

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 1 December 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.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (COMMONWEALTH POWERS) BILL 2010

Message received from the Legislative Council returning the bill without amendment.

PUBLIC HEALTH BILL 2010

Message received from the Legislative Council returning the bill with an amendment.

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

RURAL FIRES AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 24 November 2010.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove) [10.06 a.m.]: The Opposition will not be opposing the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010. The bill has been introduced to the Parliament in response to the royal commission into the tragic Victorian bushfires. The commission identified communication between firefighting services and residents as one of the key factors leading to the tragic events of Black Saturday. Further, the bill seeks to formalise the role and responsibility of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service to issue public warnings in relation to oncoming bushfires. Early warnings to residents are the best method known to minimise casualties should severe fires strike a residential area. The bill also gives power to the Commissioner of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service to grant statutory recognition to neighbourhood safer places, where residents can seek shelter from oncoming fires. This will assist in allowing residents to make informed decisions about their movements as a fire approaches, with more knowledge of the various options available to them. In addition, the bill increases the representation of the rural fire service on the New South Wales Bush Fire Coordinating Committee.

This change is welcome, and long overdue, given the vital role that the rural fire service plays in fighting large fires across the State. My honourable colleague Mr Thomas George, the member for Lismore, and the Opposition note that in relation to the most vital aspect of fire prevention, that is, hazard reduction burning, this Government has come to the party way too late. Hazard reduction burning is recognised as the most effective way of stopping fires from starting and of containing them once alight. The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recognised that the levels of hazard reduction burning in Victoria needed to increase significantly to ensure that a fire disaster of this scale would not occur again. On 14 November, just a little over two weeks ago, the Government announced that it would increase funding for hazard reduction. I note, given the time of year, that it is a bit late to have a significant increase in hazard reduction efforts in earnest before the fire season peaks.

I can only hope that in the years ahead all governments will continue to commit to appropriate levels of hazard reduction. I can only hope that the lives of the people of New South Wales are not placed in unnecessary danger due to a lowering of hazard reduction levels brought about by the unholy alliance between the Greens and the Labor Party, as the member for Hawkesbury would know.

Mr Ray Williams: It has been an incestuous relationship, hasn't it?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: It has been very close—in fact too close. The Opposition supports this bill. It makes many changes that will contribute positively to firefighting efforts in New South Wales. However, in offering support the Opposition realises that this bill alone will not prevent lives being lost unless it is matched by a constant commitment by governments to do everything in their power to prevent fires from starting. That is the most effective way to save lives, as was recognised by the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

The Opposition supports this bill because it empowers our Rural Fire Service to undertake its important combat role. On behalf of the House, I extend our sincere thanks to the men and women of the Rural Fire Service who often place their lives in danger to protect the lives and property of others. All too often we hear about those who have gone to fight fire only to come home to find their own home and property destroyed. I extend our very best wishes to the fantastic volunteers and I wish them a very quiet summer. Hopefully they will be able to stay at home with their families rather than go out to fight fires. The Coalition will not oppose this bill.

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.11 a.m.]: It is with pleasure that I support the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010. I echo the sentiments expressed by the member for Lane Cove. Members on this side of the House also pay our respects to and acknowledge the significant contribution the Rural Fire Service makes in protecting life and property. We wish them the very best and a safe summer.

On 31 July the royal commission into the February 2009 Victorian bushfires delivered its final report into the circumstances surrounding those tragic events. I understand that the New South Wales Rural Fire Service is already taking action consistent, either wholly or in part, with the vast majority of the royal commission's recommendations. To further enhance those actions, the Government recently announced a \$106.9 million funding package for bushfire protection. The amendments to the Rural Fires Act 1997 in this bill will help the Rural Fire Service to fulfil even more of those recommendations. It provides additional legislative recognition of the responsibilities of one of our finest emergency services. These amendments are, to some extent, intended to formalise existing arrangements, such as those relating to emergency warnings and neighbourhood safer places. They also sensibly enhance the membership of the State's Bush Fire Coordinating Committee by the addition of specific expertise relating to electricity infrastructure.

As stated by the royal commission, neighbourhood safer places have the potential to save the lives of residents and visitors during extreme circumstances. I have been informed that as at 18 November, 790 designated neighbourhood safer places had been identified in 111 local government areas across the State. As new locations are identified they are being added to the Rural Fire Service website. A neighbourhood safer place must meet strict safety criteria established by the Rural Fire Service. It can be a building or an open space such as a community hall or sports oval that could potentially provide refuge from a life-threatening bushfire. The Rural Fire Service is continually extending its Neighbourhood Safer Places Program for at-risk communities. The Government has provided for \$3.4 million to be allocated each year specifically for that program as part of the \$106.9 million funding package.

History has shown that leaving at the last minute during a bushfire can be extremely dangerous. The Rural Fire Service strongly urges people living in bushfire-prone areas to complete a bushfire survival plan to ensure they are prepared and know what they should do in the event of a bushfire. As part of that plan, an alternative safer location should be nominated. It may be a neighbouring property, a friend's house, or an area not at threat from bushfire. That is exactly the situation for which neighbourhood safer places have been identified. A neighbourhood safer place is meant to be a place of last resort to where people can go quickly at short notice. Of course, we must recognise, as did the royal commission, that in emergency situations neighbourhood safer places may not be entirely without risk. There may be some danger involved in moving to the location or while sheltering there. However, for people in high-risk areas their neighbourhood safer place could provide an alternative refuge with the primary purpose of protecting life during extreme bushfire conditions.

It is appropriate and timely that this planning and expertise is given legislative support. This bill gives necessary backing to the Rural Fire Service in its important roles and responsibilities. It will support the services' efforts in continuing to improve the level of bushfire fire protection provided to the people of New South Wales. I particularly mention the Rural Fire Service in the Hunter and the significant number of volunteers who help to protect life and property in our special part of the world. I acknowledge the fantastic contribution they make and the hard work they do. I also acknowledge the risks they take while helping and protecting others in the community during extreme bushfire events. I wish them a very safe and successful future and thank them again for their contributions. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [10.18 a.m.]: It is an absolute honour to make a contribution to this debate under your stewardship, Mr Acting-Speaker. I acknowledge that you are coming to the end of your term as the member for Baulkham Hills. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve in this place with you.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Thank you.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: The Coalition certainly does not oppose this bill because we should be seen to be doing everything we can to support the wonderful people of the Rural Fire Service. I acknowledge that the Minister for Emergency Services is at the table. He would know of my association with my local Rural Fire Service in the Hawkesbury. My local service probably covers a larger area and has more volunteers than any other service in the State given its proximity to vast national parks—Blue Mountains National Park, Wollemi National Park, Parr State Conservation Area, Yengo National Park, Marra Marra National Park and others.

Smack bang in the middle is Scheyville National Park. I have previously spoken in this place about the fact that a few years ago the park was overtaken by weeds and a fire broke out. Unfortunately, a family that had been in the area for many generations, the Wiese family, was burnt out. As the community always does, it pulled together and raised money to get the family back on its feet. The important point is that hazard-reduction burning had not been done in Scheyville National Park for about 10 years. It was not the native vegetation that had taken over but noxious weeds. We had called on the National Parks and Wildlife Service to clear the area, but yet again our calls fell on the deaf ears of this Government. It has abrogated its responsibility to undertake appropriate hazard reduction for the past 15 years, and that has led to the loss of homes to fire.

That was plainly evident in the Victorian bushfires. I made some very strong comments in my contributions to the debates on the condolence motions moved in this place in response to the Victorian tragedy. As members know, bushfires are very hard to hold back. However, if appropriate hazard reduction measures have been undertaken, one can minimise the fire's impact. As members know, 173 people lost their lives in that fire. Although we should always acknowledge those people and the great losses suffered by the families in those Victorian townships, we should also acknowledge that more than one million domestic and native animals were also lost. We must count the cost in terms of human life and property, but the loss of animal life is also horrific. The Australian and worldwide response to the tragedy was extraordinary. An enormous amount of money was raised to assist the victims to get back on their feet.

I will continue to raise on behalf of my electorate the fact that we must undertake appropriate hazard reduction. I can remember the Minister making the comment to me when I raised this matter after the Victorian fires that I was almost sure that certain people in departments were looking for any excuses they could find to not undertake hazard reduction. We know that because we know this unholy alliance between the New South Wales ALP Government and the Greens goes much deeper than face value. The fact is that the Greens are very much the masters of this ALP Government when it comes to undertaking appropriate hazard reduction. People like Sue Guymer, a member of a long-time Mt Colah family, and Kurt Lance, a former captain of the Blaxland Ridge Fire Brigade, came to me pleading for some sanity and to be allowed to undertake hazard reduction when they feel it is necessary, but they continue to have obstacles placed in their way. They continue to get excuses: "It's a little bit damp. It's going to create a bit of smoke."

I have said and will continue to say that we need to allow the Rural Fire Service and the people in those brigades—the people on the ground who know the area best—to undertake appropriate forms of hazard reduction when and where it is necessary. They are the people who should be making those decisions, not some bureaucrat sitting in an ivory tower, as has happened over the past 15 years. Is it not amazing that as we get closer to the election and the New South Wales ALP Government tries to claw back some shred of credibility—which will be extremely difficult—suddenly they have a knee-jerk reaction. What are they going to do? Suddenly it is gloves off and "We are going to be doing more hazard reduction than you can poke a stick at." Amazing! Thousands and thousands of hectares of hazard reduction will be carried out across New South Wales, but the Government has missed the boat.

The Opposition has not missed the boat because we have been pointing out that hazard reduction has not happened and it should have happened. We have moved into a wet season after 10 years of drought—surprise, surprise—and it has not stopped raining for the past couple of months. Unfortunately, you cannot burn vegetation when it is wet. That is a fact. It is not just a question of it being a little damp now; we might be on the verge of another flood. Water is pouring into the Hawkesbury River as we speak. Whilst it is wonderful for the Government to espouse the virtues and benefits of hazard reduction to everyone who wants to listen, the fact is not much hazard reduction will be done until the vegetation dries out. What will happen in the meantime? The wet season will encourage more undergrowth and create greater problems when the vegetation dries out. When that happens some time after Christmas it will place families right across New South Wales, but especially those in my electorate, in greater danger because of the failure of the Government to undertake appropriate hazard reduction over the past 15½ years.

I refer to the families in East Kurrajong and Blaxland Ridge, and those in Maroota where several homes were lost in 2002 during the horrific fires. I refer to families at Wisemans Ferry and St Albans. They are wonderful people who are always faced with the threat of fire in the middle of summer. There is only one way to adequately protect those people and minimise the damage that can occur when severe fire threatens them and their properties, and that is to undertake appropriate hazard reduction. That minimises the amount of fuel and takes the heat out of the fire. We know we can never stop those horrific fires but we can certainly minimise the damage.

It is a great shame that this Government has failed to acknowledge the continual requests from the Liberals and The Nationals for increased and adequate hazard reduction. Suddenly the Government has a knee-jerk reaction and is going to try to burn off half of New South Wales in an attempt to claw back a little credibility and a few votes. It will be very hard to do while the rain keeps tumbling down and the waters keep flowing down the creeks. The farmers are fortunately getting some of the best crops they have had in a decade. The one thing the Minister will not be able to do is to put on his Rural Fire Service hard hat and stand in the smoky bush and say, "Look what I'm doing. I'm out here just like Smokey Bear undertaking a bit of hazard reduction." It is not going to happen. The bush is a little too wet and after 15½ years of neglect they cannot wind the clock back and fix matters in two minutes. Unfortunately, that is what the Government is trying to do.

We will continue to stand up for those communities and people across New South Wales, especially those in bushland areas, and the great people in the Rural Fire Service who are at the forefront and look after and protect us in times of bushfire. When we get into government, hopefully we will make changes that will allow the people in the Rural Fire Service to make decisions on a local basis so that we can give the greater protection to families, property and animals that is afforded by adequate hazard reduction.

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [10.24 a.m.]: I support the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010. I was quite astounded by the speech made by the member for Hawkesbury. He blamed the Government because the weather is too wet to permit the lighting of hazard reduction fires. I thought it was a great thing to have some rain falling at the moment.

Mr Thomas George: You claim all the credit at the change of seasons.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: That is what the member for Hawkesbury did. He credited the Government for the rain that has stopped hazard reduction burning.

Mr Thomas George: You should have done hazard reduction in the winter months before it started raining.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: I say to the member for Lismore that it is absolutely wonderful to have a Government that can control the weather! I congratulate the Minister—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Cessnock has the call. He does not need any encouragement from other members. I am certain he will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: One of the amendments contained in the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010 will formalise the responsibility of the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service to issue appropriate warnings to the public about bushfires in this State. Among the many lessons to be learned in the wake of the 2009 Victorian bushfires are those relating to the key importance of delivery of information during a bushfire. People need accurate and timely information if they are to make informed decisions when caught in a bushfire situation.

To achieve this objective, the Rural Fire Service uses a broad suite of tools to inform the community. Since the Victorian bushfires, considerable work has been done to improve and upgrade the ways in which this information is delivered in New South Wales. One of these tools involves the media and, in particular, local radio, which is an important means of delivering key messages quickly to large audiences. In addition to regular news updates, the Rural Fire Service can also use the standard emergency warning signal, which is a distinctive tone played over radio or television. Having caught people's attention, the signal is followed by an important message relating to public safety.

The Rural Fire Service website and the 1800 Bushfire Information Line are valuable sources of information for people wishing to know more about a bushfire situation. Last year the 1800 information line was significantly upgraded to increase its call capacity. The Rural Fire Service website also has been upgraded, including the introduction of an interactive map that allows users to click on their own locality for more specific fire information. The Rural Fire Service is continuing to use more direct personal communication methods, such as doorknocks, community meetings and community newsletters in bushfire-affected communities. I am sure the Minister will use many of those strategies in his locality in the very near future.

New technology introduced last year includes the emergency alert system, which was used for the first time in New South Wales on 17 December 2009. The emergency alert can be used in significant and life-threatening emergencies. Phone calls and messages can be sent to landlines based on the address of the phone connection and to mobiles based on the billing address. The providers of this national service are working to improve the system, to ensure those who are in the danger zone at the time, no matter where their account is held, receive messages. All of these tools are supported by the new nationally consistent language and key messages for communicating bushfire warnings and other information to the public, along with new bushfire danger ratings.

The enhanced warning system introduced as a result of the findings of the Victorian royal commission does not replace any of the previous methods used by the Rural Fire Service. Rather, it supplements them by giving emergency services more options to ensure effective delivery of information to fire-affected communities. The introduction of a warning system is only part of the many enhancements made to the State's already world-standard fire protection.

In my 12 years as the member for Cessnock I have seen many significant changes to the Rural Fire Service. The number of vehicles that have been put into my electorate is second to none. Under the Coalition we received no new tankers. Under this Labor Government all the tankers have been upgraded and replaced. Good training systems have been put in place and the Rural Fire Service is doing an excellent job across my community. The Minister should be congratulated on that. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [10.30 a.m.]: I contribute to debate on the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010. Like many other members here today I have nothing but praise for our Rural Fire Service, and certainly no higher praise than for those in the Tweed who do a fabulous job—I know many of them. One of my sons is a member of the Bilambil Bush Fire Brigade, which is a fine outfit indeed. The purpose of this bill is to formalise the responsibility of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service to issue public warnings about bushfires, increase the level of representation on the New South Wales Bushfire Coordinating Committee and grant statutory recognition to neighbourhood safer places.

The bushfires of Black Saturday, 7 February 2009, tragically caused the deaths of 173 people. Black Saturday wrote itself into Victoria's history with record-breaking weather conditions and bushfires of a scale and ferocity that tested human endurance. About four days after that tragic event I was fortunate to be in the vicinity of Marysville representing Bowls Australia, conducting a bowls tournament. To see the sheer devastation over hectares of land and to talk to people who survived the bushfires was incredible. One particular farmer sticks in my mind. His property was not burnt, yet his neighbours on all four sides were burnt out and tragically lost their lives. You could see the tears welling in that farmer's eyes. You could also see the grim determination of the Australian spirit in the Rural Fire Service volunteers, who sacrificed many hours. I feel close to the Rural Fire Service. When I was manager of the Tweed Heads Bowls Club, I paid 15 of our staff their full wages while they were on firefighting duty. There was merit in doing that. Fires generally occur around Christmas time. Volunteer firefighters put their lives at risk and they often suffer financial hardship as a result.

On 1 July 2010 the final report of the royal commission into the Victorian bushfires was tabled, making 67 recommendations. I admit, the majority relate specifically to Victorian emergency management arrangements. However, the commission recommended a significant increase in hazard reduction. This time last

year the Tweed endured a large number of bushfires, and they are scary. One was not far from where I live and I attended a number of briefings with other local residents. The seriousness of the situation comes home to you when the sun is obliterated by smoke, and through that smoke you can see the large helicopters dumping water onto the fire. Inside the Cabarita bowls club I listened to the Rural Fire Service give a good briefing to concerned residents. There was a lot of fear and trepidation. Fortunately, no property was lost during that fire and no lives were lost. Anything we can do to ensure clear communication, particularly to residents, should be applauded. Last year I asked the Minister for Emergency Services about hazard reduction management systems in the Tweed electorate for the previous 12 months. This is the answer provided by the Minister:

Over the last 12 months ... there have been 16 hazard reduction activities completed within the Tweed local government area, of which nine were burning activities.

That occurred even though it had been very wet in the area. The answer continued:

During the 2008-09 reporting year there were 22 hazard reduction activities completed within the Tweed local government area of which eight were burning activities.

There is movement there, and an understanding of the situation. Many of the Rural Fire Service volunteers are locals who have lived in the area for a number of years. They should be applauded for their approach. This bill contains necessary amendments to implement a number of recommendations that came out of the royal commission into the Victorian bushfires. I support the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010 and praise the ongoing work of our great volunteers in the Rural Fire Service.

Mr GRAHAM WEST (Campbelltown) [10.35 a.m.]: I support the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010. I will make a few comments about the Rural Fire Service. I particularly thank a number of members from my local brigade, the Wedderburn Rural Fire Service, although I must apologise to Captain Dave Scott for not being such a regular meeting attendee. I will replace the battery in the pager very shortly. I particularly thank Dave Scott for the time he has given to the community as well as his predecessor, Alan Harding, who for many years served the Wedderburn brigade tirelessly and is still involved in that brigade. It is a great service. Alan and his wife, Pat, are a bit of a job lot. Alan Harding has led us through some of the most significant fires that our region has encountered, and has done so extremely successfully and safely. Recently we were able to present him with a flag to congratulate him on his service. He is an example of the many people involved in the Rural Fire Service who give up work—he is self-employed—not only to respond to fires but also to be involved in training, preparing equipment and making sure that the brigade is up to date with all the changes and the latest standard operating procedures. I particularly thank Alan Harding and wish him all the best for his future.

I also draw attention to a number of changes I have seen over the years. I first started training with the Rural Fire Service many years ago, but I recommenced my training in about 2000. During that time I have seen the importance of training increase and the amount of equipment increase. Wedderburn now has two category 1 and one category 3 vehicles, whereas originally we had two category 1 vehicles. Over that time those vehicles have improved and the equipment on them has improved enormously. Of course, much of firefighting is dry firefighting and a lot of manual work is involved in preparing, but there is also a very strong focus on the safety of people. The equipment has improved to enable people to better deal with radiant heat and other heat stresses. The amount of water and other things provided by the local community are always outstanding, but it is important to ensure sure that we keep ourselves rehydrated and rested—something that Rural Fire Service volunteers sometimes undervalue.

The 2001 fires in Wedderburn, which started just out of Appin as a result of fallen power lines, jumped very quickly from Appin Road into Wedderburn and swept all the way through to Sutherland, tragically in some cases. The fires remained in the Wedderburn community for about a week. I was a member of one of the night crews—Pat McNamara was our crew leader. One of the things that hits you early on is fatigue. Part of the night firefighting work is preparing for the day, doing back burns and preparing equipment. I remember many of us starting to fall asleep while holding the hose. Pat let us go to sleep under the fire truck and for that I am eternally grateful. It is important that we recognise that the more firefighters that are involved the better. Cooperation between the Rural Fire Service and the New South Wales Fire Brigade has increased over the years. In the past few years aerial firefighting has increased enormously.

I thank the Minister and the Government for providing the helicopters that have assisted in water bombing, which provide welcome relief. This bill refers to preparation and warnings, but it is important to remember that, in the right conditions, bushfires can occur quickly at any stage. If a bushfire has already commenced it is often too late to evacuate. People should keep an eye on the weather. Bushfires often

commence quite rapidly when there are westerly and north-westerly winds, low humidity and increasing temperatures. It is important for people to get ready now—not just when the dry weather commences. People should ensure that their bushfire pumps are serviced and are working, and they should check all the seals. It is amazing how one small seal that is not working can prevent the pumps from working.

People should also ensure that their water supplies are adequate, especially if they have a static water supply system. They should ensure that their water supply has not drained away. It is incredibly important to clear the gutters but often it is something that we leave until the last minute. If people have fire trails or other clearings on their properties they should ensure now that they are clear. One of the issues underestimated by many people is an adequate supply of clothing. We must ensure that we have non-flammable clothing that protects our bodies from radiant heat. I have seen tragic photographs of people fighting fires who are wearing shorts. I have read reports about people fighting fires who were photographed one minute and who perished a few minutes later. They perished not because of the fires but because they were affected by the intense radiant heat.

Anyone who has not stood close to an intense bushfire would not appreciate how hot such a fire can get. Rural Fire Service personnel wear thick two-piece cotton garments that have been treated with Proban, thick boots, gloves and flash hoods when needed. Anyone who remains in an area to protect their home should ensure that they have some type of equivalent clothing, masks to protect them from the smoke and basic equipment. We are aware that after the passage of a fire most houses burn down from ember attack. People should ensure that they have buckets and hoses ready, that any of the power tools they plan to use are in good order, that the gas is turned off, and that fuel is stored away from their homes. During the bushfire season many people die in cars. In high-risk areas we must ensure that people who travel in the summer months have appropriate car kits, woollen blankets to cover themselves, an appropriate supply of water and appropriate clothing.

People must also ensure that they have a plan. What will they do if one day they are faced with a bushfire? Will they go somewhere else? If so, they should prepare a plan before such a day approaches. If people do not have a plan in place how will they respond on the day? Where will they have a safe refuge? What will they do with their children or their animals? In 2001 that was something that we faced as a family. At the time Tanya was pregnant, so she went to Campbelltown where, ironically, she seemed to suffer more from the smoke than those of us who stayed in Wedderburn, as Wedderburn is located up on a ridge. However, it was much safer for her and it meant that we did not have to worry about our one-year-old running outside while we were preparing for the fires. It is important to determine which family members will remain to fight the fires.

I recognise the contribution of our current Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service and Phil Koperberg, our former commissioner, to firefighting. When we were fighting fires in the Wedderburn area, Phil would come out, inspect the area, and ensure that we were being well looked after. Everyone on a fire ground is pretty anonymous, so there was no reason to suspect that Phil was doing anything other than what he always did, that is, look after the troops. I congratulate him on his efforts and on ensuring that people were prepared for the fire season. I thank Integral Energy and Campbelltown council for their bushfire preparation. The last significant fires in Wedderburn in 2001 were started by powerlines. However, this year Integral Energy has improved its networks and removed overhanging branches. In a number of places cable has already been bundled through and council has been involved in clearing fire trails.

In the right conditions a fire can be stopped even by a small fire trail. However, if the winds pick up the size of those trails has to be increased, which is what Campbelltown council has been doing. I thank council and its staff for their efforts. This year the Rural Fire Service was engaged in an increasing number of burns in my area, using the mosaic burn pattern to protect the environment while also protecting homes. I congratulate all the members of the Rural Fire Service on doing that. I thank all the members of the Rural Fire Service and other emergency services, such as the State Emergency Service, for their efforts. State Emergency Service members and members of the New South Wales Police Force are often involved in fighting fires, staffing check points and policing an area to ensure that only those who are required are in a firefighting area.

I also thank all the journalists who report on conditions. In the event of a bushfire it is important to relay information to members of the community who are at home and unable to establish what is going on. It is important to provide them with information through radio broadcasts. I thank all those members of the media for their service—providing communities with the latest information and promulgating warnings. The fire season is a difficult time for many communities. One of the realities of living in Australia is that fires are a fact of life. However, we can reduce the risks by sensible planning and essential preparation, and by ensuring that we have a plan of action. Anyone who has not encountered a large fire would not be aware of its power or the impact that

it might have. I say to those who are unsure whether they are mentally equipped or prepared for such an event that the best thing they can do is leave. They can always rebuild their homes but it is too late to do anything once a fire is upon them. I congratulate the Minister on introducing this bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Later today the member for Hornsby will make her valedictory speech. I call on her now to contribute to debate on the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [10.46 a.m.]: Mr Acting-Speaker, I commend you for your massive contribution to this House. I believe that later today you will also make a valedictory speech. I am about to quote from an article on an iPad that was lent to me by the member for Tweed. Mr Acting-Speaker, I believe you were instrumental in permitting the reading of speeches and other material from such devices, on which I congratulate you. I contribute to debate on the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010—a bill for an Act to amend the Rural Fires Act to provide for the designation of neighbourhood safer places and for other purposes. I will refer later to those other purposes. The overview of this bill is as follows:

The object of this Bill is to provide for the designation of neighbourhood safer places, being places identified by the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service as places where it may be safe to shelter from a bushfire.

This bill will formalise the responsibility of the Rural Fire Service to issue public warnings about bushfires, to increase the level of representation on the New South Wales Bush Fire Coordinating Committee, and to grant statutory recognition of neighbourhood safer places. I will refer now to information that is available to me on the internet. The concept of "neighbourhood safer places" evolved as a result of the Victorian bushfires in February 2009. A neighbourhood safer place is a place of last resort for people during a bushfire. It can be part of a contingency plan at a time when the bushfire survival plans that have been developed cannot be implemented or have failed. A neighbourhood safer place is an identified building or space within the community that can provide a higher level of protection from the immediate life-threatening effects of a bushfire.

These places still entail some risk both in moving to them and while sheltering in them, and they cannot be considered to be completely safe. Neighbourhood safer places are places of last resort only in an emergency. The following limitations on neighbourhood safer places must be considered and implemented in bushfire survival plans. Neighbourhood safer places do not cater for pets. When using neighbourhood safer places members of the community should not expect emergency service personnel to be present. These places do not provide meals, amenities or cater for special needs, for example, babies, the elderly, the ill or the disabled, and they might not provide shelter from the elements, in particular, flying embers.

I welcome the provision of neighbourhood safer places in our communities. There are four designated places in the Hornsby electorate—Middle Dural Public School, Storey Park, Fagan Park in Galston, and Waitara Park in Waitara. Emergency service personnel are working on providing other safe places for those who, in the event of a bushfire, decide to remain in the area. If a bushfire rages out of control those people can seek refuge in a neighbourhood safer place—a welcome addition to any firefighting plan.

On average 50 per cent of the Hornsby electorate comprises bushland, with the Berowra Valley Regional Park and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. During the time I have represented the electorate of Hornsby the area has had a number of serious fire events. The first was within 10 months of my being elected to this place in February 2002, when an extremely serious fire started in the Hawkesbury electorate. It jumped Berowra Creek at Berowra and for four days it was all hands to the pump—literally—to ensure minimal damage to property and that people remained safe. This serious fire cut a swathe from Berowra all the way up to Brooklyn, causing damage to bushland and animals. Luckily, in the Hornsby electorate there was no loss of life. We lost only half a house and we had a couple of smouldering ceilings. For that we were eternally grateful.

Obviously I was not in the firefighting front line, but I was part of the briefings and saw firsthand the way in which emergency services in the area worked cohesively and methodically. That was before the new headquarters were completed in Homebush. I had the privilege of visiting the new Rural Fire Service headquarters and witnessing the way in which its operations are now much more coordinated. I pay tribute to Angelo Baldo, who headed up the team in our area then, and Peter McKechnie, who now heads up the team that has moved from the old headquarters in Galston Road, Hornsby Heights, to the new premises at Cowan. It provides a wonderful service.

I have a number of brigades in my electorate. Many people volunteer their time selflessly to fighting fires and providing the necessary training. I pay tribute to each and every one of those men and women. Shane Fitzsimmons, the Rural Fire Services commissioner, is a resident of the Berowra area and does a fantastic job.

Recently I have spoken to him at medal presentation evenings at the Cowan headquarters. I pay tribute also to the New South Wales Fire Brigades, which works well with the Rural Fire Service to minimise damage, and conserve and preserve life and property. I pay tribute to the many other emergency services in the area—the State Emergency Service, Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol and Hawkesbury River Rescue team, to name a few. They all play a role during the fire season, even if it is merely directing traffic in and out of areas.

That severe fire in 2002 burned 50 per cent of my electorate. Another serious fire started south of Mount Ku-ring-gai and completely surrounded the east side of Mount Ku-ring-gai. I was receiving up-to-date reports and in the evening I wanted to visit the area in order to assist, but they were extremely well organised and there was little I could do. I went to my home in Mount Colah, stayed about half an hour and then drove in an easterly direction down Beryl Avenue. When I reached the intersection to turn left onto the Pacific Highway towards Mount Ku-ring-gai all I could see was a wall of flames, which was extremely frightening. That fire reached the Pacific Highway, with spot fires along the highway. The fire travelled up to Berowra; it burnt behind the railway station, jumped the railway station and burned on the western side. This caused considerable fear amongst residents.

Indeed, residents were extremely alarmed about the recent housing strategy that proposed a five-storey high rise for a strip along the area immediately adjacent to the area where the fire had jumped the railway station. This area had been ticked off as safe for building. Residents knew full well that this was a fire-prone area and subsequently the proposal was removed from the plan. Members with large bushland tracts in their electorates live with this fire risk on a year-by-year basis. I commend also the National Parks and Wildlife Service for its hazard-reduction program. It works with other organisations to protect our bushland.

We were all shocked and saddened to hear that Peter Short, captain of Dangar Island Rural Fire Service, recently died suddenly in his sleep. Peter, a registered nurse with a PhD in nursing who worked at Royal North Shore Hospital, was only in his late 50s. I had had many recent conversations with him about his Rural Fire Service work and his work in the health area. I send my condolences to his family. Peter was very resilient; he was a wonderful, hardworking man, who loved his community, and I pay tribute to him for his work.

The Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010 was reviewed by the Legislation Review Committee, which did not identify any issues and, therefore, the Opposition does not oppose the bill. Any step forward in providing greater efficiency with respect to our bushland interface with our city and wider New South Wales is welcomed. Those whose houses face bushland areas—and I am one of them—have great faith that our local fire brigades and emergency services will deal with issues as they arise. Over the weekend more hazard reduction was undertaken. I do my level best to advertise to the wider community, as do emergency services, when that is taking place. I often receive calls from people who are worried about smoke. Sometimes smoke drifts and it is hard to pinpoint the exact site of the fires. Many just need to be reassured that hazard reduction is designed to improve safety.

I reiterate that neighbourhood safer places are a place of last resort and that people should not use them unless they are a landholder or are staying behind to assist. If emergency services personnel have advised them to leave, they should do so. I pay tribute to police in relation to the fire effort. Police are very involved during fires. They have a well-respected and strong track record of working extremely well with other emergency services personnel.

I focus also on the 2009 Victorian bushfires. Apart from the tragic deaths of 173 people, my relatives who live in the Yarra Valley were evacuated on many occasions during that period. I pay tribute to the fantastic efforts of New South Wales in sending various forms of assistance to Victoria. My uncle could not be buried on a particular Friday because of a high fire alert, but I managed to see our tankers and ambulances in action. I pay tribute to the Hornsby Leos, who raised an enormous amount of funds and manned coffee stations in many towns affected so drastically and tragically by the fires. Those stations provided a place for young people and others to have a coffee and a chat. We do not oppose the legislation.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [11.00 a.m.]: As other members have acknowledged this morning, it is an honour to have this opportunity—under your direction, Mr Acting-Speaker—to recognise your contribution to this Parliament. It is sad that your role will finally come to an end in a couple of days. I thank you for the support you have given to me during your time in the House.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Thank you.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: I make a brief contribution to the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010. The purpose of the bill is to formalise the responsibility of the NSW Rural Fire Service to issue public warnings about bushfires, increase the level of representation of the New South Wales Bush Fire Coordinating Committee and grant statutory recognition to neighbourhood safer places. At the mention of bushfires each of us immediately remembers those of Black Saturday in February 2009. It seems like only yesterday, but, sadly, in just over two months it will be two years since 173 people lost their lives. The people of the Lismore electorate especially remember Richard Zann, his wife and lovely daughter who lost their lives in that tragedy.

Another picture comes clearly to my mind from that tragedy: the gentleman standing by his house that was virtually saved. This gentleman, in the couple of years prior, had taken to clearing trees from around his house. That action saved his house, but it also nearly destroyed his life and ruined him financially. As he indicated at the time, the fines imposed on him for clearing those trees from near his home totalled approximately \$100,000. He believed that in removing the trees he was taking necessary and important action to protect his house. That issue is pertinent to this debate. All the inquiries in the world can be held about bushfires, but unless proper hazard reduction is undertaken we will be continually talking in this place about the devastation of bushfires.

I last saw Richard Zann and his son at Evans Head, which is an area surrounded by national parks. The Bundjalung National Park is on the southern side of Evans River. I also saw a friend of mine whose property adjoins the national park. I noticed that he and his neighbours mowed the area on the other side of their back fences to create a firebreak. The National Parks and Wildlife Service told him that he did not have permission to mow the area and that he was to cease doing so. However, he persisted because he wanted a buffer between his house and the national park. Common sense has disappeared from regulations in respect of people creating buffer zones in an attempt to protect lives and property from bushfires. Minister Whan, who is at the table, will well understand that. On 14 November the Government announced its response to the royal commission's recommendations, which included additional spending on hazard reduction. The shadow Minister, responding in an adjournment speech on 23 November, stated:

Prima facie, while such an announcement should be welcomed by all stakeholders, I note that this deathbed conversion to the merits of hazard reduction has come far too late in the Government's life to have any credibility whatsoever, and far too late in the bushfire season to have any practical impact on our bushfire risk as we move into summer ..."

Comments were made earlier that we now have too much rain to undertake hazard reduction. From my experience, hazard reduction certainly should not be done at this time of the year. Hazard reduction must be undertaken during the winter months, when burn-offs are a lot easier to control. Each one of us in this place would support any hazard reduction measures. We should not just talk about it; it is imperative that fire hazard reduction work is done. Constituents from the Lismore electorate and in outlying areas such as Tabulam, north up to Rocky Creek and Liston and down into the Clarence in my electorate indicated to me that forestry had allocated time and money to undertake hazard reduction, but particular people, who are part of the Greens movement, objected and that hazard reduction work was stopped. That is a typical problem for country and regional areas.

Like others in this House, I pay tribute to all members of the Rural Fire Service, not just those in the Lismore electorate. Wherever a fire breaks out, NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers respond. Often the Rural Fire Service receives interstate support. This is the time of year when we think of those volunteers and appreciate what they do. I do not want to miss this opportunity to sincerely thank all the Rural Fire Service volunteers and personnel for risking their lives to protect us. Like other members, I take this opportunity to draw something to the attention of the Minister. Nearly every area has a Rural Fire Service unit. It encourages fellowship and is a focal point for local communities to get together, which we appreciate very much. But not every area has a State Emergency Service [SES] unit.

The State Emergency Service is usually the lead agency in responding to floods, and is well resourced to do so. People often join both State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service units in areas that have both agencies. However, areas that are prone to flooding and that have only a Rural Fire Service need to be able to resource the State Emergency Service to undertake flood control work. I cite the example of Tyalgum, which is just outside Murwillumbah. The area was flooded and Rural Fire Service personnel attended. However, they were unable to carry out the work that is usually done by the State Emergency Service during floods. That is another form of cross-border issue. We should consider the possibility of amalgamating resources in emergency situations, such as during floods.

I have never seen the statistics, but I would like to know the number of Rural Fire Service members who are also members of the State Emergency Service, and vice versa. Many people probably have dual membership. Difficulties arise in areas where there is a Rural Fire Service but not a State Emergency Service. During floods, the absence of a State Emergency Service becomes a major concern. As always, it is tremendous to have an opportunity to express support for the NSW Rural Fire Service. I commend all the volunteers and staff of the Rural Fire Service for the magnificent job they do. I am sure I speak for all members of the House in expressing appreciation for the Rural Fire Service. I reiterate that the Opposition will not oppose the bill.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [11.10 a.m.]: It is with pleasure that I join in debate on the Rural Fire Service Amendment Bill 2010 as a city-based member with a large area of national parks in my electorate of Davidson. The bill contains reforms arising out of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission that investigated the causes of and responses to the devastating bushfires that swept through parts of Victoria in late January and early February 2009. The bill formalises the responsibility of the NSW Rural Fire Service to issue public warnings about bushfires, increases the level of representation on the New South Wales Bush Fire Coordinating Committee, and grants statutory recognition to neighbourhood safer places [NSPs]. While these reforms are in no way radical, they represent a significant move in the right direction. The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended that the Victorian Government:

- enhance the role of warnings—including providing for timely and informative advice about the predicted passage of fire and the actions to be taken by people in areas potentially in its path.

The New South Wales Disaster Plan, which is referred to as Displan, dictates that:

Emergency Operations Controllers and Combat Agency Controllers are responsible to ensure that arrangements are made for appropriate warnings, and for the passage of information to the public ...

Combat agencies are primarily responsible for educating the public about how to protect themselves against those hazards for which they are responsible.

A combat agency is the "agency identified in Displan as the agency primarily responsible for controlling the response to a particular emergency". When major bushfires occur in New South Wales, the combat agency is the Rural Fire Service [RFS]. The Rural Fire Service has been carrying out its various responsibilities so this bill appears to simply formalise much of the current process. However, one concern that has been raised with me is that mobile phone technology as it operates in the Australian context permits SMS messages to be sent only to mobiles based on a home address as opposed to those in a certain region. That is fine if a bushfire occurs when people are at home, but not if they are on holiday in a bush area. The Minister is noting my comments so perhaps he might respond to that issue during his reply.

The bill also increases the membership of the New South Wales Bush Fire Coordinating Committee from 13 to 14 to accommodate a representative from the energy sector of the minerals and energy division of the Department of Industry and Investment. This committee will provide a forum through which a broad cross-section of government and non-government organisations that are interested in preventing, mitigating and suppressing bushfires can join to develop and progress policies and procedures aimed at ensuring a coordinated and agreed approach to major issues. The inclusion of an energy representative appears to be sensible, considering the potential of electricity infrastructure to cause serious fires. The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended that the Victorian Government:

- strengthen the range of options available in the face of fire, including community refuges, bushfire shelters and evacuation.

Similar recommendations contain more details. The bill provides statutory recognition of neighbourhood safer places [NSPs], which are identified buildings or space within the community that can provide a higher level of protection from the immediate life-threatening effects of a bushfire. Hassell Park at St Ives is an example of a neighbourhood safer place in my electorate of Davidson. Neighbourhood safer places are a new concept that evolved out of the Black Saturday bushfires and it is a concept that is worthy of statutory recognition. The bill also gives responsibility for identifying, designing and reviewing neighbourhood safer places to the Rural Fire Service and removes those responsibilities from local emergency management committees.

I pause to acknowledge the important contribution of the RFS—the "really fine speaker" and member for Baulkham Hills, who will deliver his valedictory speech tonight. I also acknowledge the contribution, particularly in my electorate, of another RFS—the Rural Fire Service. I contacted the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Rural Fire Service and was informed that it supports the bill. I note that one of its members of more than

50 years standing will visit Parliament today. I look forward to hosting the visit by Mr David Cordery over lunch and during question time. David Cordery is a man who has given much to our local community in various ways.

Hazard reduction is an important issue within my electorate. Recent weather conditions have permitted the Rural Fire Service to conduct two successful strategic hazard reduction burns at Hornsby Heights and Berowra Heights. The Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Rural Fire Service also recently supported the Variety Club's Christmas party. The Variety Club allows sick, disadvantaged and special needs children to experience the type of Christmas that many of us take for granted. The members of the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Rural Fire Service are a credit to the electorate of Davidson and surrounding areas, including the Hornsby electorate. Recently the member for Hornsby referred to some of their contributions to the community, and I commend the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Rural Fire Service for all its efforts.

The Warringah-Pittwater Rural Fire Service also operates within my electorate and is equally dedicated to protecting life and property from fire and other emergencies. Medal ceremonies for the Warringah-Pittwater Rural Fire Service were held recently to acknowledge and reward outstanding achievement. I had the privilege of attending an awards ceremony at the Warringah Council's chambers on 17 November. I have no doubt that both the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Rural Fire Service and the Warringah-Pittwater Rural Fire Service are ready, willing and able to carry out the responsibilities that are articulated in the bill. In conclusion, it is important that New South Wales learns the lessons of the 2009 Victorian Black Saturday bushfires. This bill implements some of those lessons. However, New South Wales must continually enhance emergency management procedures and properly fund agencies that have vital responsibilities. Having said all that, I reiterate that the Liberals-Nationals do not oppose the legislation.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [11.17 a.m.]: Mr Acting-Speaker [Mr Wayne Merton], I congratulate you on your term of parliamentary service and on your remarkable career. I wish you well for the future. In joining in debate on the Rural Fire Service Amendment Bill 2010, I note that the overview of the bill states:

The object of this Bill is to provide for a designation of neighbourhood safer places, being places identified by the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service as places where it may be safe to shelter from a bush fire.

