contained in the bill are totally impractical and demonstrate a lack of thought and vision. Even worse, they would do nothing to improve conditions of our schools. The bill would oblige the Department of Education and Training to post tens of thousands of pages of data on its website. It would cost in the order of half a million dollars each year and would require a team of staff to comply with its provisions.

Furthermore, complying with the bill would not provide one extra coat of paint, a single new roof or one new playground for any school in this State. It is no surprise that that proposal has come from the Coalition. It is yet another example of the Opposition attempting to destroy the community's confidence in the public education system. Coalition members only ever talk down public education. They never do a single thing to promote our great public education or to support our hardworking teachers and our fine, talented, intelligent students. They are all squawking because I have hit a raw nerve.

By contrast the Iemma Government is providing more than \$256 million in maintenance for schools and TAFE colleges this year, under the guidance of our great Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Della Bosca. No Government in the history of this State has spent more on maintenance. Members opposite should not forget that. In fact, the Government is spending more than \$4 million each and every week. This includes an additional \$30 million as part of our \$120 million four-year funding enhancement to accelerate our program of works. That funding enhancement was announced in the 2006-07 budget and is continued in this year's budget. Each year for the four years of the enhancement program the additional funding will allow around 1,000 extra maintenance projects to be undertaken.

Over the next four years our school and TAFE maintenance budget will top \$1 billion. That \$1 billion is in addition to the Iemma Government's massive spending on new school and TAFE infrastructure. As announced in the budget, this year we are spending a record \$617 million on the construction of new school and TAFE facilities. This includes the commencement of 24 new major building projects in schools and 11 new major building projects in TAFE. Also, over the next four years an additional \$280 million will be provided

under the Iemma Government's Building Better Schools Program for the construction of new halls, upgrading science labs, renovating toilet blocks, installing security fences and upgrading electrical systems. In fact, a new gymnasium is to be constructed in Homebush Boys High School, in my electorate, which I am very excited about. We are all very excited about that—even if members opposite are not.

In introducing this bill the Leader of The Nationals referred to the Vinson inquiry. Professor Tony Vinson conducted the inquiry four years ago. Now we know what the Opposition has done about public education for the past four years. What has it done? Absolutely zilch, nothing. They have not come up with any new ideas, they are still wheeling out the same old proposals. No wonder they are sitting on that side of the House. In the past four years the Government has invested significant amounts of money in school maintenance and the department has made considerable changes to the way school maintenance is managed. In May 2003 the School Maintenance Taskforce was established. The task force focused not simply on maintaining our public assets, but also on ensuring that school facilities create a better learning environment for students. The task force made 36 recommendations to improve school maintenance and a project team was formed to implement those recommendations. All 36 recommendations of the taskforce have been implemented.

Mr Joseph Tripodi: How many?

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: All of them, not half or a third of them.

Mr Geoff Provest: But our schools are still falling down, Virginia.

Mr Joseph Tripodi: But you closed schools.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: That is right! In 2004 the department established new asset management units in each region to support our great schools, in line with the task force's recommendations. In July 2005 the department implemented new four-year maintenance contracts. These contracts provide schools with a 24-hour, seven days a week emergency repair service. Principals have also been given a greater say over what work should be done and when. And that is great, because we want to work in partnership.

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

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: We value the input of our principals and their ideas; they are at the coal face.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will give the member for Tweed the call if he seeks it. In the meantime he will remain silent.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: The member for Wyong, who was a school principal, is nodding in agreement. He has had hands-on experience in that role, and I thank him for that input. The department's asset management units work in close partnership with principals to determine the maintenance needs of their schools. I feel that as a matter of public significance I should alert members of the Opposition to the fact that Professor Vinson has since conducted an audit of his original inquiry of 2003. This audit, which was undertaken in 2005, should be of real interest to Opposition members—they are all listening, that is good—because Professor Vinson found that the department's new maintenance contracting arrangements satisfy his recommendations about emergency maintenance.

Following the task force's recommendations in 2003 the department instituted a system of condition assessments with all schools assessed against maintenance standards by independent contractors. The department reports to the Auditor General on the maintenance of school buildings and continues to look for ways to improve further on its process of assessing schools' maintenance needs. Alongside these improvements to maintenance, the department's new maintenance system provides even more information to schools and even more flexibility for school principals in managing their assets. I am an old chalkie from a long way back, and I think this is good. Teachers have considerable knowledge, particularly the principals and the senior staff. It is a great initiative to get them a bit more involved in this process.

These improvements have resulted also in clear guidelines and standards for contractors for schools and the department providing better value for money. The department has developed a state-of-the-art asset management system that supports the Government's total asset management philosophy. School planning for maintenance and capital works is recorded on the asset management system, which holds a wealth of information about the management of schools sites, including special plans, up-to-date school enrolment data

and demographic analysis, and details of current minor works projects nominations and priorities. The Government's actions include record spending on school maintenance, further enhancement to accelerate our maintenance program of works, record spending on school and TAFE capital works, and funding enhancements to deliver the Government's education commitments to our great public schools.

All the Opposition can come up with is this tired old proposal to add tens of thousands of pages to the department's website, which would be riveting reading, would it not? I am sure we would all love to go on that website; it would be so exciting to read the material if the proposal went ahead. Thank goodness it will not. It will happen over my dead body. It would add hundreds of thousands of dollars to our compliance costs and try to undermine, yet again, our great schools, our wonderful education system. The Government opposes this bill because it is totally impractical. It would waste valuable time and resources while providing absolutely no benefit to our schools, our students, our teachers and our wonderful communities.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [10.41 a.m.]: I support the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007, which sets out to ensure that the Director General of the Department of Education and Training keeps a register of school infrastructure, which includes all buildings and demountables. This bill provides for the preparation of a report on the status of school infrastructure, which is to be publicly available for accountability purposes. This will make clear the particulars of infrastructure and the state of repair of government assets at our important public schools at the end of each financial year. More importantly, this will mean also the particulars on the amount spent on infrastructure maintenance work will be available to the wider public via the department's website.

The bill includes the preparation of school building plans. This means that particulars of work to be carried out in government schools within a three financial years period are to be reviewed yearly, together with information on the particulars of the money being allocated to the building maintenance. It will give information also on how these decisions are made—transparency will be nice—through a set of criteria that is to be applied. This is to be accessible by the public via the department's website. This will ensure a truly transparent form of reporting on government assets—something this State dearly needs.

It beggars belief that the New South Wales Government does not support this bill. It seems a commonsense approach to the New South Wales Government dealing, as it does, with a vast array of public assets all over the State. New South Wales' government schools infrastructure maintenance is well overdue for an overhaul. In addition, it is good governance and good public administration to keep a register of materials and facilities requiring maintenance and a publicly accountable tab on what is spent. Clearly, the Government's opposition to this bill lies behind the fear that one of its many disgruntled education officials might reveal the poor state of infrastructure.

If the Government persists in opposing Tony Vinson's recommendations it will just have to say that he was wrong. In his revised advice of 2005, Tony Vinson did not resile from his earlier recommendations that there be State infrastructure accountability. New South Wales needs the infrastructure register for government schools to ensure that the budget, the taxpayers' money, is spent in the most effective manner to secure the best learning solutions for the students it funds—our students, our employees, our leaders of tomorrow. Infrastructure goes a long way to ensuring this occurs. A fundamental finding of the Vinson inquiry into education was the importance of school infrastructure. Professor Vinson stated in this report:

Research suggests that the quality of physical space affects self-esteem, peer and student teacher interactions, parental involvement, discipline, attention, motivation and interpersonal relations.

Reading this section of the report made me aware of and concerned about the learning conditions and the state of mind of the students attending public schools across my electorate. With the poor state of classrooms in schools across my electorate, something must be done to rectify the situation. A school community can make only so many representations. The public accountability that comes from the register strengthens a school community's case. If this bill is implemented it will mean that the state of classrooms and learning environments inevitably will be better monitored in relation to maintenance and assets within the schools.

In my electorate there are many cases of school infrastructure in a bad state. The infrastructure register, as proposed by the Leader of The Nationals, will contribute to the correct planning of issues in schools within my electorate and throughout the State. I would have thought the Government would do things like that wherever it had substantial investments in public infrastructure in any of its responsibilities—it is a very basic form of public administration. In late September this year I was informed that about 15 toilets were closed at Moss Vale Primary School. The story is that the school principal was replacing toilet rolls in the toilets when he

noticed cracks in the sheeting of the block. These toilets were then closed without any portaloos to make up for the broken toilets, which left the school with about half the toilets required.

It was rumoured that asbestos was a concern and, to my knowledge, that still has not been established one way or another. But when my office phoned the school for information and to ask if there was anything we could do, the person in my office was advised to contact the education department's media office. This was going to be about spin. Absolutely no advice was forthcoming from the school and I can only assume that the school's staff has been directed not to talk to me or my office. So much for enabling local members of Parliament to contribute to the betterment of their public schools! It seems strange to me that a maintenance issue would be directed to the department's media office. This situation suggests a department and a government much less interested in improving the infrastructure of its schools and more interested in covering up.

The implementation of this bill would mean that schools would not need to get into this sort of situation and would not need to refuse to take calls from a local member. Toilet blocks and all government buildings would be assessed regularly in a transparent manner. Do not think that the whole of my electorate does not know how this matter at Moss Vale was played out and how I, and my office, was treated. In addition to Moss Vale Primary School contending with the toilets, it has children who are made to learn in classrooms that have awful stench due to possum droppings that are never removed. Another school in my electorate at Avoca suffers in the same way. Apparently the stench is so bad that children in the classroom feel constantly nauseated. Many children suffer from asthma and other breathing-related illnesses.

Bowral Public School is another school within my electorate that is in desperate need of some attention. Bowral Public School has long outgrown its current site on Bendooley Street. It is overwhelmed with demountables to such an extent that the play area is limited and students must cross the road in the commercial heart of Bowral to play in a vacant area. A school that was originally designed for 250 students now has more than 500 students, and it simply cannot grow any more. It is completely landlocked, surrounded by commercial properties and commercial traffic. When the Premier was in campaign mode in February of this year he claimed that under Labor's Building Better Schools Program primary schools with more than 500 students would be upgraded to provide them with school halls. Bowral Public School does not have a school hall. It does not even have an area where all students can play together. It has some sort of covered outdoor living area—thanks to Federal funding assistance—but it has no hall. The State Government needs to get real and live up to its responsibilities of running the State's education system and to meet its election commitments.

That is no way for a school to operate and it is no way for students to get the most out of learning and growing into healthy, well-rounded teenagers and adults who can take their place in society. A government school register would ensure that schools such as Bowral Primary School were not left out of the loop in the provision of maintenance and facilities for students at that school. The criteria for justifying where school maintenance is planned and carried out and the transparency in which it is reported would also mean that parents at Bowral Primary School would be able to determine whether the school was receiving the same standard of services being provided across the State.

That begs the question: What are the criteria on which this Government decides which schools will receive maintenance and for what? Is it marginal seats, is it based on where schools can get donations from or is it based on need? Taralga Public School has a class where years 4, 5 and 6 students and the teacher-principal occupy a 50.4 metre area into which they cram desks, chairs, shelving, the blackboard, et cetera. The principal's office, which occupies a tiny space in this room, has no windows or ventilation and is extremely hot for about four months of the year. It is a very sorry state of affairs. An infrastructure register would ensure that the State Government did not reach a situation where infrastructure was greatly reduced from the level of service required for the number of students in a school.

All these issues have been brought to the Government's attention but they have not been acted on. Only a transparent register that shames the Government into action would do the trick. When a school gets into this situation it is clear that the State Government has no idea what is going on and no basis on which to make comparisons of relative need. Without clear and open reporting the State Government is also not held accountable for its lack of action in the provision of school infrastructure. Clear and open reporting does not just mean that the education department knows what it is doing; it also means that we have a participatory democracy in which the public and school communities can negotiate on the terms of criteria with the education department. As it is, they do it with one hand tied behind their backs and they are negotiating in the dark. This bill is not radical.

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

Mrs PRU GOWARD: This bill does not propose a radical departure from public schools or public education. In contrast, it puts public education on the agenda as a priority for this Government—something that one would have thought the Government would have welcomed. This bill will mean that infrastructure is accorded the priority it deserves in this State to get the best learning solutions for students of public education. It is a fundamental part of a modern and accountable public administration.

If parents choose to send their children to public school for an education in this State an ineffective and incompetent Government should not disadvantage them. Indeed, the same could be said about our hospital infrastructure and any other government instrumentality. Parents and students should expect world-class public education facilities. After all, Australia has the thirteenth largest economy in the world. Students should not have to live with possum droppings or broken toilets. School principals should have staff rooms rather than broom cupboards as their offices. As the Vinson report noted, better facilities means better students, and that is what this bill will produce. I urge the House to support this bill.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI (Fairfield—Minister for Small Business, Minister for Regulatory Reform, and Minister for Ports and Waterways) [10.53 a.m.]: The Government opposes the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007. The proposals in the bill are unworkable and demonstrate a lack of vision. This bill will do nothing to improve conditions in our schools—a fundamental point that has been made in debate. This Government is about delivering services and infrastructure for students in our State. The Iemma Government has a proud record of investing in education.

The SPEAKER: Order! According to the record the Minister has spoken in this debate.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: I wanted to continue.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister cannot do so. I call the member for Hornsby.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [10.54 p.m.]: I appreciate being given an opportunity to make a contribution to debate on the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007. What we just witnessed shows the lengths to which this Government will go to stop an important debate. This Government is not able to face the fact that it is not doing enough for education in New South Wales. I support the bill. I congratulate the Leader of The Nationals on introducing the bill. I thank the member for North Shore, who introduced this concept in 2004. This bill will establish a government schools infrastructure register and provide for the preparation of school status reports and building plans. The overview of the bill states:

The object of this Bill is to establish a requirement for the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training ... to keep an infrastructure register in relation to government schools. The register is to comprise reports on the status of the capital infrastructure of government schools ... and three-yearly plans on building and maintenance work in those schools ... School status reports and school building plans are to be prepared by the Director-General and included on the Department of Education and Training's website.

In the 5½ years that I have represented the seat of Hornsby, schools in that electorate have been crying out for infrastructure and maintenance assistance from this Government. However, the lack of maintenance at schools in my electorate and the backlog that exists in schools all over New South Wales is a story for another day. Schools in my electorate have made representations to me and directly to the department, but those representations have been soundly ignored. In 2004 I made a speech in debate on a bill that was introduced by the member for North Shore. Today I could read out the speech that I made in 2004 because exactly the same issues require attention—issues that have been ignored by the Iemma Government.

In 2004 I referred to the dreadful conditions at Berowra Public School, which is in desperate need of a new school hall. This Government is totally ignoring that need. The school principal and school community put a lot of work into preparing a master plan. The Government told the school that it could formulate a master plan; that it would make a decision on that plan and submit it to council for development application approval, pending funding. But the 2003 State election put paid to those well-laid plans and the whole process came to a grinding halt. Three years later, the school still does not have a master plan, let alone a development application. The school desperately needs a new school hall. The hall that students, staff and parents currently use is falling down and in an even worse condition than it was three years ago.

The Government must demolish Berowra school hall as it cannot adequately house the school community. Basically, two demountables have been rammed together and there is a canteen at one end and poor

and inadequate storage space at the other end in which musical instruments are stored. That storage space is inappropriate to house expensive musical equipment. I again call on the Government to examine the needs of this school. The parents and citizens organisation, an active body within the school, has requested the Government on many occasions to build a new school hall and to redevelop other areas. This Government is running a fear campaign in all New South Wales public schools. When the elected parent body tries to speak out and to raise issues that must be urgently addressed, the principal and staff get their knuckles rapped and warnings come down the line. Staff members, who are working in unpleasant conditions, are aware that the parents and citizens association has the best interests of the school at heart, but they bear the brunt of any reprisals when the association makes representations on behalf of the school.

In 2004 I referred also to the Vinson report. The report suggests that maintenance and refurbishment of the education estate has been neglected and fitfully managed. Schools in my electorate certainly still reflect that statement. The report referred to substandard conditions in which teaching and learning are being attempted. I would like to continue to assist teachers and students in my area to achieve the best environment in which to conduct classes, but that desire is being impeded. The Vinson report still stands; Professor Vinson has not resiled from his statement that maintenance and infrastructure are not what they should be. The Vinson report states:

... what would be involved would be the aggregation of information about individual projects that have been found to have a degree of merit short of gaining the priority needed to access available funds. The use of such information for budgetary planning purposes would enhance the rational consideration of the portfolio's claims for asset acquisition and improvement funds at both the State and national levels.

Professor Vinson thinks that the concept of having such a register is extremely good. Brooklyn Public School, which is a very small school in my electorate, does a fantastic job in a remote community. The Mooney Mooney Public School, which was just across the Hawkesbury River, has been closed down. Those involved with the Brooklyn Public School have expressed a great deal of concern about the distribution of the Mooney Mooney Public School's assets. They have not had a satisfactory answer about where money went and where the physical assets have been deposited pending further decisions. The Brooklyn Public School took a good percentage of the students from Mooney Mooney Public School but did not receive what it considers to be a fair share of its assets. I have raised that issue in representations to the Minister and also in this House. That issue must be addressed.

Asquith Boys High School is sadly neglected in a number of different ways. I have been raising the problems with the basketball court probably for five years, but the situation still has not been adequately addressed. Parents, visitors and students must walk across the court to get into the school because it is immediately adjacent to the main entrance. The court is cracking and dangerous. Tar has been poured on top of big cement slabs and the corners of those slabs cause the tar to fall away. It is very dangerous and could be an occupational health and safety issue. Children have fallen on the court but the best the Government has been able to do is to tar the cracks, but the tar falls away yet again. That remedy is totally inadequate. The court should be relocated to ensure the safety of people entering the school and those playing on it. Asquith Boys High School also urgently needs a security fence along the lengthy Jersey Street boundary. A security fence has been erected along the Pacific Highway boundary, but the Government has not seen fit to finish the job.

Cherrybrook Technology High School has also cried out for assistance from the Department of Education and Training. It has 1,900 students but accommodation for only 1,200. It has called out for assistance to provide proper accommodation for the extra 700 students to no avail. It is a fantastic school and has a great success rate, despite the fact that it has many demountables. The Government has not come to the party to provide a rational solution. Galston High School, which is on Galston Road, has no security fence, which is a huge issue for the school. I have made representations to the Minister for Education and Training about the need for the fence. The Minister has ignored the many malicious damage and vandalism attacks at the school.

I received a response from the Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Minister for Education and Training, the member for Strathfield, which I forwarded to the school. The school was disgusted because several of the issues raised were totally ignored. That is unexplainable given the school's needs. The school raised concerns about the lack of lighting at the front of the buildings as an occupational health and safety issue. The high step from the car park leading into the administration area is inadequately lit. On several occasions parents have raised their concerns about the lack of lighting and the fact that an accident could easily occur in the dark.

with the asset management unit but to no avail. The occupational health and safety implications remain. I received a letter from the principal of the school, which stated:

The step itself has also been raised by the P&C as a matter of concern, again for OH&S reasons. The solution presented by the Asset Management Unit is to leave the step as it is, but to require the school to paint a yellow strip on the front side and the top of the step. We have taken that action, but the problem remains that in the dark, a large step like that still poses a threat to safety.

The third matter that requires comment is that of security measures to protect the school and its environment. Ms Judge advises that "increased security measures were implemented in the school during May 2006".

The school was not at any time advised what those measures were. It was not aware, and is still not aware, of what those measures might have been. A risk assessment officer from the Department of Education and Training, Blacktown, visited the school at that time and discussed the placement of static guards on the premises to reduce the number of break and enters and malicious damage incidents that the school was experiencing. Several weeks later, when followed up, he informed the school that the Department of Education and Training had rejected the notion of static guards because of the cost of the initiative. The Parliamentary Secretary's response stated:

No further security breaches have occurred at Galston High School since the end of the 2006 winter school holidays. Due to the success of the increased security provision at the school, static security guards were not provided as a supplementary security measure.

I have a list of the almost weekly incidents that have occurred at the school. The school is not happy with the response from the Parliamentary Secretary. All of the incidents at the school have been reported to the police and they all have an event number. On 9 June 2005, an unknown person stole a laptop from the school; on 1 July 2005, unknown persons broke into an agricultural shed; on 8 August, broken glass was found in the woodwork area; on 5 December 2005, an IBM laptop think pad serial number was stolen and on two occasions in the same month unknown offenders gained access to two classrooms; and in January 2006, unknown offenders opened a window. I will skip about two dozen more incidents that occurred in 2006. In 2007, an outside tap has been broken, three noticeboards have been smashed and a glass panel in a toilet has been smashed. It is obvious that this school needs a security fence. Many incidents have occurred and have been highlighted. It is essential that a security fence be erected at the school. I call on the Government to address the issue immediately. It is ignoring the many incidents that have occurred at Galston High School. The police agree that the school needs the fence: it should be provided immediately.

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

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORATES AND ELECTIONS AMENDMENT (TRUTH IN ADVERTISING) BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 28 June 2007.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [11.09 a.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Amendment (Truth in Advertising) Bill, which was introduced into the House by the member for Ballina in June. This is very important legislation because for too long the people of this State have been subjected to advertising that is misleading and untruthful, particularly from the Australian Labor Party, which, election after election, runs election advertisements that do nothing but mislead. The advertisements are selective in the way they quote people and in the way they are promoted in the community. I can give no better example than what happened prior to the last State election when the Labor Party and its union mates purposely misled the public on the Coalition's sensible policy on public sector reform. Unlike the Government, which has now gone through the process of sacking public servants, we were going to put a freeze on recruitment.

I see very little reason for the Australian Labor Party not to support this important legislation. It would stand this House in good stead if the Government were to join with the Opposition to pass the truth in advertising legislation. But the Government will not support the legislation because it knows that the enormous donations it receives from unions, from developers and from hotels will enable it to continue to purposely mislead the community. I wonder how the Labor Party would like it if we ran television and radio advertisements saying it was the party of the paedophile and the party of the people who committed domestic violence. The Labor Party would not like us to run those types of advertisements: If we did it would scream that there was no truth in them. We could have done that but we chose not to. Therein lies the reason for Labor to back this bill.

The Labor Party should support sensible legislation such as this, which will make it an offence for a person to authorise, cause or permit the publication of an electoral advertisement if that advertisement contains a statement purporting to be a statement of fact that is inaccurate and misleading to a material extent. This is the key point, and this is why the Government should join with the Opposition to support the legislation. At the last State election we saw probably one of the greatest examples of untruthful political advertising that this State has ever seen. We made it very clear to the people of the State and to the media that we would not sack 29,000 workers: We would engage in a sensible reform of the public sector that would result in those who retired or resigned not being replaced. Without the dollars that the Labor Party is able to accumulate through its union mates, we were not able to tell the truth: The Labor Party had sacked 5,000 workers in the 12 months leading up to the State election—sackings that continue.

We know full well that the Treasurer of the State said that he wants to sack 68,000 public servants. We know full well that the Government time and again cuts public sector jobs. It will sack cleaning staff in some hospitals in country areas. It will sack police administrative staff. It does these things and then it has the hide to run misleading campaigns based on lies to the community. These lies were not just run through political advertisements. The Labor Party also got its mates in the nurses union—

Ms Angela D'Amore: The Nurses Association, which represents 50,000 working nurses in New South Wales.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: No, it is the union, the nurses' union. Let us not mislead about that. The member for Drummoyne would have been instrumental in getting the nurses union to run million-dollar advertisements, paid for out of the wages of hardworking nurses who had to watch their union run an enormously misleading and untruthful campaign. The member for Drummoyne knows full well that the Liberal Party and The Nationals voted on legislation in this House to keep nurses under the State award, yet those opposite continue to run advertisements based on lies.

The member for Drummoyne, who is the nurses union representative in this House, carries on about nurses and Australian workplace agreements. I would be interested to hear from the member for Drummoyne what the Western Australian nurses now want. The nurses union in Western Australia want to be signed up to Australian workplace agreements. It is intriguing that the member for Drummoyne was instrumental in organising that million-dollar advertising campaign by the nurses union in this State, which told more and more lies to the people of the State about our position.

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

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The member for Drummoyne should have been awake in the House when the New South Wales Liberals and The Nationals supported keeping nurses under the State award. Where was she? She was asleep. Today she is kicking and screaming, carrying on about the nurses union.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bega is not helping his cause by being so provocative. I ask him to focus on the debate rather than continuing a dialogue about another member.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: My point is that the Nurses Association—the nurses union—advertisement would not have been run if this legislation were in place. I also say to the Government that it should support the legislation so that in the future we do not see advertisements that make out that the Labor Party is a party for paedophiles. These are the types of things we could do but we choose not to because we are honourable and we believe the community deserves to be treated fairly and with respect. Advertisements referring to the 29,000 job cuts that were run at the last election were false. The Government knows they were blatant lies. It knew full well that we were not going to sack public servants. The irony is that the Labor Party is now doing it. The Public Service Association has been missing in action. The nurses union has been missing in action over the way in which nurses have been treated. Again, the Labor Party is willing to continue with something that is completely unacceptable when it comes to truth in political advertising in this State. Everybody should support this legislation.

I inform the member for Drummoyne, who just cannot keep quiet, that the future of this State is enormous. Advertising in the community should be truthful. During the last State election the phrase "All politics is local" changed to "All politics is personality." The Government did not see fit to run advertisements that were honest. The disgraceful attacks on the member for Vacluse were ridiculous. They were pathetic. If we had a cash cow like the union movement to fund our political advertisements, maybe we could start to throw

back some of the mud that the Labor Party is happy to throw around, but it would be truthful mud that would present the facts about the Government.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I remind the House that the member with the call is in control of the debate. There is no need for continued interjection. Other members will have an opportunity to take part in the debate.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I look forward to the contribution from the member for Drummoyne, who has been interjecting throughout mine. The bottom line is that the advertising run in the lead-up to the last State election should have been based on honesty, which is why the Opposition has seen fit, with the backing of countless community organisations, to introduce this bill. Although the member for Drummoyne may not like it, I highlight the disgraceful Nurses Association advertisements at the last State election.

