

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 8 September 2010

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

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

EDUCATION MACE

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence in the Speaker's Gallery of members of Northern Beaches Woodturners, a voluntary group from the member for Pittwater's electorate. This morning this wonderful group handed over to me as Speaker a beautifully turned wooden mace commissioned by the parliamentary education section for the use of school groups on non-sitting days. Almost 20,000 students take part in role plays in this Chamber each year, and from the next non-sitting day onwards they will be using the new education mace. I am sure members will join me in thanking the Northern Beaches Woodturners for crafting such a fine object that will be well used and well enjoyed for many years. This week the new mace will be situated in my office for members to inspect. Thank you on behalf of the Parliament.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ADVISORY COUNCIL BILL 2010

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Paul Lynch.

Agreement in Principle

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Commerce, Minister for Energy, Minister for Public Sector Reform, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [10.09 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Industrial Relations Advisory Council Bill 2010 establishes a new industrial relations body in New South Wales—the Industrial Relations Advisory Council. First and foremost, the purpose of the council is to provide, in the public interest, a regular and organised means by which representatives of the Government of New South Wales, of employers and of employees and, when the Minister considers it appropriate, representatives of other persons, bodies and organisations may consult on industrial relations matters of statewide concern. That is particularly important in the context of the national industrial relations system in which all private sector employers and employees now operate. That national system is fundamentally a cooperative system run by the Commonwealth and the referring States and the Territories.

The Fair Work Act lays down the fundamental principles of the national system, and an intergovernmental agreement and the Workplace Relations Ministers' Council provide the consultation and cooperation to make the system work in the manner intended. Consultation and cooperation, in turn, rely on information. That is where the consultative council proposed in this bill has work to do. The council is particularly designed to provide a forum for employees and their unions, employers and other bodies to discuss industrial relations issues of concern, especially as they relate to the implementation and operation of the national industrial relations system at a State level.

For example, it is expected the council will provide an ideal opportunity for peak industrial stakeholders in New South Wales to provide feedback to me on important matters that may be deliberated on from time to time by Fair Work Australia in the national system. Such matters would include, but by no means would be limited to, equal remuneration and national wage cases. In this way, the council will provide an important forum for identifying and discussing issues that have been raised by the new national system and provide me with important background information to pursue those issues either in the Workplace Relations Ministers' Council or directly with the Commonwealth and other States.

It is important to remember that late last year when the New South Wales Government decided to refer its powers to the Commonwealth, it did so only on the basis of adherence to certain fundamental workplace relations principles. Both the Commonwealth Fair Work Act and the New South Wales Industrial Relations (Commonwealth Powers) Act contain seven elementary principles. These include that the new national industrial relations system provides and continues to provide for a strong, simple and enforceable safety net of minimum employment standards; genuine rights and responsibilities to ensure fairness, choice and representation at work, including the freedom to choose whether or not to join and be represented by a union or participate in collective activities; collective bargaining at the enterprise level with no provision for individual statutory agreements; fair and effective remedies available through an independent umpire; and protection from unfair dismissal.

Further, there should be and continue to be in connection with the operation of the Fair Work Act an independent tribunal system and an independent authority that is able to assist employers and employees within a national workplace relations system. These principles are the benchmark for ensuring that the Fair Work Act develops in a fair and decent manner, as intended by New South Wales and the other referring governments.

It is expected that the formation of the Industrial Relations Advisory Council will provide all its members with an appropriate forum to ensure all workplace relations principles are being met by the new system. The council will be composed of 17 members. Its members will be appointed by me for a period of up to three years, but they may be nominated for further terms. There are also the usual provisions for resignation, termination of appointment and representation by a substitute member. This will include the capacity for the Minister to be represented by another member of the council. Under the terms of this bill, the council must meet at least twice a year. But, if necessary, I will be able to call on additional meetings. I will chair the council, which will be made up of senior public servants, representatives from Unions NSW, peak employer bodies and legal professional associations.

As well as monitoring the new national industrial relations system, the council will be an important focal point for making and implementing industrial relations policy in New South Wales. My intent is that the council assist me and the New South Wales Government in formulating industrial relations policy and then act as a source of direct information about the implementation of that policy. Obviously, that means that legislation that the New South Wales Government is intending to pass to give effect to those policies will be high on the list of items for the council's consideration. I commend the bill to the House.

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

CLASSIFICATION (PUBLICATIONS, FILMS AND COMPUTER GAMES) ENFORCEMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Barry Collier, on behalf of Ms Carmel Tebbutt.

Agreement in Principle

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.15 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The purpose of the Classification (Films, Publications and Computer Games) Enforcement Amendment Bill 2010 is to amend the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Enforcement Act 1995 to achieve three key outcomes. Firstly, it will increase the capacity of the NSW Police Force to enforce classification laws by helping to reduce the cost of classification prosecutions. Secondly, it will foster a more national approach to the recall of publications being sold in breach of classification laws. Thirdly, it will

modernise advertising provisions in the Act to ensure that people, especially minors, are not exposed to advertising content in films and computer games that is higher in impact than the content of the film or computer game that they have chosen to view or play.

Under the national classification scheme, the Commonwealth is responsible for classifying films, publications, computer games and certain other material, while the States and Territories are responsible for enforcing these classification decisions. These arrangements are embodied in an intergovernmental agreement [IGA], which also provides that State and Territory enforcement agencies are entitled to 100 free applications for classification and evidentiary certificates for use in classification prosecutions. Once this quota is exhausted, the intergovernmental agreement provides that State and Territory enforcement agencies must pay the fees prescribed in Commonwealth classification regulations for classification certificates and half the prescribed fee for evidentiary certificates to the Classification Board.

The NSW Police Force consistently exhausts its annual quota of free applications. It made 161 applications to the Classification Board in 2008-09 and has been similarly active in previous years. Enforcement action can become very expensive once the quota has been exhausted. For example, the fee for having the board classify a 120-minute DVD film is \$700. This bill will help to alleviate this cost pressure by removing unnecessary evidentiary requirements, which currently require a classification certificate and a separate evidentiary certificate in classification prosecutions. Evidentiary certificates serve a range of purposes, including verifying a previous classification decision, and can cost up to \$1,410. The Police Force must pay half this cost to obtain the certificate. In a prosecution relating to material that has not been classified, the cost to the Police Force can be up to \$1,405 for a 120-minute DVD film, comprising \$700 for the classification certificate and \$705 for the evidentiary certificate.

A separate evidentiary certificate no longer will be necessary in a prosecution for unclassified material, as the bill provides that the classification certificate is evidence of classification in the prosecution. By removing this unnecessary cost and red tape, the Police Force will have a greater capacity to enforce classification laws. This bill also will introduce new provisions authorising the prosecution and the accused in criminal proceedings under the Act to agree to the classification of relevant publications, films and computer games.

These provisions will only apply to explicit material that would likely be classified X18+ or RC by the Classification Board. Under the scheme the prosecution may, prior to trial, give the accused a notice to agree to the relevant classification of the publication, film or computer game concerned. For example, the Police Force may put it to the accused that an unclassified film would be classified X18+ if it were submitted to the Classification Board. The accused must be given an opportunity to view the material to enable him or her to make an informed decision. If the accused agrees and signs the notice, the notice becomes evidence of, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary is proof of, the matter agreed, removing the need to obtain costly classification or evidentiary certificates for the prosecution.

If a person served with a notice does not agree, or does not respond to the notice, but subsequently is found guilty of the offence specified in the notice, the prosecution is entitled to apply to the court to recover the appropriate classification fees from the person. This will encourage defendants to participate in this process in good faith. This will reduce pressure on the annual quota of free applications and reduce enforcement costs where the quota is already exhausted. It will also expedite prosecution proceedings allowing the Police Force more efficient use of its resources. If the defendant is found not guilty of the offence, for example, because the material is found to have a classification other than X18+ or RC, then he or she will not be liable to pay the costs of classification set out in the notice. Together, the intention of the new classification by agreement provisions and the removal of unnecessary evidentiary requirements are to increase the capacity of the Police Force to enforce classification laws, reinforcing the integrity of the national classification scheme.

The bill also makes important changes to the existing call-in provisions, which empower the Director of the Classification Board to call in publications that are being sold and exhibited in breach of classification laws. Once a call-in notice is issued in New South Wales, the publication must be submitted to the Classification Board for classification and cannot be legally sold or publicly exhibited in New South Wales until it has been classified. The changes provide that these notices are recognised no matter where they have been issued in Australia, so that when a publication is called in under the classification legislation of another State or Territory, it will also be called in automatically in New South Wales. New South Wales is the first jurisdiction to introduce mutual recognition for these notices and encourages other jurisdictions to follow suit to ensure a truly national approach to them.

Finally, the bill makes important changes to modernise the advertising provisions in the Act. Currently, the Act provides that a person must not publicly exhibit an advertisement for a classified film during a program for the exhibition of another classified film unless the advertised film has the same classification as, or has a lower classification than, the classified film. Similar restrictions apply in relation to the sale of films, on DVDs for example. This also applies to classified computer games containing advertisements for other classified computer games. The main objective of the rule is to protect audiences from being exposed to advertisements for material classified, or assessed as likely to be classified, at a higher level than the film they have chosen to view, or computer games they have chosen to play, and in particular, that higher level content is not advertised to children.

However, computer games are commonly advertised during film screenings and vice versa. The bill will amend the Act to ensure that advertised films and computer games carry a classification equal to or lower than the film or computer game with which they are advertised. The bill makes a range of amendments to improve the operation of the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Enforcement Act 1995. I commend the bill to the House.

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

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2010-2011

Debate resumed from 7 September 2010.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [10.24 a.m.]: In his budget presentation 2010-11, the Treasurer made reference to a number of health initiatives for the Wagga Wagga electorate. He announced an allocation for planning of a multi-purpose service at Lockhart and \$90 million for redevelopment of stage one of Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, which caused an audible stir in this Chamber. That has been promised for a long time, together with others in Parkes, Dubbo, Forbes, Tamworth, Bega, Port Macquarie pod four, and northern beaches, promised but not delivered. In relation to \$90 million for stage one of Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, on Wednesday 9 June an article in the *Daily Advertiser* was headed "Cash trickle for Hospital", "Eric Roozendaal starts ball rolling for new hospital with \$5.1m of a \$90m commitment". On Thursday 10 June another article in the paper was headed "Wagga Base staff rejoice at funding announcement".

On Wednesday 24 June, when the community realised it had been betrayed, the *Daily Advertiser* was headed "Betrayed" and states, "It appears millions spent on planning and years of waiting have amounted to nothing". On Thursday 24 June another article was headed, "New hospital plans dumped by the NSW Government". The Treasurer's announcement of \$90 million confused the community because it believed that \$300 million would be the cost of a new regional base referral hospital in Wagga Wagga. For a number of years this Government has spent between \$6 million and \$11 million to plan a brand new state-of-the-art regional referral hospital and many people have taken part in that planning process. When the \$90 million was announced for stage one, the community thought that meant stage one of the agreed plan, which was, stage one of the complete rebuild of the hospital at \$300 million.

However, when questioned days later the Government could not explain what \$90 million would provide. I have since found out that \$90 million is a patch-up, \$5 million of which is to devise a new plan. Basically, the Government has put in the dust bin between \$6 million and \$11 million that has been spent over the past seven years to devise a clinical services plan and architectural works et cetera. It has now allocated \$5.5 million to devise a new plan to partly rebuild the hospital but no one has explained what the community will get for the money. The community understood that its agreed regional referral hospital would be built in two stages: the building would wrap around the old hospital campus and the old hospital would be demolished. Under this \$90 million patch-up, the community understands now that there is a proposal to build some buildings and to utilise and refurbish existing buildings. However, no one has told the community what are included in stages two and three. Quite rightly, the community is upset and, clearly, the editorials attacked the Government for good reason. One editorial stated:

Labor MLC Tony Catanzariti must feel a defeated man as he has failed to deliver on what is surely the most critical need for this region—a new referral hospital.

Elected in 2003 and due for re-election next year, the MLC has been a part of the state labor government for the best part of a decade—a decade which now appears to be wasted for those who have fought so hard for this vital piece of infrastructure.

It seems the responsibility for the construction of the hospital now falls to member for Wagga Wagga Daryl Maguire as part of a new government almost certain to be elected next year.

The *Daily Advertiser* published other articles referring to this betrayal and the community voiced its disbelief that after seven years of planning, and an expenditure of up to \$11 million, the Government saw fit to put into the dust bin plans that suit the needs of the community and go back to the drawing board. According to the budget papers, it will take up to four years to expend the \$90 million. A new hospital will cost between \$275 million and \$400 million. I do not think I have enough words to describe the absolute disappointment that the community has felt about the way in which this Government has backflipped on a promise that every Minister for Health has said they would deliver since I became a member of Parliament in 1999.

The Treasurer also failed to mention Tumut Hospital. Tumut Hospital is in a state of decay. The dedicated staff work tirelessly to provide services for the community. Tumut is an industrial area that has had an enormous amount of investment put into it by the timber industry and it needs a hospital, but there is not a mention of it. The community has been campaigning for many years to get the hospital on the upgrade list at least and the State Labor Government has promised time and again that that would happen but it has not. Tumut Hospital was not mentioned in this budget presentation and that has disappointed the people of Tumut. If one visits Tumut Hospital and sees the way it has deteriorated despite the best efforts of the local community, the auxiliary and others to try and keep it functioning, one can understand the disappointment of the community.

I know that time is limited and I have not sought an extension of time because I will raise other issues that I should include in this budget presentation at a later date when the opportunity arises. The number one priority for the Riverina—for the electorates of Murrumbidgee, Berrinjuck, Albury and Wagga Wagga—is to have a new regional referral hospital. It is absolutely critical. We have a nucleus of physicians, nurses and others that provide a dedicated service to us but we desperately need a hospital. I ask the Minister for Health to meet with a delegation in the next couple of weeks to determine just how the Government is going to go about applying for some of the \$1.8 billion that was announced yesterday by the new Federal Labor Government, to ensure that Wagga Wagga gets the hospital it needs.

I am prepared to take a delegation to meet the Federal Minister for Health but I want the State Minister for Health to turn up as well and to strike a deal, dollar for dollar, so that that hospital is built and this Government finally delivers on its promise. The lives and health of the region depend on Wagga Wagga Base Hospital and on the nucleus of physicians and others. The nurses and doctors need that vital piece of infrastructure and I urge the Minister for Health to come with us to make that presentation and to fight with our community to deliver that hospital.

Ms DIANE BEAMER (Mulgoa) [10.33 a.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I take part in this take-note debate on the budget. This is a sound and strong budget for New South Wales. In the background of a global financial crisis—the worst in more than 75 years—it is a challenge that the State Government and the Federal Government have met head-on, to use the words of the Treasurer. This budget builds upon our past budgets in fiscal integrity. The budget is back in the black and over the past 15 years we have had an average of \$800 million in surplus. I speak about the global financial crisis because during that time the great efforts of the Federal Government and the State Government were demonstrated in building our economies. If we look across the world to economies where things have gone wrong we need go no further than our very great ally the United States of America.

Having read some statistics on its economy, it is apparent to me that Australia would be in great peril if it had economic figures similar to those of the United States. I cannot imagine how New South Wales householders would feel if they had had a reduction of 35 per cent in their house values, if 60 per cent of the growth in wages went to the top 1 per cent of the workforce, and 10 per cent of the population was relying on food stamps. However, this Government and the Federal Government, working together, have managed to blunt the horrendous implications of the crisis for the Australian economy. I refer to the stimulus package and the great results from the Building the Education Revolution Program.

I and many other members have had great pleasure in going to schools throughout our electorates that have become building sites. Along with the Federal member for Lindsay, David Bradbury—and I congratulate him on his very good win at the last Federal election—I have had first-hand knowledge of these buildings and have talked to many of the building workers in the community that are on those sites. There is no better example of why the fiscal stimulus package is working: every school has become a building site. Education is a core service of the New South Wales Government. Our continued investment in education puts it at the forefront of our priorities.

I will point to a few things that show we are definitely heading in the right direction. Our National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] results bear this out. Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 had the

highest percentage of students in the top band for numeracy and the best results in the country for spelling. The New South Wales Government can be proud of its educational achievements with students across the State. Students have risen to the challenge that we have set them and have lapped up some of the things that this Government has done. We have increased the number of teachers for kindergarten and year 1 and we have made it mandatory for students to stay at school longer. Schools in my electorate have gained a great deal in this budget. Colyton High School, St Marys Senior High School and St Clair High School have received science laboratory upgrades, with St Clair High School receiving about \$900,000. Those upgrades delivered by the State Government are in addition to what they received under the Building the Education Revolution Program.

From this State budget the Government has delivered laptops for high school teachers and there have been upgrades in other schools. Clearly, those core essential services and the delivery of things such as a lower ratio of students to teachers in kindergarten and year 1 are the reasons that students in New South Wales have done so well in the NAPLAN tests. It was fantastic to see how well students in my electorate did in year 9 NAPLAN tests. We can proudly hold our heads up in New South Wales and look at our students and our fantastic teachers and give them a big tick for the way in which education is delivered in this State.

I turn to another major part of our budget—health services. I hear a lot of comment from the Opposition about health services across New South Wales. Today, after 15 years of Labor government, Nepean Hospital is unrecognisable—it is a totally different hospital. Nepean Hospital has been rebuilt and it provides far more services. It has been transformed and it continues to be transformed. The major investments the Government has made in Nepean Hospital have turned it into a hospital that is new, modern and responsive to its community. Easy access to psychiatric emergency care services and other emergency services for people who present at the hospital is a major step forward. The oncology unit, the intensive care unit and the neonatal intensive care unit for babies show that Nepean Hospital is very different from 15 years ago—it is unrecognisable.

Fortunately and unfortunately, I have had a lot to do with Nepean Hospital in the last 12 months with something like three admissions of members of my family. I say fortunately because one of the admissions was to the labour ward for the delivery of my first grandchild, a lovely son, whose mother delivered after being there for half an hour. It was a very quick delivery and the nursing staff were very proud of her, and she was very proud of herself after delivering a bouncing baby boy—I just had to get that on the record at some point during my parliamentary career. Other admissions have not been as good, but from my experience this year of being in a hospital—one that has been maligned in this place, that is, Port Macquarie hospital—I found the service to be excellent.

Having been referred to the hospital after visiting a doctor and having to have a minor operation four hours later, I found the service to be just incredible, and the follow-up for me from the surgical unit at Port Macquarie back to the seat of Mulgoa was excellent. What we are talking about is a world-class hospital system. I am as well aware as the next person that there are hiccups, but when I talk to my constituents who have had the experience of going to hospital, by and large, although it is often traumatic for them because of the nature of illness, they say that they had great service and the practitioners and nurses were terrific.

I will now talk about the things that this budget delivered regarding Nepean Hospital. There was \$31.8 million given to continue the expansion and upgrade of Nepean Hospital, provide new operating theatres and new medical, surgical, intensive care unit and day-stay beds; \$34.6 million to commence the upgrade of the mental health facility at Nepean Hospital and continue the expansion and upgrade of the Nepean Hospital to provide new operating theatres and so on; \$800,000 to replace the linear accelerator and refurbish the cancer day care centre at Nepean Hospital; \$600,000 to expand mental health services; and additional funding of \$554,000 to support the Nepean mental health expansion.

There was also \$169,000 given to expand the general practitioner clinic at Nepean Hospital. We have had a lot of talks about general practitioner clinics. I have had one occasion to visit that clinic at Nepean Hospital for after-hours service. Certainly taking the pressure off emergency wards by having a general practitioner available after hours when they are not ordinarily available is an excellent way to deliver health services. Having a general practitioner clinic which is able to do minor procedures—look after a child who has a temperature and needs medical attention in the middle of the night—is an excellent way of reducing waiting times at emergency centres, and the general practitioner clinic at Nepean Hospital is no exception.

Getting patients to a general practitioner clinic is preferable to their waiting for priority patients to be seen—as they should be—in emergency areas. I note that the Nepean Hospital general practitioner clinic has

had a lot to do with some of the good statistics outlined by the Minister for Health in this place recently referring to the benchmarks that have been achieved at the hospital for those arriving at the casualty department. It is important to recognise that general practitioner clinics are an essential part of the services we want across our health system.

Another aspect of the budget that I would like to touch on is roadworks. Recently a number of works have been completed in Mulgoa, and more work has commenced. I refer to the Mamre Road Bridge, which was completed just over a year and a half ago and has had a significant impact on those who travel on that bridge over the M4. The bridge that linked St Clair to St Marys forced four lanes into two, and then back to four, but the upgrade to a five-lane bridge has significantly reduced the time it takes for people to cross that bridge.

The other big construction project that has just been completed is the bridge over The Northern Road connecting Glenmore Park to the M4. Without prompting, and with a range of issues surrounding it, I was very pleased to see a number of people writing to our local newspapers and saying how much it had decreased the waiting time to cross that bridge. Glenmore Park is a huge area in my electorate and has only two exit points. One of those is The Northern Road exit, and significant upgrades and lane changes to the bridge have meant that exiting the area has improved. I have surveyed my constituents, as we all do, and I remember that before the last election it was the one thing that anyone in Glenmore Park would talk about. Some talked about graffiti—and we did a lot about that—but getting in and out of the suburb was the major bugbear of the people of Glenmore Park. So they will be very pleased to know the amount of money that is being spent this year on the upgrade to the other exit.

The Roads and Traffic Authority surveyed the community about this exit, and I also wrote to them, and the Roads and Traffic Authority tells me that, of all the projects it has put out to the community, this one generated the most feedback it has ever received from a community saying that they thought its plans were wrong. There were letters from constituents—not rote letters; they were all different—telling the Roads and Traffic Authority, "We think we have a better plan." After looking at the feedback that it got from the community the Roads and Traffic Authority changed its plan and went back to the community with the things that they said were important about using the Mulgoa Road exit. This was sensational.

This year work will continue on upgrading signals at Mulgoa Road, School House Road and Spencer Street at Regentville. I am sure that when the work is completed it will generate exactly the same response that we got on The Northern Road. Roadwork is now underway and the \$1 million in this year's budget will complete the works. I thank the people of Glenmore Park for their patience in watching these projects, one completed and one continuing, because they are the beneficiaries. I know how annoying it is to have a traffic jam which extends into your suburb. I have met with various Ministers for Roads and indeed Premiers and told them about these issues and I think the response has been very good. I look forward to the completion of the Mulgoa Road bridge project.

I now refer to a small project that began in the Penrith local council area, that is, the trial of alligator teeth near schools. I have found them to be a great additional safety measure around schools in my electorate. Alligator teeth approaching schools are readily identifiable and have been really effective. The program was trialled at Penrith, and in another local government area that escapes me, and is being rolled out to other areas. For schools on very busy roads flashing lights alerting people that they are entering a school zone are very important, and they will be installed at one school in my electorate which is on a busy road. That is another important way in which we can keep schoolchildren safe at busy times when the school day is commencing and finishing. Keeping schoolchildren safe as they cross roads is a very important part of the way in which we deliver road safety in our school zones. It has been very pleasing to see that work on school zones delivering greater safety. It is also gratifying to trial these ideas and then, when they work, to extend them across our network of schools.

The Department of Housing has undertaken a number of housing projects in my electorate. I recently revisited the only departmental housing complex in Glenmore Park. It was the first complex built after seven years of no departmental construction projects in my electorate under the previous Government. I went to the complex to talk to the residents about any problems they may be experiencing with the Department of Housing. It was heartening to note that their accommodation is being upgraded and that people are being moved to accommodation that is more appropriate to their needs.

I am reminded of an elderly wheelchair-bound constituent who was living with his wife in a house with four stairs at the back door and three at the front door. He could not move from the kitchen to the lounge room.

I raised the situation with the department and as a result was able to show the couple a much more suitable house under construction that would soon be their home. The joy they expressed at no longer being housebound because of the husband's disability and their age and being able to move into more appropriate accommodation was very moving. Their existing home was also on a large block that they could not maintain without the help of their family. The move to their new home will once again allow them to be independent.

The Department of Housing has commenced 13 projects in my electorate to provide homes for disadvantaged people. It has allocated \$950,000 for the commencement of 13 homes for disadvantaged people at an estimated total cost of \$2.8 million. It has also provided \$7 million to complete an additional 30 homes as part of stage two of the Nation Building—Economic Stimulus Plan at a total investment of \$10 million. The budget also includes an allocation of \$4.3 million to construct 49 homes as part of stage two of a project in St Marys involving a total estimated investment of \$13.2 million. All of these projects involve huge investments and all will be for the benefit of disadvantaged people within my electorate.

After seven years of drought and a Commonwealth Government that refused to sign up to housing packages, houses are now being built for disadvantaged people, to provide accommodation for people on the waiting list and to help those in substandard accommodation or accommodation that does not meet their needs. It is important to note that the State Government and the Federal Government are getting on with providing accommodation for disadvantaged people in our community. I congratulate Julia Gillard on her re-election—quite belatedly in the process—and I commend the budget to the House.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [10.53 a.m.]: In speaking in this take-note debate on the budget handed down in May I will address funding allocations and vital infrastructure needs in the electorate of Hornsby. Like all members, I have a wonderful community of constituents who have assisted me in my efforts to draw the Government's attention to the needs of my electorate. It is a pleasure to represent the area and to work to ensure that the Government protects health, safety and wellbeing in our community.

I draw the attention of the House to Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai Hospital and Community Health Services. That probably will not surprise many members because the hospital has been on the agenda in recent times. It has been in the media, on the tip of people's tongues and certainly on the minds of my constituents and, more specifically, of the staff and patients. The \$3.5 million for planning provided in the budget was a surprise but, of course, it is very welcome. Perhaps it should not have been a surprise given the amount of lobbying we have done and the determination of my constituents. That budget allocation was not heralded by the Government when perhaps it should have been. The money has been allocated for the planning of new works, including the staged redevelopment of the hospital and further information and communications technology projects to support improved patient safety and more effective resource utilisation.

The hospital has received funding previously and building projects have been completed. It has a relatively new accident and emergency department that includes a psychiatric emergency care centre, a new paediatric ward, and a maternity unit. The allocation for beds in those two areas may have been underestimated because demand, particularly in the maternity unit, is extremely high. I am advised that the bed occupancy rate is usually well over 90 per cent, which is challenging for staff and patients.

A mental health intensive care unit has also been constructed adjacent to the old maternity unit. Although the unit has experienced issues and crises, it is a good facility. It was built to impress the local community just before the 2007 State election and to demonstrate the Government's alleged commitment to mental health funding. Unfortunately, staffing did not appear to be taken into account and the unit did not have any patients for 11 months. That was disgraceful given the demand for acute mental health care beds.

The budget also included an allocation of \$10 million for new or expanded mental health facilities at a number of places, including Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai Hospital and Community Health Services. The mental health community and the staff at Hornsby hospital were pleasantly surprised when it was announced that \$3.344 million would be provided for the commencement of construction of an adult mental health unit and a child and adolescent health unit. That funding was much-needed and long overdue. I have been advised that planning obviously takes some time and, while these mental health services were mentioned in the State Plan, the commencement of funding process came as a surprise. It is with great pleasure that the mental health community notes that both the adult mental health unit and the child and adolescent mental health unit will commence operation shortly. I have been contacted on many occasions—and even one call for help is one too many—by parents, friends and others concerned about young people suffering from mental illness being admitted to the Lindsay Madew Unit.

I pay tribute to the staff and management of the adult mental health unit and the staff of Hornsby hospital generally. I also pay tribute to the volunteers and community members who put so much time and effort into ensuring the hospital goes forward and not backwards. However, the placing of a young person in an adult ward has been unsatisfactory. It is good news that the Government has noted that fact and that a child and adolescent mental health unit will be constructed. The outdated Lindsay Madew unit will be replaced by an adult mental health unit adjacent to the child and adolescent mental health unit. It will be on the northern part of the Hornsby hospital campus, which is a more logical location. Mental health services will then not be so disjointed on the campus as they would be with the Lindsay Madew unit being in the southern part of the campus.

I have had many conversations about child and adolescent facilities and services. It is rather disturbing that at the moment the psychiatric emergency care centre [PECC] is being used for children under the age of 16. If a person under the age of 16 comes into the accident and emergency department, as they do weekly, the PECC unit is utilised. It seems to be the de facto child and adolescent mental health unit until such time as the new building is constructed, which hopefully will be staffed from the commencement of its operations. At the moment those young people are transferred around the State when a bed becomes available, which might be quite a long way from where their family and friends reside. Obviously, we hope that the construction of the child and adolescent mental health unit will be expedited.

I note also that rail commuter car parking construction is well underway in Berowra. Extra car parking spaces are being constructed adjacent to Berowra railway station. All I can say is that it is about time. It is something that I have been highlighting as a concern of people in the electorate since I was elected in 2002, and I am sure members preceding me also raised this issue. There are two areas that are desperately in need of improved rail commuter car parking. One is Berowra and the other is Hornsby railway station. I will refer later to Hornsby car parking as one of my concerns for the future. I noted in the media recently that out of the 47 or so new commuter car parks being built adjacent to railway stations the only one north of the harbour is in Berowra. We are very pleased about that new car park, however, it does not say much for the pork-barrelling that must be going on in Labor seats in the lead-up to the State election. The Berowra railway car park is much needed and will be well used. The letters I have received and the petitions I have brought to this House have been answered, so that is very good news.

In relation to funding for education I will address the Building the Education Revolution in my list of concerns. It is pleasing to note that the Clarke Road School for special purposes has an allocation for new works in the 2010-11 budget. That is extremely good news for the principal, Tony Brain, the staff, students, parents and supporters of the school. They certainly look forward to the application of those funds and the commencement of construction, but I have no advice at present as to how much the funding amounts to and what exactly will be constructed. That detail does not appear in the budget papers. The Clarke Road School for special purposes has done exemplary work in relation to children with disabilities. There have been many success stories, with young people graduating to other courses, such as Studio Artes. Studio Artes receives a number of young people who graduate after achieving their Higher School Certificate at that school, which is wonderful news.

Funding has been allocated for completion of the Dangar Island and Brooklyn sewage treatment works and the sewerage system in that area. That has been long awaited and it will solve many of the problems relating to sullage pump-out as well as the health of the Hawkesbury River. To see that work completed is very refreshing. It has certainly been welcomed and embraced by the people of Brooklyn and Dangar Island.

I refer also to the traffic lights that are being installed at the intersection of Excelsior Road and Pacific Highway in Mount Colah. That installation has been well over 20 years in the making. I live in Mount Colah and I received in my letterbox a notice to the householder relating to the construction works, which I believe are probably more than half completed by now. I took the liberty of sending a copy of that notice to the householder to the previous member, Stephen O'Doherty. I know that he worked extremely hard to highlight the safety issues and other matters at Mount Colah to the then Labor Government. It is good to acknowledge that Excelsior Road will have those lights.

It has been met with almost 100 per cent resounding happiness. However, there have been a few concerns. Obviously, some people will be concerned about the fact that Lancelot Street, Mount Colah, may become a thoroughfare. I have reassured residents that we welcome the funding. We lost funding a couple of years ago due to the Roads and Traffic Authority surprising the local community with a last-minute caveat, if you like, when there was funding for black spot works but time ran out. The Roads and Traffic Authority was

going to close one of the median strips at either Excelsior Road or Foxglove Road. The residents and I have been reassured that that will not be the case this time and the median strip will be left open. If we find that issues arise associated with the lights at Lancelot Street we will lobby for further lights and perhaps the reopening of Beryl Avenue, and the community is behind that.

I refer now to future needs and the issues and infrastructure that were not addressed in the budget. I have raised the issue of New Line Road many times, placed petitions before the House, and written many representations and held discussions. The community has wanted this black spot problem resolved for many years, pre-dating my election to Parliament. A number of community groups have been working hard to try to alert the Government to doing something about New Line Road. The on again and off again North West Rail Link is part of the solution for New Line Road, but the road also desperately needs an upgrade. Two lanes merge into one lane and in Sebastian Drive there is an entire community, a housing development, that is trapped because the only way in and out is via Sebastian Drive. There is no roundabout where one is needed to get onto New Line Road and residents, parents of young drivers and anybody trying to negotiate a right-hand turn out of Sebastian Drive take their lives in their hands. This Government has not listened to the concerns of the community. This site needs a roundabout and the road needs to be widened. I acknowledge that some widening is taking place but it is not enough.

I refer briefly to Hornsby railway station car parking. It is unbelievable that Hornsby railway station, which is a major hub receiving the North Shore line as well as the main Northern line, does not have enough parking for commuters. It is such an oversight. It is as though the Government is punishing commuters who are seeking to park their cars and to use rail services. A new platform 5 was constructed after the completion of a clearways upgrade, and extra stabling has been provided for trains. Suburban trains, which now have an additional line, are able to take people to work without being held up by interurban and freight trains. There has been little effort on the part of this Government to solve the parking problem, which is not good enough. I draw the attention of the Minister to that problem.

I refer to policing. It would be remiss of me in my contribution to debate on the budget if I did not address the dreadful situation facing people in the Hornsby electorate. Over the past year two police stations have been closed. The first fire sale involved Brooklyn police station, which is located 34 kilometres from Hornsby—a remote area that experiences many problems along the Hawkesbury River. There is no longer a police presence in Brooklyn. There is a police boat but there is no Eagle phone and people are not able to contact police easily in an emergency. I am aware from talking to local people and from anecdotal evidence that there has been an increase in crime in that area. Not long after Brooklyn police station was sold a major tyre slashing episode occurred and homes were broken into. More unbelievable was the sale of Berowra police station, which put Brooklyn out on a limb. Berowra police station served the large electorate of Berowra, Berowra Heights, Berowra Waters, Cowan and subsequently Brooklyn.