My contribution to the debate will be brief. I am pleased to note the implementation of recommendations made by the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission that have filtered through to New South Wales legislation. Of course the Opposition does not oppose the bill, but I wish to follow up some of the points that have been made. The member for Davidson referred to mobile phone communication. I inform the House that there is still a significant issue regarding telecommunications in areas surrounding the Wyangala Dam. Over several years I have had discussions with Telstra but there are still many areas where reception and communication are patchy. That is a continuing source of concern for those involved in emergency services and people who are just trying to go about their daily business and communicate. I hope that the Government will take the fight to Telstra and other communications service providers to reinforce the points that have been made about the extreme inadequacy of communications in some bushfire-prone areas.

As the member for Burrinjuck, I am no stranger to bushfires. We have had more than our fair share. The most vivid memories I have are of the 2003 bushfires that left four residents in the Australian Capital Territory dead and 400 homes in the area destroyed. The fires destroyed multiple forestry areas and much private land, and many stock were lost. The fires jumped from the Namadgi National Park down into the Tumut region. They spread up through the Gundagai area, skipped into Wee Jasper, over Burrinjuck Dam and in towards the Australian Capital Territory. Standing on the rain tank in my back yard, I could see fires coming from both directions—from the Australian Capital Territory and from Burrinjuck.

That day, 18 January, was pretty fearsome, as were the days leading up to it and the days after. I am sure the Minister for Emergency Services remembers that day vividly as well. It was a significant day for many people in my electorate; emergency services personnel risked their lives and worked for days without sleep. I drove around delivering sandwiches to many of those people in the Wee Jasper and Doctors Flat area, and they were grateful to get them. Massive events such as bushfires place an enormous strain on communities, and the creation of neighbourhood safer places in this legislation is a good thing.

Tumut was in my electorate at the time of the 2003 bushfires. I remember being in a village near Tumut at the time the fires were threatening. I was called into a community meeting in the local hall and I listened to people who were unsure of what to do. Should they stay or go? What advice would be given? No clear advice

was given; people simply had to hang on and wait for the next event to happen. They did not know how ferocious the fires would be. People did not know whether they should stay or go. Following the 2003 bushfires we had the bushfires in Victoria, and there was still a level of uncertainty. People did not know what to do: they did not know whether to stay or go. And all those dear lives were lost so tragically in the Victorian bushfires.

We must do everything we can to make our electorates, particularly those that are prone to bushfires, safer places in future years. There is a lot of fodder on the ground at the moment. Yass is extremely damp—almost too damp—but when it dries out there will be an extremely high bushfire risk because there will be a lot of grass on the ground and a lot of fuel for fires in our region. I congratulate a couple of organisations that are receiving awards, new fire sheds and so on. Recently I attended some events, and in the near future I will be attending more events. Congratulations to Coolac and Yaven Creek, Frogmore, Kenyu and Goba Creek, and Rugby. These great villages in the Burrinjuck electorate have some of the most dedicated Rural Fire Service volunteers.

Over the past few years many volunteers have expressed concern about the changes taking place in the Rural Fire Service. It is incumbent on us all to take those concerns into consideration. These people are volunteers. Where would we be without them? We would be a lot poorer—there would probably be a lot more property burned out, a lot more fences down, a lot more stock gone and probably more human lives lost. We need these volunteers and we need to listen carefully to them. Their points of view are extremely important to us. I enthusiastically support my local brigade, the Jeir-Marchmont Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade. My father was the captain of that bushfire brigade and it continues in very capable hands. It is extremely well managed and run. I thank the volunteers on the Jeir-Marchmont Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade. Once again, we do not oppose the legislation.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [11.23 a.m.]: In speaking on the Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010, I flag that the Liberal-Nationals will not oppose the legislation, given the serious reason the bill is before the House. The bill is a further response to the Victorian royal commission into the Black Saturday bushfires. The object of the bill is to provide for the designation of neighbourhood safer places, being places identified by the commissioner. The bill also formalises the responsibility of the Rural Fire Service to issue public warnings about bushfires. One area that I am keen for the Minister to clarify—he should also address any issues raised in debate—relates to mobile telephone warnings.

On the far South Coast, with the influx of holidaymakers to the region, particularly in the summer months, there is a risk that under the current system many people will not receive emergency warnings. I am keen for the Minister to explain whether there is an issue and whether there is a means to rectify the problem. Many people have coast homes in areas where there are major bushfire threats. In those areas vegetation adjoining coastal properties has built up over many years. Given the potential dependency of people on a mobile phone in an emergency, I am concerned that they will not receive emergency warnings.

The thrust of the bill makes enormous sense. Obviously it is important that both sides of politics examine the report of the Victorian bushfire inquiry and look closely at the application of the recommendations in a New South Wales context. I think everyone would agree that New South Wales does some things better than Victoria in terms of bushfire management. However, there are things that we can improve. To that end, this bill is important. As to hazard reduction, I am concerned about the State's south-east. The Minister is the member for Monaro and therefore he is well aware of those concerns. In some areas there been no hazard reduction burning and no wildfires have gone through in decades.

Some of the current fuel loads are well over 30 tonnes per hectare, and that will present a major problem if we have horrendous conditions similar to those faced in Victoria on 7 February 2009. We need to do more hazard reduction work. Whether or not we can set a percentage for hazard reduction work in the south-east, I am happy to be guided by the experts and the Minister in that regard. But the Minister and I, as politicians representing the south-east, know full well that insufficient work has been done over an extended period. While efforts are being made to play catch-up now, there is still a serious and major threat to the south-east. Obviously the amendments in this bill are largely common sense. That having been said, I seek clarification of the issues relating to mobile telephone warnings.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Minister for Primary Industries, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [11.28 a.m.], in reply: I thank members representing the electorates of Lane Cove, Charleston, Hawkesbury, Cessnock, Tweed, Campbelltown, Hornsby, Lismore, Davidson, Burrinjuck and Bega for their contributions to this debate. The Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2010 is fairly minor legislation. Indeed, it

probably could have been introduced as a cognate bill to the State Emergency and Rescue Management Amendment Bill, which we dealt with last week. That probably would have been logical because the two pieces of legislation fit together.

They are part of our response to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. This bill makes fairly minor amendments that put in place what already happens in practice and broadens the New South Wales Bushfire Coordinating Committee. Some members have mentioned that the committee now includes a representative of the electricity industry, which is quite a critical area. Key recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission related to power lines and their potential to cause fires.

New South Wales is in a slightly better position because all our power lines are still owned by government companies whereas Victoria privatised theirs. We have a slightly more direct input. I know that, for example, Country Energy has been upgrading lines, part of which is all about the safety of those lines. The member for Bega and other Opposition members referred to the short message service [SMS]. When we announced this system we acknowledged the limitation of the SMS going to the billing address. Phase one of the system is having messaging to billing addresses. The contractor—as I understand it, Telstra—is working on phase two. Its brief is to have a system that can send messages based on people's locations.

When we moved to the current mobile system we lost our ability to target to the towers, which is a technical difficulty. Members will remember that under the old system we could see what tower our phone signal came from, but under the new system that capability was lost. That is a key priority for Emergency Services nationally and we have tasked the companies with achieving that in the next phase of the SMS system. There are technical difficulties, but I hope they can achieve that in a reasonably good time frame. We need to continue to keep people informed in relation to that.

The member for Burrinjuck talked about the 2003 fires. She referred to people in the Tumut area who were unsure whether to stay or to leave, and who were waiting for advice. The message that we have consistently tried to get across to people, and what a lot of our education is about, is that people must make their own bush fire plans. It is too late to decide whether to stay and fight or leave when a bushfire is approaching. People in a bush-fire prone area must make plans now, preferably, about whether they will stay or leave when confronted with a fire. It is incredibly dangerous for people to wait for someone else to tell them what to do. I emphasise that they need to make decisions early and be prepared. It is true that one of the great tragedies of the Victorian bushfires was the number of people who lost their lives when they were leaving at the last minute. That can be avoided. Obviously we cannot guarantee success, because tragedies will always occur, but loss of life can be minimised with good planning and preparation.

The member for Cessnock and other members talked about local volunteers. The member for Hornsby and other members referred very positively to the progress of the Neighbourhood Safer Places project. I congratulate the Rural Fire Service [RFS] on its progress with the Neighbourhood Safer Places project. This legislation enables them to take the next step and put in place longer term provisions for management of those Neighbourhood Safer Places. It clarifies issues in relation to liability and enables us to progress further and create more Neighbourhood Safer Places. Last year the Government was criticised for not having made a lot of progress but the statistics do not support that. They show that New South Wales and the RFS have done outstandingly well in identifying Neighbourhood Safer Places. As of a short time ago, we had seven times more Neighbourhood Safer Places than Victoria, where the royal commission was directed and from where these recommendations came.

The member for Hornsby said that those places do not provide food and drink. It is important for people to understand that a Neighbourhood Safer Place is not an evacuation centre where they can sleep and be catered for. The member for Hornsby also referred to building controls and appropriately paid tribute to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. New South Wales has led the way in building controls for bush-fire prone areas. The Victorian royal commission recommended that Victoria undertake a number of measures in that space as well. New South Wales will not rest on its laurels but will continue to develop those planning provisions. It has done very well in that area. The member for Lismore referred to the flood work done by the RFS. The main restriction on that is the additional training that is needed, but I know that the RFS in a number of areas assists with flood work when required, and has been involved in rescues in flooded rivers and so on at various times.

Members of the Opposition referred to the Victorian royal commission response. They referred to things taking a long time or said they were too late. I point out that New South Wales is one of the few States,

other than Victoria, that has done a full point-by-point response to the 66 recommendations of the royal commission and its interim report. New South Wales has done that in good time. We carried out interim responses that were in effect for the last fire season before this one, things such as the new warnings, the Neighbourhood Safer Places, et cetera. This Government acted very quickly to resource those mechanisms. Opposition members talked about hazard reduction. I refer, in particular, to a bizarre contribution from the member for Hawkesbury, who would like us to think that nothing has happened and that it has been 15 years of neglect. That is typical of a lot of his comments. As usual, he spoke half-truths or exaggerated.

The fact is that in the past 15 years there has been a fundamental change and vast improvement in the resources available to our Rural Fire Service volunteers around New South Wales. Any person who has been a member of the RFS or has observed it over that time would have noted that improvement. The RFS has had a complete re-equipment, as was referred to by the member for Campbelltown, who has been a volunteer in a brigade for 10 years. He has seen impressive changes in the way it has been outfitted. Opposition members grumble that the Labor Party has done nothing for 15 years, but 15 years ago the RFS had poor equipment and was under-resourced, which cost a lot of lives of volunteers when they fought fires.

Every year since I have been the Minister for Emergency Services I have attended the memorial service for Emergency Services volunteers who have lost their lives. It is a very sad occasion, which the families attend. It is even sadder when another name is added to that list, as was done this year with the State Emergency Services unfortunately. The decrease in frequency of death of RFS volunteers is encouraging. That is a fundamental achievement, which is credited to the fact that we do a lot more training. In addition, our operational procedures mean we do not put the lives of our volunteers at risk—we make their safety our first priority. I refer also to the re-equipment program that has gone on since this Government came to power, and extra resourcing and leadership from the rural fire service commissioners and others over that period.

I know that we are in the lead-up to the election and that Opposition members want to make comments such as the one made by the shadow Minister in the upper House, who apparently said that it was a deathbed conversion to hazard reduction. Those sorts of comments are absolute and demonstrable rubbish. Over the past few years, in particular, we have seen an impressive record of hazard reduction around the State—record levels of success in planned hazard reduction. Today people will not see a lot of hazard reduction around the State, because it is too wet and conditions do not enable that to happen.

The member for Lismore talked about the need to do hazard reduction in the winter months and said that we have not been doing it. We have been doing it. In fact, during the winter months of this year I was constantly phoning the local media to tell people not to worry about the smoke in a particular area because it was coming from hazard reduction burning. Members might remember that during the last hazard reduction season there was a thick band of smoke over Sydney and a few people got excited. Such things demonstrate that hazard reduction has been happening.

In the past year the Government has introduced the employment of seasonal casual work crews who do some of the preparation for hazard reduction. You do not just wander out, light a fire and let it burn to reduce hazards—particularly not near houses. You need to do mechanical clearing, prepare fire trails, plan the water supplies, and plan where you are going to stop the fire as it goes through and so on. That work is now being done by seasonal crews so that our volunteers can spend a bit more of their precious time achieving hazard reduction burns. That is important. The new initiatives we announced recently—\$106 million worth of hazard reduction—boost that impressive record. The most important one I want to highlight is the willingness of the national parks service to boost its hazard reduction work. That has been a critical achievement. These are not Damascene, deathbed conversions, as the Opposition might like to say, but a continuation of the work that this Government has been doing. That is an important point for me to make.

On the point that members raised about hazard reduction targets, the Victorian royal commission set a percentage target in hazard reduction for its Government to achieve. New South Wales has rejected that because we believe that percentage targets are not the right way to go. In our opinion, the Victorian royal commission got that wrong. It is very easy to set X hundred thousand hectares of hazard reduction and to achieve that by simply dropping incendiaries in low-populated areas or out west of the State. If you drop incendiary devices from a plane and let them burn for a few days, you will have racked up tens of thousands of square kilometres of hazard reduction, but that does not protect properties or lives. Our hazard reduction is done where it is strategically needed to protect properties and lives. That might mean doing a smaller area, it might mean doing patchwork, but it is focused and targeted on the protection of property.

The member for Lismore referred to a person who told him that he was not allowed to have a buffer zone near his house. In the past few years we have moved to having asset protection zones in every council area with bushfire prone areas. I have one behind my house in Queanbeyan. Every couple of years the council will do mechanical slashing and clearing of undergrowth, ensuring that trees are separated and canopies are not touching in that asset protection zone. From there the local bush fire brigade can sometimes burn off back into the bushland areas. That is happening right around New South Wales, again as a result of the resourcing that the Government has been providing. I am very pleased to say that, to help councils with their work, there has been a significant increase in the package of grants announced in the last few weeks available to local councils to do hazard reduction work. Again, that is assisting directly. We also increased seasonal work crews. Those are important things that have been done.

As part of his contribution the member for Hawkesbury commented about the Greens telling people what to do and individuals not being able to do their own hazard reduction. Often a lot of these things are urban myths perpetrated by people such as the member for Hawkesbury, who just likes to repeat these sorts of things, or they might be pub conversation. Private property owners who want to do hazard reduction on their own property should go to the Rural Fire Service website, have a look at the form they need to put in to get approval to do a burn, and see how simple it is. It is a single form on the Rural Fire Service website.

People can submit it online and they will have an answer in a short time. I think even the member for Hawkesbury would be able to complete the form—it is very simple. The suggestion that it is a complex thing and that people get in the way, or the Greens can veto you doing things on your house and so on, are really just urban myths perpetrated by people such as him. They are not so—if they ever were so, they are no longer so because some years ago this Government took steps to ensure that the Rural Fire Service commissioner had the ultimate say as to when hazard reduction needs to be undertaken.

Another Opposition member said that one person could stop a hazard reduction from taking place. That is not true. A person can raise objections. I think we would all agree that, if someone raises an issue with you, you should consider it. However, the rural fire service commissioner and his delegates have the power to order hazard reduction to take place on any tenure of land in New South Wales, whether it is private property, State forest or national parks. That power has been given to them by this Labor Government.

I will not say any more than that because we have other legislation to debate—we are a very busy Government. I commend the bill to the House. It is a simple bill with a number of sensible mechanisms that respond to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, but it is not the whole response. The whole response is on the Rural Fire Service website, and I would urge anybody who wants to have a look at that to do so. People will be able to see the great progress that has been made. If they are in any other doubt, they should talk to somebody who has been in the Rural Fire Service for 30 years or 50 years—I have even presented medals for 60 years' service in the past few months. I met a member of the service who is 93 years old. He had been in the Rural Fire Service since he was in his late teens, which is pretty impressive.

Those people will tell you how much the Rural Fire Service has changed with investment of resources by this Government. They might say, "Sure, there were some things we liked in the past and now we have a central agency that coordinates things", and it is true that some people do not like that. However, talk to them about the equipment and the benefits that that has brought. When you talk to people who say, "We don't want these central bureaucracies", think about how important it was to have that central bureaucracy when we mobilised thousands of volunteers to help in Victoria. Who organised the planes and buses that took people to Victoria? Who organises out-of-area teams to assist and coordinates resourcing? Who coordinates the now much more complex business of aerial firefighting? All of those things need the very small percentage of full-time people that we have at Homebush doing those jobs.

I thank the emergency services family whom I have had the great pleasure of working with for the almost two years that I have been Minister. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with all of them: the commissioners, volunteers and staff of the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Service, the Fire Brigades, the volunteer rescue associations and marine rescue. It has been a pleasure to be the Minister responsible for all the emergency service organisations. As we come to the end of this session of Parliament, I wish them all a safe and happy Christmas. I thank them for their work for me as Minister but, most importantly, for the community of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

Bill declared passed and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS) BILL 2010

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 30 November 2010.

Ms VERITY FIRTH (Balmain—Minister for Education and Training) [11.49 a.m.], in reply: I thank all members who contributed to the debate on the Education Amendment (Ethics) Bill 2010. In particular, I acknowledge the contributions of my Parliamentary Secretary, the member for Wyong, whose comments are always cogent and considered. I thank the member for Charlestown, the member for Monaro, the member for Heathcote, the member for Sydney and, from those opposite, the member for Murrumbidgee and the member for Pittwater. In the agreement in principle speech I specifically reiterated the key issue at stake in relation to this amendment to the Education Act. This issue is parental choice. At the heart of this amendment is whether parents, having exercised their legislated right to withdraw their child from special religious education, also have a right to request that their child attend classes in special education in ethics. The Coalition would deny them this choice. In this matter, the Coalition presumes to know what is better for children than the parents of those children.

This amendment retains the primary place of special religious education—SRE or scripture—within the Act. Parents will in the first instance need to opt out of special religious education and only then can they request that their child receive special education in ethics. The amendment provides special education in ethics as an alternative to non-scripture in New South Wales government schools—just that. It provides a choice that individual parents and the peak parent body, the NSW Federation of Parent and Citizens Associations, have requested in New South Wales for many years. This amendment does not set up competition with SRE; it provides a choice for those parents who have already made an active choice that their children will not attend special religious education.

I will briefly go through the amendment before I address some of the concerns raised in the debate by members opposite. This amendment to the New South Wales Education Act 1990 will insert a new section 33A entitled "Special education in ethics as secular alternative to special religious education". Sections 32 and 33 are the sections of the New South Wales Education Act 1990 that relate to special religious education. Section 32 guarantees to the parents of public school children that a time will be allowed in the school week for the teaching of special religious education. It also states that children attending special religious education are to be separated from other children at a time fixed between the principal of the school and the relevant clergy.

Section 33 of the New South Wales Education Act 1990 also guarantees the right of parents to choose not to send their children to special religious education. The new section 33A provides an additional choice for parents who have already chosen that their children not attend special religious education. Section 33A is in three parts. The first, 33A (1), allows special education in ethics as a secular alternative to special religious education. Section 33A (2) states that if the parent of a child "objects" to special religious education, they are "entitled" to request special education in ethics. Paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 33A (2) qualify this entitlement. Special education in ethics can be made available in a government school where it is "reasonably practicable" and where a parent has requested that their child receive special education in ethics. "Reasonably practicable" refers to the capacity of the school to deliver the course with sufficient, appropriately trained volunteers.

Section 33A (3) prevents a government school from being directed by the Minister to not make special education in ethics available and therefore from overruling the choices of parents who have exercised their rights under the new section 33A (2). This amendment is necessary because the New South Wales Opposition has made it necessary. What should be a reasonable option for parents has been ruled out by the Opposition with insufficient reason. Section 33A (3) is intended to prevent this from happening. If a future Minister for Education wishes to stop special education in ethics he or she will have to debate the matter in this Parliament and change the legislation. That is how democracy works; it is not at the random whim of a Minister.

To recount for those opposite, an ethics course as an alternative to non-scripture was trialled in 10 schools in term 2 this year. The schools volunteered to be part of the trial and parents at the schools were informed about the trial and were supportive of the trial. The trial schools were from all over Sydney and rural New South Wales. It was evaluated by Dr Sue Knight of the University of South Australia. The evaluation, which is available on the Department of Education and Training website, was very positive and provided a valuable critique of the trial. To respond to the member for Murrumbidgee, the evaluation was never intended to advise that the ethics course be rolled out statewide. It was an evaluation of the trial that had occurred and whether it was effective in its aims. It is the role and responsibility of Government to make decisions and create policy, which is what we are doing here today.

The other recommendations of Dr Knight's report, many of which were read into *Hansard* by the member for Murrumbidgee and labelled "criticisms", have been considered and will be implemented other than recommendation 6, which requires faith providers to produce a description of their teachings. This will be optional. The ethics materials were not made available to SRE providers while the evaluation occurred. However as the St James Ethics Centre, which produced the materials, has repeatedly stated, all of the materials will be made available to providers to use as appropriate. The evaluation did what was intended: it identified strengths and weaknesses, some of which have been raised again here by the member for Murrumbidgee, which is why we have accepted the report, published the report and accepted its recommendations, bar recommendation 6.

I must reiterate on the public record that there was no decision to go ahead with ethics, prior to the conclusion of the trial. Parents from all over New South Wales, including from Coalition electorates, were incredibly supportive of the trial. This is not a party political issue; it is a parental choice issue. And while it is true that this issue has aroused the passions of many and led to dozens of emails, letters and responses to both the trial and the evaluation, the people whose children took part in the trial were overwhelmingly positive. As a result of the evaluation, the New South Wales Government decided last week to introduce ethics into New South Wales schools "where practicable" in terms of delivery. This would simply have required a change to Department of Education and Training policy. But then, of course, the Opposition announced that irrespective of the wishes of parents, it would discontinue the ethics course.

Despite assurances from the Leader of the Opposition that he would wait to see the evaluation of the trial, it appears that he took no notice of that evaluation. That is why we have decided to change the Education Act: to ensure parents who wish to opt out of scripture have a viable and meaningful alternative if they wish. No-one will be compelled to do ethics. Parents will be able to choose a faith-based scripture, move their children between scripture classes, opt out of SRE altogether or elect that their children attend special education in ethics if it is available. All of this will be the parent's choice. I have no idea why the Opposition is so afraid of parental choice on this issue. We strongly believe that it is appropriate.

The main concern of many has been that ethics will "compete" with faith-based scripture. This is no more the case than any faith-based scripture competes with any other. Many parents whose children attend non-scripture for their own reasons will be pleased about being able to offer their kids a meaningful option. Parents who have chosen special religious education for their children have not done so lightly. We also respect their wishes, which is why their right is retained in the Act. Some critics have questioned ethics as a suitable area of exploration. I disagree absolutely with this view. An ethics course is about a deeper exploration of ethical principles. This deeper exploration is an inherent part of religious education. Students attending scripture are already receiving ethical instruction through the faith of their choice. Ethics is about allowing those students who currently miss out on such exploration to have the opportunity to undertake something more meaningful than non-scripture. Yes, the ethics course has a secular framework, but this framework is one that dates back over 2,500 years to Plato. As Dr Sue Knight says in her evaluation:

As a branch of philosophy, ethics is concerned with the rational exploration of questions such as, "How one ought to live?" and "How should we go about justifying our moral judgements?"

Why would anyone not want children to have the opportunity to explore such questions? I went to public primary and high schools and, up until year 9, attended Anglican scripture. I am pleased that I did. I credit scripture with helping me shape my own moral sense and an intellectual understanding of what it is to be a good and kind person—to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you and not to judge". Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. It seems unfair to me that just because parents may choose not to send their children to religious scripture that their children should not have an opportunity to explore ethical questions, to undertake an examination of themselves and how they want to live.

Dr Sue Knight points out clearly that ethics taught properly is not about moral relativism—the idea that anything goes—which clearly is not what we want to teach our children. Reasoned ethical decision-making "must be carried out on the basis of fundamental principles, such as the notion that morality is grounded in suffering and wellbeing and the understanding that humans ... share common capacities for such suffering and wellbeing". In other words, it is the teaching of human empathy. I will never have a problem with children having access to this learning if their parents so choose. It is the sort of teaching that helps us build a civil society. The Opposition's position on this bill is simply hard to comprehend.

Concerns have also been expressed that enshrining this in the Act privileges ethics and removes it from ministerial or departmental oversight, which is simply not accurate. While special education and ethics will be allowed and parents will have an entitlement to its provision, where practicable, it will still exist within the same departmental guidelines that govern appropriate content in New South Wales schools. Content will be vetted by the New South Wales Board of Studies and by the Department of Education and Training for content and age appropriateness, as was done successfully in the trial. To enshrine in legislation that an ethics course will be allowed does not enshrine any ethics course, and the course will be tailored and modified to suit the children being taught, as required.

The special religious education policy of the Department of Education and Training will be amended accordingly to allow for the course and its operation. The Minister and the department will still be able to determine the nature and content of the ethics course, but they will not be able to prevent one from being offered if parents at a school wish for their children to have that opportunity. I have full confidence in the Department of Education and Training that any course that is delivered to government school students will be of high quality and appropriate in every way. The level of professionalism within the New South Wales Board of Studies and the Department of Education and Training is second to none. The idea that the floodgates will now open, as the member for Murrumbidgee suggested, and suddenly all sorts of wild and wacky teachings will enter our schools, denies the professionalism and care that is undertaken by the Department of Education and Training and the Board of Studies when it comes to these issues. It is also an insult to the parents across this State who have fought so hard for ethics as an option for their children.

This simple and uncomplicated amendment will come at no cost, as special religious education comes at no cost. I have been advised that there are no other providers of similar ethics courses. The St James Ethics Centre will deliver the ethics course in New South Wales schools in 2011. It will be delivered under the same conditions as special religious education, with volunteers who are not teachers at the same school. It provides a choice that has been requested by our most important stakeholders in public education—New South Wales parents. It does not undermine the importance and primary place of special religious education within government schools, and it prevents this legitimate choice being taken away by the whim of a Minister whose personal views have no place in this debate. I commend the bill to the House.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

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

Noes, 36

Mr Aplin	Mr Hartcher	Mrs Skinner
Mr Ayres	Mr Hazzard	Mr Smith
Mr Baird	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Souris
Mr Baumann	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Stokes
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Humphries	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	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	
Mrs Fardell	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Fraser	Mr Provest	Mr George
Ms Goward	Mr Richardson	Mr Maguire
Mrs Hancock	Mr Roberts	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

Bill declared passed and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION (DUST DISEASES) AMENDMENT BILL 2010**Agreement in Principle**

Debate resumed from 30 November 2010.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [12.13 p.m.]: I contribute to the debate on the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2010. At the outset I must say that the rush of legislation towards the end of the sitting year yet again has denied the Opposition the opportunity the time to consult on and fully scrutinise the details of this bill. Because this bill was introduced into this House only late yesterday afternoon, the Opposition is yet to formally approve it through its processes. However, in light of the time and in trying to expedite the noble underlying principles of this bill, which we are happy to support in this House, we seek and will review further details before this bill is transmitted to the upper House. We support this bill in principle, but reserve our rights in relation to further details we may find in order to understand the impacts of this legislation while awaiting the Opposition's formal approval and final sign-off. The two objects of the bill are to amend the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act as follows:

- (a) to increase the lump sum death benefit payable to dependents of deceased workers (in place of the usual indexation increases) from \$245,700 to \$311,050 in 3 annual increases, with the first increase occurring on the commencement of the proposed Act,
- (b) to extend the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Board's (the Board) discretion to reduce the amount of a lump sum payable to partially dependent persons so it applies to partially and wholly dependent persons and so that the Board may take into account the age of the worker at the time of the worker's death.

Of course, the Opposition supports this in principle. In this House we spend much time attacking the Government for its failure on various measures, but in reviewing the New South Wales Government's history of supporting sufferers of asbestos-related disease, I have to say that it has done a good job. I congratulate the Government on opening the Bernie Banton Centre in January 2009, which is the world's first stand-alone research facility dedicated to the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of asbestos-related disease. That measure gave all asbestos disease sufferers a beacon of hope by providing a research facility while at the same time bearing testament to the crusade of Bernie Banton, who was an inspiration to everyone across the community. I certainly believe that the State Government has done well. I note, however, the words of the Dust Diseases Board Chief Executive Officer, Lisa Hunt, who said:

People think the incident rate of Asbestos related diseases is decreasing, sadly it's not.

I too thought that was the case. One would have thought that the impact of asbestos would be decreasing but, unfortunately, it is not, as Lisa Hunt has articulated. The estimated number of up to 20,000 Australians who will be affected by asbestos-related disease over the next 20 years is quite staggering and unbelievable. This number is multiplied when considering the effect on families. In the past financial year 1,070 workers and 2,653 dependants received compensation totalling \$74.8 million from the Dust Diseases Board. The problem of asbestos-related disease will not go away. In fact, as Lisa Hunt argues, the incidence of this disease is increasing. Certainly, we need to do all we can to support the victims of this disease and their families. This bill appears to be part of that process and certainly makes a contribution towards achieving that result.

I ask from the Government, as will the shadow Minister, for a briefing of particular details to understand the financial consequences of these changes. Obviously, the assumption is that the changes are, and can be, funded. I have not seen those details. I ask the Parliamentary Secretary or the Minister in reply to articulate and confirm that the changes are fully funded and able to be provided as outlined in the bill. We assume that the Government can and will fund this proposal but, again, when anything like this comes before the House—which I have argued on many occasions—the financial impact on the overall finances of the State and how the intention will meet the obligations should be articulated.

In conclusion, the Opposition supports the proposals in this bill. We support the work of the Dust Diseases Board. Again, I think the Government has done a good job with this issue over the past few years. We support the bill but ask that the Government provide a briefing to the shadow Minister before he responds formally in the other place with a finalised position from the Opposition.

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA (Smithfield) [12.18 p.m.]: The Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2010 will increase the lump sum death benefit payable under the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act from the current amount of \$245,700 to \$311, 050. The proposed amendment will restore the historical relationship between the death benefits in the dust diseases and workers compensation legislation. The Workers Compensation Act was amended in October 2008 to increase the lump sum death benefit payable from \$331,250 to \$425,000, which amounts to a 28 per cent increase. No corresponding amendment was made to the lump sum payable under the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act. The amount of the lump sum paid to the dependants of a deceased worker under the Act historically has been maintained at 70 per cent to 75 per cent of the amount of the lump sum payable to the dependants of deceased workers under the Workers Compensation Act 1987.

To minimise the initial impact of the increase on the dust diseases fund, it is proposed that the increase will be phased in. There will be three annual increases, the first occurring on the date the Act commences, which is on assent. Currently, the lump sum benefit is adjusted in accordance with the indexation provisions of the Workers Compensation Act 1987. During the phase-in period the indexation provisions will not apply. Indexation will recommence on 1 April 2013, which is the first adjustment date after the lump sum reaches \$311,050. The proposal does not impact upon the weekly payments that are payable to workers' dependants. Those payments will continue to be indexed as usual.

The Dust Diseases Board's actuaries have advised that the dust diseases levy will not be impacted as a result of the proposed increases because the benefits will be funded from the dust diseases fund's capital base. The other key amendment in this bill will enable the Dust Diseases Board to consider the age of the worker at the time of death as a factor to be taken into account when determining the amount of lump sum compensation to be paid to a dependant of a deceased worker. The Dust Diseases Board considers that the age of the worker at the time of death is a relevant consideration when determining what is reasonable and proportionate. The dust diseases Act does not expressly provide for age to be taken into account when determining lump sum payments to the dependants of deceased workers.

The Dust Diseases Board proposes that a sliding scale of lump sum payments be adopted, based on the age of the worker at their date of death. That will ensure that the dependants of younger workers who worked in New South Wales all their working life and died as a result of a dust disease receive the maximum level of benefits under the Act. The Act will also enable the board to ensure that the dependants of workers who die before retirement age or who have dependent children receive the full entitlements benefit. The dependants of older workers will receive a proportion of the amount paid to the dependants of young workers based on the age of the worker at the time of death. The Dust Diseases Board also considers that a distinction should not be made between dependants who are either wholly or partially dependent on the deceased worker for this purpose.

Weekly benefits are not affected by this amending bill. The board's actuaries assess that approximately 90 per cent of dependent spouse beneficiaries who apply for compensation would be unaffected by removing consideration of the person's income. The board's actuaries have estimated that this change in policy will increase the board's annual compensation liability by \$3 million in 2010-11, increasing to an additional \$5 million in 2019-2020. The Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2010 contains worthwhile amendments that will make life a little easier for families of workers who are impacted upon by asbestosis and other dust-related diseases. With the indulgence of the House and given that this may be my last speech for this term, I wish all members who are retiring or who may not return to Parliament all the very best for the future. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.23 p.m.]: Asbestos is a concern that continues to receive this Government's closest attention. WorkCover is particularly active in relation to this ongoing problem. WorkCover established an Asbestos Co-Regulators Working Group comprising senior representatives from the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, the Dust Diseases Board, the Local Government and Shires Associations and the Department of Planning. The purpose of the working group is to develop a whole-of-government approach to the management of asbestos issues. WorkCover also works closely with the Department of Planning regarding the removal of asbestos in residential properties. WorkCover has a comprehensive demolition and asbestos strategy to ensure that the health, safety and wellbeing of workers are protected.

WorkCover's asbestos and demolition unit has dedicated inspectors who visit commercial demolition and asbestos removal sites to ensure training, supervision and safe work practices are in place. A major focus of the unit is the coordination of an ongoing audit program to verify and, when necessary, ensure compliance with the relevant standards required for asbestos removal and demolition work. The unit operates an emergency asbestos demolition hotline and after-hours response service to ensure that workers and the public are able to access information and assistance in a timely manner. An online notification system has also been introduced to enable contractors to notify WorkCover of proposed asbestos and demolition work.

The Ombudsman's report refers to estimates of 20,000 cases of mesothelioma across Australia by 2020. Dust diseases, including mesothelioma, are diseases of long onset and most people do not exhibit symptoms of a dust disease for 20 or more years from the time of exposure. Reports issued over recent years have shown varying predictions for both the number of cases of mesothelioma in the general community and when the peak of disease incidence will occur. Some reports suggest the peak will occur in 2014 while others suggest 2018 or later. The varying predictions of disease incidence cited in reports include all members of the community who might have been exposed to asbestos, not just those exposed in the workplace.

As Australia became more aware of the dangers of asbestos, New South Wales introduced comprehensive occupational health and safety laws to protect New South Wales workers from being exposed to asbestos and other hazardous dusts and to reduce the future incidence of diseases within the New South Wales workforce. The Dust Diseases Board administers a compensation scheme for New South Wales workers who were exposed to dust in the workplace. The Dust Diseases Board is one of the oldest continually operating compensation bodies of its type in the world. For more than 80 years, the board has been involved in compensating and caring for workers who have been unfortunate enough to contract a dust disease as a result of their employment. The Dust Diseases Board has made 3,775 awards of compensation for all dust disease applications over the past 10 years. Of that total, 1,572 awards were made to workers who had contracted mesothelioma.

The number of new compensation claims received by the Dust Diseases Board from New South Wales workers each year has not significantly varied over the past 10 years. The Dust Diseases Board currently provides compensation for 1,070 workers and 2,650 dependants of deceased workers. Annual compensation payments made by the Dust Diseases Board amount to around \$75 million. The Dust Diseases Board's actuaries forecast that the annual number of new compensation claims from workers is anticipated to remain steady until 2018, when numbers are expected to begin to decline. The principle purpose of this bill as outlined by previous speakers is a substantial increase in the death benefit lump sum from \$247,500 to \$311,050. The bill proposes that the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Board use a scale to determine lump sums for dependent persons, based on the age of the worker at their death.

However, when applying the scale, the board will consider carefully the individual circumstances of each family of a deceased worker and determine the lump sum based on factors such as the age of dependants of the worker and whether the worker had dependent children at the date of the worker's death. The board also

considers the degree of disability of the worker at the age of the worker's death and whether the worker died from the dust disease or from another cause. The scale was developed by actuaries and is based on life expectancy tables. The scale provides for full entitlements to be paid to the dependants of younger workers. The dependants of a worker who is 65 years old or younger at the date of their death will receive the full amount of the death benefit. If the worker is older than 65, the worker's dependants will receive a lesser amount, but the board will take into account the factors to which I have referred already.

Dependants, including spouses, partners and dependent children, are entitled to weekly benefits. The Dust Diseases Board has considered its liabilities and assets as well as actuarial advice and is confident that it can fund the proposed amendments to dependants' entitlements without the need to increase the dust diseases levy on employers. It is proposed that the increase will be phased in. There will be three annual increases, the first of each will occur on the date the Act commences, which is on assent. Currently, the lump sum benefit is adjusted in accordance with the indexation provisions of the Workers Compensation Act 1987. In place of the indexation increases, the bill fixes the amount of the lump sum from the date of commencement of the proposed Act until 31 March 2013.

The next indexation increase will occur on 1 April 2013, which is the first adjustment date after the lump sum reaches \$311,050. This is part of phasing in the increase to minimise the initial impact of the increase on the dust diseases fund. The proposal does not impact on the weekly payment payable to workers' dependants. These payments will continue to be indexed as usual. The first increase, to \$268,375, will apply from the commencement of the Act—that is, on assent—and will apply for a 12-month period. The second increase, to \$291,040, will apply for the second 12-month period after the Act has commenced. The third increase, to \$311,050, will apply after the end of the second 12-month period after the Act has commenced.

The amendments increasing the lump sum will apply to the dependants of any worker who dies from the date of introduction of the bill. The bill provides that the lump sum payable to a dependant is that which is in force at the time of the worker's death. The Workers' Compensation Dust Diseases Board is the only specialist workers compensation agency in Australia dealing specifically with the compensation needs of workers affected by dust diseases. The board's statutory function is to administer the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act. Under this Act, the board is required to determine eligibility and award compensation to workers and dependants of deceased workers, and administer the Workers' Compensation Dust Diseases Board fund and pay all moneys for compensation awards and costs of administering the Act, including operating expenses at the Dust Diseases Tribunal.

The dust diseases Act also authorises the board to fund research into dust diseases. The Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Fund is constituted under section 6 of the dust diseases Act. The dust diseases fund primarily comprises contributions made by workers compensation insurers. Under section 6 of the dust diseases Act, the Dust Diseases Board determines an amount, the dust diseases levy, to be collected from workers compensation insurers each year to cover the liabilities of the dust diseases fund. The Dust Diseases Board obtains the advice of actuaries when making this determination. The WorkCover Authority in turn determines the contributions to be paid by insurers to the dust diseases fund, and insurers adjust the workers compensation premiums payable by employers to include a levy for the dust diseases fund.

The rate of the dust diseases levy for individual employers depends on the risks attached to their category of employment. This calculation is based on the actuarially assessed risk of dust diseases by Work Industry Classification. In 2008-09 the Workers Compensation Nominal Insurer, which insures the majority of employers, contributed \$68 million to the dust diseases fund, which represented 80 per cent of the total contributions received by the fund. The New South Wales Government via the Self Insurance Corporation contributed \$5 million, which is 6 per cent, while other self-specialised insurers contributed \$12 million, or 14 per cent. The Dust Diseases Board does not meet common law liabilities, which are met by workers compensation and public liability insurers. Common law liabilities are not affected by the proposals in the bill.

The Dust Diseases Board has obtained actuarial advice that it will not be necessary to increase the dust diseases levy on insurers to meet the cost of the proposed amendments. The annual cost of compensating workers and dependants under the dust diseases Act in 2009-10 was \$75.9 million. This cost is covered by the annual levies collected by the Dust Diseases Board from insurers. The cost of increasing the lump sum will increase annual costs by \$8.8 million to the Dust Diseases Board's annual compensation liability once the increase is fully implemented. The Dust Diseases Board's actuaries have advised that the dust diseases levy will not be impacted as a result of the proposed increases, as the benefits will be funded from the dust diseases fund's capital base.

The financial position of the dust diseases fund is sound and provides sufficient investment income to fund the Dust Diseases Board's ongoing compensation payments. The dust diseases Act provides for compensation to be paid to workers who suffer from dust diseases when the dust disease is reasonably attributable to occupational exposure to dust. Compensation paid under the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act 1942 is no-fault compensation, including a lump sum payment and a weekly payment of compensation for a dependent spouse or partner and for dependent children. The scheme is administered by the Workers' Compensation Dust Diseases Board—the Dust Diseases Board—and funded through a levy on employers, paid through workers compensation insurers.