Ms Angela D'Amore: How dare you criticise 50,000 nurses in New South Wales!

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: No, I am criticising the union, which is now running the Your Rights at Work campaign. It should stop this campaign, which shows nurses working in palliative care units caring for dying patients. The member for Drummoyne should pick up the phone, call the Nurses Association and tell it to stop running grubby union campaigns using palliative care units in this State. People should be allowed to die with dignity: They should not be confronted on a daily basis with nurses wearing T-shirts and little orange armbands as part of a political campaign run by the union. It is a disgrace, but it is the sort of thing the Nurses Association has done time and again.

At the last State election the Nurses Association spent \$1 million of the hard-earned wages of the nurses of this State on one of the most misleading, grubby political campaigns, coordinated with the Labor Party. It ran advertisements stating that the Coalition would cut 29,000 jobs. They were blatant lies. This is the reason the Opposition has introduced the bill. The Opposition could have easily run a grubby campaign against the Labor Party—Milton Orkopoulos was still in Cabinet when the Premier knew what was going on—but that would not have been in the interests of the State or in the interests of the community, who want to know about policies and the future direction of government in this State.

However, the Government ran its election campaign on lies about the former Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition's policy position. Now, lo and behold, the systemic failures of the Iemma Government on disability services, youth and transport are coming to the fore; I have not even touched on the Department of Community Services and policing. These failures have occurred because the State Labor Government has cut jobs. The Government ran a smear campaign against the Coalition, which had a sensible policy of structural reform in the public sector involving a recruitment freeze, yet Costa, Iemma and others have cut jobs. Systemic failures in various departments from Disability Services to the Department of Community Services have resulted in reduced services and the destruction of people's lives.

This sensible bill is designed to bring truth to political advertising, which is the already law in other State and Commonwealth commercial advertising. South Australia has had truth in political advertising since 1985. The Government should ensure that in future elections constant slander and misleading advertising is not allowed and that the public is given timely and accurate information about party policy so that this State has the best government to which it is entitled.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [11.24 a.m.]: The Government opposes the bill. I am concerned that the member for Bega has attacked the New South Wales Nurses Association, which represents 50,000 working nurses in private and public hospitals and nursing homes. The Opposition refuses to acknowledge that the Nurses Association is a professional association and that nurses have a right to come together collectively to ensure that their terms and conditions are worthy of the job they do. The member for Bega demonstrated that he is out of touch when he attacked our working nurses in New South Wales when he should have stuck to the leave of the bill. It is disappointing that he chose to put that on the record.

The regulation of the content of election advertising is a vexed issue in Australia. It has been the subject of a number of parliamentary inquiries and considerable public debate. A common criticism is that regulatory efforts to encourage truth in political advertising might be desirable but are simply unworkable in practice. The bill has a number of problems. Similar legislation was introduced at the Federal level in 1984 but it was repealed almost immediately because a parliamentary committee deemed it to be unworkable. The Electoral Commissioner's neutrality could be compromised if this bill is passed: he may be criticised when making a

decision as to whether a person should be required to withdraw an advertisement or to refer a matter to the Supreme Court.

While similar legislation in South Australia has survived a challenge in the South Australian Supreme Court, the constitutional validity of such legislation, and whether it imposes an undue burden on the freedom of political communication, has not been determined without authority by the High Court. The proposed offence may also provide opportunities for frivolous or vexatious complaints to be raised regarding electoral advertisements. Some parties may complain to the Electoral Commissioner to prevent the publication of another party's advertisements, thereby disrupting an election campaign and obtaining free publicity.

While the bill is limited to statements of fact and not opinion, in practice it will be very difficult to distinguish between statements of fact and statements of opinion. Any statement of fact could be recast as a statement of opinion so as to comply with the bill. The legislation is likely to have little effect. The scope for enforcing the proposed offence may also be limited because decisions by the Electoral Commissioner or the Supreme Court may not be made in time to be useful, therefore defeating the purpose. The last thing the Electoral Commissioner needs during an election campaign is to be embroiled in litigation. We oppose the bill.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [11.27 a.m.]: It is very interesting that during this debate we are hearing the words that truth is inconvenient. It is an incredible way to start a debate. I commend the member for Ballina for introducing the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Amendment (Truth in Advertising) Bill. He knows what the people of this State want. Over the past 20 years we have seen the primary vote for the major parties in this House fall from 96 per cent to 77 per cent because the community has started to lose faith in this institution and in both major parties, so it is incredible that we are debating the need for truth in advertising.

How can any member of this House have a problem with advertising in an election campaign being subject to rigour and truth, that is, having an independent arbiter ascertain the truthfulness or otherwise of the material? The member for Ballina should be commended for bringing integrity back into the process. The bill proposes that the legislation be changed to prohibit inaccurate and misleading political advertising. False or misleading advertising is unacceptable in business and no debate is necessary; advertising must be factual. The same should apply to politics.

In my maiden speech I spoke about the need for this House to move towards a place of integrity, and that is the guts of it. Roy Morgan's image of professions survey this year found that only 16 per cent of people over the age of 14 believe that members of Parliament have high standards of ethics and honesty. That is disheartening for me, having recently joined the profession, and for all of us in this place. It is a condemnation of all of us. As we engage in this debate on truth, we should all hang our heads in shame if we do not uphold and reclaim truth. Soon after this year's State election a Labor member was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as saying the New South Wales Government's strategy was, quite simply, to "bombard the other guy and distract everyone from your own abysmal record".

The people of New South Wales deserve so much better than that. We should not be in a position where we are patting ourselves on the back for a political strategy that has engineered success. We should be patting ourselves on the back for standing up for what is right, for standing up for truth and, more importantly, for standing up for the communities we seek to represent.

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

PUBLIC SERVICE POLITICISATION

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.30 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the Government for its politicisation of the New South Wales public service;
- (2) calls on the Government to demonstrate accountability and transparency in the appointment of critical New South Wales public service positions;
- (3) calls on the Government to acknowledge the importance to democracy of the New South Wales public service being able to provide frank and fearless advice to government; and
- (4) demands that the Government stop using taxpayers' funds to find jobs for former Labor politicians, ex-Labor staff, and friends of the New South Wales Labor Party.

One of the key features of our Westminster system of government is the clear distinction between policy making, which is the function of government, and policy implementation, which is the function of a politically neutral public service. This distinction ensures that government services are delivered effectively and without political interference. But the Lemma Government flouts the democratic principle of public service objectivity by stacking its departments with political apparatchiks. This practice has blurred the boundary between our executive and our public service to the point where the public service has become so politicised that the delivery of services is being sacrificed for political objectives.

Old Australian Labor Party members and their mates are being parachuted into safe and cushy public positions at the expense of New South Wales taxpayers. This Labor Government has shown that it is more concerned about finding jobs for the boys than it is about delivering services to the people of New South Wales. We need look no further than one of the most important departments in the State, the Department of Education and Training. It is important because it serves the function of educating our young people, providing them with opportunities in life to get a good education and pursue a good career.

But when this Government chose the new director general of the Department of Education and Training, it made an appointment based on political considerations, not on merit or qualifications. In fact, this Labor Government chose not to even advertise or conduct interviews for the position, which is outrageous. It was a massive contrast to the situation in Police, where the Government did it right. The Government advertised very widely, across the nation and I think overseas, and the choice reflected that. But in the Department of Education and Training Labor appointed its mate, Michael Coutts-Trotter, as the director general, on a salary of \$387,250 per annum. Nice work if you can get it!

Michael Coutts-Trotter is a product of the Australian Labor Party. He was a press secretary to Michael Egan, he worked in the New South Wales Treasury, and he is married to Federal Labor member for Sydney Tanya Plibersek. Yet he has no qualifications, background or professional experience in the field of education. This is much to the chagrin of education professionals in this State. Let us compare it with the situation in other States. In Queensland, the director general of education, Rachel Hunter, has 23 years experience in the education and training sector. In South Australia, the chief executive, Christopher Robinson, has 20 years experience in education and training. In Victoria, the departmental secretary, Professor Peter Dawkins, had a successful career as an academic in public policy, with a focus on education and social issues. But here in New South Wales we get a Labor mate, and we are starting to see the fruits of that selection.

Despite only being in the job for six months, Mr Coutts-Trotter's role has already been compromised by his political allegiances. He has allowed overtly political material to enter our public schools. Earlier this year New South Wales Teachers Federation pamphlets urging people to vote against the Howard Government flooded our schools. Around 800,000 pamphlets were distributed to schools. In response Mr Coutts-Trotter issued a memorandum to all principals, school education directors and regional directors advising that this was inappropriate. However, no teachers were punished. The memorandum was all talk and no action. Political material is still entering our schools. A leaflet has gone out to schools from the Teachers Federation. The Your Rights @ Work Co-ordinator, referring to the Federal election, has issued to schools a leaflet entitled "Public Education a National Priority". It says:

What can you do

- Talk to family & friends
- Put the coalition last on your ballot paper

This is good stuff to be going into the school system! Good on you, Mr Coutts-Trotter! The leaflet goes on:

- Volunteer on polling day
- Volunteer to letterbox drop

Under the heading "Your Rights @ Work" the leaflet says:

- Individual contracts
- Unfair dismissal
- Loss of conditions
- Loss of salary guarantee

This is political propaganda going into schools. Next we will see it on the side of school buses, because the Government has the contract for school buses. I bet London to a brick on we will see this propaganda on school

buses. As recently as last Friday the Federal Liberal member for Dobell, Ken Ticehurst, visited Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College Berkeley Vale campus for a function. In the school grounds people were wandering around wearing "Your Rights at Work" shirts. Yet the director general, the Labor mate, Mr Coutts-Trotter, is not interested. Last week the Government made another political appointment to the public service. Greg Keating, brother of Paul, was made President of the Workers Compensation Commission, on a salary of \$306,990. Although Mr Keating is quite a capable lawyer, this role requires significant judicial experience. Mr Keating has only limited judicial experience. Greg Keating was given the job not on merit but because of his strong links within the Australian Labor Party.

It is a case of jobs for the boys. A long list of former Labor politicians, ex-Labor staff, and friends of the New South Wales Labor Party have been appointed to important positions in the public service solely because of their Australian Labor Party connections. In November last year Michael Costa was referred to the Independent Commission Against Corruption after he sacked the Chairman of TransGrid, Philip Higginson. Philip Higginson had more than 12 years as Chairman of TransGrid, and over 40 years experience working in the public and private sectors. He was highly regarded by Bob Carr, Michael Egan and Craig Knowles. Yet Michael Costa sacked him for refusing to give a board posting to David Croft, the mate of union leader Bernie Riordan. This was cronyism at its worst. It is clear that Mr Costa is willing to dispose of anyone within the public service who goes against his political objectives.

We are seeing the fruits of this politicisation of the public service on a regular basis. New South Wales bureaucrats are being overly political. I wrote to the Minister for Housing with regard to rumours of a relocation of families from Dubbo to Kempsey. In response the Director General of the Department of Housing, Mike Allen, told the *Macleay Argus* on 17 July this year:

If Mr Stoner cared about the people of Kempsey, he would listen to the facts and put a stop to these ridiculous claims.

He also said that it was disappointing that I would raise such an issue during National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands Day of Observance Committee week, when everyone should be celebrating Australia's indigenous culture and heritage. It was the Aboriginal people who came to me, concerned about this Government's policy. It was the local Aboriginal people who were upset. Here we have a bureaucrat giving public comments to a newspaper attacking me on political grounds. You are a disgrace, all of you! You ought to be ashamed.

Robin Osborne, the North Coast Area Health Services Media Manager, was quoted extensively in the *Macleay Argus* on 28 August 2007 claiming that the Howard Government transferred dental services to the States without appropriate funding. That is not only inaccurate but it is also a blatantly politically statement. The fact of the matter is the Federal Government had come to the rescue of the States, which always had responsibility for dental health, by providing additional funding for a limited period. Yet here is a bureaucrat making spurious claims during the context of the Federal election. We are seeing the consequences to the people of New South Wales of the Labor Party's relentless drive to politicise the New South Wales public service.

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.40 a.m.]: Why is the Opposition continuing to attack our hard-working and loyal public servants? This attack comes after an election campaign during which they variously threatened to sack 20,000, 25,000 or 29,000 public servants, depending on whom you spoke to during the day. Nurses, teachers and police were all affected. Bus drivers, train guards and firefighters—gone! Did the Opposition think about the long-term ramifications of sacking 20,000 public sector workers and the impact it would have had on hard-working New South Wales families? What benefit did the Opposition gain from attacking front-line staff during the last term? Nurses and teachers deserve our praise, not the Opposition's condemnation. Why did the present Leader of the Opposition distance himself from the policy on the election night? Only a matter of a few days into his leadership he abandoned it.

The former Leader of the Opposition, the member for Vacluse, lambasted the former Commissioner of Police, Ken Moroney, at a time when we had record numbers and crime was falling. Sadly, he used this House to refer to former Commissioner Moroney as Uncle Ken, claiming he was a distant relative of the people of New South Wales. The former Leader of the Opposition then tried to use this House to modify the former police commissioner's contract. Is that not about politicisation of the public service? Attacking public servants is no excuse for real and effective policy alternatives for the people of New South Wales. The community wants to see their own good work acknowledged. Former Liberal Stephen O'Doherty's criticism on the election night of the tactics of the member for Vacluse was reported by 9.51 p.m. on the ABC news website as:

We should have been talking about a landslide tonight... The best you can say is, 'Gosh, we won back a couple of independent seats that we used to hold anyway.'

Also on 27 March, former upper House member of Parliament, John Ryan, also criticised the tactics of the Coalition when Channel 7 reported him as saying:

I was humiliated at the weekend having to stand at polling booths watching people not prepared to vote for the Liberal Party because they believed that we were run by a group of nutcases.

The Coalition has had many months since the election to work out what it was doing wrong and to come here and present an alternative. I was teaching in the electorate of the Leader of The Nationals when the former Minister for Education, Terry Metherell, threatened to sack more than 2,000 teachers.

Mr Andrew Stoner: They want you back. Which school was it?

Ms SONIA HORNER: It was at Kempsey High. So please, let us have no more attacks on public servants.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [11.43 a.m.]: I support the motion moved by the Leader of The Nationals to condemn the States Government's politicisation of the public service. We have seen the growth of political intervention and the politicisation of a once-proud public service every day since the Labor Government was unfortunately elected in 1995. We have seen it in the Department of Natural Resources in my electorate of Murray Darling. I know the former member for Murray Darling, with whom you are all familiar, also used to complain about the politicisation of the Department of Natural Resources. When Craig Knowles was the Minister of Natural Resources he wanted to make changes to the process for people applying to clear land; he was in agreement with the landowners and farmers about the changes needed to be made. Because of the politicisation of the public service, the Department of Environment and the Department of Natural Resources, which were stacked full of greenies and left-wing Labor party mates, made sure that the Labor Party got its way and not even the Minister was able to get his way. The consequence of that in real terms is that the people of New South Wales have suffered.

There was a time when the public service was independent. We are elected members of Parliament, of course, and we are not expected to be independent by the very nature of the liberal democracy we have in New South Wales. I am elected as a member of The Nationals and members of the Government are elected as members of the Labor Party. We are meant to be political, but the public service is meant to be an independent body. The public service is meant to give free and unbiased advice to both Ministers and Governments, but the political intervention in New South Wales means the public service is not independent.

I heard the Leader of the National Party referring to the brochure that was sent to teachers not long ago telling teachers how they can intervene and interfere with the Federal election. We have the utmost respect the teachers. They do a great job, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. The Teachers Federation, together with the Labor Party of New South Wales, has tried its hardest to politicise education. The Leader of the National Party, as the shadow Minister for Education, has raised a number of instances of the department trying to ram down the throat of students extremely politically biased information. That is not what we expect from the Department of Education and Training and, most importantly, that is not what parents expect to happen when they send their children to school. They expect to get quality education free of political bias.

As the Leader of The Nationals said the ultimate example of political bias in the Department of Education and Training is the director general of the department. There was no international recruitment campaign to find a new director general of education. No advertisement was placed in the *International Herald Tribune*, in the *Wall Street Journal* or on the Internet to find the highest-grade applicant in the world. No advertisement was even placed in Australia. No advertisement was placed in the *Western Australian* or in the *Age* or wherever. The position was not even advertised in the *Sydney Morning Herald* or the *Daily Telegraph* in New South Wales; it was advertised within the Labor Party.

We have seen how deep the gene pool is within the Labor Party, and it came up with Michael Coutts-Trotter. No one would have taken exception to the appointment of Michael Coutts-Trotter if the position had been advertised properly and a range of recruits had been considered, but the Government did not do that. The Labor Party wants to get control of education and the information that students receive at school. That is why they have politicised the Department of Education and Training and that is why they continue to politicise the public servants of New South Wales.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [11.48 a.m.]: I support the motion moved by the Leader of The Nationals. This matter is of great concern to the people of New South Wales. The Government continually gives jobs to the boys and appoints incompetent people to positions of responsibility.

Mr Kerry Hickey: Why is he incompetent?

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: Obviously the member for Cessnock does not the newspapers. He should pick up the newspaper and read about the decisions that gentleman has made.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Government members will not bait the member for Murray-Darling.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: The member can read in the newspaper about the incompetent person who has been appointed to run the Department of Education and Training in New South Wales. The Government continually talks about the importance of education and its strong commitment to it. Then it appoints an incompetent person to head up the Department of Education and Training. They only want him there for one reason: to push the political agenda of the Labor Government in New South Wales. That political agenda filters down through the education system by way of propaganda that gives teachers instructions on how to vote at the next Federal elections.

Mr Kerry Hickey: Give us examples.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: The previous speakers have given examples. I have a document that was sent to schoolteachers giving them directions on how to vote at the next Federal election.

Mr Gerard Martin: They are schoolteachers. They are not affiliated with the Labor Party.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I ask members not to interject and to give the member for Murray-Darling a fair go.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: As Government members would be aware, I do not interject. I sit back quietly, enjoy the debate and listen to the speeches of Government members.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murray-Darling should continue with his contribution.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: The Government should recognise the need to maintain the separation of powers. Government agencies must be independent of government. Although they take direction from government, as happens with local government, they must be able to make independent decisions. Ministers are separate from the public service. A public service appointee does not promote the political agenda of a government. When people are appointed to positions on the basis of jobs for the boys—the old mates arrangement—the work of government departments becomes politicised. It is happening in the Health portfolio. In the Greater Southern Area Health Service we have "Yes, Minister". When someone stands up and criticises the health system, guess what? On Monday they are looking for another job.

Criticism results in change. The Government needs heads of departments who can advise on the best direction for the department. The education department is a perfect example. We are seeing the destruction of the education system in New South Wales, and it is filtering down through the education system. A patsy of the Labor Party is running the Department of Education and Training, the most important department in this State. He will make sure the department is a politicised organisation. He will push the Labor agenda to schoolteachers and students. Children can be influenced at a young age to vote later in a certain direction. Rather than working in a free and open teaching environment, teachers are being stepped on and told how to vote. They are being told that the good guys are Labor. The document tells them how to vote at the next election. It says, "Come 24 November here are the instructions, follow this chart." That is a disgrace. If I were a teacher and I received that document I would wonder what was going on.

Mr Gerard Martin: Could I have a look at it?

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: The member for Bathurst can have a look at it. The member for Bathurst is disgusted reading that document. I can see the disgust on his face.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Murray-Darling to make his comments through the Chair.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: Teachers receive that sort of document on a regular basis. [*Time expired.*]

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [11.53 a.m.]: I speak in this debate because of the rank hypocrisy of the Opposition. If they want to talk about a government politicising the public service, they should talk about the last 10 years in Canberra. Who is the Ambassador to Italy? How many failed Howard Government Ministers are now working in posts around the world?

Mr John Williams: They are not having any influence on government policies.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Ambassadors do not have any influence on Australia's position? I want to put on the record the great faith the Government has in the ability of Michael Coutts-Trotter, who is an outstanding public servant in the Department of Education, as he was in the Department of Commerce. He is a man of great personal courage and integrity.

Mr Thomas George: He has had preferential treatment.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: He has not; he is there on ability. The document, which the Opposition claims has come from the desk of Michael Coutts-Trotter and was sent to schools to pollute students' minds and urge them to vote against the Howard Government, was distributed by the Your Rights at Work coordinator of the Teachers Federation. The Teachers Federation is not affiliated with the Labor Party. We have had more blues with the Teachers Federation than anyone. We have a democratic system in this country. We do not run a secret State. This document was sent to schools for teachers to consider, but they will make up their own minds on 24 November. So let us get rid of that furphy.

The last Coalition Government was the most political Government ever in relation to politicising the public service. In particular I point to the records of Greiner and Fahey. The Opposition is worried about public education. As the member for Wallsend said, when the Opposition was last in government all it wanted to do was close schools, particularly country schools, and sack schoolteachers. For the Opposition to say it is the defender of public education is rank hypocrisy. This motion deserves to be thrown out. I am sure my colleagues on this side of the House will make sure that happens.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.58 a.m.], in reply: I thank the members for Wallsend, Murrumbidgee, Murray-Darling and Bathurst for their contributions to the debate. The only defence of the member for Wallsend was to concoct the line that The Nationals are attacking hardworking public servants, nurses, teachers and police. What a joke! We were attacking the Labor mates in fat cat jobs. The nurses, teachers and police would get a better go if their departmental secretary were not a political hack. The member talked about public sector job cuts proposed by the Coalition. Treasurer Costa stated that, in his view, 10 per cent of the public service was surplus. That amounts to about 70,000 jobs that Mr Costa would cut. He has already started with parliamentary staff under the guise of family-friendly sitting hours. He is hacking into the overtime and salaries of parliamentary staff by \$800,000 a year—people who can ill afford to have their salaries and overtime cut. The member kicked an own goal.

The member for Bathurst had no defence to the politicisation of the public service under the Labor Government. He made the usual criticism of the Federal Coalition Government. He went on to say that the distribution of propaganda in schools was acceptable, but he did not say whether it was Mr Coutts-Trotter's job to enforce the departmental guidelines, which prohibit this type of political propaganda in schools. He talked about the former Coalition Government's appointments of directors general. It is interesting to note that the Carr and Iemma Labor Governments retained some very good departmental secretaries who were appointed by the former Coalition Government. They do and did provide advice and support to the Government of the day without fear or favour. The Government kept on men such as Ken Brown, Col Gellately and Roger Wilkins. It makes a total mockery of the claims by the member for Bathurst.

It is important that this issue be debated because the implications of the politicisation of the public service are that a culture of fear is created within departments. For example, people who are prepared to speak out against the political ramifications within their departments are bullied and victimised. Whistleblowers have been harassed by this Government and within departments. As a result, there is a culture of fear within departments such as education and health. People are not prepared to speak out, and things just get worse. A recent example is the Royal North Shore Hospital. There has been a continuing drift away from public education—which is tragic—because things are not improving, particularly in relation to school infrastructure, due to this politicisation that has occurred.

The senior ranks of the public sector have infiltrated boards and committees. I refer briefly to a former Labor politician, the inimitable Barrie Unsworth. A quick Internet search reveals that in recent years Barrie "The

Cardigan" Unsworth has chaired the Taxi Taskforce, the bus review, the Australia Day Council and Ageing 2030. He has sat on the board of the State Transit Authority, the Ambulance Services Board and the board of the Constitutional Education Fund. He has chaired the Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel for the Department of Planning. He has sat on the boards of Delta Electricity and RailCorp. He has conducted a review of the University of Sydney. He has been a member of the Centenary of Federation Committee. He has done work with the Community Relations Commission. It is a case of jobs for the boys. He is a very busy person.

John Murray got appointments also. Laurie Brereton recently chaired another review. I could go on and on. This State needs a public service that acts in the best interests of the people without fear or favour. However, this Government is obsessed with spin over substance. Instead of seeing transparency and accountability through legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act, we are seeing freedom from information in this State, we are seeing cover-up and we are seeing a government obsessed with political survival, not services. As a result, the delivery of services is becoming run-down. Sadly for this State, in the case of health it is often fatal.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 34

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

Noes, 51

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

Pair

Mrs Hancock

Mr Iemma

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

WESTERN SYDNEY HEALTH CARE

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith) [12.10 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises the Government's commitment to improving and expanding access to health care for people in Western Sydney, and
- (2) congratulates the Government for its announcement of \$80 million to upgrade Nepean Hospital.

Prior to the March 2007 State election, Premier Iemma visited Nepean Hospital with a plan to improve health care for families throughout Western Sydney. That plan includes the investment of \$80 million in Nepean Hospital to deliver the very best health care available. We must remember that it was the State Labor Government that completely rebuilt the emergency department at the hospital just over four years ago. It was also the State Labor Government that lobbied for an after-hours general practitioner clinic at the hospital. It is the State Labor Government, led by Morris Iemma, that will invest \$80 million in the hospital. Members opposite do not seem to be interested in this massive investment in health care in Western Sydney, but the local families in my electorate of Penrith do care.

Madam Acting-Speaker, I know that you are wondering about that \$80 million and how it will be spent. Although the planning is continuing, we know that the money will be spent on additional patient beds, extra operating theatres and enhanced critical care services. While hospitals may not be the most commonly used health facility, they are certainly one of the most important health care providers in the local community. I recently had the opportunity to visit the site of the new psychiatric emergency critical care centre at Nepean Hospital with the Minister for Health (Mental Health), the Hon. Paul Lynch. That centre will be part of the emergency department and will provide specialist care to patients experiencing mental health care crises. In an interview last year, Joanne Seymour, the centre manager, said that the existing centre had transformed mental health care and eased the burden on the emergency department.