I remind members of the appalling state of the steep stairs at Hawkesbury River railway station. Over a period of many years constituents have been concerned about the nature of those stairs. Unbelievably, this Government's solution to the problem was to replace the steep stairs with another set of steep stairs. Taxpayers' money was used to replace those stairs with another unacceptable set of stairs. People have told me on many occasions that older people, young parents with children and people with baggage have not been able to access that railway station. A cement slab has been put down for the construction of a lift but we do not know when that will be completed.

I refer briefly to the Building the Education Revolution. A number of schools in my area have been fleeced, have had up to 27 per cent of their funding removed and put into Government coffers for whatever purposes, and some planned buildings have not been constructed at those schools. Brooklyn Bridge, which is mostly pink and no longer grey, is in need of a coat of paint. I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that that heritage bridge desperately needs a coat of paint.

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women) [11.13 a.m.]: I am pleased to contribute to debate on the Government's 2010-11 budget, which renews this Government's commitment to Newcastle and to the Hunter region. The budget delivered major investment in jobs, schools, health services, roads, housing and energy. Importantly, this budget demonstrates the Keneally Government's commitment to supporting the revitalisation of the Newcastle central business district. Members would be aware that Newcastle, in particular the Newcastle central business district, is the capital of the Hunter region—an issue that was confirmed by the Lower Hunter Strategy. A strong Newcastle and a strong Newcastle central business district will deliver growth and prosperity to the whole Hunter region.

There is general recognition of the fact that Newcastle needs a strong central business district. Over the past 30 years or so we have seen a gradual decline in the look and feel of that central business district, with a resultant number of vacant and derelict buildings. There has been a lack of action and a lack of coordinated vision for the Newcastle central business district. When I became Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women I commissioned the Hunter Development Corporation to undertake the Newcastle City Centre Renewal report, which sets out the Government's vision—a number of catalyst projects on which I, as the local member and Minister, have been delivering.

The most significant investment in the Hunter arising from this year's budget is the Government's commitment to the region's new \$94 million court complex, which will become the centre of a new justice precinct in the heart of Newcastle. That court complex is one of the catalyst projects listed in the Newcastle City Centre Renewal report—the document I outlined a moment ago that has been put together and largely endorsed by the community as the blueprint or vision for the renewal of the Newcastle central business district. This budget delivered on one of those catalyst projects.

Over \$4 million was allocated in this budget to determine the concept planning, the design, and where the new Newcastle court complex will be located. Planning of the Newcastle justice precinct will be completed in 2011-12, with construction to begin the following year. This fantastic new complex is expected to open in 2014-15. As I said earlier, it has been identified as a key catalyst to stimulate investment in our city as part of the overall efforts by the Government, by Newcastle council and by the community, to revitalise Newcastle and to help the city realise its potential fully in the future. I pay tribute to the Law Society, the Bar Association and the Hunter Business Chamber who have engaged in lobbying for this new \$94 million Newcastle court complex.

Our current court complex, which is an historic and heritage-listed building, does not meet the needs of modern-day court delivery. The new site that has been chosen is called the Burwood wedge. The court that will be delivered by the Government will be the largest and most modern court complex outside Parramatta, which is a real coup for Newcastle and its status as indeed the second largest city in New South Wales. The court complex will be some 20 per cent larger than the current court complex and will comprise 10 courtrooms as well as a large room that will be able to host, if needed, a large terrorism trial. I welcome this significant level of investment in the central business district, which has not been seen for the past 20 years and which builds on a number of important commitments already made by the Keneally Government to renew Newcastle.

To date the Government has supported the revitalisation of Newcastle through the delivery of a number of key projects. Again, these projects are outlined in the Newcastle City Centre Renewal report—a report that I commissioned and that is the blueprint for delivering a renewed central business district. Sitting on the top of that is the Newcastle City Centre Renewal Steering Committee, chaired by Warwick Watkins, Chief Executive of the Land and Property Management Authority and the Hunter Development Corporation. The committee has also as a member the general manager of Newcastle council. The committee is largely free of political influence as no politician is a member of it. The committee is delivery focused and has been working in conjunction with the Hunter Development Corporation, which is a testament to how it is working.

As part of the steering committee's delivery for Newcastle, land worth around \$4 million at Honeysuckle has been handed to the University of Newcastle for its planned relocation to the city centre, and the facilitation of an expressions of interest process for stage one of the university's new city campus. Last week the university put a submission to the Federal Government's Structural Adjustment Fund, which hopefully will result in stage one being funded. This three-stage process will result in 8,000 students and another 1,000 staff coming into the central business district and revitalising it, which will give the University of Newcastle a renewed impetus to focus on some of its core legal and business schools in the Hunter region and the Newcastle central business district.

The other important project the Government has delivered is the return of the former Newcastle post office to public hands. That the former Howard Government sold this building was a travesty. For 10 years this incredible heritage building was allowed to rot and decay. The State Government stepped in to ensure its return to public hands and to play a key role in revitalising what is called the East End of Newcastle. The handing over also of the Carrington pump house and Nobbys Headland by Newcastle Port Corporation to the Land and Property Management Authority will allow open public access to both sites. Importantly, most of my community know that I supported loudly and strongly the proposal by Neil Slater to see Nobbys Headland open. That proposal was not successful, so I intervened to make sure the community had access to that important and historic Newcastle headland.

Importantly, the \$2.55 million upgrade of the Newcastle Channel Berth has been completed to support increased numbers of visiting cruise ships and provide a home berth. Today on its maiden voyage the *Pacific Sun* arrived in Newcastle, the first of 10 home port visits for Newcastle, which is in line with increased tourism and very much about the diversification of the port of Newcastle. Most members in this House would be aware that the port of Newcastle is the largest coal export port in the world, but it is important to look also at opportunities beyond coal. The *Pacific Sun* will leave later today after transferring some 4,000 passengers on and off the vessel.

The Government has also overseen the release of the draft Newcastle Coastal Master Plan for public consultation in April, with the final plan expected to be released in early October. This plan covers 11 kilometres of coast from Stockton through to Merewether. When I became the member for Newcastle a significant amount of angst, if you like, existed between the local surf clubs and Newcastle council. I have guided a process whereby we have achieved agreement on how to move forward. This master plan is the vision for these important 11 kilometres of coast and will ensure that Newcastle does not turn its back on development or, indeed, the operation of public space, pedestrian ways and cycleways into the future.

The Government has overseen the demolition also of the derelict Shortland clinic building at James Fletcher Hospital. For a number of years no action was taken on this decaying building, but the good news is that it has been demolished. In the past couple of weeks we saw the demolition of the derelict building on the Newcastle bowling club site to be replaced by a single-storey function and convention centre. Again, I started that project when I was elected and it is pleasing that this iconic site will provide something spectacular for Newcastle.

We transferred the ownership of Wickham School to the University of Newcastle and allocated \$1.6 million in conjunction with Newcastle council for affordable student accommodation. Another issue important to me and supported by this budget are measures that encourage more people to use public transport. I worked closely with the Minister for Transport and the Hunter Development Corporation to ensure rail commuters have improved parking facilities at Broadmeadow. I was pleased that the 2010-11 budget provided \$1.5 million for a new commuter car park at that train station.

Of course, I welcome also the commitment of \$2.1 million for completion of the 20-bed unit at James Fletcher Hospital. This ongoing funding commitment not only is important for improvements to mental health services but also underscores the Government's position on preserving the site as a health facility. I have been pleased to work with the Hunter New England Area Health Service and the Coal River Working Group to get this important site heritage listed whilst ensuring that it remains a dedicated health facility. My community had tried without success to achieve this balanced approach, but were unable to enter into meaningful dialogue. This budget will build the future of the Hunter and it demonstrates the Keneally Government's commitment to support jobs, create sustainable infrastructure and deliver frontline services to secure the prosperity of the region. This budget has also detailed more than \$1 billion for investment in the Hunter region's public schools and TAFE colleges as well as an additional \$1.35 billion in health services in the Hunter New England Area Health Service.

The Hunter community welcomes the commitment to significantly improve funding for Hunter health services as well as the recent indication from the Government to support the retention of the Hunter New England Area Health Service as part of the local hospital network. This follows the agreement between the State and the Commonwealth, led by our Premier, on national health reforms to establish local hospital networks and introduce higher standards for more timely access to emergency care and elective surgery. It is important that I run through some of the achievements and key indicators within this budget that demonstrate commitment to significant funding for essential infrastructure projects and, importantly, improved services in the Hunter region.

Almost \$70 million has been allocated to deliver upgrades to nine of the region's schools, three TAFE colleges and science labs at 11 schools. Hunter roads projects will benefit from an allocation of \$612 million. There is \$471.6 million in major road infrastructure projects and \$124.3 million for road infrastructure maintenance across the region, including the biggest road project in the region's history, the Hunter Expressway. This massive project has been supported by all members in the Hunter region. We appreciate the leadership shown by the Commonwealth Government on this critical infrastructure project for the Hunter region. Approximately \$13.8 million has been provided for rail maintenance funding and \$6.5 million for the much-needed upgrade of Cardiff station, which includes an easy-access lift obtained through the persistent efforts of the member for Charlestown and the member for Wallsend. This historic victory certainly was

welcomed by the Cardiff community. Cardiff station is an important station for the Hunter region, and I certainly am pleased that the member for Charlestown and the member for Wallsend were able to get that victory.

The member for Maitland also has secured some \$12 million to complete the third crossing of the Hunter River at Maitland, with \$10 million also for planning and preconstruction of a new bridge over the railway line at Thornton. I congratulate the member for Maitland on that great work. The budget provides \$11.63 million for 51 new public and community homes, including a 16-unit complex in Maitland and a \$2.49 million eight-unit complex in Telarah. Importantly, \$5 million has been provided for nine new fire engines for Morisset, Toronto, Newcastle, Belmont, Cardiff, East Maitland, Tingira Heights, Hamilton and Doyalson fire stations.

Mr Steve Whan: I agree.

Ms JODI McKAY: I thank the Minister for Emergency Services and acknowledge his presence in the House. Clinical nurse educators are incredibly important and the \$764,000 provided to employ an additional 11 is about improving nurse clinical skills and enhancing patient care. The industry-funded, multi-million dollar comprehensive air monitoring network at 14 sites across the upper Hunter will receive \$500,000. I thank the Minister for Health, who is in the House, as is the Minister for Climate Change and Energy, and everybody else at the moment. I am pleased that I have drawn in this crowd for the Hunter region.

It is important to have a comprehensive monitoring system in the upper Hunter that supports the local coal industry, but we need also to ensure the balance that the community expects. The upgrade of the emergency department at Maitland Hospital will receive \$2.3 million for its completion and a record \$211.8 million will be invested in the region's water and wastewater infrastructure. I acknowledge the presence of the Minister for Water in the House. As part of the Government's support to those expanding industries in the Hunter region we have the Hunter Advantage Fund. This fund is important because it allows for businesses to expand and for our region to attract new industry. Of course, for us in the Keneally Government that is all about sustainable jobs. The budget allocates \$1.5 million, which is certainly very welcome.

The commitment of the New South Wales Government to improving public transport infrastructure in the State will open great opportunities for Hunter manufacturing industries and will support jobs in the region. The Hunter will benefit from the Keneally Government's investment in new buses and train carriages. The People of the Hunter region are very proud that most of the main carriage and bus manufacturers are based in the Hunter. In Cardiff approximately 300 construction jobs have been supported through the building of the new Waratah trains. The Volgren Australia bus factory in Tomago supports 143 jobs, and 192 people are assisting in building the new OSCar trains at United Goninan at Broadmeadow in my electorate.

I have been very pleased to support the efforts of my colleagues and the Australian Manufacturing Working Union in the "Make It Here" campaign, which acknowledges the strength of the manufacturing industry in the Hunter region and the opportunities beyond the work that have been won. A great local example of how the Government has directly supported the creation and retention of manufacturing jobs is the Volgren Australia plant in Tomago. It is important to acknowledge Volgren Australia's strong commitment to the Hunter region. I am advised that it pays above award salaries to its employees at its brand new purpose-built factory. Make no mistake that the Volgren Australia plant was made possible because of the New South Wales Government's bus expansion project. That could not have happened without the commitment of the New South Wales Government to providing additional new buses.

The buses are being built for the State Transit Authority and will be operated by private operators. I note that the one-hundredth bus came off the production line on Friday 27 August and celebrations for the one-hundredth "bendy" bus were keenly focused on the local workforce that built the first 100 buses. Continuing efforts by the New South Wales Government to increase opportunities for the Hunter region's skilled workforce are underway. The budget will invest \$75 million in the New South Wales Defence Industry Strategy. That investment includes a \$25 million allocation from the New South Wales Government's Major Investment Attraction Scheme, to assist in attracting and supporting defence and related high-technology industries. I cannot overstate how important defence and related high-technology industry jobs are to New South Wales.

Work is continuing to build defence capability hubs around the Williamstown base of the Royal Australian Air Force and around the port of Newcastle. It is important for us to recognise that there are opportunities within the defence industry and we should acknowledge the ship-building capabilities of

Newcastle Port. I have been working with Defence primes, HunterNet and other members of the Air Combat Capability Hub to attract private investment in our well-positioned defence industries as part of the Federal Government's investment in Defence. The Government also supports new opportunities in the maritime industries with the establishment of the big Maritime Defence Hub, which met for the first time last Friday.

In summary, the overall investment provided by the budget will deliver significant support to the Hunter region through investment and jobs. I have only touched on what is included in the budget, but I certainly commend budgetary allocations for the Hunter to the House.

Pursuant to resolution debate interrupted and set down as an order of the day for a later hour.

RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Attendance of Auntie Bev Manton, Chairperson of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, and Uncle Charles "Chicka" Madden, Gadigal Elder

The SPEAKER: I pay my respect, and acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land on which we are now gathered. I also pay my respects to Aboriginal Elders, past and present, and extend my respects to other Aboriginal people here today. I draw the attention of members to the resolution of the House passed yesterday which authorised the attendance of Auntie Bev Manton, Chairperson of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, and Uncle Charles "Chicka" Madden, Gadigal Elder, to be seated on the floor of the House during the proceedings on the Constitution Amendment (Recognition of Aboriginal People) Bill.

[Auntie Bev Manton and Uncle Charles "Chicka" Madden were conducted onto the floor of the Chamber.]

I welcome Auntie Bev Manton and Uncle Charles Madden and acknowledge that they have taken their seats on the floor of the House. I also welcome to the House His Excellency the Honourable James Spigelman, Chief Justice of New South Wales and Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales, and other special guests seated behind the Chair and in the galleries of the House. I acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of The Nationals, and all other members.

Today marks an important chapter in the ongoing process of Aboriginal reconciliation. As Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, it is a great honour for me to make some remarks to the House on behalf of the Parliament on this historic occasion. The New South Wales Parliament has played an important role in relation to Aboriginal reconciliation. On 18 June 1997 the New South Wales Parliament was addressed by Ms Nancy deVries, representing Aboriginals of the stolen generation. Following her address the Premier moved a motion apologising to the Aboriginal people for the systematic separation of generations of Aboriginal children from their parents, families and communities.

The motion also acknowledged the role the Parliament had in enacting laws and inflicting grief and loss on Aboriginal Australians. In unanimously passing this motion, the New South Wales Parliament became the first Parliament in Australia to formally issue an apology to the stolen generation. In 1997 and 1998 the Legislative Assembly Chamber hosted a Black Parliament which brought together members of Parliament and elected officials of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council. The forum provided all people involved with an opportunity to exchange views, share information, and strengthen links between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

In March 1998 the Parliament dedicated a wall in the public Fountain Court as a Reconciliation Wall. The wall displays artworks by indigenous artists from around New South Wales and features several exhibitions each year involving various media art forms, such as paintings, photography, printmaking and sculptures. The wall is part of the Parliament's commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal people. It is warmly supported.

Since 22 September 2005 the Legislative Assembly has formally acknowledged that the Eora people are the traditional owners of the land on which the House meets. The current standing orders, which were approved by the Governor on 21 February 2007, formally incorporate this acknowledgement of country into the procedures of the House and provide for the acknowledgement of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, the traditional owners of this land where Parliament meets, at the commencement of each sitting day. Additionally, this acknowledgement of country also recognises the traditional owners of the lands we represent in each of our electorates.

This amendment to the New South Wales Constitution Act, to formally acknowledge the Aboriginal People as the first people of the State of New South Wales, is an important step in an ongoing process of reconciliation. I commend all involved for the introduction of this important amendment to the Constitution Act and call on the Premier to introduce the bill.

CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT (RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE) BILL 2010

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Kristina Keneally, on behalf of Mr Paul Lynch.

Agreement in Principle

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY (Heffron—Premier, and Minister for Redfern Waterloo) [11.39 a.m.]:
I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

I acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people. I pay my respect to elders past and present, and recognise that we have in the Chamber today many distinguished Aboriginal people from a range of areas within our community. I acknowledge Ms Bev Manton, Chairperson of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council. Bev is a proud member of the Worimi nation and is a welcome guest in our House today. I also acknowledge Uncle Charles "Chicka" Madden, a most respected local Aboriginal elder who also joins us on the floor of the Parliament for these historic proceedings. I have been to many events with Chicka over the years, and at all times he has been a strong advocate for his people and respected in all communities. I also acknowledge the Hon. James Spigelman, Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales and Chief Justice of New South Wales, representing the Governor today. I also acknowledge our invited guests in the Chamber today. You are welcome guests of this Government and this Parliament to witness today's proceedings.

It is humbling to have the opportunity to put before this House legislation to recognise our first people, our Aboriginal people, in the New South Wales Constitution Act. And it is inspiring. It is inspiring because I do so with confidence that this bill enjoys the support of all members of the House, reflecting the goodwill of communities across New South Wales to our intention. Our intention is to provide recognition—recognition that is long overdue. One hundred and eight years after its first passing, our Constitution Act will acknowledge the first communities, the first nations, of what is now our State. While noting that this recognition is overdue, this Parliament can still take pride in the steps we have already taken to honour and recognise our Aboriginal communities, perhaps most notably in the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983. As well as taking real steps to redress the injustice and neglect of Aboriginal needs, this Act included in its preamble an important statement by the Parliament on the spiritual, social, cultural and economic significance of land to the Aboriginal people of New South Wales.

We now understand that this recognition should extend further and that it should not be bound to a single issue or Act but expressed as a principle of our democratic foundation. Today we are enshrining fundamental truths: the truth that our Aboriginal people are the first inhabitants of New South Wales; the truth of the spiritual, cultural and economic ties that bind our Aboriginal people to their traditional lands and waters; and the truth in the diverse and unique contributions that our many Aboriginal nations, cultures and communities make to the life, the economy and the character of our State. Some may say that this legislation is just symbolic, but I trust that those who do also know the importance of symbols and their power to inspire and to shape our attitudes and actions. I trust they understand that the icons of our national and cultural identity are of themselves merely symbols, and I ask them to consider how they might feel if they had to live their lives in the absence of these symbols, in the absence of the recognition they proclaim, and in the absence of the identity they publicly provide.

I ask them to consider that in all our cultures and in all human history there are symbols, and then there are the meanings we attach to them. People have died for reasons that others might have called symbolic. There are times when symbols matter very deeply. Similar things could be and were said of aspects of the 1967 referendum. The referendum proposal that Aboriginal people no longer be excluded from the census was, from a perspective, symbolic. But it recognised that Aboriginal people were Australian people. And the impact of this symbolism was deep and far-reaching because, by including Aboriginal people in the census, issues that had been well known in Aboriginal circles but shrouded away from mainstream Australia were suddenly exposed on a national scale. Numerous insights emerged. Many of them were shocking, and that shock kick-started much-needed improvements in health, education and services.

Similar things could be and were said of the apology to the stolen generations that was made by this Parliament in June 1997—the first of its kind by any Parliament in Australia. They were also said of the national apology in 2008. Yes, these were symbolic gestures. They were deeply symbolic gestures because they were powerful and they were necessary expressions of the community's will. These are gestures of recognition and the emotion on display at their giving, perhaps most memorably in Canberra in 2008, tells us how powerful recognition is when it comes after generations of being denied. Days like this are both emotive and empowering, and they truly serve as milestones for our whole community, reminding us of how far we have come together and showing the journey still ahead. In the words of Bev Manton, Chairwoman of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council:

There is a tendency to ignore the symbolic over the practical, but there is no good reason, of course, why we can't do both.

We can, and today we are. Three months ago both sides of this House pledged to work in a bipartisan spirit to close the gap in indigenous disadvantage, specifically the gap in life expectancy. We pledged to work with non-government organisations and the community to improve indigenous health and equality for Aboriginal people across the board, and we are pressing ahead with fresh determination to implement our many measures to improve Aboriginal health, welfare and education. What gives me the greatest hope in our ambition is that this is now finally an issue that is beyond politics, and our efforts can only be stronger for our agreements on this priority. Many people deserve mention as we reach this historic milestone today, because what we see today is fulfilment of a collective expression. So I thank all those who have brought us to this proud day in our State's history.

I thank the many New South Wales residents and members of this House who provided comment and feedback on the proposed changes. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his support, enabling us to move forward with common resolve. Above all, I thank the Aboriginal people of New South Wales for their cooperation, understanding and patience. This, like other moments in our journey to reconciliation, has been too long coming. Having lived with such recognition my entire life, I cannot begin to understand the tolerance required to live in its absence. In fact, I can barely imagine it. So while our commitment to true equality of opportunity in our State is expressed primarily in practical actions, our symbols do matter, especially those that reside in our pre-eminent legal framework. So I am grateful to be here today as our Parliament brings forward necessary and positive change. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [11.47 a.m.]: Mr Speaker, Your Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor, Councillor Bev Manton, Charles Madden, ladies and gentlemen, I acknowledge, as did the Premier, that Aboriginal people were the first owners of this land, that they are still the owners of this land and they will always be the owners of this land. The Governor of New South Wales cannot be with us here today, but anyone who knows Professor Marie Bashir knows of her dedication to the Aboriginal community and her work with that Aboriginal community over decades. I am sure this is one occasion in Parliament that she deeply regrets missing.

However, there could be no better representative of Her Excellency here today than the Lieutenant-Governor. In 1965, he was one of those freedom riders who helped seek to establish the rights of the Aboriginal people of this State—the freedom rides that were not without risk, the freedom rides that saw violence when they visited Moree and that saw the bus driven off the road in Walgett. But as my friend the member for Barwon now says, what were once symbols of segregation are now beacons of hope for the sorts of changes that can be effected if people of goodwill—there have always been people of goodwill prepared to stand up for injustice and speak out for equality—come together and work for a common cause.

I stand here in this Chamber as the member for Ku-ring-gai, one of the few seats with an Aboriginal name. The Guringai people may not be here today but amongst us are representatives of the Bidjigal people of the Eora nation, those people who come from Kurnell at La Perouse where Europeans first arrived all those years ago, where the dispossession began, and where so much distress and disappointment commenced.

Mr Speaker, I acknowledge, as you and the Premier have said, that this was the first Parliament at which a heartfelt and unanimous apology was offered to Australia's indigenous communities. It was, as you say, a place where there is now a memorial wall to that event, and I acknowledge the role of the member for Wakehurst in initiating that wall. For many years the member for Wakehurst was Opposition spokesman on Aboriginal affairs. The Legislative Assembly has been in existence for 154 years and has operated under a Constitution for 154 years, and for all of that time there has been no acknowledgement of the first nations, and

for all of that time there has been no acknowledgement of Aboriginal people. This is a long overdue action and it is supported by my colleagues, the Liberals-Nationals, my Independent friends in this House, and the Leader of The Nationals, who will indicate that bipartisan support when he also has a chance to speak.

Many of us come to this place with a philosophy—for me it is best summed up by John Stuart Mill who said, "The worth of the state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it". If we want this State to be a state of opportunity and hope, we cannot exclude anyone, and we should never exclude those for whom this State was their first home, and will always be their home. Recognition is important. It goes beyond mere symbolism but without results and clear achievement it still will not be enough. Whoever is the author of the words said in Redfern all those years ago, the sentiments expressed were right. We should never ignore historical truth, and recognition is critical. I quote:

Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.
We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.
We brought the diseases. The alcohol.

This place, in fact, owes its origins to the rum core hospital, the evils of that alcohol that came to this colony. The quote continues:

We committed the murders.
We took the children from their mothers.
We practised discrimination and exclusion.
It was *our* ignorance and *our* prejudice.
And *our* failure to imagine these things being done to us.

As I have said here before, I have the privilege to represent a wonderful woman in my electorate who for me encapsulates what so many in the gallery and so many across this State have experienced. Faith Bandler is one of those individuals who fought the good fight for the 1967 referendum referred to by the Premier. It was a referendum to ensure that the national government could make national laws for people, including Aboriginal people, and a referendum that ensured that Aboriginal people for the first time in the history of this nation would be counted literally in the census. Faith Bandler along with Pearl Gibb crashed a Liberal Party meeting and saw Bob Askin, a future Premier of the State, who said to them, "You have my sympathy". Pearl Gibb shot back at him, "We don't want your sympathy, we want our rights".

Faith Bandler tells that story with a laugh, as she tells the next. When she finally met Robert Menzies, whose government initiated the referendum that occurred in 1967 under the Holt-McEwen Liberal- Nationals federally, he said, "You are a remarkable woman. Those petitions that you collected have done a remarkable thing. I am the first Prime Minister in this nation's history to present a petition, and it was your petition". Frankly, it was the right thing to do. The 1967 referendum was passed by the largest winning margin of any in the history of this nation, of which we should all be proud. Equally we can be proud that we have had a Federal Constitution since 1901, that the right to vote for Aboriginal people was reaffirmed in 1949, and that from 1962 onwards there was no doubt about the right to vote in States and Territories.

Yet it took 70 years before an Aboriginal, Neville Bonner, representing the Liberal Party in Queensland, took a place in the national Parliament in the Senate and sat there for 12 years. It took 109 years before we had an Aboriginal enter the House of Representatives, Dr Ken Wyatt, a former public servant from the New South Wales Health department, who has become the Liberal member for Hasluck in Western Australia. It took 140 odd years—every one of them worth the waiting—for the member for Canterbury, Ms Linda Burney, to take her place as the first Aboriginal to enter the New South Wales Parliament. My only point is that, despite a Constitution in 1901, despite a referendum in 1967, it still takes time, and how much more patience do our friends in the gallery have? How much more patience should Aboriginal communities across this State have, given what is happening to them?

We know that Aboriginal life expectancy is lower than the rest of the community. We know there are higher rates of diseases, including diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease amongst Aboriginal communities, and that those rates have increased over the past decade. We know that there are increased hospitalisation rates, including for smoking and alcohol-related illnesses that have also increased in recent years. We know that the unemployment rate amongst Aboriginals in this State is at least three times higher than the rest of the community. We know that the rate of young people and children in care is significantly higher and is increasing. We know that the New South Wales Office of Aboriginal Housing shows that overcrowding in Aboriginal dwellings is increasing across New South Wales in places like the mid-west, the south-east and the North Coast. We know, in that great enabler of opportunity, education, the Two Ways Together Report on Indicators

produced last year stated, "There is a significant gap in the achievement of Aboriginal students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 relative to non-Aboriginal students in New South Wales in both reading and numeracy in the NAPLAN test results for 2008".

On Friday, the latest National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] results will be released, and I will be looking to see whether that gap has narrowed and whether all the rhetoric and commitment has translated into results. Until it does translate into results, no-one should be satisfied, notwithstanding the joy of this ceremony today, because until we have that equality, it simply will not exist. There can be no equality of citizenship without equality of opportunity. There can be no equality of opportunity until those in Aboriginal communities have the same life choices and life expectancies as the rest of the community. It will require a clear commitment. It will require a focus on results. It will require transparent and honest measurement. It will require a commitment to direct resources to where the problems exist.

As Noel Pearson reminds us in relation to another State presently, it also means that we have to do away with the modern day paternalism that says that government always knows best. Letting go of control is always scary but it has to be done because government is never always right. Those of us who believe in the rights of individuals to make decisions about their lives and the services they depend upon understand that the community, whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, is best at identifying its own needs. And the community is usually best in meeting those needs, and the job of government should be to support the community in its actions.

Giving people a real say and what they deserve in a democratic system is what citizenship is meant to be about. Reconciliation has no meaning if it does not mean equality of opportunity, if it does not mean life expectancy, if it does not mean better educational and health outcomes, if it does not mean greater life choices, and if it does not mean that any person born in any Aboriginal community across this State can have the same life choices as my children.

Outside I met Uncle Max, who was involved with the smoking ceremony, who told me proudly of his decision in 1973 to leave north-western New South Wales and come to Sydney to flee the evils of alcohol. He told me with pride about his influence and involvement and spread of Alcoholics Anonymous to other Aboriginal communities. He said with pride that he had appeared in movies—the names of which I forget, Mr Speaker, but I am sure you know—and that those movies had involved alcohol, and he had been able to resist the temptation. That was a life choice made by an Aboriginal exercising the sort of personal responsibility and understanding of what suited him that we all need to be committed to expanding across the community.

I am optimistic. I believe that people are assets. I believe that the role of government is to create an environment for people to fulfil their potential because, Aboriginal or not, that benefits us all. I understand that in achieving that we need to focus on the provision of fundamental services and infrastructure upon which people and enterprises seek to build their lives. I understand that that is the only way to return to Australia's first nations the opportunities and the care that this nation has provided to those of us who, over the past 222 years, have come to this country, who have sought and pursued opportunities, and who believe that this is a great country. It should be a great country for our first communities too. It should be a great country for those Aboriginal communities. This is the first step, but it is not the conclusion. We need to work much harder across all sides of politics, we need to forget the rhetoric and deliver the results.

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Minister for the State Plan, and Minister for Community Services) [12.01 p.m.]: May I begin in my language, the language of the Wiradjuri people, by formally recognising the traditional owners of the land on which we meet: Ballumb Ambal Cadigal yindyamarra. Ngadu—yirra bang marang. I pay my respect to the ancient Cadigal of the Eora nation. I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in recognising Mrs Bev Manton and Mr Charles "Chicka" Madden. It is a great honour to have you on the floor of the Parliament with us today. I also recognise the many other senior people who join us for what is a very significant and very good day in the New South Wales Parliament.

It is quite overwhelming for me to be standing here, and I am sure that many other people feel that sense as well. For Aboriginal people, this place has not been a place that has served us well all the time, but I particularly want to acknowledge the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs who has brought this landmark piece of legislation before the House. It has been Minister Lynch's vision and deep sense of social justice that has carried the bill which sits before us today and I want us to acknowledge Minister Lynch for that. I would also like to acknowledge the Premier and, importantly, the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the

Opposition for their recognition of the importance of this issue. I would also like to mention Veronica Graff, who I know cannot be with us today but who was very passionate about constitutional recognition of first nations people.

I begin my contribution to this debate with a brief foray into the history of Australia and its peoples, of the colony of New South Wales and a little of my personal history. This House stands a short walk from where the colony of New South Wales began, where today happy tourists and office workers arrive on ferries at Circular Quay. In 1788 the ships' boats of the Royal Navy landed armed marines, officers and convicts. The displacement of the country's first people started immediately with the guns they carried and mostly, in the first instance, the diseases they brought. But they did it even more finally with the laws that they made and the history they wrote. History, as we all know, is written by the conqueror. The history of the country, they said, started with their own arrival. Those of us in this Chamber of my vintage will remember learning that at school.

The history of New South Wales is one of contested ownership of country and contested symbols. When, in the 1850s, the colony made its first steps towards self-government warfare still raged in the State's central west. Aboriginal people had been fighting desperately in this part of the world. Pemulwuy, the Rainbow Warrior, was the de facto leader of a rebellion every bit as serious and deadly as a modern day insurgency, and his son Tedbury followed in his footsteps. For my mob, the Wiradjuri, it was our great warrior Windradyne who led his men and fought so fiercely that martial law was declared in Bathurst in 1823, the only time it was declared in the colony.

When the colonies of Australia federated in 1901 they produced a dry, empty document. It reads more like an interstate free trade agreement than a national foundation. The New South Wales Constitution Act, passed in 1902, was part of the same process and although, unlike the famous American document, they do not define citizenship or rights, the drafters of the Commonwealth version did make sure to include section 127 making explicit that Aboriginal people were not to be counted amongst Australians.

In 1967 when most—not all—Australians voted in the famous referendum that the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition have referred to I was a 10-year-old girl in the channel country in south-western New South Wales, not a citizen of this country. I was not taught that Aboriginal people had a place in the Australian nation, and we all know how that went. Throughout the greater part of the twentieth century to be Aboriginal was to be a non-citizen. Aboriginal people who were born prior to 1967—and some are here in this Chamber—were people who were born, who walked, who fought wars for this nation, who worked for this country, and who died for this country, and yet they were non-citizens.

The Constitutions of Australia and New South Wales are not institutional documents, as the Premier has said, but they do carry symbolic power. It is that power that this bill attempts to use in the service of reconciliation. It is a commonly expressed sentiment that reconciliation should be practical and material rather than symbolic. It is true, as Dr Alex Boraine told the 1997 Reconciliation Convention, that reconciliation needs real, physical amends. It needs genuine restitution, an acceptance of who we are and what has to be done to make things right. Pat Dodson was right to declare in the same year that we cannot have reconciliation without social justice. I do not, however, see the practical and the symbolic as opposed to each other. We are not playing a zero-sum game in which symbols come at the expense of action. They complement each other, in the same way that you cannot give a loved one a meaningful gift without a kind and heartfelt word. The Australian historian Melissa Harper described in her book on Australian national symbols published earlier this year just how important symbols are to who we are. She wrote that it is we who make symbols—people do. The nation is a product of its symbols:

When people draw maps, hoist flags, buy souvenirs, design trademarks and stamps, they make the imagined nation a tangible reality ...