The Dust Diseases Board does not meet common law liabilities, which are met by workers compensation and public liability insurers. Common law liabilities are not affected by the proposals. Dust diseases are diseases of long onset. As I said, many persons do not display symptoms or disability from a dust disease until after retirement age. The average age of death for workers receiving benefits under the dust diseases Act is 74 years. This differs significantly from the circumstances giving rise to entitlements to death payments under the Workers Compensation Act. The majority of those deaths are catastrophic and immediate in nature. The age of worker deaths covered by the Workers Compensation Act is somewhat younger, from 55 years to 59 years. The structure of death benefits under the dust diseases Act is different from those payable under the workers compensation legislation.

Death benefits under the workers compensation legislation include a lump sum death benefit to whole or partial dependants and a weekly benefit payable in respect of each dependent child under the age of 16 or, if the child is a student, under the age of 21 years. This benefit structure recognises the younger age of workers at the time of death and the increased likelihood of the worker having dependent children. The dust diseases Act provides for lump sum benefits and weekly payments to the dependants of deceased workers where the death of the worker or former worker is reasonably attributable to a dust disease. Most dependants are spouses and there is less likelihood of the worker having dependent children at the time of death. This benefit structure recognises that many workers are of an advanced age at the date of death. The Dust Diseases Board considers that it is reasonable and appropriate for the dependants of a younger worker to receive more substantial lump sum compensation than those of an older worker in order to meet their future needs. The bill represents a sensible amendment to the compensation provisions in relation to asbestos, and I commend it to the House.

Mr MATT BROWN (Kiama) [12.36 p.m.]: I am pleased to follow that thorough speech by the member for Wyong. I am also pleased to support the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2010. The bill makes important changes to the lump sum benefit payable to a dependant of a worker who dies or who is disabled as a result of exposure to asbestos and other dust-related diseases while at work. Asbestos Awareness Week runs from 22 to 28 November, and the New South Wales Government is urging people across the State to seek information on the asbestos support services available for victims and families. People mistakenly believe the incidence of asbestos-related diseases is decreasing. Although the dangers of unsafe handling of asbestos have been known for years, the long time between exposure and the onset of symptoms means that the instances of disease are expected to increase every year until at least 2018.

It is estimated that up to 20,000 Australians will be affected by asbestos-related disease over the next 20 years, and that figure is multiplied when one considers the effect on families. The Dust Diseases Board was established in 1927 and is one of the oldest continually operating compensation boards of its type. For more than 80 years the board has been involved in compensating and caring for workers who have been unfortunate enough to contract a dust disease as result of their employment. The board is currently helping about 3,720 people, including 1,070 workers and 2,650 dependants of deceased workers. The Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act provides a unique compensation system to support workers who have been exposed to disease-causing dust in their workplaces and the families of those workers.

The New South Wales Government recognises the devastating impact of a dust disease, as it spreads beyond the worker to include their family members. The Dust Diseases Board is the only specialist workers compensation agency in Australia dealing specifically with the compensation needs of workers affected by dust diseases. The Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act acknowledges the impact on a family of losing one of its members to a dust disease. That is why the Act provides benefits for the dependants of a deceased worker, whether the worker died directly from the dust disease or from some other cause. Key amendments in the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2010 will allow the Dust Diseases Board to consider the age of the worker at the time of death when awarding compensation under the Act. This will ensure that the dependants of younger workers who worked in New South Wales all their working life and died as a result of a dust disease receive the maximum level of benefits under the Act.

The Act will also allow the board to ensure that the dependants of workers who die before retirement age or who have dependent children receive the full benefits entitlement. The dependants of older workers will receive a proportion of the amount paid to the dependants of younger workers based on the age of the worker at the time of death. Following the death of a worker from a dust disease, the surviving spouse and other dependants of the worker are left to carry on with life. The Dust Diseases Board, through the dust diseases Act, provides ongoing financial support to those families in the form a lump sum payment following the death and a weekly compensation benefit payable for the remainder of the life of the surviving spouse or until the spouse remarries or enters into a new relationship.

The bill proposes to increase the lump sum payment so that it maintains its historical relationship with the lump sum death benefit payable under the Workers Compensation Act 1987. Historically, the lump sum payment under the dust diseases Act has been valued at 70 per cent to 75 per cent of the lump sum death benefit payable under the Workers Compensation Act. It is appropriate that immediately following national Asbestos Awareness Week we recognise the terrible toll that dust diseases takes on the families of workers and ensure that they receive just compensation. The amendments proposed in the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2010 will provide real improvements to support for families of workers who have died from asbestos- and other dust-related diseases that they acquired while on the job.

Asbestos has been debated a lot in this Chamber over time. We have seen the courage of many victims of dust- and asbestos-related diseases—for example, those suffering from mesothelioma. We have seen the leadership and drive of former Premier Morris Iemma in relation to this issue. I am pleased that a Labor Government has introduced more important amending legislation to ensure that victims of this insidious disease are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve and that they and their families receive the best support possible in such unpleasant and demanding circumstances. I trust that the amendments will have the support of all members of this Chamber.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.42 p.m.], in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate. The proposed amendments in the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2010 demonstrate that the New South Wales Government will continue to support families of workers impacted by asbestos- and other dust-related diseases. The increase in the lump sum death benefit payable under the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act will be phased in. Actuarial advice indicates that this increase can be funded without the need to increase the dust diseases levy on employers. However, to minimise the initial impact of the increase on the Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Fund it is proposed that the lump sum will be increased in three annual increases, with the first increase occurring on commencement of the proposed Act. Indexation of the lump sum payment amount will not occur until 1 April 2013.

The proposal does not impact on the weekly payments payable to workers' dependants. These payments will continue to be indexed as usual. In response to the member for Manly, I thank him and the Opposition for their support of the Government in this area. In relation to the member's funding concerns, I can advise that the Dust Diseases Board has obtained actuarial advice and it will not be necessary to increase the dust diseases levy on insurers to meet the costs of the proposed amendments. The annual cost of compensating workers and dependants under the dust diseases Act in 2009-10 was \$75.9 million. This cost is covered by the annual levies collected by the Dust Diseases Board from insurers. The cost of increasing the lump sum will increase annual costs by \$8.8 million to the annual compensation liability of the Dust Diseases Board once the increase is fully implemented.

The actuaries of the Dust Diseases Board have advised that the dust diseases levy will not be impacted as a result of the proposed increases, as the benefits will be funded from the capital base of the dust diseases fund. The financial position of the dust diseases fund is sound and provides sufficient investment income to fund the ongoing compensation payments of the Dust Diseases Board. The impact of the annual increase in payments will reduce the fund's solvency ratio in the short term to approximately 95 per cent of the board's known claims liability valuation. This is within the accepted tolerance of 90 per cent to 110 per cent for funding of known liabilities. The actuaries project that the board's solvency ratio will return to 100 per cent of known liabilities, based on a modest projected investment return, by 2014-15. The proposal to phase in the increase to the lump sum will further reduce the impact on the dust diseases fund.

Proposed amendments will also allow the Dust Diseases Board to consider the age of the worker at the time of death as a factor to be taken into account when determining the amount of lump sum compensation to be paid to a dependant of a deceased worker. The Dust Diseases Board has decided to change its policy when

assessing payments to dependants to remove consideration of a dependant's income. This complements the age proposal and will allow families to be treated more equitably. Given the age of the majority of dependent spouses receiving compensation from the board—which is over 70 years—and that most are in receipt of the age pension, this is appropriate. Actuarial advice has estimated that this change in policy will increase the board's annual compensation liability by \$3 million in 2010-11, increasing to an additional \$5 million in 2019-20. These worthwhile amendments merit the support of members. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

Bill declared passed and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

CRIMES (SERIOUS SEX OFFENDERS) AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Agreement in Principle

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.47 p.m.], on behalf of Ms Carmel Tebbutt: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

As this bill was introduced in the Legislative Council on 24 November 2010, it is in the same form and the second reading speech appears at pages 64 to 68 of the *Hansard* galley for that day, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [12.48 p.m.]: I lead for the New South Wales Liberals-Nationals in debate on the Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2010. Essentially, the bill amends the Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Act 2006:

- (a) to require the Supreme Court to be satisfied that an offender poses an unacceptable risk of committing a serious sex offence before it can make an order under the Act,
- (b) to extend the definition of serious sex offence for the purposes of the Act,
- (c) to expand the matters to which the Supreme Court is to have regard when determining whether to make an order,
- (d) to make provision with respect to the term of orders,
- (e) to permit a corrective services officer to have access to an offender's computer equipment when the offender is under a supervision order,
- (f) to permit a continuing detention order to be sought in respect of an offender who is the subject of a supervision order if circumstances change and the supervision order is no longer adequate,
- (g) to provide for supervision orders to be suspended or expire on the making of a detention order,
- (h) to provide for victims to make statements about proposed orders,
- (i) to provide for proceedings for offences under the Act,
- (j) to enable the Supreme Court to make an extended supervision order at the same time as a continuing detention order.

The bill also amends the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999 with respect to the effect that orders under the Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Act 2006 have on parole and parole orders. These amendments follow recommendations made by a 2009 review of the Act by the Sentencing Council and arise from a statutory review.

Section 5 is amended to extend the definition of "serious sex offence" to include an offence that was not a serious sex offence at the time it was committed, but which was committed in such circumstances that it

would be an offence were it committed in those circumstances at the time an order is sought against the offender under the principal Act. The test to be applied by the Supreme Court when determining to make an order under the principal Act is amended. Currently, the court must be satisfied to a high degree of probability that the offender is "likely" to commit a further serious sex offence. Now the court must be satisfied, more likely than not, that the offender poses an unacceptable risk of committing a serious sex offence before it can make an order. This appears to have been in response to difficulties with the construction of the word "likely" in the previous section and comments made by judges in *Tillman v Attorney General (NSW)* (2007) NSWCA 327. The term "likely" has been construed to mean more probable than not. Arguably, an unacceptable risk test is a lower threshold, although I note that no guidance on this important matter has been provided by the Attorney General.

When determining an application for an order under the principal Act, the Supreme Court must have regard to any report prepared by Corrective Services NSW as to the extent to which the offender can reasonably and practicably be managed in the community and the views of the sentencing court at the time the sentence of imprisonment was imposed on the offender. A sentencing court includes any court that hears an appeal on sentence. Section 11 is amended to add, as one of the conditions that may be imposed on a supervision order, a condition that requires an offender to permit a corrective services officer to have access to any computer or related equipment at the offender's residential address or in the possession of the offender.

The Supreme Court's power to vary an order under the principal Act does not permit it to extend the period of an order to a period greater than would otherwise be permitted under the principal Act. New section 14 (2) provides that the State of New South Wales may apply to the Supreme Court for a continuing detention order against a person who is the subject of an interim or extended supervision order if altered circumstances mean the person cannot be adequately supervised under the supervision order. The Supreme Court must be satisfied of this before making a continuing detention order. New section 14 deals with applications for a continuing detention order and enables the State to make such an application where a person has been found guilty of breaching a supervision order. The Supreme Court is required to have regard to the level of an offender's compliance with any interim supervision order when determining an application for a continuing detention order.

New section 17A omits a provision that deals with the interaction of parole orders and orders under the principal Act. This matter is proposed to be included in the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999. New section 18A provides that, on the making of a continuing detention order in respect of a person, any interim supervision order or extended supervision order in respect of the person expires and ceases to have effect and, on the making of an interim detention order in respect of a person, any interim supervision order or extended supervision order in respect of the person is suspended and ceases to have effect until such time as the interim detention order expires.

New section 21A is an important section and deals with victim statements. It provides for registered victims to be notified of applications under the principal Act and to be given an opportunity to make a statement setting out the person's views about the proposed order and any conditions to which the order may be subject. The statement may be placed before the Supreme Court for consideration. I note that the use of the word "person" is ambiguous and might be misconstrued to apply equally to the victim and the "person" acting on behalf of the State. I suggest that the Government reconsider this terminology.

I also note that the new section applies only to registered victims. Once again, nothing seems to have been done to rectify the appalling situation that arose when the killer of Dr Victor Chang applied for parole without the knowledge of members of Dr Chang's family. They were unaware of the application simply because they were not on the roll of victims—the murder of Dr Chang had occurred some years before the victims register commenced. The Supreme Court and the State of New South Wales must not disclose a statement to the offender unless the person who made the statement consents to the disclosure.

Proceedings under the principal Act are to be dealt with summarily before the Local Court. However, proceedings for an offence under section 12—breach of a supervision order—may also be dealt with summarily before the Supreme Court. New section 25B enables the Supreme Court to make an extended supervision order in respect of a person at the same time as it makes a continuing detention order in respect of the person. The extended supervision order commences at the end of the continuing detention order. New section 32 provides for a review of the principal Act to be undertaken by the Attorney General three years after the commencement of the proposed Act.

Section 126 of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999 provides that an offender is not eligible for release on parole if the offender is the subject of an interim detention order. Section 160A of the Act provides that an offender's obligations under a parole order are suspended while the offender is subject to an interim supervision order or an interim detention order and provides that an offender's obligations under an interim supervision order are taken to be obligations under a parole order, which means the offender's parole order may be revoked if the offender fails to comply with his or her obligations under the interim supervision order. Any parole order to which an offender is subject is revoked if a continuing detention order is made against the offender.

The Act is an important means of protecting the citizens of New South Wales and we are advised that, as at 1 September 2010, there were 27 offenders the subject of extended supervision orders and two offenders the subject of continuing detention orders. Submissions have been sought from the Law Society, the Bar Association, Legal Aid and the Director of Public Prosecutions, but no submissions have been received to date. As there are no significant arguments against the bill, the Liberal-Nationals will not oppose it.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote) [12.57 p.m.]: I would like to address a number of questions that arise from these legislative changes. First, there are several reasons why the wording of the test is being changed, as recommended by the statutory review of the Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Act 2006, which carefully considered the issue. The review found that the new test is clearer and avoids the confusion that currently exists over what is meant by the term "likely". Secondly, the new test is the same as that which exists under the Victorian equivalent piece of legislation and is similar to the test that exists under Queensland legislation. This means that all three eastern seaboard States will have a substantially similar test, which will assist in the development of a cross-jurisdictional body of case law being developed. Thirdly, there is merit in having the same test across the three States as the schemes are similar in nature and designed to achieve the same aim—that is, the protection of the community through the management of serious sex offenders.

I will also address why the amendment of the definition of "serious sex offence" is retrospective. The primary objective of the Act must be kept in mind—that is, to provide for the extended supervision and continued detention of serious sex offenders so as to ensure the safety and protection of the community. A sex offender is defined as a person who has at any time been sentenced to imprisonment following his or her conviction for a serious sex offence. It is clear then that "serious sex offence" is one of the most important terms in the Act. By its very nature, this provision must operate retrospectively in order to include existing high-risk recidivist sex offenders from whom the community should be protected. Common sense dictates that an offender's risk of committing a further serious sex offence cannot be determined unless there has been a prior serious sex offence.

Finally, I will examine why grounds for being able to make a continuing detention order are being made. In its report considering the treatment and management of serious sex offenders, the Sentencing Council noted that there may be cases when a serious sex offender has practical difficulties in his or her continued compliance with conditions of an order in circumstances that do not amount to a breach of the order. An example is when an offender on an extended supervision order living in the community may have to stop taking his medication on advice from his doctor, due to adverse side effects. The offender's inability to take the medication could mean that they are no longer able to be adequately supervised in the community. However, currently under the Act the only way the State could apply for a continuing detention order would be if the offender was convicted of a breach of the order. The amendments to section 14 now mean that the State of New South Wales can apply for a continuing detention order if there are "altered circumstances" such that adequate supervision can no longer be provided in the community. This will ensure that the community is able to be protected in these instances, rather than waiting for the offender to breach his or her order. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde) [1.00 p.m.]: I wish to make a brief contribution in relation to the Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2010. At the outset I congratulate the Minister for bringing the bill to the House. I think it is a very sensible amendment, primarily because the bill proposes that the court must be satisfied that it is more likely than not that an offender poses an unacceptable risk of committing a serious sex offence before it can make an order. When you contrast that with what currently exists, it seems it will be a lower threshold and one that is more amenable to the judiciary. It will definitely provide a lot more comfort to members of the community, who should not be fearful of serious sex offenders who have not undertaken or have refused to undertake rehabilitation whilst in jail being let out after a period of 10 years. They still pose a risk if they have not been rehabilitated and they should be the subject of orders. We should not have laws operating in New South Wales that allow them to be released and pose a risk to the community.

This is a very sensible amendment. I have one question to which I would like a response. Obviously this amendment has arisen because there was a difficulty in interpretation of the present legislation. Does the Parliamentary Secretary know how many applications that have been made to the Supreme Court on behalf of the State during the operation of the current legislation have been refused because, for example, the threshold was not met? I would be interested to know that because obviously there was some trigger that resulted in this sensible amendment being brought before this Chamber. Apart from that, I support the bill.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI (Fairfield) [1.03 p.m.]: In discussing the bill I would like to refer to the increased importance of victims' views in the criminal justice process. The Sentencing Council recommended that the views of victims should be able to be considered in relation to applications under the Act. The Sentencing Council considered that the views of victims could particularly assist the court in circumstances where they might be aware of events not known to the authorities of relevance to any ongoing danger to themselves or other members of the community. The council recognised that being notified of an application may bring back painful memories for victims or give rise to concerns about their privacy or safety. As such, this reform is limited to victims on the victims register and allows them to make a statement containing their views about the order and any conditions to which the order may be subject. In recognition of the fact that not all victims will want to make such a statement, the making of such a statement is optional.

It may interest members to know that there has been ongoing and extensive use of the serious sex offender provisions by the Government since their introduction in 2006. As at 29 November 2010, 27 offenders were the subject of extended supervision orders, one offender was the subject of an interim supervision order and two offenders were the subject of continuing detention orders under the Act.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of the expansion of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to also hear breach proceedings. The reforms made by this bill will allow proceedings for the offence of breaching an extended supervision order or an interim supervision order to take place in either the Local Court or the Supreme Court. Currently, proceedings can only take place in the Local Court. The reason proceedings can now take place in the Supreme Court's summary jurisdiction is that it is envisaged that sometimes when there is an allegation that the offender has breached their order, the allegation will be so serious and the case so strong against the offender that the State may decide that the offender's order should be immediately revoked. If the State makes such a decision, it can now have the breach offence and the revocation application heard in the same court, rather than having to lodge proceedings in two courts.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.05 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Epping, Heathcote, Ryde and Fairfield for their contributions to the debate. I note that the Opposition is not opposing the bill and I also note the strong support for the bill by the member for Ryde and his congratulations of the Attorney General. A number of issues were raised in the debate and also by the Legislation Review Committee and I will deal with them now.

In relation to the Legislation Review Committee's query as to why the wording of the test is being changed, there are several reasons for the change recommended by the statutory review of the Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Act 2006. Firstly, the statutory review of the Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Act 2006 carefully considered the issue. The review found that the new test is clearer and avoids the confusion that currently exists over what is meant by the term "likely". Secondly, and this also answers a concern raised by the member for Epping, the new test is the same as that which exists under the Victorian equivalent piece of legislation and is similar to the test that exists under the Queensland legislation. This means that all three eastern seaboard States will have a substantially similar definition, which will assist in the development of a cross-jurisdictional body of case law. Thirdly, there is merit in having the same test across the three States as the schemes are similar in nature and designed to achieve the same aim, that is the protection of the community through the management of serious sex offenders.

An issue was also raised about the definition of "serious sex offence" being retrospective. The primary object of the Act must be kept in mind: to provide for the extended supervision and continued detention of serious sex offenders so as to ensure the safety and protection of the community. A "sex offender" is defined as "a person who has at any time been sentenced to imprisonment following his or her conviction of a serious sex offence". It is clear then that "serious sex offence" is one of the most important terms in the Act. By its very nature this provision must operate retrospectively in order to include existing high-risk recidivist sex offenders from whom the community should be protected. Common sense dictates that an offender's risk of committing a further serious sex offence cannot be determined unless there has been a prior serious sex offence.

In relation to the aspect of retrospectivity raised by the Legislation Review Committee, historic sexual offences, particularly historic child sexual offences, have become an important area for law enforcement and prosecution over the last decades, and without law reform and the development of policing methods to deal with these cases, large numbers of disturbing offences would go unpunished. It is appropriate to include aggravated forms of sexual offences from before 1989, despite the lack of a legal definition of these at the time, in order to ensure that dangerous sex offenders cannot escape the serious sex offender regime on the basis of a legal loophole. It should also be noted, with reference to the committee's concerns about procedural rights and unfairness to the offender, that the serious sex offender process is not a criminal one but a civil one aimed at community protection. Different procedures from what would be required in the case of a criminal trial are appropriate.

The member for Epping and the Legislation Review Committee raised issues relating to victims' views. The Sentencing Council recommended that the views of victims should be able to be considered in relation to applications under the Act. The Sentencing Council considered that the views of victims could particularly assist court in circumstances where they might be aware of events not known to the authorities of relevance to any ongoing danger to themselves or to other members of the community. The council recognised that being notified of an application may bring back painful memories for victims or give rise to concerns about their privacy or safety. As such, this reform is limited to victims on the victims register and allows them to make a statement containing the views about the order and any conditions to which the order may be subject. In recognition of the fact that not all victims will want to make such a statement, the making of such a statement is optional.

Earlier in debate the member for Epping raised concern about the use of the word "person" in the legislation. He suggested that the use of the word "person" in section 21A is unclear. This section deals with victims' statements. It is clear that only a victim, as defined in the Act, is capable of making this statement. Section 21A (1) sets out the category of victims who can make this statement, and that includes each victim of the offender or, if any such victim is under 18 years of age or lacks legal capacity, that person's parent or guardian. The member for Ryde referred to applications. As at 29 November 2010, 26 offenders were the subject of extended supervision orders, one offender was the subject of an interim supervision order, and two offenders were the subject of continuing detention orders under the Act. In answer to the inquiry of the member for Ryde, under the existing Act no applications have been refused. Some orders have been supervision orders as an alternative to continuing detention, but no application has been refused.

This bill makes important reforms to the serious sex offender regime in this State created by this Government back in 2006. It implements recommendations made by the New South Wales Sentencing Council and arising from the statutory review of the Crimes Serious Sex Offenders Act 2006. These recommendations will ensure that the Act continues to meet its paramount objective of ensuring the safety and protection of the community whilst also encouraging serious sex offenders to undergo rehabilitation. This Act is an important and effective tool in the Government's management of the risks posed by convicted sex offenders who have completed their sentences. These amendments will ensure that applications under the Act can be made flexibly and fairly.

I will respond now to the issue raised by the Legislation Review Committee. These amendments will enable a continuing detention order to be sought in relation to an offender already made subject to a supervision order whose circumstances have altered to the extent that adequate supervision is no longer provided by the order. The amendments will also enable breach proceedings to be brought in the Supreme Court, which I think answers the point raised by the Legislation Review Committee. In addition, the amendments will ensure that the Supreme Court has all the necessary information it requires to make a decision in relation to an application under the Act, such as having regard to the views of the victim and the original sentencing judge, and any report made by Corrective Services as to the extent to which the offender can reasonably and practically be managed in the community. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

Bill declared passed and returned to the Legislative Council without amendment.

ROAD TRANSPORT (DRIVER LICENSING) AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Message received from the Legislative Council returning the bill with an amendment.

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

[Assistant-Speaker (Ms Alison Megarritty) left the chair at 1.13 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of Motions**

General Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.22 p.m.]

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I direct my question to the Premier. Given that over this term alone, her Government's financial incompetence and her political backflips have cost taxpayers \$800 million on projects such as the failed Rozelle metro, Tcard, Tillegra Dam and electricity consultants, without a single new train or hospital to show for it, why should anyone believe that re-electing Labor will fix the State's problems?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Today we have very good economic information on the State.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Oh!

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Members of the Opposition groan because they do not want to hear the good news about seven consecutive quarters of economic growth in New South Wales. The State's consistent economic performance is due to the Government's investment in public infrastructure.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: The Government has reformed the planning system and accelerated projects, which has resulted in jobs being delivered for the State. Seven consecutive quarters of economic growth cannot be said for Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria. Indeed, what happened in Victoria? It went backwards while New South Wales posted yet another quarter of economic growth. That is fantastic news for the New South Wales economy. The New South Wales Labor Government is growing a \$400 billion economy. The State final demand data demonstrates that.

When it comes to public transport, these are the facts: the Epping to Chatswood project—delivered; duplication of the Cronulla line—done; Millennium trains—delivered; 122 OSCars—already delivered; free shuttle buses in Sydney and Wollongong—delivered; pensioner concession tickets on private and public buses—delivered; equal fares on private and public buses—delivered; removal of tolls from the M4—delivered; new Metrobus routes for 640,000 more journeys across Sydney—delivered; 450 new buses in service—delivered; the South West Rail Link—under construction now; and the MyZone fares are making public transport easier and cheaper for commuters.

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

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: Wasting money!

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: When I mentioned reducing fares for commuters, the member for Willoughby interjected that it is wasting money. Will she commit to the MyZone fares structure, or will the Liberals do what they did with the airport rail link? We all remember the airport rail link. The Leader of the Opposition stated in *Hansard* that he told the ABC it was a Coalition achievement. He is very proud of the airport rail link. He promised it would come at no cost to taxpayers but ultimately it cost the State \$800 million. That is what the Liberals-Nationals deliver when they are in office.

The Government wants to know whether Mr O'Farrell's supposed commitment to independent costing of election policies is anything more than a stunt. Will he commit his policies, should he ever develop any, to the independent Parliamentary Budget Office? We all know that the Leader of the Opposition has released a plan and we all know that the document "Start the Change" promises not one new bus, not one new train or ferry, not one new kilometre of road, not one new police officer, not one new child protection service, not one new respite service for disability, not one new teacher, not one new nurse and not one new hospital bed.

In fact, he is promising to take apart national health reform, shut down 488 hospital beds and give the money back. We all remember his brilliant negotiating strategy during the Council of Australian Governments health reform. When the Commonwealth Government was offering less money he said, "Sign up!" When the Commonwealth Government put more on the table, he told us to walk away. It is no wonder that the last time the Coalition occupied the Treasury benches we had six consecutive budget deficits. Today we welcome the good news for New South Wales—seven consecutive quarters of economic growth.

MAJOR EVENTS

Mr MATT BROWN: My question is addressed to the Premier. Will she update the House on the 2011 major events calendar?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Just yesterday we launched the 2011 New South Wales events calendar, which features a spectacular line-up of events including the largest Picasso exhibition ever staged in this country and the world premiere of *Doctor Zhivago* to which we are all looking forward. Sydney is always home to Australia's great events. Sydney and other places in New South Wales are always the places to be in the summer. This year the events will be bigger and better than ever. The State will be boasting more than 80 ticketed and free events that will be staged exclusively in Sydney and regional New South Wales next year. There is truly something for every New South Wales family in the 2011 events calendar—*Doctor Zhivago*, Picasso, *Mary Poppins*, Vivid Sydney, the Elvis Festival, the Sydney Festival First Night, the Wintersun Festival that now has a new home in Port Macquarie, the Sydney Telstra 500 V8s about which I will have more to say in a moment, the Rugby Union Tri Nations and the new opera on Sydney Harbour. The list goes on and on.

It is no wonder that last night at the Sydney Opera House the global entertainment icon and AIDS ambassador, Bono, spoke glowingly of the can-do attitude of Sydney. Obviously, he has never met any Opposition members, because they have a can't-do attitude. They exhibit a can't-do attitude. While 30 new events have been added to the events calendar since Events NSW was created by this Government, the member for Manly wrote on his blog that he would rather watch re-runs of *I Dream of Jeannie* than attend the Vivid Festival.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Perhaps it shows his lack of sophistication in culture, or maybe he simply likes talking the State down. The Leader of the Opposition, who announced "shadow EOI programs", talked down our great convention and exhibition infrastructure.

Mr Michael Daley: Shadow expressions of interest.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Shadow expressions of interest indeed. Members opposite cast a long shadow.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Fortunately the world is not listening to members opposite.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: We are focused on New South Wales.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: As we all know, Sydney has been voted the best festival and major events city in the world. The Leader of the Opposition can interject. He cannot stop this from going on the record. He would do well to congratulate the city of Sydney, the metropolitan region of Sydney and indeed this Government because Sydney is the major events capital of the world.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Of the world?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Yes.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Members opposite do not realise it. As the Minister for Tourism—who is responsible for major events—knows, recently in America Sydney was awarded the best festival and major events city of the world. Members opposite are always talking the city and the State down. On nine occasions Sydney has been recognised by the readers of *Condé Nast* magazines as the best city in the world. All we get from members opposite is negativity and criticism. Frankly, the city deserves more, and it is getting more because it is all on in Sydney this December. I encourage people to attend events this weekend. There is a great line-up of events: the V8 Supercars, Guns N' Roses, Annie Leibovitz, and the entombed warriors. It is all on in Sydney in 2011.

REGIONAL HOSPITAL UPGRADES

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. With \$800 million wasted in this term alone, a figure that could have built eight Bathurst hospitals, have regional communities such as Port Macquarie, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Dubbo, Parkes and Forbes not received the long-promised but never delivered hospital upgrades due to waste and incompetence over 15 years of Labor?

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I simply say this: compare and contrast. This Labor Government has rebuilt or upgraded nearly every major hospital in New South Wales. What is the Coalition's record? The Coalition closed 30 hospitals when it was last in government.

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The people of New South Wales and the communities affected, including my community of Marrickville, have not forgotten that. Clearly, the Leader of The Nationals has some difficulty with economic literacy and understanding budget papers. It is not difficult to look at the 2010-11 budget and see the Government's commitment to capital works. Funding has been allocated to commence major new projects such as the redevelopment of the Dubbo and Wagga Wagga hospitals. I think they were on the member's list. They are in the 2010-11 budget. I think the Leader of The Nationals mentioned Tamworth. In the 2010-11 budget there is a maternity upgrade and cancer centre for Tamworth. Did I hear the member say the Central Coast and the North Coast? The 2010-11 budget provides for new and expanded cancer care centres on the Central Coast and the North Coast. The member did not bother to look at what the budget papers provided before he made his claims.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Leader of The Nationals has ignored the new \$257 million hospital in Orange. Last time I looked, Orange was in regional and rural New South Wales. Narrabri hospital will be redeveloped. Again, I think Narrabri is in regional and rural New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. The member for Orange will stop smiling.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Leader of The Nationals would do well to do a bit of homework. The Coalition would do well to do a bit of research and policy development. Not only are members opposite completely ignorant of what is in the budget papers, we know that the Coalition's policy document does not say anything about these capital works programs for regional and rural New South Wales. That document is only one page! Did the Leader of the Opposition say anything in his reply to the budget? He had an opportunity to say what he would do for health services in regional and rural New South Wales. Was there any mention of regional and rural health services in his reply to the budget? No, there was not. Coalition members have been exposed for what they are: members who ask cheap questions and take cheap shots because they have no commitment to making any substantial change for the people of regional and rural New South Wales, let alone the people in metropolitan New South Wales.

HIV-AIDS

Mr NICK LALICH: My question is directed to the Minister for Health.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. Hansard cannot hear the member for Cabramatta.

Mr NICK LALICH: How is the New South Wales Government increasing awareness about HIV-AIDS?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I thank the member for Cabramatta for his interest in this important area of health. Many members are wearing red ribbons because today is World AIDS Day. Last night the Premier and the Prime Minister were joined by U2's Bono and the Edge as the Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge turned red to mark World AIDS Day. Our iconic buildings are part of some 80 landmark buildings across the world that are turning red to mark Product Red, the landmark campaign to promote awareness about the fight against the AIDS epidemic. World AIDS Day reminds us that millions of people have lost their lives to HIV-AIDS, and that it continues to affect men, women and children across the globe. Product Red has raised some \$US150 million to help fight three of the world's most devastating diseases: HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. HIV-AIDS programs funded through these initiatives have touched the lives of more than five million people in countries such as Rwanda, Ghana, Zambia and South Africa.

People die from this disease every day, but they do not have to. As Bono highlighted last night, initiatives such as Product Red help us to aspire towards a world where HIV-AIDS is eliminated. I am sure many members of this House would share that aspiration. Twenty-two years on from our first World Aids Day, Australia can be proud of what we have done to fight against HIV-AIDS—its prevalence in Australia is low by world standards. We have managed to avoid the significant increase in HIV transmission rates seen recently in many other Western countries, because of our successful health policies and prevention programs.

In 2010-11, the Government is investing some \$110 million in direct efforts to prevent HIV, sexually transmissible infections and also hepatitis C, and to provide treatment and support for people living with or affected by those conditions. Approximately \$46 million was spent directly on prevention and control activities. This has proved to be a very sound investment. Independent analysis concluded that the HIV prevention program prevented some 45,000 HIV infections and 2,750 deaths in New South Wales. The report also found that for every dollar invested in HIV-AIDS prevention and awareness campaigns, the New South Wales Government saved \$13 in direct clinical care costs. Not only is it the right thing to do from a social point of view, but it is also economically sensible.

While our response has been effective we should never forget that any new HIV infection is one too many. We must remain vigilant in our efforts to contain and reduce the spread of HIV, to provide care and support for people who live with HIV-AIDS, and to deal with the economic and social impacts of HIV-AIDS. Partnerships will be crucial to continue these efforts. Through organisations such as ACON and Positive Life New South Wales, the Government works closely with affected communities. In tackling rates of HIV-AIDS in New South Wales, the Government is also partnering with researches and healthcare providers. While today those programs are an accepted part of our public health measures, many of us can still remember in the early days the hysteria and ignorance that occurred with regards to the AIDS epidemic.

HIV-AIDS was first identified in Australia in 1983 and in the first year the number of cases rapidly increased by approximately 540 per cent. They were days of ignorance and hysteria from some people. There is no doubt that the effective HIV-AIDS response in Australia would not have been possible if bold governments at that time were not prepared to be both proactive and practical to take measures to address the disease. Neal Blewett, the health Minister in the Hawke Government at the time really was ahead of his time and deserves tribute for being prepared to be an advocate and to put in place practical, humane and compassionate policies to deal with HIV-AIDS. Today we have cause to be grateful because our rates are so much lower because of the action taken at that time. [*Time expired.*]

BELMONT BABY DEATH

Ms PRU GOWARD: I direct my question to the Minister for Community Services. Will the Minister commit today to having the case involving the death of a baby in Belmont in December 2007 re-investigated, after revelations that a whistleblower, a caseworker from the Department of Community Services, had submitted

a warning report recommending an urgent risk assessment of the family but that was never passed to police or the Child Death Review Team? Given his report could have significantly changed the then murder investigation, will the Minister have the case re-investigated? Or, will the Minister cover it up? I have his affidavits if the Minister would like access.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: This is a terribly sad case that occurred three years ago. I ask members to listen carefully, in particular the member for Goulburn. Despite investigations by the Coroner and the New South Wales Ombudsman, the cause of death could not be determined and the baby may have been still born. In fact, this little baby probably never took a breath. I will repeat this just to make it absolutely clear.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will listen to the Minister in silence.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: Separate investigations by the Coroner, the police and the Ombudsman have been carried out and not one of those experts or professionals has ever identified any grounds to substantiate a charge of murder—

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

Ms LINDA BURNEY: —or found any basis to support the allegations of a cover-up.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: He does not have access to the case worker.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: If you can just hold your tongue for one minute, you will find out.

The SPEAKER: Order! A question has been asked on a serious matter and the Minister is giving her answer. I again ask members to listen to the Minister in silence.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: How utterly irresponsible of the member for Goulburn to start smearing a family with the gravest of possible charges, all without a shred of evidence to support such a charge. The member for Goulburn evidently launched this crusade against this family not only without evidence but also without any thought of what those kinds of allegations do to the other children in the family. They do not deserve this. I know from some of the letters I have received from the member for Goulburn that she fancies herself as a bit of a social worker. She now seems to think she is also a judge and a jury.

Ms Pru Goward: Point of order: Standing Order 129—it was a very direct question: Will the Minister re-investigate the matter?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. The Minister's response is clearly relevant to the question.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: The allegations of a cover-up in this matter are simply absurd. Community Services conducted an internal review to examine whether there was anything the agency could learn from this case because there are always things we can learn, or might do differently with the benefit of hindsight. We recognise that and that is exactly why a review of this case was conducted. The Opposition knows all of that because it has a copy of the review report. The Opposition requested information under freedom of information and it was provided. The Opposition also asked questions on notice, which were answered. So where is the cover up? Where is the secrecy? The internal review focused on the way the case was managed prior to the tragedy. Community Services was never made aware of the pregnancy, nor received any reports about the existence of the unborn baby, until the discovery of the body. The mother in question kept her pregnancy to herself.

All information about this case, including findings of the Coroner and police were provided to the Child Death Review Team. Furthermore, all of the Community Services information about this family was provided to the Special Commission of Inquiry. Where is the cover up? It would be laughable if it were not so horrifying to think that the member for Goulburn is holding herself up as ready to take on the responsibility of the Community Services portfolio. Families in New South Wales be warned! I am aware that the employee of Community Services was quoted in a media report. I am concerned about confidentiality. The investigation of that staff member had nothing to do with this case. This matter was completely unrelated to the death of the

baby in Belmont. Any allegation of that kind is serious and an investigation was undertaken. The findings of that investigation led to disciplinary action, which was eventually settled in the Industrial Relations Commission.

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: I address my question to the Minister for Rural Affairs. How is the Government supporting infrastructure and services in regional areas?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Away we go.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, away we go, as the Opposition has said. Labor was born in the country and Labor is very proud to deliver for country New South Wales—and that is what we have been doing.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We have been delivering for country New South Wales through things like the Building the Country package and through our roads funding packages, and that is in stark contrast to those opposite who are trying one of the biggest pre-election cons on country New South Wales that we have ever seen. In this year's budget alone, the New South Wales Government announced a record \$4.7 billion for roads. That included a \$3.5 billion investment in rural and regional roads. The Government is spending 73 per cent of the total roads budget on rural and regional roads, including a number of key roads around New South Wales such as the Princes Highway, the Pacific Highway and a variety of other roads around the State. We have also been investing in CountryLink. In 2009-10, \$175 million was provided for maintenance and other works to the country regional network as part of the capital programs.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Coast will come to order.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We have seen patronage of CountryLink trains increase by 7.6 per cent.

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

Mr STEVE WHAN: The member for Willoughby is talking about closing things on CountryLink. Who was it that closed the Cooma railway line? It was the Coalition who closed that down and many other railway lines around country New South Wales. As the Premier has been reading extracts from the Opposition's Start the Change document for the last few weeks, I have been waiting with bated breath to hear about all the policies for rural and regional New South Wales. But I have been sorely disappointed. There is nothing for country New South Wales on agriculture and very little on regional development. In fact the only regional development policy is a grand plan to give people who move to the country—wait for it—\$7,000. But first read the fine print, because to get the \$7,000 you will have to sell a house in Sydney. In the Coalition's policy: renters need not apply. They do not want renters in country New South Wales; it is only if you have a Sydney house that they want you in country New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides of the House will come to order.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Earlier we heard the Deputy Premier talking about investment in rural health. We are seeing the redevelopment of Narrabri, Orange and Wagga Wagga hospitals, and, of course, we have seen Queanbeyan hospital in my home town. What do we have in the Coalition's health policies? Not a single dollar for country and regional New South Wales—nothing at all in Start the Change. Imagine how excited I was when I saw on Andrew Stoner's website, "Start the Change: Make Regional NSW Number One Again". I thought, "Wow, here it is, a regional policy!" I opened it with great excitement and I found it had a different cover page, "Make Regional NSW Number One Again", and it had a different cover letter, this one signed by Andrew Stoner, not Barry O'Farrell, but not another page was different. It is full of platitudes about Sydney transport, but no doctors, no new nurses, no country hospitals, no country roads, no police stations—no commitment to anything. What do I see the Coalition candidates in country New South Wales doing?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: That is embarrassing.

Mr STEVE WHAN: They are out there saying, "We have all these infrastructure things we are going to do with our new fund"—or "we could do with our new fund", because it is going to be determined by a so-called independent—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order. The member will state his point of order.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: I am being interrupted, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: If that is going to be the criteria, we will not do anything today! The member will state his point of order.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: My point of order is Standing Order 129.

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

Mr Adrian Piccoli: The question was about what the Government is doing for regional New South Wales.

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

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can understand why the member for Murrumbidgee is embarrassed about a program that sees Coalition members going around and promising everything but nothing at the same time.

STINGRAY CREEK BRIDGE, NORTH HAVEN

Mr PETER BESSELING: My question is directed to the Minister for Roads. What funding support will the State Government give to the communities of Camden Haven for the urgent replacement of the Stingray Creek bridge?

Mr DAVID BORGER: I thank the member for Port Macquarie for his question. I recall the member bringing this matter to my attention when I first became Minister for Roads. In fact, I recall visiting the site and looking at the bridge with the Minister for Local Government, and the member's request and the administrator's request to assist with that particular project. For the benefit of the House, Stingray Creek bridge is under the management of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council. I am told that the bridge serves as a primary link between North Haven and Laurieton, south of Port Macquarie, and it carries about 9,000 vehicles every day. This bridge is in a severe state of disrepair and the council has been forced to impose a load limit of 18 tonnes, restricting commerce in the area.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Your administrator wouldn't fix it.