A new, purpose-built facility will be even better news for the staff and the patients who use the facility. This Labor Government has also invested millions of dollars in the cancer care centre at Nepean Hospital, which has been established for more than 10 years. With the help of the specialist cancer care staff, this facility is making a huge difference to the lives of cancer patients and their families. The Nepean Cancer Care Centre offers radiotherapy and medical and palliative services to patients in Western Sydney. The centre treated my mother-in-law over the past few years. I commend all the staff and the palliative care nurses for the kind treatment they provide to the many patients who use the centre.

I also commend the palliative care nurses at the Governor Phillip Special Hospital, which is part of Sydney West Area Health Service. After the election this year I hosted a morning tea for the nurses at Governor Phillip Special Hospital, particularly the nurses who specialise in palliative care and who cared for my mother-in-law during her last few months of life. The people of Penrith are proud of our local hospital and are grateful to the hundreds of men and women who work there. Rarely does a week go by without a patient of the hospital writing a letter to one of the local newspapers praising the work of the staff. A letter from Patricia Knight was published in the *Penrith Press* a few Fridays ago. It states:

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the ambulance drivers and all the wonderful staff at Nepean Hospital, especially those in emergency, cardiac lab and the nurses in the cardiac ward...

The Iemma Government is fully committed to improving health care in Western Sydney and this massive investment of \$80 million will be welcomed by everyone. The 2007-08 budget allocates more than \$1 billion to Sydney West Area Health Service. That includes \$32 million for award increases and enhancement funding; \$3.2 million for oral health; \$2.6 million for elective surgery; \$2.5 million for intensive care unit and neonatal intensive care beds and cots—many of which will be in the Nepean Hospital; \$1 million for mental services; and \$300,000 for sexual assault clinics. This is just a snapshot of some of the \$1.2 billion allocated to Sydney West Area Health Service in the 2007-08 State budget. It would be remiss of me not to point out the fact that the nurses working in our public hospitals, like Nepean Hospital, are the most highly paid public hospital nurses anywhere in Australia. That is in stark contrast to the performance of the Federal Government, which with its unfair WorkChoices legislation is looking to reduce their pay and cut their entitlements.

I will compare this State Government to the Federal Government, which has repeatedly under-funded health care. Earlier this year it was revealed that the Federal Government is spending \$1.1 billion less a year

than was recommended by an independent arbiter. Let us not forget about the Federal Government's failure with regard to dental health care. That is a responsibility entrusted to it by no less than the Australian Constitution. Not a week goes by in my office that a constituent does not contact my staff with a concern about dental health care, but the Federal Government still refuses to accept its responsibility for this area.

I was appalled to read a recent newsletter published by our now retired Federal member, Jackie Kelly, who claimed that the States were not doing enough about the dental health crisis. She had 11 long years as the member for Lindsay and her Government scrapped the program. It is no surprise that Jackie Kelly opted to retire before the voters had a chance to tell her what they thought of her. Unfortunately, that was not before a taxpayer-funded study tour from Penrith to Paris. I digress. Fortunately, Kevin Rudd has a plan to fix our nation's health system. That plan involves cooperative federalism. I will get back to the issue of health care in Western Sydney, and in particular at Nepean Hospital.

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order: The member has had sufficient leeway. My point is relevance. The motion is specific to health care in Western Sydney and the Government's commitment to it—which by implication means the State Government. The member was digressing, as usual.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I was listening carefully to the member for Penrith. She said words to the effect of, "I digress and I am moving back." The member for Penrith may continue.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: Let us get back to the issue of health care in Western Sydney, in particular at Nepean Hospital. Nepean Hospital is committed to meeting the increasing demand. Latest performance indicators show that the staff at the hospital are making that happen. Latest figures show that the number of patients waiting for more than 12 months for elective surgery has dropped from 272 to zero. These figures show that people presenting at Nepean Hospital emergency department with the most serious cases—that is, triage category 1—are seen within the benchmark time of two minutes. When the New South Wales Coalition was last in government, 20 per cent of people presenting at Nepean Hospital emergency department were not seen within the benchmark of two minutes. The Iemma Government is committed to meeting the healthcare needs of our patients. Over the years, New South Wales has reduced the number of patients waiting for non-urgent surgery from 1,000 to 79. We have also reduced the number of patients waiting longer than the national benchmark of 30 days from 4,000 to 117.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! Members of the Opposition will remain quiet.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: That is the lowest number ever. Unlike members on the other side, we do not seek to vilify the hardworking doctors, nurses and allied health professionals who do their jobs every day trying to make a difference. We will not try to score political points over a tragedy. We look to get beyond the sound bytes of the nightly news. This House is continuing—[*Time expired.*]

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [12.20 p.m.]: I will start where the member for Penrith left off and refer to the hardworking doctors and nurses of Western Sydney, particularly those at Nepean Hospital. I refer to an extraordinary general meeting of the Medical Staff Council held in 2006. The question asked on the notice announcing that meeting was, "Is mass resignation required?" Doctors at Nepean Hospital were so fed up that they were considering mass resignation. Why? Various documents prepared in connection with that meeting show that the Director of Physician Training at the hospital resigned due to lack of support. They refer to a culture where senior medical and management resignations have increased following amalgamations and an ensuing drop in morale and culture.

There has been a reversion to a blame culture where staff, rather than system-based causes, are targeted for perceived failures. They refer to care being driven by performance indicators, not quality and safety. The documents note that savings have come from non-replacement of critical clinical services and essential support staff, rather than less bureaucratic inefficiency. This is extraordinary, given the claims made by the member for Penrith. This hospital was bleeding, with doctors and nurses screaming out that it was a disaster. The Government announced funding of \$80 million just before the election. What has happened since? Absolutely nothing. I have just downloaded a document from the website about the Penrith health campus redevelopment. The front page shows some pretty pictures of the announcement during the election. The next page says, "This page is currently under development," and the next one contains nothing, because nothing has been done.

I have visited Nepean Hospital on a number of occasions. Indeed, I have a very fine painting on the wall of my family room that I bought while attending a fundraiser for the neonatal intensive care unit. It has a

wonderful team of nurses in place. It receives marvellous community support from mothers. I am proud to have spent a fair amount of money out of my own pocket supporting that program, because I understand their commitment and I support them entirely. That is why these statistics for Nepean Hospital worry me. For example, 1,562 people are waiting for elective surgery at Nepean Hospital. At Westmead, 1,423 people are waiting for elective surgery. That hospital is in Western Sydney as well. If this motion is about Government members congratulating themselves, I am a bit concerned that they think that is a good thing. At Nepean emergency department, if people need to be admitted eight hours is considered the benchmark to send them to a bed. I do not think the member for Macquarie Fields knows these figures very well. Does he know what the figure is at Nepean? I can tell him that 36 per cent had not found a bed within that time. I find that extraordinary. I move:

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

this House recognises the Government's contribution to escalating problems for people needing access to health care in Western Sydney.

I refer now particularly to Westmead Hospital in Western Sydney because considerable anxiety has been expressed by patients, doctors and other staff in recent times. At a meeting on 10 October—very recently—the Medical Staff Council at that hospital resolved to endorse and support the concerns raised by Dr Valerie Malka, the head of the emergency department at that hospital. The council went on to talk about the lack of delegation of authority to clinicians. It talked about seven layers of bureaucracy to get the most simple things done at that hospital—many more layers than were ever in place before Morris Iemma was the health Minister and restructured. I shall read onto the record some of the issues that have been raised by Dr Valerie Malka. Her letter to the Medical Staff Council reads in part:

I have over the last 10 years and particularly over the last 5 been increasingly alarmed by the decline of our hospitals and our increasingly substandard levels of care. As the Head of a Specialty, which crosses a multitude of disciplines and departments, I have the ability to see first hand the deficiencies in care seen across the board. I have therefore remarked that what has led to this has been multifactorial and well recognised by all health care providers. I am gravely concerned that patient care and safety is regularly compromised due to all the following factors:

- Lack of funds and resources preventing us from delivering the level of expertise and the care we know is acceptable and appropriate.
- Decreasing numbers of medical, nursing and allied health staff.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Not trained by the Feds.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: In fact, the number of nurse positions has increased dramatically under the Howard Government. There are 100,000 nurses in New South Wales, according to the Department of Health annual report, and 37,000 of them are choosing to work in our public hospitals. Why is this so? Because the great majority of them know that if they work in public hospitals the State Government does not support them. They are overwhelmed by bureaucrats and interference at the middle management level, with people telling them how they are not to treat their patients. This letter continues:

- Increasingly junior staff, both medical and nursing, often working unsupervised, particularly after hours when senior clinician input is most necessary.
- Lack of Consultant led services after hours in major teaching hospitals.
- Increasingly poor conditions and outdated equipment as well as lack of essential equipment.
- Increasingly poor communication and documentation regarding patient care, often with no clear definitive plans of management leading to delays and errors in care.
- An increasing loss of privacy and dignity for our patients in "mixed" wards which are also often unclean and chaotic.

Mr Barry Collier: What is Tony Abbott going to do?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: Government members are not interested in listening to one of the doctors in one of our hospitals. They are only interested in congratulating themselves. This is one of the major hospitals. I know Government members are feeling uncomfortable listening to this doctor's words. They are trying to shout me down so the doctor's words will not be heard. However, I know that the Hansard reporters are very good at listening and, despite the attempts to drown me out, they will get all the comments—and I will give Hansard the letter anyway. Dr Malka goes on to make the following points:

- Increasing patient and relative complaints regarding the care provided with an increase in reportable incidences.
- An increasing culture of blame shifting and teams refusing to take responsibility for patient care.
- Increasing proliferation of bureaucracy with decreasing clinician authority and input into decision and policy making.

- Increasing layers of administration with inability to be heard or have our concerns and issues addressed.
- Increasing erosion of staff goodwill across the entire Area as well as an alarming decrease in staff morale across all departments and at all levels.
- No clear accountability by Executives to the clinicians.
- Constant and ever present obstacles to progressing simple individual department issues with increasing adherences to senseless protocols and policies.
- Managers with questionable competence and no clinical acumen, vision, leadership or understanding of priorities and critical concerns.

It sounds to me as though she is speaking about the current health Minister in New South Wales, but she is talking about Westmead Hospital—

- Constant focus and reminder regarding "the budget" with cuts in fund allocation despite clear evidence of compromised patient care.
- Increasing and unmanageable "paperwork" in order to run and manage individual departments with often skeleton staff and lack of secretarial support.

Dr Valerie Malka said that she raised these concerns with the Medical Staff Council because she fears she will be victimised by this vindictive Government for having had the nerve to speak out. I have spoken to her and she is genuinely worried about patients in these hospitals and the lack of services in this area. The Government congratulates itself despite a senior doctor in one of our biggest teaching hospitals speaking out because she is worried about her patients and the fact that the Government is ignoring the needs of hardworking doctors and nurses.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [12.31 p.m.]: The hardworking families of Western Sydney deserve the very best in health care. The population of Western Sydney is growing rapidly. It is currently home to 1.84 million people and this is expected to increase to around two million by the year 2010. The Iemma Government has provided substantial capital funding for the region's health facilities to help meet our commitment to deliver better services now and into the future

This year alone the regions two area health services and the Children's Hospital at Westmead will receive funding totalling more than \$3 billion. These are record increases, with funding for Sydney South West Area Health Service up by 4.6 per cent; funding for Sydney West Area Health Service up by 6.2 per cent and funding for the Children's Hospital Westmead up by 5.9 per cent on the previous year's budget. Since 2003 the Iemma Government has completed major upgrades or rebuilt hospitals at Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Nepean and Westmead. This financial year further major redevelopments are underway at Auburn and Liverpool hospitals at a combined cost of over \$67 million.

This year's budget provides for an additional 124 beds and community-based bed equivalents for local residents in addition to the 124 last year. Under the Pathways Home Program, \$1 million has been allocated to fund improvements in community care and rehabilitation units at Bankstown Hospital. Recently the redevelopment of the Women's Health and Newborn Care Centre at Westmead Hospital was completed. We will also spend \$17 million on the Westmead Cancer Care Centre to provide an integrated cancer care service in a specially designed new facility. This centre will provide a one-stop, comprehensive centre for cancer care.

The Westmead renal unit is also receiving funding to the tune of almost \$7 million to enable the facility to be completed by the end of this financial year. As the member for Penrith just outlined, planning has begun for the \$80 million stage three redevelopment of Nepean Hospital, which will significantly improve services in operating theatres, and critical and ambulatory care for residents in the area. Earlier this year the Premier announced a \$23 million rollout of digital mammography technology to BreastScreen units across New South Wales. As last Monday was Pink Ribbon Day it is critically important to acknowledge this funding.

Western Sydney will be the first region of the State to benefit from the rollout. We have been working to further enhance the close working relationship that exists between health service staff and local general practitioners to keep people healthy at home and out of hospital by providing them with support in their local communities. Our after-hours general practitioner services have been operating successfully out of Campbelltown, Nepean and Liverpool hospitals, with the service at Liverpool Hospital rapidly expanding since its establishment last year. We are rolling out the HealthOne model of care in Camden whereby community health staff are co-located within the Elderslie Family Practice to provide early intervention and prevention services that target chronic and complex diseases. An identical centre is also being delivered in Mount Drutt.

Mental health services for the region have also been given a substantial boost by the Iemma Government. This financial year \$400,000 has been provided for the mental health community rehabilitation

program across Sydney South West Area Health Service and a further \$200,000 across the Sydney West Area Health Service. We have opened more than 100 extra mental health beds at Blacktown, Nepean, Liverpool, Westmead, Cumberland and Campbelltown hospitals since 2003. Psychiatric emergency care centres have also been either established or enhanced at Liverpool, Blacktown and Nepean hospitals.

Last week I had the pleasure of launching the transcultural child, adolescent and family outreach clinics at Fairfield, which will boost access to mental health care for migrants and refugees, bring together local clinical services and provide culture-specific support and education to these groups on how to access the resources and care they need. The transcultural child, adolescent and family clinics are a joint initiative of the Immigrant Women's Health Service and the Transcultural Mental Health Centre, partly funded by the State Government. The Iemma Government is committed to protecting the wellbeing of the people of Western Sydney. It has opened community health centres at Narellan and Rosemeadow and introduced the Macarthur in-home support service to provide a monitoring service for people with dementia. We are committed to delivering better health services for the people of Western Sydney and we are providing the funding necessary to achieve results for our region.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [12.35 p.m.]: I am more than happy to debate this motion today, given the neglect that residents in my electorate of Hawkesbury have to contend with because of the State Government's complete ignorance and failure to provide adequate health care in the area. The Hawkesbury, in the north-west area of Western Sydney, encompasses one of the fastest growing areas in housing and population in New South Wales. With a population of 250,000 residents expected in the near future, there has never been a suggestion of providing improved health services for the north-west. Many young families in Rouse Hill, Kellyville, Beaumont Hills and Glenhaven are therefore forced to take their children to either Westmead or Penrith hospitals for treatment.

I highlight the instance of a family with a baby by the name of Cooper Gingell, who is 15 months old. He was taken to Nepean Hospital on 14 May at 2.15 p.m. suffering from an asthma attack. His lips were blue and he had a massive fever. He waited six hours to see a doctor and when he was finally admitted on 15 May at 2.00 a.m. he had been waiting 15 hours for health care. More than a month ago, when I was driving to Parliament House at 6.00 a.m., I listened in graphic detail to the events that surrounded the miscarriage suffered by Jana Horska. I heard how Jana had pleaded with hospital staff to give her attention as she waited in extreme pain.

Mrs Karyn Paluzzano: Point of order: The motion relates to Western Sydney, in particular, Nepean Hospital. I ask you to direct the member to return to the leave of the motion.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The amendment refers to Western Sydney. I ask the member for Hawkesbury to return to the leave of the motion.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am highlighting the graphic detail of the miscarriage and the problems that have not been addressed by the New South Wales Government. As a parent who witnessed the birth of both my children I cannot comprehend what those two people must have gone through. I can only think back to my concerns and apprehensions as my wife went through labour and delivered two wonderfully healthy children. As a father, I was extremely grateful for the medical attention my wife received at the time, albeit I was terrified at the thought of her going through the entire process—not terrified by the birth of my children, which was indeed a blessed event, but frightened at the thought of anything similar happening during the birth of my children. Any person in this position would have had similar feelings. Therefore, I highlight the fact that I cannot understand how anybody, particularly a woman in this Chamber, could not feel physically sick on hearing the problems that woman went through and the nightmares that confront her on a daily basis.

Mr Barry Collier: Point of order: The member for Hawkesbury is obviously canvassing your ruling. You have asked him to return to health services in Western Sydney but he has not done that. I ask you to direct him to return the leave of the motion.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I ask the member for Hawkesbury to confine his comments to either the motion or the amendment.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is exactly what I am doing. The people of Western Sydney are fearful of the endemic and systemic problems across the health system, as any person who has had a sick child or family member would attest to. People in Western Sydney are confronted by these problems because of lack of health services in the area. Children now have to travel from the north-western areas to either Nepean or Westmead

hospitals to access health services. Throughout this week we have heard about a worm that measures the approval rating of an audience. If we had a worm that measured the performance of the New South Wales Government it would sink straight back into the ground. There is something interesting about a worm: it is a mollusc, a spineless invertebrate. A worm has great similarities with the New South Wales State Government, which refuses to acknowledge the endemic problems in the State's health system.

Mr Ninos Khoshaba: Point of order: I ask you to direct the member for Hawkesbury to refer to relevant issues. He is now talking about worms. This is the third time you have warned him but he continues to carry on with irrelevant material. I ask you to bring him back to the leave of the motion.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I am sure the member for Hawkesbury will speak about either the motion or the amendment.

[Time expired.]

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [12.40 p.m.]: I support the amendment moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, which is a very important one. The motion moved by the member for Penrith asks the House to recognise the Government's commitment to improving and expanding access to health care for people in Western Sydney. The people of Western Sydney deserve the best possible health care. They are hardworking people. Something like 10 per cent of the Australian population—almost two million people—live in the many suburbs that make up Western Sydney, which is designated by the Government as covering areas from Bankstown to Bilpin, the Blue Mountains, the Wisemans Ferry area, and all the way out to Menangle, Campbelltown, and places such as that. Health is a paramount consideration to ensure the welfare of the people of Western Sydney, and the Opposition supports that.

In my opinion the most important asset in the New South Wales health system is the hardworking people who work in our hospitals—the dedicated and committed nurses and doctors who go the extra mile. Nothing deters them in their effort to provide assistance to the sick and those who are suffering. I have had firsthand experience of their dedication and commitment, and I can certainly attest to them. However, if there are faults in the healthcare system in Western Sydney—and, indeed, there could well be—it is because the Government has abandoned our hospital staff. It is because the Government has not given them the resources and support they are crying out for. I invite honourable members on both sides of the House to visit a hospital emergency ward on a Friday or Saturday night. Indeed, I invite them to visit an intensive care ward to observe the people who are brought in. By some force of miracle—the commitment and dedication of our hospital staff to helping people—many of the patients are able to walk out of those emergency departments or intensive care wards.

To use a great adage that a world leader once said, "Give me the tools and I'll finish the job." That was the cry of Winston Churchill in World War II. It is also the cry of the staff in our hospitals. They want the tools, and they are prepared to deliver the job, but the Government, a government that is prepared to live by spin and is prepared, in this case, to say that the problem does not exist, has abandoned them. The Government must first acknowledge that it has a problem with the healthcare system. When it does that, the State will move forward. The Government cannot keep putting spin on this problem because it will not go away. The problem exists in Western Sydney, it exists in the whole of New South Wales, and it will not get any better until the Government bites the bullet and accepts it. It then needs to sit down with doctors and staff in the healthcare system and work on the problem, and then determine a course of action that will allow our healthcare system to reach the 2010 standards the people of New South Wales deserve and to which they are entitled.

The Opposition has a commitment to improving and expanding health care in New South Wales. My question is: What is the Government's commitment, what is it doing about it, and when will it improve and expand access to health care for people in western Sydney? Let us have the Government's proposals. Let us see its course of action. The Government has announced an \$80 million redevelopment of Nepean hospital. To date all the Government has done is issue a glossy photograph of Premier Iemma announcing the project—nothing has happened. I believe it will happen, as it should. But let us hear about the Government's program, about what it is going to do. Labor has been in office since 1995. The ball is in its court, but it has made a mess of the healthcare system. What will it do to rectify the situation? The Opposition is determined to do something about it. *[Time expired.]*

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [12.45 p.m.]: I will be brief. I had not planned to speak in this debate but I feel I cannot stay silent. I have worked in the public health system for 32 years, the last 17 years in Western Sydney.

Mr Thomas George: Why have you come here?

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The member for Lismore interjects, "Why have you come here?" I have come here for one very good reason: it looked as if government mattered and I could improve health care much more by being on this side of the House, with the people who believe in social justice than when I was working under the Liberal Government. At that time I was working in Western Sydney and Peter Collins' contribution to health care in that area was to sue health workers who complained about a lack of services. His contribution was to send a letter to every healthcare worker saying that if we spoke out about the deficiencies we would be sacked!

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I ask all members to come to order. The member for Macquarie Fields has the call.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: There have been dramatic improvements in health care in Western Sydney over the last 12 years of Labor, and members opposite know that. If there had not been such dramatic improvements in health care in that area the people of Western Sydney would have elected the Coalition and not the Labor Party. The people of Western Sydney know that their best chance for decent health care can only come through the Iemma Labor Government, and that is why they voted for us in the election. Three months ago I worked for eight hours at Nepean hospital on the College of Physicians examination—the second time it has been held at Penrith due to the dramatic improvements in the standard of healthcare facilities in Penrith over the last 12 years under the Labor Government.

The member for Baulkham Hills suggested members should visit a hospital emergency department on a Friday or Saturday. I have spent my whole life in hospital emergency departments. The difference is dramatic. We now have senior staff on duty. We have been asked to acknowledge a problem in health care in New South Wales and the answer is, yes, we have significant problems in our hospital system. They are oversubscribed and underfunded. The Federal Government has taken a large amount of money out of the healthcare system. If this were a chicken shop and we both had responsibility for looking after the people and one of us was doing nothing, would that be okay? The Federal Government has emasculated our funding. It is running dead. We have increased our funding: It is doing nothing—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. We are talking about this State Government. Dr McDonald has worked under this State Government and knows the problems that have occurred under this State Government. I ask the Chair to get him to return to the point.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Macquarie Fields was speaking about the motion. I will ask him to return to—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Perhaps he can talk about the fact—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! Are you canvassing my ruling?

Mrs Jillian Skinner: No, I am talking about—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition not to interrupt me whilst I am speaking. The member for Macquarie Fields has the call.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I know, and the people of Western Sydney, know that health care in Western Sydney has improved dramatically. They know where their future lies. One of the members opposite said I should be ashamed to be a doctor in the Labor Party. The Labor Party stands for social justice. Just because those policies managed to turn some of our kids into doctors does not mean we forget where we come from. We believe in social justice and care for our people, especially those in Western Sydney—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! Members on both sides of the House will refrain from interjecting.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith) [12.50 p.m.], in reply: I restate that the Iemma Government's commitment to improving and expanding services in Western Sydney was acknowledged by the Minister for

Western Sydney, the member for Auburn. The member for Macquarie Fields also acknowledged it quite passionately. I note that Dr McDonald, who has worked in health care for more than 32 years, made the most important statement in the debate: the dramatic improvement in the last 12 years. We are talking about Western Sydney. We are talking about Nepean Hospital. The member for Hawkesbury is still concentrating on branch stacking, but I suggest that he get back to business. Bring back Steve Pringle.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Hawkesbury will come to order.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: Scoring political points in a debate about health care in Western Sydney is absolutely appalling considering the amount of money that has been invested by the Carr-Iemma governments over the last 11 years. The accident and emergency department of Nepean Hospital has been completely rebuilt. The north block is under re-development. The west block has been totally rebuilt to house cardiac services and \$80 million has been earmarked for intensive care. I also note the contribution by the member for Baulkham Hills. Our thoughts and prayers were with him when he was visiting Nepean Hospital, both in emergency and intensive care. He, too, acknowledged that the services provided were impeccable.

The emergency and intensive care units are hard areas to work in, and the Iemma Government has allocated \$80 million to improve the intensive care unit. Like the member for Baulkham Hills, I have also visited the intensive care unit. I welcome the extra beds in the redevelopment, the improvement to intensive care and the new surgical wards. The Iemma Government is supporting healthcare professionals. Even though the member for North Sydney acknowledged the work of doctors and nurses, she did not acknowledge a policy that supports that rhetoric. The policy of the last State Government was to cut front-line services by 20,000—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Wrong!

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: If it is wrong and if the Coalition meant it was not front-line, then it is those who support—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: It is the bureaucrats, yes.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: Is it the people who make the appointments for the breast screening unit at Penrith? Is it the people who support the doctors and nurses at the accident and emergency department? Is it the allied health professionals, the radiographers?

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for North Shore will come to order. I will call her to order if she does not comply with the direction of the Chair.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: Is it the people supporting the hardworking doctors and nurses? These are the questions that were not answered. We took a policy to the people of Western Sydney. The member for Mulgoa, the member for Londonderry and I, with the Premier, went to Nepean Hospital to announce the \$80 million upgrade. The people looked at the two policies: sack front-line services or upgrade a hospital? The proof is in the eating of the re-election pudding for the member for Penrith.