Far more than the animals on our stamps and the trademarks on our groceries, this symbolism goes for our laws and our fundamental Constitutional documents, and, more importantly, our sense of identity as Australians together. I remember as a child marching with the school to the local war memorial on 25 April to pay our respects. I remember as a child at the gates of the Whitton War Memorial looking up at the names and thinking, "Who are those people? What did they do and why did they do it?" Today is very much about that as well. There are no more generous people in this country than Aboriginal people.

That is what you are all experiencing today—an amazing generosity. The State of New South Wales does not have a legal document more important than the Constitution and this Parliament deals with nothing less important than the laws we all live by. Throughout the twentieth century legislation has been one of many tools

for improving the position of Aboriginal people. To mention just one example, the State of New South Wales should be proud of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983—some of you who were champions then are here today—which aimed to compensate traditional owners for the loss of their land. It remains a landmark and powerful piece of legislation. Social activism, legal debate and acts of history and truth-telling have informed the drafting of those laws. We can thank the lifetime struggles of Aboriginal people and their non-Aboriginal allies for the gains we have made together. I stress that—the activism of Aboriginal people and our non-Aboriginal fellow travellers.

In the pitching of the famous 1972 tent embassy and actions such as reclaiming the Redfern Block for its Aboriginal tenants, symbolism and the demand for real action combined powerfully. In the courts, Aboriginal people have found redress for their grievances. Eddie Mabo's famous 1993 victory in the High Court won Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people their rights, their dignity and their official place as original owners of their lands. In setting the record straight about the past, Aboriginal people have even been able to establish their place in the national story. That goes for academic histories, through the works of authors such as Henry Reynolds, whose work has been dedicated to *The Other Side of the Frontier*, and official, legal histories such as that of Sir Ronald Wilson and Mick Dodson, who gave Australia the "Bringing Them Home" report. This was a seminal report. The country could no longer say—and we were all there when that report came out and we heard the stories of the stolen generations—and as a nation not one of us could ever say again that we did not know.

Perhaps the most important thing about this Act is that this is not just for Aboriginal people, rather it is for everyone. We measure ourselves and recognise ourselves in the documents and institutions we share. Ghassan Hage, the Sydney University anthropologist, described societies as "mechanisms for the distribution of hope". Isn't that fantastic—mechanisms for the distribution of hope? A society that creates attachment and encourages its citizens to commit to its future is an embracing society. It distributes hope among its citizens and induces them to care for it. When I was a child, as I mentioned before, I could certainly not find this hope and care in the institutions of the Australia that existed then. An Australian child growing up is surrounded by Australian symbols, institutions and language. A girl or boy learns to recognise herself or himself, as if they were looking in the mirror, in the symbols around them. For Koori children growing up the reflection was not clear and sometimes it was non-existent. It is critical that those symbols and institutions make a truthful account of the past and present so that everyone can be included and accounted for. Constitutions are nothing if they are not living documents. An institutional document that does not take account of the truth and the history of the land and its peoples is a false document.

Today is also about feelings and about story-telling. In acknowledging the true history of New South Wales this bill recognises the heritage of every citizen, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. It is, after all, a past we share. The country is coming of age and we must now know, understand and embrace true history. The peaceful settlement people once believed in was a lie. When groups of school students tour this House I hope that they are able to recognise it as a representative of their society—all children. This Parliament is not just a place for the dry making of laws; it is a place for telling true stories of people and places. It is a place for feeling. It is a place for people to demand their rights. It is a place for achieving social justice. In recognising Aboriginal people as traditional owners and custodians of the land in this State's Constitution this bill achieves this. I am so proud. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [12.14 p.m.]: Mr Speaker, Your Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, Auntie Bev Manton, Uncle "Chicka" Madden, members of the Aboriginal community from right around New South Wales, honourable members and ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the New South Wales Nationals I express my strong support for this amendment to the Constitution Act 1902. New South Wales has had a Constitution since 1856, so today's special sitting is truly a historic occasion. It is a rarely acknowledged fact that New South Wales has the largest indigenous population of any State or Territory. My New South Wales Nationals colleagues and I represent the majority of regional New South Wales and therefore most of the indigenous communities throughout our great State.

In my electorate of Oxley a significant number of indigenous Australians live, in places such as Kempsey, Bowraville, Bellbrook and many of the other communities on the magnificent mid North Coast. I and other Nationals members in this place have a close affinity with the indigenous communities we represent and we are therefore proud to support this amendment that, firstly, acknowledges and honours the Aboriginal people as the first people of this State; and, secondly, recognises Aboriginal people have a spiritual, social and cultural relationship with their traditional lands and waters and have made a unique and lasting contribution to the identity of New South Wales.

This constitutional amendment is therefore of great symbolic importance to indigenous communities and to Australians as a whole. We see that in the packed gallery here today, which is full of indigenous community representatives. However, we will need much more than symbolism to close the disparity gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in this State. The Nationals, being often in the indigenous communities we represent throughout New South Wales, are only too aware of the wide gaps in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that sadly still exist today.

The "Two Ways Together: Report on Indicators 2009" report released in July this year shows us that in far too many cases the outcomes for indigenous Australians are not improving and in some cases even deteriorating. We find the following socioeconomic indicators of particular concern: Life expectancy at birth of 70 years for Aboriginal males and 75 years for Aboriginal females in this State, are 8.8 and 7.5 years shorter respectively than for non-Aboriginal males and females. In 2007 Aboriginal children aged between three and five made up only 4.5 per cent of preschool enrolments in New South Wales. Between 2002 and 2007 the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people was consistently over three times higher than the rate for all New South Wales residents. Hospitalisation rates for Aboriginal males increased by 43 per cent over a similar period, rising from 39,587 per 100,000 in 2002-03 to 56,628 per 100,000 in 2007-08. And the rate of family-violence-related assault involving Aboriginal women is six times higher than the rate among non-Aboriginal women.

The Safe Families Program to tackle Aboriginal child sexual assault in five nominated communities in western New South Wales is running behind schedule, leaving at risk our most vulnerable. This is simply not good enough in the Premier State in the twenty-first century. These gaps on economic and social outcomes are a measure of the distance we still need to travel in this State and reinforce the need for all of us to work together and work harder, beyond symbolism, to what I have previously termed "practical reconciliation".

Amending the Constitution is a tremendous start, but in a State as prosperous as New South Wales more must be done to support our indigenous communities, and not just in a symbolic sense. As the Premier said, this issue is above politics. I urge all members to work together with indigenous communities to identify local solutions to local problems and then to take real action, in a practical sense, to support the significant and symbolic step that has been achieved today. I note the young baby who is present in the gallery today. On the theme of symbolism, perhaps today represents a fresh start for reconciliation and a new start for indigenous people in New South Wales. On behalf of the New South Wales Nationals I offer our strong support for this bill.

Pursuant to resolution debate adjourned and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

The SPEAKER: It gives me a great deal of pride to call on Aunty Bev Manton to address the House.

Councillor BEV MANTON: What a wonderful day for us as Aboriginal people of this country. I acknowledge the Gadigal people, their elders past and present, still strong and still surviving after 200 years. I acknowledge the Hon. James Spigelman, Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales, Premier Kristina Keneally, our wonderful Linda Burney, the Hon. Paul Lynch, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Barry O'Farrell, MP, Leader of the Opposition, Uncle Charles "Chicka" Madden, other members of the Parliament who are with us today, my fellow councillors from the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, and my other Aboriginal brothers and sisters in the gallery. I am honoured to be here today as the Chairwoman of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council to welcome this amendment to the New South Wales Constitution.

As most members would be aware, the New South Wales Land Council is the peak duly elected representative body for the Aboriginal people of New South Wales. We are firmly focused on protecting the rights and interests and furthering the aspirations of our 20,000-odd members and the broader Aboriginal community. It has been acknowledged on all sides of this Parliament and elsewhere that there is much unfinished business when it comes to State and Federal constitutions. That is particularly so when it comes to acknowledging the crucial importance of the special place of Aboriginal people in the history of our nation. Today we share an important moment in our constitutional history. Today Aboriginal people are being given due recognition and honour as the first peoples and nations of Australia and New South Wales.

As members are all aware, the tone for this country's relationship with Aboriginal people is embodied in the Constitution. That is why the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council sought a commitment from the State and Federal governments to give constitutional recognition to Australia's first peoples through

amendments to the preamble of their respective constitutions. This commitment was sought during the 2009 annual conference of the Local Government Association of New South Wales, which was attended by Premier Keneally, but who at that time was not Premier. The New South Wales Government is now acting upon that commitment. I am encouraged by its willingness to extend this special recognition to Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians and occupiers of the land. I am encouraged by its willingness to acknowledge that we have, and we always have had, a continuing spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with our traditional lands and waters.

In doing so the New South Wales Government has set the tone for the rest of this document. It is offering us an opportunity to articulate further our shared goals, principles and ideas as a nation. This is a significant constitutional step in the right direction and I am hopeful that it will not be the only step. There are very few mechanisms for our people in this State that provide a basis for protecting the rights that are available to us as first peoples. The New South Wales Aboriginal Rights Act is one of these. Like the proposed amendment to the New South Wales Constitution, the Land Rights Act gives due and special recognition to the spiritual, social, cultural and economic importance of land to Aboriginal people. It is our sole form of compensation for the dispossession of our land.

This is little understood by the general public. It is important for the Government and for this Parliament to continue to uphold such legislative mechanisms as they are fundamental to the protection of our rights. Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales would appreciate it if the Government and the Parliament built upon such laws to extend the goodwill that is evident here today. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides a framework that fully respects Aboriginal people's rights and creates an opportunity for all Australians to be truly equal. I urge the State Government and all members of this Parliament to work together in the coming months to take the next step on the path towards full recognition of Australia's first peoples. They could do so by commencing to implement the principles enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Practical steps for implementing the declaration include the delivery of services, financial and infrastructure support, legislative amendment, education programs, and reparatory measures. In taking this step the Government and all members of Parliament must ensure meaningful, respectful and culturally appropriate consultation with grassroots Aboriginal peoples; recognise the impact of historic injustices and the fundamental importance of self-determination and the right to self-government; recognise and respect Aboriginal people as the only determinants of their Aboriginal culture and heritage; and provide freedom from discrimination and respect for legal and other protections that enshrine these rights.

In our view these measures should be supported by a rights-based scorecard for benchmarking and monitoring policies, programs and services for Aboriginal people. Such a scorecard was developed in 2004 by the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC], which attempted to provide a framework against which laws, policies programs and services could be assessed. That would be a good starting point. Without the political will and funding to secure the rights enshrined in the declaration these measures alone will not create opportunities to remedy the disproportionate disadvantage experienced by so many Aboriginal communities in Australia. In the now famous words of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd during his apology to the stolen generations in Canberra:

... unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong.

In closing, I acknowledge and applaud the New South Wales Government for taking this step. I look forward to a time when the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is implemented into law, policy and service provision for Aboriginal people in this State. I, too, acknowledge our youngest guest in the gallery today, who appears to have agreed with a lot of what has been said.

The SPEAKER: Very well behaved as well, I might add!

Councillor BEV MANTON: This is about creating a better future for us and for future generations of Australians. I am ever hopeful of what tomorrow will bring. Thank you.

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the House, I sincerely thank Aunty Bev Manton. I now invite members and distinguished guests to join me in attending a reception in the Speaker's Garden on this memorable occasion.

[Auntie Bev Manton and Uncle Charles "Chicka" Madden withdrew from the Chamber.]

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS**Financial Year 2010-2011****Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [12.30 p.m.]: It is quite mundane to return to budget matters after such an historic occasion in the Chamber. I acknowledge the significance of the ceremony that just took place. This amendment to the Constitution is long overdue and every parliamentarian in this House can be proud that we have undertaken this process. My hope remains strong about the words spoken that this symbolic start is just the start of a united and bipartisan approach that will close the gap that was articulated so well by all speakers today.

I shall take a little time talking about the budget and all matters within it. In this place a forensic review of the budget used to be undertaken before it was passed. The current procedure of the Treasurer handing down the budget and then disappearing back to the upper House and beyond does not do democracy or this State any good. Certainly, talking about the budget months after the event is a slap in the face for democracy and for every community across this State to articulate concerns and to scrutinise and put forward issues espoused by various communities but not addressed in the overall budget process.

I remain strongly of the opinion that the budget process needs to be examined more rigorously and certainly be subject to more scrutiny. The 2010-2011 Budget was more of the same from New South Wales Labor: short-term promises, no vision, no plan and certainly no acknowledgement that New South Wales for a considerable period has operated at a level well behind the rest of the nation. We have been trailing on critical economic indicators. I shall not spend time referring again to those issues, but I argue strongly that the forecast surplus is concocted. This year's budget announcements were all about getting through to an election rather than laying a financial platform for the future.

I shall highlight five critical problems and then talk about what the Coalition proposes in reply as a road map to take this State forward. The budget and the forecast expenditure are incredibly unrealistic. This should be of concern to every member of this House because spending last year grew at 9.6 per cent. The Government would argue that adjustments were required in rolling out some of the Federal Government stimulus packages. One needs to examine previous budget expenditure. Over the past four years average spending growth was about 7.6 per cent, yet we are supposed to believe that over the next four years it will be 3.4 per cent, and 2.7 per cent in this particular budget year. We are yet to see how the Government intends to enact some of those savings. It just cannot be believed. Every member of this House and, indeed, everyone in New South Wales should be concerned that if expense growth rolls forward at just the historical average of the past four years, we will not see the surpluses this Government talks about; we will see significant deficits. Certainly, we all need to understand how this Government intends to achieve the fiscal discipline it has articulated, notwithstanding that its track record suggests a different story.

The budget reference to mining royalties lacked credibility. The Government has forecast receiving \$925 million more in royalties over the next three years even though the mining tax remains of concern to many in the industry, notwithstanding a compromise deal struck with a few of the bigger players. Daily I receive numerous complaints from all types of industries, not just mining, expressing concern about sovereign risk. This morning I met with a multinational company that used to invest in Australia to offset political and country risk in more emerging markets. Australian investment was cited as investment in China, India and Vietnam, but that has been turned on its head. Board level murmurs are that investments in Australia now come with considerable sovereign risk—an incredibly sad but true statement to make to this House.

This mining tax is more of the same and adds more to that uncertainty. Its retrospectivity is appalling and will impact significantly on this economy. I was incredibly disappointed that the Treasurer and the Premier did not stand up to Canberra when this tax was introduced. State Parliament should stand up for the rights and interests of the people of New South Wales and not act as just a back office for a Federal political party. That is what has happened with the mining tax. The Premier and the Treasurer did not show any strength to stand up and ask about the impact on this State's economy, jobs or investment. They just ticked the box because Sussex Street head office told them to stay out of it, which is what they did. Investment decisions for the next six to 12 months will impact significantly on whether we see any of those mining royalties. Certainly that should have been taken into account.

Infrastructure has been cut in the budget. Despite the Treasurer's rhetoric, Labor has cut \$700 million from infrastructure plans over the next four years. In addition, it has spent \$1.4 billion less on infrastructure

projects just because they failed to deliver. Despite now having up to 10 failed transport plans, New South Wales still has no credible pipeline for building critical infrastructure or delivering the public transport services we need. In this reply I shall articulate some of the ideas the Coalition has put forward and urge the Government to adopt. We need to start delivering infrastructure objectively for the greatest community need and biggest economic impact for the State, not by electorates or postcodes. The numbers tell us that the only vision from the Treasurer in this budget was cutting infrastructure.

Homeowners were clipped in this budget. The ad valorem tax hike on property transfers was sneakily introduced on Federal budget day, again with the classic spin that no-one would notice. The Minister for Planning was sent to deliver a press release at about 3 o'clock without details. One must ask: What is this Government trying to achieve? If there were clear articulation to use those funds for the betterment of making homeowners more competitive by pouring money back into the industry and providing incentives in other ways, one might start to understand what is happening. However, only \$140 million will be returned in stamp duty. The historic presentation was that new apartments and homes would not attract stamp duty, but that was just a portion of the increased tax take. The incredibly sad indictment is that the Government does not understand that housing affordability remains a critical issue.

The Coalition certainly opposed increases in property transfer tax and ad valorem duty. We pressed for details of the funds and how they would be spent. Within 48 hours of commencing our investigation, it became very clear that it was nothing more than a tax grab. The funding was already in place. The assurances of title were a ruse, so it was nothing more than a tax grab. This is another instance of homeowners in the State being clipped. The economy continues to struggle because of the approach adopted by the Government. The Government cannot spin its way through issues of critical economic importance.

The Coalition notes that New South Wales lack of a competitive position relating to payroll tax remains entrenched in the budget. Although there has been some movement in the payroll tax rate, the critical comparator is the rates applying in the other States, our competitors. When the Coalition was last in government in 1995 the New South Wales and Victorian payroll tax rates were on a par. Now New South Wales imposes the highest payroll tax burden of any State. New South Wales medium-size businesses with 60 employees pay the most payroll tax of any State. The token reduction in payroll tax rates by the Government really only matched the reduced rates offered in Victoria. New South Wales continues to lag behind in payroll tax incentives.

It does not take a significant understanding of economics to realise that a State that is not competitive will not attract capital and investment or create jobs. The role of a Premier and Treasurer in presenting a budget is to make the State competitive and induce capital interests and investors to participate in the State's economy. That is what the Government has to do to start turning the New South Wales economy around. Irrespective of which report of a consultant is examined, such as CommSec or Sensis, the conclusions are the same: New South Wales is entrenched in the position of last on the list of economic performance. The lack of competitiveness of the State is the critical comparator.

It is worth reiterating the Opposition's economic plans in the hope that the Government will take heed. The first step, of which the Opposition is very proud and where we think the current budget should have began, is accessing the capital we need to build infrastructure that the State requires. The Coalition announced Restart New South Wales, which is a \$5 billion fund that can be applied to creating infrastructure to increase economic activity and assist the State to perform well above the national average, rather than lag behind. The program has been funded. The Coalition has examined a range of issues with a view to determining from the balance sheet capital that could be released to start building infrastructure.

The Coalition intends to release capital that is tied up in the desalination plant and put it to work in the expectation that it may well provide \$1.5 billion without impacting at all upon net borrowing debt levels. We found \$1.5 billion in capital funds that could be put to work. We also propose, when tax revenues come in above budget, to assert discipline and put those revenues in a fund to build assets for the future of the State instead of using the revenue as a means to fund uncontrolled expenditure. The Coalition's proposals attracted criticism from the Treasurer. However, he had to acknowledge that net debt will increase quite considerably over the next three to four years.

Within the context of infrastructure development the Coalition is prepared to engage in sensible borrowing alongside that fund. While retaining the State's triple-A credit rating, the Restart New South Wales fund and Waratah bonds, which offer self-managed superannuation, will offer exponential sources of capital

growth that should be tapped to fund infrastructure development. Waratah bonds will do exactly that. The package presents an opportunity before the next election for Treasury, the Treasurer and the Premier to get on with the job of increasing infrastructure that the State so desperately needs.

Another way of turning around the economy is the creation of jobs. It is not rocket science and it certainly is not complicated. The way to get the economy moving is by increasing employment. The Australian Bureau of Statistics suggests that each new job created in the economy generates an outward benefit of \$65. Increasing employment in the State is critical. That is why the Coalition's Jobs Action Plan is very specific and targeted. Should an O'Farrell government be elected, the first 100,000 jobs would be free of payroll tax and there would be a payroll tax rebate of \$4,000 for each full-time employee for the first 100,000 new eligible jobs created in New South Wales. The rebate is targeted at the average wage and offers an incentive. It sends a clear message to each business throughout Australia that New South Wales is serious about attracting small, medium and large businesses to create employment and get the State's economy moving again.

The Coalition calls on the Treasurer and Premier to take up the Jobs Action Plan. The Coalition is proud that 40 per cent of its jobs will be reserved for rural and regional areas of New South Wales. To get the rural and regional economies of New South Wales going, the Government should provide jobs and infrastructure. Approximately 30 per cent of the Coalition's Restart New South Wales capital fund is targeted to regional and rural areas of New South Wales. I will deal in more detail with that later.

The creation of Infrastructure New South Wales is the way to remove political interest from infrastructure decisions. I cite the example of the Parramatta to Epping rail link announcement made during the Federal election campaign. That was an incredible admission that politics was the only game in town in relation to infrastructure. The rail link was not part of the transport plan and was not part of a formal Infrastructure Australia submission. In spite of that, the Federal Labor Party made the announcement because it needed to announce an attractive project for western Sydney. The billion-dollar Parramatta to Epping rail link was announced without a sign of preparation, due process or consideration of the long-term best interests of the areas it would serve.

I understand that the Premier and Treasurer announced a contribution of \$500 million towards meeting the cost of the project, but did not announce the source of the funds. The Coalition looks forward to examining the detail of the plan. How can we have a fully funded transport plan without any mention of a \$500 million project? Have other projects been cut to fund it? Where have the funds come from for the project? If the Government announces a project, it should ensure beforehand that processes are in place and proper preparation has been made to avoid embarrassing mistakes, such as the CBD metro. After all, preparation work, funding and political stability ratings are sent up the flagpole for the information of people throughout the world who are considering taking on projects in New South Wales. Infrastructure New South Wales will be an independent entity with an independent board. It will promulgate the priorities of the State and take New South Wales forward.

The Coalition's Regional Kick-Start Plan articulates with the Jobs Action Plan and Restart New South Wales. It will provide grants to facilitate the creation of infrastructure and employment in rural New South Wales. The plan offers a relocation grant as an incentive for development in places such as Tamworth, Dubbo, Bathurst and to get the regional economies of New South Wales working again. The Coalition is proud of that package. It will assist not only in reducing congestion throughout central business districts but also in providing a shot in the arm for regional economies throughout the State. That is another measure designed to take New South Wales off the economic scrapheap and return it to its former status of being the Premier State and the leading State, which it so definitely deserves.

The Coalition also proposes to offer stamp duty concessions to people aged over 55 years. That aligns with a promise made by the Government, but the Coalition's proposal reduces the age limit from 65 to 55. The concession will affect a large number of people. The Coalition believes that the concession should be made available to people aged 55 years and over. The Coalition is in favour of savings achieved by procurement and franchising Sydney Ferries. The people of New South Wales should understand that the Coalition would value every taxpayer dollar under its control, should it win government at the next State election. We have witnessed large-scale waste, and reversing that pattern of expenditure will source funds to meet the demand in services related to ageing, disabilities, mental health and closing the gap between indigenous Australians and non-indigenous Australians. The Coalition will make every dollar count, as any State government should.

This year's budget allocations again short-changed the Manly electorate. A new Northern Beaches hospital has been on the drawing board for at least 15 years. An announcement was made 11 years ago, but the

people of my electorate have heard nothing but tokenism ever since. The budget commits \$5 million to the project, but that falls short of what the Build and Retain Campaign participants have been asking for. People want the Government to retain existing services and get on with building the new hospital. When a Government announces a project, it should provide the capital that goes with it. Capital has been sadly lacking in relation to the proposal for a new hospital on the Northern Beaches.

The community is completely outraged. The people of my electorate have had a gutful. They are sick of hearing empty rhetoric about the project. The Minister for Health, the Premier and the Treasurer must commit to construction of the new hospital. I hope that funding will be provided before the next State election. To date the Government has offered my electorate nothing but tokenism, which is a sad indictment on its performance. The Manly police station is one of 17 local area commands that will share \$70 million. The funding will meet the cost of providing a police station that was promised in 2006. However, it is finally getting built, and we appreciate that. Our local command is happy that a new police station will commence in January, with completion in 2012.

My last point—I would be remiss if I did not mention this—is that yet again The Spit corridor has been completely abandoned by this State Labor Government. The second slowest corridor in a morning peak needs a strong, viable and holistic public transport solution. The Government is spending \$48 million on tinkering around the edges. It will take about five years to complete enforcement bays, extend clearways, et cetera, and the view is that it will cut about three minutes off travel times. We need to be visionary on this. We are calling for full expressions of interest for a bus rapid transit system for the Northern Beaches, which extends up The Spit corridor and from Dee Why to Chatswood, to solve the problem once and for all. The solution must be built on public transport and include the necessary associated infrastructure, but it also needs a time frame. What can be done within 12 months, 24 months, five years or 10 years? That is what the community is demanding. In summary, the budget is more of the same from Labor. We call on the Labor Government to look at the budget, pick up some of the Opposition's ideas to get the economy moving and look after Manly as it deserves to be looked after.

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [12.50 p.m.]: I support the State budget that was handed down before the winter recess. Speaking on the budget today is somewhat easier to do in light of the fact that a Federal Labor Government in Canberra has finally been confirmed, some days after the Federal election was held. I believe that will also enhance the State budget because a Labor Government in Canberra will provide the services and funding that this State lost during the years of the Howard Government. I refer in particular to the Health budget. Prior to the Howard Government taking office in the mid 1990s, the State and Federal governments each provided 50 per cent of the health funding. Progressively over the Howard years the Federal contribution to the Health budget went from 50 per cent to 40 per cent. The same applies to Education: funding for public schools in particular was reduced progressively over the Howard years. The Coalition will often argue that it left the current government with a surplus. Of course, that is true. It is easy for a government to have a budget surplus when it does not spend any money, and that would have been the fate of our State Government had a government of a different political persuasion been declared in Canberra only yesterday.

It is easy to talk about a State Labor budget that over some 15 years has continued to deliver record infrastructure projects and fantastic management of the State's finances. Contrary to the spin of Opposition members—they like to use the word "spin" in relation to the Government—New South Wales has been independently assessed time and time again as a triple-A rated State. The budget debate enables a member of Parliament to talk about how the management of the State impacts on his electorate, and I will certainly do that. These speeches hardly get any media coverage, mainly because the facts do not suit the nonsense that is said about the State Government's handling of the economy or in fact the state of the economy itself. Those sorts of comments, pushed by some media outlets and members opposite, are in stark contrast to the facts.

I sat through the three leading contributions to the budget debate—those of the Treasurer, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals. They are all on the *Hansard* record. I made a few notes in my notebook on those occasions. The Treasurer spoke about the challenge of formulating a State budget in the aftermath of an international financial crisis, yet he was able to talk about a record infrastructure budget of some \$62 billion. He mentioned getting the budget back into surplus, low debt to gross domestic product and numerous benefits such as 1,300 new buses, \$3 billion for the Pacific Highway, \$500 million for the Princes Highway and 7,000 commuter car parking spaces. I will come back to that, especially the \$16 billion Health budget and some other items, later.

In contrast, listening to the two Opposition speakers, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals, one could be forgiven for thinking that we are talking about a different State and certainly a

different economy. The member for Manly described the New South Wales economy as an economic scrap heap and talked about bringing the State back to the fore. And members opposite accuse the Government of spinning lines! The Leader of the Opposition painted a very dark picture of the State economy—words such as "no infrastructure spend in 15 years". How can one get away with comments like that?

Mr Frank Sartor: They're just wrong.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: They just make them and do not worry about the truth. If one listened to the Leader of the Opposition, apparently we have spent no money on infrastructure in this State in 15 years. Citing health and roads as an example, he said that all the problems with this economic scrap heap that is our economy could be solved by spending something called windfall revenues—I think he used that phrase in a previous reply to a budget speech—such as leasing the desalination plant and issuing Waratah bonds, which I assume are the old Premier State bonds of the 1980s. The Leader of The Nationals did not say much more, except that—here is a good line that should be repeated—"Barry and I are coming to fix things". That was one of his memorable lines, but it was probably outdone by the quote of the year. Given that we have had a Federal election, with many quotes, media comments and press conferences every day, to give somebody from the Opposition in State Parliament the quote of the year takes some doing. Talking about the road toll, attacking reductions in speed limits and referring to fatigue-related fatal accidents, the Leader of The Nationals said:

The only thing reduced speeds do is keep motorists on the roads longer.

I have never heard that one before! In my 13 years as a police officer enforcing speed limits and the like, while sitting on various committees and while listening to traffic debates in this place, I have never heard a reduction in the speed limit being criticised for keeping motorists on the road longer. His speech was not a complete waste of time; there was some entertainment value in it. According to the Leader of The Nationals, apparently the solution to fatigue-related accidents is to ask motorists to drive faster so that they get home before they get tired. Who said the Opposition does not have any policies? It must have been one of our Ministers. I think that is a brilliant policy that should be repeated every chance we get.

Mr Frank Sartor: And we will.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: And we will. The less said about those great Opposition policies, the better. I have one question about the comments of the member for Manly, who called us some sort of economic basket case, the Leader of The Nationals and the Leader of the Opposition. If the State Government has not spent enough on infrastructure—according to the Opposition, we have spent nothing over 15 years—if our borrowings are too high, despite the fact that our debt to gross domestic product is among the lowest, and if the Government is mismanaging the budget and allowing the State to fall behind other States, the one rhetorical question I ask is: How did we retain the triple-A credit rating? How could the New South Wales economy retain a triple-A credit rating? How did these international independent rating agencies get it so wrong, not just once but time and again? New South Wales has gone from being a State on credit watch under the Coalition Government back in the 1990s to a State that has consistently achieved a triple-A credit rating. How can this be? Of course, the answer is simple: The Opposition and some sections of the media cannot be believed.

I will put on record some facts about my electorate. Some Opposition members have claimed that safe seats—seats that are high on the electoral pendulum—do not get any funds from the Government. The Liberal spokesman for western Sydney says that such seats are taken for granted. But the story in the Mount Druitt electorate is the same this year as it has been for the past 15 years: capital works records are being broken. But this year the State's efforts have been supplemented by the Federal Government's stimulus package. As far more prominent members than me have said, that is why this State's economy has a triple-A credit rating. Unemployment, which was estimated to be approximately 8 per cent, is now about 5 per cent because the business sector has continued to grow. Yet that stimulus package was opposed by the State Opposition and by the almost alternative government in Canberra.

As I have said in the past few budget debates, my electorate resembles a building site. Existing public housing has been dramatically refurbished. A short time ago I joined the former Minister for Housing, Mr Borger, and the member for Londonderry, Mr Allan Shearan, in Tregear, where we watched tradesmen refurbishing a fairly old Department of Housing house. I asked the builder, "What impact has the stimulus package had on your business?" He has a small building business. The builder replied, "We've taken on apprentices and had to employ new staff to keep up with the work". That story is repeated in street after street

throughout the Mount Druitt electorate. The stimulus package is having a positive impact in western Sydney generally, and certainly in my electorate. Not only is existing public housing being refurbished but new public housing is being constructed.

Just about every school in my electorate has received massive amounts of public works funding—something that was the subject of criticism by the Federal Coalition during the recent Federal election campaign and by the State Coalition only this week. They attacked the Government, claiming that funding for school halls and libraries was over budget. But not one school or parents and citizens association has come to me and said, "I think we're spending too much money on that library, please take it away". I am sure that you, Madam Acting-Speaker, as a representative of a western Sydney electorate, have had a similar experience. Not one parents and citizens association has said that it does not want the library, the fencing or the covered outdoor learning area for which it has been fighting for years. The message to come from the Coalition's criticism, at both State and Federal levels, of the Government's stimulus package for schools is that Labor governments in Canberra and in Sydney are spending massive amounts of money on our schools. All the Coalition can find to complain about is some budgets over-runs and so on. I would rather get a new library or school hall and have a budget over-run than not have that library or hall. That is what we would get under a Coalition government.

The MyZone ticketing system has been referred to many times by the Premier and by former and current transport Ministers. One might assume that it is broad general policy. It has been mentioned in budgets. But I became worried that people might have stopped recognising the scheme's benefits. MyZone ticketing is more convenient, and I am happy to say that it provides lower fares for people travelling to and from work each day from my electorate. What surprised me was how much money could be saved by commuters who use more than a single form of transport each day. I have been given permission to use the example of Ms Tara Hurlstone of Hebersham, a suburb in my electorate, to demonstrate the benefits of the MyZone ticketing scheme. Tara travels to work by bus, train and then another bus. She has given me a handwritten note of her details.

Tara lives in Hebersham and works at a book shop in West Pennant Hills. Tara's journey to work involves catching a bus from Hebersham to the Mount Druitt railway station. She then catches a train to Parramatta railway station and a bus from Parramatta to Thompson's Corner at West Pennant Hills, and repeats the journey after work. It has been said that the MyZone ticketing system offers a convenient way to travel, but it also offers great savings. Before its introduction, Tara was paying \$122 a week to travel to and from work. Now she pays \$57 for the same journey—a saving of \$65 per week, or \$3,120 over the 48 weeks a year that she works. Not only does the budget include new infrastructure for schools, public housing and roads but the Labor Government's good policies are delivering real benefits to commuters in my electorate—especially those who use multiple modes of transport and are thus saving significant amounts. I thank Tara for giving me that information to highlight how a Labor Government policy is benefiting real people.

I thank the Government for its continued work, and for providing funding for the new trade school at Chifley College, Bidwill Campus; \$908,000 for a science laboratory upgrade at Plumpton High School; \$150,000 for toilet block upgrades at Dawson Public School; approximately \$65,000 for 130 laptops for high school teachers, funded by the New South Wales Government, to complement the laptops for students being funded by the Commonwealth Government; and \$449,222 for a toilet upgrade at Colyton Public School. Colyton Public School and its parents and citizen association have been fighting for extra benefits for years. Thanks to this Government and the Federal Government's stimulus package, Roger Price, a former Federal member for Chifley, and I recently attended the opening of the school's new hall—it is also getting another \$500,000 for facilities. The school has an active community and parents and citizens association and is now getting the benefits that it so rightly deserves. The Government is also providing nearly \$140,000 for a toilet upgrade at Niland School, and new fences for Chifley College, Bidwell Campus.