Mr DAVID BORGER: The member is back from London—he is back from the Benny Hill school of governance in London. I am glad he is back to talk about local issues.

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

Mr DAVID BORGER: I am sure a lot was learned about governance, visiting the Queen.

Mr Andrew Fraser: You could learn a hell of a lot over there, young boy.

Mr DAVID BORGER: You should listen to Barry. That is the fact. Barry wanted you to stay and you should have stayed.

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

Mr DAVID BORGER: The member for Port Macquarie tells me that this has had major impacts for bus and truck operations in the area. Based on engineering advice I have received from the Roads and Traffic Authority, I also understand that it is not viable to make repairs to change the bridge to improve its load and capacity. It is clearly apparent, given the history of the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, that it was too busy spending millions of dollars on the Glasshouse in the main part of town rather than attending to essential infrastructure.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Murrumbidgee that he is on three calls to order.

Mr DAVID BORGER: I appreciate the advocacy of the local member in raising this matter, bringing it to my attention and trying to find a solution for the local community, despite the many delays that that council had in working out a solution for this bridge. In recognition of the local and regional significance of the Stingray Creek bridge to the Port Macquarie area, the New South Wales Government previously committed a special grant of \$3.2 million to assist the council to replace the bridge. Now that the council has completed its environmental assessment and design for the bridge, the cost of replacing the bridge is approximately \$10 million to \$15 million, a cost that would have been less if they did not build the Glasshouse. They have had those costs verified by the Roads and Traffic Authority.

At a recent meeting with the member for Port Macquarie and the administrator of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, I obtained a commitment that the council can build the bridge for \$12 million. Based on this commitment and given the importance of maintaining access for those 9,000 motorists each day, I am prepared to provide an additional \$2.8 million on top of the \$3.2 million already committed to council to provide a 50 per cent contribution towards the replacement of the Stingray Creek bridge. However, I want to make it clear that this additional \$2.8 million contribution will need to be offset by the deferral of other non-critical activities from the program in the Port Macquarie area. I am happy to work through these details with the member for Port Macquarie and the Roads and Traffic Authority.

GREAT WESTERN HIGHWAY UPGRADE

Mr RICHARD AMERY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Roads. Would the Minister update the House on the progress of the Great Western Highway upgrade?

Mr DAVID BORGER: I thank the member for his question and interest in the matter. Since 1988 this Government, in partnership with the Federal Government, has invested over half a billion dollars in the upgrade of the Great Western Highway between Emu Plains and Mount Victoria. As part of this year's State budget we will be investing a further \$174 million into the highway, supporting around 480 direct jobs and nearly 1,500 indirect jobs across the State.

The results of our investment are clear for everyone to see and it has delivered major improvements in travel and safety for commuters along the Great Western Highway. I am pleased to report that just two weeks ago, the member for Blue Mountains, Phil Koperberg, commemorated the completion of the first two stages of the \$220 million upgrade of the highway at Lawson with the local community. I acknowledge Phil Koperberg's efforts in working with the community while these works took place. This was a difficult job. The road runs through a national park and there are many unique opportunities and constraints and many sensitive heritage conservation and preservation precincts. I acknowledge the genuine work of the local member and the Roads and Traffic Authority in resolving those issues with the local community.

We are working as quickly as possible to complete the full four-lane duplication of the highway east of Katoomba by the end of 2013. This stands in stark contrast to the Coalition's genuinely piecemeal efforts before Labor took office. To achieve the Government's objectives, a further \$250 million has been allocated to upgrade the highway between Mount Victoria and Lithgow through to 2014. Of that, \$30 million will be invested to deliver a number of safety improvements around Victoria Pass and Mount Victoria, including the installation of median barriers and road widening. This funding is further demonstration of how the Federal and New South Wales Labor governments are working together to deliver infrastructure. It happens across the State, but it may not always be this way.

I say to communities that are worried about future roadworks that the largest single threat to new roadworks is the election of a Coalition government. We know that the two Andrews from the North Coast do not have a plan for the Pacific Highway, despite the fact that it runs through their electorates. The community is entitled to ask: What is the future for the Great Western Highway? I am afraid we already have the answer. When he is not attacking the Government's \$500 million-plus investment as "piecemeal", the member for Oxley has repeatedly vowed to stop the proposed highway upgrade to Lithgow if the Coalition wins the 2011 election. By my calculation that makes him the first shadow Minister in history to go to an election with a policy of negative spending on roads.

Put it this way: The Coalition has committed no funds towards roads and no funds to a shadow roads budget, or even shadow roads or any road in the State. Therefore, the starting position is zero dollars on roads in New South Wales. If they rip a further \$250 million out of the budget that means the Coalition is starting with negative \$250 million. Is this Goldman Sachs or an alternative government in New South Wales? Of course, we

all have nothing to fear because the Coalition has this whiz-bang infrastructure fund, the original magic pudding. We see the magic pudding pop up in country and rural newspapers full of criticism. The solution is the magic pudding—no commitments; not a dollar committed to any of these projects.

I know the member for Oxley reacts badly to scrutiny, even from the Pacific Highway task force, but I ask him to reconsider his plan to abandon the Great Western Highway roadworks and to commit to the completion of the current major roadworks as a matter of urgency.

WATER PRICE INCREASES

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: My question is directed to the Minister for Water. How can the Minister possibly justify slugging Sydney residents with further water price increases despite the fact their bills have already skyrocketed since he wasted almost \$2 billion on an unneeded desalination plant? With this track record why should voters return a 15-year-old Labor Government that has so comprehensively failed on waste and cost of living pressures?

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: I thank the member for her Dorothy Dixier. I will begin by drawing members' attention to how the Opposition works when it comes to water reform or action. When it is tough, they walk out. Mention the Murray-Darling Basin and they are out of there. They will not build the Tillegra Dam and they will not go anywhere near it. When it comes to the really tough business the Opposition is just not ready to govern. That is the problem. I will give members a little background regarding what is happening in Sydney Water and the Government's achievements in Sydney.

The New South Wales Government has acted for many decades to improve the Sydney water system. We have the best system in the country and we are delivering the best service in the country. We have the best outfit in the country looking after Sydney, Wollongong and the Blue Mountains. We have a world-class outfit looking after dams, recycling, desalination and water efficiency. They win awards for what they do. That is how they contribute to the Metropolitan Water Plan, a plan that has set up Sydney for decades to come. The people of Sydney should be very proud of the results we have achieved.

The Sydney Catchment Authority has completed engineering works on all the dams and we are now taking water from the deepest part of the dams if necessary. In 1998 work began on stage two of the Warragamba Dam safety program and \$200 million-plus has gone into looking after that dam. The Metropolitan Water Plan provides water for people and the environment. From 1 July this year, new variable environmental flows have been released from Cataract, Cordeaux, Avon and Nepean dams. We have a very proud record of delivering for Sydney.

Let us talk about recycling. Greater Sydney is home to about 20 recycled water schemes, the largest residential, industrial and environmental schemes in Australia. We are now recycling 33 billion litres of water every year and we are on track to hit our target of 70 billion litres by 2015. We have some of the largest recycling projects in the country. Australia's largest residential recycled water scheme is at Rouse Hill. Let me talk about my wonderful desalination project, the best thing since sliced bread. The award-winning, wind powered desalination project is the biggest water infrastructure project completed in New South Wales since Warragamba Dam was built 50 years ago. This massive infrastructure project was delivered on time and on budget.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. The question was about how struggling families in Sydney are going to be able to afford future water price increases. I ask the Minister to get back to that fact.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will hear further from the Minister.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: I was getting so excited about the fantastic gains we have achieved across the system. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Authority [IPART] sets our prices. Part of the IPART process is that funds are allocated to support those people who require help. We support those in need and we are delivering what people are looking for in this system. We have some very proud achievements in Sydney Water and some outstanding results. Over 5,400 properties across 17 villages in the region have been provided with an improved wastewater service as part of the Priority Sewerage program. This is where the money goes. We put the money into infrastructure across the entire basin. We have built many priority sewerage schemes in the past 10 years. Over 2,800 properties across eight villages are currently being provided with an improved wastewater service, at Agnes Banks, Londonderry, Appin, Glossodia, Freemans Reach, Wilberforce, Hawkesbury Heights and Yellow Rock. Planning has commenced on other areas.

We in the Sydney Water portfolio are very proud of our outcomes. We are still one of the most cost-effective and supportive water bodies, in terms of helping those people who require assistance, in the country. Sydney Water is one of our great successes and an award-winning outfit. I will have to check, but I believe we built the desalination plant not only on time but also under budget. We are doing what the people of Sydney require from us in the most cost-effective manner.

TILLEGRA DAM

Ms SONIA HORNER: My question is directed to the Premier. Will the Premier update the House on the community's reaction to the Government's decision not to proceed with Tillegra Dam?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I acknowledge the advocacy of the member and of her colleagues the member for Charlestown, the member for Newcastle and the member for Maitland—all members for the Hunter—in ensuring that the concerns of their communities were heard as we went through a robust merit-based assessment planning process.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: This was one of the most detailed and comprehensive environmental assessments undertaken in this State. The Government has refused planning permission for Tillegra Dam. Levies collected to fund the Tillegra project will be returned to Hunter Water customers. Members will be further interested to hear that the Government will waive stamp duty on any buybacks of acquired lands with buyback clauses. As was the case with Bickham Coal and with all major project assessments, our independent, merit-based assessment process has delivered the right result. We reached that decision through this process. The Government examined the least cost option for a bulk water supply in the Hunter. It was found wanting on environmental grounds and it has been rejected. Doing it through this process instead of some kneejerk reaction means that the decision is final.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: The communities of the Hunter now have certainty on this issue. Our decision has been welcomed by those communities and by environmental groups. The Wilderness Society writes:

This is a momentous decision for the Keneally Government.

This is a great day for the Williams River.

We are pleased to hear this dam option will never be tabled again.

We welcome the invitation to work with the NSW Government to develop new ways to secure water supplies for the Lower Hunter.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Opposition members do not believe in an independent merit-based assessment process. They are happy to take Hunter Water rates, to put them into an infrastructure fund and to continue this tax on Hunter Water customers. Opposition members still do not have a water plan for the Hunter. They want to take money from Hunter Water customers and put it in a fund. They do not know for what purpose that fund will be used and they do not know who will govern it. When the Leader of the Opposition is asked these questions he says, "Can't you just take me on trust?"

No, Hunter Water customers and members of the Hunter community cannot take him on trust. They know that this is an idea the Leader of the Opposition came up with in the car as he drove up to the Hunter, and he was roundly condemned by Hunter radio and by the Newcastle *Herald* for this Sydney-centric approach. They call him a Sydney-centric politician with no ideas. Those Opposition members who are interjecting are saying that they opposed the Tillegra Dam proposal. Is it clear that their position is to oppose the Tillegra Dam proposal? Opposition members now remain silent. What has happened? Will the Tillegra Dam be put back on the agenda?

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Murrumbidgee that he is on three calls to order.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: There is evidence to show that not everybody in this House is happy about the Tillegra decision. Last night the member for Tweed is reported in *Hansard* as stating:

As an Opposition member I was disappointed at the announcement by this Government that it would be shelving the Tillegra Dam proposal.

It is coming back!

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order. My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. There was no reference in the question of the member—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I remind the member for Murrumbidgee that he is on three calls to order.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Opposition members refuse to commit themselves to ruling out the Tillegra Dam.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: They refuse to outline their infrastructure fund. If the member for Tweed has his way Tillegra Dam will be back on the agenda.

Question time concluded at 3.15 p.m.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

The Clerk announced the receipt, in accordance with section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, of the Auditor-General's Report for 2010, Volume Eight, received on 1 December 2010.

PETITIONS

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

Northern Rivers Area Health Service

Petition opposing job cuts from the Northern Rivers Area Health Service, particularly Grafton and Maclean hospitals, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Identity Concealment Legislation

Petition requesting support for the Summary Offences Amendment (Full-face Covering) Bill 2010, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Religious Education and School Ethics Classes

Petitions opposing the proposed ethics classes and requesting continuation of the scripture classes, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell** and **Mr Victor Dominello**.

Coffs Harbour Showground

Petition opposing certain proposals in the draft master plan and land use strategy for the Coffs Harbour Showground land, prepared by the Land Property Management Authority, received from **Mr Andrew Fraser**.

Sydney Harbour Planning

Petition requesting an inquiry into development processes on the Barangaroo site and the creation of a dedicated Bays Renewal Committee to coordinate redevelopment around Sydney Harbour, received from **Mr Richard Torbay**.

Coffs-Clarence Local Area Command

Petition requesting increased police numbers in the Coffs-Clarence local area command and provision of a 24-hour-a-day police presence in Yamba without cutting police services to other areas of command, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Clarence Electorate Police and Community Youth Club

Petition requesting the establishment of a police and community youth club in the Clarence electorate, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Grafton Bridge Site

Petition requesting the consideration of certain matters before the determination of a preferred site for a new bridge over the Clarence River at Grafton, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Grafton Bridge

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

Mental Health Services

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

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**.

Barangaroo Planning Guidelines

Petition opposing the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority proposal to modify Barangaroo planning guidelines, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Empire Bay Substation Proposal

Petition opposing the construction of the proposed substation at Empire Bay and requesting that it be constructed on a more appropriate site, received from **Mr Chris Hartcher**.

Main Road 217

Petition requesting major road upgrades on Main Road 217 specifically between Excelsior Parade to Bay Street, received from **Mr Greg Piper**.

Pet Shops

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

Offshore Gas and Oil Exploration

Petition opposing the proposed application for offshore seismic and drilling exploration for gas or oil of the east coast of New South Wales, received from **Mr Greg Piper**.

The Clerk announced that the following Minister had lodged a response to a petition signed by more than 500 persons:

The Hon. Frank Sartor—Burrill Lake—lodged 27 October 2010 (Mrs Shelley Hancock).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Reordering of General Business

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [3.18 p.m.]: I move:

That the General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) given by me this day [North West Rail Link] have precedence on Thursday 2 December 2010.

It is important for all members of this House to commit to the North West Rail Link in the next term of government, irrespective of who wins the next State election. This infrastructure is necessary to the people of Sydney—not only to people in north-west Sydney but also to people in the greater Sydney area. Currently, thousands of people get in their cars or try to get on an overcrowded bus. Having this rail option will improve the public transport options for everyone.

Mr Andrew Stoner: And the traffic congestion.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: As the shadow Minister for Roads said, it will also improve the traffic congestion. I am interested to know whether Government members with electorates in western Sydney will vote in support of this motion. Whether or not they like it, transport expert after transport expert has accepted that the most important pieces of transport infrastructure in this State for the future are the North West Rail Link and the South West Rail Link.

The Liberal-Nationals Coalition has committed to both rail lines in a first term of government if it is elected. The Labor Party must do the same. It has the opportunity to debate this motion and to show its cards once and for all. For the benefit of members it is worth repeating the sorry history of the announcement of the North West Rail Link. It was first announced by Bob Carr and Carl Scully in 1998 and was supposed to be completed by this year. It was fully funded. It is interesting that the current Premier and Bob Carr, being 12 years apart in office, said exactly the same things when they announced their respective transport plans being fully funded. The North West Rail Link was first announced in 1998 to be completed by this year. Obviously that did not happen. It was then delayed in 2005 and the Government said, "We will build it by 2017." It was axed altogether in February 2008. It was then promised in March 2008 by another Premier, Morris Iemma, but as a North West Metro at a cost of \$12 billion. We remember that much money was spent at that time on glossy brochures and television advertisements raising community expectations.

The North West Metro project was axed in 2008. This year the State Government issued its ninth transport plan in 15 years—it is interesting that in 15 years of Government Labor has released nine different transport plans. However, this most recent transport plan was perhaps the most devastating for residents of the north-west and greater Sydney because the State Government has not committed to giving a cent of funding for that rail link until 2017. The Labor Government is asking people to re-elect it in March next year for another four-year term, but will anybody in the north-west see a cent of funding go towards the North West Rail Link? No. They will have to wait until at least another election, if the Labor Party is to be believed, for a single cent to go to the construction of that rail link. I mention also the highly regarded transport expert, Ron Christie—perhaps one of the most well-regarded transport bureaucrats we have had in this State—who broke his eight-year silence last year to talk about transport infrastructure in this State. This credible expert was appalled by the State Government's position on this matter, and for him to comment on the record is a big deal. On 6 April 2009 he said:

The point I am making is that we're not doing anything to deal with the source of the issue, which is that vast tracts of the north-west and south-west do not have access to public transport.

In regard to the CBD Metro he said:

We're proposing to spend money in places that do not fix the problem.

These are not the comments of a politician, nor are they the comments of a member of the Liberal-Nationals Coalition. These comments are from a highly regarded senior transport expert who has worked on all sides of politics for the betterment of public transport in this State. Members opposite do not need to believe us; just listen to the experts. The Labor Party refuses to do what is in the best interests of the people of this State. When Premier Keneally announced the North West Rail Link and her big transport plan in February this year she was extremely dishonest because I have just outlined to the House the history of this project. On 21 February the Premier said:

Land has already been purchased along the corridor of the new rail line and I'm pleased work would begin in 2017—

She was pleased that work would begin in 2017—

—well ahead of previously flagged dates.

The Premier says that 2017 is well ahead of previously flagged dates when she knows that her predecessors said the rail link would be constructed by the end of this year. The Premier needs to apologise to the people of New South Wales and to commit her Government to the construction of the North West Rail Link.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.23 p.m.]: The New South Wales Government and, indeed, the Premier and the Minister for Transport, have shown on a number of occasions that the Government is delivering transport infrastructure for the people of New South Wales through its 10-year fully funded \$50.2 billion Metropolitan Transport Plan. This plan will deliver real results to the people of Sydney for the next 10 years and far into the future. The Metropolitan Transport Plan is a comprehensive transport strategy for Sydney that delivers the key infrastructure and rolling stock needed to support growth in Australia's only global city. The plan is a 10-year \$50.2 billion package of transport infrastructure. Most importantly, the plan is fully funded and affordable. The Government is prudently rolling out a plan over 10 years to ensure secure delivery of this infrastructure and to preserve the State's triple-A credit rating.

I am advised that the plans have been sensibly spaced over 10 years so the Government will be able to afford to deliver all aspects as promised. Over the next 10 years projects in the Metropolitan Transport Plan will strengthen the City of Sydney's concept by enhancing links to the regional cities of Parramatta, Penrith and Liverpool as well as other strategic centres. This will enable the Government to support urban renewal and employment growth in locations with existing or planned transport capacity. Key projects such as the Western Express and City Relief Line will provide new express train services from Richmond, travelling through my electorate, Penrith, Blacktown and Parramatta.

The Metropolitan Transport Plan includes more than \$4.5 billion for a Western Express CityRail service to provide faster and more frequent services from western Sydney to the city. The Western Express project involves the construction of a City Relief Line within the Sydney central business district and is fundamental to unlocking capacity for service improvements across the CityRail network, including the addition of a North West Rail Link. These projects will provide additional capacity where our rail network is most constrained and will also play a critical role in supporting other rail expansion projects such as the North West Rail Link and increasing capacity across the entire network over time. The 2010-11 budget allocates \$30 million for design of and planning for the Western Express rail service. I am advised that new rail lines cannot simply be plugged into a system that already has existing capacity constraints and bottlenecks. A logical staged approach has to be taken to maximise the benefits of any new additions to the network. The construction of the Western Express and—

Mr Michael Richardson: Point of order: I have been listening to the member for Riverstone with a great deal of interest.

The SPEAKER: Order! What is the member's point of order?

Mr Michael Richardson: His comments are not relevant to the issue the member for Willoughby raised, which related to debating that a motion on the North West Rail Link have precedence.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Castle Hill will resume his seat. I have extended him a little latitude as a retiring member. However, I will not extend him any more. The member for Castle Hill will resume his seat now.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: The construction of the Western Express and City Relief Line is the best means by which to provide the capacity needed to maximise the benefits of the new lines and has been given priority as a result. This project is already planned. That is why this motion does not need to be debated tomorrow. The North West Rail Link would link into the North Shore line, which currently is close to its maximum capacity. Building the North West Rail Link would add only eight additional trains per hour to this corridor. If the North West Rail Link were built prior to the City Relief Line, these capacity constraints would limit the number of trains able to travel beyond St Leonards in peak periods. The Opposition comes up with a plan to debate an issue about building a new railway line that is not going to be able to link into anything that can actually take the trains from that new railway line. Once again we end up with the usual cart-before-the-horse mentality that the Opposition displayed the whole time it was in government.

An example of that was in my area where the M2 led into a flush-sealed two-lane road with a wide shoulder. When I raised with the then Minister for Transport—I understand that the current Leader of the Opposition was his chief of staff at the time—what would happen at the end of the road because we needed a road to link into it, he said we could wait another eight years. At that rate we would have the link road built some 8 to 10 years after the construction of the M2—a road with nowhere to go. The same thing will happen with the North West Rail Link. Opposition members want to build a railway line that will go nowhere. The motion is not supported.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 41

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

Noes, 48

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Business Lapsed

General Business Order of the Day (for Bills) No. 3 and General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) Nos 1155 to 1163 will lapse on Thursday 2 December 2010 pursuant to Standing Order 105 (3).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing Orders: Routine of Business

Motion by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That standing orders be suspended to provide for the following routine of business after the motion accorded priority at this sitting:

- (1) matter of public importance;
- (2) private members' statements at the conclusion of the matter of public importance;
- (3) the Speaker to leave the chair at the conclusion of private members' statements;
- (4) the Speaker to resume the chair at 7.30 pm for the presentation of valedictory speeches; and
- (5) the House to adjourn without motion moved at the conclusion of valedictory speeches.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

National Health Reforms

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.38 p.m.]: As we reach endgame of this Parliament, we realise that the people of New South Wales will have to decide on who will govern them from March next year. There is no more important challenge for any government than to deliver equity of access to the latest and highest quality medical care. Modern health care is the most complex undertaking the human race has ever embarked upon. The mantra of right treatment, right place, right time has never been more appropriate, but it remains a challenge for all levels of government worldwide. That is why members need to discuss the health of the people of New South Wales.

We need to know what the Opposition plans to do if it wins government. The previous Coalition government banned all health workers from speaking out about their concerns relating to health care. Like every other health worker in New South Wales, courtesy of the then Liberal Minister, I received a letter with my payslip pointing out that I would be sacked if I ever spoke to the media. The health Minister at the time, Peter Collins, sued a health worker, Dr Michael Ryan, who spoke up about under-resourcing the needs of children with disabilities. Services for developmental disability were moved from Health to Community Services in 1989, with no consultation whatsoever. It was only with the advent of a Labor Government that the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care was created. That is why we need to talk about health care today.

Members opposite have spent 16 years talking down the New South Wales public health system, while we have some of the healthiest people in the world, we have been increasing the amount of money we spend on hospitals and we have been employing significantly more doctors and nurses. That is one reason that health care has become one of the biggest employing sectors in the country. We are treating more people and our hospitals are becoming more efficient; indeed, they are very efficient compared with the OECD rates of getting people into and out of hospital. Ninety per cent of the 70,000 people who were treated in the New South Wales health system in 2009, when asked about their care by an independent observer, rated that care as good, very good or excellent.

This is why we need to talk about health today. We want to know whether members opposite will do a Baillieu. Will they tear up the agreements initiated by the Federal Labor Government that have been in place since 2007—agreements that have resulted in long-overdue funding increases and allowed us to announce 439 extra beds? What do we know about care in Australia? The Americans review international care using the Commonwealth fund. The most recent report, which is available on the internet, stated:

Overall, Australia rates highest on healthy lives, scoring first or second on all of the indicators.

On indicators of patient safety, efficiency and equity, New Zealand, Australia, and the U.K. continue to demonstrate superior performance, with Germany joining their ranks of top performers.

This is hardly a basket case; it is hardly a failing system. Members opposite repeatedly make such claims, yet there is no objective evidence on which to base them. The main reason we do so well in New South Wales is that, like the rest of Australia, we have access to universal health care. This remains a challenge for all governments for the future. That universal health care, which was introduced by a Labor Government, is still

opposed by members opposite. That is why we need to talk about health care today. So what is the policy of members opposite in New South Wales? They have a simple commitment to a management restructure. Not one more dollar, not one more nurse and not one more social worker, cleaner or doctor—just more administrators. The Coalition would do well to heed the advice of the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association. This week the Executive Director, Prue Power, said:

If these two large states back out, or even just one of them, it will have the potential to destroy much needed work in bringing national consistency to healthcare financing and performance.

If elected, what will the New South Wales Coalition do with national health reform? The people of New South Wales have a right to know. Today is the day. That is why we need to talk about health care today.

Belmont Baby Death

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [3.43 p.m.]: The Opposition's motion should be accorded priority today for a number of reasons. It is about the potential cover-up of the circumstances surrounding the death of a child—a death that began as a murder inquiry. It is about the values at the heart of public administration in New South Wales and the balance between the political interests of the Keneally Labor Government and the interests of the people of the State. It is about what happens when a Government operates on the principle of money throwing—it is easier to throw millions of dollars at a deep and disturbing problem than it is to change government practices and culture. Surely nothing should be of more concern to the New South Wales Parliament than the death of a child and the standard of public administration in this State.

Today the Minister defended the mother—a mother the Government thought worth helping when it had the chance. Today it is about the child. The Minister has refused to reopen the inquiry, despite the evidence in the affidavit. The Department of Community Services is quoted in this morning's *Daily Telegraph* admitting that files from the Key Information Directory System [KIDS] database were never passed on to police, and a Community Services spokeswoman as saying that staff cooperated with the police but officers had never asked for the file. So whatever the Government says it did in the case of the Belmont baby, it did not pass on the relevant files from the only caseworker who dealt with the case in the run-up to the baby's death.

It is true that the Belmont baby's death occurred before the Wood commission of inquiry. I am sure the Government will wave away the astounding revelations of the caseworker, Mr Wayne Lewis, and say that it is all history because it is pre-Wood. But in the Opposition's view the new revelations could easily have been part of the Wood inquiry and could have led to some very different considerations, and even recommendations. These would go to the heart of the Westminster-style public service—that the best public administration is at arm's length from government, is apolitical, and is not there to consider the political interests of its political masters but, rather, the public interests of the people of New South Wales. Let me remind the House of the circumstances that led to the Wood inquiry. That inquiry followed the tragic deaths of two children known to the Department of Community Services.

In the wake of Keep them Safe and the Wood recommendations, the number of children in out-of-home care continues to grow, and the deaths continue. The transfer to the nongovernment sector has stalled and the Minister has admitted that her department cannot respond to the number of level 1 referrals it receives. Now we are looking at a claimed cover-up by Community Services following its failure to protect an unborn child who subsequently died shortly after birth. The claim has been made by an experienced caseworker who knew the case. Apart from the tragic loss of a young life, I am worried about the nature of the disclosure of this alleged cover-up. It has taken a courageous Community Services caseworker to blow the lid on this because, rather than admit to the endemic nature of problems within the department, everything possible was done to sideline this worker rather than let the truth be known.

It is not the first time a Community Services worker has come to me saying that they have complained about a process or a lack of response, or that they have been shut down and sidelined. They come to me begging for confidentiality. The allegations made by Mr Wayne Lewis are astounding because of his courage and his preparedness to be named. They are astounding also because they identify four facts in the circumstances surrounding the death of that baby. Not only should the facts have justified a face-to-face meeting with the mother before the birth, which might have saved the child's life, but also they are relevant to the inquiry into the death. These facts were never provided to the police, and that might well have made a difference in the coronial inquiry.

As I said, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that the department had never offered to give the information to the police. The facts are as follows. First, when the mother rang for emergency housing she did not divulge that she was six months pregnant. This is highly unusual because pregnancy is a priority for emergency accommodation. What was she afraid of? Secondly, when she went into labour she did not seek to go to the hospital. Again, what was she afraid of? Thirdly, when the baby was delivered she did not call an ambulance, and neither did her partner. Again, why were the pregnancy and the birth concealed? What was she afraid of? The partner had been in prison months earlier and did not know the mother was pregnant. That was reported at the time, but it is almost certain that no DNA check was made on the baby. Surely these were relevant facts for the Coroner. Surely the family's history of homelessness, domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse was also relevant.

Wayne Lewis could have provided those facts because he knew the family. He recommended that the family be investigated properly. Those outcomes would also have been of great interest to Justice Wood. He might have asked how the public of New South Wales could possibly have confidence in a department and a Government that are so driven by the imperatives of political headlines that they might have been prepared to cover up what they knew about the circumstances leading to a newborn baby's death. I commend the motion to the House.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

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

Noes, 38

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

CONTRACT CLEANING INDUSTRY (PORTABLE LONG SERVICE LEAVE SCHEME) BILL 2010**LONG SERVICE CORPORATION BILL 2010**

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

TILLEGRA DAM**Personal Explanation**

Mr GEOFF PROVEST, by leave: I wish to make a personal explanation. Earlier today the Premier made reference to my comments about the Tillegra Dam. I make it quite clear that I do not support the Tillegra Dam project.

NATIONAL HEALTH REFORMS**Motion Accorded Priority**

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.56 p.m.]: I move:

That this House expresses its support for national health reform, which will deliver over \$6 billion in funding and 488 beds to New South Wales.

The decisions made at the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] meeting held on 19 and 20 April are historic. For many years the rhetoric between the State and Federal governments was traditionally a barrier to progress but finally some progress was made. Under the agreement the Commonwealth became, for the first time, the majority funder of public hospital services, providing 60 per cent of funding. The Commonwealth has full funding and policy responsibilities for general practice and for primary health care in areas outlined in the agreement, and takes on full funding policy, management and delivery responsibilities for a national aged care system.

New and existing Federal bodies will provide national oversight of hospitals and health services, including setting an efficient price for public hospital services and monitoring performance and clinical standards. As the aphorism goes: You manage what you measure. New South Wales, like other State and Territory governments, will remain responsible for system-wide public hospital service planning and performance and the purchasing of public hospital services and capital planning. It will support the Commonwealth responsibility for system-wide general practice and primary healthcare policy and service planning in coordination with the agreement.

We need to remember that while the Commonwealth Government's initial reform proposal justified the need for serious discussion and debate, the Commonwealth offer fell short of what New South Wales wanted and needed. Premier Keneally led the detailed negotiations and she won on each of our key points. Premier Keneally achieved a better financial outcome for our health system and a better outcome for the residents of New South Wales. She achieved pool funding arrangements to ensure that funding could be directed to best meet the needs of New South Wales families. She achieved block funding for small rural hospitals so the services can continue to be provided to rural communities that do not have economies of scale. She achieved protection from any future New South Wales clawback.

In April 2010 COAG agreed to a \$3.4 billion funding package nationally to improve access to public hospital services. That is \$1.2 billion for New South Wales, which means more beds and planned surgery and better access to emergency care. To give effect to the COAG agreement, New South Wales signed the national partnership agreement on improving public health services on behalf of the people of New South Wales on 19 July 2010. In exchange for this extra funding, New South Wales has signed up to achieve national access targets for waiting times in emergency departments and waiting times for elective surgery, and to improving access to acute and subacute care in hospitals. New South Wales is already reaping the benefits of the health reforms, and 488 new beds will be opened across the State during 2010-11. To date, a total of 439 beds have been announced, and I will provide advice as to the location of those beds later in the debate.

I repeat: A total of 439 new beds have been announced. That is a tangible example of real improvements to our hospitals due to national health reform. Some 107 of those 488 beds are subacute beds, and by 2013-14 New South Wales will deliver and operate an additional 428 subacute beds, with additional Commonwealth funding of \$527.4 million over four years. Hospitals will use this funding to increase access to

subacute care. The services include rehabilitation, palliative care, mental health and geriatric services in both hospitals and community. The reforms will also increase capacity in the public hospital system by freeing up acute care beds for those who need them and will assist in reducing pressure on emergency departments. The New South Wales health system has never faced a greater challenge. We have a growing and ageing population and rapidly rising medical costs, and we are now at tipping point. Without fundamental reform, the health system is unsustainable into the future. That is why this historic agreement is so important.

We do not know what the Coalition stands for in health because it has not announced what it plans to do with regard to Federal-State relationships if ever it is elected to government. In Victoria the Coalition opposes national health reform, just as it opposed the introduction of Medicare. These people have form. They closed 30 hospitals in seven years when they were last in government in New South Wales, privatised health services at Port Macquarie—the hospital we paid for twice—and sat in silence while John Howard ripped a billion dollars out of the Australian healthcare system. Tony Abbott is determined to wreck health reform. He is opposing the Gillard Government's legislative agenda, with the collusion of those opposite. He opposes local health networks, e-health, Medicare locals and aged care one-stop shops. He opposes reforms that will improve the health system for patients, their families and carers.

Under the reforms, the Commonwealth will become the dominant funder of health as a result of the Council of Australian Governments agreement and New South Wales will receive an extra \$1.2 billion over four years, starting this year. New beds and equipment would not be possible without the Commonwealth Government's funding. In fact, if steps were taken by a future Coalition Government to unwind that funding, the \$1.2 billion would be placed in jeopardy and we would lose most of it. The Commonwealth has also guaranteed that under the National Health and Hospitals Network no State government will be worse off. In order to give effect to this commitment, the Commonwealth has guaranteed top-up funding of \$15.6 billion between 2014-15 and 2019-20—with \$5 billion for New South Wales. This long-term funding is at risk if Tony Abbott, Barry O'Farrell and Ted Baillieu have their way. "To do a Baillieu" will become part of the lexicon of the health professions for tearing up an agreement after you get into government, even though at no stage during your campaign did you announce that that is what you were planning to do.

The Liberals are determined to wreck the public health and hospital systems in the two most populous States. They have ideologically driven actions, and always have since the advent of Medicare. The Coalition has failed to grasp the long-term benefits of national health reform. It wants to return to the blame game. It would do well to heed the advice of the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association that I quoted before. Ms Prue Power said:

If these two large states back out, or even just one of them, it will have the potential to destroy much needed work in bringing national consistency to healthcare financing and performance.

Hospital costs grow at 10 per cent per annum. They will grow at 8 per cent per annum over the medium term, which is well above the annual indexation rate. We need to work with the Commonwealth forever. Those opposite have yet to indicate what they will do with Federal-State relations. Today is their day to say what they are going to do about health.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.03 p.m.]: May I say at the outset that for more than 10 years the New South Wales Liberals and The Nationals have been calling for genuine health reform, and we are still very much committed to moving in that direction. I remind the House—as the Parliamentary Secretary and member for Macquarie Fields knows—that we released our first health policy in March 2009. It was about getting rid of the huge area health services and bringing in a flatter structure with districts, and creating district health boards comprising community members and doctors so that there is local involvement and local control of health. We also said that we would extend clinical networks to enable referral patterns between specialists to continue across geographic boundaries.

The Government spent the next year pillorying that proposal until Mr Rudd stood up and announced the Council of Australian Governments reforms, which were based very much on local involvement. It is simply nonsense to say that the Coalition does not support reform. However, we point out that no government in Australia has signed up to the financial arrangements proposed in the Federal health agreement. It is prudent to await more details. We have always voiced our concerns about handing over GST funding, especially when there are no details from the Commonwealth with respect to what the efficiency cost will be.

When the Premier and the then Prime Minister talked about the Council of Australian Governments reforms, they said in media commentary that it was going to be 30 per cent. But the communiqué from the

reform negotiations refers to an agreed amount. What are we expected to sign up to? Is it going to be 35 per cent or 40 per cent? Do we give away money when we do not know what the deal is or how New South Wales patients will benefit? Will it compromise the financial position of New South Wales, and indeed patient care? You would not buy a house without knowing how much it is going to cost or without inspecting the property and getting a structural report. I do not believe the State Government will sign an agreement until it receives a report on the costs involved.

There is no detail before the public on the exact rate of GST. There is no detail as to what the efficiency cost will be. There is no detail as to how local health networks [LHNs] will link with primary healthcare organisations. When will primary healthcare organisations and boundaries be announced? They have not been decided yet. Another disquieting question is why the Keneally Government has added its own new layer of bureaucracy through so-called clusters—the three geographical regions. Clinicians are raising the alarm with me. Is this just a barrier between real involvement by local communities in the running and funding of their local services and the head office of NSW Health? There are grave concerns about that issue. The Parliamentary Secretary spoke about health concerns over many years. He is correct. He knows very well that before he was elected to this place he was among those who, in 2006, sought out me and the Leader of the Opposition at a shadow Cabinet meeting in Camden to raise concerns about the public health system. At the time he was a doctor working in a public hospital and he expressed concern that Labor was running down the health system.

What has the Coalition done? We have led the way in formulating the idea of local involvement and local health networks, which we call districts. We have said that we will engage local doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and other local people with the right credentials to be involved in those networks. I am pleased that that idea has driven the Government's new policy approach, although many concerns remain. We are concerned about not only the new clusters that will get in the way of local involvement, but also the idea that the chief executives of these so-called networks will report to two masters—that is, the board, which is our preference, and the director general. How can you report to two masters? That is nonsense; it is simply unacceptable. The local control to which the Government is paying lip service will be lost.

Turning to the \$6 billion—the so-called "new" money—the value of the new money amounts to less than 9 days per year, that is \$1.2 billion, of what it costs to run the hospital system in New South Wales. That is hardly reform! The total funding is similar to the annual amount, plus growth, that would have been negotiated through the normal Commonwealth-State healthcare agreement—the health specific purpose payment. It is \$4 billion in the 2010-11 financial year. So if we add 6 per cent each year—which has been the norm over the past decade—we see that by 2019-20 funding would be approximately \$6.5 billion. That it is more than the \$6 billion that the Parliamentary Secretary indicated will result from the new Council of Australian Governments arrangement. Every member of this place should do their sums. In fact, we are not getting extra money, we will be losing money. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all words after "reform".

We support national health reform, we think it is essential, but it is nonsense to suggest that credit should be given to the Government in relation to the other matters mentioned in the motion. The Government has closed 2,500 hospital beds since it came to office. The Department of Health's annual report released yesterday reveals there are fewer beds per 1,000 of population this year than last year. The Australian Medical Association says that over 1,000 beds are needed. Some of those new beds are recliner beds and winter beds, nothing more.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.10 p.m.]: I support the motion. The great benefits of national health reform will be at risk if the New South Wales Coalition is ever elected to government. I know this firsthand from what happened in my electorate. During the Federal election the Federal Labor Government's plan for a general practitioner super clinic to be built at Warnervale, just up the road from where I live, was opposed by the Federal Liberal candidate. The Liberal Party did not want to open an additional facility that would take pressure off Wyong Hospital's emergency department. It opposed the general practitioner super clinic. That is the Liberal Party's record at a Federal level. When the New South Wales Government came up with a plan to open an urgent care centre to take pressure off Wyong Hospital emergency, the shadow Minister criticised it and opposed it.

Two services for people in the Wyong electorate, the general practitioner super clinic and the urgent care centre, were both opposed by the Liberal and National parties. That is their record. They do not want people in our electorates to get better health, they oppose it. They ignore the fact that we have spent \$95 million upgrading Wyong Hospital. They ignore the fact that the Howard Government's funding did not keep pace with

given up? Why was Bob Carr fighting so hard for it? Why was John Brumby fighting so hard for it? I know he rolled over in the end when head office told him he had to roll over. Colin Barnett was arguing about the GST. Why were they all in favour of holding on to the GST? It is because the GST is the broadest, most reliable and stable of all taxes that are currently available to the State. Yes, it is allocated by the Federal Government, but unlike stamp duty, which is volatile, and payroll tax, which inhibits growth and is an economic deterrent in its ongoing impact on the economy, GST is efficient, stable and grows with the economy. It rewards an economy. If you manage the State well, the growth in GST goes along with it. That is why Peter Costello brought it in. The States had a mishmash of inefficient taxes and he wanted to make the States much more sustainable from a financial point of view.

That is where GST came from and now we have given part of it away. I am not going to argue that health costs are not rising; they are. I think the member for Macquarie Fields said they were rising by between 8 per cent and 10 per cent. It is a huge cost and it will not go away. The question is: How should the agreement be funded? Why has the Federal Government taken some of the GST as part of this agreement? The Australian Doctors Fund has added to the suspicion on this side of the House about what is happening with the GST. The Australian Doctors Fund, a very reputable commentator in the medical field, said:

The reforms are a mirage covered by oodles of promises of dollars. It is a GST snatch.

They are not our words, they are not the shadow Minister's words and they are not my words. That was the Australian Doctors Fund. There is more. When I was on a tax discussion panel with my good mate the Treasurer, Eric Roozendaal—I think we are good mates—I asked him specifically, "When you went down to sign that agreement with the Premier did you actually ask Treasury to model the amount of GST you were likely to give up over 20 or 30 years and see how that compared to the money you got up front?" It was a pretty basic assumption. The Treasurer said he had a bucket load of cash up front, which is terrific, but he has given away this State's share of the GST. I asked the Treasurer whether he had determined how much he was giving away in exchange for these issues: I wanted to know whether or not it was 10 times what he had gained up front.