Let us not forget in this debate that John Howard and Tony Abbott have a role to play. Tony Abbott has acknowledged that he has underfunded health care in New South Wales by a considerable amount. Every dollar that is not spent at Nepean Hospital is spent somewhere else. Where is it? We want that money back. We want a Federal member for the seat of Lindsay who will speak up for the people of Western Sydney and bring back the Federal money and the parity we should have. I am proud of the Government's record in health care in Western Sydney. Like others in my party, I will continue to work for the local community to ensure that all families have access to quality health care. We are proud of Western Sydney's facilities. Not only are we proud of the \$80 million upgrade, we are proud—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The Chamber will come to order.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: We are proud of the services that have been introduced in the cancer care unit, in particular the palliative care beds that were previously mentioned—

Mr Richard Amery: Which hospital did they build in Western Sydney? Name one.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: None. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 51

Mr Amery	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Borger	Ms Hornery	Mr Piper
Mr Brown	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Mr Shearan
Ms Burton	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr Koperberg	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Lynch	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 McMahon	
Ms Firth	Ms Meagher	
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gibson	Ms Moore	Mr Ashton
Mr Greene	Mr Morris	Mr Martin

Noes, 32

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

Pairs

Mr Iemma	Mr Cansdell
Mr Rees	Mrs Hancock

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

Division called for and Standing Order 185 applied.

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

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

Noes, 33

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

Pairs

Mr Iemma	Mr Cansdell
Mr Rees	Mrs Hancock

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

[Acting-Speaker (Ms Beamer) left the chair at 1.05 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

DEATH OF THE HON. GEORGE FRANCIS FREUDENSTEIN, A FORMER MINISTER OF THE CROWN

The SPEAKER: It is with regret that I inform the House of the death on 22 October 2007 of the Hon. George Francis Freudenstein, a former Minister of the Crown. On behalf of the House I extend to the family the deep sympathy of the Legislative Assembly in the loss sustained.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the House I welcome to the New South Wales Parliament the Speaker of the Northern Territory Parliament, the Hon. Jane Aagard. I have assured the Speaker that this is a very well disciplined House. I also welcome a Minister in the Northern Territory Government, Marion Scrymgour.

REPRESENTATION OF MINISTER ABSENT DURING QUESTIONS

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In the absence of the Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Water Utilities, who is attending an international water conference, the 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) will answer questions on his behalf.

RECONCILIATION

Ministerial Statement

Mr MORRIS IEMMA (Lakemba—Premier, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.20 p.m.]: I have just had the honour of taking part in a forum called Reconciliation in Parliament, and I can think of no better way to acknowledge the event than to join with colleagues from both sides of the House and reaffirm that this Parliament, once the source of laws that hurt and hindered Aboriginal people, now proudly stands in the front line of reconciliation, and does so with one heart and one voice. The currency of reconciliation is word, gesture and symbol: above all, words, because there is no eloquence in silence. Silence equals denial, and denial repeats and entrenches the very crimes it seeks to veil and excuse. That is why perhaps the most profound word ever spoken in this Parliament was "sorry", breaking a 200-year wall of silence here in the colony where Aboriginal civilisation, as it had been known for 60,000 years, began to meet its end.

Those of us who were privileged to be among the members who inscribed that apology in our public record will forever consider it a high point of our careers and, indeed, our entire lives. As much as we may celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the referendum, the fifteenth anniversary of Mabo and the tenth anniversary of "Bringing them Home", the one thing we cannot yet celebrate is reconciliation itself. If reconciliation is a journey, our apology at least showed we are finally on the way. But if reconciliation is a destination, we still have a fair way to go. Too many generations have lived and died stranded in a wasteland between the loss of their millennial culture and a future, always just out of reach, where Aborigines may once again walk this land in honour and justice.

If, as Paul Keating so famously said, "We brought the diseases, we took the children from their mothers, we practised discrimination and exclusion", then it is equally us who can make things good. I am not talking about direct, personal culpability. Few of those responsible for the failed policies of the pre-referendum era remain. None of us was alive when the worst things happened. In fact, my ancestors were toiling the Calabrian soil half a world away when the First Fleet arrived. Despite those truths, we are all diminished by the fact that Aborigines are strangers in their own land, and we are all responsible—not guilty, not personally liable, but nonetheless responsible.

We are collectively and morally responsible because the benefits of dispossession have flowed to us, because we as the Government and Parliament of New South Wales are the direct legal heirs of Governor Phillip and his colonial successors, and because the past has left wounds, material and spiritual, that fall upon us to bind and to heal. In that spirit I join my colleagues from every party and faction, from every corner of this State, in reaffirming this Parliament's commitment to the process and the goal of reconciliation. It is time we ensured that not another generation of elders dies before that journey is complete. The first peoples of this land have waited long enough.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [2.24 p.m.]: I join with the Premier in this expression of support for reconciliation. I do so acknowledging the Aboriginal elders in the gallery and in the Parliament today. As the Premier has said, the fact that this was the first State Parliament to offer an apology is something that those of us who were here at the time share as a matter of pride. I make the point, as I did earlier this year, that a number of my country colleagues who came into this place for the first time in this Parliament also offered an apology in their inaugural speeches, and that is a matter of pride to members on this side of the House.

As much as I support what the Premier said and the goal that we should all share, as much as I believe, as far as is practicable in this country, that this issue should be above politics, and while I support what he said about the importance of words and the dangers of silence, words mean nothing without action. None of us in this State can be proud of the outcomes that Aboriginals face. Aboriginal women die in childbirth three to four times more frequently than women in the rest of Australia, Aboriginals die about 15 to 20 years younger than the rest of us, Aboriginal children leave school earlier than other children and, of course, Aboriginals are overrepresented in our prisons.

I support, as do my colleagues, the goal of reconciliation. We know we will achieve it as a result of government action. On behalf of my colleagues, I support the goal. However, we will not reach it without action

on reports like the one presented to the New South Wales Government last May and the "Breaking the Silence" report about the treatment of Aboriginal communities across the State. We will not see action until Aboriginal children at risk of harm in the community get the support they deserve. I am happy to support the goal of reconciliation and to acknowledge the contribution Aboriginals have made to this country and the wrongs that have been done to them. However, practical reconciliation will be achieved only when those of us on both sides of politics stop with the words and start with the action.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I seek leave to allow the Leader of The Nationals to also respond to the ministerial statement.

Leave not granted.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. Members of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: The Opposition requested that the—

Mr Chris Hartcher: There is no motion before the Chair.

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

Mr Chris Hartcher: Why is he allowed to make a statement?

The SPEAKER: Because I have allowed the Leader of the House to make a statement.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: An agreement was reached with the Opposition that the Leader of The Nationals would be allowed to make a statement after question time and the Opposition is aware of that.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: Given the significance of the Premier's statement, it is only appropriate that the leaders of all three major parties in New South Wales get an opportunity to speak on such an important matter in the company of all members of Parliament and people in the gallery, who are here for the reconciliation proceedings today.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee has made his point. In this instance leave would be required for the Leader of The Nationals to speak. I have stated the position. Consistent with the statement of the Leader of the House, the Leader of The Nationals will have an opportunity to address the House after question time.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Is it in relation to that matter?

Mr Andrew Fraser: It relates to whether the Leader of the House can give leave and then direct the House as to when that leave may be granted. Leave is either granted or not granted. If leave is granted, the granting of leave should be acted upon now.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Coffs Harbour that leave was not granted. I call the member for Upper Hunter to order. The member for Bathurst will remain silent. I will now move on to other business.

QUESTION TIME

HOSPITAL BEDS

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Given the Australian Medical Association describes the Minister's practice of 95 per cent occupancy rates of beds in our teaching hospitals as a "threat to patient care", how does she justify her Government's record of slashing 2,300 beds across the State?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The most notable finding of the Australian Medical Association's public hospital report card today is that yet another report has found that the Commonwealth Government has reduced its funding to public health services.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I call the Leader of The Nationals to order.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Australian Medical Association's report found:

The average contributions of governments since the 1980s are close to 50 per cent each but in recent years the Commonwealth Government effort has slackened off.

It also stated:

The Commonwealth Government needs to pull its weight with funding contributions that are more appropriate to the needs of the people.

The Australian Medical Association's own report is critical of the Commonwealth Government's underfunding.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: This report backs the findings of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report that was released last month. That report found that the Commonwealth Government is underfunding public hospitals in Australia by \$2.2 billion a year. As I have said in this House before, that is \$750 million for New South Wales, which means 8,000 year-eight registered nurses or the operating budget for Royal North Shore Hospital for two years. Our health system is one of the most complex businesses in Australia. We admit over 1.5 million patients a year, we treat 23,500 outpatients, we accept over 2.3 million people through our emergency departments a year, and we spend \$12.5 billion delivering that service.

The Australian Medical Association has made a number of findings about bed capacity, access to services and elective surgery waiting times that I would like to respond to. Hospital bed capacity has changed over the past 20 years as new treatments like day surgery have been developed and accepted. The Australian Productivity Commission report in January this year included data on the number of hospital beds per thousand people across Australia. New South Wales maintained a higher number of total beds per capita than all other States except South Australia—compared 3.1 to 3.3—and higher than the national average, which was 2.8 on the data available in 2004-05.

Since then, the New South Wales Government has funded a massive expansion in hospital beds—an additional 1,800 beds since 2004. The 2007-08 budget provides more money for early health care intervention in home strategies to prevent admission to hospital. The Coalition, by contrast, closed or downgraded 30 hospitals during its seven years in office. In 1995, when the Coalition was last in office, the average number of available public hospital beds had fallen under the Greiner and Fahey governments from 31,000 to 23,500. That is a thousand beds per year cut by the Coalition.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I now turn to performance. New South Wales has the highest proportion of admitted patients arriving via emergency departments of 31 per cent compared with the national average of 29 per cent.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Australian College for Emergency Medicine report, which took a nationwide snapshot of the emergency department function in June 2007, reveals that New South Wales emergency departments performed the best out of five States. New South Wales was the only State not only to demonstrate a decrease in the number of patients waiting for a bed and the number of patients with access blocked, but also to show a significant improvement in performance when compared to three years previously. This is despite an increase in demand for emergency departments across New South Wales over the past three years. One of the State Plan targets is to achieve the national triage benchmarks for access to emergency departments. We met 100 per cent of life-threatening cases. We exceeded the national benchmark for triage category 2, triage category 4 and triage category 5, and significantly improved our performance for triage category 3 from 62 per cent to 71 per cent, close to the national benchmark of 75 per cent. On the issue of access

and equity, this year the New South Wales Government allocated an additional \$18.5 million for more elective surgery.

The Government's predictable surgery program will continue to target elective surgery waiting lists to achieve better results for patients. Waiting times have dramatically reduced in New South Wales. In June 2007 only 79 surgical patients were waiting longer than 12 months. In January 2005, this figure stood at 10,500 patients. Similarly, the number of people waiting longer than 30 days for urgent surgery stands at a record low of just 117 people. In January 2005 this figure stood at 5,296. Patients requiring admission within 30 days had an average waiting time of 12 days in June 2007, compared to an average waiting time of 70 days in January 2005. Patients requiring admission within 90 days had an average waiting time at 72 days in June 2007 compared to an average waiting time of 141 days in January 2005.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: I refer to the excellent publication *Practice, Procedure and Privilege*, specifically section 11.11.4. The question asked of the Minister was about the Australian Medical Association's comments in relation to occupancy rates. I refer you, Mr Speaker, to page 106 of this very good book, where it states:

The Chair is able to direct a member who is transgressing the rules regarding the relevance to cease speaking.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is an excellent point, but the Minister is relevant.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Another indicator of the good performance of the New South Wales hospital system is that patients requiring admission within 12 months have an average waiting time of 122 days in June 2007 compared to an average waiting time of 226 days in January 2005. There have been outstanding improvements in performance of the New South Wales hospital system, improvements that we would like to build upon with the cooperation of a committed Federal Government.

CITYRAIL FARES AND SERVICES

Ms SONIA HORNERY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport. Can the Minister update the House on the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal determination on CityRail fares and improvements to services?

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Today I can inform the House that the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal has approved increases to CityRail fares of between 20¢ and \$1 for single fares and between \$2 and \$3 for a weekly ticket. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, following its annual independent and public process, has approved the fare increases, to apply from 11 November. The approved increases mean that 88 per cent of adults who purchase a single ticket will pay 20¢ more and 77 per cent of adults who purchase a weekly ticket will pay \$2 more per week. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal fare determination process is an open and transparent one, with the tribunal taking submissions from members of the public on the fare increases sought before the determination is made.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I understand that the tribunal received over 110 individual submissions this year and the tribunal held a public forum to ensure commuters had their say in the proposed increase. No-one likes a fare increase but these are modest and reasonable increases that recognise the increased cost of running RailCorp; the record investment in the rail system; the improved reliability of our rail system, now at 92 per cent up from the 63 per cent on-time running before September 2005, and the need to maintain the balance between fare box revenue and support from the taxpayer.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I remind the Opposition that the fares process is independent. It is not up to the Government to assess the increase. This has not always been the case.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The Leader of the Opposition will remember the days when the Government simply approved fare increases without any independent scrutiny or public input. In the seven-year period

between 1988 and 1995 under the Coalition's watch and the stewardship of the father of the member for Manly, an old friend of this Parliament, fares went up on average by 48.7 per cent.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition, as Minister Baird's chief of staff, will accept his share of the responsibility for many of those increases. The difference is that the former Coalition Government did not have the external independent process that we currently have in place. This Government determined that consideration of fare increases should be done independently of the Government, which is why we established the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal process and why we stand by that independent process. Public transport is a major priority for this Government, which is why we are spending a record \$5.8 billion this financial year, an 11 per cent increase in one year over what was spent last year.

The fare rises approved today make up only a very small part of this massive investment. The extra revenue to CityRail from this increase will be \$22 million, while this year CityRail will spend an extra \$339 million. Just \$22 million of that will come from the increase. We are increasing investment in CityRail services and it makes sense for that cost to be shared partly with commuters.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Despite the increase approved today about 70 per cent of the cost of running CityRail services comes from taxpayers. Commuters' fares pay for less than one-quarter of the costs and today's determination by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal does nothing more than to maintain the balance. Members opposite are out of practice. They do not understand what it is like to be in government. They have forgotten that one must increase the budget in order to deliver improved services. That is what the Government has done. If none of it is coming from the fare box, it is going to come straight from the pockets of the taxpayers. The balance has to be right between the fare box and the taxpayers.

The members of the public in the gallery today who do not use CityRail services because the services are not in their area nevertheless are supporting CityRail services. Surely it is reasonable to have a balance between their support and those who use CityRail services. While CityRail costs have increased above the consumer price index, the cost of a train ticket has not kept pace with the consumer price index. In fact, train fares have increased by 1.4 per cent less than the rate of inflation since 2001-02. As inflation has gathered momentum we have not kept up with the cost of customers' tickets. It is worth making the point that rail fares are still reasonable, especially when compared to the cost of driving a private motor vehicle. Most reasonable customers will accept that if the train system is to improve, they will accept a reasonable increase in fares.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The member for Willoughby should do her homework. Just last week she claimed that CityRail figures showed that patronage on CityRail was falling and only this morning she claimed that services have become less reliable and less frequent. I am sorry to say that on all three the member for Willoughby was wrong yet again. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Over the past year that this fare determination covers, customers have told the Independent Safety and Reliability Regulator—

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: Point of order: My point of order relates to the Minister for Transport misleading the House. This morning the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal said that it is concerned that the efficiency of CityRail's performance, whether in terms of costs or labour productivity measures, is well below international standards. That is what the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal said about the Minister running the Transport portfolio.

The SPEAKER: Order! That was entertaining. I call the member for Willoughby to order for the second time. The Minister has the call.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The member for Willoughby can yell and be unpleasant, but it will not hide the fact that an independent review undertaken by the Independent Safety and Reliability Regulator, which every year does a review and surveys our customers, stated that customers said that services had improved.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: It was the customers saying that, and if it is a choice between the member for Willoughby and the customers who use our CityRail network, I will back our customers.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: On-time running has now improved to 92 per cent. It was at about 65 per cent. Contrary to the statement last week of the member for Willoughby, passengers are flocking back to CityRail in droves. In just the past 12 months there have been 10 million more passenger journeys on CityRail. That is a 3.7 per cent increase. On some of our busiest lines like East Hills, Bankstown and the western line there are increases of over 5 per cent. So people are coming back to CityRail. The member for Goulburn, who has been interjecting throughout my answer, constantly criticises CityRail services in her electorate. I can tell her that an additional 1.2 per cent of journeys have been made on the Southern Highlands line over the past year. So it is clear that communities are coming back to CityRail, and that is happening throughout this great city.

To ensure we continue to encourage people to use public transport, the Government has also asked the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal to review its long-term approach to determining CityRail fares. We want to place more emphasis on improved efficiency, quality, reliability, safety, and investment for the benefit of commuters. The terms of reference for the review have been available on the tribunal's website for some time now, and the tribunal has today released a paper for public consideration, which canvasses the issues it would like to hear about from the public. Submissions will be taken for the next few months, and I encourage anyone who has an interest in this matter to make a submission. I expect that this broader review will be concluded in time for the next determination of fares. In conclusion, I must say I was shocked by what happened in this Chamber earlier today when the Premier made a statement about reconciliation and the Opposition—

Mr Malcolm Kerr: Point of order: This is clearly a departure from what the Minister was asked.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not regard what the Deputy Premier has said so far as a departure from the question. I draw his attention to the question and ask him to continue.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: It is very clear from what occurred today that the Leader of the Opposition does not speak for the Opposition any longer. The Premier speaks for this side, but the Leader of the Opposition does not speak for the other side. There is a split within that party. I made no comment about the issue of reconciliation.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Premier will resume his seat.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The Leader of the Opposition no longer speaks for The Nationals in this State.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Premier will resume his seat. I place him on three calls to order.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, which deals with relevance. The question was not about indigenous affairs. What we have just heard is the most disgusting attempt to use indigenous affairs as a political wedge.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am sure the Deputy Premier is drawing to a conclusion.

[Interruption]

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: As I said, I made no comment about the debate on reconciliation. I simply draw attention to the fact that what happened here today was extraordinary: that the Leader of the Opposition no longer speaks for a united Opposition. I simply made a statement of fact. I have concluded my answer.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: When a point of order was taken on the Deputy Premier some three or four minutes ago you placed him on three calls to order, which clearly indicates to the House that he was out of order. The Deputy Premier then canvassed your ruling by continuing to speak.

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

MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Has the Premier failed in his first-day pledge to do more to help those with a mental illness, when two years into his premiership the Sentinel Review found that pressure on acute beds was a factor in at least three homicide cases and that child safety concerns are not documented in half of cases where the patient is a parent?

Mr Morris Iemma: Why don't you ask me?

Mr Andrew Stoner: I am asking the Minister for Health; she is responsible for mental health. You have failed, but she is responsible.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Leader of The Nationals has not caught on yet; there is actually a Minister for Mental Health, who would be very happy to provide the specific information—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals has interjected twice since he asked his question. I call him to order for the second time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Government is investing over \$1 billion in mental health this year, which is an 11 per cent increase on last year's budget and almost three times the allocation provided in 1994. This year we are investing in three key areas. We are investing \$3.5 million over four years to improve maternal and infant mental health through the new Safe Start Program. We are also investing \$4 million to address eating disorders. This funding will support inpatient treatment in both psychiatric and medical services, and expand community-based care, including support for families of people with eating disorders.

We are also investing in child and adolescent mental health, with \$15.8 million to be allocated over four years for new and enhanced child and adolescent outpatient services across New South Wales. Area health services will be funded to offer community care for children and adolescents with a mental illness and to improve the linkages between inpatient treatment and local community-based teams. In 2007-08 the Government's investment continues to focus on community care and practical solutions. An additional \$5 million has been provided for over 150 more places offering lower and medium-level support to people with mental illness through the Housing and Support Initiative, which provides support in the home.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: We are also investing over \$9.6 million to continue the programs that are delivering psychiatric emergency care centres at a number of hospitals and supporting emergency mental health in rural areas.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition will cease conversing.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: For young people, more than \$5.4 million will help to enhance and develop youth mental health services. For older people, we have provided \$37.3 million over five years to enhance specialist assessment and treatment services in community settings and promote better mental health, independence and quality of life.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: We have provided a further \$10.8 million to redesign specialist transitional units for older people suffering from severe psychiatric symptoms associated with dementia or other mental illness. The 2007-08 budget allocates nearly \$70 million for improved mental health facilities, part of an overall four-year \$2.4 billion program to build, redevelop, upgrade and refurbish health facilities in New South Wales.

NOISE CONTROL

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: My question is addressed to the Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water (Environment). What is the Government doing to protect neighbourhoods and communities from noisy neighbours and car hoons?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: Noise pollution can have a major impact on our quality of life. I know I am not alone in finding loud or persistent noise frustrating. Car alarms that wail for hours at a time, noisy cars and motorbikes, and loud music being played late at night are all an unfortunate reality of urban life. A recent survey conducted by the Department of Environment and Climate Change found that one in three people in New South Wales were affected by neighbourhood noise and that one in eight people were very annoyed or disturbed by it. Pardon the pun, but the message is loud and clear.

The impact of excessive neighbourhood noise is not just irritation; it can have a significant effect on our already busy lives. To anyone who has been woken by a car in the middle of the night, or has had a neighbour's music wake a baby they have just put to sleep, I have no doubt that new measures to address these issues will be welcome. The Government has reviewed New South Wales' Noise Control Regulation, we have consulted widely to ensure it reflects current community standards and we will make significant changes based on what the community has told us they want.

The Government consulted extensively with the agencies responsible for enforcing the noise regulations—councils, the NSW Police Force and NSW Maritime Authority—as well as with key industry groups and affected individuals. On the basis of these discussions, the Department of Environment and Climate Change prepared a draft proposal, which was released for public comment in June this year. Altogether, 227 submissions were received. This is one of the department's biggest responses to a draft regulation and it reflects the level of community interest in reducing the impact of unwanted noise on our lives.

I am pleased to say that the community strongly supported the proposed amendments, with many proposals attracting over 90 per cent support. The community overwhelmingly endorsed adjusting the time that noise from musical instruments and sound systems in residential premises may be heard by neighbours. The new regulation will bring the time limit down from midnight to 10.00 p.m. on Sunday to Thursday evenings. So the Government is not accused of being wowsers in this respect, the limit will still be midnight on Friday and Saturday evenings and any night followed by a public holiday. This is not the death knell of the backyard barbecue or the election night party. I also want to make it clear that this change is not designed to prevent people from playing instruments or listening to music after 10.00 p.m. It simply means people need to keep the volume down if it is affecting their neighbour. I think all of us would consider this fair and reasonable. Of those who commented on this proposal, 88 per cent agreed.

Over 90 per cent of submissions supported reducing the time that car and building alarms may sound before attracting higher penalties. A tiered system of penalties will now apply. For example, a car alarm will attract a \$400 penalty if it sounds between four and eight hours, where previously this penalty kicked in at 24 to 48 hours. Opposition members are shouting about on-the-spot fines. The important point about this fine system is that it is a warning system. It really is about getting people to talk to each other about the sorts of noises that are impacting on their lives. We encourage that. A warning is given and if people refuse to listen to the warning they will be fined. That is absolutely fair and reasonable.

Police and council records indicate that a significant number of noise complaints are about car alarms. The changes will mean that all car alarms must be designed to not sound for more than 45 seconds, whether continuously or intermittently, no matter what activated the alarm. This will discourage the use of poor quality alarms in the future and encourage the use of other means to reduce car theft, such as engine immobilisers. There will be a 12-month grace period for this provision, to allow industry time to adapt. Cars and motorbikes with noisy exhausts or modified mufflers are one of the most common causes of complaints, especially in urban areas. To address this problem, the revised regulation will make it more difficult for the cars we hear before we see to cheat the noise testing system by making it an offence to have temporary noise reduction devices. Again, this proposal was met with widespread community support.

The Government is also in the process of establishing a statewide network of approved mechanics to conduct noise testing and muffler inspections on vehicles suspected of being excessively noisy. Two new inspection stations are already up and running in Granville and Campbelltown. Over the next 12 months they will be rolled out across the State. One of the major benefits of creating this network is that the Government will be able to refocus its resources on compliance and enforcement activities in areas where noisy vehicles are a particular problem. The community supported all three proposals affecting boats, including making it an offence to emit offensive noise from all vessels being used on navigable waters, not just engine-powered vessels.

Finally, about 20 per cent of the submissions we received commented on leaf blowers. Opposition members may laugh, but this issue has occupied an enormous amount of the time of the Department of

Environment. These are the issues their constituents care about. I would listen, if I were them, because this is the feedback to the department. Over 90 per cent of those submissions wanted greater restrictions on the use of leaf blowers. Unlike some other articles controlled by the regulation—such as chainsaws and lawnmowers—leaf blowers are not currently required to have a maximum prescribed noise level or to have a noise label attached at the time of sale. I plan to raise this issue with environment Ministers from across Australia at a future meeting, with a view to establishing a national noise-labelling scheme. I am acting on the concerns of the constituency. The regulation will be remade by the end of this year and most provisions will come into force on 1 March 2008. The department has also revised its educational brochures on how to deal with neighbourhood noise issues and updated the guide for local government that helps council officers deal with day-to-day noise complaints.

From the outset, the Government has sought to take a common sense approach when it comes to these issues, balancing the rights of property owners to enjoy their property in peace but with the need to maintain peaceful and harmonious neighbourhoods. At the first sign of a problem with a neighbour we encourage people to go and have a chat to them about it. We want people to talk to their neighbours about these things. However, if people are in a situation where a noisy neighbour continues to cause them distress, the Government has new measures in place to help them resolve the situation.