This year's budget provides road funding and extra money for health—for example, Mount Druitt Hospital is getting a more modern CT scan. I have been concerned about that issue for some time. The budget continues providing major infrastructure funding for western Sydney, and my own electorate has been a beneficiary. Past budgets have provided \$12 million for the transport interchange at Mount Druitt, a brand-new courthouse, new facilities for Mount Druitt Hospital, road funding assistance to Blacktown City Council, and money for sport, such as soccer facilities at the Olympic centre on Eastern Road. Mount Druitt has benefited greatly from this Labor Government's budgets. The Government's economic management has once again, despite all the knockers and the critics, earned the State a triple-A credit rating. That is in stark contrast to the views that Opposition spokesmen express about our economy, which are sometimes supported by elements of the media. I commend the budget to the House.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [1.10 p.m.]: As many people in this House know, I am deeply committed to the people of the Tweed—in fact I am 100 per cent for the Tweed—and I deliver my speech on Labor's 2010-2011 budget from their perspective. I sat in this Chamber and watched the Treasurer deliver his budget to the people of New South Wales. The question is: What is there more of? In the Tweed, the budget delivers more broken promises, more inconsistencies, more patients awaiting surgery at Tweed hospitals, more Tweed residents fearful of crime, more children in average Tweed classrooms, more bottlenecks on our roads, more taxes to prop up Sydney, more confusion as the game of ministerial musical chairs continues, and more reasons why we need a change of government come March 2011.

The budget again sees residents paying more for less service. Electricity prices are on the increase. Over the past three years—and prices are tipped to go up even further next year as a result of the Government's handling of electricity services—we have seen an average increase of around 60 per cent. This is a cruel blow to many people in the Tweed, who in some cases have seen their bills double. My electorate has a large number of people over the age of 65 years. In fact, we rank second among the State's electorates in terms of residents aged over 65 years. These hardworking people of New South Wales—hardworking Australians—are in their later years and in their retirement, and what do they see? They see a continual rise in the cost of living and a State Government doing very little.

Of the \$184 million given to the State Government by the Federal Government, only \$54 million was used to cut elective surgery waiting lists in our public hospitals. So some \$130 million is missing. The Tweed Hospital has one of the largest waiting lists on the far North Coast. The wait for elective surgery is currently four months. At the nearby Lismore hospital it is only three months. It is a travesty that money in the New South Wales Health budget is not being used to alleviate elective surgery waiting lists. According to the Government's August figures, the average waiting time is around four months—we should call it suffering time. People must wait an average of four months for an operation at Tweed Hospital.

We also know that the Tweed Hospital accident and emergency department failed in three out of five categories regarding on-time treatment of patients, particularly those in the imminently and potentially life-threatening categories. This is no reflection on the hardworking doctors and nurses in the Tweed—I have the highest respect for them. I recently had the privilege of accompanying an ambulance on a Friday night. When we transported patients to the accident and emergency department at Tweed Hospital—which treats about 40,000 patients a year there—I saw how hard the doctors and nurses work, and I saw the consideration and deep feeling they have for people of the Tweed in the execution of their duties.

The budget also slugs Tweed motorists with an extra \$30 on their registration. I recently asked a question about the number of vehicles in the Tweed electorate that will be affected and, believe it or not, it is close to 34,000 vehicles. That amounts to close to \$1 million that we are taking out of the pockets of people who can least afford it. I have heard many times in this House that the increase is to make up for the mishandling of funds on the failed Sydney Metro rail project. It will take \$300 million to \$500 million to fix that mess, and money is coming from my area and out of the pockets of the hardworking people of the Tweed. Even Sydney residents will not benefit as the \$300 million to \$500 million that the new tax will raise is barely enough to pay for Labor's Metro disaster clean-up.

Meanwhile, we do not have trains in the Tweed any more. Members have heard me speak about this issue many times, and I am supported by many colleagues who represent North Coast electorates. The Casino to Murwillumbah train service was stopped nearly six years ago. It is a travesty. On the other side of the border, Anna Bligh's Government—I must admit it is a Labor Government—seems to be getting on with the job. There is a rail verge all the way to Coolangatta and electric trains will be reinstated. There are also plans for a light rail service running from Southport and terminating in Coolangatta. The Queensland Labor Government appears to be planning for the future—it has rail reserved—while on this side of the border our trains were taken away six years ago. A number of reports have been produced on the subject, and last week in the Legislative Council my colleague the Hon. Jenny Gardiner asked the Minister for Transport:

When will the Government take responsibility for its still much-resented decision to close this rail service and reopen the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line?

The response of the Minister for Transport—the would-be Premier—was just a lot of Government spin. First, he blamed John Howard—even Ms Gillard is doing more than that. Then he blamed cheaper airfares. I am yet to see a cheap airfare from Murwillumbah to Casino! Then the Minister boasted about Labor's Cross-Border Transport Task Force report. He did not mention that the report is all of five pages. A call for papers in the other

place revealed that the report took 18 months to produce. It was mooted by then Premier Morris Iemma and then Queensland Premier Peter Beattie that the document would establish a blueprint for cross-border public transport for the next 20 years. Eighteen months and countless meetings later, the report was released—and it is five pages long! That is an absolute disgrace. The report does nothing other than say that there will be more meetings. That is typical of what is happening in New South Wales at the moment—there is a lot of spin and a lot of talk but nothing is happening on the ground. Then came the clincher, when the Minister said:

The most flexible, responsible and sustainable mode of public transport in the region is by bus.

Why does Labor not try that line with the people of Mount Druitt, Blacktown or the Blue Mountains? If buses are good enough for the Tweed, why are they not good enough for other areas, particularly in Sydney? It would save a lot more money. I doubt it will ever happen. The budget should include funding to begin the process of establishing a light rail link from Casino to Murwillumbah. But I will take it one step further. We need some vision and foresight in this budget. It should contain planning money for a rail link from Murwillumbah to the Gold Coast, preferably terminating at the Gold Coast Airport, which is the sixth busiest airport in the country. This year alone it will be visited by five million people, nearly 30 per cent of whom will travel to New South Wales. We expect the number of visitors travelling to New South Wales from the Gold Coast Airport to exceed 1.5 million, which is more than ample reason to make the economic argument for a light rail service to Murwillumbah, linking Byron Bay and the North Coast. That is a real vision for the future—but once again the budget is void of that.

The budget should also have included funding for the new Pacific Highway interchange at Kirkwood Road. The famous Sexton's Hill bypass—which I have mentioned many times in this place—is currently under construction. Some \$300 million is currently being expended on that bypass and, while through traffic will benefit, the locals who use that major highway to get to work, take the kids to school, go to sport and support local businesses will derive no benefits. There are around 3,500 local businesses in the south Tweed precinct. The precinct, which is the major economic driver and the major employer in our region, will be virtually cut off because of the short-sightedness of the Roads and Traffic Authority. It did not include in its roads budget funding for the Kirkwood Road interchange by which locals could access the business area and local shops. This is a particularly important issue for me because unemployment in the Tweed is 2 per cent to 3 per cent higher than in the rest of New South Wales. The rate of youth unemployment, in particular, is very high and is causing many problems. We should give proper stimulus to those businesses and to locals. It would have taken very little to include the Kirkwood Road interchange in planning for the Sexton's Hill bypass debacle.

But, once again, there is short-sightedness. That was evident to me recently. I was the only New South Wales politician to be invited to the opening of the Tugun bypass. It is a magnificent piece of infrastructure seven kilometres long, five kilometres of which are in New South Wales. This State did not contribute a cent towards it; it was funded by Federal and Queensland money. We had the unusual circumstance where the then Treasurer, Michael Costa, sent the Queensland Government—which had just spent hundreds of millions of dollars on five kilometres of road in New South Wales—a land tax bill for \$250,000. It was absolutely ludicrous. You would think that Labor governments on both sides of the border could cooperate, but it is like having the Great Wall of China there. There is no cooperation by this mob here with the Queensland Government. The upgrade of the road is great for B-doubles travelling from Brisbane to Sydney, but it is a nightmare for local residents and businesses.

There was no other sign in the budget that Labor will keep its three-year promises. In one of my first speeches in this House I asked the then Premier about a number of election promises the Labor Government had made to the people of the Tweed. One involved the creation of a HealthOne centre at Pottsville. Another promise was to build a new police station, and the third promise was a new mobile police van. On all three occasions I was told by the then Premier, Morris Iemma, that I did not understand the parliamentary cycle. I had to ask some of my learned colleagues on this side of the House exactly what that meant. I was told it meant that the Premier had four years to deliver those promises. Guess what? There are about six months left before the next election and not one sod has been turned for a new police station. Not one sod has been turned to build HealthOne at Pottsville. The then Premier also promised a trades school at Kingscliff TAFE. It is a great college with great staff. Still, not one sod has been turned for that building. Do we have a second mobile police van? No, we do not.

There are four major issues on which this Government has failed to deliver. I thought they might have been recognised because they receive some mention and funding in the budget, but there has been no positive action on the ground. A number of things in the budget cause me concern. Recent speeches by the shadow

Treasurer, the member for Manly, give credence to my concerns. He referred to New South Wales having the highest level of stamp duty in Australia. That is quite correct. Currently stamp duty in New South Wales has a threshold of just over \$600,000. Over the border, in Queensland, there is a threshold of \$1 million and the rate is about 0.5 per cent lower than it is in New South Wales. That would explain why a number of businesses migrate from New South Wales to Queensland—Queensland is much more favourable to businesses. It stimulates business. That is why the population of Queensland is on the rise.

In recent times the new housing market in New South Wales has stalled, which is a common denominator used by State and Federal governments to measure the economic wellbeing of different areas. If there were identical blocks of land in Tweed and in Coolangatta for which a person bought a basic kit home from any of the large manufacturers it would cost on average \$70,000 more in New South Wales. That is \$70,000 for the same product on identical blocks of land. It is absolutely ludicrous. That \$70,000 comprises taxes and charges, stamp duty and so on. It is stifling the housing market. In recent times some large housing estates have been developed but at the end of the day there is a distinct shortage of rental accommodation in the Tweed. Investors are walking across the border because it is far better to do business in Queensland than in New South Wales. All I have been asking for over the past 3½ years is some ability to compete to keep people in New South Wales and to keep the Tweed prosperous.

One of the big health issues in the Tweed is cancer treatment. There have been recent announcements about scanning machines and radiotherapy treatment for the North Coast at Lismore, and there are some services at Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie. But I have news for the Treasurer and for the Minister for Health. I have made numerous submissions, backed by the fine clinicians in the Tweed, where we have about 2,500 cancer sufferers. That is a large concentration of cancer patients—perhaps the highest on the North Coast. We were told recently that the Tweed will not have one of the new radiation units and that residents can use the new Queensland cancer unit.

The new Queensland unit has not even been built and that Government is providing only two radiation treatment machines at Parklands. That will not even cope with the current population of the Gold Coast. Then people in the Tweed were told that they could go to Lismore for treatment in future. Lismore is about an hour and 20 minutes away; it is well over 100 kilometres away. Guess what? The Labor Government took away our trains so we cannot travel there by train. There are no buses and no other form of public transport, so cancer sufferers in the Tweed are out on a limb. They are in no-man's-land at the moment, and it is causing a lot of pain and suffering in the Tweed.

The Tweed is a very special place. It is one of the fastest-growing regional areas in the fine State of New South Wales. All we are asking for is our fair share of the budget. Treat us the same way you treat the people in Sydney. Give us the public transport we desperately need. Take some of our cars off the road. Look after the elderly and make sure they have a hospital bed when they are sick. Make sure there are proper school buildings. More importantly, make sure that we get a new police station. Over the past three or four months a number of State and national television shows have focused on youth crime in the Tweed. I have been a great advocate in the field. I have done overnight shifts with our local police. Two key components of the problem were totally ignored in this budget. The first is extra police. Currently we have 15 highway patrol officers but, as of yesterday, seven were on long-term sick leave. They have been unavailable for duty—to put handcuffs on offenders—for the past three months.

The other component is that we do not have an emergency youth refuge. Last year I spent some time with Father Chris Riley and his great Youth off the Streets program here in Sydney. But when young kids in the Tweed are picked up by police and other agencies, there is nowhere to take them. We have been campaigning about this issue. I have met with a number of housing Ministers—they keep changing—to try to get funds to establish emergency youth accommodation in the Tweed. We have premises picked out and all the agencies are involved. We even have good support from government agencies and Centrelink, but there is no money for it in this budget. There was no money last year when we asked for it.

These kids are the future of the Tweed and the future of Australia. I have seen kids as young as eight and nine who after having been abused in their homes are forced onto the streets for many nights in a row. These kids are falling into antisocial and other unsuitable practices and activities. They need our help. They do not need much—just basic accommodation in a crisis centre so we can alleviate some of their problems. It is heartbreaking when I see the mismanagement and waste of money on projects such as the Sydney Metro when a very small amount of money could make an enormous difference to the lives of these kids. It could also make an enormous difference to the lives of people in the Tweed.

These people are part of the New South Wales population. Even though some people believe Byron Bay is the northernmost point of the State and the Tweed has lost various festivals to other areas in recent times, the Tweed is a very important part of New South Wales and it needs recognition from this Government. I get very passionate about this issue. I love to get involved. I spend many nights on the streets of the Tweed talking to people and trying to understand the issues because the people of the Tweed, young and old, are very important not only to New South Wales but to the whole of Australia. I am very proud to represent them and I will continue to bring their issues to this place so that they get the proper attention they deserve. Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed.

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Virginia Judge and set down as an order of the day for a later hour.

[The Acting-Speaker (Ms Diane Beamer) left the chair at 1.30 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Councillor Lee Watts, Mayor of Upper Hunter Shire and a delegation, guests of the member for Upper Hunter.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

REPRESENTATION OF MINISTERS ABSENT DURING QUESTIONS

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I inform the House that as the Minister for Local Government, Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister Assisting the Minister for Planning, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health) is absent, I will answer questions on her behalf.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.23 p.m.]

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Given a clear sign that taxpayer dollars again are being misused for political purposes—

Ms Kristina Keneally: Who is the question to?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is to the Premier.

Ms Kristina Keneally: Thank you.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I do not seem to question anyone else these days.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: These documents reveal that not only has Eric Roozendaal's promise to cut annual spending on taxpayer-funded advertisements by 25 per cent to \$85 million not been met but that spending actually increased to \$105 million per annum. It is an ominous sign that once again taxpayer dollars are being misused ahead of a State election campaign. So, why should anyone believe the Premier's post-Federal election claims of ending the spin and being a changed Government?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: As I am unaware of the documents the Leader of the Opposition refers to, I am unable to answer his question.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: What are you aware of?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Table the documents.

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

POLICE FORENSIC RESOURCES

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA: My question is addressed to the Premier. How is the New South Wales Government supporting police with the resources they need to process forensic evidence?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I thank the member for Smithfield for his question.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: The safety of our families and communities received more good news with the release today of the latest Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research quarterly report: all 17 major categories of crime are stable or falling. Of course, it is no accident that crime is down in New South Wales because in this State, with laws, equipment and conditions we have built the best-equipped and most-professional Police Force in the country. Indeed, it is one of the best police forces in the world. We remain serious about giving our Police Force whatever support it reasonably needs to keep it that way. I was pleased this week to join the Minister for Police to unveil New South Wales' first two state-of-the-art mobile forensic vans supporting our front-line police force in examining and analysing forensic evidence.

These mobile forensic vans will be used at major crime scenes, clandestine drug laboratories, chemical and biological warfare sites, and explosives and disaster sites. We have invested more than \$2 million in these mobile labs as part of our \$25 million commitment to drive DNA service delivery—a critical front-line in modern crime solving. The vehicles are fitted with state-of-the-art equipment and bring the laboratory to the crime scene. They can be deployed in residential, rural and bushland locations. They give our police the equipment they need to get on with their jobs fast—solving crimes and taking criminals off our streets. Let us not forget that the technology we unveiled this week works because of the groundwork that has been laid over past 15 years.

We introduced geospatial mapping. We introduced intelligence-based policing. We introduced digital fingerprinting. We acknowledged that DNA was the next frontier of policing. We put laws and resources behind DNA gathering and creating a DNA database. Since 2001, DNA evidence has produced more than 23,000 cold leads in New South Wales leading to more than 7,000 charges and almost 4,600 convictions for offences ranging from stealing to murder. This is what modern policing looks like, delivering real safety improvements by tracking and targeting criminals in our society. We will continue to keep New South Wales police the most modern and best equipped in the country. After all, they are the strength behind every New South Wales family and community. It is an honour for the Government to support them.

REGIONAL HEALTH FUNDING

Mr ANDREW STONER: I direct my question to the Minister for Health. In view of the Government's infamous bungling of Federal infrastructure submissions, what guarantee will the Minister give that regional New South Wales will receive at least 30 per cent of funding under the new regional health agreement and that long-promised hospital upgrades at Tamworth, Dubbo, Port Macquarie, Parkes, Forbes, Wagga Wagga and Bega finally will be delivered?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is interesting that today the Coalition wants to make sure that New South Wales benefits from Commonwealth investment in health infrastructure. When this Government was negotiating with the Commonwealth over the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] health reforms and securing a good deal for the people of New South Wales, what did we get from the Opposition? We got opposition to those Council of Australian Governments health reforms and opposition to the 488 beds. Members opposite know that is true.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition knows that in this House on 12 May she stated:

The only thing that the Coalition agrees with in the Council of Australian Governments recommendations is that relating to the setting up of local district health boards.

She knows that she opposed the provision of 488 beds and \$1.2 billion for residents of New South Wales, investment in training, investment in the recruitment of doctors and investment in the provision of health services. I am very pleased to respond to the question asked by the Leader of The Nationals. The reality is that the Coalition has not supported the hard work of the New South Wales Government, in partnership with the Commonwealth Government, to improve health funding for residents of New South Wales.

Yesterday the Prime Minister announced the Commonwealth Government's new investment in regional Australia of up to \$10 billion. All Labor members welcome the announcement. Importantly the investment in regional New South Wales includes a major boost for our regional health services. I know the member for Tamworth, the residents of his electorate and the residents of Port Macquarie also will welcome the announcement. Funding for regional New South Wales includes a new round of health and hospitals funding, of which \$1.8 billion remains, as well as \$20 million for a new teaching and training facility at the Tamworth hospital. The new Tamworth facility will include student accommodation, teaching and tutorial space as well as a simulation laboratory to enable medical students to refine their skills.

The Commonwealth Government's investment will complement the New South Wales Government's contribution of \$52 million to commence redevelopment of the Tamworth hospital. Planning is well underway for maternity services and a new cancer centre that will be funded jointly. The Prime Minister also announced, subject to the approval of the Health and Hospitals Fund Board, \$75 million to build the fourth pod for the Port Macquarie Base Hospital. That is great news for the Port Macquarie community. It took a Labor Prime Minister to deliver that very positive benefit for the people of Port Macquarie. We all well remember the record of the Coalition regarding the Port Macquarie hospital.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The New South Wales Government has not been inactive in relation to Port Macquarie. We welcomed yesterday's announcement by the Prime Minister. Last month the New South Wales Government announced its allocation of \$600,000 to complete a service procurement plan and a project definition plan to advance planning of the fourth pod. Planning has already commenced. Currently the North Coast Area Health Service and local clinicians are refining their priorities in relation to the expansion to determine exactly which services the fourth pod will deliver. The careful planning that has already been set in train will stand us in good stead in submitting a comprehensive proposal to the Health and Hospitals Fund Board when formal applications are called for. As we have in the past, the New South Wales Government stands ready to work with the Commonwealth Government to achieve improved services throughout New South Wales and to increase investment by the Commonwealth Government in health funding in New South Wales.

NURSING HOMES

Mr PAUL McLEAY: My question is addressed to Deputy Premier and Minister for Health. Will she update the House on changes to nursing homes?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I thank the member for Heathcote for his question and for his close interest in this issue. The Garrawarra nursing home is located in his electorate and I know he has always shown a close interest in the operation of nursing homes. Since the mid-nineties, policy funding and regulation for residential aged care has been a Commonwealth responsibility. More than 98 per cent of residential aged care in New South Wales is provided by the non-government sector, which has the experience and expertise to provide high-quality care.

The Commonwealth Government provides less funding to State Government owned nursing homes than for residential care provided by the non-government sector. There is no doubt that the policy position of transferring State Government nursing homes to the non-government and private sectors is a policy position that makes sense. The Federal Government has primary responsibility for residential aged care, so it is a policy position that largely makes sense.

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The New South Wales Government always has made clear its priority of ensuring that residents continue to receive high-quality care. We understand that the important task of providing residential aged care is not something that can be pursued by adopting a one size fits all approach, which simply

will not work. The Government has always understood that. An examination of the history of decisions made by the Government in relation to residential aged care will provide proof of that assertion. There is no doubt that the unique nature, location and type of care provided at each facility must be taken into account.

For the reasons I have stated, the Government will not transfer nursing homes from State Government ownership unless a positive outcome will be delivered for residents and their families. Last year New South Wales Health began a process of transferring the remaining State government nursing homes to the non-government sector. A number of principles guided the process: first, that standards of care need to be maintained; second, that existing residents and residential aged care places will remain in the local area; and, third, that staff entitlements will be maintained.

Today I am pleased to update the House with further information about State Government nursing homes. The Government has accepted proposals to transfer the Governor Phillip Nursing Home at Penrith to RSL LifeCare; the Queen Victoria Memorial Home at Picton to Moran Australia Residential Aged Care; and 46 standard high-care places at the Lottie Stewart facility at Dundas to Moran Australia Residential Aged Care. RSL LifeCare's proposal for Governor Phillip Nursing Home at Penrith includes a major refurbishment as well as development of a retirement home on adjacent land. I understand that the Penrith City Council is eager to establish an aged care precinct on the site. The RSL LifeCare proposal will give that initiative a kick-start.

As part of the transfer of the Queen Victoria Memorial Home at Picton, a new wing will be developed at the facility. It will be located adjacent to the main nursing home and will house 30 low-care places. The 70 high-care places that are currently at the Queen Victoria Memorial Home will be transferred to Moran and will continue to operate on the site. At both the Queen Victoria and Governor Phillip nursing homes, New South Wales Health will continue to provide funding for residents who have special care needs. The 46 standard high-care places at the Lottie Stewart facility at Dundas will be transferred to Moran.

As I have previously reported to the House, the Lottie Stewart facility is owned by the Wesley Mission, which has asked that the site be vacated by mid 2012. Residents at the Lottie Stewart facility, which is operated by the Sydney West Area Health Service, will be moved to suitable nursing homes following consultation with their families. The transfers will benefit the broader health system in New South Wales. The proceeds will be reinvested in the health system. The Government will not transfer a number of other State-owned nursing homes that originally were identified as part of the tendering process. The Government recognises the important role played by each of these facilities. These nursing homes enjoy strong community support. In some cases, they provide care to residents with highly specialised needs in significant and unique local circumstances.

Last year I announced that the State-owned aged care facilities at Murrumburrah-Harden and Wallsend would not be transferred to the non-government sector. The Wallsend aged care facility has a large number of residents who have dementia as well as people with disabling conditions, special clinical care requirements and several young people with brain injury who have complex care requirements. The proposals received would not have met the Government's objectives of continuing the requisite quality of care. I inform the House that New South Wales Health will continue to operate the Carramar Aged Care Facility at Leeton, the Holbrook aged care facility, the Corowa aged care facility, the Hillcrest Nursing Home and Kimbarra Lodge at Gloucester, the Muswellbrook Aged Care Facility, and the Garrawarra Centre at Waterfall.

The decision to retain the Carramar facility at Leeton recognises the importance of nursing homes in regional and rural areas as well as the difficulty of developing a financially viable deal for transferring small facilities while still meeting the Government's commitment and requirement to maintaining levels of service. The Government recognises the financial contribution of the local Leeton community to the Carramar facility. The Garrawarra Centre is another facility that enjoys strong support from the local community: it cares for 120 high-care residents who have dementia, including 23 residents assessed as having special care requirements. A high proportion of residents at Garrawarra have challenging behaviour, and the staff do a fantastic job. Everyone in the House would probably join with me in congratulating the staff at that facility.

The facility and its staff have also built up a reputation for excellence not only in caring for residents with extremely challenging needs but also as a training centre in providing support and training to staff throughout the system. So the decision to retain Garrawarra under State operation preserves this role. NSW Wales Health will investigate options with regard to surplus land at Garrawarra. There is a large parcel of land that is not required for the health system. However, I make it clear that arrangements with the Homicide Victims Support Group, which is on this site, will remain. Transfer of the nursing homes as I have outlined today will occur once the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing approves the transfer of aged care places for each facility.

As we have done throughout this process, we will continue to place the interests and needs of residents and their families at the forefront. This is a good outcome for the residents of the various nursing homes I have spoken about, and it is a good outcome for the people of New South Wales. It recognises that the Commonwealth Government has the primary responsibility for residential aged care, and that on the whole, the non-government and private sectors can better deliver residential aged care services. Having said that, there are unique circumstances either by geographical location or by the type of care that a centre offers that in some circumstances mean that those centres should remain in State Government care and responsibility, and that is exactly what the Government has done.

CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION SPACE

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: My question is directed to the Premier. In light of Michael Knight's statement that "Melbourne already has better conference and exhibition facilities" and "unless Sydney's deficiency is addressed, our share of the high-yield conference business will spiral downwards", will the Premier support our commitment to the construction of a world-class exhibition and conference centre in Sydney?

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I thank the member for his question, which is the first question I can recall receiving from the member in his shadow portfolio. The member raised the issue of convention space in Sydney and a speech made today by the Hon. Michael Knight, a former Government Minister. I will first address the speech and then the issue of the convention centre. In a speech earlier today the Hon. Michael Knight flagged a call that Sydney should put in a bid for the expo in 2017 and that this would provide impetus for additional infrastructure and boost Sydney's standing as a city that hosts major events very well. Of course, our reputation for hosting major events is well known. The Sydney Olympics, World Youth Day, the rugby world cup—we have a very strong record.

Mr Andrew Fraser: World Youth Day?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Yes, members opposite might remember World Youth Day. I know the member for Mount Druitt has fond memories of World Youth Day. Indeed, as an aside, last night the member for Mount Druitt let slip that he actually attended World Youth Day, and we thank him. Our numbers just went up by one! The Hon. Michael Knight put forward an interesting suggestion: he proposed that the expo be held at Glebe Island. While I support the idea in principle that Sydney would be a good host city for an expo, I am not convinced and would have concerns about a proposal to hold it at Glebe Island given its location and size. People such as Michael Knight could provide an excellent leadership role, working with the Government as we examine this proposal and potential sites around the Sydney metropolitan area.

As for the issue of convention space, I am sure the shadow Minister would be aware that the Government has formed an interdepartmental committee which is finalising a master plan for convention and exhibition facilities for Darling Harbour south, as well as for Sydney Olympic Park. That committee is headed by the Land and Property Management Authority and is due to report at the end of October 2010. I acknowledge the leadership demonstrated by the Minister for Tourism and the Minister for Planning in the other place, working with a key group of stakeholders in Sydney as we examine in detail the issue of convention and exhibition space. We now look forward to that report coming back to Government.

CRIME TRENDS

Mr PAUL PEARCE: My question is addressed to the Minister for Police. Will the Minister update the House on crime trends across New South Wales, in particular the efforts by police to reduce alcohol-related violence?

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I thank the member for Coogee for his question. Our seats are next-door neighbours, and I know the member for Coogee does a hell of a lot of work in his community to ensure that alcohol-related violence is kept under control, given that he has one of the biggest entertainment precincts in the State in his seat of Coogee. In New South Wales we are fortunate to have an independent Bureau of Crime

Statistics and Research that basically has unfettered real-time access to police data. The expertise and independence of the bureau are unquestioned. So today the Government and I welcome the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research June 2010 quarterly report, a rolling two-year quarterly report that shows that the significant work of the police, aided by record police numbers and a record police budget, is driving crime down across the State. It is true to say that in general terms 10 years ago, and slightly before that, all of the 17 major crime categories were either stable or trending upwards.

Today I can report—as the Premier mentioned a moment ago—that in the 24 months to June 2010 all 17 major crime categories in New South Wales are either falling or stable across the State. The report's greatest value is that it portrays a trend. It is a report over two years that looks at not spikes and aberrations but trends. Of particular note in this report is that five offences showed a downward trend: break and enter dwelling, down 6 per cent; break and enter non-dwelling, down a whopping 15.3 per cent; motor vehicle theft, down 4.9 per cent; steal from motor vehicle, down 9.7 per cent; sexual assault, stable across the State; and malicious damage to property, down 9.7 per cent.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: Today's report is not just great news for the community; it is also a report card on the New South Wales Police Force—the fourth largest police force in the English-speaking world. Only the New York police, the London metropolitan police and the Canadian mounted police have more numbers in their police force than we enjoy in New South Wales. The present figures and the results published by the bureau a decade ago show just how far we have come in keeping our community safe. Consider this: since the 2000-01 June report the break and enter non-dwelling number has more than halved. Over the same period, motor vehicle theft and steal from motor vehicle have fallen by almost 60 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. We can talk about percentages all day long but what does this mean for individuals in our community? It means that, for example, there were about 74,000 fewer victims of a break and enter this year than in the same reporting period a decade ago. About 45,000 fewer people came back to their cars this year and found that they had been broken into, and about 32,000 people did not report their car stolen.

These are massive figures—real people who are not victims of crime. Not only property offences but also personal offences are down. Robbery without a weapon offences are 50 per cent lower than they were a decade ago. Robbery with a weapon offences are down a whopping 67 per cent. Robbery with a firearm offences are down 50 per cent. The hard work of our police officers has led to the fact that there were 7,800 fewer victims of violent robbery offences over the 12 months to June 2010 than over the same period a decade ago. The latest report from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research also shows that the efforts of this Government to bring down alcohol-related assaults are also having a marked effect. Assaults on licensed premises showed a significant downward trend of 10.8 per cent during the 24 months to June 2010. That substantial fall shows that this Government's policies are working.

The Government has been working with the hotel and club industry to get it to do its work better and to better protect its patrons. The overwhelming majority of hotels and clubs have improved and tough restrictions have been placed on the most dangerous venues in the State to make sure their communities are looked after. We have also given police tough powers to deal with drunken violence and the figures show that we are making significant progress in that regard but, as usual, we will not relent. It will be an ongoing battle. That is why the police are running Operation Unite 2 this weekend, which is a trans-Tasman two day operation that will see hundreds of extra officers on our streets. This blitz is designed to prevent alcohol-related violence through a high-profile police presence as well as enforcing the law in known trouble spots.

Operation Unite involves general duties police, the highway patrol, commuter crime police, mounted police, the marine area command, operational support group, the public order and riot squad, the alcohol licensing and enforcement command, the dog squad and the aviation support branch. The operation proved highly successful last year. I received an inordinately high number of compliments about the operation from members of the public. Last year in New South Wales alone Operation Unite resulted in 640 people being arrested, with more than 1,000 charges laid for offences ranging from assault to stealing and to possession of illicit drugs. The police will not be targeting people who go out to have a peaceful good night. It is not about the ones who go out for a couple of drinks with their mates but it is about the people who want to abuse alcohol and abuse others after they have had too much to drink. It will target the troublemakers.

During last year's operation, our police conducted a staggering 48,162 breath tests and 374 drivers in one weekend were foolish and reckless enough to have jumped behind the wheel after drinking. I remind drivers

in New South Wales, not only for this weekend but for all time, that every police car is equipped to conduct random drug tests as well as random breath tests. It is not the job of the police to attempt to arrest their way out of a problem that manifests itself. In fact, as with most crimes, police cannot arrest their way out of this problem. Instead, people need to look at their own behaviour. This operation is as much about public awareness as it is about enforcement. It is about encouraging people to make sensible decisions and to take responsibility for their own actions, and for those of their mates if they have had too much to drink. They should not pat them on the back when they start to make a fool of themselves; they should grab them by their ears and put them in the nearest cab and send them home.

Initiatives such as Operation Unite 2 keep our community safe, not by simply catching those who break the law but by preventing people from becoming victims in the first place. That is why we see crime statistics such as the ones we have seen today. That is why we have fewer victims of crime than we had a decade ago. People who do not become victims never know about it and, therefore, can never say thank you. On behalf of the grateful people of New South Wales who have not become victims, and for those victims who have been aided by the police, I congratulate and thank police for these tremendous statistics that have come in today.

DOCTOR BACKGROUND CHECKS

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Following revelations this week that a doctor at Shoalhaven Hospital was allowed to work unsupervised in breach of strict conditions imposed upon him, why does the Minister still refuse to sign up to New South Wales Liberals' and Nationals' legislation that would make doctor background checks mandatory by law?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I thank the member for South Coast for her important question. On 8 March 2010, the Medical Tribunal found Dr Muralidharan guilty of professional misconduct and ordered that he be deregistered.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Members will listen in silence to the Minister's answer to this important question.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Medical Tribunal found Dr Muralidharan's conduct between October 2005 and 30 May 2007 revealed both dishonesty in making a false and/or misleading statement and a deliberate disregard of established procedures of which Dr Muralidharan was well aware. This was illustrated by his failure to comply with the conditions imposed on his registration on more than one occasion. It is the case that the majority of doctors and health care professionals that work in the New South Wales health system are highly respected law-abiding citizens who undertake their role with professionalism and dedication. But it is also the case, unfortunately, that from time to time there are doctors who breach the trust of the community and for which swift and adequate action needs to be taken to protect the public.

With regard to this former doctor, I am advised that the New South Wales Department of Health is undertaking a review of the medical records of patients who were in his care at those facilities where the supervision he received was not in accordance with his conditions of registration, including the four-week period when he was at Shoalhaven Hospital. New South Wales has a range of legislative and policy based systems for reporting conduct by registered health service providers that have been significantly improved over the past five years. Since March 2005 it has been mandatory for public health organisations to check Medical Board registration when credentialing senior doctors. Since 2008 all hospitals and health services have been required to keep a log of all doctors who have practice conditions on their work practice, and those health services report on a quarterly basis to the New South Wales Department of Health on the compliance of doctors with practice conditions on their registration.