Every member in this House would be concerned to know that the Treasurer could not answer my question. After his astounding admission it appears as though we have signed up to a health agreement without proper modelling and without knowing what we have given away. Opposition members are saying that they are supportive of health reform but the Treasurer should not be giving away GST without quantifiable numbers and background support. The GST, an efficient and good tax, is critical for the funding of ongoing services in New South Wales. The Federal Government should fund a greater share of health services; the solution to these problems is not to give away this State's share of the GST. [*Time expired.*]

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.20 p.m.], in reply: I thank members who contributed to debate on this motion. I agree with Opposition members: they are committed to reform of the health system. Health systems worldwide have to be reformed as health needs change. Our disagreement relates to the direction of that reform. Talk is cheap and blame is easy. A management restructure alone, in the absence of increased funding, without one more doctor, nurse or cleaner, will do nothing to improve the delivery of health care to the people of New South Wales. As Opposition members said earlier, they are awaiting the detail, which is akin to something from *Yes, Minister*. They really mean no. They will probably refer this matter to a committee—to a cul de sac where ideas are taken and quietly strangled.

By 2040 health will comprise 100 per cent of this State's budget, unless State and Federal governments work together to deal with the increasing health demand. I put on the record a meeting I had in 2006 with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Camden. When I was shopping at Woolworths the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was there and I met her at a shadow Cabinet meeting. I thought then what a good and decent person she was, and I confess that that is still my view. At that stage I thought also that it was a shame she could not convince me to change my mind. I am afraid that things have not changed. For that reason we will not be supporting the Opposition's amendment. Health is too important to play the blame game.

I place on the record the location of the 439 beds that have been announced: 12 beds for Prince of Wales Hospital; 20 beds for Campbelltown Hospital; 21 for Wollongong Hospital; 26 beds for Nepean Hospital; 27 beds for the Sydney Children's Hospital network; 17 beds for Sutherland hospital; 22 beds for Royal North Shore Hospital; 16 beds for Maitland Hospital; 16 beds for John Hunter Hospital; 19 beds for St George, 10 beds for Mount Druit; 16 beds for Gosford; 10 beds for Wyong; 10 beds for Port Macquarie; 10 beds for Dubbo; 13 beds for Orange; 16 beds for St Vincent's; 22 beds for Liverpool; 8 beds for Royal Prince Alfred; 16 beds for Concord Hospital; an ICU bed for Tamworth; 18 beds for Blacktown; 45 beds for Westmead; 5 beds for Bathurst; 4 special care cots at Canterbury; 6 beds at Wagga Wagga; 7 beds at Ballina; 20 beds at Coffs Harbour; and 6 beds at St Joseph's at Auburn—a significant increase in the bed base.

I repeat that when a State chooses not to sign up to the intergovernmental agreement the Commonwealth could well decide not to provide the much-needed additional top-up funding from 2014-15. It means that States that do not participate in the National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement [NHHNA] are unlikely to be considered eligible for additional Commonwealth funding—a tragedy for the people of New South Wales and a return to the blame game. It would be impossible for a Coalition government in New South Wales to deliver adequate health care after a reduction by the Commonwealth Government of \$5 billion in funding. Non-participation in the NHHNA would also condemn a State to have to find the extra funds required to fill the widening gap between the growing costs of health care and the lower indexation rate applied to the annual national health care agreement grant provided by the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth's contribution to public hospital costs would be stuck at around 40 per cent or less—a legacy of the Howard years. The non-participating jurisdictions would have to continue to fund the larger balance of at least 60 per cent of hospital costs, which is unsustainable for the people of New South Wales. A decision such as that could not be defended. We must continue our support of national health reform which will ensure sustainable funding now and for the long term, and new beds and services for patients and families. We must stand opposed to people such as Baillieu who try to tear down the benefits of these reforms. I listened carefully today to the contributions of those opposite who have not yet said that they will support these reforms. I suspect that they will do as Baillieu has done and tear up the agreement if they are ever elected to government. They must not continue to play the blame game as the health of our communities is far too important. We must move forward and work with the Commonwealth for all time. I commend this motion to the House.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

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

Noes, 38

Mr Aplin	Ms Goward	Mr Richardson
Mr Ayres	Mrs Hancock	Mr Roberts
Mr Baird	Mr Hartcher	Mrs Skinner
Mr Baumann	Mr Hazzard	Mr Smith
Ms Berejiklian	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Stokes
Mr Besseling	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Humphries	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>
Mrs Fardell	Mr Piccoli	Mr George
Mr Fraser	Mr Provest	Mr Maguire

Pair

Mrs Perry

Mr Souris

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The motion accorded priority having concluded, and in accordance with an earlier resolution, the House will now consider the matter of public importance.

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

Matter of Public Importance

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.36 p.m.]: Last week the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training announced that the New South Wales Government will spend \$8.1 million over the next four years to double funding for community languages schools funding from \$60 to \$120 per student a year. The New South Wales Government's funding boost includes a \$500,000 Community Languages Schools Grant Program to provide schools with new textbooks and resources for the 2011 school year, an additional \$30,000 for 300 volunteer teachers to undertake a fully subsidised professional accreditation course each year through university study, and an increase in start-up grants for community languages schools from \$1,000 to \$2,500 to support the introduction of new schools and language courses where there is unmet need. Funding for community languages schools now will be adjusted annually also to ensure the Government's support keeps pace with inflation. This is a first for any Australian Government.

The New South Wales Government is providing the most generous support package for community languages schools in the country, and rightly so. We are funding the most community languages schools, the most students and the most languages to support the culturally diverse community we are fortunate to share in New South Wales. Unlike other States, the New South Wales Government does not charge community languages schools rent to use public school premises. So the additional \$8.1 million will go directly towards buying new textbooks and equipment for students—exactly where the money should be going. This is in addition to support that the New South Wales Government provides already, including funding of \$410,000 each year in subsidies so community languages schools do not pay rent, investing \$200,000 each year in professional development for volunteer teachers, providing two full-time project officers and funding for two full-time professional development officers.

We are all proud of the Government's unprecedented support for community languages schools in New South Wales, which do some important work. Australia always has been culturally diverse. In addition to our nation's migration history, it is estimated that for thousands of years there were 700 different indigenous cultural groups speaking some 250 different languages. People arriving in this country as new settlers have recognised over the decades the importance of preserving their language and culture. Community languages schools were established to ensure the children of migrants across New South Wales maintain links to their heritage through language learning. However, it is more important to state now that many students do not necessarily come from a non-English speaking background but their parents recognise the value of extending their language skills to speak a second and third language other than English.

Initiatives such as community languages schools have operated in Australia for more than 150 years. Community languages schools have flourished since the first school was established in 1857. Volunteers run classes for children across New South Wales in languages other than English, often using public school facilities on a Saturday. I benefitted from Saturday community languages schools when I was in primary school and high school after undertaking Italian at Ashfield Boys High School. Languages studied at community languages schools include Arabic, Italian, Assyrian, Chinese and Greek. The people who work and volunteer in community language schools deserve our support. The Government is delighted to double the funding received by those schools. This sends a clear message about the importance of multiculturalism and diversity in our State. Information on how to apply for funds in the \$500,000 Community Language School Grants Program and the \$2,500 Establishment Grants Program will be released shortly.

As I mentioned earlier, the Government has committed \$30,000 for 300 volunteer teachers to undertake a fully subsidised professional accreditation course each year through university study. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training has assisted in establishing a certificate accreditation in community language teaching at the University of Wollongong to enable volunteer teachers to obtain professional

qualifications. I am pleased to acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the member for Wollongong. The 300 New South Wales Government-funded volunteer scholarship recipients will undertake community language school training in short courses offered by the university at various locations in Sydney or in the Illawarra. That recognises the important role of volunteer teachers in community language schools and will support high standards of teaching and language schools across New South Wales.

I know the Premier and Minister have met with peak representatives of the community language schools, including Ms Jozefa Sobski, who is the Chair of the Community Languages Schools Board, and Mr Albert Vella, who is the President of the New South Wales Federation of Community Language Schools. I am sure those two representatives welcome this wonderful announcement. Recently the Premier and Minister also visited five community language schools to meet with students, teachers and parents and see the operation of the schools firsthand. I know that the Minister for Education and Training and the Premier visited Co.As.It., which is located near the Drummoyne electorate, to meet with the President, Lorenzo Fazzini, and a number of other representatives of Co.As.It.

Co.As.It. delivers a number of Italian classes after hours to thousands of students throughout New South Wales. It ensures that a very high standard of Italian is taught both to children of Italo-Australian background and to children of non Italo-Australian background. It was great to see firsthand the fantastic work that is being undertaken not only by Co.As.It. in delivering Italian classes in out-of-school hours but also by other community language groups. Members of those groups give up a great deal of time after hours and on weekends to ensure that not only are language classes maintained in New South Wales but that children thrive through the cultural benefits of being enriched by what they learn, not only through language tuition but also through learning about the culture and history of other countries.

This is a strong Labor Government reform and I am very pleased to support it. As the State member for Drummoyne, I benefited from learning a second language, Italian, in out-of-school hours. I welcome this reform and note that outstanding funding has been contributed by the Government to community language schools throughout New South Wales.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [4.43 p.m.]: The New South Wales Federation of Community Language Schools has pioneered language diversification in New South Wales schools since 1973. Language constitutes one of the fundamental dimensions of a human being. It is not only a means of communicating thoughts and ideas but it also forges friendships and cultural ties. The New South Wales education system is unquestionably world class in terms of both its outcomes and the quality of its teaching staff. Community language schools play a large part in the success of that education system. As local institutions, community language schools are important in fostering community-wide respect for diversity and acceptance.

The New South Wales Federation of Community Language Schools has pioneered language diversification in New South Wales schools since 1973. This successful and hardworking community of passionate professionals currently operates in 350 locations throughout New South Wales and is educating more than 27,000 students. It offers tuition in more than 50 different languages. Members of the Coalition recognise and respect that the children of New South Wales being given a chance to learn multiple languages provides greater opportunities for them. Countless studies have shown that children who learn a language at a young age have a higher prospect of adopting more refined and natural pronunciation. Additionally, a child who has learnt a second language has greatly increased job prospects.

Community language schools play a vital role in the promotion not just of multilingualism but also multiculturalism. I know that all members of the Coalition are supportive of the significant role that languages play in the fabric of our multicultural society. A broad range of ethnicities, languages and lifestyles enrich our community. It is important to maintain and uphold the diversity that makes us all uniquely Australian. As a major provider of language education in New South Wales, the New South Wales Federation of Community Language Schools is well placed to highlight the importance of linguistic diversity in our education system. The federation fosters a healthy respect for languages among students and brings awareness of the links between language and community acceptance. The federation continues to ensure that language remains a vital expression of our cultural identity.

The New South Wales Liberals and Nationals will continue to support efforts to enhance the education and language skills of our students. We are confident that the Federation of Community Language Schools will continue to develop and strengthen the connection between language and community acceptance throughout New South Wales. I look forward to working with the shadow Minister and ensuring that the federation delivers

real solutions to future challenges. I draw the attention of the House to questions asked by the Leader of The Nationals and member for Oxley, Mr Andrew Stoner, on 9 May 2008. The questions state:

Does the NSW Government provide funding to the NSW Federation of Community Language Schools?

If so, how much funding has been provided for each of the last five years?

Is this funding indexed?

The answers to those questions generally were in the affirmative. I enthusiastically welcome the \$8 million announced by the Premier today, but I point out that in 2006-07 just \$70,000 was allocated to the program. There is a big difference between \$8 million in 2010 and \$70,000 in 2006-07. In the 2007-08 financial year, just \$73,000 was allocated. I pay tribute to the Chair of the Community Languages Schools Board, Jozefa Sobski, and the President of the New South Wales Federation of Community Language Schools, Albert Vella, who have done a great job. Considering all the great work that they have been doing over past years, particularly when they received only approximately \$70,000 each year for 2006-07 and 2008-09 compared with the 2010 allocation of \$8 million, we can appreciate that those two people have achieved a great deal on virtually the smell of an oily rag.

I am disappointed that the Government has taken a number of years to realise what a really great job they are doing. In contrast to the Government, members of the Coalition have recognised those efforts over a period of years. There are funding issues that remain to be addressed. I understand that the schools need electronic devices, such as whiteboards. In the context of respect that community language schools deserve, it is pertinent to draw the attention of the House to the federation's recent prestigious annual awards presentation which was attended by two members of the Coalition, the member for Ryde and the member for Lane Cove.

I am reliably informed by the member for Lane Cove that the Government was not represented on that occasion. Government members could not be bothered to turn up. That is not surprising considering that for 2006-07 the Government allocated only \$70,000 to community language schools. While I appreciate that the Government's recent allocation of \$8 million over four years will double allocations made to community language schools and welcome the increase in funding, I am a little disappointed that the New South Wales Labor Government has taken approximately four years to realise the value of community language schools. Recently the shadow Minister for Education asked the following questions:

When was the 2008 Review of NSW Community Language Schools completed?

When will this review be tabled in Parliament?

What is the reason for the delay of the tabling of this document?

The Minister's response was that there is no requirement to table the review reports in Parliament. The Minister stated:

These programs are reviewed from time to time as is deemed good practice in Grants Administration. There is no requirement to table such Review reports in Parliament.

My concern in relation to the Minister's response is the inherent veil of secrecy, lack of openness and lack of transparency. I am a relatively new member of the House, but many times I have heard Government members express their desire for transparency. The Minister's answers were provided on 6 May 2009. While I applaud the efforts of the community language schools and the achievements of hardworking and dedicated individuals, I am a little disappointed that it has taken four years for the Government to recognise their good work. As members have heard me say many times, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed—and I am 100 per cent for the community language schools.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.50 p.m.]: It was interesting to hear the member for Tweed criticise the amount of money being invested in community language schools, whether it be in 2007, 2009 or currently, considering that the previous Coalition Government invested zero. The Coalition Government gave no money and no recognition. Now members opposite want to jump on the bandwagon and try to take some credit.

Mr Geoff Provest: Why didn't you go to the annual dinner?

Ms NOREEN HAY: The member for Tweed went to an annual dinner? I live in Wollongong. I live with the community language people. I live in a multicultural society. I do not need to go to a dinner; I need to lobby for resources.

Mr Geoff Provest: They are the annual awards. They are recognising excellence.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Was the member there?

Mr Geoff Provest: No.

Ms NOREEN HAY: No, the member was not there. Community language schools are a vital part of our State and its future. I was delighted when the Premier announced last Tuesday that the Government will spend \$8.1 million over four years to double community language school funding from \$60 per student to \$120 per student each year. Wollongong is a predominantly multicultural electorate. I have dealt with the community groups, the Ethnic Communities Council and, in previous years, the special education classes provided for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. I am proud of the work that has been done. In addition, the Government has committed to a \$500,000 community language school grants program to provide schools with new textbooks and resources for the 2011 school year and an additional \$30,000 for 300 volunteer teachers to undertake a fully subsidised professional accreditation course each year through university study.

Also, community language school start-up grants will increase from \$1,000 to \$2,500 to support the introduction of new schools and language courses where there is an unmet demand. Volunteers work hard in community language schools each and every week, and their dedication deserves our support. The languages taught in community language schools across the State include Greek, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Khmer, Serbian, Sinhala, Marathi and Pukapuka. I am pleased to say that the Government's announcement has gone over well in the community languages school sector. The Chair of the Community Languages Schools Board, Jozefa Sobski, said:

NSW will now lead Australia in assisting language learning and maintenance, and this is good for our culture and good for our global future.

The President of the New South Wales Federation of Community Language Schools, Albert Vella, said:

This funding increase by the Keneally Government is a very welcome recognition of our hard work and the importance of teaching languages for the future of New South Wales.

Indeed, it is recognition of their hard work. The Keneally Government greatly appreciates their dedication. We know that when young people are able to master their background language they develop vital skills that will help them all through their lives. They have the advantage of bilingualism, which is an enormous asset in the modern world. But research shows that they are also better able to master English and other languages. There is a misconception among some people that the maintenance of a first language can interfere with the acquisition of English. However, as many members would know, research has confirmed that the opposite is true. But I believe the study of community languages delivers much more than just language skills.

We all know that a crucial part of any young person's development is building a sense of self—of who they are and where they fit in this world. Young people who have a strong sense of their identity approach life with greater confidence. Often they are better able to succeed in school and other fields, and they are less susceptible to life's knocks and challenges. Community language schools play an important role in helping young people to develop that sense of self. It is no wonder so many leaders in our communities have been involved in community language schools. The Labor Government supports our community language schools as an investment in the next generation and in the future of a diverse, multicultural New South Wales. I am proud to be a part of it. It goes some way to explaining the Australian accent. It is wonderful that the Australian accent has developed as an amalgamation of many different accents and backgrounds—we should be extremely proud of that. As the member for Wollongong I am extremely proud of this Government's investment in the teaching of languages.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.55 p.m.], in reply: I acknowledge the contributions of the member for Tweed and the member for Wollongong on this matter of public importance. I was disappointed by the contribution of the member for Tweed. I find it difficult to see how he could criticise an announcement to spend \$8.1 million over the next four years to double the funding to community language schools. I am at a loss as to how the doubling of funding per student for community language schools throughout the State can attract criticism from the member for Tweed and the Opposition. It blows me away. We all understand that this injection of money for community language schools maintains their multicultural value in New South Wales and Australia broadly.

Members opposite fail to recognise that this money is about investing in the future of this State. This has great significance. In New South Wales and abroad, maintaining community language funding and ensuring that students throughout New South Wales, whether they come from an English-speaking background or a non-English speaking background, have the opportunity to study a second and third language means that on the world spectrum New South Wales is seen as a world leader in exporting our language skills overseas. The international significance of our language schools is well known. That strengthens our trade links with most countries in the world because they know that they will find someone in New South Wales who speaks the language of their country as well as English.

I strongly reinforce that because many business chambers from different cultural backgrounds have told me that it is important to maintain and increase funding to our community language schools, as the Government has done, to ensure that these languages are maintained. It is not only about students attending out of school hours and on weekends to learn a second and third language; it is also about how that enriches our State economically and the status it gives us on the world stage. I thank Government members who strongly lobbied the Minister for Education and Training and the Premier—we heard the concerns of our respective communities and language schools—to increase funding. That is why it is fantastic that the Government has doubled the funding from \$60 to \$120 per student per year for community language schools and provided the \$500,000 community language schools grant program to provide schools with new textbooks and resources in 2011.

Funding for those textbooks and resources is much needed because they are vital for the provision of those community languages. Indeed, for the first time an additional \$30,000 is available for 300 volunteer teachers to undertake a fully subsidised accreditation course each year through university study. These volunteer teachers give up their private time to ensure that students have access to community languages outside school hours. The Government has increased the community language schools start-up grants of \$1,000 to \$2,500 to support the introduction of new schools and language schools where there is an unmet need. This is on top of the mainstream programs already provided by the Government from Monday to Friday.

Although the member for Tweed made some positive comments, the Opposition should back-pedal and recognise that the announcement is fantastic. The money will go where it is needed. The member for Wollongong said that the federation had welcomed the additional funding. The Government has recognised the fantastic work done by the federation in progressing its case for additional funding. Ultimately, that funding will go where it is needed: to students and teachers of community languages. That means that New South Wales will remain strong in providing those cultural languages and reinforcing the cultural value of having a second and third language. It means that for many generations to come students will benefit from having access to community languages education. I welcome this injection of funding into a well-deserved area.

Discussion concluded.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Debate on the matter of public importance having concluded and in accordance with an earlier resolution, the House will now proceed with private members' statements

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EAST HILLS ELECTORATE

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [5.00 p.m.]: I want to deliver a state-of-the-union speech about the East Hills electorate. A lot of work is going on in my electorate as a result of a big infrastructure boom, for which I thank the Government, Premier Iemma and Premier Rees. It is being continued by Premier Keneally. The largest commuter car park in New South Wales will be opened in my electorate before March 2011 providing 720 car park spaces, 580 of which will be reserved for commuters and the remainder for allocated timed shopper parking. I apologise to my Revesby community for the dislocation while that work has taken place but a car park six stories high, with lifts and closed-circuit television cannot be built without causing some dislocation. Thanks to the Labor Government we have the Alford's Point Bridge and we have seen the Woronora Bridge widened, the Bangor bypass widened—

Ms Alison Megarrity: Hear! Hear!

Mr ALAN ASHTON: I hear the member for Menai. I thank her particularly for her efforts. The bridge has been doubled and now more work is being carried out to widen the northern approach. I apologise to nearby residents who have to cope with the noise and inconvenience as a result of the work—it is not pleasant—but the bridge will be fantastic when it is finished. An issue that has created some dislocation in Padstow is the closure of Memorial Bridge, but it is on target to reopen in March 2011. The bridge will be integrated with the station concourse, which will improve local pedestrian access. In the past year the Treasurer has provided \$500,000 to each electorate, and more in some electorates, for the Community Building Partnership Program. One of the great passions of my life is schools. A \$7.7 million upgrade is underway at East Hills Boys High School and East Hills Girls High School will get a multimillion-dollar upgrade, which is due to commence in December 2010 with work anticipated to be completed by December 2011.

Bus commuters have also had a big win. The Panania Railway Station divides the northern and southern parts of Panania, just as the railway line does at Padstow. I have had a win with the Minister for Transport, and the Veolia bus company will provide an extra service to take people on what is called a shopper hopper, not just to the northern side of the shops where people have to walk up to Panania station, which does not have appropriate ramps or lifts, but also to the southern side. East Hills station does not have a lift, but it has easy access with good incline ramps. I pay tribute to other parts of the Community Building Partnership Program that has provided \$25,000 to the Revesby YMCA for an upgrade of the Revesby Hall and \$300,000 to revitalise Yeramba Lagoon, which for about 30 years has been smothered by terrible weeds. I congratulate Sarah Heslop who won my Christmas card competition this year and many other people who in the course of this year have won various awards from the Government. They visited my office and I presented their awards.

With the tolerance of Madam Acting-Speaker and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and because there is no time for felicitations this year, I take this opportunity to thank my wife, Linda, and daughters Gemma and Breanna for their continued support. I thank my staff Christine, Joanne and Allan who have been with me for nearly 12 years, and Sue, Myrna and Rosanna for their support this year and over the past few years when needed. I thank the East Hills Australian Labor Party branch members for their continued support and enthusiasm and I place on record my appreciation to Daryl Melham, the member for Banks, for his continued, support, advice and friendship, and that of his family.

I also acknowledge the support in this Parliament of the Whip, Gerard Martin, and Jan from his office—Jan is really the boss. I thank the Leader of the House, John Aquilina, and Priscilla of course. I thank the staff at the table, Russell Grove, Mark, Elaine and all Russell's people. I also thank Hansard. They can give themselves a big wrap. They do a great job. I thank the caterers, the people in the member's dining room who make things pleasant for us, the librarians for their assistance and finally all the members of the Government caucus for their support and making my job as Deputy Whip easier. I acknowledge the role of Daryl Maguire, Thomas George and Adrian Piccoli in making sure that things work smoothly. I thank my constituents in East Hills for their support, constructive comment and criticism, when appropriate, since my election in March 1999. I also thank the various community groups, sporting, social and licensed clubs for their support as well. I wish everyone a Happy Christmas and New Year. I hope to see everyone after 26 March 2010.

BERRYS BAY MARINA

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.05 p.m.]: The North Shore community has worked together for many, many years in developing plans for the use of former industrial sites on the Waverton peninsula including the former BP site at Berrys Bay. A community that highly rates preservation of the remnant bushland on the shores of Sydney Harbour and the retention and restoration of built heritage features, it took great care in developing the Waverton Peninsula Strategic Master Plan released in 1999. The master plan and North Sydney Council Development Control Plan 2002 and its local environment plan waterfront zone controls relating to Berrys Bay, permit only shops and offices not exceeding 50 square metres and they must be ancillary to waterfront industrial use.

So it was with a great deal of dismay that the community, including me, the local precinct, North Sydney Council and many individuals, learnt in September 2009 that NSW Maritime had announced a preferred proponent to develop the site with plans that ignore the design guidelines set out in the master plan, and the provisions of the local environment plan and the development control plan. Instead, the \$40 million proposal of Meridian Maritime, accepted by the State Labor Government, is for an extensive business park rather than a true working waterfront development. It is totally inconsistent with the commitment of former Premier Bob Carr that the site would be zoned as waterfront industrial, in keeping with the harbour's historic uses and to complement the existing use at Woodleys boatyard.

It proposes a lower level of boat repair and maintenance than envisaged in the control plans and a higher level of retail and office space than allowed in the master plan. It includes four times more office and shop space than permitted, and buildings that are the wrong shape and in the wrong place, and double the height allowed. It includes a five-storey office block, a two- to three-storey retail development, harbourside parking for 140 cars, 92 berths for boats up to 30 metres, which is three times more than the existing marina, and dry rack storage for a further 60 boats. The mayor of North Sydney and local precinct members have recently met with the Minister. I have placed many questions on notice regarding the status of the Meridian proposal. None of those efforts have allayed community fears that this proposal will proceed under section 3A, which will by-pass further community input and council control. In fact, a standard sentence appears in all correspondence from the Government, namely that:

... the Meridian proposal combines the principles of the Master plan, the North Sydney LP and DCP with contemporary maritime industry and boating community needs.

That is absolutely nonsensical. It does not combine any of the principles of the master plan or the other local controls and it is certainly outside the contemporary maritime industry and boating community needs in that part of the world. I seek an honest response from the Government regarding the status of this proposal and an undertaking that now, only three months out from a State election, it will not proceed with an agreement for lease with Meridian for this site. I attended a public meeting at Berrys Bay on 16 October 2010 which passed the following resolution:

This public meeting calls on the New South Wales Government to immediately terminate the current Berrys Bay development process because of its complete failure to work within the Master Plan for the Waverton Peninsula, a plan agreed between all levels of Government in a long and thorough consultative process.

The Government should instead work with North Sydney Council as the consent authority and the community, to plan a use of the site consistent with the Master plan, with Council development controls, with the adjacent public open space lands and with the amenity and capacity of the Waverton Peninsula.

I stand by the statement I made at that public meeting that if elected in March next year the New South Wales Liberals and The Nationals are committed to returning local planning powers to local communities through their councils. We will scrap part 3A, a wide-ranging power that New South Wales Labor has given to the planning Minister to override local communities and a factor that the Independent Commission Against Corruption noted had contributed to corruption risks in the planning process. The New South Wales Liberals and The Nationals have committed to commencing an overhaul of the planning system soon after March 2011 should they be elected to government. I call on the Government not to proceed with this planning proposal. I give an absolute commitment to my community that I will fight with all I have to make sure it does not happen.

LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL LIBRARY FUNDING

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai) [5.10 p.m.]: The New South Wales Government recognises the important role that libraries play in communities across the State. There is, of course, the Public Library Grants and Subsidies Program. Every council receives a library subsidy from the State Library of New South Wales, which is funded by the New South Wales Government. I urge certain elected members of Liverpool City Council to visit their nearest library—while there is still one close by—and consult a copy of the *Macquarie Dictionary* for the definition of the word "subsidy", which means a grant or contribution.

In 2010-11, the current financial year, the public library grants and subsidies funding increased again. The actual dollar allocation in 2010-11 is \$25.538 million, which I think in anyone's terms is a significant slice of the State Government's budget. Councils do not have to make a case to support receipt of the subsidy payments. There is a separate, competitive Library Development Grants Program that requires an application from councils, and the following priority areas are targeted by the grants: library buildings and mobile libraries; major information and communications technology projects; local studies, including digitisation; cooperative activities; innovative programs that target specific client groups; and collection development.

In 2009-10 Liverpool council received \$71,888 under the program to upgrade to wireless services in the library and to redesign service desks to improve customer service. I understand that the assessment of 2010-11 applications is currently underway and that the Library Council of New South Wales will make its recommendations to the Minister this month. I can only hope that Liverpool council has made a healthy application, as it claims that it is short of money. I note that last year many other councils received grants of hundreds of thousands of dollars, so, whilst I am very happy that Liverpool got approximately \$72,000, I hope it made every effort this year to apply for a substantial amount of money.

Turning to the larger amount—which is the library subsidy—in 2010-11 Liverpool council will receive a subsidy of \$337,183, with a disability/geographic adjustment [DGA] of \$122,510, which makes a total of \$459,693. It is probably appropriate that I define what a disability/geographic adjustment is. It is an extra weighting on the subsidy calculated according to each council's share of funding increases received since the 1990s, and relative council disability factors. The five disability factors are: the number of children under five years of age, the number of people over 55 years of age, the number of people from a non-English speaking background, council isolation, and population distribution. Councils with relative disabilities in these factors receive enhanced funding. I hope that that information will be particularly useful to one councillor who has been circulating a notice saying that Liverpool council should be recognised for the ethnicity of its population and its growth. He can rest assured that that is what happens currently. I hope he finds that informative.

At its meeting last Monday night, the council considered a motion. The implication of that motion considered by council and of recent public statements by the general manager is that if the council receives more money from the State Government it might not have to implement its new libraries plan, which involves closing several local libraries. Apparently, if the council receives this additional money it will remove the sword of Damocles that is hanging over the head of Moorebank local library, which is in my electorate. I have read the lengthy motion and the phrase that sprang to mind is the much quoted, "Lies, damned lies and statistics". According to my internet research, that phrase describes the persuasive power of numbers, and particularly the use of statistics to bolster weak arguments. Need I say more?

The second thought that sprang to mind was: If it is such a great plan—and there have been full-page advertisements in the newspaper telling us why the new libraries plan is the best thing since sliced bread—why will it be reviewed if the council gets more money? I thought the plan was supposed to be a good thing. It was quite a turn of events to read that and to discover that it is now all the fault of the State Government. The word "scapegoat" comes to mind. It made me wonder whether it might have more to do with something else I read in the *Liverpool Leader* on 24 November under the heading "Councillors plan their move". One councillor is running for the seat of Macquarie Fields and another is contesting the seat of Liverpool. Maybe that is what it is about.

I agree with Di Hallinan from Casula, who wrote a wonderful letter—which I wish I had time to quote—saying that she agreed with one councillor who said that there had been a lot of misinformation about the plan. She pointed out just how much misinformation had come out of the councillors' mouths. I realise that this may be the last time I get to raise the issue of the library plan, but I want the councillors to know that I certainly will not be going quiet on this issue. My community believes this is too important to give up on, so we will be looking to them and hoping that they will reverse the plan.

TRIBUTE TO REX MARSHALL

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [5.15 p.m.]: Today I give tribute to a life of contribution and meaning by Aboriginal elder, "Uncle" Rex Marshall, who passed away last week. As Josh McMahon wrote in today's edition of the *Clarence Valley Review*:

Uncle Rex was a respected Aboriginal elder, a champion of his people whose door was always open to anyone who wanted help, according to his family.

Uncle Rex died at the age of 67 in his home town of Grafton on Tuesday November 23, after a heart attack five days earlier. He had been airlifted to Lismore hospital after the heart attack, but returned home to Grafton to be with family after doctors said there was nothing more they could do, according to family members.

I have known Rex personally for more than 10 years. I have seen him conducting smoking ceremonies at functions and welcome to country. He was a strong advocate for mental health and was involved in Mental Health Week and any functions or forums to do with his people and the betterment of those in the community who needed help. The article continues:

Uncle Rex was especially known for his work in improving mental health for Aboriginal communities. He was instrumental in setting up services in Kempsey and later in Grafton, and has been recognised with numerous awards for his work, including an Order of Australia Medal in 1989.

Out of concern for his people Uncle Rex also held grief and loss sessions for families at Bowraville, following the murder of three Aboriginal children in the small North Coast township in 1990-91. He was involved in setting up a school for Aboriginal children at Bellbrook, and was one of the first members of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee set up by the Whitlam Government.

Most recently, Uncle Rex received an award for the Mental Health Association, as part of the 2010 Mental Health Matters Awards.

I was at the presentation and a photo was taken of me, Professor Anthony Kidman—Nicole Kidman's father—and Rex, which I took to his wife, Beryl, yesterday morning as a keepsake and which she much appreciated. The article goes on:

Shortly before his death, Uncle Rex shared with the Clarence Valley Review how he had gone down to Sydney to receive his award at the end of October, and told those gathered at Parliament that they "need to get off their bums and do something" to help Aboriginal people with mental illness.

His words were not in vain, as he attracted the attention of a prominent Sydney psychiatrist who was interested in setting up a mental health program in Grafton.

They were to meet in Grafton in November to discuss their plans, but their plans were cut short by Rex's passing. It continues:

Rex's niece, Janelle Brown, said that he was a caring Uncle who was loved by many, including his family.

"He's very caring and he was loved by all of us. He always had lots of funny stories to tell"...

Rex was a very quiet and serious man, but he had a very humorous side. The article states:

"It didn't matter which tribal area he was in—he was accepted everywhere as an Elder. He was so well known in the community, and if anyone needed help he'd be the first one there. He accepted everyone, and everyone was his family."

Uncle Rex had been experiencing ill health in his later days, after he was diagnosed with asbestosis as a result of working in the Baryulgil mine in his early years. He was also diabetic. Despite ill health, he was still regularly seen buzzing around town on his scooter.

Only two weeks ago he walked into my office to show me the award he had received a couple of weeks earlier. The article goes on:

"He was so full of life and energy. He was more interested in living his life and helping people—he wouldn't let those other things get him down", Janelle said.

Rex's sister, Carol Wilson, said her older brother loved dancing, singing and having a good time.

And he loved chatting, there is no doubt about that—he was a good talker, the old Rex, and always had a story to tell. The article further states:

Rex Marshall was born in Grafton on 16 July, 1943, the son of Jack and Elizabeth "Tottie" Marshall. Rex was one of 10 children—his siblings were Joyce, Elsie, Betty, Pat, Ralph, John, Allen, Carol and June.

He had five children with his wife Beryl—Lizzy, Faron, Pritchard, Lena and Ralph, with a number of grandchildren. His second great grandchild was born just after he passed.

His funeral will be held this Friday at 1pm at the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Bent Street, Grafton.

Rex was a man who was well respected by all in his community and he will be sadly missed. His contribution will be a legacy for many years and for many generations to come.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [5.20 p.m.]: Some constituents have asked me to reflect on road safety. I served two terms as chairman of the Staysafe committee of this Parliament, from 1995 to 1999 and from 2003 to 2007. We produced 42 parliamentary reports. The work of the committee was much more than just inquiries and reports. While the primary role of the Staysafe committee is to conduct inquiries into matters of road safety, it also has several supporting roles, including the raising and debate in Parliament and in the media of issues affecting road safety. These are all very important and complementary functions and extend the concept of Westminster-style parliamentary committees.

Among the successes of the committee—and they are stark—is the introduction of wire rope safety barriers. The Staysafe committee did not conduct a traditional inquiry and report on wire barriers. At its first meeting on Tuesday, 30 May 1995, following a multiple fatality head-on crash on the M5 motorway the previous day, the committee passed a motion that adequate and appropriate safety fencing be installed on all urban freeways and motorways, and on freeways and highways in regional and country New South Wales generally. This was an attempt to prevent crossover crashes. I met with the then Minister for Roads, Michael Knight, who was also a previous Staysafe committee chairman, as a matter of urgency. The Minister accepted the committee's recommendation.

We now know that wire rope safety barriers are used extensively across Australian jurisdictions. The flexible barrier absorbs energy and restrains a vehicle from median crossover or roadside run-off, greatly reducing the severity of crashes. These barriers have a demonstrated benefit cost ratio of 9:1, as measured over a 10-year period. Wire ropes present the lowest risk of injury and damage when a vehicle crashes into a barrier, and involve much lower crash costs compared with crashes into other barrier types. Wire rope barriers occupy less space on the road than other barriers, and thus can be used down the centre of roadways. The barriers can restrain massive vehicles such as B-double trucks, motorcycles and the smallest motor vehicles.

A significant achievement was the work undertaken by the Staysafe committee in the 1990s that led to new programs for drivers at work, and for young drivers. The committee also sponsored two major conferences on drivers at work, and the conference proceedings underpinned the development of new programs and new legislation that marries occupational health and safety concerns with road safety. These changes are best seen in the reform of the trucking industry in Australia, but they affect everyone working in the road transport and logistics chain. This is a stunning achievement that was the result of the committee's non-traditional methods—it held not an inquiry, but several conferences that brought people together to talk and to listen and to come up with new policies and programs.

But the Staysafe committee also achieved great results from its formal inquiry processes. New South Wales now has what is widely regarded as a blue ribbon graduated driver licensing system and world's best practice. The reforms introduced in 2000, following a major inquiry and report by the committee in 1995-97, were shown by recent published research to have resulted in reductions in the annual road toll for our young drivers of between 40 per cent and 50 per cent. Again, that is a stunning achievement. The Staysafe committee was also responsible for the introduction of 50 kilometres an hour urban and residential speed limits. It took seven years to get that through the Parliament, and it is a great success. I am particularly proud of the achievement of an affordable driver monitoring system for speeding and the innovation by Australian industry that resulted in the development of such systems.

I am, of course, talking about intelligent speed adaptation, or ISA. I have spoken about it many times in this Chamber. The committee saw that ISA was the way of the future and that the technology would soon be available at an affordable price. In 2006, I said the price was about \$300, but people, including road safety experts, scoffed at the idea. We know it is now a great success and, yet again, this is a stunning achievement by this committee. Finally, the Staysafe committee always focused on administration issues, and an inquiry in 2005-06 resulted in the decision by the Government to form the New South Wales Centre for Road Safety. The centre now has a world-class reputation and fulfils national and international road safety roles.

I would like to pay tribute to the committee director during my periods of chairmanship, Ian Faulks. Ian was an exceptionally experienced parliamentary committee director, and was for many years the most senior committee officer on the staff. He was the "go-to" man and he knew who was who in public transport. He retired from parliamentary work in 2007 and is now a partner with a United States based transportation safety consultancy. I have nothing but praise for Ian Faulks. He did a great job and knows a lot about road safety. He is responsible, together with the Staysafe committee of this Parliament, for saving thousands of lives.

GOULBURN ELECTORATE

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [5.25 p.m.]: I have spoken in this place before about the diversity of the Goulburn electorate. The 7,628 square kilometres of diverse climates and communities include nearly 50,000 enrolled residents, whose interests and beliefs about some things are equally diverse. I have consulted with my electorate in the four years that I have been the local member and have asked regularly for feedback about local concerns, including transport and health. In recent months, however, the prospect of mining in the Southern Highlands area has elicited a passionate response from the community, with public meetings filled to capacity. I thought now would be a good time to send out a questionnaire across the electorate to get feedback not only about the proposed mining, but also about children's services, preschools, special education and health and transport. It will certainly help me to represent my constituents better.

The questionnaire was distributed last week and results began pouring in immediately—a good sign that not only does the community care about where it lives, but also it expects its elected representatives to deliver. Respondents have diligently answered the questions, added comments, included letters and returned the forms to me in their hundreds. The post office sympathetically provides my staff with trays to transport the responses each morning, and, while I will give some feedback today about the results of the questionnaire, I know it would be premature at this stage to suggest these results are conclusive.

The respondents have so far overwhelmingly indicated their lack of support for longwall coalmining in the local area. Other people, although fewer, have indicated that mining developments should be negotiated to meet community concerns, but not stopped—and that is not surprising either. There is little argument, though, about the need for reliable transport to and from Sydney and services that go all the way to Goulburn rather than terminating at Moss Vale, as they mostly do now. The transport discussion is a chicken-and-egg one. I argue that if the services were improved the patronage would increase. The New South Wales Government's rebuttal is that there is no point in increasing the number of train services because not enough people use them. It is the sort of argument that has allowed the Government to reduce services and the number of carriages on the trains by half.

Health services also feature in the survey, although people are quick to sing the praises of health and ancillary staff. In communities such as the Goulburn electorate, people usually know the doctors and nurses who tend to them and the staff who serve their food or empty their bins. Despite the large number of people in the electorate, we still live in the country, not the city. People know each other because they bother to talk, ask questions, share information and acknowledge each other in the street. It is one of the reasons, I think, we are getting such an overwhelming response to the questionnaire.

One aspect of being a local member that I have found difficult to understand is the refusal by some local State government agencies to talk directly to me or to the staff in my office. When I visited the Bowral Community Services office I was very impressed by the staff, their competence and their concern. That visit, however, required me to get permission from the Minister, who wanted of course to know the who, what, why and wherefore before permission was granted. I asked whether I was able to contact the staff directly about any local issues. There was a palpable pause and a number of glances were exchanged before I was told "absolutely not"; all inquiries had to go through the Minister. It is that sort of attitude that, sadly, stops all us concerned locals solving local problems at a local level. I have had more luck with non-government organisations and other government departments, so all is not lost. I am very grateful for the trust that locally based workers and public servants have put in me to help out, facilitate and be generally involved, without any public embarrassment to them.

I really do not think the New South Wales Government understands the notion of country living and the importance of knowing and trusting your neighbour and pulling together. That is a quality of country town life that could be well used by governments, rather than overwhelming people with paperwork and a one-size-fits-all process approach. I have seen the paperwork regarding representations made by me to the Minister for Community Services, for example, so I know that each letter goes through no less than nine pairs of hands who together craft an appropriate—but not necessarily helpful—reply. How much quicker it would be if I were able to pick up the phone and call the local Community Services desk to ask a question.