TWEED ELECTORATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. A Tweed magistrate advised the Minister in August that he was being forced to send patients to jail because of the shortage of mental health beds. He made similar criticisms again this week in his report into a local suicide case. Why does the Minister need another review to tell her what is so clearly obvious? Tweed Heads is desperately short of mental health beds and her Government is putting lives at risk.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Tweed to resume his seat and redraft his question.

Mr John Aquilina: Point of order: Many times you have ruled that questions should seek, not convey, information. In question time the member for Tweed should ask a question, not make a speech.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: To the point of order: Yesterday the member for Lake Macquarie asked a question that was significantly longer and you allowed it.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Tweed asked a number of questions and then made a statement. I will allow the question, but as the member for Tweed is a new member of the Chamber I ask him, as I asked the member for Lake Macquarie, to have his questions looked at by the Clerks if he is in any doubt as to their admissibility. The Clerks provide that service. I ask all members to do the same.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The New South Wales Government is committed to providing improved mental health services within the North Coast Area Health Service. This financial year the mental health budget within that health service has been increased by \$6.6 million, which constitutes a 15.5 per cent increase for the financial year. Major service enhancements for mental health services funded in this year's budget include \$1.4 million to the North Coast Area Health Service to expand the award-winning mental health housing accommodation support initiative; \$200,000 for improved child and adolescent mental health services; \$450,000 for youth mental health for clients in the 14 to 25 age group; \$200,000 to the North Coast Area Health Service for the specialist mental health services for older people initiative; \$164,000 to the North Coast Area Health Services as part of the Aboriginal workforce initiative; and \$795,000 to the North Coast Area Health Service in the last financial year for the recruitment of mental health emergency care clinicians.

STANDARD MINIMUM JAIL SENTENCES

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Police. Can the Minister update the House on crime initiatives?

Mr Kevin Greene: This could take a month.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I thank member for Londonderry for his long-term interest in crime policy and policing matters. The Minister for Community Services interjected that my answer could take a month—I will do my best to ensure that it does not take that long. Serious criminals are one step closer to receiving tough new standard minimum jail sentences for offences such as the murder of a child and recklessly

inflicting grievous bodily harm. These provisions were approved by this place last night. The message to criminals is simple: If you commit a serious crime you deserve and will get serious time.

These standard minimum sentences deliver on our election commitment to increase sentences to match community expectations—an election commitment that the people of this State clearly voted for by returning the Lemmon Government. Victims of crime groups welcomed our reforms. What does the shadow Attorney General think about this policy—or should I call him by his proper title, the shadow Minister for the Director of Public Prosecutions? The best response that the member for Epping could come up with on 13 September was, "High sentences don't bring back the child or take away the hurt of losing someone." That sort of sentiment is a slap in the face for victims and their families.

Last night the House agreed to proposals delivering on our election commitment to introduce new aggravating factors that judges must take into account when determining sentences. The new aggravating factors include that the offence was committed in the presence of a child; the offence involved a grave risk of death to other persons; the offence involved the use of a stupefying drug; and the offender has prior convictions for offences of serious personal or sexual violence. As always, the member for Coffs Harbour, the man with the matches, finds this issue very funny. What was the response of the shadow Minister for the Director of Public Prosecutions? He wants all those factors scrapped. He objects to our law that when determining a sentence a judge should consider whether the victim was a police officer. He objects to our suggestion that offenders who abuse a position of trust or authority in relation to victims cop more time behind bars. The member's response is offensive.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Epping will cease interjecting. The member for East Hills will remain silent.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The member for Epping made his position clear last night when he said, "Section 21A should be scrapped."

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent.

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The Minister for Police was asked about Government initiatives. He has attacked me and described me as the shadow Minister for the Director of Public Prosecutions. All I did was put to the House the views of both prosecutors and defence counsel about the uselessness of the Government's bill.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Epping to resume his seat. I remind the member that when he is given the call to take a point of order he should state the point of order. I ask the Minister to return to the leave of the question.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The shadow Minister just showed his irrelevance by that attempt.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The Government believes that judgments should reflect community expectations. That is why we have designed these laws—although that is not the view of the Opposition. Last night the House also passed laws to abolish appointments for life of statutory legal officers, such as the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order: My point of order is relevance.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Epping to return to his seat. When he wants to take a point of order he should seek the call. His actions are very entertaining, but if he acts in that way for the next four years he will get very tired. I ask him to state his point of order and not make a speech.

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order: The Minister was asked a question about police initiatives. He is now moving on to an issue of Crown law, which has been dealt with in Parliament. That issue has nothing to do with police initiatives.

The SPEAKER: Order! Earlier I asked the Minister to address the leave of the question. He has only just recommenced his answer. I have yet not heard him deviate from my ruling.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: According to my recollection, the question was: Can the Minister update the House on crime initiatives? That is as Government members recall, and they have excellent memories. I would have thought that crime initiatives and the Director of Public Prosecutions are very much linked. It shows once again that the Opposition has no ideas. Opposition members have no ability to listen, no ability to contribute and no ability to concentrate. Last night the House passed laws to abolish appointments for life of statutory legal officers, such as the Director of Public Prosecutions. Life appointments are out of step with community expectations and are all but extinct in Australia. It is like the cooperation on that side of the House between the Liberals and The Nationals. It is almost extinct, as the Deputy Premier has pointed out.

In July last year former shadow Attorney General Chris Hartcher called the Director of Public Prosecutions "a high priest of a religious cult". That is an interesting comment from the member. He also promised to diminish the impact of the Director of Public Prosecutions' discretion over criminal prosecution. At the same time former Opposition leader Peter Debnam told the *Daily Telegraph* that he sees celebrity public servants such as Nicholas Cowdery as roadblocks on the path to progress.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: The Minister is breaching a number of standing orders, in particular, Standing Order 128 relating to matters before the Parliament and Standing Order 129 relating to relevance. The member for Londonderry asked the Minister a question about crime initiatives. The Minister's answer does not relate to crime initiatives. Last night a police car was stolen in the electorate of the member for Londonderry. Why did he not ask a question about that, if he wants to know about police initiatives in New South Wales?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. The question was very broad and the Minister's answer is relevant.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Former Opposition leader Peter Debnam said that celebrity public servants such as Nicholas Cowdery were roadblocks on the path to progress and that he would ensure Nicholas Cowdery would be the last Director of Public Prosecutions to enjoy lifetime appointment. The member for Vacluse nods in agreement with that comment. The Opposition's 2007 election policy document states:

We will end the practice of life appointment of the DPP by introducing a 7 year, non-renewable limit on tenure ...

While the Opposition embraced that policy before the election, now it wants to disown it. The current shadow Attorney General, or rather the shadow Minister for the Director of Public Prosecutions, disagrees with his own party's policy. He said so last night. What is the reason for the embarrassing turnaround?

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: What does Barry O'Farrell think? Nothing, as usual. No comment, no policy direction, no leadership. It has been a difficult six months for the error-prone member for Epping. At every opportunity he has run down our police. While he is always ready to speak up for lawyers and judges, he has called for the eradication of police prosecutors.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order again relates to relevance. The question was a very simple one about crime initiatives. The Minister is not speaking about crime initiatives. He should talk about the stolen car because whoever stole it will only get a \$300 fine.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: On 29 May the shadow Minister said in this place:

... the time is long overdue for all prosecution matters that are currently run by the Police Force to be handed over to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: My point of order is that the Minister for Police, throughout his speech, has launched into a series of personal attacks not only on the member for Epping but also on other Opposition members. If he wishes to speak about a member, he should use the forms of the House and do so by way of a substantive motion. If he wants to continue on this line, he should not do so during an answer on government policy. He should move a substantive motion against the member for Epping. If he does not do so, he is grossly out of order.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Minister that attacks on members should be made by way of substantive motion. I will allow the Minister to conclude his comments.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: That attack on the Police Force and police prosecutors suggesting that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions take over all the work of police prosecutors—

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Is this a point of order on the same matter?

Mr Brad Hazzard: Yes.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has not made any personal remarks in reference to the member since my ruling. I ask the member for Wakehurst to resume his seat. I will not hear further points of order on this matter. I have ruled on it and I am listening carefully to the Minister.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: This is the same Director of Public Prosecutions that the Coalition described as a "high priest" that it would remove. Unlike the Opposition, this Government supports police prosecutors and the very critical work they do. As a matter of policy and as a matter of principle we support police prosecutors, as we support all our police. In June, while debating the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Local Court Process Reform) Bill 2007, the Opposition again demonstrated pathological disdain for our police when the member for Epping said:

It seems that the Government is still caving in to the police.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: The Minister is flouting several standing orders, particularly the standing order relating to relevance. The Minister had the opportunity to introduce the bill, to make an agreement in principle speech and to reply. He did not even do it.

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

[Interruption]

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: This State's 15,206 police do an outstanding job. They work hard under difficult circumstances to keep our community safe. The Lemma Government will continue to support them.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: Mr Speaker, you drew the Minister's attention to the fact that if he is going to attack the member for Epping he should do so by way of substantive motion. He continued that attack, flouting your ruling. I ask you to direct the Minister to be seated or to move a substantive motion against the member for Epping.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has concluded his answer.

RYDE HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT FUNDING

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. In light of the opening of the Federal Coalition Government's funded after hours general practitioners clinic at Ryde Hospital, will the Minister guarantee Labor will not now make cuts to Ryde Hospital's emergency department to cover the \$10 million in budget overruns that have occurred in just three months at Royal North Shore and Ryde hospitals?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: We make a commitment to Ryde Hospital, as we do to all our hospitals across New South Wales, as demonstrated by the fact that we have delivered a \$12.5 billion budget. That represents a significant increase in the contribution by the State Government and it represents nearly one-third of the New South Wales budget. If the member for Lane Cove were serious about making a contribution to the public of the New South Wales, he would pick up the phone to his mates in Canberra and tell the Commonwealth Government that its lack of contribution is increasing the burden on this State's health economy.

Mr Anthony Roberts: Point of order: I draw your attention to standing order 129, which appears in *New South Wales Practice, Procedure and Privilege*.

The SPEAKER: I thank the Clerk very much for that book.

Mr Anthony Roberts: The question was quite specific. I would like a guarantee that services will not be cut at Ryde Hospital.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The member has merely repeated the question.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I make the point again that we have only ever increased our services; we have never cut them. The fact that the member for Lane Cove could ask that question off the back of the opening of a new service at Ryde Hospital demonstrates the extent of his hypocrisy.

The SPEAKER: Order! Question time has been rowdy.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier will cease interjecting. All members who have been called to order are now on three calls. Question time will be concluded in the appropriate manner.

SYDNEY WORLD MASTERS GAMES 2009

Ms CHERIE BURTON: My question without notice is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. What is the latest information on preparations for the Sydney World Masters Games in 2009?

Mr GRAHAM WEST: I am pleased to advise the House that the world's largest multisport event, the World Masters Games, will be held in Sydney between 10 and 18 October 2009. It is important that the games are in two years time because by that time all members of this House will be eligible to compete, including me, the member for Bega, the member for Pittwater and the Minister for Women. We will all be eligible to enter by 2009 because the minimum age for all sports is 35. This event is three times larger than the Olympics and is the largest multisport event in the world. It is currently a bipartisan project that I am proud to support. The shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation and I were at the Overseas Passenger Terminal for the launch two years ago. The New South Wales Government is supporting this event with \$8.5 million. I am pleased to say that in the spirit of bipartisanship on Saturday the Federal Government announced it would also contribute a further \$8.5 million. Clubs NSW has a sponsorship package of \$500,000 to encourage people to participate and to use its venues for post-match entertainment.

It will be a massive event. There will be seventy venues throughout Sydney, including Sydney Olympic Park, rowing and kayaking at Penrith, softball and soccer around Blacktown, cycling at Bankstown, beach volleyball on the northern beaches, water polo and basketball in the Sutherland shire, and some sports and the opening ceremony in the central business district. The oldest competitors involved in this event are into their nineties. It is a real participation event. If people are not interested in participating in events such as synchronised swimming, there are many other events—26 in total—for them to participate in. For example, the member for Murrumbidgee may wish to participate in the cycling. The member for Upper Hunter may wish to participate in the rugby union. The member for Mount Druitt could lead the parliamentary bowls team to victory in the lawn bowls. The Minister for Disability Services could take up her old career in basketball.

If competing is not your thing, you could recapture the Olympic spirit by joining one of 6,000 volunteers that will be needed to host this event. Or perhaps you will simply provide a warm New South Wales welcome to the 30,000 competitors, including 10,000 from overseas. It is estimated from previous games that on average these visitors, much to the joy of the Minister for Tourism, will spend about nine days touring the area and are expected to inject about \$100 million into the New South Wales economy. The Sydney 2009 World Masters Games will be a great event. I place on record our thanks to the Games Advisory Committee: Margy Osmond, Chris Jordan, Phil Coles, Bob Elphinston, Michelle Ford-Ericksson and John Moore. Jens Holm, the chief executive officer of the International Masters Games Association, declared that all was on track for a successful games in 2009.

WORKCHOICES HIGH COURT DECISION: CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr ROBERT OAKESHOTT: My question is directed to the Premier. Will the Premier reveal to the House the detail of advice received on which New South Wales agencies are now defined as constitutional

corporations following the landmark High Court ruling in *The States v The Commonwealth*, otherwise known as the WorkChoices case?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: As the member would be aware, according to the legislation, all foreign, trading and financial corporations are forced to operate under WorkChoices. The Government's position has been consistently clear: We have opposed WorkChoices because we believe it is a fundamental attack on the living standards of families. Workers get a substandard range of statutory protections to replace what were once comprehensive awards and agreements and there is no independent umpire.

I will outline to the member the advice received about the impact of the Commonwealth legislation when it was introduced, which indicated that a number of New South Wales government agencies might be subject to the WorkChoices legislation because public sector organisations that are statutory corporations could be characterised as trading or financial corporations for the purposes of the Commonwealth legislation. If those statutory corporations employed staff, their staff would be subject to the WorkChoices legislation. For example, a number of these organisations directly employ key front-line staff, such as nurses—

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: —allied health workers in the health area and teachers in our TAFE institutions. Many of those bodies could have been trading corporations for the purposes of the WorkChoices legislation.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Could have, but are not.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The member for Coffs Harbour is correct: they could have been defined as trading or financial corporations. Given the number of agencies and the wide range of activities that they undertake, it was impossible to obtain advice on each individual government entity. Accordingly, the Government decided to introduce the Public Sector Employment Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 to insulate and therefore protect New South Wales Government employees from the WorkChoices legislation.

The Deputy Premier, when introducing the legislation, stated that the Government believed that about 45 per cent of the New South Wales public sector could be exposed to the WorkChoices legislation. To ensure those employees were not subject to that legislation, the State legislation provided that they would no longer be employed directly by individual statutory corporations—which may or may not have had a trading corporation purpose—but would instead be employed directly by the Crown. As a result, those employees have been protected from the worst aspects of the WorkChoices legislation. I am advised that we have through this legislation successfully protected 180,000 New South Wales public sector workers.

Mr Robert Oakeshott: Point of order: My point of order relates to the question of relevance. My question was not about industrial relations and staff; it was about the agencies themselves and whether they are defined as constitutional corporations.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I covered that in the first part of the answer. I referred to trading or financial corporations and whether they are caught by the definition.

[Interruption]

Allied health workers work in health services, which were corporations. Nurses work in health services, and that is why the Crown now directly employs them.

Mr Malcolm Kerr: Point of order: The Premier has already covered that and he has answered the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I thank the member for Cronulla for his assistance.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Approximately 180,000 New South Wales public sector employees have been protected from direct exposure to WorkChoices. The bill did not cover State-owned corporations. Unlike the public sector corporations covered by the bill, State-owned corporations have unique structural arrangements. Although government owned, they do not represent the State. They are intended to operate as commercial entities and they largely operate at arm's length from the Government. However, State-owned corporations may

utilise referral agreements made under the Industrial Relations Act 1996—another State Government legislative initiative to protect working families from the worst aspects of WorkChoices—to continue to have matters dealt with by the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission. Further, State-owned corporations must collectively bargain with unions and must not enter into Australian workplace agreements.

SINGAPORE AIRLINES AIRBUS A380 FIRST COMMERCIAL SERVICE

AVIATION AND TOURISM

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY: I direct my question to the Premier. What is the Government doing to promote aviation and tourism in New South Wales?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Tonight Sydney welcomes the first Airbus A380 commercial flight to Australia. The Singapore Airlines flight is on its way with 455 passengers on board for the 7½-hour flight from Singapore to Sydney. This heralds a new era in air travel. It is expected in Sydney at about 5.30 p.m. I offer a special welcome to Captain Robert Ting and his fellow crew members. The A380 is one of the greatest developments in aviation since the Wright brothers took to the air. It is fitting that this new giant of the skies should come to our nation's oldest and largest international airport—the unrivalled gateway for Australian tourism. The A380 is bigger, faster, safer and more spacious than any other large aircraft. Above all, it is greener. It is the most fuel efficient and quietest aircraft in the world.

In the spirit of global friendship, I welcome this flight to Sydney. I will tour the aircraft before it departs Sydney Airport tomorrow. I also welcome the fact that this inaugural flight will raise about \$1.4 million for charity, including Sydney's children's hospitals. The arrival of the revolutionary Airbus is just one of the new developments in our aviation and tourism sector. This Government played a major role in securing a new daily service for Jetstar between Sydney and Osaka, which means an astronomical 110,000 more visitors every year to New South Wales. Etihad Airways is another airline that the Government has aggressively encouraged to keep investing in our State, and we have secured four extra flights a week to Sydney. This will deliver 50,000 extra travellers to the State, which will lead to an injection of \$20 million into the New South Wales economy each year and 20 extra full-time jobs.

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In recent times the Deputy Premier opened the new Emirates lounge at the international airport.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lane Cove will cease interjecting.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: It is a haven for weary travellers and a few wayward members of Parliament, or so I am advised. Members have promoted the wonders of the first-class lounge around the halls of Macquarie Street very eagerly this week, and I thank them for their promotion. I will inform the House of a conversation between the Leader of The Nationals and the member for Terrigal, which went something like this:

Mr Hartcher: You had better put on a tie, otherwise people will think you are a hack.

Leader of The Nationals: I will, but if I go too far the other way people might call me metrosexual.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: If the Premier really wants to invent conversations between people and trot them out I have one for him: What did David Tierney say to the Premier? I have the transcript right here: "Mr Premier, did you know that ..." I will fill you in later.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I remind him that he is on three calls to order. He should consider how he takes points of order in future.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The conversation went on:

Mr Stoner: Although I had my first facial the other day—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: Standing Order 129 clearly does not allow this sort of attack upon the Leader of The Nationals and the member for Terrigal.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier should stay within the leave of the question asked.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The conversation continued:

You know the new lounge at the airport? I was there the other day and you can get a facial. It was great. I had three therapists waiting for me at the same time.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: The standing order is No. 129, if you would care to look at it. It relates to relevance. If you are going to allow Ministers or anybody else in this Chamber to invent conversations and then somehow justify them by having them printed on a piece of paper, you set a very low standard. I know the standards you wish to set are very high. If you wish to set those standards high, you have to rule the Premier out of order and stop him from doing this. Otherwise, he is going to set a very dangerous precedent for himself.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Premier to ensure, if he continues his answer, that he complies with the standing orders and that members are not attacked. Apart from that, his response must be relevant to the question.

Question time concluded.

RECONCILIATION

Ministerial Statement

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will now respond to an important ministerial statement. I ask members to remain in their seats.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [3.43 p.m.], by leave: I respond to the Premier's statement given before question time today regarding reconciliation with our Aboriginal people. I remind members that most of the State's Aboriginal communities are located in country areas. The Nationals are proud to represent most of country New South Wales. The Nationals, who are acquainted with the social and economic disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal people in their communities, have long sought to improve their quality of life. It is breathtakingly hypocritical for the Premier to mouth platitudes in this place about bipartisanship and then refuse to allow The Nationals the opportunity to respond to his statement on reconciliation. It is a longstanding convention that on important matters such as this the leaders of the three parties contribute. That is what happened when Parliament last made a formal statement of apology to the indigenous people of this State.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: Recently The Nationals undertook a tour of Aboriginal communities in western New South Wales and, I have to say, there is a long way to go to overcome that social and economic disadvantage. For example, the average life expectancy of an Aboriginal male in far western New South Wales is 33 years. That is unbelievable in this country in the twenty-first century. Aboriginal people in New South Wales are 12 times more likely to be incarcerated than the population in general. The retention rates in high schools in New South Wales are the lowest in the nation. We saw chronic drug and alcohol abuse and their ramifications upon Aboriginal families, including domestic violence and child abuse. I shudder to tell this place of the things we saw and heard but they included young children in Aboriginal communities in New South Wales with sexually transmitted diseases.

The Nationals are happy to support a statement about reconciliation, but we want practical reconciliation—that is, dealing with the issues highlighted in the Breaking the Silence report, which the Government has had since May last year. However, the Government has taken little or no action to implement its recommendations. I can say from experience that the people who spoke, who, at some risk to their own safety, bucked the leadership in their communities and spoke of the tragedies within their communities and families, feel betrayed that this Government has failed to act on those recommendations. In the spirit of bipartisanship—or should I say tripartisanship—I welcome the Premier's statement, but I seek action, because actions speak louder than words.

If the Government is fair dinkum about reconciliation it must act on the recommendations of the Breaking the Silence report. It must resource and implement a whole-of-government response—police, Department of Community Services, Department of Health, Department of Education and Training and other agencies—to tackle the chronic drug and alcohol abuse, to stop the drug dealing and trafficking, to lock up the paedophiles, and the wife and child bashers, and to provide better support for the victims of domestic violence

and child sexual abuse. Lastly, to the Premier and to the Leader of the House, be genuinely bipartisan—or should I say tripartisan.

Mr ROBERT OAKESHOTT: On a topic such as reconciliation it is time for certain conventions to be broken. I ask that leave be given to permit the member for Port Macquarie, the member for Tamworth, the member for Dubbo, the member for Sydney and the member for Lake Macquarie to speak to the motion on reconciliation. I ask for the same reasons that the Leader of The Nationals asked. The Independents did not have the privilege of a behind-the-chair negotiation

Leave granted.

Mr ROBERT OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [3.47 p.m.], by leave: I thank the House for allowing the five Independent members to speak to what is a very important motion and what I consider to be one of the most significant topics all of us in this Chamber can and should work on for a better New South Wales and Australia. Plenty of negative stories are told about Aboriginal history, Aboriginal culture and relationships with Aboriginal people. However, I hope all of us recognise the good and positive stories, and that as much focus, if not more focus, is put on the positives. Government can adequately fund reports such as *Breaking the Silence* and there are issues of interagency plans versus *Breaking the Silence*.

The Commonwealth is intervening in one Territory in Australia because of the maltreatment of children, when it has a poor record in other States and Territories around Australia. Negatives are discussed in the media and in parliaments, both at a State level and the Federal level. However, for what it is worth, I, as the member for Port Macquarie, see many good stories in the communities we represent. I will talk about those today. We hear during Federal election campaigns—I am sure we will hear them much more over the next five weeks—discussions about the importance of the family and the importance of strong law and order policies.

I hope that anyone with any connections to our indigenous communities would recognise that no section of our community has more belief in the family unit and family structure than indigenous communities. Anyone who has read and understood the, at times, quite punitive law and order policies of indigenous communities would recognise that respect for elders and respect for the laws of indigenous communities are often the envy of many people in this Chamber. Many members talk about spirituality in political terms. History shows that no greater spirituality can be found than that in indigenous communities throughout New South Wales and Australia.

We are only just coming to terms with an appreciation of the land and defining it under the term "climate change". Indigenous communities have been teaching us about the land for many years, yet Europeans have only just come to the table and recognised the importance of our land. In the debate about conciliation—and in some people's minds still, self-determination—I hope we do not get caught up in the negatives but that we, as a Parliament and as individuals, highlight and celebrate the positives.

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [3.51 p.m.], by leave: I speak briefly on the important matter of reconciliation and ask what actions we are taking on reconciliation. The Leader of The Nationals said that it is more than making a statement; it is doing something practical. Indeed, we should have been doing something a long time ago. I was fortunate to have been raised in a multicultural community that comprised people from all walks of life—indigenous people, Greeks, Italians and Yugoslavs. I grew up in an atmosphere that encouraged me to accept everyone and not to be judgmental.

When was the last time a member of Parliament who spoke about reconciliation walked the walk and talked the talk? When did a member have an indigenous person in their home for a cup of coffee, or give in indigenous child a kiss or a cuddle—in the presence of a carer, of course, because one has to be careful these days—rather than just saying what people want to hear? I have been reading the Dubbo health service vision directions strategy. The health record of indigenous people is appalling; they do not enjoy the same level of health as the wider community.

The Greater Western Area Health Service has the highest age adjusted death rates in New South Wales, mainly because the Wiradjuri nation in Dubbo has the lowest level of access to health facilities in the State. The death rate from coronary heart disease and diabetes are the highest in the State, while injury and poisoning rates are also high. Asthma death rates and hospital separation rates are higher than other State averages for males and the highest for females. Pulmonary diseases and hospital separation rates are the highest in the State for males. Factors contributing to these health problems are the high incidence of smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, and

obesity among indigenous men and women. Indigenous communities have much lower than the recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables and poor exercise habits. More concentration must be placed on action rather than words of support for reconciliation so that these appalling figures recorded by the Greater Western Area Health Service can be improved. Indigenous people should be supported with programs, not money in the pocket.