I am advised that NSW Health commissioned the New South Wales Internal Audit Bureau to conduct two statewide audits of compliance with practise conditions, one in 2008 and one in 2009. The bureau found no instance of non-compliance. The health department and I take this issue seriously. Since June 2008 medical professionals have a duty of mandatory reporting a reportable misconduct of their colleagues to further protect patients. In 2009 NSW Health established a service check register which alerts staff involved in the recruitment process or in a serious disciplinary matter to the existence of previous matters that may be relevant prior to making an offer of employment. Public health organisations are required to check the register for all recommended preferred applicants for employment or appointment as a medical practitioner, as well as non-medical employees. There is no doubt that it is critical that the community have confidence in the health system and doctors, nurses and clinicians who work in it. We have a robust system in place.

Once again the Opposition is calling for legislative processes relating to background checks for the recruitment of doctors but the reality is that this Government is already doing that. Prior to commencing work, all doctors in any New South Wales public health organisations are required to undergo the following rigorous mandatory checks to ensure that they are a fit and proper person to hold a position. They are required to undergo a 100-point identification check to confirm their identity; a national criminal record check and a working with children check where they have contact with children; verification of registration directly with the registering authority, and any conditions on practice identified; structured referee checking, including with the current supervisor; the candidate needs to be reviewed in line with the service check register, as I have just outlined; and also a health assessment. So there is a robust process in place. The vast majority of doctors and clinicians working in our health system are highly professional and dedicated individuals, and I would once again point out that Dr Muralidharan has been deregistered.

ILLAWARRA AND SOUTH COAST STORM DAMAGE

Mr MATT BROWN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Emergency Services. What is the latest information on natural disaster declarations following severe weather in the Illawarra and South Coast on the weekend?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I thank the member for Kiama for his question and for his interest, along with my colleagues in Shellharbour, Wollongong and Keira, and for their response on the weekend. When I saw the member for the South Coast jump up so enthusiastically I thought I might get a question from her on this as well as the other question without notice.

Mr John Williams: The Rob Oakeshott of Macquarie Street.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Nationals member opposite just called me the Rob Oakeshott of Macquarie Street. I would not mind a share of the money he has for regional Australia. I would like to thank The Nationals for their important role in getting Julia Gillard back up as Prime Minister. They did an excellent job. Only three days ago one of their upper House members was busy bagging the Independents on radio in Coffs Harbour. You have to wonder about them, don't you?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr STEVE WHAN: On the weekend torrential rain caused flooding in the State's south and on Sunday the coastline from Illawarra to Eurobodalla was buffeted by wild winds gusting up to 125 kilometres an hour. The winds caused extensive damage, lifting roofs off homes and other buildings—including the Sanctuary Point Rural Fire Service station—bringing down trees, branches and powerlines, and flinging around debris, which then wreaked even more havoc. Public infrastructure was damaged, including water supply and sewerage infrastructure, cemeteries, the Milton showground, the Sussex Inlet communications tower and 11 holiday haven tourist parks.

Thankfully, the flooding in the south of our State has not been as severe as that in Victoria, but it has still damaged infrastructure such as roads, culverts and bridges. As of 8 o'clock this morning the State Emergency Service had received a total of 3,356 calls for help, the vast majority of which—2,203—were from the Illawarra-South Coast region. As always, this Government stands ready to assist communities impacted by natural disasters, such as this wild weekend weather.

On Monday the Minister for the Illawarra joined the member for Wollongong in visiting the State Emergency Service headquarters in Wollongong for an in-depth briefing on events and to assure the community that the Government was taking swift action. That same day I was able to declare a natural disaster. It is good that the Minister for the Illawarra is also Treasurer, because he has to approve these things. I declared a natural disaster covering nine local government areas: Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama, Wingecarribee, Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Tumut, Gundagai and Tumbarumba.

Mr Thomas George: You're good!

Mr STEVE WHAN: I acknowledge the interjection from the member opposite. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has ensured that the interjection of the member for Lismore is now in *Hansard*. He will proceed with his answer.

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

Mr STEVE WHAN: This triggered a range of assistance for those suffering damage. While the weather caused a lot of dismay and hardship for many in our community, I am very pleased to report that once again the State Emergency Service was prepared to respond and did so magnificently. The State Operations Centre is co-ordinating the response operation. We have hundreds of volunteers—many would have been enjoying Father's Day on Sunday—but they did not hesitate to go to the assistance of people who needed help in the aftermath of the winds. They have worked tirelessly since Sunday with the support of Rural Fire Service volunteers and NSW Fire Brigades, and Integral Energy and Country Energy, which brought in extra crews to restore power to thousands of customers across the coastal region.

Today we have 60 field teams in the area, including many State Emergency Service volunteers from outside the region who have come to assist. They had by last night completed 77 per cent of jobs and they will continue until the last of those jobs is done. At the same time we continue to monitor potential flooding in the Murray and Murrumbidgee regions, with five flood warnings still current in that area, so there is planning underway in case of flood issues there. Sandbags are being provided as well as stockpiles and we have flood rescue operators in the region in case they are required. In the last couple of days, I have spoken to the Victorian emergency services Minister to offer any assistance that we could provide in Victoria, as the Premier indicated in a press conference the other day.

We are able to provide a terrific response because of fantastic volunteers resourced by unprecedented levels of funding provided by this Government. Over 16 years the State Emergency Service has had funding totalling more than \$547 million. This year's budget is a record \$64 million, which has provided 32 new jobs, many of them in the Illawarra region, \$2 million to assist with the cost of about 60 emergency response vehicles and \$1.4 million for rescue equipment, including \$600,000 for 20 brand new flood boats. We are proud of this record and we are delivering this because we want to make sure that our volunteers have the best possible equipment to do their jobs well.

They work tirelessly with skill and commitment in the great Australian tradition of lending a hand to someone who needs it. We are likely to see more storms as the summer storm season starts around 1 October. Residents across New South Wales should prepare for the summer storm season by making sure that they do things like clearing gutters, pruning overhanging tree branches and removing loose objects around their house that could fly around and cause damage in high winds. Once again, thanks to our volunteers in the State Emergency Service and all the other emergency services that supported them.

DIALYSIS PATIENT TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

Mr PETER DRAPER: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health. Given the disappointing response that I received last week to representations made on behalf of local renal patients who needed transport assistance in my electorate, will the Minister undertake to revisit their situation and provide help to these people, who are rapidly running out of options?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I thank the member for Tamworth for his question. There is no doubt that one of the strongest records that this Government has in terms of regional and rural health services is the investment that we have made in expanding renal dialysis services across regional and rural New South Wales. We have opened renal dialysis satellite centres in Bathurst, Tweed Heads, Griffith, Goulburn and Moruya. We have also expanded a number of rural units enabling more patients to be treated locally, including Dubbo, Moree, Armidale, Bathurst, Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour, Grafton, Lismore, Kempsey, Wagga Wagga and Moruya. Recent funding enhancements have enabled further service expansion for a six-chair service at Taree, expansion of home-based dialysis on the far North Coast and an increase in the number of places in Broken Hill and Forbes. So we have invested substantial additional funding in providing renal dialysis across New South Wales, particularly in regional and rural New South Wales.

There is no doubt that renal dialysis is a severe impost on the quality of life of people who need it. They need to travel regularly to centres and it does pose real challenges for people who live in regional and rural New South Wales. I know that the member for Tamworth has made representations on behalf of some of his constituents with regard to assistance with travel—funding for travel—for their renal dialysis services and I am very aware that there are transport difficulties for patients who live in rural communities who require regular and ongoing medical treatment. The department undertakes periodic assessments of travel expenses and program criteria as part of its ongoing monitoring of the Transport for Health Program. The Government

introduced changes to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme [IPTAAS]. In August 2006 we included a reduction in the distance criteria from 200 kilometres to 100 kilometres, that is one way, and also an increase in the motor vehicle allowance—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I refer you to the Oakeshott standing order. It has taken a long time to get to the answer, which is "No".

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: From July 2009, NSW Health also abolished co-contributions for patients in approved escorts who are pensioners and health care card holders. These changes have significantly increased the number of people who are eligible for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme. I am happy to look once again at the issues raised by the member for Tamworth. However, I point out the increased investment in renal dialysis services across regional and rural New South Wales, the substantial changes to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme to make more people eligible and the increased funding for health services in regional and rural New South Wales. Sometimes it is simply not possible to satisfy the circumstances of every individual. I will look at the issues raised by the member and I undertake to get back to him.

HOME DETENTION

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Corrective Services. What is the latest information on the administration of community-based orders for offenders in New South Wales?

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: This morning the Auditor-General—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has the call.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: I am almost finished!

The SPEAKER: Minister, you almost started!

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: This morning the Auditor-General released the performance audit report on home detention and I would like to bring to the attention of the House some detail relating to that. The House is aware that home detention commenced in New South Wales in 1997. Home detention is a means of diverting less serious offenders from entry into full-time imprisonment in a correctional centre to an environment of intense community supervision. I understand the Auditor-General has spent a considerable amount of time compiling this report, including consultation with Corrective Services NSW.

I welcome the Auditor-General's comments concerning the benefits and success of the program as an alternative to full-time custodial imprisonment. I note the report contains a number of recommendations, some of which Corrective Services NSW are already implementing, including potential expansion of the home detention program. I inform the House that by the end of this year an additional 155 placements will be available under the home detention program. These extra places are consistent with the expansion of the Community Compliance Group, a division of Corrective Services NSW responsible for the supervision of offenders serving home detention orders and other orders requiring intensive supervision.

It is important to recognise that home detention is not suitable for everyone. The assessment includes a recommendation to the judicial officer who then imposes the most appropriate sentence. Each home detention order is accompanied by an individual case plan specifically designed for each offender. As part of our State Plan we are working towards reducing our reoffending target by 10 per cent by 2016, and we are well on target. We also introduced earlier this year intensive correction orders as part of the regime of improving our corrective services system. While becoming used to some of the rather bizarre comments that come from the Opposition, I particularly acknowledge the wonderful contribution by the learned member for Epping, who said:

We probably should be looking at other alternatives to imprisonment to try and rehabilitate prisoners.

The member said that on 2GB on 1 February. We thank him for that contribution and his bipartisan approach to keeping our community safe. This Government will continue to keep the community safe, putting those who deserve to be in prison in full-time custody. We will work with those who want other types of sentences.

Question time concluded at 3.14 p.m.

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION**Report**

The Speaker tabled, in accordance with section 78 of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, the report entitled "Investigation into Undisclosed Conflicts of Interest of a University of Sydney Employee", dated September 2010.

Ordered to be printed.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

The Clerk announced the receipt, in accordance with section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, of the Performance Audit Report of the Auditor-General entitled "Home Detention: Corrective Services NSW", dated September 2010.

PETITIONS

The Clerk announced that the following petitions signed by fewer than 500 persons were lodged for presentation:

Wagga Wagga Base Hospital

Petition requesting funding for and the commencement of construction of a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital in this parliamentary term, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Wagga Wagga Respite Services

Petition requesting funding for a second respite house and the provision of accessible access to the existing respite premises in the Wagga Wagga electorate, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Wagga Wagga Hearing School

Petition requesting the establishment of a hearing school in Wagga Wagga, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Mobile Breast Screening Units

Petition requesting that mobile breast screen units be reinstated in areas within the North Coast Area Health Service, received from **Mr Donald Page**.

South Coast Rail Line Staffing

Petition opposing the reallocation of and reduction in staff on the South Coast Illawarra rail line, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Bus Service 389

Petition requesting improved services on bus route 389, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Walsh Bay Precinct Public Transport

Petition requesting improved bus services for the Walsh Bay precinct, and ferry services for the new wharf at pier 2/3, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Companion Animals Travel

Petition requesting that companion animals be allowed to travel on all public transport, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Inner Sydney Light Rail

Petition requesting the development of an integrated light rail network through inner Sydney, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Mosman and Neutral Bay Ferry Timetable

Petition opposing the revised timetable for ferry services from Mosman to Neutral Bay, received from **Mrs Jillian Skinner**.

Religious Education and School Ethics Classes

Petitions opposing the proposed ethics classes and requesting continuation of the scripture classes, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire** and **Mr Donald Page**.

Protection of Crown Reserves

Petition requesting an expansion of the draft local environmental plan template to enable Crown reserves that need protection from development, but that are not national parks or nature reserves, to be protected, received from **Mr Donald Page**.

Adoption Laws

Petition opposing any adoption law changes that take away the right of adopted children to be raised by a mother and a father, received from **Mr Gerard Martin**.

Shoalhaven Police Station

Petition requesting funding for the establishment of a new police station in the central Shoalhaven area, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Mental Health Services

Petition requesting increased funding for mental health services, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Burrill Lake

Petition requesting the opening of Burrill Lake, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Public Housing

Petition requesting that no inner city public housing stock be sold and that funding for public housing maintenance be increased, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

The Clerk announced that the following petition signed by more than 500 persons was lodged for presentation:

Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust Land

Petition opposing any transfer of land from Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust to the Sydney Cricket and Sports Ground Trust, and requesting increased funding to the trust and proper public consultation on any future proposals that affect public access to the parklands, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Reordering of General Business

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Terrigal) [3.16 p.m.]: I move:

That the General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) given by me this day [Wyong Valleys Coal Mine Proposal] have precedence on Thursday 8 September 2010.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.16 p.m.]: The Government is eager to debate the motion of which the member for Terrigal gave notice.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Business Lapsed

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) Nos 962 to 968 will lapse on 9 September 2010 pursuant to Standing Order 105 (3).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business

Motion by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That the business of the House be interrupted, after the conclusion of the motion accorded priority, to permit the presentation of an inaugural speech by the member for Penrith.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

Crime Trends

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [3.18 p.m.]: The results are finally in, the raw data has been gathered and the State's independent crime statistician, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research—one of the only independent crime statisticians in the nation—has published the result of the second quarter in 2010. I am pleased to inform the House and the people of this State that, yet again, in the 24 months to June 2010 crime has fallen or is stable in major crime categories in New South Wales. The facts speak for themselves; in fact, today they shout. Crime is down across the State. The New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research June quarterly report is a great report card for the NSW Police Force. Today no motion deserves priority more than the one that congratulates our extremely hardworking police officers.

Exhibition and Convention Space

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [3.19 p.m.]: When one visits the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Melbourne, one gets a sense of what a good government can do. One gets a sense of the hope that the people of New South Wales could have if we had a good government instead of the lethargic logs that currently occupy the Treasury benches in New South Wales. New South Wales needs a break from the Keneally Labor Government, which has destroyed our worldwide credibility in our capacity to deliver infrastructure.

Members in this place would know—and I am sure members of the public who are present in the gallery would know—that New South Wales is in the doldrums. We have the lowest housing starts in 50 years. Sixteen years of State Labor has given us the worst economic indicators. When the Liberal-Nationals Coalition left office, it led every State in this country but now we are at the bottom of the pile. Only a Liberal-Nationals Coalition government can return a sense of dignity, a sense of hope and a sense of certainty when it comes to delivering infrastructure in this State. Today this Parliament properly recognised that symbols are important. However, as was observed also this morning, so is the delivery of tangible change.

On the cusp of the tenth anniversary of the Sydney Olympics it is proper for members in this House to reflect on the incredible achievement of the last Liberal-Nationals Coalition Government in winning the 2000 Olympics against the odds. All members would remember Juan Antonio Samaranch's faltering and perhaps hesitant declaration, "The winner is Sydney." Since that time, under this State Labor Government, we have not been the winner. State Labor effectively slammed shut the gates that the Liberal-Nationals Government

opened to the world at that time. Nick Greiner and John Fahey opened the gates to the world and, shortly thereafter, State Labor called, "Lights out; time to go. Do not bother coming back." We have no convention centre, no exhibition centre and nothing was to be delivered in New South Wales.

It is incredible that Sydney is the only Olympic city to lose the tourism market share it had after hosting the Olympic Games. Premier Kristina Keneally said, "I am no-one's puppet and I am no-one's girl." Premier Kristina Keneally is the successor of four State Labor members of Parliament who have completely ruined New South Wales. The sad fact is that she wears almost like a badge of pride the fact that she has managed to destroy New South Wales. One of the great brakes on the capacity of New South Wales to increase its tourism market off the back of the 2000 Olympics has been the failure by State Labor to provide a high-quality convention and exhibition centre. All those members who were here at the time of the former Government would remember Michael Knight. Sometimes I worried about his insights but, on this occasion, I agree with him. Today he is reported in an article in the *Australian Financial Review* as follows:

But Mr Knight said it was obvious that Sydney's convention and exhibition facilities were being "outclassed" by others in the region.

He went on to state:

This means we will get a lesser share of that business, especially the big international conventions with their big spending delegates. Unless Sydney's deficiency is addressed, our share of the high yield conference business will spiral downwards.

That is exactly what happened. He said this in the softest possible way, as a good loyal foot soldier for the Labor Party. However, in reality it is far worse than even he is portraying. Every year we are losing the financial equivalent of one Rugby World Cup. How shameful! I visited the Exhibition and Convention Centre when I visited Melbourne in my capacity as shadow Minister for Infrastructure. Melbourne and its Government should be proud of their achievement. However, they would like us also to be successful. Victoria and New South Wales can grow together and have a relationship in which they will both do well. At the moment New South Wales has an Exhibition and Convention Centre that is tired, sad and run down.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Like the Government.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: It is just like State Labor and it mirrors precisely the position of State Labor. On behalf of the Liberal-Nationals Coalition and the New South Wales community I call on Premier Kristina Keneally to wake up. As we heard today, all that she has delivered is an interdepartmental committee. It is time for Premier Keneally to deliver for New South Wales. We need a new Exhibition and Convention Centre to give New South Wales hope. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion of the member for Parramatta be accorded priority—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

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

Noes, 39

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

CRIME TRENDS**Motion Accorded Priority**

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [3.32 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data released today shows crime in New South Wales is stable or falling in all 17 categories; and
- (2) congratulates the NSW Police Force on driving down crime.

I am pleased to notify the House and the people of this State that, yet again, in the 24 months to June 2010 crime in all major categories in New South Wales is falling or stable. Crime is down across the State and our hard-working police deserve to be congratulated. The New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research quarterly report is a great report card for the New South Wales Police Force. As I mentioned, this report shows that all 17 major crime categories are either falling or stable across the State. Over the 24 months to June 2010 five offences were trending downwards across the State: break and enter non-dwellings, down 15.3 per cent; break and enter in dwellings, down 6 per cent; malicious damage to property, down 9.7 per cent; steal from motor vehicle down, 9.7 per cent; and motor vehicle theft, down 4.9 per cent.

I am further pleased to inform the House that in Parramatta, the centre of western Sydney and a major growth hub in New South Wales, the results show that in the two years to June 2010 crime had fallen or remained stable in all 17 major crime categories in the Parramatta Local Area Command and in 16 out of 17 categories across the Rosehill Local Area Command. In the Parramatta Local Area Command the categories to record major drops in crime include steal from motor vehicle, down 31.4 per cent; break and enter non-dwelling, down 23.8 per cent; and steal from person offences, down 21.6 per cent. In the Rosehill Local Area Command malicious damage to property offences fell 13.4 per cent. This is fantastic news for our community, and our local police deserve to be congratulated on the result.

Our police are protecting hard-working western Sydney families every day and they should take pride in these results. The New South Wales Government is committed to supporting police in their efforts to reduce crime in all major categories, making New South Wales and Parramatta a safer place to live and work. These figures are fantastic, especially when we put them in context and compare them to the number of incidents a decade ago. The 2000 Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research annual report showed that crime was rising or stable in every single major crime category. Despite a 6.4 per cent growth in population in this State since 1994 and growing crime avenues that emerged with the spread of new technology, the 2009 annual Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research report demonstrated a 50 per cent reduction in property crime across the entire State since 2000.

These phenomenal results alone mean there are now 250,000 people who were not the victim of break and enter, stealing, motor vehicle theft or fraud offences in 2009. However, these results do not just happen by

themselves. Crime does not fall because crooks take a year off or that we have more rain than usual. Crime falls because this State's 15,556 police officers—the fourth largest police force in the English-speaking world—have put in the hard work to keep New South Wales communities safe. This hard work can continue only when New South Wales police are backed by a Government that supports them with the resources they need to drive down crime—resources such as a record \$2.8 billion budget in this 2010-11 financial year, including a whopping \$166 million worth of capital funding, or the additional \$34.9 million set aside in this year's budget to fund the extra 250 authorised strength positions that will come online in January. These numbers will keep the New South Wales Police Force on track to reach almost 16,000 by December 2011.

These numbers manifest themselves in an increased local police presence, including an authorised strength of 211 to the Parramatta Local Area Command and an authorised strength of 126 officers for the Rosehill Local Area Command. Modern policing is not just about solving crime; it is about preventing people from becoming victims in the first place—as reflected in today's results. New South Wales Police Force officers are on our streets every day keeping our communities across the State safe. The Keneally Government will continue to support our police by providing them with record numbers and the best resources and technology available. This work can happen only when a Government is prepared to put its money where its mouth is.

I am proud that since 1995 this Government has supported New South Wales police with the resources and legislation they need to keep criminals off our streets and in our prisons. The Government is delivering record police numbers to New South Wales, which now stand at a record 15,556 and represent an increase of more than 20.5 per cent since members on the other side of the House were in power. As I mentioned earlier, another 400 police positions are on the way by December 2011 to bring the contingent to nearly 16,000. Crime falls because of outstanding police work from the best police force in the world here in New South Wales.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [3.39 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by adding the following paragraph:

- (3) notes that there is a statewide increase of 4.1 per cent in sexual assaults, a 76 per cent increase in the instances of people apprehended in possession of cocaine, and a 24.8 per cent increase in blackmail and extortion.

It would have been interesting for people who live in Dareton and Wentworth to have heard the speech made by the member for Parramatta. In spite of statistics produced by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and all that has been said by Government members during the debate, crime is having a real impact on people who reside in the Wentworth shire, particularly for those who live in the communities of Wentworth, Dareton and Buronga. The most recent incident of serious crime occurred when juvenile offenders decided to steal a car and drive over the top of its owner. Crime rates in the Wentworth shire have reached a peak. I assure the House that the Murray-Darling electorate office's phone rings continually because people are informing me of crimes being committed in Dareton and Wentworth.

The data produced by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research ignores shire populations of fewer than 5,000 people and to that extent, statistics for Wilcannia in the Central Darling Shire, which has a very high crime rate, are non-existent. In other words, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data does not reflect all crimes that occur in the State but merely measures the overall effect of crime rates in large areas of population. For example, data relating to breaking and entering offences bears no relationship to the numbers of breaking and entering offences that occur in Dareton. The small percentage of offences committed in Dareton, despite having an impact on each household in the community, pales into insignificance in the eyes of the Minister for Police alongside statistics for areas such as Parramatta.

People who live in the small communities of my electorate know that at some point in time their house will be broken into, they will be intimidated and they will be assaulted. For places such as Parramatta, where the incidence of breaking and entering offences is relatively small and does not affect the entire population, the offence is not rated highly in crime statistics. Breaking and entering offences occur every night of the week in Dareton in relation to commercial facilities, shops, clubs and hotels, and that has a major impact on the local community. But that is not the totality of offences; breaking and entering of homes occurs continually. I share the frustration experienced by police who are trying to prevent that type of crime. The crimes are committed predominantly by juveniles, but irrespective of the age of offenders, the effects of breaking and entering offences are just as serious for the people of Dareton as are more serious and more highly rated crimes experienced by the people who live in areas such as Parramatta.

While there have been attempts to reduce rates of juvenile crime by amendments to the Young Offenders Act, the reality is that those endeavours are not achieving results in remote country areas. Incomplete

crime statistical data is not helpful for people who live in smaller communities. Recently I met with the Minister for Police and the Mayor of the Wentworth Shire Council to discuss problems associated with crime rates. We were presented with the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data, but there was no sense in talking about the statistics. From my personal experience of shires in my electorate, I know that the Wentworth shire has a major and ongoing crime problem. In other areas of my electorate where crime is less of a problem, I hear very little about concerns related to criminal activity.

I believe that the Government has a responsibility to focus on hot spots and assign a task force to address the concerns of people experiencing high crime rates. A 24-hour police presence for a short period would probably have a salutary effect, and I am sure my constituents would appreciate any action resulting in a marked reduction of the impact that crime is having on their lives, particularly people who live in Wentworth and Dareton. Although I make repeated representations to the Minister for Police and the Attorney General for action to address the high incidence of offences, my representations seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Meanwhile I continue to receive numerous phone calls from residents of Dareton and Wentworth who have been victims of crime or whose neighbours have been victims of crime, and there is no solution to the problem in sight.

I wish I could join the member for Parramatta in rejoicing over statistics relating to crime rates. In the Parramatta electorate, obviously crime is not an issue. Apparently constituents of the member for Parramatta do not come to her with concerns associated with crimes, but that is certainly not the case in my electorate. Wentworth and Dareton seem to be pockets of high crime rates, and the problem should be addressed. I ask the Government to assemble a task force that will take one-off action to reduce the crime rate in my electorate. The task force could move around the State of New South Wales and possibly deal with other hot spots to make safer other areas that are not recorded in statistical information produced by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. In small communities, the percentage of crime rates has a greater impact than an equal percentage would have in metropolitan areas with higher populations. If the Government takes action to protect my constituents and address some of the issues I have mentioned, perhaps I too will be able to rejoice with the Minister and the member for Parramatta in crime statistics produced by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira) [3.46 p.m.]: Before I express support for the motion moved by the member for Parramatta, I will address some of the remarks made by the member who preceded me in the debate, the member for Murray-Darling. It is always very important to advise constituents of country and city electorates to report crime and to emphasise the importance of local people who know about crimes coming forward to provide information to the police and assist with their inquiries.

I thank my colleague the member for Parramatta for providing the House with an overview of the latest information from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research in relation to areas across New South Wales. I reiterate that rates of crime are either decreasing or stable in all 17 out of 17 major categories of crime committed right across New South Wales. That is no small achievement when one considers that just 10 years ago, in 2000, when the New South Wales population was increasing by more than 6.4 per cent, crime rates were either increasing or stable in all major categories of crime. In other words, our crime rates are stable or decreasing whereas 10 years ago crime rates were either stable or increasing. What a turnaround we have seen. Across the State, crime rates for all 17 categories are either stable or decreasing. I am pleased to note that the trend is replicating in my hometown in the Illawarra.

The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research June quarterly report showed that in the two years to June 2010, crime either decreased or remained stable across all 17 major crime categories in the Wollongong Local Area Command. That is fantastic news for my community. Our local police deserve to be congratulated on that result. I express my admiration and thanks for their efforts to the contingent of police officers who work at the Wollongong Local Area Command and led by Superintendent Kyle Stewart. Police officers patrol the neighbourhoods to protect hardworking Illawarra families, and they should take pride in the results they achieve.

I point out that in the Wollongong Local Area Command the crime categories that recorded major decreases over the 24 months to June 2010 include assault—non-domestic violence related—which decreased by 35.1 per cent; break and enter offences in non-dwellings decreased by 16.6 per cent; and offences of malicious damage to property decreased by 14.7 per cent. Following a recent bust, which would not be part of the bureau's statistics, targeted to reduce offences related to breaking and entering of dwellings, I am confident there will be a reduction in the incidence of that offence—one of which was committed on a member of my family recently.

As my colleague the member for Parramatta pointed out, these heartening results have not occurred just because the crooks have all chosen to go on sabbatical for the two years to June 2010. Crime is on the run and crooks are on the back foot because of the hard work of officers of the New South Wales Police Force who are getting on with the job. They can do their job only when they have a Government that backs them by providing the resources and support they need—a Government that provides the incentives to ensure that people join the Police Force in record numbers. Since 1995, police salaries have almost doubled. The New South Wales Government is helping to deliver record police numbers to New South Wales so that the Police Force now stands at a record 15,556 in authorised strength, an increase of more than 20.5 per cent since the Coalition was in government.

As my colleague has already mentioned, another 400 police positions are on the way by December 2011, which will bring the authorised strength to nearly 16,000, with an authorised strength of 213 police officers in Wollongong Local Area Command. Instead of threatening to conduct audits of the Police Force, as others in this House have done, this financial year the Government is investing a record \$2.8 billion in the police budget. In 2010-11 the Government will be funding major works on 20 police stations, 10 of them in Government seats and 10 for folks living in seats represented by the Coalition or Independent members.

Modern police stations built around this State now provide state-of-the-art facilities for police officers, putting the latest in crime-fighting technology and communications at the fingertips of front-line police, helping them continue to drive down crime and put those responsible for that crime behind bars. But police do not catch crooks while sitting behind desks. That is why the Government continues to make a significant investment in the latest innovations to support modern intelligence-driven mobile policing operations. That is why the Government is rolling out mobile police command vehicles to target crime whenever and wherever it happens. [Time expired.]

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [3.51 p.m.]: I am 100 per cent committed to the Tweed. It gives me great pleasure to speak on this motion. Opposition members are 100 per cent committed to our hardworking men and women in the New South Wales Police Force. Recently on a Thursday night, I had the privilege of going out overnight with members of the highway patrol, dedicated and committed people who put their lives on the line every day of the week to protect the community. However, they lack support from this Government. Others speakers have mentioned the statistics. The member for Murray-Darling pointed out that while a number of crime categories have come down in certain areas, there has been a State-wide trend upwards: 4.1 per cent increase in sexual assaults, a 76 per cent increase in the incidents of people apprehended in possession of cocaine and a 24 per cent increase in blackmail and extortion. I draw the attention of members to today's *Sydney Morning Herald*, which states:

Police knew the latest quarterly NSW crime figures would show a big increase in drug offences, NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione says.

"We have seen that coming for some time," Mr Scipione told reporters in Sydney on Wednesday.

Yet we have a Minister for Police saying, "Aren't we doing a really good job; crime is dropping." Somewhere the message is being mixed up. I would rather believe the police commissioner, Andrew Scipione, who is a fine, hardworking officer, than the police Minister. I refer to the crime statistics published in recent times. Only two months ago, Don Weatherburn, the director of the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, pointed out, again in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, that incidents, particularly relating to assaults, are being rejected so they are not showing up in the crime statistics. I think he said the police were lowering the number of recorded assaults in an effort to make good what the police Minister has been saying.

The sad reality is that a large number of residents are living in fear. My electorate of Tweed has been shown on a number of national and State television programs, including the *7.30 Report* and *A Current Affair*, indicating that elderly residents are too scared to go out at night. I have a good rapport with our local police men and women and the Police Association in particular. In the Tweed we have one police officer per 750 head of population, whereas the State average is one police officer per 550 head of population. If one includes the 50,000 tourists who come across the border every day, the Tweed is roughly nearly double the State average in terms of the requirement for police per head of population.

I look with regret at the increase in illicit drug crimes. In Tweed in the last year alone, 53 kilograms of illicit drugs were confiscated, excluding cannabis and other derivatives of marijuana. That puts the Tweed third behind Cabramatta and Kings Cross in terms of illicit drugs. Only recently, after intense lobbying by me in this place, two drugs officers were appointed. Without that lobbying, we would not have drugs officers. However,

I found out recently that those two drugs officers have been taken from the target action group, so there has not been a net increase in police officers in that area. Yet the Tweed is a major manufacturing drug port. While the police Minister issues glossy press releases about how well he is doing, the sad reality is that that is not the case on the streets. The police need extra resources.

Members on this side of the House fully understand. They are all good local members and they talk to their local police and local residents. They understand the real issues. They are not covered by spin doctors. In the short time I have been in this Parliament, I have seen members opposite eventually start believing their own spin. They start believing that everything is hunky-dory and everyone is behind them. Recently the police threatened to go on strike and the Police Association ran a massive campaign. Assistant Police Commissioner Dave Owens told elderly people in the Tweed that the rise in crime rates was a perception in their minds. They are being bashed on the street, they receive black eyes and other injuries, but they are told it is simply a perception. Unfortunately, it is a perception by the police Minister to issue press releases and purposefully neglect sexual assaults, drug crime and so on. Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed.

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [3.56 p.m.], in reply: The amendment is not acceptable to me and I am happy to give members opposite my reasoning; namely, the purpose of my motion is to congratulate the New South Wales Police Force on its extremely hard work. I was speaking generally about crime rates across the State and in accordance with the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research report today. I found it almost astonishing that the member for Murray-Darling managed to call into question the independence of the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research as an organisation. He knows enough about the way the system works in this State to encourage community members to report crime when it occurs in their area. If additional police resources are to be allocated, it is imperative that members of the community come forward and report crimes. If that were occurring, it would reflect in the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research report.

I thank members for their contributions to the debate. In particular, I thank the member for Keira, who obviously has a profound interest in the workings of the New South Wales Police Force. I was happy to assist him as a parliamentary secretary when he was responsible for the Police portfolio. Members opposite referred to cocaine use. It is clear that cocaine use is on the rise. The New South Wales Police Force is working extremely hard behind the scenes and joining forces with the New South Wales Crime Commission, the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and other law enforcement agencies to target drug traffickers and reduce the amount of drugs such as cocaine that are smuggled into New South Wales. Police are currently in discussions with other jurisdictions to establish a special task force to investigate crime in the ports. In relation to sexual assaults, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research review shows that there has been an increase within the Sydney—

Mr Ray Williams: A massive increase in western Sydney—

Ms TANYA GADIEL: Bag up, idiot, and then you might learn something. Why don't you learn to just shut your mouth for a while?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order!

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! No, I have called for order.

Mr Andrew Constance: Are you going to bring her into line?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for Bega will resume his seat.

Mr Andrew Constance: The language too.

Ms TANYA GADIEL: We are speaking about sexual assault and I have somebody out here trying to denigrate the form of this Parliament, and when I am speaking—

Mr Ray Williams: Somebody?