But that is country living for you. Country people prefer the direct approach so that they can get on with the rest of their wonderful day. I acknowledge that I received a great deal of assistance with the questionnaire from local residents Vari and John Clark, who arrive at my office and take away swathes of questionnaires to collate. I look forward to their finished report. I am grateful to all those in my electorate who took the trouble to fill in and return the questionnaire to me. In this the Christmas season I refer, sadly, to the passing of two great supporters and friends of mine. Pam and Geoff Mitchell, a wonderful couple who died within 11 months of one another, were like second parents to me. I thank them for all the care and love they gave me.

WALLSEND ELECTORATE DERELICT BUILDINGS

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) [5.30 p.m.]: Civic pride in our local communities is an important issue for the vast majority of people in cities, in regional and rural areas of New South Wales and throughout the whole country. We know from Tidy Towns that there is fierce competition to make towns neat, safe and attractive. Our communities want their areas to be the best. Advocates of Tiny Towns frown on those who neglect their buildings. Members would be aware that derelict buildings create a great many problems. They become a haven for squatters, rubbish accumulates in and around squalid buildings, vandals smash windows and doors, fires are lit, graffiti artists go wild, residents in and around the building area are endangered, and the potential for loss of life is real.

How do we ensure that buildings remain safe and secure? I am not sure whether community members understand the toing and froing involved in trying to ensure that landlords meet their obligations. The procedure is as follows. A complaint is made to the local council. The council might then issue orders under the Protection

of the Environment Operations Act 1997 and the Local Government Act 1993. A notice of intention must be served and the recipient is given 28 days to respond as to why such an order should not be issued. A subsequent order must give the recipient a minimum of 28 days to act on the direction of the order. Put simply, it takes two months to get the ball rolling. The owner can then do a quick and minimal tidy up and often the whole process starts again. This takes up the time of councils and it eats into resources that could be put to better use, which is not good enough.

Why should communities and local councils have to put up with this? That is what the Wallsend community is currently dealing with. The old Salvation Army building, which is located at 22 Council Street, Wallsend, is abandoned and derelict and has an absentee landlord. The building is located next to the entrance of the main shopping centre in Wallsend. This uninviting view greets shoppers and staff alike as they enter the complex. What is the state of the building? Alison Nix, a neighbouring property owner was quoted in the *Post*, a local newspaper, as stating that she was "fearful when leaving her business at night". She said also that a number of people were squatting there, so I am not surprised that Ms Nix is fearful about wandering past the building in the evening. I have received many letters from constituents about this issue. I received one letter from Ty Brennock, a local businessman, who sums up the feeling in the area. He said:

The old Salvation Army building in Council Street (Wallsend) is a hazard, an eye-sore, and a detriment to Wallsend. The owner's neglect and carelessness is disgusting.

Wallsend, like any other electorate, has had its fair share of absentee landlords, a small number of whom have proved themselves unworthy of being Wallsend tenants due to their apathy following the 2007 storm and tempest. It is three years since that storm and tempest but I am afraid that their apathy continues. What will it take to jolt irresponsible landlords out of such complacent apathy? I am sure I am not alone in saying that legislation must be strengthened to empower councils to deal with neglectful landlords in order to produce positive outcomes for the community. It should be remembered that the community will suffer if we neglect this issue.

What can I do as a concerned member of Parliament? I have invited community members to write, phone, fax or talk to my office about the need to right this wrong. I am talking to Newcastle City Council about two options and I am happy to work with the council on those options. The first option is to rebuild and refurbish the building, at some cost to the landlord. If that is not possible the other alternative is to demolish the building, which will benefit residents and business owners in Wallsend and the Wallsend community. Business owners have had enough of irresponsible and absentee landlords in the Wallsend area.

YOUNG AND GRENFELL FLOODING

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [5.35 p.m.]: I speak today about a grim subject—the need for a natural disaster declaration in Young and Grenfell. An itinerant labourer who obtains work by following the harvests rang my office this morning and said that he was very worried. One of the pubs in Grenfell is the traditional haunt for casual labourers seeking work during the harvests. This labourer arrived in Grenfell for the grain harvest and to see what work was available before going on to Young for the cherry harvest. What he heard last night in the pub was so distressing that he rang my office this morning. A farmer said that once the drought had broken and the early rains had provided so much promise for a good harvest he had gone to the bank to get more money to upgrade his equipment. He did that in anticipation of the good harvest expected by almost everyone.

The New South Wales grain harvest was the subject of a matter of public importance discussion that I initiated on 21 September. Because of the recent rain this farmer is terribly distressed as the crop on which he had pinned so much hope is basically worthless. He said that the bank was now going to take his house and his farm and that he would be left with nothing after struggling to survive the past 10 years of drought. He said that he felt his only option was to take his 22 down the back paddock. That is most distressing. According to the Bureau of Meteorology, since 28 November—only in the past few days—Weddin shire received 184.6 millimetres of rain and Young shire received 183.8 millimetres. This rain has come at the worst time in the growing cycle of most grain crops and also for the production of cherries. Rain bands extending from Queensland to Victoria are expected to cause huge damage to cereal crops in the eastern grain belt. Mark Hoskinson, chairman of the grain committee of the New South Wales Farmers Association, is quoted as saying:

We have a natural disaster developing at the moment.

Today there have been reports of up to 2,000 acres of cereal crops being inundated, with only 5 per cent spared, of paddocks being too wet for headers, or the machines getting bogged in rain-soaked paddocks. Farmers who just weeks ago were expecting an excellent cereal crop are now wondering what price they will be able to get for weather-damaged grain. The cherry harvest, for which the Young district is so famous, has also suffered

significantly. Yesterday, ABC Rural interviewed Mr Scott Coupland, one of my constituents and President of the New South Wales Cherry Growers Association. The association's offices are located in Young. In fact, this weekend the cherry festival will be held in Young. Mr Coupland said that before the rain the annual cherry crop was estimated to be worth about \$10 million, but after the rain over the past four days many early-ripening varieties had begun to split. Mr Coupland, who is a cherry grower, said he had picked only a fraction of his cherries and he expected to struggle for the rest of the season. Yesterday on ABC Radio he said:

You know, we've been in 10 years of drought and struggling and looking for a bit of wet weather, and finally it's come when we have had a bit of moisture in the ground and the crop on the trees and everything was looking fantastic.

Unfortunately it's just another year, we're going to have to dig our heels in and struggle to get through until next year.

There's some varieties, where growers will just walk away and won't even pick.

I know I've got a block of bings.

For the benefit of members, Bing cherries are a cultivar of the wild or sweet cherry *prunus avium*, which are used almost exclusively for the fresh market. Bings are the large, dark and firm cherries that ship well—the really delicious cherries that crack open if they are exposed to rain near harvest. Mr Coupland also said:

They're two weeks off being picked, they're probably 28 mm and I looked at one tree there yesterday, I couldn't find a decent cherry on it.

That to me was probably worth about \$12 a kilogram.

Earlier today I met with the Minister for Primary Industries, and Minister for Emergency Services, and I thank him for taking the time to meet with me. I spoke with him and expressed concern about this desperate situation. I gave him with letter outlining the situation and I sent a copy of the same letter to Minister Burney, the Minister for Community Services, for her attention and consideration, as the lead agency for the Community Disaster Relief Fund.

The intervention of the State Government is needed urgently. Farming families who were looking at being able to have a good Christmas for the first time in 10 years have now been devastated. Not just farming families will feel the impact of this continuous rain; every business—small rather than large—in Young and Grenfell will be affected, and those who provide services to the farming community more than others. The local butcher, the chemist, the supermarket, the builder and the local fast food outlet that gives young kids a shot at their first job will be affected as farmers try to pull in their belts and survive for another year.

Young and Weddin shire councils have suffered damage from the rain. Weddin shire has reported low-level flooding, loss of a pedestrian footbridge and damage to many local roads estimated at more than \$500,000. Young Shire Council reports similar damage, mainly to gravel roads, estimated to be more than \$250,000. I do not have enough time to do justice to this topic. The communities of the Young and Weddin shires desperately need government assistance now. I call on the State Government to immediately make a natural disaster declaration to allow relief assistance to be provided urgently.

FAIRFIELD RELAY FOR LIFE

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [5.40 p.m.]: I speak tonight about a fantastic event in which I had the pleasure recently to take part: the 2010 Fairfield Relay for Life. I was so honoured and proud to see our community out in force supporting this worthwhile cause. This year was the first year the Fairfield Relay for Life was held at Horsley Park Showground after being held at Brennan Park, Smithfield, for the past two years. The event was attended by the patron, Ninos Khoshaba, State member for Smithfield, councillors of Fairfield City Council, representatives from the Cancer Council New South Wales and, most importantly, local brave cancer survivors, some of whom are still fighting the disease. Relay for Life is an event where teams of 10 to 15 people take turns walking or running around the local oval over a 24-hour period to raise funds for cancer research, education, support services and advocacy.

The Fairfield Relay for Life started at 10.00 a.m. and walkers, survivors and cancer patients walked shoulder to shoulder for 24 hours. The Fairfield Relay for Life creates a festival-style atmosphere around the event with participants being encouraged to pitch a tent, camp overnight and enjoy the community atmosphere. Participants were entertained with bands, food and fun. The Fairfield Relay for Life was proudly supported by Fairfield City Council and was organised jointly by the Cancer Council of New South Wales and the Fairfield Relay for Life Committee, which is made up of community volunteers. Relay for Life is all about celebrating

the courage of local cancer patients and spreading hope. Many participants in this fantastic event were people from my electorate and this event reflects the spirit and personality of my electorate of Cabramatta. More than 500 local residents took part hoping to raise \$150,000. Members of the Fairfield City Council Youth Advisory Committee took part in the event this year, a good sign for the event's future as I know this young group will continue to participate.

Unfortunately, cancer is a leading cause of death in Australia, with one in two men and one in three women diagnosed with cancer before the age of 85. It is great that a special event such as the Relay for Life is held not only to raise vital funds and support for the cause, but also to advocate and promote the importance of cancer prevention and treatment. I was honoured and extremely grateful to be a part of this year's Fairfield Relay for Life and I hope to see the event continue to grow. The sense of community that the people of my electorate and the wider local government area of Fairfield share shows that we are always willing to lend a hand, no matter what the cause. That is why I love my electorate of Cabramatta and its people.

I place on record my thanks to Lee and Allanah Filappi for organising this event, the Cancer Council for its tireless efforts to reduce the impacts of cancer on the community, and all the volunteers who assisted with the Relay for Life. I thank the Youth Advisory Committee of Fairfield City Council, which has shown its support for the event by joining the organising committee to assist. Youth Advisory Committee members also worked extremely hard behind the scenes to encourage residents to participate in the event so that the target amount could be raised. In 2008, \$36,000 was raised, in 2009 this figure was doubled and \$80,000 was raised, and in 2010 more than \$100,000 was raised. These funds will help with cancer research, education, support services and advocacy and will bring us one step closer to one day finding a cure for cancer.

MANLY ELECTORATE

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [5.44 p.m.]: Tonight I shall talk about the 2010 highs and lows in the Manly community. As a whole, it has been a fantastic year and the community remains a group of which I am incredibly proud to be part and to represent. We have had some successful wins this year. The fast ferry came to fruition and has been an incredible turnaround for this community. It is more reliable and affordable and provides better customer service. I thank everyone who was involved in helping to save this service as an alternative to the old JetCat service for those who remember. The impact of this service on community support has been phenomenal. The service faces challenges; the Government tried to jeopardise it recently by kicking it off wharf 6 after passenger numbers increased, which is the only reason I can put forward. I urge the Minister to reverse the decision to enable the fast ferry to operate from wharf 6. It is beyond belief that a highly patronised service has been pushed aside without coverage and wharf 6 remains empty. I ask the Government to listen to my request to reinstate the fast ferry service from wharf 6.

I am pleased that the Minister for Health responded to pressure, supported by local fundraising results, and has guaranteed to provide funding for Bear Cottage to get a brand-new kitchen. Bear Cottage is an unbelievably important place and I thank the Minister for responding to the community's call. I am thankful also for the developments for mountain biking. Thousands of people across the northern beaches enjoy mountain biking. I was pleased to be able to work with Warringah Council earlier this year to ensure that Manly Dam remained open for use by mountain bikers. I thank the many hundreds of people who provided input into the Government's discussion paper on sustainable mountain biking. That push came to me from local mountain bikers. I am pleased that the northern beaches residents were invited to drive the consultation on the Government's statewide strategy. This important first step will ensure that the environment is protected while people enjoy mountain biking. We were pushing for this win-win scenario; I am glad that we were able to make such progress.

Almost 1,000 submissions were received about the transit lane, of which 92 per cent objected to the Roads and Traffic Authority's plan to scrap the T3 lane and replace it with a 24-hour bus lane on the Burnt Bridge Creek deviation. It is a nonsense to punish carpoolers when no evidence suggests that buses would be significantly delayed by the transit lane. The Minister for Roads acknowledged that traffic surveys failed to show how the bus lane would reduce congestion, and it was scrapped. I commend the Minister for listening and responding to the community. We also reversed the Roads and Traffic Authority proposal to spend \$400,000 on a huge sign in Seaforth telling people in traffic that they are in traffic, even though no alternative route was available. I reiterate that this whole corridor needs a public transport solution. The Government has got it wrong in the past with bits and pieces here and there. It is time for a holistic solution from one end of this transport corridor to the other. I will argue strongly for a northern beaches rapid transit system.

The relocation of the sewage tank project was a big win. The community convinced Sydney Water not to put a sewage tank in public open space in John Fisher Park behind Manly Selective High School and Harbord Park. Industrial land has been purchased in Brookvale for this project. I commend Rod Abbott and the Curl Curl

Lagoon Friends who articulated this solution to which Sydney Water responded. Well done. I look forward also to the benefits as the sewage overflow no longer will pour into Curl Curl Lagoon and instead will be redirected. The Pioneer Clubhouse received a grant for the tremendous work it does and the Salvation Army's soup kitchen was provided with a new shower and kitchen to look after the homeless in Manly. I thank everyone involved in both establishments for the amazing work they do.

I am incredibly inspired by the work of the Burdekin Association. A dinner held this year raised \$26,000 to provide accommodation and support for homeless youth, to help caseworkers continue to do their amazing job and for Manly Hospital to secure nine electric beds for the maternity unit, which will arrive soon. This will be good for nurses and patients. We are grateful to achieve that. The Manly local area faces challenges, including trading hours. Manly has been the scene of far too many alcohol-related assaults, but I will not deny that good progress has been made. The council, police, local petitions and I continue to call for a 2.00 a.m. cessation of serving of alcohol and a 2.30 a.m. closure time for licensed premises. Petitions containing more than a thousand signatures across the political spectrum support this proposal. I will not rest until the community is heard on these important matters. My job in this place is to push the community to respond.

Developments have come to fruition in Freshwater and Balgowlah. The clear message is to listen to the community and not steamroll ideas or do backroom deals. We must consult and listen to communities and act in their best interests, not act with vested interests or strike deals behind closed doors. It is time this approach was taken, particularly in respect to Freshwater. I urge the Government to provide the Manly electorate with a new hospital. It is about time the Government built a brand-new hospital in Manly. We have had all the words and we have seen all the maps and drawings. It is time for funds to be allocated to give the people who live on the northern beaches the hospital that they deserve.

URALLA FOUNDRY MUSEUM

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands—Speaker) [5.49 p.m.]: The closely knit Uralla community has a well-deserved reputation for uniting behind projects and getting things done. For a town its size it has a remarkable record of taking on projects, organising festivals and supporting the activities of the local community. Among its most ambitious projects was the restoration of McCrossin's Mill, one of three steam-powered flour mills established in the town in the 1870s. In 1982 the mill reopened as a function centre, gallery and museum of local history and artefacts. It has since been recognised by the Association of Sydney Metropolitan Museums as the best museum outside Sydney.

But Uralla is not resting on its laurels. A team of volunteers is putting its considerable enthusiasm and expertise behind another equally challenging and important assignment. They aim to raise \$100,000 to buy the historical and heritage-listed Uralla Foundry. It is Australia's only working foundry in continuous operation since 1872 and has been called the mother of the metal working industry in Australia as it is one of the earliest foundries still in existence. One of its main claims to fame was the production of iron lace found in buildings across the New England and also exported to the new suburbs of Balmain and Newtown where it can still be found in some Victorian era buildings.

The foundry was constructed to coincide with the arrival of the railway but that was not extended farther north to Armidale for another 10 years. In 1872 there were six foundries operating in Uralla to meet a high demand from local business people and owners of oxen and horsedrawn carts that dropped off and picked up goods from the rail yard. During the 1920s the owner turned his hand to new car sales and maintenance. Over the years since then, many of the farming properties in the New England have had equipment maintained and older parts made to measure that were no longer available on the market.

The foundry is currently for sale and although there has been some interest from buyers the restoration costs have been too daunting. Rather than see this historical building and its host of artefacts lost to Uralla, the Uralla Foundry Museum Inc. was established to buy the foundry at a cost of \$100,000. The group has estimated it will cost \$50,000 just to stabilise the building and secure its valuable contents. It is in every respect a museum piece and icon of early Australian industry, covering the full gamut from blacksmithing to forging and contemporary foundry practices—all on its original site. The collection, including the irreplaceable hand-carved cedar moulds, handmade hammers, drills, spanners, tools, parts, machinery, belt drives, blast furnaces, heritage items, including a customised 1928 Willy's Overland ute and office relics, represent a unique record of industrial enterprise in Australia. The Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Emergency Services, who is present in the Chamber, might remember the 1928 Willy's Overland ute.

Some of the drills at the foundry can still cut to an accuracy of 1,000th of a millimetre. During both world wars the foundry made parts for armaments, among many other military orders. In 1947-48 it made the

cast iron pipes for the reticulated water system in the township of Uralla. Many of the pipes are still in use after 60 or more years. The collection contains more than 2,000 precision made red cedar moulds, some with evidence of borer damage, for the original cast iron designs. The art of making the moulds is a fast-disappearing skill. The largest bell ever cast in the Southern Hemisphere was cast in the Uralla Foundry Museum. It still hangs in St Joseph's Catholic Church in Glen Innes.

The foundry museum group has raised \$5,500 and has pledges of a further \$10,000 to help with the purchase of the property. Members currently are planning nationwide fundraising in the local area and are seeking government funds. I will be strongly supporting its applications for assistance from the State Government and other levels of government as the foundry has national significance and, of course, is heritage listed. The overall intention is to create a working museum and to demonstrate the work practices of past eras and the conditions in which the work was carried out. This is a great project with strong community backing and, as is most often the case in rural communities, the level of volunteer contributions will be as high as any funding that can be sourced. I urge the Government to support this project, which is of significance not only to the people of Uralla but also to the State and the nation as a valuable example of our history and unique industrial heritage.

Mr PHIL KOPERBERG (Blue Mountains—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.54 p.m.]: I am sorry to disappoint the member for Northern Tablelands, but I have only vague memories of a 1928 Willy's Overland ute. However, my very first car was a 1927 Essex, which I am sure the member for Northern Tablelands will remember well!

I must attest to the spirit of Uralla. During my many happy days as the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service I spent much time in Uralla. As the member for Northern Tablelands said, the spirit of Uralla prevails right across the spectrum of activities—social activities, historical activities and community togetherness. In the old days when equipment and money was not in abundance, the community of Uralla banded together and made do very well. They raised lots of money and were very innovative in ensuring that the township had adequate fire protection. That was in the days when the State did not provide everything, which fortunately it now does. I can attest to the spirit of which the member for Northern Tablelands spoke so fondly.

TRIBUTE TO ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER STEVE BRADSHAW, APM

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [5.55 p.m.]: I pay tribute to one of the State's most senior policemen, Assistant Commissioner Steve Bradshaw, APM, who retired recently after more than 40 years of service to rural communities. I have worked closely with Steve for a number of years and can personally attest to his commitment and dedication to policing in western New South Wales. Throughout his esteemed career, which concluded yesterday, Steve worked as a general duties officer, a detective and also as a member of the stock squad. He was instrumental in the reintroduction of the stock squad under the title of the Rural Crime Investigators in 2000. He often liked to say, "Rural policing is about knowing your community and the community knowing you. It's the difference between living in a community and camping there."

In 2007 Steve was presented with a New South Wales Premiers Public Sector Award for the implementation of a national livestock identification system for cattle. At his farewell it was announced that the new livestock squad would be named after him. Rural policing gave Steve a keen awareness of the plight of indigenous communities. Throughout his career, he was dedicated to improving police and Aboriginal community relations in western New South Wales. He also was instrumental in the development of the highly successful Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery program [IPROWD] in Dubbo, which was recently rolled out statewide. In 2009 Steve was presented with a Premier's Public Sector Award for the program. In Dubbo last Friday I was pleased to recognise the third year of the IPROWD program. Throughout the three years of its operation, its record is 100 per cent graduation. It is a very successful program.

Steve Bradshaw was actively involved in the development of the IPROWD program. The success of the initiative reflects his leadership, passion and ability to collaborate with external agencies. Steve has had a great influence for policing in country New South Wales. His passion and commitment have contributed enormously to the establishment of our specialist rural crime investigators. Throughout his career, Steve has been supported by his wife Jenny for 33 of those years. Jenny has dealt with all types of situations—from assisting car accident victims while her husband directed traffic to dealing with house calls at all hours of the night and the endless telephone inquiries. Policing in the country is a family business and the Bradshaws certainly reflected that.

In February 1970, a 19-year-old Steve Bradshaw was working with a shearing team at Burren Junction when he heard about a team of police recruiters visiting nearby Narrabri. He immediately caught the train to sign up and take an application test. He passed the test, was then sent to Sydney and stationed at Regent Street. But although Steve held a licence, he was not allowed to drive in that strange city traffic! He spent three years patrolling the streets of Sydney on foot and as a divisional motorcyclist at Kogarah.

In 1973 Steve was transferred to Walgett, and for the next 32 years he served the communities of Walgett, Cootamundra, Narrandera, Deniliquin and Wagga Wagga. From 1990 to 1993 as a senior sergeant Mr Bradshaw undertook the role of patrol tactician at the Narrandera patrol before gaining his commissioned rank as the patrol commander in 1993. In 1997 he gained promotion to the rank of superintendent and was appointed as the Wagga Wagga Local Area Commander, a position he held for the next seven years. In July 2005 he gained the rank of assistant commissioner and was promoted to the position of Commander, Western Region.

Assistant Commissioner Bradshaw has received numerous awards during his service: the Peter Mitchell Trophy for first place in sergeant examinations in 1982, the National Medal in 1987, 1st clasp to National Medal in 1995, the Australian Police Medal in 1996, the NSW Police Medal in 2003, 2nd clasp to the National Medal in 2006, 5th clasp to the NSW Police Medal in 2007, the Commissioner's Commendation (Service) in 2007, and the Commissioner's Unit Citation in 2008. Mr Bradshaw has completed a number of tertiary and in-service courses, including an Associate Diploma in Social Science (Policing Studies) at Charles Sturt University and a Postgraduate Diploma in Police Management at Macquarie University.

Stephen Bradshaw retired yesterday at the rank of assistant commissioner. Over the past 10 years he has held the additional responsibilities of being the corporate spokesperson for rural crime and for the past four years he has been the corporate spokesperson for Aboriginal issues. It was most fitting that one of the last official functions Inspector Bradshaw attended was the graduation of 14 students from the Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery program. This program, developed in Dubbo, is a stepping stone for indigenous youth to enter the Police Force. The program has been an outstanding success, transforming the lives of young indigenous people, as was evidenced by the positive stories that emerged at the graduation ceremony.

Steve has been a strong supporter of the program and has worked tirelessly to end the high rate of Aboriginals ending up on the wrong side of the law. He believes, rightly, that the program is only the start of bigger things for Aboriginal employment in remote areas. The recent statewide rollout of the program will make a great contribution to turning around the lives of people in remote areas. I wish Assistant Commissioner Steve Bradshaw and his wife, Jenny, all the best for a great retirement, and sincerely thank them for their contribution to the communities of western New South Wales. A fitting farewell was held at Dubbo RSL club last Friday evening, with Deputy Commissioner Dave Owens in attendance. One thing close to Steve's heart was the dog squad. At the function the police brought in a new dog they are training which they have nicknamed Bradshaw.

Private members' statements concluded.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS) BILL 2010

RURAL FIRES AMENDMENT BILL 2010

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

[The Assistant-Speaker (Ms Alison Megarrity) left the chair at 6.00 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

VALEDICTORY SPEECHES

Mr PHIL KOPERBERG (Blue Mountains—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.30 p.m.]: What a delight it is for me to have you, Madam Deputy-Speaker, in the Chair on this occasion. Things moved uncharacteristically quickly today inasmuch as my ashes are not even cold and the Serjeant-at-Arms presented me with my former member's badge—now there's efficiency for you, if ever I saw it! A few years ago the University of Western Sydney was generous enough to confer upon me an honorary doctorate in letters, of which I am very proud. I am prompted to do justice to that by calling upon some great literary figure. It occurred to me that I might have another look at Charles Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities*. In the past couple of days when I began to read:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

I thought, "That is all too Dickensian to use tonight" so I did not use it! Being elected to Parliament by one's constituency to represent them is probably one of the greatest privileges afforded to anyone. I cannot think of a greater privilege that a community of peers can bestow on one other than to say, "Go to that Parliament and represent us, and do the best you can for us". I am enormously grateful for that privilege. My 43 years of public service began in 1967 when I joined the North Springwood Rural Fire Brigade—it was then known as the bush fire brigade—and there followed four decades of being part of one of the greatest services in the world. For 21 years of those 43 years I had the privilege of being the chief executive officer and seeing the service evolve from very humble beginnings to an internationally recognised emergency service without equal.

I note that Trevor Anderson, who was with me from the very start, is in the gallery tonight. In fact, he was there before me and rose to occupy the position of director of corporate services for many years. Trevor was my confidante throughout the whole of that period, and I am enormously grateful to you, Trevor, for the wisdom and guidance that you gave me over that 30 or 40 years. I used to be the bane of Trevor's life. When I was fire control officer in the mountains he was in charge of finances so I made a point of making his life as difficult as I possibly could in my never-yielding efforts to get more money for the organisation. For my short political career spanning four years by the end of this parliamentary term, I sought to invoke someone's name as perhaps a summary of what those four years might mean. I hunted around and it occurred to me that on this occasion I might invoke the name of Leonard Cohen and the words of his renowned song *Closing Time*, which include the words "the Gates of Love they budged an inch. I can't say much has happened since", which I thought was apt to describe it. I thank my colleagues for being here tonight; I appreciate it.

During my tenure as member for the Blue Mountains I have been pleased on behalf of my community to improve the amenity of the Blue Mountains in numerous ways and I cite amongst them: the establishment of a commuter car park at Katoomba; the extension of the Yellow Rock Priority Sewerage Program to an additional 40 properties that were not going to be connected and for which I thank Minister Costa; a new State-funded library for the Faulconbridge Public School, thank you Minister Firth; a State and federally funded library-administration block for the Mt Riverview Public School, thank you Minister Firth; an increase of funding for the Community Services Grants Program, which was so important in my community that has the highest per capita rate of people requiring special attention in terms of disabilities, mental illness, et cetera—I really appreciated being able to do that—the hosting of the Blue Mountains Environment Summit, and I thank all those involved; flashing lights for school zones at Wentworth Falls, Hazelbrook, Lawson and Winmalee; a long and arduous campaign to prevent a road-widening proposal through the heart of Blackheath and Mt Victoria townships that would have decimated the heart and soul of the towns; and the reinstatement of the Shipley Rural Fire Brigade that had been closed down some years ago and is now back up and running and providing vital protection to the residents of the Shipley plateau.

The demolition of the historic Mechanics Institute at Lawson was able to be prevented. There was a great deal of emotion about that building, and a dichotomy of feelings, but at the end of the day it was part of the Blue Mountains history and the intention to bulldoze it for road widening and other purposes caused great consternation to the local residents. I am pleased to say that, working in concert with the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Blue Mountains City Council, the building stands and will be used for community purposes for hopefully decades to come.

In concert with the Rural Fire Service Association, which is the body formed specifically to represent the views of the 70,000 or so volunteers to the Rural Fire Service, the Government and so forth, the absorption of the Rural Fire Service into one of the proposed super departments was prevented. I took great pride in being able to spearhead the campaign against that, and I had to do it very publicly. It was very important to me and I am glad that we achieved it. I pay tribute to the Rural Fire Service Association for its vital part in making that happen.

Perhaps most importantly of all is spearheading a campaign to have unflued gas heaters removed from schools in my electorate and elsewhere. In this regard, it is incumbent upon me to thank the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Verity Firth, for her courageous stand—for which she was admonished—in taking the decision to remove unflued gas heaters, a decision that will ultimately ensure that schoolchildren are not exposed in the future to the possibility of emissions from this type of heating.

When I look back on all of this, much of which I have enjoyed—some of which I have not—I am proud to have played a small role or some role in these outcomes. It will be a source of enormous pride to me for as long as I live. I have had the privilege of meeting many fine people in this Parliament, across both sides of the political divide, and I appreciate—always have and always will—the courtesy that they have always extended to me. Having moved from one family, that being the Rural Fire Service of New South Wales—people with whom I worked, people who became my friends, people whom I socialised with, had long nights with and took risks with tend to become family—and leaving them after 40 years was very difficult. Coming here as the new kid on the block was not without its difficulties, but I have always been treated with courtesy and kindness by members on both sides of this House, and that is something that I really appreciate.

One of the regrets that I harbour about my decision not to contest the next election—and I have many—is the sense of unfulfilled business. There remain so many issues still to be addressed, issues about which I feel very strongly. These include enhancing funding for mental health. Mental health is an area that Australian governments at both the State and Federal level really have to start getting serious about. It is a huge problem and it is out there. It goes almost unnoticed. My colleagues will know from visiting facilities that try to deal with people who have mental health problems how moving it is to see what is being done—but it is really only a fraction of what ought to be done. I urge parties of all persuasions and governments, present and future, to pay more attention to mental health in this State and in this country. It is an area in which we lag sadly behind and much remains to be done.

I feel very strongly too about the way that utilities—gas, electricity and water—have increased in price. I wrote to my local paper only this week and made the observation that access to utilities ought not to be a question of affordability. It is a fundamental right for people to be able to throw a light switch and have light, and to throw another switch and have heating. It is a fundamental right for them to turn on water and use it wisely and sparingly, but not to have it cost prohibitive. And so it is with gas and utilities generally. As members know, for some weeks I have been calling for the Government or a future Government to commission an inquiry into the energy pricing structure. No matter how hard I try I cannot be satisfied that the determination of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal is really in the best interests of the consumer, because people are feeling this. People are telling me that they are going to bed earlier than they otherwise would; people are saying, "We are skipping lunch—breakfast and dinner will suffice—because we really can't afford the electricity bill." Whilst I acknowledge happily the subsidies and assistance available to low income households, it occurs to me that there has to be a better way of doing this. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

It ought not to be dependent on the yield or dividends that might be paid by the utilities. I have often said that I have very strong views that, in this egalitarian society in the twenty-first century, privatisation and corporatisation are an abrogation when it comes to the core entitlements of people living in our State and elsewhere. In the few months remaining to me, I propose to pursue those and other issues. It has been my privilege during my time as Minister for Climate Change, Water and the Environment to introduce five important bills into this House. Those were the Murray-Darling Basin Amendment Bill 2007, the National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Leasing and Licensing) Bill 2007, the Renewable Energy (New South Wales) Bill 2007, the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Bill 2007, and the Energy and Utilities Administration Amendment (Climate Change Fund) Bill 2007.

I want to thank so many people, but time does not afford me the opportunity to thank all of them. I thank first my constituents for having the confidence in me to elect me to this Parliament in the first instance. I am sorry that I cannot, and have not been able to, fulfil many of their expectations, and I regret not being able to succumb to expressions voiced on the part of many of them that I continue in this role, but my heartfelt thanks go to them for their confidence in me. I also thank the branch members who worked tirelessly during the campaign and did not know me from a bar of soap, so to speak, when I first decided to contest the seat. I thank them for their continued support.

I thank two people in particular, my staff Helen Buckle, who is in the gallery, and Patricia Doyle. I have worked with many, many very efficient people in my 40 or 50 years of professional life, but few have matched the proficiency, commitment and support that Helen and Trish have given me. I thank them and wish them both well for the future. I thank Priscilla Armstrong-Guirguis for the incalculable bits of advice she has given me—she really should be running this place because she is by far the most efficient person—and for accommodating me in my many stupid requests about times of speeches, chair duties and so on. She has been a delight to work with, as have Jan Clifford from the Whip's office and Margaret from the Speaker's office.

I also thank the Blue Mountains Local Area Command Superintendent, Tony McWhirter, whom I call "Sheriff". We have great rapport and I know how he struggles to keep the mountains as crime free as possible and keep people doing sensible things—as do commands and patrols right around New South Wales. He and his team are to be mightily commended for their work. It has been a privilege. I am not oblivious to the nature of the privilege that has been extended to me by being a member of this House for a period of four years at the end of the parliamentary term.

While I remain committed to the fact that there are many things that need to be done, and I have mentioned some of them and I will continue to pursue those, I will spend the remaining two or three months getting to know people, some of whom I have known for decades, like the former Minister for the Environment, Chris Hartcher, who claims, perhaps legitimately, that when I was in uniform I used to salute him. I cannot imagine that, Chris, but if you say it is true, then it must be so.

Mr Chris Hartcher: It's the law and you would have followed it.

Mr PHIL KOPERBERG: Yes, it is the law and I followed it. Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for your consideration in the chair and as a confidante, and I thank all members of the House for their courtesy. It has been an experience from which I have learnt many lessons and one which I will not quickly forget. Thank you members; thank you all.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I thank the member for Blue Mountains, who truly is one of life's gentlemen.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [7.51 p.m.]: It is almost unbelievable that I stand here to deliver my final speech as the Liberal member for Hornsby, my 450th contribution. Much water has flowed under the bridge since I stood for the first time before this House to deliver my inaugural speech—a lifetime ago, and yet it seems only minutes. The time has flown, with many events and elections and vast changes having occurred, not least of all to me as a human being, a person, a family member, the local representative, and part of this Legislative Assembly. The weight of responsibility of being elected to this place has never left my consciousness and I have tried my very hardest to be the best member of Parliament I could possibly be. I never lost sight of the focus of all my efforts—the men, women and children of the Hornsby electorate. I have loved every minute of the past nine years and, despite a few rocky patches, would not change a thing.

Tonight is a low key one for me as I say my final words. I have never been one to stand on ceremony. Being the oldest of six children and then a nurse by profession has taught me self-discipline and humility. I am a practical person and have performed my duties for the electorate in such a manner. On many occasions I was challenged, sometimes so significantly that there seemed to be no solution to the problem at hand. However, with a steady and clear mind and wonderful staff, as well as a number of amazing mentors, I managed to steer through these difficulties to a partial resolution, if not a total answer.

As a matter of interest, I recently discovered that Sir James Brown Patterson, a Victorian Premier, is a great, great, great-uncle of mine. Sir James was born in 1833, and was Premier of Victoria from January 1893 to September 1894. These years were the lead-up to Federation. His main claim to fame was a letter written by Sir George Dibbs, then Premier of New South Wales, dated 12 June 1894, which said:

My dear Sir James Patterson,
...

The consideration I have given to the various aspects of federation since the National Convention of 1891 ... has led me to the conclusion that it would be easier first to completely unify the interests of the two great colonies of Victoria and New South Wales, and then to attract neighbouring colonies within the sphere of our extended influence.

Parkes quashed that. I acknowledge previous members for Hornsby. Major James Shand first spoke on workers compensation. Sydney Storey, as a wartime parliamentarian, cared about proper conduct in the House, concern above party politics for the residents of New South Wales and spoke on taxation, planning, education, health, and liquor laws. John Maddison first spoke on infrastructure and priorities of funding, sewerage connection, transport, the public service, land valuation, roads, law reform, and Parliament as an institution. I knew Neil Pickard quite well until his untimely death due to liver cancer a number of years ago. He was passionate about education, disabilities, preschool education, and the institution of the Parliament. Stephen O'Doherty spoke on that year's budget and its relationship to the electorate of Hornsby, his Christian values, education, jobs, health, housing, environment and urban infrastructure.

In their final speeches, only one made a speech that almost resembled a valedictory conclusion to a career and that was Major Shand. On 19 November 1941 he referred to the war in which Australia was a participant. The others did not make final speeches. On 29 November 1961 Mr Storey spoke at length on land issues; on 16 October 1973 Mr Maddison spoke on death duties and committee work; on 2 May 1991 Mr Pickard spoke on a mining bill; and on 5 December 2001 Mr O'Doherty spoke on a portfolio area very close to his heart, education, and included an issue about which he was passionate—the education of boys.

In relation to my elections, in the 2002 by-election I won the seat with no Labor opponent and, despite attracting more votes, the margin stayed at 2.7 per cent. In 2003, at the start of the Iraq war and following a change of leadership 12 months prior I gained a swing of 0.4 per cent, which then made the margin 3.1 per cent. In 2007 I had the largest swing in New South Wales to the Liberal Party on a two-party preferred basis and the margin for the seat became 16.5 per cent.

When a brand-new member of Parliament stands in the Legislative Assembly, or either of the Houses for that matter, to make a first speech it is an enormous occasion and one that will remain significant for the rest of that person's life. I will refer to parts of my speech in this, my final contribution in this place. Once again, people who are very important to my life and career are in the gallery. Suffice to say the past nine years have been a rollercoaster ride of so many ups and downs I cannot recount them all. In many respects I began my representation of the Hornsby electorate with anticipation of the unknown. Despite having worked closely with a number of fantastic members of Parliament—Bruce Baird and Philip Ruddock to name two—since I joined the Liberal Party in 1981, nothing quite prepares you for the time when you stand up in the House and ask for the trust of the people who elected you, and say that you will do your best to serve them and to make the services and resources they need for their community a reality.

I decided in the first instance to become one of the many people in the local area that make the community a success. I did not want to live in an ivory tower; I wanted to be a real part of the work in the Hornsby electorate. The downside of that decision is that the residents can see the real you, warts and all. I did not hide my contact details, including my mobile phone number. I embarked on the journey through the years of representation and all the ins and outs of the local issues, the service clubs, the local organisations, and life in Hornsby. By and large, the initial decision has really been successful in enabling me to communicate with local people and listen to their needs and opinions. It has been said that a good listener is the wisest of persons.

Not everyone has agreed with the way forward, not everyone has had their problem solved 100 per cent to their liking, but any problem encountered has had some way forward and many have had outside-the-square attention. I have treated every issue presented to me as if it were the most significant—as it no doubt was to the people bringing their concerns to me. I was not the token member of Parliament. I did not just turn up at annual general meetings, but rather I tried very hard to be part of the work of the groups. I attribute my career as a nurse, and the skills I attained therein, as crucial to my ability to work with the wide diversity of matters presented to my office and to me in person. Nursing is a job that provides the skills that enable an individual to address multifocal issues, keep many balls in the air at the one time and problem solve when it is not apparent what route to take towards diagnosis and hopefully resolution.

I have been very fortunate to have some amazingly efficient and hardworking staff members over the entire nine years. Initially I inherited Tracey and Joy from Stephen O'Doherty, and then I employed Clair McNally and Christine Collins. Christine left after about a year and joined the Ambulance Service and Fiona Brown filled the gap before Camille Smith joined us. Clair and Camille worked together until Clair decided to seek more experience and that is when Vanessa Crago joined my team. Concurrent to that, Christine Collins returned as one part of a job-share arrangement with Vanessa. This staff make-up remained until very recently. Camille joined the Police Force earlier this year and a young woman who had been a regular relief person, Linda Smith, Camille's sister, joined the office. This is how my office is now.

I also mention some remarkable people who have worked as relief staff from time to time. Lachlan Mansell, a young man I have known since he was a boy, is completing a communications degree and has a wonderful future ahead of him in journalism or whatever he chooses. Jenni, Donna and Dorothy also filled our gaps as relief staff. Volunteers have been of huge assistance to my staff as well as to the people of the Hornsby electorate. Shirley Allen and Maurie Smith spent countless hours helping with work in the electorate office. Sadly, both have died and their deaths have left a gaping hole. I thank all of the members of my staff and all those who helped me in any way. There are so many special people that I cannot list them here. Your faith in my ability to represent the residents of the electorate of Hornsby in a very practical sense, on the ground as well in the New South Wales Parliament, really shows the immense faith you had in me. I certainly could not have done so or achieved what we have achieved without each and every one of you.

Over the years many colleagues, if not all, have had some influence on my career, my maturation in the role and my overall ability to survive the often punishing hours. I am proud to include members on the Government benches as colleagues as well as members of the minor parties and Independents. As I looked around the Houses I could see that, despite the different brands, we were all there to represent our respective communities. In that, I felt an affinity with every other elected member. However, there are three colleagues

I would like to acknowledge in particular. I refer, first, to Jillian Skinner. I had known Jillian for many years before being elected to Parliament, and we are firm friends. It has been amazing to work beside her as a parliamentary secretary and as a member of the shadow Cabinet in mental health and community services. Jillian has such a wealth and depth of experience in health and associated portfolio areas, and I have learned a great deal. I thank her for providing me with an opportunity to develop in policy and portfolio areas.