I asked a question in the House of the Minister for Housing about the Federal Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, withdrawing funding from indigenous housing and redirecting it towards remote communities. I accept that the Northern Territory needs assistance, but Wilcannia is also a remote community and it should not be denied funding for its housing needs. Much has been said about domestic violence and the rights of children. This is a problem in all communities throughout New South Wales, not just indigenous communities. I shall finish on a positive note. Last week in this House I made a private member's statement about Gary Shipp, head of Dubbo campus, which is part of Charles Sturt University. He is the first Aboriginal person to be in charge of a university. Indigenous teachers outlined their programs to improve truancy rates and encourage indigenous children to finish high school and obtain university education. I am disappointed that not one member of this House has acknowledged the wonderful program I announced last week.

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [3.55 p.m.], by leave: I am honoured to contribute to this debate. Reconciliation is one of the most important things that our country can do for the future and it is something that has been dear to my heart for a long time. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to grow up on an Aboriginal mission for the formative years of my life. I spent 5½ years at Wallhollow Aboriginal mission where my father was the headmaster of the school. I met people there who are still very close friends of mine whom I see on a regular basis. The life expectancy gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is something we should be ashamed of. I am also privileged to say that I have been working closely with an inspirational man, Father Ron Perrett, who has worked his whole life to try to redress the imbalance between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. He does not just talk the talk: he walks the walk. I offer my public support for everything he is trying to accomplish.

I live in the middle of the Kamilaroi nation. They are a very proud people. When I was young and growing up on the Wallhollow Aboriginal mission I was fortunate to have a delightful man, an elder of the tribe by the name of Charlie White, influence my life. I cannot speak highly enough of him. He taught me not only to value the Aboriginal culture but also to respect myself, to have integrity, to value others and to value opportunity for others. I have fantastic memories of my childhood and many of those are thanks to that one man, who means so much to me. Other speakers have said that we need a whole-of-government approach to address the issue. I am 100 per cent convinced that is right. It is not something that can be done in isolation. Today's gathering in the Parliament is very important. It is an opportunity for people from all backgrounds to put aside differences and stand together to improve the lives of young people in the future.

I am encouraged by the quality of young people in the Aboriginal community I see around Tamworth, Gunnedah and Werris Creek. They are grasping at opportunities and making the most of chances that were not available to previous generations. We must celebrate the positives, as the member for Dubbo said. One of the big positives in my local area is the Aboriginal employment strategy, which has done a sensational job in providing employment for many people. It is now a common occurrence to walk into a bank, a building society, a hairdressing salon or other retail outlet and see an Aboriginal face. That is one of the keys to breaking down some of the differences and lack of opportunity. Congratulations to every member who has supported the ministerial statement made by the Premier. We have a long way to go, but with the right attitude we can get there.

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [3.58 p.m.], by leave: I, too, wish to express strong support for the ministerial statement made by the Premier. On every occasion as a member of Parliament I have taken the opportunity to express my strong support for members of the world's oldest culture, the indigenous community. I have significant indigenous populations in my electorate of Sydney, and there are significant indigenous populations in the City of Sydney, which I lead as lord mayor. That is why, before every function or event in the city, I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

It is with great honour and pleasure that the city always involves itself and supports important events such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands Day of Observance Committee Week. I am very proud of the community centre in Redfern, at the Block; I think it is probably one of the finest community centres ever built. It is used by more than 40,000 people each year, it has extremely innovative and exciting programs,

particularly for young indigenous people, and it is also provides opportunities to lead them on to employment. Many success stories have come out of the Block, from employment opportunities for young indigenous people to the wonderful aunties and uncles sessions we hold there regularly during the week.

One of the most important projects the city is undertaking at the moment is Sustainable Sydney 2030, and one of the important communities we are working with to plan for the future of a sustainable city is our indigenous community. In April last year I was very pleased on behalf of the City of Sydney to sign the Principles of Cooperation together with the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, representing the indigenous custodians of the City of Sydney. This is of great symbolic significance because this is where the Europeans first arrived, the City of Sydney. The signing of those Principles of Cooperation was extremely important. The agreement formally recognises the community, spiritual and cultural ties to the land and waterways, and commits us to working together to foster reconciliation, promote Aboriginal culture, and establish a framework to consider development proposals affecting indigenous heritage.

The agreement was signed in the presence of the New South Wales Governor, Marie Bashir, and co-signed by our then acting chief executive officer, who played a key role in negotiating the agreement over 18 months. Significantly, the principles were signed at the Redfern Community Centre in an area that many people recognise as the heart of the Aboriginal struggle for land, justice, co-existence and recognition. In the months that followed the signing of the agreement, the City of Sydney strengthened its commitment through the development of a strategy and action plan for Aboriginal people.

I am pleased to say that I made a grant of \$10,000 from my lord mayor's salary trust to help two indigenous students from the City of Sydney undertake tertiary studies in 2006-07. That grant was given through the Robert Riley Scholarship Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, which is overseen by the Foundation of Young Australians. The scholarships will help the students study law, human rights, child protection, criminology and juvenile justice. I do not have sufficient time to refer to the matters I would like to cover, but I will conclude by expressing my very strong support for reconciliation, both as the member for Sydney and as the Lord Mayor of Sydney.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [4.02 p.m.], by leave: As an elected representative I have found that the most important part of our relationship with indigenous people is mutual respect. This respect has value when it is earned and not assumed. In Lake Macquarie the Awabakal people are the traditional owners and custodians. I have had a lot to do with them over the years in my role in council. The indigenous community represents some 2.3 per cent of the community of Lake Macquarie, which equates roughly to the percentage of indigenous people represented within Australia.

This year's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands Day of Observance Committee Week marked the fiftieth anniversary of the committee and celebrated the survival of indigenous culture and indigenous contribution to modern Australia. I was very pleased to participate in the local celebrations at Toronto. I participated in flag-raising ceremonies at the courthouse, followed by a street march, which finished with a gathering at Toronto foreshore. I have seen the value indigenous people have placed on this event and the respect that flows from it. The participation by non-indigenous people in the event carries great weight in showing that people value a cohesive community.

I wish to see a move to practical solutions to the issue of reconciliation. These can be found in listening to and supporting leaders within the Aboriginal community. I trust that the ministerial statement in this Chamber today is a further step on an inexorable path to a true reconciliation. I place on record my support for any persons of good faith who are pursuing this goal.

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Report

The Deputy-Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 78 of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, the report entitled "ICAC Annual Report for 2006-2007".

Ordered to be printed.

OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

Report

The Deputy-Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 13 of the Annual Reports (Departments) Act 1985, the annual report of the Office for Children entitled "Annual Report 2006-2007: Financial year ending 30 June

2007", incorporating the annual report of the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People for the year ended 30 June 2007, together with two children's version of the report entitled "Feedback 2007", and the annual report of the Children's Guardian for the year ended 30 June 2007.

Ordered to be printed.

CHILD DEATH REVIEW TEAM

Report

The Deputy-Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 26 of the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998, the report entitled "Annual Report 2006".

Ordered to be printed.

POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION

Report

The Deputy-Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 103 of the Police Integrity Commission Act 1996, the report entitled "Annual Report 2006/07".

Ordered to be printed.

PETITIONS

CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee

Petition requesting the removal of booking fees charged to pensioners on CountryLink services, received from **Mr John Williams**.

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**.

Edgecliff Interchange Upgrade

Petition requesting the upgrading of Edgecliff interchange, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Breast Screening Funding

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

Lismore Base Hospital

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

Hornsby Palliative Care Beds

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

Daffodil Cottage, Bathurst

Petition requesting that Daffodil Cottage remain in its entirety for the treatment of cancer patients for the Bathurst electorate, received from **Mr Gerard Martin**.

Licence Laws for Older Drivers

Petition asking for an inquiry into licence laws for older drivers and the implementation of a suitable licensing system for senior citizens, received from **Mr John Turner**.

Pet Shops

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

Department of Housing Graffiti Removal

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

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**.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY**Public Service Politicisation**

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [4.07 p.m.]: Last week the Premier criticised my attack and claim that we need to focus the public service of New South Wales away from the needs of Labor politicians and back on the needs of the public. There can be no clearer example of the need to refocus our New South Wales public service than what the Liberal and National parties have been highlighting in this place over the past two weeks. Whether it is the "Breaking the Silence" report on Aboriginal child abuse, an issue raised in this House today, whether it is the Sentinel Review report on the suicides of mentally ill people across our community, the treatment of children at risk of harm across New South Wales, or the deplorable outcomes within our public hospitals, there is a common pattern from members opposite: deny the problem, blame others, but, more importantly, blame the Federal Government.

The "Breaking the Silence" report is perhaps the worst example of the way in which the Government pretends to fix issues but fails to do so. The report detailed horrific sexual abuse of children in Aboriginal communities. But was it met with the increased funding it sought? No. When the budget committee sought to consider the report, it was rejected. It was not until the Federal Government took action that we started to see action from the State Government in relation to some of those matters.

Time and again we hear from the State Government claims of increased funding for the Department of Community Services and for mental health services, yet we hear from our hospitals, the Department of Community Services and mental health services about the failure of that money to reach those who are most in need. Despite the latest Sentinel Review report, which indicates that at least three people died because they were pushed out of hospital because of pressure on beds—

Ms Virginia Judge: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The Leader of the Opposition is supposed to establish why his motion should be accorded priority over the motion of which I gave notice.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough. The remarks of the Leader of the Opposition relate to the context of the debate.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The ignorance of the member for Strathfield covers the State like a blanket and there is not a hole in it. She does not know the standing orders or anything about the book *New South Wales Legislative Assembly Practice, Procedure and Privilege* that was tabled this week.

Ms Noreen Hay: Point of order: The personal attack on the member for Strathfield is not in line with what is supposed to be happening here at the moment.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I take the point, but the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition is within the ambit of the discussion.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I leave 20 cents here. The member for Wollongong can go and ring her friends, but I want the change. I am appalled that the member for Strathfield and the member for Wollongong would seek to prevent a debate on child abuse within Aboriginal communities, on people with mental illness who died after being forced out of hospital because of a shortage of beds, children at risk of harm not getting the support that their families are calling for from the department, and the conditions of our hospitals. All that does is sum up what is wrong with the Government. It does not understand what is happening on the ground. It does not understand that after 12 years of Labor Government the service has gone from the public service.

Too many public servants are forced to respond to the political needs of those opposite instead of responding, as they want to, to the children at risk of harm in our community, the Aboriginal children at risk of abuse within Aboriginal communities, the mentally ill people crying out for assistance and who not only harm themselves—the latest Sentinel report indicated how many did harm themselves—but are murdering other people because they do not get the treatment they need. People like Sara Claridge and Jana Horska are put through the horrors of hell because those opposite, like the members for Strathfield and Wollongong, think all is okay in the State of New South Wales. If there is an example of why we need to refocus this State Government—

Ms Virginia Judge: Point of order: The Leader of the Opposition is misleading the House. He is casting aspersions on the integrity of the member for Wollongong and myself. It is totally inappropriate.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The ignorance of the member for Strathfield is now spreading beyond the State borders and there is still no hole in the blanket. We need to refocus the Labor Government on the needs of the people of New South Wales.

Australian Technical Colleges

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.12 p.m.]: My motion should be accorded priority because the Commonwealth Government has wasted over half a billion dollars to establish 28 standalone Australian technical colleges that operate outside the established vocational education system and serve the Commonwealth Government's extremist industrial relations agenda. In New South Wales, after a period of three years, this has amounted to only four colleges having opened and trained only 500 students. Look at Opposition members scattering like little mice out of the Chamber; they cannot face the facts. The motion should be accorded priority because if the Commonwealth Government had committed these funds to establishing vocational providers, such as TAFE NSW and schools, then thousands more of our students would have been trained in skills shortage areas. This motion is urgent because after the election a new government will be able to rectify the situation. The Commonwealth Government's Australian technical colleges have been a monumental waste of money and an unmitigated policy disaster. The colleges have been an absolute failure. [*Quorum called for.*]

[*The bells having been rung a quorum was formed.*]

Pursuant to standing orders business interrupted.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

F3 SEAHAMPTON TO BRANXTON LINK ROAD

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [4.18 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the much-needed Seahampton to Branxton F3 extension, which has been talked about and planned for the past 25 years. This

infrastructure will be a major benefit to the Hunter and north-west regions of New South Wales. Since 1986 the communities throughout those areas have been banging on about this corridor and the need for funding commitments to be forthcoming. For the information of members, that is a period of 21 years. Planning for this important infrastructure has almost been completed and it is at the stage where a commitment of funding from the Federal Government is required for its construction.

In November 2005 the State Government, through former Minister for Roads Tripodi and confirmed by Minister for Roads Roozendaal in June 2007, made a strong commitment to providing the New South Wales component, and as soon as the Federal Government money is put on the table the State Government will provide the funding. The Federal Government will fund 80 per cent of the project and the State Government 20 per cent. It is now time for the Federal Government to make a commitment to fund the project. I have raised this issue many times in the House. The member for Maitland also raised the issue on 17 October and called for a commitment from the Federal Minister.

The Link or Sink group in the Hunter, headed by Fred Brown and Toby Thomas, has agitated for this project for a long time and is keen to see it up and running. The group has gathered a great deal of information on the project, and I am concerned about some literature that has been handed to it. The group has threatened to protest in early November by lying on the New England Highway until a commitment is made to the project. I have grave fears for the safety of those who will be involved in that protest. The group is concerned that both sides of Federal politics have not made a commitment to the F3 link road. They have asked and will continue to ask for funding to be committed to the road. In a letter to Federal member Mr Ferguson, Fred Brown, the group's coordinator, stated:

The link is in Federal and State Labor held seats but pork barrelling which you referred to does not come into the equation because we are referring to an important National road link, which has been on the drawing board for at least sixteen (16) years and some interested people say fifty (50) years.

The Link will cut out nineteen (19) sets of traffic lights and three (3) roundabouts between Branxton and Beresfield and five (5) sets of traffic lights and three (3) pedestrian crossings in the main street of Cessnock on the Branxton to Freemans Waterhole route.

As important, ten (10) schools, cumulative on both routes, will be nullified by this unobstructed Link.

In that letter the group is seeking a commitment from both sides of Federal politics. In a letter dated 4 October in reply to Fred Brown's letter, Martin Ferguson stated:

... I confirm my previous advice that now that Auslink 2 funding has been finalised, I will continue to consult the New South Wales Government on Federal Labor's project priorities for the next four years. This will be based on agreed corridor strategies—to which the New South Wales Government is already a party—and strict criteria for other Auslink programs.

Federal Minister Jim Lloyd, in a letter dated 13 March, said that the revised cost for the project was \$765 million and that the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Department of Transport and Regional Services were looking at ways to bring forward the project. He said he expected a decision on construction in the immediate future. As the member for Cessnock I request that the Federal and State governments make a very strong commitment to this project. The benefits of this project will extend much further than the electorates of Cessnock and Maitland. This link road is important to the whole of the State.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.23 p.m.]: I congratulate the hardworking member for Cessnock on raising this issue on behalf of his community, which is obviously very passionate and committed to the project. The member referred to two of his constituents, Toby Thomas and Fred Brown, who are promoting the project. They do not get paid for this work; they do it voluntarily. They give up their free time, working collaboratively with their local member, to make sure that relevant issues are brought forward. I hope for collaboration between the State Government and the Federal Government, which would have the available funds, to ensure that this project goes ahead.

SPECIAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO SYDNEY FERRIES

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [4.24 p.m.]: I talk today of the concerns of Manly residents about the Manly ferry service, the inquiry into Sydney Ferries and the inquiry recommendations that are to be handed down next week. Following today's question time, it would be remiss of me not to talk about concerns within my community. The Premier engaged in frivolous recounting of conversations between members and the Minister for Police slandered the member for Epping. The State's public hospitals are in crisis and the Department of Community Services lets young children die in its care. The New South Wales Police Force is

now failing in the enforcement of crime. I call on the Premier and his Government to take their responsibilities far more seriously than was demonstrated in the House today.

As to the inquiry into Sydney Ferries, I congratulate Bret Walker on the work he has done. When I asked about making the Manly community a core component of the inquiry, he listened. I asked him to listen first-hand to the people who make up almost 50 per cent of Sydney Ferries customers as to why 432,000 fewer passengers used the service than in the previous year, complaints had increased by 49 per cent and delays and cancellations had increased 38 per cent on the previous year. I asked him to inquire about the impact of the declining service on our community. He attended a forum and listened to clear and constructive contributions. At the forum between 200 and 300 local constituents and commuters gave a voice to the problems, 50 to 60 made contributions and hundreds made submissions to the inquiry.

The key concerns that were raised during my consultation with the community were the integration of the service with buses, customer service and, in particular, parking. All the concerns provide a case for change, but, as always with change, there is community concern that things may get worse. The community of Manly and I are open to the recommendations that Bret Walker hands down. We are keen to have them address the problems. We have one message for Bret Walker and, indeed, the Minister as he reviews the recommendations: Hear our voice. We want to use the service and we ask the Government to address our concerns.

In relation to the changes, I need to be very clear about the parameters on which the community will judge Mr Walker and how the Minister deals with the recommendations. Those parameters include maintaining all existing services and giving consideration to increased services during peak times. Any new vessels must not be inferior to existing ferries and Jetcats and must be more environmentally friendly. The community is passionate about that. Fares should not be increased to make up for past mismanagement. The management of Sydney Ferries has been under attack. I will not refer to the number of chief executive officers Sydney Ferries has had. One statistic tells it all: over the past five years Sydney Ferries revenue has increased 14 per cent but expenses have increased 46 per cent. Today the Minister for Transport talked about reasonable fare increases. It is not reasonable to ask commuters to fund poor management.

Management must be made more accountable and the contracts of management tied to performance. Customer service surveys must be undertaken. There must be an essence of reliability and a focus on patronage growth. A focus on patronage growth will result in commuters using the service and fewer cars being on the road. The whole system will start to work. Senior management must be stable and must have a long-term sustainable plan. Management cannot be thinking about short-term patronage numbers. Maintenance and safety must be made a priority. The member for Willoughby made a compelling case to have the inquiry examine safety. I implore the Minister to heed the call to make maintenance and safety a priority. Finally, there must be more investment in customer service. Better customer service will drive commuters to use the ferry service. Again, I ask that Bret Walker and the Minister to hear our voice and listen to the desires of the community. If the Government invests in the service in the way we have asked, we will follow and use the service.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.29 p.m.]: I thank the member for Manly for speaking about our wonderful ferries. Who does not love the ferries and the great service they provide? It is good to hear that many residents who use the service have taken the time to make their views known, because that is what consultation is all about. We want to hear what people have to say and we will listen to those views.

HAMMOND CARE SOUTHWOOD NURSING HOME

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai) [4.30 p.m.]: On Wednesday 17 October I was honoured to attend the official opening of Hammond Care's Southwood Nursing Home by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, Governor of New South Wales. Chief Executive Dr Stephen Judd pointed out to Her Excellency that in November 1932 her predecessor Sir Phillip Game officially opened Hammond's first nine Pioneer Homes. This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary year of this wonderful organisation's presence in Hammondville, a suburb within the Menai electorate. The Hammondville settlement was envisioned and established by Canon Robert B. S. Hammond, the Minister of St Barnabas' Anglican Church, Broadway. By all accounts he was a man of deep compassion and worked tirelessly to practically assist the poor, especially during the dreadful years of the Great Depression. Hammond realised that, "Shelter for the family is the most acute problem today."

In September 1932 he sold his personal life insurance to purchase 13 acres of bushland 2½ miles from Liverpool. The land was cleared and nine very basic cottages were built in just two months. The scheme

expanded and increased to 110 cottages over the next five years. The village also acquired a community hall, a church, several shops and a primary school. Reverend Bernard Judd carried on Canon Hammond's good work after his death. In the early 1950s Reverend Bernard Judd was determined to direct the organisation's efforts and resources to what he called the "new emergency" of the plight of the needy aged. It soon became apparent that nursing care was also an essential component. Right from its innovative and humble beginnings, Hammondville had been conceptualised as a village, but even more importantly as a home.

In 2007 this commitment to a home-like environment is being amply demonstrated still in the latest and highly impressive development, Southwood. Like all the residential services that Hammond Care has built over the past 14 years, Southwood is specifically for people with dementia. But in direct contrast to the current trend for nursing homes to be larger and more institutional, Southwood comprises six individual cottages. It has the same key design principles of all Hammond Care's recent buildings: it is small, domestic, familiar. As Chief Executive Dr Stephen Judd said at the official opening:

The building scale and fit-out is domestic. The kitchen is the heart of this home; and it is not a pretend kitchen, it is not a servery. It is a fully-functioning kitchen where all the meals are prepared, just like at your home. Residents, as they are able, will be involved in meal preparation. Regardless of a resident's ability, the smells and activity of a kitchen are an important cue to the rhythm of the day.

Hammond Care works hard to ensure the focus is on what is best for the resident. Independence and growth in self-esteem are promoted and the individual's right to privacy is respected. There are few locked doors and they are not obvious. The technology used to discreetly monitor the movement and wellbeing of residents, particularly in their rooms at night, must be a great comfort to the residents' families. Day and night, buzzers and alarms alert only staff as such noises can distress people with dementia. There is one aspect about Southwood that is different from Hammond Care's other residential services: it has a special care program for up to 16 residents.

The focus of this program is one cottage, Linden Cottage, which has been purpose-built for those who are unable to be cared for in mainstream or even dementia-specific nursing homes because of their severe and challenging behaviours. The additional annual funding of about \$1 million necessary to support the special care program comes from NSW Health and is the result of an agreement with Hammond Care in conjunction with the local area health service. I have spoken in this House before about the excellent training and support Hammond Care provides for its staff. Another comment by Dr Judd on the day revealed the underlying motivation for this impressive commitment. He said:

Hammond Care's strength is, however, not in bricks and mortar. As it was in Canon Hammond's day, the strength lies in the people that build the community - and here I mean our staff. Our strength is the people who have made this happen today - and who will continue to make it happen tomorrow.

Southwood was named after Ida Southwood, who was Hammond Care's first employee. She was Hammond's secretary and the company secretary. It was a fitting gesture to recognise the organisation's first employee in its seventy-fifth year. In relation to the successful completion of this project, Dr Judd acknowledged Joy Robinson and Paula Pearce, Southwood's manager and deputy manager, as well as property manager Michael Cooney. Thanks were also offered to Sue Hunt, Helen Croft and Bruce Collier for their hard work and long hours. Tim Burke's achievements in relation to the interior design were obvious to everyone present. The effort of Angela Raguz, Hammond Care's General Manager, Services Development, was described as awesome. Her passion and insistence about getting it right would be readily verified by the architects, Allen Jack and Cottier, and the building company, Grindley. Bill Clements and Glynn Evans from Allen Jack and Cottier and Alan Carstens and Bob Southerton from Grindley were acknowledged.

Last but by no means least, I know that Dr Judd would want me to particularly mention Glen Wood, the site manager from Grindley, who did such a fantastic job. Hammond Care's commitment to excellence is evident in every aspect of its operations. I know many local families who are pleased and relieved to have their vulnerable loved ones in the care of Hammond Care. In this ageing population and with increasing levels of dementia, I urge all members to have a look at what Hammond Care does for our older people.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.35 p.m.]: I commend the hardworking and committed member for Menai for letting us all know about this wonderful organisation, Hammond Care, which provides a personalised approach in looking after the vulnerable members of our community. It is great to hear of the work of that organisation. If the organisation ever opens a home in one of our electorates, we will know it does a good job looking after seniors, particularly those with dementia, because the member for Menai has spoken highly of it. Putting these people in a small house makes them feel as though

they are in their own home and being cared for with love and compassion. Mr Hammond's spirit lives on well in the seat of Menai.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [4.36 p.m.]: Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed. Today I inform the House of the success of Australian athletes competing in the 2007 Special Olympics that were held in China. The Special Olympics is an organisation that dedicates itself to helping people with intellectual disabilities to develop self-confidence and social skills, to enhance their physical fitness and to develop a feeling of accomplishment by means of training for and competing in sporting events. For members who may not know, the 2007 Special Olympics was the biggest event on the 2007 international sporting calendar, with Australia being strongly represented by a 130-person team participating in 11 sports. We won a phenomenal 49 gold, 50 silver and 27 bronze medals.

In particular, I outline the fantastic achievements of Susan Philip and Craig Read, two competitors who hail from my electorate of Tweed. These two competitors spent two weeks in China. In addition to competing in their respective sporting events, they were able to immerse themselves in the local culture. They were assigned a host town and they thoroughly enjoyed themselves. They participated in a wide range of activities, including local cooking, ribbon dancing, Chinese writing and visiting a local kindergarten school. Susan, who is 37 and lives at Tweed Heads south, competed in the 10-pin bowling competition and won two gold medals. She won one of her gold medals in the women's singles division, where she beat her rivals from the United States and Belgium by 11 pins. She won her other gold medal as part of a four-person team that topped the team standings in the competition and ultimately blew away their second-placed and third-placed rivals, Malaysia and China, by more than 200 points. I know Susan and I have no doubt that she is over the moon with her achievements as a representative of Australia. Congratulations on a top effort, Susan!

Craig, who is 36 years old and lives at Upper Burringbar, competed in the golfing competition as a member of an eight-person Australian contingent for this event. He competed at the Shanghai Tianma Country Club Golf Course and narrowly missed out on winning a medal. Craig's scores of 97, 90 and 95 for each 18-hole round of the competition saw him take out fourth position in the competition, which ranks him in fourth position on the world for this competition. Congratulations to Craig on a fine performance! I also acknowledge the achievements of 18-year-old Kieran Lendalls, who hails from just outside the Tweed electorate. Kieran had an outstanding performance on the golf course that saw him tie with a Swedish competitor for the gold medal in this event. That is an excellent achievement and one I am sure Kieran and his family are extremely proud of.

I acknowledge some of the people who made these athletes' dreams a reality. First, I congratulate Kevin Borger, Craig and Kieran's golf coach at Murwillumbah, for all his hard work and guidance. Kevin, the boys could not have done it without you—well done! I also commend the local Tweed community for its support of these athletes. The generous donations from the community assisted not only these two Tweed athletes on their trip to China, but also a number of other members of the broader Australian contingent.