Ms TANYA GADIEL: The member for Hawkesbury would be very good at doing it—trying then to denigrate where we come from in this Parliament. I am happy to speak about this and address the issues that were raised legitimately by members in this House.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: I take on board the sensitivity to which the member for Parramatta referred but I think there is an appropriate way to conduct herself in the House. I think the member for Parramatta should withdraw her comments so that they do not remain in *Hansard*. Mr Assistant-Speaker, you should reflect the standing orders when governing the House.

Ms TANYA GADIEL: Mr Assistant-Speaker is aware that I have no obligation to withdraw my comments. The statewide figures for the same period showed that sexual assault offences have remained stable. As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, it does not matter where a sexual assault occurs or who was the offender—it is a crime; it is a disgusting crime. Over the past decade or so, we have seen a willingness of particularly young women to report these disgusting crimes. I encourage all victims of sexual assault to contact the police immediately. The more victims who report these crimes the more chance there is of these offenders being put behind bars, and less chance for someone else to be victimised.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 38

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

Noes, 48

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

Pair

Mr Stoner

Mrs Perry

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: Order! In accordance with the resolution of the House, business is interrupted for the presentation of the inaugural speech by the member for Penrith.

INAUGURAL SPEECHES

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith) [4.10 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): As I first walked through the doors into this historic Chamber in late June, past the watchful and slightly intimidating eye of Sir Henry Parkes, I was—as I imagine all of my colleagues past and present have been—struck by the responsibilities and honour of this role. I hope and expect that feeling will never diminish as long as I remain a member in this place. At the outset it is important to record that none of us comes here without the support of the people of our electorates, and today I warmly thank the people of Penrith for the support they have given me. I have learned much from so many local people in recent months and look forward to continuing to learn into the future.

I have an undiluted passion for Penrith and its people. I will always strive to listen to and hear their concerns, their views and their perspectives on the issues with which we grapple in this place every day, and to bring those views to this Chamber to ensure that they are well and strongly represented here. My commitment to the people of Penrith is essentially identical to the commitment that they make to their own families and in their own jobs, that is, to work hard and to work with strength and integrity in everything I do.

I am also standing in this place today because of the support of the New South Wales Liberal Party and the support of its members and staff, both in Penrith and further afield. It is fair to say that it has been some time since a Liberal member took their place in this Chamber representing Penrith, but to those who never lost the faith—thank you. To the members and the supporters of the Liberal Party in Penrith who have helped to make my election possible, I express my sincere appreciation. To Barry O'Farrell, the leader of the Liberal team, the Leader of the Opposition, and a familiar face in Penrith and the lower mountains, I thank you for your drive, your determination and your leadership. I thank you and the team of colleagues here who worked so hard to harness those winds of electoral change that were blowing so hard in western Sydney in my campaign.

It seems to me that in 2010 the electorate of Penrith, from Cranebrook to Kingswood, to Emu Plains and Glenbrook, represents far more than a simple geographic or demographic description might reveal. Penrith, in my view, is the essence of modern western Sydney, at once dynamic and diverse, but also a close community with great respect for our history, traditions and indigenous heritage. We are a proud regional city bounded by key suburbs and the smaller villages of the lower mountains, and united by the bonding ties of the magnificent Nepean River. In one corner of my electorate the traditions of market gardening continue in what was once the food bowl of Sydney. In another corner the magnificence of the world-renowned Blue Mountains National Park begins its rise from the banks of the Nepean. In long-established suburbs traditional family homes now sit side-by-side with villas and townhouses and, simultaneously, new chapters of the development story are written every day.

We have all watched Sydney grow massively in recent years, and Penrith along with it. For my part, I think some in Penrith have been relatively mute in communicating beyond our borders what is needed to make this State and this city of Sydney, and our growing western Sydney region and its cities such as Penrith, function optimally. That is a change I intend to make. Penrith and western Sydney will no longer be taken for granted. I most certainly promise that the strong voice of Penrith will be heard loud and clear in this Chamber on many issues. The people of Penrith rightly expect their elected representatives—and indeed the Government—to advocate on their behalf and to be responsive to their growing needs and demands. Meeting and exceeding those expectations is my goal.

We are the essence of burgeoning western Sydney because we are a region of great opportunity and potential. Business in Penrith optimistically sees that significant potential in our community and has enormous drive and enthusiasm to build on that with plans that befit a growing regional city. We also exemplify modern western Sydney because right now, on the one hand, we are facing the great coincident challenges of development and, on the other hand, the preservation of important open space and natural environment. We confront challenges of infrastructure neglect and, further, a complete absence of infrastructure planning let alone delivery for growth. We face the challenge of increasing numbers of young families choosing to live in our part of the world because of the lifestyle and the opportunities, and at the same time a community service

environment where support levels cannot always keep up with the needs of the most vulnerable people, including the disadvantaged young and the elderly, those who may be homeless or suffer mental illness, and many people with disabilities.

In these not insignificant challenges lie many of the strengths of the future of Penrith and of western Sydney, but it will take a government which understands that the term "service delivery" comes with an obligation to actually deliver, a government which understands that with growth and development comes a responsibility to work with business, the job creator in this State, and with the people, to ensure that infrastructure is provided in those areas which need it now—not decades hence when the planning and construction obstacles have become insurmountable. In short, we need a government that will reclaim first position in Australia for the State of New South Wales.

In my view that requires a significant cultural change in the politics of New South Wales, a cultural change that the Liberal Party can and will deliver. That cultural change will bring about a government that in fact meets the quite simple and reasonable expectations of the people of Penrith—that they will be served by a government that works as hard as they do, that meets high standards of integrity and honesty, and that has a vision for the future of this State that extends beyond its own political existence.

I am a product of Penrith, of Penrith schools, first St Dominic's at Kingswood—and I am not the only Dom's boy in this place, I might add—and also McCarthy Catholic College at Emu Plains; a product of Penrith's numerous sporting clubs, in my case the Penrith Rams; of Penrith businesses, where I had my first jobs; and a product of my Penrith mates and friends. I love the commitment and engagement of the people of Penrith in their community, whether it is in sport or the hundreds of other groups and organisations. It is a natural part of our life and gives our city and region great vitality, which plays out in parks and ovals, in halls and at volunteer committee meetings across town every day of the week.

My choice to become a participant and move beyond observer status in the political arena came when I joined the Liberal Party over 10 years ago. I am as passionate about politics as I am about Penrith. You could ask a few people about that, but probably no better referees than my parents Garry and Lesley and my brother John. It is wonderful to see them here today. To my family I owe so much. Let me just say here and now that my parents' commitment to public service exemplified in their defence careers and community activity, my family's love for our nation and our history, did not just rub off on me—it is in my DNA. Their commitment to public service is also mine, demonstrated now in a different profession. I am so proud to be the son of Garry and Lesley Ayres, and so very proud that I can acknowledge and thank them and my brother here today. To Marise, your grace and poise continually amaze me, your strength and courage inspire me and without your love none of this would be possible.

I joined the Liberal Party because the fundamental Liberal values of individual freedom, support for free enterprise, commitment to small government and a just and humane society are my own values. I think we should remind ourselves from time to time of some of the often forgotten basics of Liberal philosophy. They are tried and true, "well tested in the marketplace" some might say, and a good foundation for solid government.

Let me start with individual freedom and our judgements of others, and most particularly not judging people on their race, creed, religion, age, gender or sexuality. We are all New South Welshmen, we are all Australians, and we are all human beings created by the God to which we pray. The diversity of this nation is woven into the fabric of our past, our present and our future. I believe that utilising that diversity, not fighting it, is the way forward. I have great respect for the fundamental significance of individual freedom and for a just and humane society, and in a nation such as Australia, where we have a proud history of men and women fighting for those rights and freedoms, it seems worse than counterintuitive to me to approach life in any other way.

The backbone of my electorate is the assembled force of small and medium businesses, their owners and workers. We are not a government town. In Penrith, jobs and futures are overwhelmingly created by business men and women who have a commitment to free enterprise, to making their own way in life and reaping both the rewards and challenges that come with their endeavours. They make their desire for a strong, competitive New South Wales economy where they can run their businesses and compete in the marketplace clear to me in our discussions. Some operate as sole traders in the villages of the lower mountains, others in light industry and small workshops, and many in the large retail and commercial centres of Penrith. Wherever and whatever their trade, they need consistent rules and regulations, they need a strong business environment and a government that genuinely has an interest in their wellbeing and future—perfectly reasonable

requirements of a government, I would suggest. I also acknowledge the role of local business organisations that advocate for Penrith and for their business members in their work. I want to help harness their vision for the future of Penrith and help carry it forward wherever I am able.

If business is the backbone of Penrith, its heart can be found amongst those who work with and care for people in need in our community and who in their contribution make our society more humane. I think particularly of carers for children and adults with disabilities, and for the elderly and chronically ill. In what is an often exhausting and thankless role, hundreds of women and men support and look after mostly family members in a very personal and intense way. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The load carried by carers is significant, the reward most certainly not financial, but the value of their contribution to the community is immeasurable. New South Wales will hopefully see substantial political change in the next year. I am working for it, the people of Penrith are hoping for it, and the people of this State deserve it. It is overdue, it is necessary and it will see a generational change in politics in our State. I do not mean by age, but I do mean by attitude and calibre and mission. We must have a new generation of politicians. As a State we must absolutely challenge ourselves to be better than we have allowed ourselves to be in recent years. I want to challenge people to think about the sort of State and country in which they want to live, and to work with them to make sure that change happens.

In thinking about the future and the vision for New South Wales and Australia I have another change in mind, and that is a fundamental and also long-overdue change, a constitutional change. I firmly believe that as a modern, mature nation Australia should be a republic; that we should be selecting our own head of state from amongst Australians, and that any Australian should be able to aspire to be our head of state. In a modern nation, where success is not dictated by birth or wealth, where we pride ourselves on our down to earth and egalitarian society how is it still the case that our head of state is drawn from the British royal family? How is it that not one of the schoolchildren from Penrith, from Cranebrook or Lapstone who come to visit this Parliament can aspire to be our head of state? It is time for that to change.

In this place I represent a community that owes much to the foresight of Governor Lachlan Macquarie, whose bicentenary we are celebrating this year. Governor Macquarie opened up the west of Sydney with key land grants, watched over the laborious and backbreaking development of a path through the Blue Mountains, and recognised the enormous potential of this region. As a keen student of history I believe it is important to acknowledge that vision and the possibilities it created for our State from the beginnings of our small colony to today.

The people of the electorate of Penrith, from the mountains to the plain, are immensely proud of their community. They are self-made, they are strong, they are great contributors to community and they are fiercely loyal. And there is more to come. This is a community, a regional city, that has not yet achieved its enormous potential. We, like Macquarie, have a vision for western Sydney and our place in it. And I have the honour and the opportunity to represent the people of Penrith at this very exciting time. I look forward to the challenge. I am passionate about what is possible. I look forward to Penrith continuing to cement its position in the future of New South Wales.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): It being almost 4.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to Government business.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2010-2011

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [4.29 p.m.]: I speak in debate on the current State budget, which I think is a visionary document, and indicate to members that I intend to do so in two ways. First, I will talk about the global impact of the budget and, second, and more specifically, I will refer to how it affects my electorate. In certain sections of the media there has been much criticism about this Government's performance. However, if we are serious about it and we look at the history of this Government's fiscal management over the past 15 years we find that it has an excellent record, which was outlined in detail in the Treasurer's Budget Speech in this House. I will refer later to that in detail.

Over an extended period this Government has had an excellent record in health and education. I note that the Minister for Education and Training is in the Chamber. This Government also has an excellent record in areas such as community services, where it has increased support for people with disabilities. Because this Government is a good financial manager it has record expenditure across a range of services. In 1999, when I first became a member of Parliament, I remember Bob Carr giving new members a stirring speech. He said that the first duty of a Labor government was to be able to manage the economy. Despite some ill-founded criticism, I can state with great pride that this Government and successive governments—from Bob Carr, Morris Iemma, Nathan Rees and Kristina Keneally—have all been able to do that.

Some people might think that I am somewhat biased in my endorsement of this Government. However, international rating agencies such as Standard and Poor's—our barometer around the world—have maintained this State's triple-A credit rating, which gives us cheaper access to funding and which makes New South Wales an attractive place for people to invest. Our record is on the board. I say to those members of the media who talk down this Government that they should try to get out the message that this Government has managed the economy well, which has enabled it to do good things in a number of portfolios. All local members will benefit from that. As I elucidate on what money is being spent in my electorate that will become increasingly clear.

Twelve months before the Treasurer brought down this budget we were in the middle of a global financial crisis. It is worth pointing out that that happened against a scenario over which we had no control and from which governments around the world were reeling. Those governments have not been able to handle themselves as well as the Federal and New South Wales governments. Twelve months before the Treasurer brought down his budget he referred to major deficits and to income streams that would not be available to the Government. Since that time—in one year alone—we have had a \$1.1 billion turnaround. Over the next four years of the forward estimates our budget surplus will average \$800 million a year.

What an outstanding effort when compared with the scenario of the previous 12 months! That can be attributed to the prudent financial management of this Government and its good financial record, which has resulted in market confidence. Debt has been kept under control. In the previous 12 months we were looking at a debt ratio of almost 4 per cent. It is now projected that the debt ratio will be 2.5 per cent by 2013-14. It is worth pointing out that that is one-third of what the Liberal-Nationals Coalition left to New South Wales back in 1995. Any extrapolation of those figures reveals that that is an outstanding result. The Parliamentary Secretary and member for Bankstown, who is presently in the Chamber, would have been a member of Parliament in 1995 and would have been aware of the deficit left by the previous Coalition Government.

Mr Tony Stewart: It was a shameful deficit.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: It was. Discounting this Government's major financial infrastructure development with the Federal Government through its education and housing investment, which resulted in millions of dollars being spent in New South Wales, our capital budget of \$61 billion over a four-year period has kept investment in infrastructure going. We have been able also to support the construction industry and all its affiliated industries. That multiplier effect has resulted in more jobs in the construction industry. For all those reasons this Government can say to the community that it, like successive Labor governments before it, has been a good economic manager.

Yesterday when the shadow Treasurer spoke in debate on the budget he referred to payroll tax as being a tax on jobs and said that everyone would like this Government to get rid of payroll tax. However, no-one in politics can afford to do that. Opposition members came up with a mickey mouse, gimmicky approach of creating 100,000 new jobs that would be exempt from payroll tax but after that there will be a vacuum. The shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition said in their contributions to debate on the budget that the former Coalition Government had a good record on payroll tax. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer said that when they were in office New South Wales and Victoria had the lowest payroll tax rates in Australia. However, they did not say that at 8 per cent the rate was 30 per cent higher than it is now.

Opposition members cannot claim any sort of fiscal responsibility by referring to their payroll tax record when in office as it was 30 per cent higher than the payroll tax rate of this Government. The two payroll tax cuts that were announced in the budget will be introduced progressively. Over the next six years the \$4 billion that will be saved in this area will go back to businesses in New South Wales. That will underpin their financial viability and enable them to invest further. The payroll tax cut that is due to be implemented on 1 January 2011 has been fast-forwarded to 1 July. Another tax cut will occur on 1 January 2001, which will take payroll tax down to 5.45 per cent—the lowest payroll tax rate in New South Wales in more than 20 years.

Once again, that underscores the hypocrisy of Opposition members who talked about having a better record on payroll tax. The Treasurer said in his Budget Speech that the State and Commonwealth stimulus measures were critical to putting Australia and New South Wales in the strong financial position in which it is today, in stark contrast to almost any other economy in the world. As this stimulus package continues to be rolled out and this Government works through its investment strategies, investment in infrastructure will remain at an all-time high. In this current financial year—2010-11—it is almost \$17 billion.

This State Government is continuing projects such as its Community Building Partnership, even though it has allocated only a modest amount of \$35 million for that project compared with other projects, which will result in the delivery of about 1,100 projects around New South Wales. Because of the success of that project the Government has allocated an additional \$35 million this year. Public transport is often criticised by members of the media in Sydney. Those members from country areas who use Sydney's public transport system sometimes wonder what people are complaining about. Once again the Government has a good record in this area. Some arguments have been espoused about these projects and the priority that has been given to them. However, over the next three or four years more than \$22 billion will be invested through this budget in the Government's transport plan.

There is some controversy about the money that is being levied on vehicle registrations and it has been said that country people are paying for infrastructure in the city. However, all members would be aware that there are cross-subsidies both ways. This amount of 60¢ a week is not something about which we should be complaining. Opposition members said that people from the country never use metropolitan transport infrastructure when in fact they do. I do, and so too do many of my colleagues and constituents. A few years ago I remember, as will the Parliamentary Secretary, that when Carl Scully was Minister for Transport the Sydney Harbour Bridge toll was increased from \$2 to \$3 and 60 per cent of that money was quarantined to go into country roads. Certainly, there was no complaint at the time. People using the Sydney Harbour Bridge subsidised construction and maintenance of roads in country and regional New South Wales. Whether country subsidises city or vice versa is not the issue, but quite often that is used from a politically divisive point of view.

Law and order always has been a major issue, but to a large extent this Government has removed it from the front pages of newspapers. Once again we have provided a record investment in our police budget, this year to the tune of \$2.8 billion. As well as having record numbers of police we also have invested heavily in technology. Today highway patrol cars are a mobile technical wonder. The amazing facilities police have available to them make their job easier and, importantly, safer. New camera technology enables police within seconds to trace and identify stolen cars as they pass. This technology makes police work safer and more efficient and, therefore, delivers a good result to the community.

In general, the budget is good and we are proud of it on this side of the House. We are proud also that in a time of an unprecedented world financial crisis, in 12 months we have been able to turn around our economy without any massive tax increases and by maintaining record expenditure in those important portfolios of Health, Education, Transport and, of course, Disability Services and Community Services that face increasing demand. We will never turn our backs on those important services as those opposites did when they were in government. Under the former Coalition Government, whenever the belt was tightened Community Services was first to suffer—the Department of Community Services was under attack together, of course, with the wholesale sacking of schoolteachers, and the closing of railway lines and hospitals, particularly in the country.

As I have said, I am proud of our record. However, the Government needs to sell to the general public our good, reasonable and responsible record in managing the State's economy. I am pleased that the budget has provided a good deal of expenditure to keep projects rolling in my electorate. Much has been said by members opposite criticising the new Bathurst hospital that has been operating for two years. This hospital is a magnificent facility despite some initial commissioning problems. We wrestled with a few problems to keep as part of the new complex the regional heritage building that was built in the 1870s—indeed, Florence Nightingale had something to do with its design. We were able to secure this magnificent heritage-listed building as part of the newly developed \$100 million hospital, but at a price. Because of the clay soil around Bathurst, the building had to be brought to an earthquake-proof standard. For that reason the budget provided an extra \$7.7 million to complete that work and to allow extra space for ambulatory care. Visitors to Bathurst Base Hospital will experience a first-class facility with excellent staff.

Another area about which the Government can be proud, particularly in my electorate, is education. My electorate has approximately 40 public schools comprising small one-teacher schools to high schools catering for over a thousand students. Apart from the excellent work under the Building the Education Revolution

program, which is on time in my electorate, maintenance funds provided in the budget over the past few years, and particularly this year, are welcomed by the school community. Carenne special school in Bathurst, a place for which I have high regard, received an additional \$100,000 to upgrade disability access to older classrooms and approximately \$3 million in capital works funding.

We have invested also in laptop computers for high school teachers to enable them to keep up to date with the latest technology. Of course, in conjunction with the Federal Government's laptops in schools program this will ensure that teachers are up to date with their students. The budget has allocated to Portland Central School \$90,000 for toilet upgrades; to Black Springs Public School \$25,000 for storm and sewerage upgrades; Blayney High School received another \$75,000; the excellent small school at Cullen Bullen received \$35,000; Hampton Public School received \$20,000; and Neville Public School received \$25,000. Some of the schools I have mentioned have only one or two schoolteachers but they are receiving their share of funding.

The Bathurst electorate has a Police-Citizens Youth Club in Bathurst and Lithgow and the budget provides recurrent funding for those clubs' civilian managers. The new model Police-Citizens Youth Club, which involves police working with troubled youth, has resulted in something like a 60 per cent to 70 per cent decrease in crime from young people diverted into the program. Police work alongside the civilian managers and respond to community needs from a range of projects, including getting young people involved in sporting activities, exercise, homework classes, after-school care and a range of other activities. Another initiative from the budget was the rolling out of the new police mobile command. I am pleased that Bathurst will be one of the first places to receive a mobile command. This will be handy for the annual Bathurst 1000 car race. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Of course, as a country member a major issue always is roads expenditure. Every year I have been in this place I have heard complaints about not enough money being spent on country roads. That may be true on some occasions, but this Government is spending about 60 per cent of its Roads budget in regional areas that service about 35 per cent of the population. My electorate has been allocated something like \$43 million for general works, including \$12 million for network development, \$26.5 million for infrastructure maintenance, nearly \$800,000 for traffic and transport management and, of course, \$4.3 million for road safety. One interesting project that has continued to receive funding is the Great Western Highway upgrade between Mount Victoria and Lithgow.

Despite funding also from the Federal Government for a major route change or upgrade, the State Government continues to provide funds by allocating \$11.4 million for that planned upgrade and also continues to allocate funds for major work on black spots such as Victoria Pass and River Let Hill. Castlereagh Highway, which links Lithgow to Mudgee, has been allocated \$5.5 million for road realignment at Cudgegong River. As everyone knows, the Mudgee area is a very important and well-established wine-producing area. It is an area in which increasing investment and expansion of major wineries takes place. For those reasons it is important for the area to have a good system of roads. The Castlereagh Highway has been improved significantly in recent years, and upgrades to major road networks in the area will continue.

The Great Western Highway, which is the major highway into Bathurst, is undergoing major upgrades at Glanmire. I am pleased to note that the budget allocates \$1.2 million for improvement of the Bathurst-Oberon road, particularly at the village of O'Connell. The road takes a great deal of heavy traffic, in particular B-doubles that service the major timber industry located at Oberon. For years the community battled for improvements to be made to the road. The Government has provided sufficient funding to enable the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Oberon City Council to do an excellent job of effecting improvements.

Sofala, which is near Kelso, is one of the many historical goldmining villages in my electorate and is a significant tourist destination. It is important for Sofala Road to be upgraded and I welcome the budget allocation that will enable the upgrades to be carried out. The budget also provides for road widening of the Great Western Highway between Evans Bridge and Kelso, which is on the eastern side of Bathurst. Everyone agrees, including the Bathurst City Council, that increased funding is required to maintain the road in good condition so that Australia's oldest inland city has a roadway entrance in keeping with its status in our national psyche.

Significant funding has been allocated to continual upgrades and maintenance of rail infrastructure, such as level crossings and rail tunnels in Bathurst and surrounding districts. The main Bathurst railway bridge, which was constructed in early in the twentieth century and requires major upgrades if not replacement, will be

refurbished. It is important for the Great Western Rail Line to remain open and operational because it is a major freight line between Sydney and western areas of the State as well as a link to intermodal centres in Bathurst, Blayney and Parkes.

As a result of the significant investment by the New South Wales Government and funding derived from the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, something akin to a revolution in public housing has occurred. Strategic government expenditure has been part of the economic stimulus that kept Australia well and truly ahead of other areas of the Western World throughout the recent global financial crisis. It sustained the construction industry and hundreds and thousands of workers who are employed currently would not have a job if it had not been for cooperative fiscal arrangements between the State and Federal governments.

As part of stage two of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, the New South Wales Government allocated \$3.2 million to complete construction of 38 homes for disadvantaged people in Lithgow out of a total investment of \$9.8 million; \$64,000 to complete construction of six homes for disadvantaged people in Bathurst South as part of a total investment of \$1.8 million; and \$230,000 to complete construction of seven homes for disadvantaged people in Mitchell. Most of the funding provided through stage two of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan has been allocated to areas of greatest need.

The new standard of public housing is excellent and features architectural designs. The homes are places that anyone would be proud to live in. I am sure all members would agree that nothing is too good for people who suffer from disabilities. A similar project in Gormans Hill, Bathurst, received a budgetary allocation of approximately \$700,000. The Government also allocated \$2.4 million to complete construction of 22 homes for disadvantaged people in Kelso. The funding will assist in the Department of Housing to carry on with its incredibly important work of providing public housing.

The Government allocated \$5.4 million to a large housing estate at Kelso comprising approximately 300 homes. The estate has experienced problems that are similar to those experienced in some public housing estates in Sydney relating to the suitability of designs and standards of construction. The Government is working with the Bathurst City Council and members of the community to adjust designs, reconfigure roads and replace walkways that are dangerous places at night with safer options so that people will not be terrorised in their own homes. The Government is selling off some public housing stock to reduce the concentration of public housing in the Kelso area, and funding derived from the sales will be directed to the development of public housing estates elsewhere.

Recently the Minister for Housing, Frank Terenzini, visited Bathurst to launch the Kelso project. One of the innovations in public housing is that people will be given the opportunity to purchase their home. Far from walking away from the provision of public housing, the Government is working towards better housing construction standards and improving the environment in which public housing tenants live. The Government built the Kelso Community Centre in conjunction with the Bathurst City Council, and numerous services operate from that centre. The area is characterised by a high level of Indigenous residents so a number of the centre's services are directed to meeting their needs as well as the needs of other members in the local community so that services can be accessed readily, particularly by young people.

I am pleased with the funding that has been allocated to the Bathurst electorate. Some people may think that issues of climate change and the environment are off the agenda, but I know that the Government's allocation of \$91 million to the Environmental Trust will result in funding for school projects and community endeavours in my electorate that will protect our environment. Funds have been allocated for riparian regeneration and construction in the magnificent Wolgan River Valley. Another interesting project is one being conducted by the Sisters of Mercy: \$205,000 has been allocated for a stormwater harvesting system, which is part of their economic education unit. Part of an allocation of \$1.5 million will be directed towards the upgrade of the Lithgow hospital's energy facilities. The Government is funding multifaceted, innovative and clever ideas for a sustainable environment and supports measures that reduce energy demand and costs and conserves water resources.

The task of Labor members is to strongly promote the Government's excellent budget. In the most trying circumstances, the Government has maintained the State's triple-A credit rating and is able to move forward with budget surpluses. The Government allocates funding to support the provision of essential public services that any Labor Party would hold dear to its heart, particularly services provided for people with disabilities and people who are less fortunate in our community. I commend the budget to the House.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.57 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I participate in debate on the 2010-11 State budget—and what a budget it is. I note that the only member of the Opposition in the Chamber is the member for Port Stephens. The Opposition constantly criticises the budget, so I can only infer from the absence of Opposition members in the Chamber that they are quite happy with the budget and have no complaints. The budget has allocated funding for projects that will benefit the Sutherland shire, particularly my electorate of Miranda. The budget is a Labor budget through and through. It is all about improving and delivering services to people, particularly those who live in the Sutherland shire, across all areas of government responsibility. In relation to education, the Government has allocated \$1.7 million for science laboratory upgrades at the GyMEA Technology High School and the Kirrawee High School.

The rollout of the new laboratories began with the Port Hacking High School in my electorate of Miranda, which was the very first school in the State to receive them. The then Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Della Bosca, visited the school to officiate at the opening ceremony and the laboratories have been well received. In a former life, I was a social science teacher at the Port Hacking High School in the late seventies and early eighties. I know that science teachers at the school are delighted with the new science laboratories. The principal of the GyMEA Technology High School, Mr John Bedwell, also is absolutely delighted with the laboratories provided for his school. The school recently received an upgrade to toilet facilities. I congratulate the GyMEA Technology High School and Mr Bedwell on the school. I have described it as being one of the best kept secrets in the Sutherland shire.

Kirrawee High School is an outstanding school in the Sutherland shire. People even move into the suburb so that their children can attend the school. The school has an excellent reputation in music and performing arts and will receive a science laboratory upgrade. Recently the school was provided with a security fence. The school community is delighted with the improvements that have resulted from budget funding.

A security fence is being provided to Sylvania High School. The school recently received a much-needed \$3.2 million school hall and for the first time the whole school community will be able to meet in one space. I add that the school hall has not been provided from Federal Government funding but, rather, is the result of an election commitment I gave. The project was announced by former Premier Morris Iemma and has been well received by the school community. The school is a superb educational facility. The school community is looking forward to the official opening ceremony, which will occur shortly. Como Public School is a small school in my electorate. The largest primary school in the shire is GyMEA Bay Public School. Como Public School is a very small school in Como in the shire; it is almost like a family country school, and is delighted that it is getting a security fence.

Miranda Public School is another great school, and it has some special needs kids. A security fence at the school will be completed. It has also had a hall completed. I am working with the principal and the parents and citizens association, which will ask Sutherland Shire Council to close the road that services the school only. The parents and citizens do a fabulous job and I am delighted that the school is getting a security fence upgrade. Of course, security fences cut theft, graffiti and vandalism in our schools. Speaking of school improvements, recently I took the opportunity to visit the vast majority of schools in my electorate and talk about the projects they are getting under Building the Education Revolution. Despite the Federal Opposition leader referring to the school halls as rip-offs and so on, I have yet to find one parent or one principal who is complaining about the facilities being provided under the program.

I am sure members opposite feel much the same way, and it involves simply rhetoric from the Federal Opposition leader. It has been acknowledged that delivery of the projects could be improved, but I can truly say that not one school in my electorate is complaining about the facilities they have received. Those facilities will last for years and years. The parents and the school communities are simply delighted with them. Recently I heard the principal of Kareela Public School, Dr Margaret Turner, address parents on grandparents day. I know it does not look like it, but I am a grandparent. I attended the grandparents day with my wife, Jeanette. It was fabulous. Although grandparents day did not start until 10.30 a.m., the grandparents were there at 10.00 a.m. The hall was packed. We visited a new classrooms at Kareela Public School.

[Interruption]

That is right, grandparents do a great job. We are the great carers and child minders of the twenty-first century. It is a different world. The parents and grandparents were impressed with the new facilities at Kareela Public School.

Sutherland shire and my electorate are served by two police commands: Miranda Local Area Command and Sutherland Local Area Command. Sutherland is set to receive a new state-of-the-art mobile command vehicle that will allow police to better target known crime hot spots in the shire. I attended an inspection of such a vehicle at Sutherland police station with my colleagues the Minister for Police, the member for Heathcote and Acting Superintendent Damian Henry. Miranda Local Area Command already has one mobile vehicle; it is one of 25 new mobile police commands worth some \$3.3 million being rolled out as part of the record 2010-11 police budget.

The new vehicle is equipped with location-specific radio, a data terminal, access to police databases, and a digital message board for the public. The new mobile command vehicles can also serve as an interview room for suspects and witnesses. It is simply another weapon in the armoury of our local police, who are doing a great job in driving crime down across both commands. As part of the budget the Government promised that we would get more police on the beat. Recently the member for Heathcote and I had the privilege of welcoming 13 new police officers to the Sutherland and Miranda commands at Sutherland police station. Those new police officers were among the 370 men and women who graduated recently from the Goulburn Police College.

I am sure other members go out and meet new police officers as they arrive on duty. One thing that impresses me particularly is the backgrounds of the new police officers. They are electricians, bricklayers, mechanics, Qantas personnel—a whole range of professions. In one case a Corrections officer became a police officer, which might be seen as a logical progression. I was delighted to meet them all. They will bring to the commands that vast experience of life, which they will need in dealing with the issues and problems that arise in the local community. Complementing police and more police on the beat is Sutherland courthouse, which is undergoing a \$2.8 million renovation, providing more support for crime victims.

As a former legal aid solicitor who worked for five years as the public solicitor at Sutherland Local Court my job was often running between five courts. Often, I seemed to be called in five courts at once, being called by five different magistrates. Legal aid solicitors are a particularly hardworking bunch of solicitors and I take my hat off to them for the work they do. If I was not in the courts I was downstairs in the cells interviewing people in custody for the first time and making bail applications. Sutherland courthouse is very well used, but it needs modifications and renovations. I am sure the staff, the solicitors, whether or not they are from legal aid, the police prosecutors, who do a fabulous job in Sutherland Local Court and the magistrates who work there will all welcome the new courthouse renovation. As well as the courthouse renovation, one interesting innovation is the introduction of forum sentencing for Sutherland Local Court, which will give victims a greater say in the sentencing of offenders.

The Minister for Transport, the Hon. John Robertson, MLC, was in the shire recently with plans—this was announced in the budget—for the \$6.2 million Sutherland interchange. At the announcement he was joined by the Member for Menai, the Member for Heathcote and me. About 12,000 passengers use Sutherland station each day, and with increasing numbers using public transport we need to upgrade facilities at the station. The upgrade will mean the relocation of the interchange, changes to traffic flow over the rail bridge, dedicated kiss and ride zones, and new bicycle parking, as well as expanded closed-circuit television surveillance and lighting. The \$6.2 million upgrade, which is welcome, will improve access to Sutherland railway station and improve links with other transport modes.

The upgrade of Sutherland interchange will complement what I consider to be a great improvement and advancement in the Sutherland shire—that is, the \$344 million Cronulla rail duplication project, which the Premier opened recently. The duplicated line eliminates the bottlenecks and delays caused by the single sections of track between Cronulla and Sutherland, and it means faster and more comfortable rail services and rail trips as well as extra services for the 40,000 commuters who travel on the rail line each week day. One key feature of the rail duplication is the station upgrades and installation of lifts at Kirrawee and Woollooware stations, improving access for seniors, disabled people and parents with young children. Kirrawee was once a cold and miserable station. Seniors and disabled people could not get down the stairs so they had to travel miles up to Sutherland or to GyMEA for lifts to get down to the station. Now the many seniors who live in the southern part of Kirrawee can simply go to the station, access the platform, get on a train and have a comfortable trip into town.