I refer, second, to Robyn Parker. Robyn Parker and I have also been firm friends for many years. I was President of the Liberal Party Women's Council from 1996 to 2000, and Robyn was elected as my successor. Two past Women's Council presidents were elected to the New South Wales State Parliament so it is a solid step forward for women in the Liberal Party—something that needs to receive more recognition. In our days of presidency we supported the Liberal Women's Forum that was established with the purpose of encouraging women to think about a career in politics, to put a toe in the water, or to gather more skills to mentor women who sought such a career. There were many great meanings and experiences in the work of the Women's Council and without my time as president I would not have been as well equipped to become a member of Parliament. As Robyn seeks to transfer from the Legislative Council to the Legislative Assembly she shows her mettle and the knowledge and skills gained from all the years leading to her parliamentary career. On a personal note, we have also journeyed through our family lives with some ups and downs. Politics is tough on families, in particular, when days go by with little contact between family members. I thank Robyn for her unfailing friendship.

I refer, third, to Andrew Tink who is now retired. Andrew became a mentor for me in so many ways. He took me under his wing very soon after my election and I attended a number of functions with him. He has a unique style of leadership and representation and I learned many lessons from him. On a number of occasions I sought advice on very serious matters and he never failed me. I believe him to be a true statesman and from time to time I enjoy a coffee and a chat with him. I congratulate him on his recent well-deserved success in the literary world. I refer next to parliamentary personnel, and thank the following people for guidance and assistance: the Speakers over so many years; the Clerks of the Legislative Assembly; the Serjeants-at-Arms; the attendants; and the Parliamentary Library, which is integral to the success of legislation, speeches, policy and research. I thank all the staff as every person is important in the running of the juggernaut that is the Parliament of New South Wales. I thank each and every staff member for helping me over the years. They have been responsible for making my initial transition into this place easier than it might have been, as well as providing essential information to enable me to function correctly.

I refer now to the Liberal Party. Since joining the Liberal Party in 1981—almost 30 years of membership—the party has faced many challenges, enjoyed many successes, and sought continually to reinvent itself to cope with the changing times. There have been staff changes and each team brought its own complexion to the business of winning elections. I have been faced with many challenges relating to internal machinations. The most recent boundary change brought with it a whole raft of difficulties. I had to decide how to approach my main reason for being—that of representing the people of Hornsby. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I decided that my number one priority was to be the best I could possibly be for the residents and that everything else was secondary. I quote from Miles Franklin, who said:

It is a sign of your own worth sometimes if you are hated by the right people.

I will say no more other than to thank the branch members who supported me. I refer next to the people of Hornsby. By far the most rewarding times have been spent working with local residents and witnessing their diversity of backgrounds, interests, issues and qualities. I have loved being part of their community and walking the hard roads as they have tried to cope with many calamities—bushfires, flooding, storms and tempests, death, disappointments and serious illnesses. It has been an honour to come to know them, to work with them, to listen intently to their wisdom, and to bring their problems to this Parliament so that they had a voice. They are what I will miss most but I know I will be part of their community into the future in a number of different and meaningful ways.

I am sure that every member of Parliament can recount many amazing experiences over their years of representation. I delivered an oration at a graduation in the Great Hall at Sydney University. I was a participant in briefings when the major December 2002 bushfire broke out and burnt 50 per cent of my electorate. Last year I conferred citizenship on an American member of Hornsby Rotary on 4 July, Independence Day. I conducted a funeral service for Shirley Allen, one of the beautiful volunteers in my office, at the request of her family. I have attended far too many funerals but I have had the honour of delivering eulogies to some very special people. I have been part of some of the most traumatic times that any family could be expected to endure.

In this context I mention the Anderson family. Five years ago, Warren and Michelle and their children, Nathan and Amanda, lost 16-year-old Vanessa to a problematic hospital system. It has been a wonderful honour to assist this amazingly strong and resilient family through the months and years following her untimely death. I have talked for many hours with them and I sat in the Coroners Court throughout Vanessa's inquest. I worked with Jillian Skinner to try to change parts of the system so that this would not happen to any other child. I developed Vanessa's law, which this Government refused to adopt. I view my relationship with the Anderson family as an honour and a privilege as they allowed me to enter the most poignant and vulnerable part of their lives. I thank them for giving me much more than I gave them.

What were the gains for Hornsby? Over the past nine years there have been a number of significant steps forward for Hornsby residents and these are just a few: sewerage connection for Brooklyn and Dangar Island; a new accident and emergency unit with a psychiatric emergency care centre, maternity unit and paediatrics unit for Hornsby hospital; a new mental health intensive care unit for Hornsby hospital; lights at a Pacific Highway intersection at Mount Colah, which took only 20 years to install; a new substation at Galston; attention to power cables going into the Galston and Dural areas; construction of 130 parking places at Berowra railway station; a budget allocation for a new adult and child and adolescent mental health facility on the Hornsby hospital campus; new stairs for Hawkesbury River railway station—one of the illogical decisions that was made—upgrades to two stations, Berowra and Hornsby, as part of the Clearways Project; flashing lights in 40-kilometre school zones; finally, plans for the rebuilding of old and outdated operating theatres and ward areas for Hornsby hospital; and, equally significant, recognition of the many homeless people in the Hornsby area and beyond.

My creation of the Hornsby Homelessness Task Force has made vast inroads in providing homeless people with accommodation and improved services. I rate that as one of my most outstanding achievements, and one of which I am most proud. What were the losses for Hornsby? The sale of the two police stations—Brooklyn and Berowra—which was a sad occasion; no multistorey parking station at Hornsby railway station; imposition of demands for increased population densities into the electorate via local government, despite having no adequate infrastructure to cope with the same; failure to upgrade New Line Road; and failure to fast-track the north-west railway line to solve transport issues. Obviously these will be ongoing challenges. No-one can confidently predict what the future holds. I do not know exactly where I will be or what my role will involve following my retirement as the sixth member for Hornsby, and, proudly, the first woman.

It is an aim of mine to put something back into my first profession—nursing—in some way that enhances it as a profession and seeks to solve the challenges it faces. It is such an honourable profession but, sadly, it is not viewed with the importance it truly deserves by some people in power. Not enough has been done about clinical experience for undergraduates, skills mix in clinical areas, and bullying and harassment. They are just some of the problems that hold up good nursing care, and any government worth its salt needs to address them as a matter of urgency. Lastly, I wish to speak about my family. This part of my speech will be difficult for me. To be elected to any parliament is a unique and humbling experience. Often it is an overwhelming change not only for the new member of Parliament but also for the family of that person.

Whilst I have had other time-consuming jobs, nothing compares with the way in which being a parliamentarian impacts on one's home. As I have often said, this role is not a job; it is a life. When I was first elected, in 2002, my daughters were in their early to mid teens. Adolescents in any family can be a challenge, so to remove the role of a mother in the usual sense could lead to issues. I have been so lucky that my daughters, Jessica and Ashleigh—Ashleigh is listening to and viewing my valedictory speech in the United States at this time—adjusted well to my long hours, coped with fitting in family events, and generally grew into lovely young women. The upside of this lack of quantity but not quality time has seen them learn well, develop independence and a clear social conscience, and believe in themselves. They have completed university work and become aware of our local community needs. Both volunteer to help those who are not as advantaged as they are. My son-in-law, Craig, has been a wonderful addition to the family. I love my daughters and am proud of the adults they have become. I firmly believe that having a mother who was not there all the time, but who they knew was trying to make life better for thousands of others, showed them that we do not live in a cocoon and that it indeed does "take a village to raise a child".

My husband, Steve, is to be commended for sustaining the regular chores that need to be done in a family. He took over the cooking and shopping—by choice because he enjoyed cooking and he needed the correct ingredients so he had to acquire them himself. Conversely, I performed the home chores that did not require a specific time slot. I admire his endless patience with my long hours—I took my new role very seriously so on many evenings I was not home as I came to know the numerous organisations and people who

were going to be critical to my work as the member for Hornsby. However, I know that Steve found it very difficult because of our lack of time together as a couple. There were electorate events that he could not attend—often due to childminding or for child transport reasons. He has been very supportive of me over these past nine years. Again, I certainly could not have achieved what I did in my work without him as a firm backstop. I know he is proud of my work, and often we discussed the issues and political directions of the day. I know he suffered though, and I offer my apologies for the inevitable workload that took its toll in later years.

I pay tribute to my parents. My father, who died in 2000, was not present at my elections and did not see the hard work or listen to my many speeches, but he is with me always in spirit. I pay tribute also to my parents-in-law, who helped me on election days, my father-in-law trying to persuade many a voter that I was a worthwhile risk for their vote. To quote: "An important reward for a job well done is a personal sense of worthwhile achievement." I have this feeling. In all, it has been the most interesting, challenging, rewarding and unique time of my life. I wish my colleagues on all sides of both Houses and all parliamentary personnel every success into the future.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I thank the member for Hornsby and congratulate her on her outstanding contributions as a member of Parliament and, of course, to her community. I wish her well in the future.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [8.13 p.m.]: To have been a member of the Legislative Assembly of the New South Wales Parliament for almost 16 years has indeed been both a privilege and an honour. It was a great pleasure to represent the electorate of Peats from March 1995 to March 2007, and the electorate of Gosford—which includes a major portion of the former electorate of Peats—from the 2007 election to the present day. I sincerely thank the people of these electorates for their support over all these years, which have gone all too quickly. I shall always be grateful to them for providing me with the opportunity of being their representative in Australia's oldest and first Parliament.

There is an old saying, "You can choose your friends but you can't choose your family." I consider myself to be very lucky indeed because, even if I had been able to choose my family, I could not have done any better. My family has always been very supportive of me, but no more so than in my current position. I thank you, one and all, and I am pleased that a number of family members are in the Speaker's Gallery tonight: my sister Margaret and her husband, Alan Staunton; my sister Clare, who has been so supportive throughout; my youngest sister, Pauline; and my nieces Jacinta, who is a Labor councillor serving on Kogarah council, and Angela. Other family members who helped over the years but were unable to be here tonight are my brother John and his wife, Vivian, and John's son Mark and his son Callum; my brother-in-law Owen Bowland; my niece Lisa Ryan and her husband, Matt, and their three daughters, Lauren, Megan and Imogen; my nephews David, Paul, Christopher, Timothy and his daughter Georgia; Andrew, who is now residing in Adelaide, and his wife, Kylie, and baby daughter, Ella; Jacinta's husband, Sean Petroni, and their children, Catherine, Joseph and baby Gabriella, and my niece Monica, who is planning to get married in the new year to Mat Willoughby. I wish them every happiness for the future.

To my late parents, Arthur and Hilda, I owe a deep sense of gratitude. They led by example and their five children are thankful that our parents were people of integrity and honesty with a great sense of social justice. My father was a very active member of the then Australian Railways Union, now the Rail, Tram and Bus Industry Union. I was always impressed with my father's public speaking abilities and determination to improve the working conditions of others. My paternal grandfather, John Andrews, was a non-conscription Labor candidate in the State seat of Armidale during the First World War and performed very well in a conservative electorate. My grandfather was an organiser for the Shearers' Union, which later became the Australian Workers Union. Arthur Andrews, my great-grandfather, was a foundation member of the Australian Labor Party and was a friend of Henry Lawson. The involvement of my forebears in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century political and industrial Labor movements has been well encapsulated in a one-hour biography entitled, "Squattocracy and Struggle" by my second cousin Sean O'Brien, who is the son of my cousin Patricia O'Brien and her husband, Dr Peter O'Brien, OAM. Patricia, too, has been most supportive of my preselection campaigns.

That I entered this Parliament in the first place as the member for Peats was due largely to the encouragement I received from Jim Walshe, OAM, former Secretary of the New South Wales branch of the Australian Railways Union. I had the great pleasure of working for Jim and the union prior to being preselected for Peats. I thank Jim for his good advice and support over all these years. Jim contributed much to the union movement and to the Australian Labor Party throughout his working life and remains an active member of the party. The lead-up to my preselection was intriguing and I was interested to learn that some of what had transpired was recorded by former Premier Bob Carr in his diaries published some years ago.

During my terms as a State member I have been most fortunate to have had very diligent and caring staff members, who have all gone well beyond the call of duty in serving the electorate. To Suzanne King, who is, without a doubt, electorate officer extraordinaire, Catherine Wall and Narelle Arnfield I extend a big thank you for looking after the constituents and me so well. I acknowledge that the job of an electorate officer is not easy and I am so grateful to my staff for always being polite in their dealings with constituents. I also thank former staff members Megan Howdle, nee Sullivan, who recently gave birth to her second daughter, Isla Catherine, a sister for Lily; Camille Stephens, who worked in the electorate office from 1995 to 2002; Gary Hayden; and Lisa McBride for their wonderful assistance and for carrying out their duties in such a pleasant manner.

I make special mention, too, of Nicolette Blanch and Emma Johnson, who help out in the office from time to time. Both these young ladies have a bright future. Megan's father, Ken Sullivan, was an organiser for the Australian Railways Union and was the Australian Labor Party's candidate for the State seat of Southern Highlands in the 1991 elections. Ken waged a tremendous campaign against John Fahey, who was then Premier of New South Wales. I thank Ken and his wife, Jenny, for their ongoing support. Winning elections requires a team effort and I acknowledge the efforts of members of the Australian Labor Party branches over the years. I could not have succeeded without you and I will always remember you.

Special thanks must go to Bill McGilchrist, who was my campaign director for the 2003 and 2007 elections, and who also served as Secretary of the State Electorate Council. Thanks go also to Ross Bowen, former President and now Secretary of the State Electorate Council, who played a prominent part in the 2003 and 2007 campaigns. Ross is the proud father of Federal immigration Minister, Chris Bowen. I thank also Bruce Penton, who was my campaign director for the 1995 and 1999 elections, and Rob Allen, who worked so hard to ensure a successful outcome to my first campaign.

My gratitude is also extended to Anne and Don Craig and Jamie Clements, the current president of Gosford State Electorate Council, all of whom have been unswerving in their support over the years. To be awarded life membership of the Australian Labor Party is no mean feat and age is no barrier to these life members—Kevin Parish, OAM; Phil Gleeson; Tom Rodwell; and Jean Martin, the widow of life member Vince Martin, a former Federal member for Banks and one of my good mentors. Tonight I pay tribute to these life members, who remain active within the party today. My thanks go also to former member for Wyong Paul Crittenden, who provided me with some good sound advice over the years.

There have been a number of highlights during the past 15½ years and one that really stands out was the impact the wearing of the "Marie is Peats" badges at the 2002 State ALP conference had on the lead-up to the 2003 State elections. That act created quite a stir among some fellow members at the conference. Thank you to fellow parliamentary colleagues and conference delegates who supported me on that occasion. Unfortunately, I cannot take credit for the creation of those badges but they were a great success and are still a talking point today.

Included among my parliamentary colleagues who proudly wore that badge was the member for Mt Druitt, Richard Amery. Richard has been a tower of strength to me and other colleagues in this place when the chips have been down. When the disastrous outbreak of the Newcastle disease struck poultry farmers at Mangrove Mountain on 1 April 1999 and lasted 61 days, Richard Amery, who was then the Minister for Agriculture, wasted no time in visiting the area and together we consoled the farmers affected by that terrible disaster. Despite this being the worst outbreak of an exotic disease among animals since European settlement, the then Federal Coalition Government did not tick off on the New South Wales Government's application for the payment of exceptional circumstances. So much for looking after people who are involved in producing food to put on our tables.

It has been wonderful working in cooperation with State government agencies and non-government organisations. I thank all those who work in our schools, hospitals, children and young people services, the Roads and Traffic Authority, aged care facilities and many others, for their dedication and tireless efforts. Our front-line workers—nurses, police, ambulance, firefighters, both with the New South Wales Fire Brigades and the Rural Fire Service—deserve special thanks. The services provided by the New South Wales Fire Brigades have been substantially increased on the Central Coast under Labor. Recently retired Central Coast zone commander Keith King was at the helm when much of this growth occurred. I take this opportunity to thank Keith for his long and outstanding service to the Fire Brigades and wish him and his good wife, Gwenda, a long, happy and well-earned retirement. I am happy to say that in my electorate of Gosford we now have two new fire stations—one at Kariong and the other in Trafalgar Avenue on the Woy Woy peninsula.

Being a member of Parliament provides a person with many opportunities. One of the most humbling experiences I found was meeting so many people of all ages who give so generously of their time as volunteers. Whether this involved volunteering in the Donnison Street kitchen in Gosford or Mary Mac's Place in Woy Woy—both of which provide nutritional meals to the disadvantaged—or as a volunteer in a wide variety of sporting activities; hospital auxiliaries; Police and Community Youth Club; Saint Vincent de Paul Society; Salvation Army; Red Cross; Lifeline; St John Ambulance; marine rescue; disability and aged care facilities; parents and citizens associations; RSL sub-branches; war widows; Legacy; senior citizens; progress associations; community centres—just to mention a few—they are all outstanding people whose efforts are recognised and much appreciated.

It has been a great honour to be a patron of several organisations, including the Ocean Beach Surf Life Saving Club; Woy Woy Peninsula Netball Association; Woy Woy Peninsula Swans Junior Australian Football League; Henry Kendall High School Parents and Citizens Association; and Central Coast Historic Car Club, and I wish all those involved every success in the future. While on the subject of volunteering I want to take this opportunity to mention the great work done by hospital auxiliaries. The Gosford Hospital Auxiliary—whose president is Cathie Greenwood, with secretary Jenny Sims and treasurer Kerrie Babinski—has raised \$166,388 for Gosford Hospital since 1998, enabling a number of items to be purchased for Gosford Hospital. The Auxiliary's patron is Verlie Kirkby, who is also the longest-serving member.

Woy Woy Hospital Auxiliary—president Phyllis Thomas, vice-president Patricia Harding, honorary secretary Mrs Olivenne Barron and treasurer Ms Deborah Van Breugel—has raised over \$88,000 since 1998 for the purchase of a number of items for Woy Woy Hospital. Ourimbah Hospital Auxiliary, which was in my former electorate of Peats, has raised \$82,726 since 1998. This has enabled a number of much-needed items to be donated to hospitals on the Central Coast. Mrs Toni Brewster has been the auxiliary's president for the past 11 years; the secretary is Mrs Diane Keenan and the Treasurer is Ms Narelle Rogers. It is worthwhile noting that the united hospital auxiliaries throughout New South Wales in the period 2008-09 raised \$9,060,375.52. Well done to all those volunteers, especially those involved in the Gosford, Woy Woy and Ourimbah auxiliaries.

There is no truth in the claim that in the past 15 years the State Labor Government has not spent anything on infrastructure. To prove that claim wrong I will mention just a few improvements that have been made within the Gosford electorate. They are the upgrading of Gosford Hospital with funding of well over \$100 million; a new dental clinic at Woy Woy; building a new high school at Kariong at a cost of \$26.37 million; upgrading of Brisbane Water Secondary College, Umina and Woy Woy campuses; the Henry Kendall High School and the Umina and Ettalong public schools. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Others include the widening of the F3 between the Central Coast and Sydney to three lanes each way, in conjunction with the Federal Government; rebuilding of Woy Woy railway station, including the installation of lifts; improvements to the Woy Woy rail-bus interchange and extensions to the commuter car park; upgrading of Woy Woy police station—a 24-hour, seven days a week service; the establishment of Woy Woy Children's Court; upgrading of Dane Drive and Masons Parade, Gosford; shared pedestrian-cycleway from Gosford to Woy Woy; a continuation of that cycleway to Ettalong; and continuing improvements to the Central Coast Highway.

In addition, I am proud of the fact that the Government has invested heavily in the delivery of health, education and community services. The record allocation of funds under Stronger Together has made a huge difference to the lives of so many constituents who have disabilities and their families. Our fire fighters have been provided with vastly improved equipment and protective clothing. The \$2.50 pensioner excursion ticket now also covers private buses on the Central Coast. Just recently, 41 new buses were delivered by the Government to the private bus companies, and we now have a dedicated bus service operating from the Woy Woy peninsula to and from Gosford Hospital. I thank all those people who helped me in the campaign to achieve that service.

I am proud to have served under four Labor premiers: Bob Carr—who has the record for being the longest-serving Premier of New South Wales—Morris Iemma, Nathan Rees and Kristina Keneally, the first female Premier of our great State. They have all made a significant contribution to New South Wales. It is my sincere hope that after 26 March 2011 Kristina Keneally will continue to be Premier and Carmel Tebbutt, our first female Deputy Premier, will continue to serve in that role too. We are very fortunate to have such talented members in Labor's ranks.

To all the Ministers and my parliamentary Labor colleagues on the backbench, I thank you for your support and camaraderie over the years. To those of you who will not be contesting the 2011 elections, I wish

you all the best for the future. To those who are re-contesting, I wish you every success. To the Central Coast Labor team, I wish a long and happy retirement to the member for The Entrance, Grant McBride; good luck to the member for Wyong, David Harris, who is at the table; the member for Swansea, Robert Coombs; and Labor candidates for Gosford and The Entrance, Katie Smith and David Mehan respectively. To members on the Opposition benches and the Independents I thank you all for your friendship and may good health be yours for the future.

Parliament House operates so smoothly due to the efforts of a number of people, and I express my appreciation to all of them—the Speaker, the Hon. Richard Torbay, who carries out his duties well and with a good sense of humour; the Deputy Speaker, the Assistant-Speakers and Acting-Speakers; the Leader of the House, the Hon. John Aquilina; the Government Whip and his assistant, Jan Clifford; the Clerk, Russell Grove, and all the other Clerks; Hansard, who do such an amazing job in making our speeches look so good; the parliamentary attendants; catering; printing; security; building services; IT; the library staff, and the list goes on. Thank you all very much.

Finally, I must say that I feel proud of the fact that two of my Labor colleagues, Tony Stewart, the member for Bankstown, and Graham West, the member for Campbelltown, will be continuing to make an invaluable contribution to our society after they leave Parliament. Tony will be helping Father Chris Riley in running Youth Off the Streets, and Graham will be heading the St Vincent de Paul Society in our State. I wish them both well for the future. Rather than say goodbye I will now just say *au revoir*.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (Castle Hill) [8.30 p.m.]: When more than 17 years ago I stood in this place to deliver my inaugural speech, it was a very different Parliament and a very different world. Not only was it another century we—that is, the Liberals and The Nationals—were in government, so when I spoke it was from the other side of the Chamber. It was also before September 11, the global financial crisis and the inexorable rise of China—the three key events that have changed the world since 1993.

While September 11 may end up being the biggest news story of this century, as the sinking of the *Titanic* was of the last, the most important story over the next 90 years almost certainly will be the changing balance of power in the world. While Australia currently is a beneficiary of China's insatiable demand for raw materials, when those raw materials run out what will we have left? Will we be like the poor nations Adam Smith described in *The Wealth of Nations* that cannot compete with rich nations in manufacturing but can do so only in agriculture? Even that is in doubt as Australia becomes drier and our population continues to grow. I understand that last year was the first time since the 1790s that New South Wales was a net importer of food.

So what is needed for New South Wales and indeed for Australia is a vision for the future. What size population do we want? What industries should we encourage? Adam Smith was a free trader, but he would have recognised the fundamental disconnect between supporting a First World standard of living long term by digging holes in the ground and growing things—important though those two industries are, and always have been to Australia. Where should people live? My view is that we cannot afford to continue to shoehorn people into the Sydney Basin. We must decentralise and that decentralisation has to be driven by government.

People will go where the jobs are. We can either create those jobs where they live or provide fast transport links to Sydney so they can commute long distance. This happens in Britain, it happens in France, it happens on the east coast of the United States of America. But it is no good expecting our people to drive to work. They need trains that are the equivalent of Britain's 125s—200-kilometre an hour trains on their own dedicated tracks. It will be an expensive exercise that will be best developed as part of a strategic planning review of the State, but ultimately it will be less costly than allowing Sydney to grow to seven million people.

I guess the most momentous change in my 17 years in Parliament was losing government by one seat in 1995. Throughout most of the ensuing term, people were predicting that the Carr Government would collapse. The reverse was the case. We went over a cliff in 1999—a cliff so deep that only now, 11 years later, are we on the verge of clawing our way back to the top of it. John Fahey resigned as the leader of the Liberal Party after that defeat, even though he had won a significant majority of the votes. I phoned him after the result was known and urged him to continue as leader, but he declined.

As members would know, John Fahey went on to become Minister for Finance in the Howard Government. We then went through a period of leadership instability, with first Peter Collins, then Kerry Chikarovski, then John Brogden, then Peter Debnam and finally Barry O'Farrell who, against the weight of history, has held onto his position for all of the current term of Parliament. It has been our political opponents in the Labor Party who have suffered from instability in recent years, with no fewer than three leaders over the last four years.

Like the world around us, the electorate I now hold has changed dramatically from the one I was first elected to represent in August 1993. In those days it extended from Beecroft to Annangrove; it is now much more compact, taking in Carlingford as well as Castle Hill and West Pennant Hills Valley. Even the name has changed, from The Hills to Castle Hill. When I first was elected to this place my electorate contained an 800-head dairy herd, an alpaca farm, market gardens, chook sheds and horse studs. It is now purely suburban, all those farms having been subsumed by housing. It is because of that exponential population expansion in the North West Growth Centre that my constituents are so vociferous about the provision of infrastructure.

In my maiden speech I spoke about the money that had been allocated in that year's budget. Ostensibly it was a budget reply speech—that is the way things were done in those days—to building the M2. I said, "There is no choice other than to build the M2." Yet the Labor Party opposed the road, even trying in the dying stages of the Fiftieth Parliament to instigate yet another inquiry into it. Unquestionably that would have killed it off and today it would be taking people two hours or more to get into the city from Castle Hill. Yet earlier this year the current Premier claimed her Government was responsible for building the M2!

In fact, it has been hard to persuade this Government to invest any money in The Hills infrastructure. After the Coalition won a famous victory on Windsor Road, Carl Scully went cold on spending any more money on roads in my electorate, believing we had had our quota for the next 50 years or so. He forgot that The Hills was a growth electorate and that, up to the 2007 election, it had the biggest population of any State electorate in the history of the country. He also forgot that those people have as much right as anyone else to basic services, such as roads and public transport. That same Carl Scully famously announced in December 1998 that by 2010 the Government would build a railway line to Castle Hill. It is now the end of 2010 and we are still waiting for the first sleeper to be laid. I predict that it will be a Coalition government that starts work on the North West Rail Link, just as it will be a Coalition government that widens Showground Road and a Coalition government that converts the Carlingford line into a usable rail service.

This is not a case of looking after Liberal voters. It is a matter of equity and a victory for common sense. Every transport planner who has ever examined Sydney's transport needs has identified the North West Rail Link as the number one priority. I have a sneaking suspicion that when Carl Scully released his Action for Transport 2010 plan in 1998, he never thought the Government would survive for this long and that therefore he would not have to deliver on his promises. Carl Jung's pithy observation, "The man who promises everything is sure to fulfil nothing ...", could be the epitaph for this Government.

But a member of Parliament's role is not exclusively to look after his electorate. While my electorate has always come first, I have also been mindful of the responsibility parliamentarians have to all of New South Wales. It was that broader responsibility that led me in 2000-01 to write the planning paper "Community Ties". To research this 20,000-word document I travelled around the world, talking to leading planning authorities such as Mike Breheny from Reading University, Mike Jenks from Oxford Brookes University and John Molenkopf from the Centre for Urban Research in New York, viewing examples of the new urbanism, visiting towns and suburbs planned using Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of To-morrow* principles such as Sunnyside Gardens in New York, Letchworth and Milton Keynes in England, and looking at the way one of the best planned cities in the world, Vancouver, is structured.

A number of the recommendations I made in that paper have since been adopted by the Government, including the infrastructure being provided before the houses are built—although I urge members not to get too excited because the Government really has paid only lip-service to that one—and setting limits to growth. In 2007 the Government established the Western Sydney Parklands, which was a first step on the path of re-establishing a green zone around Sydney. Designating growth areas where the bulk of Sydney's population increase will be accommodated. Breaking up the large public housing estates and making greater use of community housing providers are two policies I took to the 2003 election when I was the shadow Minister for Housing. But many more are yet to be implemented, including creating a proper green zone, giving neighbourhood character equal weight with urban consolidation when approving new developments, establishing urban design centres in Sydney and major country towns to raise development standards, and selling off air rights above railway lines, as has happened in Tokyo and New York.

We can create a better living environment for the people of Sydney, even with a rapidly expanding population. It is not all about building new railway lines and widening roads; it is also about creating communities that people want to live in. Governments across the world now recognise that whatever we can do to strengthen civic engagement also fortifies our society. Community is not dependent on bricks and mortar or the layout of suburbs, but proper planning can sow the seeds of civic engagement. Governments, by tending those seeds, can help them to germinate and grow, and by so doing increase people's health and happiness.

In 1996 I introduced lock-up legislation for spray cans to reduce the amount of graffiti blighting our streets. The Government ridiculed it at the time—and Labor members opposite would blush if I repeated the words then Minister for Fair Trading Fay Lo Po' used—but 10 years later, it adopted the legislation as its own. That shows that in this place persistence is a virtue! I believe that measure has reduced significantly the incidence of graffiti and that the minor inconvenience to the public is a price worth paying.

Politics can be the most frustrating of occupations. My friend the former Federal member for Mitchell, Alan Cadman, once flatteringly described me as "results orientated", and I think I probably am. That results orientation is the result of my private sector background. In magazine publishing there was always a goal to achieve each day, whether it was writing another story, selling another advertising contract, organising a photo shoot or putting another issue to bed. It is not like that when you are in Opposition. An Opposition's duty is to oppose and that means being negative about almost everything the other side does. But negativity is not a goal in itself and simply carping about anything and everything the other side does is pretty unedifying.

An Opposition must also propose, which is why I am proud of "Community Ties", why I am proud of being the first frontbencher to start talking in 2003 about rehabilitating prisoners, and why I am proud of the comprehensive suite of policies I developed for the 2007 election over my four years as the shadow Minister for the Environment. Those policies included a renewable energy target of 20 per cent generated here in New South Wales rather than interstate and largely funded by a revamped Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme, and building the country's first base load solar power station in the solar triangle of Moree-Cobar-Dubbo, making use of the fantastic natural energy resource available in western New South Wales. We intended to provide \$10 million towards renewable energy research at CSIRO Steel River, with a particular emphasis on geothermal—something that has once again been in the news this month. We were going to allow hybrid cars to travel in transit lanes regardless of the number of occupants, set up a \$120 million stormwater trust to harvest stormwater and devote an extra \$15 million to cleaning up dioxins from the harbour.

We would have tackled the scourge of caulerpa taxifolia before it got away. Today this noxious weed infests hundreds of hectares of Pittwater and Brisbane Water, as well as 12 other waterways. It is one of my greatest regrets that I was unable to prevent its spread. Now it is too late and it will never be fully eradicated from New South Wales. Also I put forward a policy of carrying out prescribed burns in national parks for ecological reasons—an issue I have raised in the Parliament previously—as well as for hazard reduction purposes, something that would have fundamentally changed the way we care for our bushland. The environment has long been a passion of mine. As many members would know, I wrote a book on self-sufficiency in 1978 and I have since written other books with an environmental flavour.

So in the spirit of goodwill that accompanies a valedictory speech I pay tribute to the Government for introducing the Contaminated Lands Management Act in 1996. This Act has provided a better mechanism for cleaning up contaminated land than ever existed, although orphan sites remain a problem for taxpayers. Of course, one of the most contentious orphan sites in New South Wales still has not been cleaned up. I refer to Nelson Parade in Hunters Hill where a uranium smelter operated early last century. Everybody knows the site has to be cleaned up; doing nothing is like living in a house knowing the roof is in imminent danger of collapse. Unfortunately, the upper House inquiry into the site squibbed the most important issue: where will the radioactive waste go?

The Government took the soft option of averaging the radioactive levels across the whole site, effectively diluting the hazardous waste with garden soil. That enabled it to classify the whole 5,000 tonnes of waste as industrial waste, which it then said it would send to Sydney's only industrial waste dump at Kemps Creek. The people of Penrith were understandably hostile about this proposal and following a front-page story in the *Sun-Herald* the Premier said she would find somewhere else to send the material, either interstate or overseas. This was the wrong decision made on the run by a Premier who does not understand the first thing about radioactivity.

The vast bulk of the material on this site is harmless. Plenty of places in the world have a greater level of naturally occurring radioactivity than Nelson Parade, Hunters Hill. But the hot spots, containing perhaps two to three tonnes of material, need to be treated differently. This waste should be separated and stored in drums, perhaps by the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation [ANSTO], pending the creation of a radioactive waste dump, probably in Central Australia. That is what I have consistently argued and I would have told the Premier so if she had bothered to contact me.

We cannot allow a repeat of 1978: the waste was left in situ because the Government could not find anywhere that would take it. You cannot have radioactive waste like this sitting in a suburban street. Until it is cleaned up the whole street will be tainted. I know of one local resident whose house is completely clear of contamination, yet he has negative equity in the property and his bank is threatening to foreclose on his mortgage. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Several members of Parliament offered criticisms of the media in their valedictory speeches. As a former journalist I recognise the important part a free press has to play in keeping governments and individual members of Parliament accountable. I have defended the media on countless occasions at Liberal Party branch meetings as someone who understands not only the pressures of deadlines but also the impossibility of remaining objective and pro-Liberal at the same time. Liberals love Alan Jones but I know he would agree that Australia is better off for having a range of views presented by the media. Politicians have a love-hate relationship with the media. We love it when the journalists are on our side—who does not like to be praised?—but hate it when we are on the receiving end of criticism. Often that criticism by the media is justified. Sometimes it is not.

For example, I can remember a piece 12 or 14 years ago—and members who have been here for that length of time probably remember itemising what was provided for us by the taxpayers of New South Wales in our opulent Parliament House offices: six tumblers, six wine glasses and, wait for it, a wall clock! I might add, I felt I had been gypped because my office did not contain the wine glasses, although the one I have moved to now does, I am glad to say. Members of Parliament are, of course, often their own worst enemies. Many stories about the perks of members of Parliament—like the one about the wine glasses—are provided by a member seeking to ingratiate him or herself with the media. The worst culprits are the Greens, whom Bob Carr once described as "ravening timber wolves" but are probably best categorised as anarchists. The Victorian Liberal Party won last weekend's election by putting the Greens last, and I note that Michael Costa is urging the Labor Party to do the same in today's *Australian Literary Review*. Certainly, Julia Gillard has done this country no favours by forming a de facto Coalition with Bob Brown in Canberra.

In search of a headline, in 2008 Nathan Rees scrapped members' so-called gold passes for free travel on government buses and trains. The cost of this pass to taxpayers was \$2,000 a year in fringe benefits tax. Now members claim their work-related bus and train journeys and the cost of processing those claims, I understand, is \$50,000 a year. That does not seem very cost-effective to me. I might add that as I have very few government buses in my electorate and no North West Rail Link, the gold pass was of very little value to me. This is a time of considerable turmoil in the world, a time when the institutions that are the foundations of our society need supporting. The Westminster style of democracy has evolved over almost 1,000 years; it was forged in the furnace of civil war, and tempered during more than 300 years of constitutional monarchy.

Britain led the world in the development of Parliament and a fair and transparent justice system, both of which it has transferred to this country. It is no accident of history that the greatest democracy of them all, the United States of America, evolved from the Puritan colonies established in the New England area in the seventeenth century. There most certainly have been well-publicised instances of politicians behaving badly, and not all of them from the New South Wales Parliament. Bill Clinton is surely the best-known example in modern times. When a member—any member—does the wrong thing, it reflects on all of us and ultimately on the institution of Parliament.

Speaking of the media, defamation law reform is an issue I addressed in my maiden speech, having worked as a journalist and publisher for some 23 years before coming in here. The Government changed the law relating to defamation in 2002 and again in 2005, and while the changes did not include all of my suggestions, they went a long way towards meeting them. I still think the jury should be removed from defamation trials, or at least the defendant should be allowed to choose between a judge and a jury. At least the law was changed to prevent major corporations from using it as a weapon to silence journalists.

Technology has significantly changed the way we operate as members of Parliament. Seventeen years ago mobile phones resembled bricks, the Internet was in its infancy and, while laptops existed, very few people owned them. Compare that to today, where all members have laptops and BlackBerries given to them, some have iPads and use them for their speaking notes in the House, many members have their own websites, and email gives us the opportunity to communicate with hundreds of people simultaneously. Communication techniques may have changed but the role of a member of Parliament has not. We are still the intermediaries between the ordinary man or woman and the bureaucracy. When the public servants get it wrong, members are often the only ones who can sort things out. It is when you help a little old lady who has been battling with council for months over a blocked drain or you find accommodation for someone who would otherwise be on the street that you get real job satisfaction.

The last 17 years have been a roller-coaster ride, and I would be lying if I said that I have enjoyed every moment of it. But the good moments have significantly outweighed the bad and I will look back at my time in Parliament more with pride than with regret. The defining moment of my last term—indeed one of the defining moments of my life—occurred on 28 March last year when I was involved in a motorcycle accident that almost claimed my life. I do not know what it is about 28 March, but my son, Andrew, was born on 28 March—he was 11 weeks premature and had a 10 per cent chance of living. So 28 March is a pretty significant date in the Richardson annals.

In this, my final speech, I again pay tribute to the ambulance officers, and to the doctors and nurses at Nepean Hospital who treated me after that accident. Many people were surprised when I returned to the Parliament after six weeks, well before the expiry of the period of leave the House had granted. I was determined, not only to get back to work, but also to exceed the level of fitness I had enjoyed previously. Regrettably, that has not happened, and I think I now have to accept some limitations on what I can do for the rest of my life.

That accident led to Staysafe, under the chairmanship of the member for Camden, conducting an inquiry into motorcycle safety. The committee approved the report today. While I was disappointed to note that the committee did not recommend a side intrusion test for motorcycle helmets, as I had suggested, it was encouraging to read in the report that "The Committee has received overwhelming evidence supporting the benefits of protective clothing and headwear for motorcycle riders," and that the Roads and Traffic Authority is considering new rules for appropriate clothing for riders. I understand both the NRMA and the Motor Accidents Authority support developing an independent star rating program for protective clothing, which would be a real step in the right direction.

As I told the inquiry, riders should dress for the crash, not for the ride. Shorts and thongs should be banned forthwith. I note also that the member for Macquarie Fields, who is at the table, is a member of Staysafe. There also seems to be movement on the ABS front, with the Roads and Traffic Authority considering mandating this technology for new motorcycles. Certainly, I would not have had my accident had my bike been equipped with anti-lock brakes, which were available as an optional extra on my machine; money not well saved, I suspect. If the report has an impact, some good will come from my misfortune.

Governments come and go but the spirit of a people lives on. My constituents are overwhelmingly family orientated, kind-hearted, community-minded, hardworking and generous, and it has been a great privilege to have represented them over such a long period of time. I thank them for supporting me over five elections. I also thank local Liberal Party members for their continuing efforts over so many years and my staff, Luke Scott, and before him, Andrew Collins, and particularly Joy Saly, who will have been with me for nine years and has a marvellous way with constituents.

I also thank my family—my son, Andrew, my daughter, Jane, who is here tonight, and particularly my wife, Cherry, who has not only supported me through the vicissitudes of political life but has also accompanied me to and represented me at countless functions, very ably and without pay—something that never gets any recognition by the media, I might add—as well as relieving in the office and running my campaign office at election time. I could not have done it without her. I wish my colleagues on this side of the House and the Liberal candidate for Castle Hill, Dominic Perrottet, every success in the upcoming election, and I wish all members the very best for the future. My father died in 1984. After I was first elected I learned that he had told a number of local Liberal Party members that I would be the member for The Hills one day. He was right. I only hope I have lived up to his expectations of me in my time in this place.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr David Campbell): On behalf of the House I congratulate the member for Castle Hill on his service as a local member and his contribution in this place.

Mr GRAHAM WEST (Campbelltown) [8.51 p.m.]: A valedictory speech is supposed to be the opportunity to take your leave of the Parliament—a Parliament of which I have been privileged to be a member for 10 years in February. I have been told to expect this speech to be difficult as it represents a closing chapter of my life, and I am sure the final stages will be difficult. However, I have long believed that being a member of Parliament is but one of many forms of public service that we can be called to do. It may be possibly one of the most privileged but it is not the only form of public and community service, and I do not feel that this is coming to a close. I remember giving a speech to my old school, St Gregory's College, at the invitation of the Principal, Marshal McMahon, in which I stressed this to be the case. Caring for our neighbour, joining residents groups, leading youth organisations, getting involved in charities or contributing to policy debate is just as important for our society.