In addition, I must also thank the generous hosts in China, who helped make it a truly worthwhile and thoroughly enjoyable experience for these athletes. I have read in the local Tweed paper that Craig has said of his Chinese hosts, "After being spoilt over there, I'll have to get used to life at a home." Fine praise indeed! I also acknowledge the volunteers. Without their help, the smooth operation of this Special Olympics would not have been possible. These volunteers not only assisted athletes with other languages, they even came to the events to cheer on the athletes.

I take this opportunity to encourage more Australians to become involved in the Special Olympics event by volunteering to assist disabled athletes in achieving their goals in the international arena. I feel that if we encourage students at school to become involved in some of the various programs available to disabled students we are likely to see an even greater Australian representation at the next Special Olympics. Hopefully, national coverage of the next Special Olympics will be better than that experienced at the 2007 event to ensure that Australia can see the extraordinary achievements of intellectually disabled athletes. Congratulations to all of Australia's representatives on their outstanding achievements at the 2007 Special Olympics. You have done Australia proud and I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.41 p.m.]: I thank the member for Tweed for bringing the Special Olympics to the attention of the House. People with disabilities face huge challenges. To have this opportunity to compete internationally is a fantastic thing. I congratulate the People's

Republic of China for hosting the event. I am sure that all athletes were made to feel very welcome. On Sunday I had the privilege of cutting the ribbon to start the Walk with a Buddy for people with Down syndrome. My buddy had just returned from the Special Olympics, where he won the silver medal for golf. He was over the moon. I thank the member for making a fine speech.

ESTONIAN RELIEF COMMITTEE

Mr PHILLIP COSTA (Wollondilly) [4.42 p.m.]: I also congratulate the member for Tweed for his contribution. I am proud to have within my electorate the home of the Estonian Relief Committee at Thirlmere. This facility is renowned for its close relationship with and support of immigrants from Estonia escaping the oppressive communist presence in Estonia in the 1940s and 1950s and finding security and prosperity in Wollondilly. Their settlement in our community became embedded across the wider community of Wollondilly as families flourished and carved a future through hard work, dedication to family and enterprise.

Charles Dickens once said, "Reflect on your present blessings"—which these people do—"of which every man has many; not your past misfortunes of which all men have some." The Estonian community in Wollondilly has done just that and in return they have prospered and brought much richness to our nation. The Wollondilly area has benefited from this greatly with cultural diversity and friendship, hardworking farmers, a high quality retirement village and an overall attitude of appreciation of and gratitude to our country. The Wollondilly Heritage Society, the Powerhouse Museum and the Thirlmere community have developed an exhibition portraying the contribution the Estonian community has made to our national prosperity.

The Republic of Estonia is situated in North Eastern Europe and was one of the many eastern European countries that suffered under the Soviet regime in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1940 a mass exodus began as a result of the Soviet policy of deporting Estonians, expropriation of property and severe restrictions on cultural life. By the end of 1949, most Estonian farmers had been forced to join collective farms. Increased political repression and the deportation of Estonians continued until the death of Stalin in 1953. Some of the Estonian immigrants have built new lives and homes here in Australia and are to be commended for their success and ability to focus on making the best from what they have.

The Estonian Village at Thirlmere is a major centre for Estonian expatriates who settled the many small family farms that are still peppered across the rural sectors of Wollondilly. Over many decades they have supplied the Sydney market with poultry products and fresh fruit. The Estonian exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum portrays the hardships the families endured as they carved a livelihood from a very harsh environment. This outstanding exhibition will remain at the Powerhouse Museum until 2008. I recommend that members and their families find time to visit the exhibition to appreciate the contribution the Estonian community has made to our contemporary society.

They transformed the land into a highly productive agricultural industry. They did not look for handouts; they simply got on with the task of surviving in a foreign land that had very little resemblance to that which they once called home. Hot, dry landscapes, foreign vegetation and virtually no transport facilities faced them as they arrived at Thirlmere. They brought with them the Estonian way of doing things and a deep sense of family and community. Today Thirlmere is a thriving small community with country charm and facilities that continue to develop. In fact, the Iemma Government is investing \$14.6 million to redevelop the transport museum at Thirlmere, which will bring significant economic benefit to our community. The Estonian community has also been involved in that project.

In the decades that followed their arrival, the very large Estonian community at Thirlmere reached out across the Wollondilly community and other areas of Australia and helped to develop the culture we now all share. I congratulate Mr Rampe and his committee for the wonderful leadership they give to their community and the vision they have for the future. The retirement village at Thirlmere offers an outstanding level of service for the elderly, offering not only quality care but also a sensitive cultural context for the many Estonians who choose to move into a retirement village. Plans are being developed to expand the facilities at Thirlmere, which will result in a significant extension of the great work of this organisation.

Last week I had the pleasure of attending a luncheon with the Estonian community at Thirlmere. Our guest was Sir Arvi Parbo, who spoke about the harsh reality of the journey to Australia and the road to prosperity and the security they enjoyed in their new home. Sir Arvi spoke about the importance of remaining vigilant in our modern world to ensure that the tyrants they experienced do not emerge again. He articulated his deep appreciation for the opportunities he and his people have received in this great country of ours, and that was very evident as he shared his stories with us.

We in Wollondilly have now established formal links with Viljandi in Estonian. A number of local residents have travelled to Estonia at their own cost to meet with the Governor of Viljandi, Kalle Kuttis. The governor has warmly welcomed our community into his homeland. Over time I anticipate that we will be able to bring both nations closer together as a result of the deep relationship we share built upon respect, appreciation, dignity and hard work. I look forward to a great future with our new partners in Estonia.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.47 p.m.]: I commend the member for Wollondilly for his incredibly interesting private member's statement. It was fascinating to hear what the Estonians have done to contribute to the prosperity of our great nation. It was instructive to hear about all the activities in which they participate in his electorate. With him as their new member of Parliament, their concerns and issues will be in very safe and proactive hands.

WILLOUGHBY ELECTORATE ROADS, ROAD SAFETY AND TRANSPORT

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [4.48 p.m.]: Roads, road safety and transport are critically important issues to the constituents of Willoughby. The majority of the correspondence I receive at my electorate office is about those issues. Therefore, it is of extreme concern that the Minister for Roads has an appalling record in responding to constituent correspondence. I will address the records of other Ministers on other occasions. I appreciate that the Minister for Roads has various responsibilities, but it is unsatisfactory some correspondence received in my office that was forward to him more than two years ago remains unanswered.

I have promised constituents who have written to me and whose representations I have forwarded to the Minister that I would raise those concerns in this place. I have raised their specific concerns, but today I will note on the record all the outstanding correspondence which has been sent to the Minister for Roads and to which he has not responded. On average, I send correspondence to the Minister every three weeks about these outstanding representations, but that does not appear to have any impact on him. It concerns me that he thinks that the issues are unimportant, that he could not be bothered responding or that he does not care about northern Sydney.

Some concerns relate to statewide issues and some are specific to the Willoughby electorate. For example, representations made on 14 September 2005, more than two years ago, relating to a proposed cycleway/pedestrian path in Northcote and Ruth streets, Naremburn, still remain unanswered. On 31 October 2005, constituents wrote to me about the impact of the Lane Cove Tunnel on local residents in Naremburn, but they have still received no response. On 1 November 2005, constituents wrote to me about the Cross City Tunnel project in Cammeray, and they still have not received an answer. On 10 November 2005, residents wrote to me about the noise break in Sexton Place, Cammeray, and they have still not received a response. On 27 March, residents in Willoughby South wrote to me about Lane Cove Tunnel planning condition 229, and they still have no response from the Minister.

Representations made on 21 July 2006 by Cammeray residents about access to the Warringah Freeway are still unanswered. Representations made on 26 July 2006 about the pedestrian overpass at Falcon Street relating to the Lane Cove Tunnel project in North Sydney are still not answered. Representations made on 2 August 2006 related to the impact of the Lane Cove Tunnel on Artarmon residents are still unanswered. Representations made on 19 October 2006 about the road surface between Fullers Road and Boundary Street, Chatswood—which remains a safety concern—are still not answered. Representations from 17 December 2006 by residents from Neutral Bay about the Falcon Street pedestrian and cyclist facilities have still not been answered. On 31 January 2007, residents in Naremburn wrote about the Flat Rock Bridge on Willoughby Road, Naremburn, and that has still not been answered.

Neutral Bay residents raised the impact of the new Falcon Street ramps as part of the Lane Cove Tunnel project on 28 February 2007, and there is still no answer. Representations made on 4 April 2007 about traffic issues along Mowbray Road, Lane Cove are still not answered. The lane markings project along the Pacific Highway between Help Street and Mowbray Road has still not been completed and representations made on 25 May 2007 about that issue have still not been answered. On 13 July 2007 Chatswood residents raised road safety issues along Fullers Road, Chatswood, and they are still not answered. Representations by a Chatswood constituent on 9 August 2007 regarding the employment of a school-crossing supervisor still have not been responded to. On 17 August a constituent in Chatswood raised concerns about street lighting, and that is still not answered.

On 21 August this year a Northbridge resident wrote about a pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Sailors Bay Road and Harden Avenue, and there has been no response. On 24 August this year a constituent in Artarmon wrote about noise walls between Hampton Road and the North Shore overpass, and there is still no answer. On 10 September a constituent from Lane Cove wrote about the impact of the Lane Cove bus interchange development, and there is still no answer. On 14 September 2007 residents in Artarmon wrote about the impact of the Lane Cove Tunnel on residents, and there is still no answer.

I could continue with much more correspondence from constituents, but I do not have time today. In an important portfolio such as Roads, it is critical for a Minister of the Crown—or the Parliamentary Secretary at least—to respond in a satisfactory way to constituents who raise concerns. Some of these concerns have been ongoing for more than two years. Some concerns relate to local road issues, which are the responsibility of the State Government, and some concerns relate to statewide projects, such as the Lane Cove Tunnel project. It is simply unsatisfactory for the Minister for Roads to think he can ignore these constituent issues. He has a responsibility to respond, even to constituents in northern Sydney.

PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS CHRISTMAS CARD COMPETITION

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [4.53 p.m.]: For some years now I have been running a Christmas card competition and all primary schools within my electorate are invited to participate. This year—as has been the case in the past—a number of schools participated. Once again, the standard of the artwork by the year 3 students was very high. The judges had a difficult task in selecting a winner from a total of 183 entries. Other students' artworks were judged to be worthy of special commendation. I am pleased to inform the House that this year's winner of my Christmas card competition is Chloe Parsons of Gosford East Public School. In the near future I will present Chloe with an Australian Geographic voucher for \$50. The school's principal, Mr Graeme McLeod, will receive a cheque for \$200 to Scholastic, enabling the school to purchase new resources for the school's library. Chloe's winning artwork, together with her name, the year she is in and the name of her school will be proudly printed on my 2007 Christmas cards.

The students who will receive a highly commended certificate and a \$10 Australian Geographic voucher are Matt Stokes from Gosford East Public School, Delaney Boschuetz from Woy Woy Public School, Lachlan Corda from St John the Baptist Catholic Primary School at Woy Woy, Holly Franich from Point Clare Public School, Kalisha Chidgey from Woy Woy South Public School and Martin Liaina from Kariong Public School. All the other participating students will receive a certificate from me recognising their efforts. I congratulate Chloe, Matt, Delaney, Lachlan, Holly, Kalisha and Martin on their outstanding artwork. I look forward to presenting them with their awards in the near future.

I extend my congratulations to all the students who participated in this year's competition and I thank their teachers for their cooperation. The principals of all the participating schools, Mr Graeme McLeod of Gosford East Public School, Ms Ona Buckley of Woy Woy Public School, Mr Frank Cohen of St John the Baptist Catholic Primary School Woy Woy, Mr Lee Oliver of Pt Clare Public School, Mr Mick Tattam of Woy Woy South Public School and Mr Terry Greedy of Kariong Public School, together with their teaching and office staff, do an outstanding job in ensuring that all their students receive the very best education available in a caring and safe environment. I commend them for the high standards they all pursue and consistently maintain.

A good, rounded education is what every parent or carer desires for their children. We are very fortunate in this State that we have schools that can meet and exceed their expectations. Next year I intend to run my Christmas card competition again, with the ever-ready assistance and cooperation of my wonderful electorate office staff. Artwork is a wonderful way in which students can express their inner feelings in an outward way. I encourage all primary schools in the Gosford electorate to participate next year and I look forward to receiving a record number of entries.

Today, it being 25 October, we are exactly two months away from celebrating Christmas. Although it may be a little premature, I take this opportunity to extend the compliments of the forthcoming Christmas season to the principals, staff, students and members of the industrious parents and citizens associations and parents and friends associations within the electorate of Gosford. They all do an exceptionally good job in assisting young people in their journey through life. Today I pay special tribute to all of them.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.58 p.m.]: I congratulate the extremely hardworking member for Gosford. I note her passionate interest in education. She has spoken about education in this Chamber a number of times and she is always actively involved in her local schools.

I commend her on her initiative to encourage schoolchildren to be part of designing her Christmas cards. It is a fantastic idea. She makes available cheques for the schools and for the winner. That is incredibly generous. The people of Gosford, particularly the schools and the students, are lucky to have someone like Ms Marie Andrews as their local hardworking member.

SANCTUM FACTORY AND PACIFIC HIGHWAY ROADWORKS

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina) [4.58 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a disgraceful situation that a business in the Ballina electorate has been placed in since the construction of the Brunswick Heads to Yelgun Pacific Highway upgrade commenced some time ago. This business, Sanctum, located at Billinudgel, manufactures skincare products and provides jobs for 20 local residents. Sanctum's factory, which is located within metres of the new road, has been severely affected by the dust, vibration and noise that occurred during construction. The owner of the business, Mr Greg Milham, has made many approaches to the Roads and Traffic Authority and Abigroup seeking advice and assistance with the difficulties he has experienced. He has had no satisfaction from these parties, which led him to write to the Minister for Roads in January this year. To date he has had no response from the Minister.

This business plays an important role in the economy of the Ballina electorate. Mr Milham sells Sanctum products nationally and internationally. Since construction of the upgraded highway commenced he has lost approximately 60 per cent of his business. He has suffered losses due to contamination of product batches. He was forced to cease production completely between December 2006 and February 2007, leading to cancellation of orders and an inability to meet supplier deadlines. Mr Milham has also been forced to carry out modification works to his factory to deal with the contamination issues, which have cost him around \$125,000. The works included installing an air filtration unit, as well as lining and sealing the factory walls and ceiling.

During the seven-week shutdown of the Sanctum factory, Mr Milham was unable to continue to employ his casual staff. His permanent staff agreed to either job share or take up accrued leave. He estimates that the business lost \$10,000 per day during the seven-week closure. Mr Milham has been forced into the situation of having to sell his home to pay for the losses incurred due to the vibration and dust pollution caused by the construction work.

I am not disputing the requirement for the Pacific Highway to be upgraded: to the contrary. Neither is Mr Milham, for that matter. However, this Government persists in literally bulldozing through peoples lives, homes and livelihoods without proper consideration or compensation for the effect the work has on those unfortunate enough to be in their way. Mr Milham is just one of many people who have tried to seek answers from the Minister but to no avail. I am also still awaiting a response from the Minister to my request on behalf of 200 residents of the Ocean Shores area for a meeting with a small delegation to discuss the problems they have with noise.

Mr Milham commenced communication with the Roads and Traffic Authority and Abigroup in October 2005. Throughout construction Mr Milham attempted to raise the issues as they evolved with the relevant parties. After 46 emails to the Roads and Traffic Authority and Abigroup he was finally advised that he would have to take legal action to address his complaints. This is an appalling response to the situation. Due to the losses Mr Milham was already facing, taking legal action was not a financially viable option. Moreover, it should not be necessary for him to commence legal proceedings.

In his communication with both the Roads and Traffic Authority and Abigroup, Mr Milham attempted to offer compromises in relation to the operation of his business. Yet the construction parties could not pay him the courtesy of advanced warning of works that would create dust and vibration. He was not afforded the opportunity of mitigating damage to stock or limiting disruption to production. His requests for alleviation measures went unheeded. When he could not gain satisfaction from the construction team, he sought assistance from the Government. Again, he has been ignored.

I call on the Minister to at least pay Mr Milham the courtesy of a response. Surely he is entitled to that much. This situation is indicative of this Government's uncaring and insensitive attitude towards the residents of northern New South Wales. Mr Milham is one of many people who has been unfairly treated and affected by the upgrade of the Pacific Highway. I have previously called upon the Government to address the lack of provision for just compensation to those parties affected by the highway upgrade, both during construction and after completion. To date virtually no steps have been taken by this Government to accommodate these unfortunate people. Through no fault of their own, they are left out in the cold to deal with the ramifications of the highway

construction themselves. They are often unable to relocate due to the decreased saleability of their property or the enormous costs involved in moving. They are left to endure a stressful situation with no alternative or compensation offered.

Mr Milham, along with most of the affected residents, accepts that the highway must be upgraded. Indeed, it is something the majority of residents on the North Coast have wanted for many years. But it is a gross injustice that affects these residents, who are willing to be proactive; they want to work with the Roads and Traffic Authority and construction companies to alleviate the effects. They attend meetings and contact the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Minister for Roads, but they are ignored and unheard. I call on the Minister for Roads to address the issues I have raised today relating to Sanctum and Mr Milham at the very least.

NATIONAL FIRE CADET CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith) [5.03 p.m.]: This evening I speak on behalf of the people of Penrith about the inaugural national fire cadet championships held from 5 October to 8 October at St Paul's Grammar School in Penrith. Teams travelled across New South Wales and interstate from Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia to compete for the fastest time while correctly and safely completing the 11 events. I commend Anthony Head, the coordinator of St Paul's cadet rural fire service unit and his committee for their dedication and initiative in organising and coordinating these championships. I commend also the Rural Fire Service and the Rural Fire Service Association for being major sponsors of the events. I acknowledge also John Collier, Principal of St Paul's Grammar School, which hosted the championships.

Members may remember that 5 October and 6 October were very hot days and a time of extreme fire danger. The school provided shelter and refreshments to the competitors. The cadets are part of school-based or volunteer brigade programs. I congratulate St Paul's Bravo, which came first; Orchard Hills, which came second; Oakville, which came third; St Paul's Alpha, which came fifth; and the Blue Mountains cadet unit, which also participated. It should be noted that St Paul's Grammar Rural Fire Service cadet units were the New South Wales State champions in 2003 and 2006. These units comprise 50 students from years 7 to 11, who train once a week in firefighting, communications, map reading, team work and leadership. They also participate in community service activities and regular camps. On at least one occasion they have participated in Clean Up Australia Day at a site that I hosted in Kingswood. I appreciated their work at the local park.

St Paul's Bravo group consisted of Jonathan Wong, Cameron Varcoe, Joseph Maloney, Alex Casalini and Reed Bryce. The Orchard Hills group consisted of Christopher Mallia, Rebecca Gillespie, Nicholas Edwards, Aaron Cochrane and Heather Gillespie. I note that one of the Gillespie girls was the captain of that team. The Blue Mountains Alpha group consisted of Amanda Rich, Dorji Hall, Rachael Hardy, Michelle Clarke, Luke Achland and Karl Zeizinger. The Blue Mountains Bravo group consisted of Daniel Sloan, Kane Haslam, Cory Kaslam, Tim Hindler and Mathew Cordie.

The cadets participated over two days in different timed events. I observed part of the day with Minister Rees, the newly appointed Rural Fire Service Commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons, and my parliamentary colleague the member for Londonderry. We noted that the types of activities undertaken by the New South Wales cadets were about precision and safety whereas the Victorians concentrated more on speed. With the relay event the cadets had to unfurl pipes, blast images and then get back within a certain time. It was interesting to see how quickly they could do it. Teachers from interstate and parents helped out during the two days of events. I note also that the Rural Fire Service has a cadet program in State high schools and that Nepean High School participated in the cadet program this year.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.08 p.m.]: I commend the hardworking member for Penrith for bringing to the attention of the Chamber the work of the Rural Fire Service, particularly those wonderful young cadets. Often we do not know what is going on in other electorates and it is pleasing that the member is so supportive and involved. Indeed, some of the events sounded quite dramatic: She is an adventurous woman. These young people are volunteers, which is an important part of our Australian values—people who do something for nothing. The fact that these young people are involved in such an organisation augurs well for the future.

PRINCES HIGHWAY

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [5.08 p.m.]: Over the past four years that I have been a member of Parliament I have spoken in this House on countless occasions about the Princes Highway, but still the road

has not improved. Last weekend the communities of the far South Coast lost another member, Vicki Peterson, who was well known to many throughout Narooma, Bermagui and, more recently, Merimbula. Unfortunately, Mrs Peterson passed away last Sunday following a head-on collision on the Princes Highway. What is particularly tragic is that she lost her 18-year-old son only seven months ago on the same stretch of highway between Narooma and Cobargo. I do not know what the Government can do about this problem, other than members on both sides of the House doing everything in their power to try to improve the road.

Over the past few days people have contacted my office to draw my attention to concerns they have raised directly with the Roads and Traffic Authority about the Princes Highway. I know the community of the Bega electorate pass on their heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the Petersons, and I am sure members of this place would also want to pass on their condolences. The accident in which Vicki Peterson was killed followed another accident that occurred very close by only two weeks earlier involving a Wollongong man who lost his life. Last night another very serious accident occurred on the Princes Highway north of Batemans Bay, and people involved in that accident are now fighting for their lives. Again our heartfelt condolences go to the families and friends who are directly affected.

Once again I place on record the ongoing concerns of local communities in relation to the Princes Highway, particularly the stretch of road between Narooma and Cobargo. Back in 2004 Bega electorate residents Dianne and Tony Pye wrote to Trish McClure, the Road Safety and Traffic Manager of the Roads and Traffic Authority in the southern region, to express legitimate concerns about sections of the highway with regard to speed, road characteristics, alignment and roadside development. There are bridges on the Princes Highway between Cobargo and Narooma where two trucks cannot pass each other. The Princes Highway is a State road—and I will not get into an argument about that. Suffice it to say that the Roads and Traffic Authority has responsibility for it.

What is particularly concerning is that the Roads and Traffic Authority carried out a road safety audit on this section of the highway back in 2004. A confidential, but leaked, document from the Roads and Traffic Authority states that the section of the highway south of the Bermagui turn-off is a very narrow alignment that makes drivers feel like they are in a "container". The document further states that there is a need for a widening formation or safety barrier protection. These improvements have not been carried out. It is incredible that the Roads and Traffic Authority has put together a document that talks about this section of highway, where fatality after fatality has occurred, and simply says it is a very narrow alignment that makes drivers feel like they are in a "container".

Tens of millions of dollars are spent on road projects in Sydney and Western Sydney, but we do not see that funding spent on the Princes Highway. I implore the Minister to examine the Roads and Traffic Authority road safety audit that was done in 2004, and to release documentation showing the work that has been done since that audit was released and what is planned for the highway in the next five years. The community of the Bega electorate is broken-hearted by what has happened. Given that the State coronial inquest will begin in April next year, I hope that the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Minister take into consideration the tragedies that are occurring on the Princes Highway.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT EXPENDITURE SCHEME RECIPIENTS

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [5.13 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the commitment by Canada Bay Club, which is located in the State seat of Drummoyne, to the Community Development and Support Expenditure Program and its recipients. On 17 August 2007 I had the pleasure of attending Canada Bay Club's Community Development and Support Expenditure recipients presentation luncheon. This year Canada Bay Club distributed in excess of \$120,000 to 17 organisations. This gave the club the opportunity to support and sponsor many well-deserving organisations in the local community.

The Community Development and Support Expenditure Scheme, which was set up by the State Government, is designed to ensure that larger registered clubs in New South Wales contribute to the provision of front-line services to their local communities, and to ensure that disadvantaged members in the community are better positioned to benefit from the substantial contributions made by those clubs. Canada Bay Club's commitment to supporting the community continues to grow, with the strengthening of its relationships with local schools, day care centres, our local hospital, and charitable organisations. An example of this is that the club is now the principal sponsor of the Inter Lions Soccer Club, which has more than 600 players from under fives right through to senior grades in the local community.

Louis Salvagio and Robert Salerno from Inter Lions Soccer Club were presented with \$30,000. Inter Lions is the leading soccer club in the inner-west region, having won two consecutive club championships in 2005 and 2006. The money will go a long way towards supporting the young soccer stars of the future. Ann Roberts and Rosemary Parsons from Lucas Gardens Special School received \$15,000. The money will go towards the school's plan to create an additional playground for children who have severe physical and intellectual disabilities. Play equipment for children with disabilities is a highly specialised field and it is not found in the community at large. The equipment will be accessible and safe for children with both intellectual and physical disabilities.

Virginia Walker from Bridge for Asylum Seekers was presented with \$11,000. The funding from the Canada Bay Club will provide urgent basic living allowances, especially for the healthcare needs of 11 asylum seekers, including two families with young children who are living in the Canada Bay area. These asylum seekers are in Australia on bridging visas, which deny them the right to work or to access Medicare or any government benefits. There are currently 101 asylum seekers in the greater Sydney area. These people totally depend on Bridge for Asylum Seekers for money for basic food, clothing, pharmaceuticals and medicines.

Wendy Castelao and Debbie Lorry from Abbotsford Community Centre were given more than \$7,000. The Abbotsford Community Centre is run by volunteers and services the local community. It runs independently from Abbotsford Public School as a non-profit organisation providing out-of-school-hours care to children from kindergarten to grade six. The funds from the Canada Bay Club were utilised for the purchase of products on the centre's wish list, which includes educational books and toys, play equipment, jigsaw puzzles, and musical instruments and furniture, to ensure the children in the Abbotsford Community Centre have an adequate balance of physical activities, arts and craft, problem-solving skills and fun.