I pay tribute to the station staff on all stations in my electorate who do a wonderful job. I see them helping disabled people getting on and off the trains. They assist people left, right and centre. I particularly thank Sam Eljerman of Jannali station, Victor Gorgievski of Kirrawee station, Ben Dihén of GyMEA Station and Peter Steerman of Miranda station for their work and commitment to the public. That duplication fulfils an

election commitment I made in 2003, when Carl Scully was the transport Minister. It is the largest single investment in public transport infrastructure in the Sutherland shire's 106-year history. So I was delighted about that. We recently have also had completed new state-of-the-art signalling infrastructure from Sutherland to Loftus and Oatley, to improve safety and efficiency even further in the Sutherland shire.

All up, the Government has made a total investment of some \$436 million in local public transport infrastructure. There is a new timetable on the way in October, and we will be getting express services from Cronulla to the city in the morning peak, which are expected to slash about six minutes off each journey. When the Premier opened the rail duplication at Kirrawee station we purchased our MyZone tickets, which are a big hit with commuters on the Cronulla line, and boarded a train.

The budget provided for some \$12.5 million to complete the Bangor Bypass stage II and I compliment the member for Menai, Ms Alison Megaritty, who has been stalwart for improving infrastructure in the Sutherland shire to the west of my electorate. I note the fabulous Woronora Bridge, one of only two of its kind in the world, and the Bangor Bypass stage I. The member for Menai has worked very closely with the member for East Hills in relation to the Alford's Point Bridge. The Bangor bypass, Alford's Point Bridge and the fabulous Woronora Bridge benefit my electorate significantly. They provide an easy way out to the west, to Bankstown and other parts of the metropolitan area.

We are also out there tackling graffiti in the shire. Recently the Attorney General, the Hon. John Hatzistergos, came to a graffiti hotspot in the Menai electorate and announced a \$100,000 crime prevention grant to the Sutherland Shire Council as part of the Government's \$1.6 million support of grassroots crime prevention strategies. Also present were the member for Menai and Mayor, Councillor Lorraine Kelly. We talked about the progress being made in reducing graffiti right across the shire. We now look at the environmental design of graffiti hotspots to make it harder for vandals to deface property. Last year on behalf of the Attorney I had the privilege of opening the Designing Out Crime Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney. Vandalism costs the shire, residents and businesses an enormous amount of money. Council has an existing hot-spot strategy which focuses on the rapid removal of graffiti and encourages the community to report vandalism to the police.

I commend council and local police for their work which sends a clear message to vandals that malicious damage in the community will not be tolerated and we will work together to do whatever it takes to stamp out vandalism and the destruction of shire property. The Designing Out Crime Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney, received a \$400,000 grant from the Government to look at ways to better manage graffiti and crime in general by better design of the environment. I know it designed a garbage bin which could detect bombs and other offensive material placed inside it at stations which could be a particular problem.

I was also pleased that the budget announced that the Community Building Partnership Program would continue. Last year people in my electorate were very happy with the \$300,000 for local community groups. Forty applications were put through a rigorous assessment in my electorate. I know members on both sides of the House apply that rigorous assessment and are delighted that the Community Building Partnership Program will continue. I have received more than 40 applications this year, and one was from the Point Preschool, an award winning preschool in my electorate of Miranda. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I thank the member for Goulburn and the member for Port Stephens for their indulgence. The Point Preschool spent 10 years raising money to provide for an extension to the preschool and improvements. Sutherland Council came on board and I was pleased to recommend to the Premier a grant of \$50,000 for it. The 50-year-old preschool building has been transformed for the kids. Recently I attended its fun day and had the privilege of singing with the entertainer, Mr Peter Morgan, as I do every year, and inspect the premises. The staff, students and parents are blown away by all improvements that came about with the help of that \$50,000 grant. I congratulate staff, parents of children at the Point Preschool, and the council for delivering that.

Grants also help to pay for the construction of disability ramps. The parents and citizens of Sylvania High School were able to upgrade the kitchen-canteen. The Triton Group and the wood carvers of the Cubby House at Oyster Bay, were given \$6,500 to install roller shutters to its equipment stores. The term "Cubby House" came about because years ago Sutherland council was about to demolish a Scout Hall. A group of retired men who were interested in woodturning renovated the hall and established Southern Region of Sydney Woodturners Inc. They are often down there working their lathes. When their wives were asked where the men were they would say, "They are down at the cubby house". Suddenly the "Cubby House" came into being. It

provides recreation and produces excellent craftsmanship. Recently an arts and crafts exhibition was held there. The wonderful items produced by these men and female members of the Woodturners and Triton Group are amazing. I tried to work the wood lathe but I was hopeless.

Recently this Government supported victims of domestic violence in the shire with a \$500,000 grant—\$100,000 every year for five years. The member for Heathcote, the member for Menai, the Minister for Women and I attended the Sutherland Shire Family Centre on the announcement of that grant. The Shire Family Centre has the Domestic Violence Pro-active Support Service [DVPASS] project run in conjunction with police in the shire. It provides victims of domestic violence, mainly women and children, with swift access to specialists and support services. I am sure all members agree that domestic violence in all its forms is an abhorrent crime. I say to people "Don't think it doesn't happen in the Sutherland shire because it does". In fact magistrates at Sutherland Local Court devote Wednesdays to dealing with domestic violence and apprehended violence orders. I commend the police domestic violence liaison officers and the people who work in the domestic support room for their work.

It is astonishing that official reports show that one in three women are physically assaulted in their lifetime and 42 per cent of homicides are the result of family and domestic violence. It is intolerable. It is inexcusable and we cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the problem. Addressing the scourge of domestic violence is a responsibility of the whole community. The project is producing results with a 12 per cent reduction in repeat victimisation since it was introduced. Victims of domestic violence in the shire are becoming more willing to access the available support.

This grant is part of the State Government's \$50 million action plan called Stop the Violence End the Silence. When we were there we talked to a young woman who had been involved in domestic violence. Her story was an eye-opener to all who were there, but not uncommon to domestic violence workers. I know that she is getting the help and support she needs from the police, who were also present at the announcement, and the shire family service people, including Dianne Manns, Miranda Woman of the Year in 2009, who was involved with the Domestic Violence Pro-Active Support Service project, and the Sutherland Shire Family Service Manager, Ms Kath Jones.

The budget is a Labor budget through and through—it is about delivering better and improved services—and it is, of course, complemented by the Federal Government stimulus package. I must say, as a former economics teacher, having heard the rhetoric and vitriol from the Leader of the Opposition about the stimulus package, I am astonished by the low level of economic literacy in this country. The package was simple Keynesian economics at its best, the kind of economics that ensures that we do not have depressions. If we applied the economics of the Opposition we would have the Depression again, because the Opposition says we should cut spending. We do not do that when we are heading into a recession; we spend money, and this was done by spending in short-term, intermediate and long-term spending programs.

We are the country to which other countries look to see how we avoided a recession. How did we avoid the worldwide financial crisis? It was through good economic management and judgement, and simple Keynesian theory. We spend when we are heading into recession. We refrain from spending and have surpluses when the economy is overheating and inflation is rearing its ugly head. It is simple stuff that all kids in years 11 and 12 at high school know and understand. It is a shame that the Opposition—federally at least—does not understand that simple process.

We see marvellous facilities in our schools. People kept their jobs and people were employed in my electorate because of the Federal Government stimulus package. One person said to me, "Barry, I am a plumber by trade and I have five workers who would have gone but for the stimulus package", so I thank the Treasurer for the budget and I also commend the Premier for her work in coming up with a Federal Government reform package for health. The Deputy Premier Ms Carmel Tebbutt recently came to Sutherland hospital and announced the opening of 17 new beds with \$6 million in extra funding following the historic health agreement between the State and Federal governments. We will get those across a range, especially those 17 beds, and I know that the Director of Emergency Services at Sutherland hospital, Dr Michael Golding, was absolutely delighted with the new funding for extra beds. He said that that funding would mean a 25 per cent increase in beds in emergency at Sutherland hospital.

To people who think that we have not done a good job at Sutherland hospital I can say that in my time we have redeveloped the hospital and basically opened a brand new hospital. We have a wonderful health campus, including heart clinics, community health centres, dialysis unit and an acute psychiatric patient unit.

We have expanded the aged care health service. Each year Sutherland hospital delivers some 6,500 emergency and planned surgical procedures, provides over 515,000 outpatient services, assists with the birth of more than 1,240 babies and treats more than 39,400 people in emergency. That is not just pretty good, it is excellent, and I congratulate the doctors, nurses and allied health staff on providing such a marvellous service to my community and making it a first-class comprehensive health campus in the Sutherland shire. I thank members for their indulgence. I know the member for Port Stephens has listened very carefully and attentively without interruption, and I appreciate that. I thank the House and commend the budget to the House.

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

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! Government business having concluded, the House will now proceed to private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOULBURN REGIONAL CAMPUS PROPOSAL

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [5.25 p.m.]: Residents in the city of Goulburn have battled through crushing drought, business closures and unemployment. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics classifications of income, Goulburn has some of the poorest areas of any city in New South Wales, yet we also have crime rates among the lowest in the State, great sportspeople, artists, good high schools, tremendous community spirit and a vast array of community groups and activities. It is a city of great promise and certainly spare capacity. The optimistic spirit of the city's residents is a testament to their love of the city, and I am sure that is a loyalty felt by Australians in regional areas across New South Wales. Unfortunately, however, young people flee these areas in droves. Driven out by lack of employment or study opportunities, they head to major cities and sometimes do not return for years, if ever.

So it is with cautious excitement that I met recently with representatives from the University of Canberra to discuss Goulburn's potential as a regional campus. I first raised this with Professor Parker two years ago, but only recently has the university decided to make Goulburn central to its bid for Commonwealth Government structural adjustment funding. Whether the university will be successful with this funding remains to be seen, but I am cautiously optimistic because Goulburn is the perfect venue for a regional university campus. The city has three high schools, with Crookwell and Yass within an hour's drive. Despite the high number of students from these five high schools attending secondary school, the tertiary enrolment rate remains low by State and Australian standards. In 2010 Universities Admissions Centre offers for the capital region were 5.27 per 1,000 population compared with 8.46 per 1,000 population for Canberra and Queanbeyan. This is very much the story throughout New South Wales with the under-representation of regional students in Australian tertiary institutes as observed by Professor Denise Bradley in the Bradley Review of Higher Education.

There are, of course, a number of reasons why young people in this region are underrepresented, but I have no doubt that the costs associated with sending an 18-year-old student to a tertiary facility at least an hour and a quarter's drive from Goulburn are significant. There is no daily bus service linking Goulburn with Canberra or any other centre with a university, such as Wollongong, so car travel is the only option other than boarding. Even with government assistance, boarding and travel expenses impose a significant cost upon families, and family incomes in the greater Goulburn area are significantly below those in metropolitan areas, in part because two-income families are much less common. Over the years Goulburn has come to accept that families either find the money to board their children in Canberra, Wollongong or Sydney or, if that is not possible, university is just not open to them. It is a choice that families in metropolitan New South Wales rarely have to face.

It is not that the city is unambitious for its children. Goulburn has a very large Conservatorium of Music and its high school students are well represented in sporting achievements. In 2009 Goulburn High alone had five students in Australian representative sides. I wonder how many students could also achieve at a tertiary level, should they choose to do so, if a campus was located in their hometown? Goulburn has a wealth of cultural facilities, the envy of other larger communities. There are three theatre companies, one of which has toured internationally, an extremely active conservatorium and a well-supported regional art gallery. Goulburn boasts an impressive standard of tradespeople. Heavy engineering trades have been well supported by railway

work for over a century and the city also abounds with electricians, plumbers, carpenters and builders who travel widely. These trades would translate into appropriate degree and associate degree qualifications with encouragement and assistance.

The establishment of a university campus in Goulburn would transform the city as it has other regional centres. It would enable students to live at home and study locally as well as build connections with the local TAFE sector and high schools that would inevitably increase tertiary participation rates. In addition, it would contribute to a culture of education from which the city more broadly would benefit. It would boost local employment and also broaden the range of employment possible in the city, making it an even more attractive residential and business location for a more diverse range of families and businesses than at present. Depending on the faculties established on the Goulburn campus, it might also contribute to a deepening of Goulburn's current employment strengths in the areas of allied health and engineering. Goulburn is well placed to serve students throughout the capital region as well as the Southern Highlands.

Goulburn is acutely conscious of its failure to grow over the past 20 years and the lack of growth greatly concerns the business community. I am confident that local business, including present owners of aged-care facilities and managers of Government facilities such as the Goulburn Correctional Centre, would be unanimous in their support for this project and welcome the opportunity for teaching partnerships with the University of Canberra and indeed any other tertiary institution that expressed a desire to do so. It is a facility that would service the people of Goulburn well and also the growing international market.

NEWCASTLE RAIL PLANS

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) [5.30 p.m.]: The word "integrity" is bandied about frequently in public life, yet the community is far more interested in what we stand for and how we defend their interests than in what takes place in our private life. I have represented the views of my community against electricity privatisation, against the closure of Cessnock Jail and against the closure of the Wallsend aged care facility. In all of these issues, my community has supported me. For this, I humbly thank them. Now the community is asking me to defend them in the Hunter rail debate.

In February 2006 then Premier Morris Iemma promised to maintain the rail line through to Newcastle station for the benefit of all commuters. Throughout the election campaign he never wavered on that commitment. No-one elected to this Parliament in 2007 ran on removing the rail. So what has changed? The Hunter Development Corporation [HDC] report, "Newcastle City Centre Renewal, March 2009", recommended that the rail be terminated at Wickham with an interchange to buses at this juncture. The consultants for this report cost \$207,915. The proposal was estimated to cost approximately \$650 million. This idea has now been dismissed. The same report indicated that only 5 per cent of commuters are using the train to get to work in the Newcastle central business district compared with 51 per cent for Sydney, 31 per cent for Chatswood, 25 per cent for Parramatta and 17 per cent for Hornsby. Why is there such a discrepancy between Sydney and Newcastle? What are we doing wrong? How do we encourage more local workers to travel by train? Why do we not do this? Have the pundits investigated this?

Now there is a proposal on the table involving light rail. The Hunter Development Corporation report did not see this as a viable option. Has there been new research to contradict the corporation's assertion? The debate must be about how we best get locals and tourists to visit the east end of Newcastle. Have we fully explored all the options? For instance, I can think of two examples that would benefit further investigation. The Newcastle *Herald* reported that the Coal River working party called on councillors to revisit a plan that fuses tourism with the city's heritage to boost visitor numbers. Marcus Westbury, Renew Newcastle's founder, stated that his organisation has 200 proposals that could potentially fill 200 shops in the east end of Newcastle. Is this the way forward? These options deserve further investigation.

I come to this issue with an open mind. Nevertheless, my decision will be shaped by what is best for all Hunter commuters. I do not rule out light rail, although I will need to be convinced that this is a better option, not just a different option, than the infrastructure that is already in place. We, the community, do not know the details yet. What the community will want to know as well is: Will we get value for money? Geoff Hassall summed up the mood of the Hunter when he wrote in the Newcastle *Herald*:

Residents of the Hunter don't care if they travel by train or tram ... as long as they are not disgorged onto the footpath at the edge of town, at Wickham.

Professor Howard Dick believes that the connectivity problem between Hunter Street and the foreshore can be overcome quite cheaply by controlled-access, ground-level crossings. The only obstacle is RailCorp's

inflexibility. Such crossings are widely used in other capital cities and overseas. When locals are asked what they feel about the line they say they enjoy the convenient and speedy service from Fassifern and Cardiff but are critical of the ugly fence. Professor Dick further suggests that proposals to landscape the corridor have been available for 20 years at a modest cost.

Meanwhile, the Glendale interchange slumbers. The workers, shoppers and sports people of my electorate would kill for this debate to be about the Glendale interchange. I know if that were the case there would be no need for calls of "unity" as there is unity and common purpose about this project. I will continue to work for the best outcomes for the people of my electorate. That is what integrity in public life is all about.

TWEED AREA COMPUTER TUITION

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [5.35 p.m.]: As members all know, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed. I would like to bring to the attention of the House a tremendous organisation. I recently had the pleasure of attending their annual general meeting and being the guest speaker. I refer to Tweed Area Computer Tuition [TACT], which specialises in teaching people to use computers, particularly our senior citizens. They have been doing it for a number of years. They are based at the South Tweed Sports Club and I pay homage to the club, which is iconic in the club industry. I have been involved in the club industry in the Tweed for some 17 years.

The South Tweed Sports Club is a great club and it has assisted this band of volunteers to set up computer training. There were a number of terminals there and I witnessed a large number of their students being given tuition on the computers. I would like to praise George Etheridge, the president of TACT, and Pat Trappel. Both of them work tirelessly for their organisation. I was amazed because they have established a classroom environment. They have an annual membership fee of \$15 and students donate \$3 per lesson. That has kept the organisation operating and enabled them to replace antiquated computers, purchase an overhead projector and a printer and, more recently, four brand new Apple computers. They teach senior citizens and many of the seniors told me on the day it has enabled them to pay bills through e-commerce and to keep in touch with their families, particularly their grandchildren, who are far more computer literate than they are. It has opened up a whole new life for these people. It has also enabled those experiencing some form of disability or mobility problems to use computers.

I was very impressed with TACT. Currently their membership is 545 and they have a current paid-up membership of 246. Over the past two years they have instructed just over 800 people over the age of 65 in the use of computers and how to conduct their day-to-day affairs on them. More importantly, it enables them to talk to their grandchildren and keep in touch with their friends. Currently they are seeking Government support to improve their facilities. To make it easier for their students to view keyboards they desperately need overhead drop lighting. This is their top priority, and the funds required for five fluorescent lights are estimated between \$1,500 and \$2,000, a small amount of money. It would enable them to go on teaching just over 800 seniors.

I met Alan Lynch, another member, and I pay tribute to him. He is able to turn his hand to most of TACT's building and computer requirements. He is a very understanding chap. He was a senior IT consultant before he retired and he goes out of his way to help. We should recognise people such as Alan Lynch in our local area because many of the inquiries I get from constituents are about downloading government information, forms and so on. People such as those in this organisation go out of their way to help and do not receive remuneration or government support. I have endorsed TACT's application for Federal funding to assist the aged and I hope they are successful. If they are not I guess I will be back here looking for just on \$2,000 for them.

I was amazed at their camaraderie, their patience and their ability to educate seniors in our workplace who have never had any real exposure to computers or to technology. It was good to see those members of our community walking out of the room with a smile on their faces as they had an ability to communicate, were no longer scared of technology, and were able to use it as a tool to improve their quality of life. I am talking about retirees—about people who have worked 40 or 50 years to contribute to the wellbeing of New South Wales. These volunteers go out of their way to support elderly people in my electorate. While I was there I learned a few new things about my computer. Tweed Area Computer Tuition, or TACT, deserves our support and praise. Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed.

SYDNEY SECONDARY COLLEGE, LEICHHARDT CAMPUS

HABERFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOL

Ms VERITY FIRTH (Balmain—Minister for Education and Training) [5.40 p.m.]: Tonight I inform members of two notable birthdays for schools in my electorate. Sydney Secondary College, Leichhardt Campus

has just celebrated 50 years of public education, while Haberfield Public School is celebrating its centenary. Last week I was delighted to attend a centenary ball at Haberfield Public School. A huge cohort of teachers past and present, staff, students past and present and current parents and friends joined to celebrate the school's achievements. I was especially impressed with the wonderful musical talent of students past and present. Congratulations go to Principal Karlynnne Jacobsen and to the parents and citizens association for organising such a great event.

Haberfield Public School was founded in 1910 and had 50 students. In 2010 it has grown to a school with 602 students. It is a culturally diverse school, with 76 per cent of students coming from a non-English speaking background. The school continues to excel academically and it has a reputation for excellence in all areas, including performing arts and sport. The school is part of the history of Haberfield—itsself a heritage treasure of Sydney, listed on the Register of the National Estate and the first suburb recognised as a heritage conservation area. Haberfield was established in 1901, the year of Australia's Federation. It was built following the Garden Estate movement, which was a reaction to the crowded "insanitary" settlements of the earlier suburbs.

When establishing the estate, Richard Stanton used the slogan "Slum-less, lane-less, pub-less". This indicated that he was designing a genteel residential suburb of free-standing brick houses that did not need back lanes because every house was connected to a sewer—the first such suburb in Sydney. The first few streets in Haberfield were given the names of the members of the first Federal cabinet—Barton, Kingston, Forrest, Turner, Deakin and Dickson. The whole suburb was developed by the 1920s and Haberfield Public School was a crucial part of Haberfield life. The school has always offered excellent education. Earlier this year, at the launch of the centenary celebrations, I enjoyed visiting the display in the library, where tools of learning from every era were displayed. Slates lay beside quills, exercise books, pencils and biros, textbooks old and new, all in front of one of the school's interactive whiteboards. How education has changed and continues to develop!

Last Saturday, the day after the Haberfield Public School centenary ball, I was privileged to attend the fiftieth birthday assembly of Sydney Secondary College, Leichhardt Campus. What is special about Sydney Secondary College, Leichhardt, is its commitment to excellence in public education and the journey that that school has taken to achieve excellence during the past 50 years. Not many schools have had the opportunity for change and innovation that Leichhardt has experienced. Public education commenced on the Leichhardt site 50 years ago with the opening in 1960 of Ibrox Park Boys High School. In 1976 the focus of the school changed to comprehensive education and Leichhardt High School offered education to both boys and girls in the local area.

In 2002 the school became the Leichhardt campus of Sydney Secondary College and it now offers comprehensive education to a diverse range of students in years 7 to 10. The school has adapted to the changes in the local area and has adopted innovative models of teaching. Throughout that time it maintained high standards of teaching and learning. Today Leichhardt campus caters for students from years 7 to 10 who come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Children from the local community join with students in the selective stream and in the support unit to make up the wonderful fabric of society that is celebrated every day by the school community. Sydney Secondary College, Leichhardt, is a school with a proud past that is looking towards the future.

The anniversary assembly took the community on a journey across those 50 years, and I enjoyed hearing the stories and celebrating the achievements of students past and present. I know that Principal Judy Kelly, all the staff and the committed and active parents and citizens association want Leichhardt campus to be a centre of excellence for middle-year schooling. Their ongoing commitment to the school is a wonderful display of community. They are committed to providing the best possible opportunities for students in their early years of secondary education so that they are well equipped to be successful in their senior years at the Blackwattle Bay Campus. I have every confidence that they will achieve their goal and that over the next 50 years the students who pass through that school will leave with the skills, experiences and understanding to shape their own lives and to contribute meaningfully to Australian society. I wish both schools all the best for their birthdays and I wish them continuing excellence in public education.

JUGIONG QUARRY EXPANSION PROPOSAL

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [5.45 p.m.]: Today I raise concerns about the way in which the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water has treated a company operating within my electorate. Tegra Australia Pty Ltd runs a significant number of operations within the Southern Tablelands, the

south-western slopes and the Monaro. Starting as a small road transport company in 1964, it has expanded steadily and it now provides employment for more than 80 permanent staff and about 20 casual staff. Tegra operates four quarries, one at Jugiong, Gundagai, Braidwood and Bungendore. It has seven concrete plants, one at Boorowa, Braidwood, Gundagai, Harden, Tumut, Yass and Young. The company also operates three landscape supply yards one in Belconnen and Fyshwick in the Australian Capital Territory and also one in Queanbeyan. Finally, it is involved in the ongoing upgrade of Blowering Dam, operating a mobile concrete batching plant.

Recently I met with the director of Tegra Australia, Mr Craig Sargent, to discuss his concerns about what should have been a simple request to extend one boundary of the Jugiong quarry by 174 metres. Tegra owns most, if not all, of the land surrounding the quarry that is overlooked by the busy and noisy Jugiong bypass section of the Hume Highway. In July 2007 Tegra wrote to Harden Shire Council seeking permission to extend one of the boundaries of the Jugiong quarry by 174 metres. Tegra owns the land onto which the extension is proposed. The quarry needs this extension to access higher quality quarry products for the Hume Highway upgrades at Coolac, the Holbrook to Sturt Highway turnoff, Tarcutta, Sheehan Bridge at Gundagai, and also for the Blowering Dam upgrade. The extension was necessary for environmental reasons so that the local watertable was not disturbed.

Following this request Tegra prepared a statement of environmental effects and in January 2009 lodged a development application with Harden Shire Council. As part of the normal approvals process a planning focus meeting was held on site at Jugiong in February 2009, which was attended by representatives from the various government agencies involved in the approval process. An officer from the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water was present but raised no concerns or issues. Four months later, in June, Tegra received a document from the department containing six pages of requirements, none of which had been raised at the planning focus meeting or at any time before the receipt of this correspondence. The majority of these requirements indicated that the department did not comprehend the nature of the development application, with the department seeking information that is provided only for a greenfields site. The department also seemed to be unaware that the quarry had been in operation for a long time and still had 13 years of its existing approval to run.

It was at this point that Craig Sargent probably made the mistake that has brought him to his current situation. His mistake was in believing that he could resolve this issue in a sane and sensible manner by asking the department for clarification and by questioning some of the issues that it had raised. Shortly after this correspondence the department replied requiring additional information and saying that it now "had concerns" regarding Tegra's day-to-day operations. The department did not identify and still has not identified those concerns, nor did it provide any of the clarification or answers sought by Tegra. To seek a way forward, on 3 December 2009 Harden Shire Council organised another on-site meeting with Tegra and three officers from the department. Further discussions followed at Harden Shire Council, which Mr Sergeant considered to be productive and fruitful.

The department staff attending the meeting dropped most of the earlier requirements and Tegra agreed to carry out noise monitoring in and around Jugiong to establish the impact of the quarry noise. In February 2010 an independent assessor carried out noise monitoring tests. However, for an as yet unexplained reason, on 21 June 2010, nine weeks after it was submitted, the department rejected the noise report. It also requested further information that had not been discussed in any of the meetings or previous correspondence. The independent noise report showed that the Jugiong quarry had little effect on the village of Jugiong but that the noise emitted from the Hume Highway exceeded acceptable limits. Tegra again asked the department for clarification of its issues and questioned why the new requirements were necessary. The company also sought an explanation of why the department took nine weeks to review an eight-page report. No response to this letter has yet been provided.

Both Tegra and Harden Shire Council sought to follow up these matters with the department in the intervening period but their calls have not been returned. The overall effect of this has been to restrict the ability of Tegra to meet its contracted deliveries. I have great concern that this company is being mucked about by a bureaucratic system because Tegra had the effrontery to stand up for itself and to question the actions of this department. I have written to the Minister seeking his investigation of this matter but I have not yet received a reply. Employers do not need, nor should they have to accept, being put to these extremes by a government department for no good reason. I strongly encourage the Minister to investigate this matter and to act to ensure that this company is not further disadvantaged. I would be grateful if the Parliamentary Secretary and member for Blue Mountains, who is in the Chamber, would take this up with the Minister on my behalf.

BUILDING THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION PROGRAM

Mr MATT BROWN (Kiama) [5.50 p.m.]: Over the Parliament's winter recess I had the pleasure of visiting many public schools in my electorate to look at the wonderful work being undertaken not only as part of the Building the Education Revolution Program but also from State Government investments within schools in the Kiama electorate. New classroom facilities being built at Albion Park Public School are 95 per cent complete. This school has used many demountable classrooms and I know the school community has overwhelmingly welcomed this new investment. Only recently I spoke to the principal, Mr Jim Cooper, when I attended the school to celebrate the school's water initiatives. Albion Park Rail Public School, which is located just down the road, has received a similar investment for new classrooms. I thank the principal and school community for supporting these projects.

Recently I attended Berry Public School to celebrate the construction of its new hall, which is the result of a long campaign by the school. The school community got behind past and present school principals to ensure that hall was built as it will provide a wonderful opportunity for the community. I particularly thank principal Wayne Courtney for his leadership and for working so closely with the school's parents and citizens association. I had the pleasure recently to visit North Nowra Public School not only to inspect its classroom facilities and talk to school community members but also to be part of its fundraising night. I reiterate that the strength of these schools is not just in their new classroom facilities or new halls; it is in their interrelationship with the parents and citizens associations. Principal David Hogg, who transferred from Shoalhaven Heads Public School, provides a great link with his school community. The North Nowra Public School shares many resources with Havenlee Public School, which is led ably by Julie Ashby and her school community. It is pleasing to see that the projects in those schools work together extremely well.

Bomaderry High School received security fencing recently and managed to obtain a commitment for the construction of a new gymnasium. I congratulate principal Jill Appleton and her school community on achieving funding for that project. At Kiama High School work will start on a \$3.2 million gymnasium funded by the State Government. Graham Sutherland and Donna Flanagan from the parents and citizens association as well as the whole school community lobbied hard for funds to construct this gymnasium. I remember the old gymnasium well: it was already a little tired when I attended the school. The new gymnasium will be appreciated very much by the school community.

I attended the wonderful opening of the Jamberoo Public School hall, which was well attended by its school community. I thank Pam Gross and her team for putting on such a wonderful day. I could keep talking about more schools in my electorate but I shall close by saying that Building the Education Revolution has worked extremely well. It has provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to invest in the future of young Australians. The State Government organising those contracts and investing in other facilities at the same time means our schoolkids will have the best chances.

ST IVES PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.55 p.m.]: The suburb of St Ives spreads over almost 18 square kilometres to the north of Sydney. It has a growing population of just over 17,000 people living in almost 6,000 residences. St Ives is home to numerous schools, a shopping centre complex, sporting facilities and a fabulous community centre. St Ives is not connected to the CityRail system. Residents who are unable to drive rely on taxis, buses or the goodwill of family and friends for transportation. The suburb has one main taxi rank located on Memorial Road close to the shopping centre next to Village Green. As there are few, if any, taxis generally stationed at the rank, it is important that St Ives has a well-functioning and regular bus service. However, many residents are uncertain about the location of stops for buses to take them to their intended destinations. While the main bus routes run to and from Gordon station along Mona Vale Road, other routes service the back streets of St Ives to Gordon station and from St Ives Chase via Killara to the city.

The population density of St Ives continues to grow unsustainably under the current State Labor Government. Many multistorey housing complexes are being built, contrary to the Government's metropolitan plan. Further, St Ives has a multilevel shopping centre that attracts shoppers and employees from surrounding suburbs who require transport to and from the complex. Many senior citizens who like shopping in St Ives no longer drive and, therefore, depend on buses. With increased population density comes further demand for public transport. Additionally, reports warning of the correlation between high petrol prices and the increased pressure placed on public transport demonstrate the need for investment in transport infrastructure. Demand for

public transport services has already increased and is expected to escalate further. Increased traffic congestion is a consequence of inadequate public transport options, increased housing densities and associated high-level car use.

The reality of population growth must be matched by investment in infrastructure and public transport. No convenient place has been established in the area where services can connect to allow residents to use public transport to travel across St Ives and to surrounding suburbs. The lack of a central location from where people can catch a bus often results in confusion. Various potential sites that have been identified for the location of a central bus stop near Village Green and the main shopping centre could be determined after closer examination and appropriate community consultation. In making these observations I do not criticise the existing service operators—Forest Coach Lines and TransdevTSL Shorelink—which generally provide a great service. Instead, all criticism should be levelled at the State Government and the transport ministry for planning deficiencies.

Another example of service problems is how current bus routes inadequately cater for the north-eastern parts of St Ives. When a train is delayed on the North Shore line by only a few minutes the connecting bus at Gordon station may have left already, forcing commuters to wait for the next service. This does not appear to be intuitive coordination, especially as some routes run only every hour at certain periods of the day. This highlights also the farce of classifying train services as "on time" when they run up to five minutes late. I look forward to a Liberal-Nationals government introducing an integrated transport authority to help improve such planning and transport matters.

I have called for a central bus stop proposal to be implemented in St Ives in consultative public forums and previously in this place. Admittedly, bus services connecting St Ives to the city have recently increased in number during peak times, albeit with inadequate publicity. However, generally the plight of St Ives and many other north-side communities does not seem to be on the Government's agenda. The Government's failure to correctly prioritise was further evidenced by recent disclosures relating to continued funding of commuter car parks that almost exclusively are provided in Labor-held electorates rather than in areas on the north side of Sydney. I look forward to a Liberal-Nationals government fairly allocating expenditure priorities, particularly in relation to transport matters on the north side of Sydney and in St Ives.

RURAL AND REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands—Speaker) [6.00 p.m.]: Whenever I conduct a survey in my electorate, asking the community to rank its priorities and major concerns, health is always at the top of the list. That has been the case since I was elected to Parliament in 1999. Most recently, in a survey in June this year, the people of the Northern Tablelands again nominated health as their key concern. Most wanted increased resources for regional hospitals, incentives to recruit and retain more doctors and some alleviation of the high costs involved in travelling to access medical treatment. They also identified as priority issues a need for more visiting specialists and surgeons to be assigned to regional hospitals, the lack of dental services, the need to upgrade aged care services, and long waiting times for surgery and general practitioner appointments.

Over the past 10 years there have been some major improvements to the delivery of health services in my electorate. Multipurpose health service hospitals have been built in Bingara, Emmaville, Guyra, Tingha, Walcha and Wyallda. The six new hospitals have been jointly funded by the State and Federal governments and offer acute care, aged care, community health and other services under one roof. They have been an outstanding success, replacing old and inefficient infrastructure with well-designed modern buildings to meet community needs. Another initiative that promises to address the shortage of rural doctors in the future is the joint medical program between the universities of New England and Newcastle. The new Rural Medical School at the University of New England is in its third year, with 180 students enrolled in the five-year course. With an annual intake of 60 students specialising in rural medicine, that should make a dent in the shortage of doctors in rural areas in the long term. Research shows that students who train in country areas are more likely to stay there to live and work.

Mr Peter Draper: Hear! Hear!