Jackie Brosnan and Alison Travis from St Mark's Primary School received \$3,000. St. Mark's Primary School wishes to expand its current parenting program, which also includes local community parents. The committee endeavours to achieve this by arranging seminars, which are open to the community, on a broad range of issues facing parents. Kylee Blackwell and Paolo Polimeni from Inner West Neighbour Aid received \$4,000. Inner West Neighbour Aid funding was used to facilitate training sessions, focus groups, volunteer recruitment and support expenses for the Beyond Home Transitional Care Project. Beyond Home links trained volunteers to work with clients on a one-to-one basis in the client's home to provide social support and practical assistance during their transition from their home into a residential aged care facility or other alternative living arrangements.

The money allocated by the Canada Bay Club under the Community Development and Support Expenditure Scheme will go a long way towards assisting these 17 fantastic groups in our local community. I commend the club for undertaking the project and making so many groups extremely happy. The club's profit for this year has increased by more than 50 per cent on the previous year due to some of the measures it has implemented, as well as the revitalisation program and an increase in club membership. The valuable contribution of the club's outstanding caterers—Enrico Indorato in the Brassiere and Mr Wing and his partners in the Wings restaurant—has attracted not only club members but also visitors from the inner west.

I acknowledge in particular the outstanding work undertaken by Maureen Heywood, the chief executive officer, who was appointed on 1 April 2007, and her dedicated management team and staff, which includes David Raiti, the marketing and functions manager; Adam Lewis, the operations manager; Andrew Trent, the supervisor; and Annette Graham, the receptionist. They have all worked hard on a daily basis to ensure the club's success. I also acknowledge the board of directors, president Robert Kirby, vice-president Charles Stephan, executive director John Idotta, and directors Sam Failla, George Aziz and Connie Trimboli. Congratulations to the club on its outstanding work in our local community.

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.18 p.m.]: Community Development and Support Expenditure grants to groups in the Canada Bay area will be very well received. Grants totalling \$120,000 to 17 organisations are no small fish. The State Government deserves credit for setting up this initiative, which has certainly contributed to the provision of services for all areas of New South Wales. In the Wallsend area, Wallsend Diggers Club has been extremely generous in its provision of Community Development and Support Expenditure grants, particularly to sporting clubs. One of the clubs to which the member for Drummoyne referred supports a disadvantaged group that plays netball in the local area. The group has a great time. People in the group are able to get out and about, exercise, and have some intellectual stimulation as well. I commend the State Government for the Community Development Service Expenditure grants, and I commend the member for Drummoyne for her initiative in bringing the matter to the attention of the House.

NERINGAH HOSPICE, WAHROONGA

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [5.20 p.m.]: Neringah Hospice at Wahroonga is a wonderful facility that serves not only my electorate but also several other electorates from surrounding districts, but it is under threat. It is essential that the hospice and its 10 beds, which were reduced from 19, be retained. If they are not retained in the hospice, which is owned by Hope HealthCare Limited, they must be transferred to the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital. A report that has not been officially released—although I have a copy in my possession—casts doubt upon the future of the palliative care hospice. The staff feel they have already received unofficial confirmation that the beds will be lost and the services transferred to Greenwich. This would force the carers and families of dying patients to travel to a distant suburb to visit their loved ones.

Nurses employed at Neringah also face an uncertain future, as the relocation would force them to work elsewhere. Staff and patients are very worried about the impact of the move away from familiar surroundings, family and friends on extremely sick and dying patients. Neringah is a family. My congratulations go to the caring nursing, medical and ancillary staff. Congratulations also go to the organisation known as Friends of Neringah, under the capable chairmanship of Jeanette Batchelor, which has done a great deal of work. As a nurse with 24 years experience, and a community nurse with 7½ years experience with the Sydney Home Nursing Service, I know well the importance of keeping this facility in the environs of Hornsby.

On the many occasions on which I have sought a bed from Neringah for respite or crisis care it has always responded positively to aid the dying person. I also note that Jo Bottemanne, a much-loved resident of Mount Colah, died in Neringah today. Both Jo and his family were well served by Neringah. There are many other examples of people who have been served well by Neringah over many years. I refer to a letter received by me on 24 July 2007 from Lyn Maciver when she became aware that Neringah was under threat:

I am very concerned to hear that there are again plans to close Neringah, a hospital staff for which, and whom, I have the deepest respect. My dear mother, Lucinda Lamb Nightingdale, died in Neringah on 28 May 1991, after a long deterioration in health due to cancer.

... a time came when I was no longer able to give my mother the full-time nursing care she required at home.

Lyn Maciver's mother was admitted to Neringah and on meeting the staff Lyn decided:

... this was a very well run and special place for my Mother to receive palliative care.

I cannot emphasise how wonderful the experience of my Mother's final months in Neringah was for both of us, and others in our extended family who visited her there.

I was with her the night she died, and cannot give praise enough for the way my Mother was nurtured and upheld, and so was I, by the caring and expert staff at Neringah.

With the assistance of the Friends of Neringah and many other community people, I have been gathering signatures on a petition calling on the New South Wales Government to save Hornsby's palliative care beds and to commit immediately to maintaining funding for Hornsby palliative care beds. I present a petition with thousands of names to add to the hundreds of names on previous petitions I have already tabled. I also draw the attention of the House to a response received from the chief of staff to the Minister for Health, dated 16 October 2007, in response to my sending Lyn's letter to the Minister:

I am advised by the Acting Chief Executive, NSCCAHS, that the Area Health Service is undertaking a review of specialist palliative care services. The outcome of the review will be a plan for palliative care that best meets the needs of the community.

Neringah meets the needs of the community. Leave it alone!

DUDLEY REDHEAD JUNIOR RUGBY LEAGUE FOOTBALL CLUB

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown) [5.25 p.m.]: I share with the House some good news about the Dudley Redhead Junior Rugby League Football Club. Last Sunday it was my great pleasure to join with the club and all the children for the opening of the long-awaited canteen and the unveiling of upgraded storage amenities for the sports field in Dudley. In the last couple of years the growth of the club has been enormous and has highlighted the need for additional facilities and services to support young children participating in a range of different sporting codes. We all recognise the positive benefits from participation in sport.

It is always pleasing to be in a position financially to support clubs in these types of projects. I acknowledge the contribution of NSW Sport and Recreation, which provided assistance and advice to the club

to get through the application processes, which resulted in a total of \$18,000 being contributed to the project. I make particular mention of a couple of key people involved in the project—I call these gentlemen the leadership team for the club—Mr Peter West, Mr Graham "Sugar" Matthews and Mr Dale Leard. Those three gentlemen were instrumental in building the club over quite a number of years. In fact Graham, "Sugar" as we know him, has been involved with the club for more than 25 years and has been instrumental in bringing together major projects, pursuing funding, coordinating work, and in seeking contributions from the private sector, individuals and local business people, not only financial support but also materials and voluntary labour. The club has numerous parents and supporters throughout the community who have been very helpful in fundraising, which has enabled the club to provide much-needed facilities for the children.

The club has put together a new range of programs for the young team players. Whilst we recognise that various sports are seasonal, the club continues off-season to assist young people in the community by keeping them active, involved in sport and out of trouble. That is a terrific thing. Not only has the department supported this organisation but it has also supported a range of other sporting codes. Warners Bay Soccer Club in particular has been instrumental in bringing about improvements to the grounds. The most recent project was the installation of floodlights to allow the children to train through winter with suitable lighting. For many years the club has struggled and has not been able to provide adequate facilities for winter training. Now, with the support of the department and the club's hard work in fundraising, it has much better amenities for its players. The Dudley project has been very close to my heart. That is purely in recognition of the individuals involved and their untiring commitment to supporting youth.

Funding has also been provided for a range of other projects. Some of the funding opportunities have been through the local council. I place on record my appreciation to Lake Macquarie City Council for its commitment to assisting local sporting clubs in major upgrade works to their grounds. The assistance has not only been limited to canteen upgrades, amenity upgrades, storage facilities, gymnasiums, fencing but also to further drainage and irrigation projects. All these elements are important in providing adequate levels of facilities and playing surfaces. It is a credit to all the youths involved who are willing to participate in sport. I wish them well for the future. They have my support.

RICHMOND RIVER HIGH SCHOOL

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [5.30 p.m.]: This afternoon I show my support for an excellent school in my electorate, Richmond River High School. The principal, Neville Ryan, staff and students of this great school do an exceptional job. I acknowledge their hard work in achieving so much in difficult conditions. Cheryl Amor, president of the parents and citizens association, and her committee have shown great dedication to improving the school. They have worked together with the principal and the teachers to address the school's problems. The school continues to attract students, although it competes with private schools for enrolments. Richmond River High School is located in north Lismore and has some unique problems. The school is heritage-listed and was one of the first schools in rural New South Wales to achieve first-class heritage status.

As one of the original schools in the area it is of historical importance. However, its heritage listing results in extra costs to the school. Every time there is a flood in Lismore the school floods, and it has experienced floods over many decades. Having been built on a flood plain, there is considerable soil and building movement. The design of the building and the materials used are of an early era, and the school grounds are large and difficult to maintain. The building's height and age cause considerable problems. Because of height restrictions, under occupational health and safety principles the general assistant is unable to clean or repair windows. That means that work incurs extra costs.

As I said, the school community works hard to compete against private schools and other schools in the area to attract students. As members would know—and if they do not, they must have been asleep—Lismore recently suffered a major hailstorm, during which Richmond River High School was damaged. The hail damage has highlighted the school's ventilation problems as some windows have now been boarded up. The parents and citizens association wrote to the Minister for Education and Training inviting him to visit Richmond River High School. I hope he accepts their invitation. A little birdie told me he might be heading that way in the next few days. No doubt he will let me know. Most Government ministers are polite and give notice when they are visiting a member's electorate and inspecting schools. I am sure Minister Della Bosca will notify me if he intends to do so.

Some of the ongoing problems at the school that need urgent attention include uncovered dish drains, cracked and uplifted concrete trip hazards, rusty roofs, verandah boards with protruding nails, and external

painting required on rotten weatherboard walls. The list goes on. A number of rooms have been measured for air-conditioning as they meet the hotspot requirements for air cooling, but the work has not been done. I thank the property division of the North Coast education area which has worked very hard on Richmond River High School, but it is a unique school that needs a great deal of assistance. I hope the Minister for Education and Training will provide assistance to the school.

HUNTER MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle) [5.35 p.m.]: The Hunter Medical Research Institute is one of Australia's pre-eminent research bodies and, over the last nine years, has grown from nothing to be the third-largest medical research organisation in New South Wales. I am proud to have been associated with the Hunter Medical Research Institute since 1997 when we embarked on realising our vision of creating a focus on research and establishing a medical research institute for the Hunter region. What sets the Hunter Medical Research Institute apart from other research institutes is its partnership with the University of Newcastle, Hunter New England Health and the community. The people of the Hunter part own the Hunter Medical Research Institute. In the last nine years the Hunter Medical Research Institute has distributed just over \$22 million in funding and in-kind support to Hunter researchers, which is an 11 to 1 return on the \$1.95 million investment made by the university and Hunter New England Health over the 10-year period.

Research is an area that the Hunter is building on. It is a leading and new industry in our region. I particularly commend the University of Newcastle for its research focus, which includes the establishment of priority research centres and an emphatic commitment to the Hunter Medical Research Institute. In the last month the Hunter Medical Research Institute and the university combined have attracted around \$30 million in research grants, including \$14 million in National Health and Medical Research Council grants, which is an increase of \$3.5 million on the figures for 2006. The Hunter Medical Research Institute has also been awarded the Hunter Business Chamber President's Award for its contribution to the economic fabric and diversity of our community. The New South Wales Government has recognised the Hunter Medical Research Institute as an innovative example for the coordination of medical research that has been adopted by the New South Wales Medical Research Plan as its preferred model for other regional and smaller medical research hubs.

The Hunter Medical Research Institute idea began in order to consolidate the researchers and their work, which were spread throughout the university and various health campuses. More than 550 researchers and support staff are engaged in work through the Hunter Medical Research Institute. That is a significant increase on the initial 150 researchers. With the significant growth experienced over the last 10 years and the recognition the institute has received for its research work, further consolidation is required. The Hunter Medical Research Institute is embarking on an ambitious building plan to consolidate the institute's expanding efforts into combating disease and illness. Currently the Hunter Medical Research Institute occupies seven sites, including the University of Newcastle, John Hunter Hospital and the Calvary Mater Hospital.

The institute intends to consolidate into three major neighbouring precincts, that is, the University of Newcastle, Rankin Park and the Calvary Mater Hospital, with the Hunter Medical Research Institute building proposed for the Rankin Park campus of Hunter New England Health. The building will provide space for more than 340 medical researchers to engage in groundbreaking research to improve the quality and longevity of life for all members of the community. The Hunter Medical Research Institute building represents a fantastic and exciting opportunity to further expand our knowledge of human disease through medical research. Combining the large number of research groups within one building will create a number of economies and better focus resources.

The development of this project represents an investment in the future of health and medical research in Newcastle and the Hunter and in the future of the entire region. Its advantages for the region extend beyond the direct benefits that medical research provides to the entire community. The world over it has been shown that quality research facilities, in addition to attracting the best researchers, are responsible for bringing to their locations the best doctors and clinicians. The total cost of the building project is estimated to be in the order of \$92 million. The New South Wales Government has contributed \$25 million to the project in grants, including the Rankin Park land. The Hunter Medical Research Institute and the University of Newcastle are in a position to contribute \$18.5 million and the Federal Government has so far put forward \$13.5 million.

The Hunter Medical Research Institute building is urgently needed and it is vital the shortfall of \$35 million from the Federal Government be announced as a matter of urgency. Given the national and international benefits to be derived from the extraordinary work of the Hunter Medical Research Institute, I call

on the next Federal Government, whether it be led by Kevin Rudd or John Howard, to make an exceptional contribution to the development of this much-needed facility. I call on the next Federal Government to make a \$35 million commitment to the future of medical research in the Hunter, the nation and the world. The expansion of commercial opportunities arising from the research of this institute is very real, and investment in the Hunter Medical Research Institute building will realise the potential for greater economic growth from this increasingly important industry in New South Wales.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.40 p.m.]: I commend the member for Newcastle for bringing the Hunter Medical Research Institute to the attention of the House. The institute is situated in the John Hunter Hospital complex at New Lambton in the electorate of Wallsend and is very innovative in the extension of coordinated research. It has great partnerships with Newcastle University in the Wallsend electorate and with the John Hunter and Calvary Mater hospitals—and it is building on those partnerships. The member for Newcastle and I both hope that the partnership with John Hunter Hospital means that sooner rather than later a facility will be built on the hospital site. As the member for Newcastle said, the State Government has generously donated the land. I commend the member for Newcastle for bringing the Hunter Medical Research Institute to the attention of the House because it is a wonderful institute and the people of Newcastle are very happy to be involved in its research.

BALLDALE PUBLIC SCHOOL CENTENARY

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [5.42 p.m.]: I am looking forward to attending this Saturday the celebrations for the centenary of the Balldale Public School in the shire of Corowa. More than 300 people from the border community are expected to attend, including former student Iris Drum. Iris, at 93 years of age, can still recall her days as a student in 1925 when there were two teachers and about 100 students. She remembers the days of struggling to find a seat in the school, and corporal punishment being meted out to boys for trying to kiss the girls. Whilst student numbers peaked at 145 during the 1940s, times have changed and today there are just eight students enrolled in the rural school. This weekend we will have the opportunity to celebrate the school's history and reveal its past when a time capsule from 1987 is unearthed.

When we look back into the early records of rural towns like Balldale, we discover family histories, because sometimes there was only a handful of large families living in a district and those families' names became the names of the districts. Sometimes six or seven children of the same family were at the school at the same time. Their parents were the church wardens or local shopkeepers, their cousins lived next door, their uncle was the policeman, their aunty was the local midwife. In 1903 John Morrissey, a member of the Victorian Parliament who lived in the Lower Goulburn Valley, purchased the Quat Quatta estate on the New South Wales side of the Murray River between Corowa and Howlong. He subdivided this estate and sold it to Lower Goulburn Valley farmers in 1903 and 1904. Late in 1903 a party of 12 from the Mooroopna district travelled by buggy and wagonette to inspect the land, and most of them bought around where the village of Balldale now stands.

The township could well have been called Quat Quatta at first, but when the Balldale railway station first opened in October 1892 it was called Carnsdale, only being renamed Balldale in 1905 after R. T. Ball, the member of the Legislative Assembly for the district at that time. In 1904 the settlement in the vicinity of the railway station had increased from eight to about 26 households and from 1905-06 Miss Bess Wall ran a small private school. The parents of the children who attended this school paid a small fee per week. With the influx of the new settlers to the Quat Quatta estate it became obvious that a public school was required, and after much debate about a suitable site and the writing of many letters to government departments by Mr Mungo Wilson, the Balldale Public School opened on 31 March 1907 and was moved to its present site in 1938.

In a school photograph taken in 1918 I observed a thriving and comparatively large country school nestled in the shire of Coreen, forming the heart of the growing young community and probably having much contact and interschool competitions with the other Coreen shire towns: Mulwala, Coreen, Daysdale, Lowesdale, Hopefield, Rennie, Savernake, Buraja and Warragoon. Sadly, many of our rural towns have suffered from the exodus of young people to the cities. The populations now are considerably smaller, but even so, the remaining schools are still the beating heart of their communities.

The Balldale school is still a major focus of social activities, with all families supporting school education, fundraising initiatives and the tree planting program. This year the school applied for and received \$100,000 from the Federal Government's Investing in Our Schools Program. This will provide a covered outdoor learning area at the front of the school, a new photocopier, a new ride-on lawn mower and the relocation

of the school office. Despite its size, Balldale Public School has managed to develop the students in a range of different skills. The school has employed specialist teachers in computers, music, dance, art and aerobics. They also give the students dance and art instructions on a weekly basis.

On my visits to the school over the past four years I have been impressed by the achievements of this school and others like it in the district and by the warm, friendly and welcoming atmosphere in the classrooms. My wife, Jill, and I were fortunate on one occasion to arrive at the school a few days before the Albury Eisteddfod and we were given a sneak preview of the item the school was presenting. It was a wonderful experience for us, and also, it seems, for the judges at the Eisteddfod, as Balldale School won first prize in its section.

It is not a surprise to find excellence in small schools as the teaching is outstanding and parent involvement is enthusiastic and positive. It is always a pleasure to visit and to join the teachers and students for a cup of tea at recess or lunchtime. This Saturday we will remember many of the famous sons and daughters from Balldale Public School, and none more so than John Longmire, the North Melbourne goal kicker of the 1990s who kicked 98 goals in the 1990 season and was the youngest player in Australian Football League history to kick that many goals. Congratulations to Balldale Public School on achieving 100 years of excellent education. I look forward to sharing the weekend with the school.

PRIVATE CERTIFICATION

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [5.47 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about an issue of great concern to the people of the electorate of Sydney. Urban consolidation policies that promote high-density living in the inner city need to be complemented by protections and safeguards for sound apartment construction. While developers have an understandable focus on reducing their costs and increasing returns, the Government must protect consumers against substandard building construction that can occur when private interests are not properly balanced with the public interest. Recent announcements that the Government is considering expanding the role of private certifiers are alarming to the many existing and potential apartment residents, and for local councils who are left to deal with development that does not comply with codes or council consent conditions.

In 1997 the then Independent member for Manly and I opposed the private certification system in the Legislative Assembly. Since then the system has significantly added to the litany of failures in public protection relating to development. It is a betrayal of consumer protection to allow developers to select and pay the person who checks whether a development complies with council conditions and building standards. Self-interest and commercial imperatives put pressure on private certifiers to keep the person who pays their wages happy, or lose work. My 2002 submission to the Joint Select Committee on the Quality of Buildings recommended the establishment of a standards body responsible for the accreditation of appropriately trained and experienced private certifiers.

I welcome the establishment of the Building Professionals Board as a single body authorised to accredit and audit certifiers and investigate complaints. However, I remain opposed to the private certification system because it entrenches conflicts of interest and provides incentives for collusion and corruption. The Government says private certification improves efficiency, but I agree with Paddington Society planner John Mant that it can delay development because more detailed information is required during assessment, which is time consuming and expensive for all parties. As the representative of an inner-city electorate that is the focus of urban consolidation policies that promote higher-density living, constituents frequently raise concerns about development that does not comply with standards and requirements.

A family on Moore Park Road in Paddington discovered that the height of their neighbour's privately certified property was much higher than council had approved and, as a result, their new neighbours are able to look down into their young daughter's bedroom. Fire safety is a major concern for residents of a privately certified apartment on Goulburn Street where access to a sprinkler pump was obstructed during construction, preventing mandatory testing. Residents tell me that they continue to spend money to meet fire certification because the building was not adequately certified. A neighbour of a new apartment on Belmore Street in Surry Hills tells me that the setback of fire exit doors adjacent to his property is deeper than approved and he is concerned that the alcove will attract drug users.

My 2002 submission on behalf of constituents listed numerous examples of building work that failed to meet basic standards, but had been signed off and approved for occupation. In June the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a series on the certification system, which identified faulty work across Sydney due to private certification.

In two reported examples fire safety requirements were seriously violated in a development of 95 apartments in Blacktown, and Woollahra Council had to direct the removal of an entire storey from a development in Rose Bay. Councils are left to pick up the pieces when developments do not comply and there is limited power to intervene before final certification if there are concerns about compliance.

The Local Government and Shires Associations state that private certification is a major problem, particularly because private certifiers liberally apply the cop-out of "not inconsistent with consent". The associations say that the financial costs to councils are significant particularly in areas where many developments use private certifiers and where there are numerous complaints. The associations presented their concerns on private certification to the Building Professionals Board. They say that the conflict of interest must be removed before the system is expanded, and I support their call for private certifiers to be contracted by and responsible to councils.

The bulk of new inner-city buildings are multi-storey apartments built by speculators. Private certification as currently established does not guarantee consumers buying apartments that their new homes have been independently inspected and comprehensively certified. While major developers effectively control private certifiers, there is motive and opportunity for them to operate in their own vested financial interest rather than the public interest. Private certification is a recipe for non-accountability and I call on the Government to protect public interest by removing the conflict of interest inherent in the private certification system.

RATHMINES CATALINA MEMORIAL

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [5.52 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a proposal and vision that if delivered will preserve and pay respect to an important part of our State and national heritage. The proposal, if realised, would be of significant benefit to the local community, being broadly the people of Lake Macquarie and, more specifically, residents of the Rathmines area. The Rathmines Royal Australian Air Force base played a pivotal role in the defence of Australia in World War II. It was the largest seaplane base in the Southern Hemisphere and the longest serving during the war effort. The base's Catalina flying boats were involved in the mining of Manilla Harbour and played an important part in the Battle of the Coral Sea. The Catalina was one of the most successful flying boats produced and was crucially important for the defence of Australia. Its role in World War II for Australia has been equated to that of the Spitfire in Britain.

The Rathmines airbase was also a significant centre for training and for repairs. Even now, having been closed for more than 50 years, it is regarded as the most intact example of a Royal Australian Air Force World War II seaplane base in Australia. The layout of the base can still be seen in a number of Rathmines streets and in elements of the 61-hectare Rathmines Park, which occupies the former base. On Thursday 24 November 2005 the former Royal Australian Air Force base was added to the State heritage list at a ceremony attended by more than 350 people, including dozens of former Catalina aircrews and former Royal Australian Air Force and Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force personnel. The role of Minister Sartor in achieving this listing and attending on this day to proclaim it was greatly appreciated by local residents and former base crew. The heritage listing is a credit to Don Lowe and other dedicated people who pursued this goal.

An inaugural Rathmines Catalina Festival was held in Rathmines Park on Saturday 29 September this year. The event, organised by the Rathmines Progress Association, brought together many people and organisations that love this area and wish to see its heritage properly recognised and retained. Among these was the Rathmines Catalina Memorial Trust, whose members were all associated with the activities of the base and the Catalinas. As part of this event I was pleased to name the eastern end of the site as Catalina Bay. A flypast and landings by the Seaplane Pilots Association and others evoked memories of the military past. Funds raised on the day will go towards the proposed Catalina Flying Memorial, which aims to return a Catalina flying boat and exhibit it at the site. This is a fabulous vision to honour not only the aircraft but also the men and women who serviced and flew them.

The success of the inaugural Catalina Festival is due to the dedicated efforts of the Rathmines Progress Association, with particular credit going to Mr Alan Brady, who conceived the idea and contributed much of the effort. Catalina Flying Memorial Limited has raised considerable funding and has purchased a Catalina, which is currently in Portugal. They are ensuring that the aircraft is in good working order and on 10 November the aircraft will begin its flight to Australia. The fuel alone for the flight will cost \$100,000. Particular mention must be made of Mr Phillip Dulhunty, OAM, and Mr Neville Kennard in this endeavour. Mention should also be made of Mr Alec Howard, who, on behalf of the Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society, has elicited an enthusiastic public response in amassing a collection of memorabilia for a museum that will be co-located with the Catalina.

I commend to this House the efforts of so many people in recognising and acting on the heritage value and the potential of the former Royal Australian Air Force base. Credit goes to all those in achieving the heritage listing, the naming of Catalina Bay, the inauguration of the Catalina Festival and the purchase of an aircraft. I foreshadow that there may be a request made to the New South Wales Government for assistance with the permanent location of the aircraft at Rathmines. I respectfully ask the Government to identify ways in which it can assist in realising this wonderful vision.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 5.57 p.m. until Friday 26 October 2007 at 10.00 a.m.