Mr RICHARD TORBAY: Of course, the member for Tamworth is aware of the program and the Rural Medical School, as well as the work performed for the people of his electorate at the Tamworth Base Hospital. There are issues around establishing a new medical school. Most of our rural hospitals are not set up for teaching medical students. That is being addressed as an issue of concern in Armidale and Tamworth at present. Both centres have major hospitals that need substantial upgrades. The hospitals are old, inefficient and

not suited to make the most of the highly trained and skilled doctors, nurses and allied health professionals who work in them. The Inverell, Glen Innes and Tenterfield hospitals are in the same position. Over the years the hospitals have grown in an ad hoc fashion through spot upgrades, either when there is a complete infrastructure breakdown, or when new services need to be introduced.

Now that the Commonwealth Government is planning to take over the bulk of hospital infrastructure funding we must push for regional hospitals to share fully in that new and promising regime. That will require community leaders as well as members, health workers and administrators in rural centres to put aside traditional differences to make the most of the opportunities being presented. Recently in Armidale I co-hosted a forum, in conjunction with the New England Division of General Practice, that brought together clinicians, representatives of the University of New England and Hunter New England Health, and staff engaged in the delivery of front-line services.

The reason for the meeting was to present a plan for a major upgrade of the Armidale hospital and to receive feedback and suggestions to address issues such as recruitment and retention of doctors in the region. This was something of a historic meeting at which health administrators, trainers and practitioners resolved to work together more closely to reach the goal they all want to achieve—upgraded hospitals in the region to meet the current and long-term needs of the community, the Rural Medical School, clinicians, nurses and allied health professionals. This cooperative venture offers something of a blueprint for the region. I encourage the Inverell, Glen Innes and Tenterfield communities to follow suit with community leaders, doctors and the area health service collaborating on plans to upgrade their local hospitals.

One of the highlights of the forum in Armidale was consensus on the need to deliver better overall rural health outcomes including improved community transport, creation of local centres of specialist excellence and further development of the hub-and-spoke model between centres to deliver more specialist services. The State and Federal governments have a successful cooperative model, the multipurpose health service hospitals. It is now time to extend that model to redevelop and upgrade larger rural hospitals to accommodate the needs of modern medicine, to train medical students and to create conditions that attract and retain greater numbers of specialists and clinicians.

TOURLE STREET BRIDGE

MEDOWIE HIGH SCHOOL PROPOSAL

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [6.05 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the State Labor Government's inherent lack of forward thinking, innovation, vision and planning, and the toll that its incompetence is taking on my electorate of Port Stephens. On one hand, we have a \$45 million new two-lane bridge that, at 16 months old, is already struggling to cope with demand. On the other hand, we have a secondary schooling system that is fast approaching its capacity limit and in need of expansion. Yet the Government claims it can cope now and in the future.

I turn my attention first to the bungled Tourle Street Bridge upgrade in Mayfield. I have spoken about this short-sighted ill-conceived project a number of times in this House. The Tourle Street Bridge is located in Mayfield and links Kooragang Island, which is home to the majority of Newcastle's coal loaders to Newcastle, and provides a direct link north to the Pacific Highway. It is the main thoroughfare linking Newcastle to the airport as well as to central and eastern Port Stephens. The original steel bridge was built in 1961. It had reached its use-by date and needed to be replaced. It was then that the State Labor Government revealed its grand plans to replace the old two-lane bridge with a new two-lane bridge.

If the Government had vision and a single planning bone in its body it would have built a four-lane bridge. Traffic on this bridge will only go to increase as the coal port grows, as the Newcastle Airport and Royal Australian Air Force base at Williamstown expand, and as further residential development occurs in Port Stephens. But, no—not this Government! In May last year, on the day the bridge was opened, the Minister for the Hunter claimed:

The new bridge is a critical piece of infrastructure that will support growth over the next seven to 10 years on Kooragang Island, at Newcastle Airport and in the Port Stephens area.

She claimed she would fight for another two-lane bridge to be built when the need was manifested. This left economists and engineers alike scratching their heads. By the Government's own admission, it would have cost an extra \$15 million dollars to build a four-lane bridge that would have lasted well into the future. However,

under the Minister for the Hunter and her Labor Government's bizarre plan it is thought to be better to spend \$45 million building a two-lane bridge now—and presumably spend another \$50 million in a decade building another one. It was an example of incompetence and mismanagement at its best. But, surprise, surprise, the plan unravelled just 16 months after the bridge was opened. In a move that has the whole Hunter region screaming, "We told you so", the Minister for the Hunter admitted this in relation to the Tourle Street Bridge to the media:

Current and future growth in industrial, employment and residential areas will continue to produce significant constraints on the existing road infrastructure, which is showing serious signs of difficulty coping with traffic volumes.

She says she has written to the Minister for Roads asking, more or less, for a new bridge. As I told the media yesterday, it is too little and far too late. However, another project that is needed in Port Stephens could be addressed by the Government now instead of waiting until it is too late. I refer to the proposal for a high school in Medowie. This is another issue to which I have referred numerous times. Medowie is a village outside Raymond Terrace that is growing quickly. Currently it has a population of 8,000. A proposed housing development, when approved, will essentially double the population.

High school students in Medowie currently travel to Irrawang High School or the Hunter River High School, which are both in Raymond Terrace, or further afield to specialist or private schools. As well as the proposed Medowie housing development putting pressure on school enrolments, a 4,000-lot subdivision is proposed for north Raymond Terrace that will boost the population there by approximately 12,000 residents. The development is all in accordance with the Government's lower Hunter strategy.

Just like the need for a four-lane bridge at Tourle Street, we would think it is fairly obvious that the Government should think about building a high school, or at least a middle school, at Medowie to meet current and future demand. But, like the four lane bridge, a secondary school at Medowie makes sense! This vision-deprived backward Labor Government of course thinks otherwise. In response to my recent question on notice regarding possible funding in the State budget for an expansion of high schools in the west Port Stephens area the Minister stated:

Hunter River High School and Irrawang High School in Raymond Terrace are able to accommodate current and projected enrolments from the Port Stephens area.

To my mind that is the clearest indication yet that this Labor Government has no intention of supporting the establishment of a high school in Medowie. Clearly, the State Labor Government is not learning from its mistakes. Typically, this State Labor Government sits on its hands, does nothing and offers no solutions. But when it is all too late it comes up with a plan—a plan for a plan. The much-hyped working party report into the proposal for a Medowie high school is proof of my assertion. I have asked numerous questions on notice about the report such as: What is in it? What is the Minister's response? When will it be released? During the past 12 months I have received the same reply, "The report has been received and is under consideration." The least this Government can do is admit it has no vision, no planning, and no intention of listening to the pleas from the people of Medowie—at least until March 2011.

VICTORY MIRACLE CENTRE

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Commerce, Minister for Energy, Minister for Public Sector Reform, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [6.10 p.m.]: I raise again concerns of constituents of mine about Victory Miracle Centre and its three elders, George Mani, Neil Lal and Anand Prasad. Lonesh Govind has complained to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission about what has happened to himself and his mother. Mani and Anand Prasad asked Mr Govind and his mother to invest in a real estate development in Fiji. They were told that the venture would be blessed because of a vision given by God to George Mani. They did not have the money to invest; however, Anand Prasad and Neil Lal indicated that they knew of a scheme for them to get the money to invest in the venture.

The scheme involved pulling out their superannuation money and rolling it into a self-managed superannuation fund, and it could all be organised through an accountant, Peter Ristevski. Ristevski set up a company called Chand Investments International Propriety Limited that would be trustee for the fund. Govind would be a director of the investment company, as would his mother, Pramesvari Chand, who would also be a director of the fund. Money would be transferred into Shiloh Developers Propriety Limited. Mr Govind rolled over \$19,000 and his mother rolled over \$44,000 into the Chand self-managed superannuation fund. This was done in 2009. They received no documentation from Ristevski or Prasad. Their inquiries as to progress were fobbed off.

About 15 March 2009 Govind was told by Anand Prasad that the money had in fact been used to pay off debtors. Govind said he then became extremely alarmed and concerned. Seeking advice, he was told he had "been defrauded and scammed into a Ponzi scheme". He demanded his money back, but was told that Mani and Anand were waiting for more funds from other investors until they could be paid back. I have seen the list of payments made from Mr Govind and Mrs Chand's money. It has no connection with what they were promised. Some payments appear to be payments for lease payments to Australian Christian Services for cars used by church elders. Govind asked Peter Ristevski to return the money. He did not or could not.

Govind also asked Ristevski for all accounting records regarding the fund. Ristevski said he had nothing to give. In June 2009 Govind sought end-of-year financial documents for the fund from Ristevski. This was refused because Ristevski said Govind and his mother had resigned from the fund. They had not. Ristevski treated them as resigned because Anand Prasad had told him so. Interestingly, it seems that a Peter Ristevski at this time was suspended from membership of Certified Practising Accountants of Australia. The money of Govind and Chand would appear to have gone.

Another two of my constituents, Umesh and Premita Kumar, were deeply involved with the church. They were introduced to Pastor George Mani in 2003. He prayed for Mrs Kumar to find work and she did. They were introduced to the church's investment arm, Ephraim Investments, and one of the church elders, Neil Lal, who was also a mortgage broker. The Kumars tell me the church explained that Ephraim would be 50 per cent owned by the church and 50 per cent owned by the shareholders, who would be selected and chosen members of the church, including the Kumars. Ephraim would make lots of money through property development.

Mani encouraged the Kumars and other targeted congregation members to give large sums of money to Ephraim. He would explain this by saying, "God gave him a vision for this". The Kumars say he said, "God told me what name to go to" and "I've prayed for this and God told me to do this". The Kumars wanted to be prosperous and believed the pastor. They now think that the church elders consciously chose people who were naive. The elders would target new Christians, people who were new to the church and who were vulnerable because they were ill, poor or out of work. Mr and Mrs Kumar tell of more than \$2 million to their knowledge being obtained in this way from church members, with repayments largely not being made. Mr and Mrs Kumar have also told me of other cases apart from themselves. The use of the money they describe is noteworthy. Mrs Kumar said about the church elders:

They went on a spree of opening up many different businesses. They started Ephraim finance, which they sold off in 2007. Neil Lal was the mortgage broker.

Mrs Kumar believes that lots of loans—no doc loans and low doc loans—were fraudulently obtained for clients. She also says:

They opened up an Indian clothing shop in Liverpool; they went into diamond mining business. They were promoting God TV and selling the decoder and installation. They opened up Shiloh Developers, to sell blocks of land from Vatia off the plan. They also asked people to invest their superannuation into Shiloh Developers.

Mr and Mrs Kumar confirm that Neil Lal would often fill in the applications for finance for other people and just hand it over to parishioners for them to sign. The history of the financial dealings between Mr and Mrs Kumar and Victory Miracle Church is tragic. On multiple occasions they gave money to the church, including personal loans from banks and money they borrowed from relatives. On one occasion they applied for a credit card and simply handed it over to Neil Lal. The church elders promised to repay money to the Kumars to meet the repayments on the loans in the Kumars name. They did not. As a result, the Kumars are in what can be called diabolical financial difficulty. Mrs Kumar says she was foolish to trust these people. She said:

We were supposed to get a good return on the money given into the company. All they did was have a lavish lifestyle, drive new cars every nine months through Australian Christian Services leasing agreement. They basically used up over \$2m, which they took from so many of our ethnic Indians.

All of these victims seek to speak out to make sure other people are not similarly trapped. There is one other point to make. Both Neil Lal and Peter Ristevski contested the 2008 Liverpool local government election as endorsed Liberal Party candidates. In addition, I have had the opportunity to speak to Michael Jacob, who has been a member of the church. He is the owner of the premises in Whyalla Road, Prestons, in which the church has been meeting for some considerable time. His cousin George Mani talked him into by buying the Whyalla Road premises with borrowed money for the church on the promise of the loan being serviced by the church.

They missed numerous payments. This was meant to have lasted for only two years but went on for much longer. It imposed great stress and financial hardship on Michael Jacob and his family. It is another example of Victory Miracle Centre failing to honour its obligation and commitments.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [6.15 p.m.]: The main church groups providing social services in Australia—Anglicare Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, the Salvation Army and UnitingCare Australia—are calling on the major political parties to commit to an immediate and substantial increase in funding for community mental health services to support participation, inclusion and recovery. Local grassroots organisations such as Gunnedah Active Minds and the Billabong Clubhouse in Tamworth are providing day-to-day support, but both organisations need additional funds to support their efforts.

I have forwarded recommendations from both groups to the Auditor-General for inclusion in an upcoming audit, including the need for a specialist workforce to target recruitment and retention of clinical workers for rural and regional areas; the possibility of regulating provider numbers for psychiatrists by limiting those in metropolitan areas and making them available in rural areas; and negotiating with Federal Health so that staff specialist psychiatrists in New South Wales have provider numbers to write a script for clients on discharge, or at community mental health centres, because at present clients are instructed to get scripts from general practitioners and, as we all know, they are extremely difficult to access in country areas.

Billabong Clubhouse has operated for 12 years, providing psychosocial rehabilitation for adults with a mental illness. Over the past year Billabong has provided 14,400 occasions of service. It received two funding grants from NSW Health—a base grant with cost escalation, plus a non-recurrent triennial term grant. For the past six years Billabong has employed 4.2 to 4.5 full-time equivalent staff, but over that period it has experienced a massive 65 per cent increase in average daily attendance. Given this escalation in demand for services, Billabong management sought an increase in triennial funding to enable it to employ five full-time equivalent staff and to cover a moderate increase in operational costs. Unfortunately, it has been advised that its term grant for the next financial year will be reduced to the 2007-08 level—effectively, a 5.5 per cent reduction.

The Billabong Clubhouse's smaller base grant receives annual cost escalation adjustments, and this will be 2.5 per cent for 2010-11. However, it is interesting to note that the All Groups consumer price index for Sydney was set at 2.9 per cent for the same period. Billabong's salaries and on-costs represent about 80 per cent of its total costs, and the last salary award increase was 2.8 per cent. Management holds serious concerns as to their financial position, not only for the current year but for future years should the cost escalation rate that is used continue to fall short of actual consumer price index rates.

Billabong's President, Joan Wakeford, has told me they will have to reduce their trained staff and service delivery if they wish to continue operating. Our community will find this inconceivable, given that mental health services are difficult to access in rural and regional communities. Mental illness remains one of the greatest causes of disability, reduced productivity, and diminished quality of life. Sadly, those affected experience poorer health and higher death rates, including suicide, than the general community. Severe and ongoing drought has highlighted a range of challenges regarding current mental health service provision across rural and regional New South Wales.

Local mental health providers consistently state a need for additional funding and resources so they can provide a range of home-grown solutions to address current workforce shortages, which can be developed by promoting peer support and consumer-run services through existing and potential credentialed counselling services. There is also a need for more school counsellors to link them to early intervention programs, and to bring equity to the prevention of chronic mental illness for young people in rural and regional centres. There is a need for better access to long-term supported care and accommodation and mentoring services, increased funding for consumer advocacy positions, plus support through short courses in assertive communication, conflict resolution, healthy lifestyle plus drug and alcohol dependency, and supported quit smoking courses.

Increased, ongoing funding for carer peer support positions as presently managed by non-government organisations in rural areas is essential. Local providers tell me there is an urgent need for more affordable housing and supported accommodation for people with a mental illness, particularly those leaving the hospital or prison systems, along with step-down accommodation for extra short-term support and more housing and social initiative funding for people with their own accommodation. Local mental health supporters fear that

expecting people with acute mental illness to present their case to Mental Review Tribunal members by video link may lead to patients being discharged when unfit. They believe that tribunal members should attend rural acute mental health units, in the same way as magistrates once visited patients for assessment.

Frank Quinlan, the Executive Director of Catholic Services Australia, has pointed to the failure of successive governments to invest in adequate community-based mental health services. He points out that while many Australians see only a small part of that failure as they try to assist a loved one, agencies such as his are overwhelmed every day with family breakdown, long-term unemployment, homelessness and suicide. Much of that could be avoided if governments further engaged with community based organisations like Tamworth's Billabong Clubhouse and Gunnedah's Active Minds and funded them appropriately.

AIRDS YOUTH CENTRE

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.20 p.m.]: With the Mayor of Campbelltown, Aaron Rule, and the Director of Community Services for Campbelltown Council, Lindy Deitz, I recently visited the Airds Youth Centre and met Sue Dobson, a Campbelltown councillor and an outreach community development worker. My work in Airds with Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service brought the centre to my attention. Since late 2009 Sue has been running this centre for young people from the area to access 25 computers that were installed, using some of the funds from the proceeds of the national Crime Prevention Program funded by the Commonwealth Government, in the early intervention learning and development project. The computers are heavily used by the local community, many of whom I have worked with for years, and many of whom are either Aboriginal or Islanders.

In Airds 23 per cent of the population are under 19, 36 per cent come from single-parent families, 12 per cent of the population identify as Aboriginal, unemployment is 30 per cent, and only 14.8 per cent of the population currently complete year 12. The advantage of the computers is that each child is able to then access various educational programs such as maths at their appropriate level. Parents need to accompany their children to the centre. This program is aimed at primary school children to give them a chance to catch up with areas of education that they have missed in the early school years, and to keep them engaged in literacy and numeracy prior to the inevitable disengagement that occurs in high school if students underperform. In the long term it is proposed to extend the program to cover children in high school in years 7 and 8.

The long-term goal of the project is to establish a sustainable project for the community to strengthen the educational prospects and life skills of young people by supporting them to be more able to contribute to their lives, the lives of their siblings, their peers and their community. We need to break the generational cycle of poverty and reoffending. This will help in cases of learning difficulties, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and also help with other computer skills for job applications. As the New South Wales Auditor-General reported in 2006, risk factors for juvenile involvement in crime include poor parental supervision, negative peer associations, truancy, poor school performance and substance abuse. The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research concluded that programs that reduce the risk of reoffending should focus on children aged 10-14, be community based such as this program and have multi-agency collaboration. This program is a perfect example of those aims.

In poverty continuity of care is vital and even though this centre has just started it will require governments of all persuasions to hang in there for the long term. For example, Bea Davies, a local resident, volunteers at the centre full time. Many children currently in Juvenile Justice come from this highest risk population. We all know that in 2004-05 it cost \$567 per day—that is, about \$200,000 per year—to keep a juvenile in custody, so preventative measures such as this are vital and also cost effective for crime prevention. This centre at Airds is the perfect model for the engagement of higher risk youth. Family literacy and supported learning are needed to return those students who are excluded from school to the mainstream. This program will be vital for those who fail in school, who truant or who become disruptive at school—the highest risk youth for incarceration. The program also provides a flexible curriculum that includes vocational training and work experience to boost self-esteem and build success. The core funding for this centre is from the Department of Community Services Community Grants and Sponsorship Program.

The operational annual budget is approximately \$60,000. It should be noted that the current Community Grants and Sponsorship Program funding provides minimal project funding, with the vast majority of funding from the Department of Community Services used to cover wages, administrative overheads and insurance. Extra funding sources need to be investigated. The member for Campbelltown, Mr Graham West, visited the centre and suggested community building partnerships as a start. For example, they need fencing

around the centre and vital information technology support, such as anti-virus programs at a cost of \$3,000 per year. These computers, though brand new, will need replacement in the longer term. The centre also needs discretionary funding for flexible needs such as food, drink and warm clothing, which are vital. Occasionally children drop in and require food, drink and even warm clothing during winter. I urge governments at all levels and of all political persuasions to support this wonderful program. I pay special tribute to Councillor Sue Dobson for her wonderful work for the future of our community.

Private members' statements concluded.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Private members' statements having concluded, the House will now consider the matter of public importance.

FOSTER CARERS

Matter of Public Importance

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.25 p.m.]: Next week is Foster Care Week, which provides an opportunity for the community of New South Wales to show its appreciation for all foster carers, whether they are traditional foster carers or care for their own grandchildren as kinship carers. Their compassion, dedication and commitment to looking after children who cannot live at home with their families makes a huge difference to the quality of the lives of those children. I am acutely aware of the valuable year-round role that foster carers play in our community. I also recognise the value of the different types of care provided—ranging from respite, emergency, short-term and long-term care—and those caring for children with complex and special needs to meet the many and varied circumstances of children needing care.

Many grandparents also step in as kinship carers when families have difficulties. Carers are invaluable because they all help to protect our community's most valuable asset: our children. The Keneally Government is committed to providing and improving support to carers and children in care. Supporting carers through better communication is a key priority for the Government. There are many ways that the Government has been working to achieve this that I will talk about. It has established Connecting Carers NSW, a partnership between Karitane and the Foster Parents Support Network. This service supports foster, kinship and relative carers through peer support activities. Mentoring and training programs are designed to meet the needs of carers and give up-to-date advice on policies and practices. The Government wanted to address foster carers' concerns about potential disclosure of personal details to birth parents so it changed the law to provide greater safeguards. This move received widespread support within the out-of-home care sector.

Community Services has recruited Foster Carer Support Teams right across New South Wales. Those specialist teams focus on recruiting new carers and supporting them in their first 12 months of fostering. They also work closely with existing carers. The extension of those teams has led to an increased number of carer support groups that provide valuable ongoing training and peer support opportunities for carers. As well as the successful Muslim foster carer support group in Sydney's south-west, other carer groups have now been formed specifically for Aboriginal carers and for Vietnamese carers with caseworkers from each of those cultural backgrounds to work with them. The Government also introduced age-based rates for foster carer allowances after consultations with foster carers and based on research on the costs of raising children. The Government recognised the rising costs of caring for kids as they grow. I am pleased that carers in New South Wales are the highest paid in the country.

The Foster Carer Partnership Agreement forges a stronger relationship between Community Services and carers. That is done by encouraging open communication and to identify the levels of support carers should expect in their day-to-day dealings with Community Services. The Government has also produced a series of fact sheets for all carers. They include information to help carers and kids in care understand things such as case meetings, which can be a stressful experience, as well as the important value of life story work and helping children and young people reach their potential at school. This can be particularly challenging for children and young people in care, especially if there have been gaps in past learning opportunities and frequent school changes. Life story work records the experiences, relationships and interests of each child. It is important for all children in care.

The Government recognises the invaluable contribution and sacrifices that grandparents have made to give their grandchildren the loving and safe homes they need. There is better support for kinship carers in New South Wales, including the supported care allowance. This can apply to children in relative care who are not

subject to a court order where parental responsibility has been allocated to the Minister. There has been some debate in this place about changes to the supported care allowance, but let me assure the House that grandparents looking after any of their grandchildren in need of care and protection will not be losing this allowance.

I am glad that the Government has announced additional support for grandparents of \$60,000 for community organisations to run respite camps for grandparent carers and the children in their care at Wyong, Port Macquarie, Gosford and the Blacktown-Mount Druit areas. This includes \$15,000 for a camp for children from the Wyong area to be organised by the group Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. This funding recognises that grandparents have particular vulnerabilities when taking care of grandchildren. They do so for various reasons, including parental drug and alcohol abuse, parental incarceration, parent mental health issues, child neglect and abuse, or domestic violence.

While dealing with their adult children having issues, grandparents are taking on raising children when they are getting older. We know that, by taking on this responsibility, grandparent carers can become isolated from their peers who may be enjoying retirement while they are busy looking after children. Children being cared for by elderly grandparents can have fewer opportunities to socialise with other children their age. The camps that the Government has announced are occasions for grandparents and children in their care to build support and friendship networks with other families in similar circumstances.

Sadly, the number of children and young people needing out-of-home care has continued to grow steadily over recent years. A number of factors are contributing to this increase, including the growth in child protection reports reflecting international trends, as well as increasing community awareness about child welfare and greater confidence in our child protection system. Foster Care Week is about celebrating and thanking our carers. The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies hosts its annual carnival day on Sunday. This is the first of many events being held across the State next week to acknowledge and thank foster carers. I am pleased that the Minister for Community Services is contributing to the prizes given out to foster families on Sunday. Next week in regional New South Wales there will be morning teas, lunches, celebration dinners, pamper days and picnics to acknowledge and thank all foster carers for the valuable work they do for the State's most vulnerable children. Foster carers are involved in one of the most vital areas of the work of the New South Wales Government. It is fitting for us to demonstrate how much we value them.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [6.32 p.m.]: It is my pleasure to join in discussing this matter of public importance about Foster Care Week and the importance of foster parents and foster parenting. It is, as has already been said, a great form of volunteering. There can be no greater gift than to care for somebody else's child, often in extremely difficult circumstances and without the legal constraints and rights that need to go with effective parenting. Foster parents care for children in constrained circumstances. It is difficult to know how many foster parents there are in New South Wales. I know that 2,500 newsletters are sent to foster parents around the State. However, as there are more than 16,000 children in care there could well be as many as 4,000 or 5,000 foster carers in the State, including kinship carers and, in particular, wonderful grandparents.

Grandparents are at a time in their lives when, having brought up their own children who sometimes have had their own demons and struggles, they would like to slow down. However, they are suddenly faced with the enormous responsibility of bringing up two, three or four children with great energy, often without many resources because they are living on pensions or retirement benefits of some sort. We must acknowledge that a very high proportion of foster parents in New South Wales—I think it is almost half—are kin carers of some kind or another. They are people who go to a non-government sector organisation or to the Department of Community Services and offer themselves as foster parents. They need to be greatly supported. The non-government sector advises me that they provide enormous support for their parents and I understand that this particularly applies to foster parents with high-needs children.

Sadly, one of the changes in the foster care environment in New South Wales is the increasing number of children with complex needs as more and more young women give birth to children with drug and alcohol damage. We are not talking about an epidemic but, in respect of the numbers in the out-of-home care sector, I think it is starting to be a significant source of disability in children and more likely to be seen in the foster care sector. Indeed, the World Health Organization says that foetal alcohol spectrum disorders are the fastest-growing source of disabilities in the world. Children often have very complex needs and foster parents are just good people. They might get some training from the department or they might get some training and assistance from the non-government organisation to whom they have contracted, but I suspect nothing prepares them for some of the difficulties they have to deal with when they work with these children. It is absolutely incredible that they persist in doing it and do it so well most of the time.

The rewards of foster caring obviously are, for them, the sense that they have made a difference to a child's life and that they have been able to contribute their gifts of parenting. They must know that they are reasonable parents or I do not think they would put their hands up. They have been able to give the same patience, love and affection, and enjoyment and guidance that they have felt capable of giving to anybody. It is wonderful to see that they are able to make this offer and contribute in such a significant way. Obviously, they always need more support. We are well-off in New South Wales compared with other States financially, but foster parents constantly remark upon the difficulties of providing sufficient services for their children, particularly since high-needs children need a complex array of support—dental, medical, therapy and counselling. Something that might seem to an ordinary person to be a leisure activity, such as swimming, is often a form of therapy for a child who has been made brain damaged and blinded by childhood abuse from a parent.

We need to give children in these circumstances all the support we can, but that also means that we have to support foster parents, particularly those with adolescents. In my short time in this shadow portfolio I have been struck by the number of foster parents who have come to me having had a wonderful relationship with their foster child for eight, 10 or 12 years—they have treated the child like their own, taken the child on overseas trips—and then at adolescence, when those hormones kick in, all those early tapes, distress and trauma to the child re-emerge in quite a different form. Foster parents are often unprepared for this.

The story of Carol is exactly like that. The child she had had for 12 years hit adolescence and ran away from home. Unfortunately, the department did not support Carol. It considered that she had in some way failed the foster child and allowed the child to go to a series of child refuges and live on the streets. That child was never placed again. As I understand from the foster mother, who still keeps track of the child, she is now prostituting herself and using drugs. That would not be an uncommon story for teenage foster children. We must recognise that if this system is to be viable for the entirety of a child's life until they reach 18 years of age, we have to think much more critically about how we support foster carers of teenage children. I believe that is where we are seeing some difficult and emerging problems.

Tonight is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the coming week and the wonderful activities that are being created to celebrate foster carers. We want foster carers to know we care for them, we know what they have done, we know they need a break and we know they need pampering. That is all part of Foster Care Week. I think all members of the New South Wales Parliament would be unanimous in joining together to say thank you to foster carers and kinship carers in New South Wales.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [6.39 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to join my colleagues the member for Wyong and the member for Goulburn in making a contribution to this matter of public importance. There are of course many children in New South Wales who need care. The New South Wales Government is aiming to reduce the number who cannot live at home, but we will always need foster carers. We can only reduce the number; unfortunately, we can never get away from the facts of child abuse and neglect.

The Keneally Government recently launched a successful campaign to recruit new foster carers for both government and non-government agencies. In April this year every member received posters, leaflets and information brochures for the campaign, which was conducted from April to June. In the 12 weeks from the commencement of the campaign to 15 July 2010, New South Wales Community Services received 1,516 calls to the Carelink 1800 number, received 638 applications, trained 55 foster care applicants, assessed 77 applicants, and authorised 66 foster carers. These are outstanding figures, especially considering the very strict process that goes into selecting foster carers.

It is worth mentioning just how stringent the process is when agencies go about selecting foster carers. First, a phone screen is made to make contact with an applicant and to explain the process. Then a probity check is made, for those who wish to proceed, which also involves a check of Community Services' KiDS database, a Working with Children check, and contact with other foster caring agencies to check for concerns. Once the probity checks are complete, Community Services conducts a home inspection to make sure that the accommodation is safe and secure for children. A foster carer does not have to live in a mansion or in a wealthy suburb but their house or unit has to be safe for children to live and play in. A pool or pond might need fencing or a high staircase might require a childproof gate.

When the checking is nearing completion, prospective carers are trained, in small groups of 10 to 20, with experienced carers and other foster parents. They learn about bonding and attachment, about how children deal with grief and loss, how they cope with trauma and abuse, and about how difficult it can be to maintain

their identity when they cannot live with their family. Foster parents have to show that they are able to deal with potentially challenging behaviour, to provide a safe, abuse-free environment, and to work as part of a team with the foster care agency. At any stage a foster carer can withdraw or Community Services may have to determine their training should not proceed. When it comes to foster carers, many are called but few are chosen. Foster carers are not necessarily a special kind of person; foster carers are ordinary people making an extraordinary contribution.

We should take the opportunity during Foster Care Week next week to thank and congratulate all foster carers. We should also recognise that half the children in care are looked after by members of their extended family. This is a special kind of foster care known as kinship care. Many of these carers are grandparents who devote significant time, love and energy in their senior years to caring for their grandchildren. I am very pleased to note that the Government has supported the organisation Grandparents Raising Grandchildren to hold a respite camp for grandparents in the Gosford and Wyong local government areas. The \$30,000 funding is very welcome and I am glad that these grandparents will be able to access the opportunity to have some time when their responsibilities are somewhat eased for a while and the grandchildren are given the opportunity to socialise with other children in similar circumstances to their own.

I am also pleased that the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies is having one of the regional events for Foster Care Week in Gosford on Sunday. We all owe a debt of gratitude to those in the community who put themselves forward to care for others and Foster Care Week is a wonderful opportunity to show our thanks. In the years I have been the member for Gosford I have had the opportunity to establish a close association with Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and I want to place on record my appreciation to those wonderful grandparents who are taking on the raising of their grandchildren. I say thank you to all the foster carers in my electorate.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.44 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Goulburn and the member for Gosford for participating in the discussion of this matter of public importance. As both speakers said, everyone in this Parliament would acknowledge the fantastic work that carers do in our community. Like the member for Gosford, I have developed a relationship with grandparent carers on the Central Coast and was very fortunate to speak to grandparents at Ourimbah RSL last month about how they can interact better with the education system. I raised the issue that, being grandparents, they had been away from the school system for quite a number of years after bringing up their own children. It is a particular challenge for them to interact with a school system that has changed considerably. This is particularly so if they were caring for teenage children and investigating what sorts of courses they should do in years 9 and 10, whether they should be involved in vocational education and training, and how to have better relationships with the school to help sort things such as suspension.

One of the key parts of that meeting that I found very enjoyable and moving was the welcome to country by indigenous grandparents, followed by a Maori welcome. It showed that those two communities, which have a long tradition of grandparents looking after children in their community, can in many ways be of great value to the rest of the community in understanding that very important role.

I also acknowledge the member for Goulburn's comment that there is no greater gift that someone can give than looking after someone else's child in difficult circumstances. In my life as a teacher and in working in the community I have come across a number of really devastating situations where parents were either unable to continue to look after children or had significant problems that prevented them from caring properly for children. The fact that we have people in the community who are ready to step in and look after these children to make sure they have a loving family situation, are properly clothed and fed, and get a decent education is something we cannot put a value on.

As the member for Gosford rightly said, grandparent carers in particular have special needs because of their age. They just do not have the same energy they had when they were younger to run around and look after sometimes quite young children. When children are placed in care with foster carers, they must be properly supported. The member for Gosford referred to the issues surrounding the process by which carers are selected and how they are given information about dealing with potentially difficult situations. As has been mentioned, there is sometimes even greater difficulty in dealing with teenagers, given they are going through a stage when their hormones are having an effect on them. That is difficult in a normal family situation but with the other pressures when they are in care, it can sometimes be very difficult. As the member for Goulburn said, unfortunately it sometimes leads to them running away and getting into dire situations.

As we look towards next week, I hope many members will contact their local carer organisations and join in some of the activities, such as pampering days, barbecues and other activities. We should also not forget that even carers need respite. One of the main issues people in my electorate raise with me is that they take on this role and it is quite demanding, and every now and then they need a rest and some assistance. That is where short-term respite care comes into its own to give them a rest. The issue of looking after children with special needs was raised. It takes a very dedicated person to take on that role, particularly if the child is not their own. I met a parent a few weeks ago who had a child with intellectual difficulties and she just could not cope any more. The fact that people stepped in and took care of her child was a relief for both the child and the family. Once again, we congratulate carers and thank them for the work they do in the community.

Discussion concluded.

ADOPTION AMENDMENT (SAME SEX COUPLES) BILL 2010 (No. 2)

Message received from the Legislative Council returning the bill with amendments.

Consideration of Legislative Council's amendments set down as an order of the day for a future day.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 6.50 p.m. until
Thursday 9 September 2010 at 10.00 a.m.**