I suppose that I am now given the opportunity to put those words into practice. I remember talking to the Premier some time after announcing that I was leaving Parliament and she asked what I was going to do. I replied that, having decided it was time to do something else, it was now a question of what. As many members would now be aware, I applied for the job of Chief Executive Officer of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales, the place where I first met the Premier, and I will start in that role next year. I am looking forward to this new opportunity for many reasons. First, it is a great institution that helps many of the most disadvantaged in our community. It is also the organisation that brought my wife, Tanya, and I together, when Sister Gwen Tamlyn drove me to the youth meeting in Armidale that I otherwise could not have attended.

The St Vincent de Paul Society was also one of the key drivers in my entering politics, wanting to change many of the systems in which people in poverty find themselves—a fact I referred to in my inaugural speech. However, as I said in June, being older and hopefully wiser than the 27 years I was when I entered this place, I realise that there are many ways to effect change and that a bipartisan approach is needed in many areas. One of the great challenges we face as a community is poverty. It manifests itself in many ways: holding people back from their true potential, and creating cycles of unemployment and disadvantage. We know that those in poverty are at greater risk of health problems such as diabetes, at greater risk of ending up in trouble with the law, and at greater risk of premature death.

Poverty not only means that people do not have access to the best and the latest; it also often means that people do not see other opportunities. When the Opera House ran a program called Detours and Destinations for kids in Mount Druitt and Campbelltown at risk of dropping out of school, the staff were surprised by the number of young people who had not left their communities before. They were also surprised that when they asked the kids where they would like to go they did not get answers such as Disneyland or the Gold Coast. Instead the young people genuinely asked, "Where can we go?", as they had not considered broader opportunities. The work to overcome poverty and disadvantage is not easy or quick, but as a community we must tackle it together. I noticed recently that Frank Quinlen has called for a plan to tackle poverty—a statement I support.

As I said earlier, one of the symptoms of poverty is incarceration. That is one reason I favour justice reinvestment. It takes a long-term view, is rigorous in its assessments and works with local communities. I hope that this Parliament can work with the Federal Government and a local community to try this approach. The approach is now underway or being investigated in 14 American States and was recommended by a House of Commons committee for use in England and Wales. While tackling poverty will be a lifetime project for all of us, there are other issues that I would like to see considered, all of which I have raised at various forums in the past. The first is a real constitution for New South Wales that sets boundaries for all of us to operate in and that would require consultation with the people of New South Wales to change.

Currently one of the only things that requires a referendum in New South Wales is the abolition of the upper House; all other changes can be done by a simple majority in the Parliament. This particularly came to mind during debates on detention without charge, when the Federal Government asked the States to implement the system as it was not sure that the Federal Constitution would allow it to do so. Thus, the lack of protections at a State level was used to overcome the only document that the Australian people sat down and developed. I believe that the people of New South Wales are mature enough to develop a constitution and approve the changes for New South Wales in the future. This is quite independent from a human rights Act, which I also support, but recognition that all of us must be part of setting the boundaries in which legislators operate.

On a more local level, I would like to have seen the achievement of an outcome that I have raised for many years, that is, the underlying title of the Sydney catchment lands in my area—Cataract, Woronora, Cordeaux and Avon—and the underlying title of the Holsworthy military lands converted to a national park. Such a title would not conflict with existing uses. Indeed, other catchments are managed in this way: the Bundjalung National Park and Tianjara Plateau in the Morton National Park are used for military purposes concurrently. This underlying title would mean that, should those agencies want to change the use, the land would stay protected for the people of New South Wales. It would also give us a real connection from the Royal National Park to the Blue Mountains National Park, enabling a large contiguous area of bush to be protected and allow the migration of animals and plants in response to climate change. All of this can be done at no cost.

One advantage of a valedictory speech is the ability to wander and wax lyrically, but it is also an important time to say many thank-yous. While I thanked many people in June, many others deserve special mentions. However, when I started drawing up a list I realised that I can never do these people justice: from the many people who have supported me and encouraged me as a child, whom I still feel obliged to call by their last name when I meet them at mass or in the street, to those who have come more recently. I thank the people of

Campbelltown. While not all of them may have voted for me—and many of them have told me so—they have been a great inspiration and assistance. Indeed, over the years I have often come to learn that sometimes those who tell you that you are wrong are right!

I thank the many teachers of St John's and St Greg's who encouraged me while I was there, and even those who gave the odd dose of corporal punishment, or at least threatened it. Along with the Vincentians, the Marist Brothers and the Good Samaritans have been an important part of the life of both Tanya and me, and I say a special thankyou for the unrecognised service they give. All members of Parliament, even the Independents, know that you cannot get the chance to be a member of Parliament without a legion of people who support you. In my case as a member of the Labor Party the local Labor members delivered me their trust and confidence to see me returned as the member for Campbelltown.

While I cannot name them all, and some that I would like to have named have passed on, such as my good friend Mary McTigue, I express my special thanks to the branch officials of the Campbelltown branches and the Minto and Ingleburn-Macquarie Fields branches over the years. People such as Rudi Kolkman, Meg Oates, Emma Brindley, Wal Glynn, Aaron Rule, Anoulack Chanthivong, John and Jan McLaughlin, John and Jacquie Duncan and Karen Smith—all of them have taken on leadership roles and done us all proud. Many of them opened their homes for events, poster storage and booth kit preparation, especially the Oates, the Brindleys, the Duncans, the James, the Goodfellows, and Pat and John Davis. I also pay special thanks to those who have been involved in my campaigns over the years, particularly Terry and Emma Brindley, John Duncan, Peter Rouse, Chris Minns and Michael Knight.

All of them have had calls in the middle of the night seeking advice or simply listening to me rant, and all can give as good as they got. Terry's great wish was that one day I would get the water portfolio, and I am sorry to have disappointed him in that regard. While I am leaving this place, I am staying in Campbelltown so I look forward to a few relaxing barbecues with them in the months and years to come. Over the years I have been privileged to work with great public servants at all levels, many of whom I now count as friends, and I have had the opportunity to meet their families and even catch the odd fish or two with them. I had thought about naming them, but I will not do so on the off chance that it is career-limiting for them! Suffice to say that I am glad to have worked together with them for the people of New South Wales.

I also thank the media, which provide an important public service in this State. While I have not always agreed with the conclusions reached, there are many times when I have. Providing journalists with the time and resources they need to do their job in this 24-hour world we live in only becomes more critical, and I hope that their employers recognise this. A particular mention must go to the staff of the Parliament, and especially to the staff of Hansard and the Parliamentary Library, who for many years have helped improve my speeches, and to Jan in the Whip's office who made sure I got there to give them.

I have been able to work with many fantastic members in this place from all sides, members who care passionately about their communities. But I do need to make special mention of Team Macarthur—Phillip Costa, Andrew McDonald and Geoff Corrigan. While we are a great team and good friends, I want to single out Geoff Corrigan as for many years before the last election we were a double act. I have seen many political friends fall out in this place, but while Geoff and I have our disagreements—often over green issues—we have never fallen out. Often we have walked into meetings and taken turns to play the reasonable and unreasonable member, swapping those roles as needed to get results for our community.

Mr Barry Collier: Good cop, bad cop.

Mr GRAHAM WEST: Yes. Geoff is a great advocate for the people of the area and a bloke you want beside you in a fight. I thank him for that. There are some public servants that I am happy to mention though, as they are the staff that have worked with me over the years—some, like Denise and Gail, for most of the time I have been a member of Parliament and others more recently. I still get phone calls and cards from people thanking my staff for their efforts, and I place on the record my gratitude to them too. I would like to take the time to name them: Denise Thorpe, Gail Wilson, Vicki Bargashoun, Denine McGrath, Karen Walden, Karyn Ingram, Bev Reed, Di Sucur, Linda Caruthers, and Paul Nunnari, the paralympian, who is in the gallery tonight.

I thank Paul for taking the time to come out. I am renowned as being a fast walker. One of the things Paul used to enjoy about working for me was that he thought it was good sprint training for him. I also acknowledge Ann Holland, who is also in the gallery tonight—who I think got a mention in Barry Collier's speech for my poaching of her from him, one of my better efforts!—Steve Ellis, Cara Davis, Kathleen Plimsoll,

Rosemary Crossley, Ian Webb, Elspeth Driscoll, Joanne Zammit, Phillip Kelly, Polo Gilbert-Wright, Adrian Leopardi, Lucy Gonano, who still works in the Parliament, Alex McGregor, Joanna Knight, Patrick Deegan and Elena Collison.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Are they all still working for you?

Mr GRAHAM WEST: The pockets aren't that deep! They did not all work for me at the same time. I hope that all of them continue to achieve success. Finally, I thank my family: my brother, Michael, and my sister, Belinda, and my mum and dad, and my in-laws, Steve, Fae and Tracey, who have been placed on the hardest-to-staff booths in any election, not just mine, and often without consultation, or have taken care of the kids at elections, which is probably just as hard. Thank you. To my extended family who often have done the same—including my grandparents, John and Marie, who handed out in Kentlyn and Auntie Veronica who flew across from Adelaide to hand out—thank you. All of them have been incredibly supportive and understanding, especially when I would, for example, cancel walking the Overland Track to work on an election campaign, or miss family functions.

I thank my three wonderful children—Lachlan, Nicholas and Siobhan—for their support and the joy they bring. And I thank my wife, Tanya, who always thought I would end up in aid work, not politics—aided by a visa in my passport to Ethiopia that I never got to use because of the escalation of the war and the nuns saying it was too dangerous to go. Indeed, when we met I had not even joined a political party. In spite of this, Tanya has been supportive and encouraging—and there. So I would like my last words in this place to be: Tanya, I love you.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr David Campbell): I convey the congratulations of all members to the member for Campbelltown for his service to the Parliament of New South Wales. I wish him well in his future role with the St Vincent de Paul Society.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): I welcome the distinguished guests of the member for Baulkham Hills, the Hon. Wayne Merton.

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [9.06 p.m.]: In politics many people say timing is the key ingredient for success. Well, my political career had a rocky start as I was in the small town of Daly Waters, on the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory—which proudly displayed the sign "population 17"—driving a 70-year-old car in the Bicentennial Car Rally when the 1988 New South Wales State election was announced. I did not have a mobile phone in those days. I can still remember my frantic efforts to get back to Sydney to lodge my nomination as the Liberal candidate for the seat of Carlingford, having beaten New South Wales cricket captain and test cricketer Dirk Welham by one vote in the preselection. I am sure that many of you will not be surprised that I made it just 10 minutes before closing time on the last day nominations could be lodged. I am seldom late, as you all know. And here I am now, nearly 23 years later, bidding farewell after my long, rollercoaster career as a member of the New South Wales State Parliament.

I must say that the time has gone with almost unbelievable speed. In 1988 the seat of Carlingford was one of 10 new seats created in the last year of the former Labor Government. Upon my election as the first and only member for Carlingford I discovered that Parliament was a long way from the security of a small solicitor's office that I had commenced in Parramatta with the assistance of my mother, who came out of retirement at the age of 50 having last worked when she was 22. My father joined us some five years later.

The Coalition victory in 1988, under the leadership of Nick Greiner, was a wonderful time, with the Coalition winning with a majority of 16 seats. The elation and euphoria felt at that time were amazing. People from all walks of life, and different backgrounds and circumstances, were elected with one thing in common: they were virtually on fire to work for their electorates. Regrettably, in a number of cases, such idealism and enthusiasm was shattered on the hard, rugged and cruel rocks of political reality. Nick Greiner had given a commitment, if elected, to reduce the number of parliamentary seats from 119 to 99 and, sadly, Carlingford was one of the 10 seats that disappeared. In its place the new seat of Baulkham Hills was created for the 1991 election. And I have been honoured to be the member for Baulkham Hills ever since.

During my time in this place it has been my privilege to serve in a variety of roles. I enjoyed the challenge as Minister for Justice, and Minister for Emergency Services, and I thank John Fahey for giving me that opportunity. I was Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Premier and Treasurer, and later Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Roads and Transport, who happened to be Mike Baird's father, Bruce. I also served

under the leadership of Kerry Chikarovski, as shadow Minister for Western Sydney, Public Works and Urban Water Quality. In addition, I have enjoyed my membership of various committees and as a trustee of the Parliamentary Superannuation Fund, a role I presently hold. I have also been privileged to serve as an Acting-Speaker. I thank Speaker Richard Torbay for extending that opportunity to me, and to the members of this House for endorsing my appointment.

In my inaugural speech I referred to the fact that I attended Granville South Public School and Fairfield High School. I am particularly proud of the fact that I received a strong public education. I have enjoyed an excellent relationship with all the schools that are located within my electorate. I was humbled by the fact that it was recently pointed out to me that many young people within my electorate have grown up knowing only one person, Wayne Merton, as their local State member. Included in those young people is Jana Pittman, who, as an 11 year old, first attended my electorate office to receive her State representative certificate when she was a member of the local little athletics club.

In my inaugural speech in 1988 I referred to the fact that after 12 years of Labor we had to deal with the results of incredible mismanagement by a State Labor administration. In 1988 Premier Nick Greiner was clearly demonstrating his ability to manage the State Government for the benefit of the community. It is said that history repeats itself and here we are again in 2010 faced with a State that has suffered under the mismanagement of a Labor Government for the past 14 years. Although we may not share the same politics, I am proud to say that I have made many friends who have sat on the benches opposite me or who have been elected as an Independent member, and I acknowledge their presence tonight. I have certainly made some long-term friendships. They are dedicated and decent people whose main purpose in life was to serve their constituents to the best of their ability.

During my term in this place I have been very grateful for the support given to me and my family by many members from both sides of this House, including former Premier Bob Carr and former Speaker John Aquilina during my times of personal crisis such as when my daughter, Rachel, suffered critical injuries in a car accident some five years ago. More recently members, including Speaker Richard Torbay, provided support during the medical battle of my wife, Olwyn. The support and understanding provided to me was of immense assistance during these difficult times.

The main issues of concern to the people in my electorate, which is adjacent to the north-west growth area and has a projected population larger than Canberra, continue to be roads and transport. Hills residents are captive to congested local roads and a public transport system that offers only buses. Although I believe that we still need more buses and additional car parking facilities, the M2 bus service has been a tremendous asset for local residents. The M2 was an initiative and one of the major achievements of the Greiner-Fahey Coalition Government. It is quite obvious that the Hills needs a rail service—it has been on the agenda since the early 1930s when the Parramatta to Castle Hill rail closed.

In 1998 the then Labor Minister for Transport announced the Epping to Rouse Hill rail, with the first stage to Castle Hill to be built by 2010 and then on to Rouse Hill. This week was the twelfth anniversary of the announcement, yet not one sod of earth has been turned. The Labor Government scrapped the heavy rail about two years ago in favour of a \$13 billion Metro, which was also subsequently dumped after only a matter of months. The current proposal by the Government is to build a heavy rail link with work commencing in 2017. It was at this point that I adopted the phrase that under a Labor Government only the unborn would see a rail line built in the north-west. Barry O'Farrell has committed a Coalition Government to commence construction of the rail line during the first term of a Coalition Government. Barry, I know you won't let the Hills residents down, but don't forget: I am keeping those old corflutes! I look forward to attending the opening of the rail line when the first train pulls into Castle Hill station.

People who live in my electorate are privileged to live in one of the greatest places in Australia, an area where truly the city and country meet. Our rural traditions are proudly displayed, while we recognise the inevitability of urban expansion. I was pleased to obtain a heritage grant of some \$1 million from the State Government to restore and conserve Bella Vista farm property, which was occupied by Elizabeth Macarthur. It was she who actually grew merino sheep in Australia—not John! Today John would not get away with it. And they were not grown at Camden, either. I am sorry Geoff.

It has been my privilege to serve under seven leaders of the New South Wales Liberal Party—Nick Greiner, John Fahey, Peter Collins, Kerry Chikarovski, John Brogden, Peter Debnam and Barry O'Farrell—each of whom had different attributes and abilities, and worked tirelessly to promote the conservative side of politics

in New South Wales. Unfortunately to date only two of them have achieved the office of Premier. That the political career of Nick Greiner was cut short, a man of great ability and intellect, who I believe saved New South Wales from the economic collapse that other States suffered, was a tragedy New South Wales could ill afford. John Fahey, who worked relentlessly in the role of Premier which was thrust on him, had the added difficulty of heading a Government in a hung Parliament. On many occasions the fate of government legislation was not known until each member took his or her seat in a division, which is something that the present Prime Minister would be sympathetic to. History will never know the full contributions that the other four could have made as Premiers.

I have always considered myself to be a team player and I leave this House content in the knowledge that I have at all times been loyal to each of those leaders. I have known Barry O'Farrell for many years and I have confidence that, under his leadership, New South Wales would, with a Coalition Government, move in a new and positive direction. I thank the Clerk, Russell Grove, for his guidance and assistance during the time that I have been a member of this House. I should also mention the excellent advice and assistance I have received from the table clerks of the Parliament, as I understand they are officially referred to. I acknowledge the presence of two of them who are in the Chamber tonight, Ronda Miller and Les Gonye, who respond to my "Quick, what happens next? Give me the script". They give it to me and I sound as if I know everything—that is what I think anyway!

Mr Andrew Fraser: Just like Olwyn!

Mr WAYNE MERTON: That's right, exactly. I also extend my thanks for the friendship and assistance given to me by the staff at Parliament House, whether they be located within this Chamber, the Parliamentary Library, information technology, security, catering, or Hansard. Hansard has that almost unbelievable ability to make often the most incoherent ramblings present well and, on most occasions, read far better than one's memory can ever recall. I should also note the loyal and faithful service of Peter, Ian and Danny in the Chamber, and Maria, Charlotte, Katherine and Anong in the dining room, who understand my allergic aversion to tomato soup! [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I must also refer to Greg Kelly and Merv Sheather who have served with distinction as Sergeant-at-Arms and offered friendship and advice. I cannot forget Joe Andrade, that poor, tireless and committed Speaker's assistant, who ensures that the small group of speakers are ready to take the Chair at the appointed time. I thank the members of the Carlingford and Baulkham Hills State electorate conferences for their strong support of me over so many years. Not only did they support me in my own electorate, but on many occasions, they travelled to the so-called Labor held seats of challenge, to ensure that voters received a Liberal presence on polling days—even though some could not understand my optimism and enthusiasm when encouraging them to travel to Labor's heartland where we needed only a 28 per cent swing and we were in with a chance. Some later felt they were conned!

I note that in my first speech I referred to the campaign committee people like John Goldsbrough, Ken Norris, Tom Moore and Joan Andrew, and they are still on the road tonight and they are here! They have travelled the journey with me. Many others—recruits, converts—have joined along the way, including Alan Manly, Jenny McCarthy, the late Bob Craigen, Linda and Joseph Seagrove, Rod and Lyndal Garrett, Mike Thomas, Jacky Walker, Rudy Limantono and Allan and Karen Ward. There are too many others to mention, but without their help I would not be here tonight.

I will always be proud of the fact that the people of my electorate have allowed me to be their representative in the New South Wales State Parliament from 1988 to 2010. I leave with few regrets, but the reality is that you cannot beat the hand of time. I depart with the belief that a Coalition Government led by Barry O'Farrell will, given the opportunity, step up to face the very same challenges that Nick Greiner inherited and overcame 23 years ago.

It is expected that outgoing members should make some general comments; I will oblige only briefly. In 1995 it was difficult to accept that, having been elected only seven years earlier with a majority of 16 and such hopes and aspirations for the future, we should have to leave office so early. It was not made easier by virtue of the fact that we received the majority of the two-party preferred vote, yet the Labor Party drove away in the white cars. The subsequent 15 years of Opposition have proved a long and hard road, with often only a flicker of light at the end of a very long and dark tunnel. If ever a political party needs motivation to rid itself of the chains of opposition it is to be found in those long days of being part of the political process, and yet, on many occasions, being unable to have any real say in or impact on determining the result. Notwithstanding this,

from time to time during the Carr Government I did receive light-hearted relief from some very clever theatrical performances by former Premier Carr in question time. Thank you, Bob. You might have been bashing us up and belting us about, but you did give some of us a laugh along the way.

During my time in the ministry I had considerable dealings with the media, particularly as Minister for Corrective Services. Whilst a number of those interviews were lively to say the least, as they related to matters of high public interest, my recollections are that—accepting that the broadcaster's role was to provide a program to maintain the interest of listeners—I was treated fairly. In more recent times, as shadow Minister, Parliamentary Secretary and local member, I have spoken with many radio broadcasters, including Alan Jones, Ray Hadley and John Laws—prior to his retirement—to raise and discuss issues of concern to my constituents, particularly issues relating to the Transport and Roads portfolios. I appreciate their time and interest in those matters. I understand that John Laws intends to revive his career, and I wish him well—I may be tempted to follow his lead! As for the local press, if you have a good product or story to tell they are more than helpful. I acknowledge Therese Murray, Beverley Jordan and John Blair of the *Hills Shire Times*, and Heloise Reece and Col Allison of the *Hills News*, as well as many others who have worked with me over many years to help the residents of the Hills.

In conclusion, I also thank my electoral staff. Joan Andrew has been with me throughout my political career. She is always trying to keep me out of trouble. She has the patience of Job, and has done an amazing job—she brought her own cheer squad! Roslyn Rigby, recently received recognition for 20 years of service, and Susan Sinclair, has worked with us as relief staff—we do not have a high turnover. My parents, Ted and Nancy Merton, who were children of the Great Depression, supported me both as a young person and struggled to pay my university fees. Later, they came to work in a legal practice I established in Parramatta. They continued to work there for some years after I came to this place, and they retired at the age of 78. My mother, Nancy, passed away last year. My father, Ted, who suffered a heart attack two weeks ago at the age of 90, is presently in hospital. The last time he was in hospital he was 12 years old. He was a former baritone singer: he sang in the choir at the opening of the Opera House.

I also acknowledge the contribution my family has made. My dear wife, Olwyn, has been actively involved in the community on a number of committees in her work for the Salvation Army. She is a remarkable person. She puts up with me, as well as the lonely, the sick and the deprived. She would probably have made a better member than me. Alexandra, Rachel and Andrew were teenagers when I first came here, and they have had to put up with the usual sacrifices endured by the children of all members. For example, the family joke was "The only speech day that dad didn't go to was ours!" Other kids at school who would read the papers or watch the news on television, particularly when I was Minister for Corrective Services and the inevitable incidents were newsworthy, would say, "Your old man is at it again, Merton, letting those blokes out of jail early." When I was Minister for Emergency Services they would say, "Oh, your old man is now lighting bushfires." I could not win. Today all my children are married: Alexandra to Peter, with four boys—Edward, William, Charles and Tom; Rachel to Justin—both of whom would be well known to many members; and Andrew to Samantha, with children Harry and Matilda—Matilda is only weeks old.

Finally, I wish all those members leaving this place all the best for a long and happy future in a new world. But it is not a brave new world, because it is the brave world of politics we are leaving behind. For those who will remain to continue the struggle, I will be forever thinking of you. Where to now? As both my parents retired at the age of 78, I regard my present situation as only being another chapter in hopefully a much longer journey. My journey began as a teenager living in a modest fibro cottage in an unmade street in the western Sydney suburb of Merrylands when I first listened to a broadcast by Sir Robert Menzies. I referred to this in my first speech in this place, noting that Menzies spoke of the forgotten people: the working and middle-class people who I believe are exemplified by the people in the electorate of Baulkham Hills.

Menzies believed government should recognise that the real life of the nation was to be found in the homes of those who were nameless and unadvertised, and who, whatever their individual religious conviction may be, see in their children their greatest contribution to the immortality of their race. Menzies was convinced that the home was the foundation of sanity and sobriety: an indispensable condition of continuity, and its health determined the health of society as a whole. That philosophy has sustained me in both good times and bad, in days of sunshine and in periods of inevitable threatening shadows of doubt. How many of us go home from here and from time to time think that we could have done something in a better way?

Someone far more eloquent than I once said that when we lose an election we think when we suffer defeat all is ended. That is not true. It is always only a beginning. It must always sustain us because the

greatness comes not when things always go well for you. Greatness comes when you are really tested, when you take some knocks, some disappointments and when sadness comes. Because only if you have been in the deepest valley can you ever know how magnificent it is to be on the highest mountain. Politics is like this and it is a commitment that every person, irrespective of political persuasion, who enters this place must accept.

To Premier Kristina Keneally, I wish you all the best in your personal life. Barry O'Farrell—who I spoke of previously—you will have my ongoing and unqualified support. Andrew Stoner, Leader of The Nationals, I have great admiration for you, and I have also appreciated the friendship of the members of The Nationals. I accept with pride that honorary party membership so kindly offered to me some years ago, although I must say it was late at night and under dubious circumstances following a very busy sitting day. To my many dear friends in the Liberal Party, you have put up with my idiosyncrasies and you have never betrayed my friendship. I can never repay you for this. I simply say thank you. We are fortunate to live in a democracy where you do not have to come from a privileged background to join this Chamber, but to become a member of it is a privilege. I have enjoyed this privilege for nearly 23 years and, if I had the same opportunity, I would do it all again. Thank you.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): On behalf of the Speaker and his team, I thank the member for Baulkham Hills for his contribution to this Parliament and to previous Parliaments that he has served. We will all treasure for a long time to come his wonderful speech tonight.

Ms DIANE BEAMER (Mulgoa) [9.30 p.m.]: I thank the House for giving me the opportunity to make a speech tonight. I am a little apprehensive, however, given that I am speaking directly after Wayne Merton, who has made a sensational contribution to this House and the Parliament. As a member for nearly 16 years and having held public office for over 22 years, I have had the honour and privilege to serve my community. To the electors of East Ward Penrith, Badgerys Creek and now Mulgoa, who have placed their faith in me, I will always be grateful. The group that afforded me this opportunity was of course the Australian Labor Party. My many good friends in the party have always given me support and, of course, the occasional constructive criticism. They have kept me informed of local issues, and in some cases badgered me about local issues. Whilst naming them all would be impossible, I wish to single out one, and I hope he will forgive me for doing so. I want to talk about Wayne Forno, who was a colleague while I was on Penrith City Council and is now the secretary of the Transport Workers Union. He was my campaign director in many elections, and I thank Wayne and all the members of the Australian Labor Party in my electorate and throughout New South Wales for their efforts over the years.

For the past 16 years—and so many members have already expressed this sentiment in their speeches tonight—dealing with local issues and the local community has been the best part of the job. Issues that are not large in the scheme of State Government but large in the lives of individuals are the best issues one can solve. In this regard I am reminded of the time when a lady with a number of children came to me in despair after receiving a substantial bill from Legal Aid. She had been through a messy and tough divorce and was not aware that Legal Aid was going to bill her for the property settlement part of the divorce. Quite simply, she could not afford to pay the bill. The Sheriff's Office informed her that it would take some of her possessions in lieu of payment. Included on the list of possessions from the Sheriff's Office was her microwave oven and her pots and pans. It was just appalling.

Her only option was to sell the house in which she had a very small interest. I made phone calls to the then Attorney General Jeff Shaw, who agreed that this was an outrageous situation. He used his discretion as a Minister and waived the bill. The lady kept her house and kept her children stable, and told me proudly and with delight a few years later that one of her children achieved a score of over 98 in what was then called the Universities Admission Index [UAI]. It is those little issues that you work on—little issues for the State, but big issues in the community—in relation to which you are able to sit back and say to yourself, "God, it was good being a member of Parliament." It is those victories that stick in my mind, and I know that other members here have similar victories stuck in their minds.

Of course, this would not have happened without the help of my electorate staff. I would like to personally thank Greg Davies, Barbara Williams, Stuart England, David Fisher and Anne Platovnjac—I have spelled it right in my notes, Anne; I just cannot ever say it! I single out Kim Byrne, who came to work for me 15 years ago for three months. She has threatened to take me to the Industrial Relations Commission for unfair employment, saying that she has to get out of her job. Kim, you just have a few months to go—just get over it, princess; you can do it!

I would like to talk about some of the achievements in my electorate over the last 16 years. Today Nepean Hospital is so different from the way it was 16 years ago. It now has an oncology unit; it has a world-class neonatal intensive care unit; it has emergency care for psychiatric patients. When I visited the hospital last week I could see that work is still going on. This transformed and wonderful institution has now been adopted by the University of Sydney as a teaching hospital. It is just fantastic. I am extremely proud of the way that hospital has grown over the years.

I am going to tell members about an incident that took place a few years ago about which I am sure the then Minister for Education would loved to have known. Two weeks out from a State election, Colyton High School parents and citizens association contacted me and said, "We would like you to come and visit the school". I said, "Of course, I am available to visit the school", and I did. In the science lab of that school I was shown skirting boards that fell apart when I touched them; they were riddled with white ants. The school had not complained to anyone, and this was just two weeks before an election. I said, "I can make only one promise to you, and that is on Saturday in two weeks time there will be a State election, and should I be re-elected my first phone call will be to the Minister for Education."

Two days later the Minister inspected Colyton High School, which had never raised its hand for assistance. It is now a magnificent trade high school. You should see the building work of the students. They work with the local community work to achieve things of which they should be really proud: apprenticeships that are on line for the future and work with TAFE colleges. It is a sensational place in which to learn and the enthusiasm that the school has for its future is unparalleled. Some kindergartens in my electorate have fewer children in them because of programs introduced by this State Labor Government. I am so proud of the things that we have done.

I want to talk about police. I went to my local police station after officers continually complained about the state of their police station. Their complaints were justified; it was pretty appalling. I got the then Premier Morris Iemma and then Minister for Police Carl Scully to go out there to announce the rebuilding of St Marys Police Station. It was a wonderful opening. It is a terrific building and is much needed. I recall Carl Scully standing in front of all the local police officers—and everyone knows Carl; he is a very modest bloke—saying, "Here I am, you can ask me any question. I'm absolutely here for you, so ask me anything you want." One brave police officer put up his hand and said, "Diane, are we going to build a bridge over Mamre Road or what?" I am proud to say that that bridge was built. Roads programs in my electorate in the last four years have blossomed, and we now have a bridge over Mamre Road. For that I must thank the Sackos for collecting the many petitions. They were two branch members who agitated for the cause on behalf of their local community, and they never let me forget it. The projects and work that we have done on the Northern Road and Mulgoa Road are just fantastic for the future.

I cannot leave this place without talking about my time as a Minister. I was so lucky to serve as the Minister for Juvenile Justice, the Assistant Minister for Planning, the Minister for Western Sydney, the Minister for Fair Trading, and the Assistant Minister for Commerce. Some of my days were a bit fraught—just a tad. One of my best days I recall was sitting in this Chamber and being asked as the Assistant Minister for Planning the first, second, third and fourth questions of question time. Thinking back, I would have to say that the ICAC diet that I went on was just part and parcel of being in government. It was tough making decisions, and it would always take you to tough places. I went through a tough time and I feel vindicated by the way in which we dealt with Orange Grove. I cannot make this speech without saying that Orange Grove took up a part of my life—quite a substantial part of it.

When I talk about my time as a Minister, I must mention my staff: my media adviser, Steve Adams—the Griz, as we call him—who is in the gallery tonight, Lyn Cuneo, Carmel, Tina, David Fisher and Craig Munnings. Sadly, a few months ago my chief of staff, Michael Meagher, passed away in a skiing accident. It was sad not only for his family but for New South Wales. He was a great, generous, wonderful man. More than 2,000 people attended his funeral. He was a man who gave himself continually to public service, to charity work and to the people around him. It astounded me how many of us at the funeral talked about the last time they saw Michael.

For me, it was about three weeks before he died. For John Aquilina, for whom Michael was also chief of staff, it was a week before. So many people saw him in the weeks before his death and he made them feel special. He was a fabulous human being. I have not placed on record until now how much we love him and how much he will be missed. I say to the Griz and our team: We had fabulous times together. One of my parliamentary colleagues said to me, "Your office works so well with us." I will be forever grateful for the way

in which my staff—Michael Meagher, David Fisher and Steve Adams—worked well with everybody, both Government and Opposition. They wanted to do the best they could. My four years as Minister stand out as a highlight of my parliamentary career.

I now want to talk about my partners in crime in Parliament—Nors and Cherie, Critto in the past, Allan, and Tony Stewart. Tony Stewart and I share a sense of humour that is a bit dodgy, if I can put it that way. When I moved into my new house at Mulgoa, Tony gave me a present of six Rhode Island Red chooks. I thought, "I've got a chook shed. Great, now I've got some chooks." Tony said, "Don't worry, Di, they will lay in about eight weeks time." I dutifully fed the chooks. I loved them. I gave them names: Xena the Warrior Princess and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. I loved Judge Judy, she was a great chook. After about eight weeks they were not laying. After nine weeks I got my first egg. I was over the moon. I rang Tony's electorate office and asked, "Is Tony there?" The reply was, "No, he's not." I said, "Can you take a message? Tell him the chooks are laying." A voice came back, "Okay, the message is: The Chooks Are Laying." Tony was on holidays with his kids. They tracked him down. He was scuba diving off a boat. They got him back to shore because he had an urgent message from Diane Beamer, the member for Mulgoa. The message was, "The Chooks Are Laying". Tony just said, "Thanks, mate". [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I regaled one of my parliamentary colleagues with this story. She got a fabulous idea. She rang up Tony's electorate office and said, "Can you pass a message onto Tony? The rooster crows at midnight." At the time Tony's office was under attack. Some terrible things were happening. The office thought that this call was a threat. They called the police and told them they had received a threat on line two, that someone purporting to be Gabrielle Harrison had said, "The rooster crows at midnight." Tony got a full report from the police telling him that they traced the call to the PABX system in Parliament House. To Geoff, I have never seen you without a smile and I have enjoyed every time we have been together. To Richard Amery, thank you very much for being a good colleague.

I want to talk now about the duo, Tanya Gadiel and me. We seem to be joined at the hip. Between us we have eight children—I have six and she has two. The rumours are wrong. We are the best mates in the world. When I leave this place I know that Tanya and I, her children and my children will be meeting on so many occasions because we are good friends. I love you, girlfriend. Thank you for being such a joy to know as a human being. I also want to thank the Clerks and the staff of Parliament House. To the Clerks, we had a wonderful trip to Bougainville. Don't go there for the food. To Russell Grove and Joe Andrade, you have been fabulous and always helpful. To all the staff that make this place work, thank you very much.

With my final remarks expect tears. I am a sooky chook and I always have a bit of a cry. I want to talk about my family. When I arrived here I had two three-month-old babies. When I leave they will be 16. They keep saying, "I've got a stay-at-home mum; I can't wait!" They have not had a stay-at-home mum and they want one. Next year they will be in year 11 and then year 12. I look forward to providing them with stability for their HSC studies. To my four other children: to Lauren, you are such a goer and a sensational human being, and her partner, Pete; to Michael, my lovely son, his partner, Lesley, and Lesley's little boy, Jacob, you are wonderful; to Alex and Matt, you are lovely human beings; to my daughter, Julia, who had a little baby boy, William, and made me a grandmother, and her husband, Leon, I am so proud of you, girlfriend. It is beyond belief how beautiful you are. My family is a precious thing. For the past 16 years, in fact 21 years, throughout my public service they have always been wonderful.

Over a month ago my stepfather passed away. I want to say some things about Charles Atyeo. My father died when I was 16. I spoke about him in my inaugural address. Dad, you know how much I love you. My stepfather could not pass a road without criticising it, unless it was new. If he had his way the whole of the New South Wales budget would have been spent on roads. He could not describe roads as anything other than beautiful. I cannot describe him as anything other than beautiful. He was a beautiful man. His passing is very sad for me and my family. I reserve my last thoughts for my mother, who has lost two wonderful men in her life. She is a gracious person. She taught me so many of the things that I care about. She taught me how to look after children, to value individual thought and to preciously love. To my mum, who lives with me now, I do not think I would be anywhere near the person I am without you. My mum needs a carer. People ask me what I will be doing when I leave here. I have a beautiful task ahead of me. I am going to look after my mum, in return for all the years she has given to me. I want to say to my mother: I love you so much. It has been an honour to be your daughter. We will get through this time.

I have one last person to pay tribute to: my husband, David Humphries—or the Man Mountain, as Critto used to call him. I met him here in the staff bar. How bad is that? You have to be a sad person to begin a

relationship in the staff bar. My husband told me I had to quit politics eight years ago and I told him to give me a bit more time. To my husband, David, you are a man of feisty intellect. There is nothing about you that is calm but there is everything about you that brings out the best in me, and for that and for the rest of our lives together, I thank you.

I will be leaving this place to market garden—not actually to sell anything, but Kim and I have plans. I think they are weight reduction plans more than anything else. I know that my time here has been so precious and that there is so much more to do. I thank the House for its indulgence. I say good luck to all of you who will be re-elected. Good luck to the new members who are here. To Prue Guillaume, the candidate for Mulgoa: good luck to you, girlfriend. It has been an absolute pleasure to serve with everyone—my Coalition colleagues and members on my side. I have enjoyed it so much. Thank you.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): On behalf of the Speaker and the Speaker's team, of which you are a very important part, I thank you for your contribution to this House. You have certainly left us with a lot of wonderful memories. Thank you very much.

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [9.52 p.m.]: As a previous speaker, Wayne Merton, said, it is a great privilege to be in this House. It is a great democracy that allows all people to have a go if they have the passion. I have been fortunate enough to be given that opportunity. On 12 May 1956 I turned the ripe old age of 15 years. I was lying in bed at the family home in Frenchs Forest, Sydney, with diagnosed rheumatic fever and ultimately would spend the next six weeks recuperating. Fortunately, I recovered fully with no long-term effects. At that stage of my life I was neither enjoying nor doing well at school. Unfortunately, my parents did not value the benefits of a good education so, following in my father's footsteps, I became an apprentice butcher in North Sydney. By the time I was 17 I had obtained my driver's licence, purchased a car on hire purchase—as we used to do in those days—and was managing a small one-man butcher shop. Then at 18 I met a beautiful 16-year-old girl called Diane and my life began to evolve to where I am today.

Diane's parents had a poultry farm at Oxford Falls, near Frenchs Forest, and I started to also become interested in farming as a way of life. Over the next couple of years we started collecting eggs—I took special note of the comments by the member for Mulgoa—first in a small shed on Diane's parents' farm. Then we leased another shed down the road and finally purchased 10 acres of land at Annangrove, in the Dural district, built a new home and a bigger shed and thought that was going to take care of the future. Diane and I married in 1962 and came home from our honeymoon with \$30 to our name, another car on hire purchase and a small shed full of chooks whose eggs belonged to the NSW Egg Marketing Board.

Scott, our eldest son, came along in 1963, followed by Karyn in 1966, and finally Simon in 1970. Then in 1973 I made the wild, courageous and best decision of my life—to move everything and everyone to Orange. One of my brothers is here tonight with his wife, Lyn, and they made the same courageous move and joined us there for a few years. This was before "tree changes" had even been heard of. It was a decision that brought tears to Diane, and no doubt to her mother, as we headed over the mountains in our early thirties with three kids, 20,000 chooks, a couple of dismantled sheds, a huge debt and stacks of enthusiasm, optimism and a strong will to give it a go. We had what you would call "initial dramas"—an old house that leaked when it rained and a slow combustion stove that supplied the hot water as long as Diane chopped the wood. There was the drama of building sheds in an Orange winter that saw 58 inches of rain fall with a smattering of snow instead of the normal 30 inches, and a brooder shed burning down on the same night that 10,000 day-old chicks were already on their way from Sydney.

Somehow we survived all that and the new chooks started laying. Scott, Karyn and then Simon settled into school. We bought a ski boat, again on hire purchase, and started water-skiing at Wyangala. I was invited to join Apex. I know Andrew Fraser is an old Apexian and perhaps others of my colleagues are as well. One day a new turn in the evolution of life occurred with the arrival in the mail of an invitation to join the Country Party. Prior to that I had no interest in politics. I assumed that as I voted Liberal while in Sydney we should vote for the Country Party now that we lived in the country. So we accepted the invitation and attended a luncheon barbecue at the home of Libby and Garry West. I started attending meetings and, as we all know, it does not take long to become the secretary and then chairman of the Orange branch of the party.

In 1983 I stood for the Federal seat of Calare against the sitting Labor member, David Simmons, but was not successful. Following my political loss in 1983 we bought another property. I became involved in the poultry committee of NSW Farmers and was elected to Orange City Council, serving for 12 years until 2002. Then out of the blue came the opportunity for me to try for my third career. In early 1996 Garry West decided

that 20 years in State politics was enough and, as we say, "pulled the pin", which resulted in a by-election. It was contested by four other candidates and resulted in my becoming the member for Orange in the oldest Parliament in Australia, with Diane, as always, by my side.

Along with the honour of representing the people of this great electorate came the responsibility that goes with that honour. Of course, being an egg producer and a member of Parliament aroused the interest of that fanatical little group who would have us all eating imported lettuce leaves—the Animal Liberation movement—who decided to raid our farm at 3.30 one morning late in 1996. It was the first and only time I made page 3 of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, along with a spread-eagled chook. I thank my colleagues and NSW Farmers for all their support during that dramatic episode. But, as they say in politics, no publicity is bad publicity. However, over the next couple of years we decided that running a poultry farm, an orchard, and thousands of sheep, with the responsibility of full- and part-time staff—and being a full-time polliie—was a bit too much. In 1998 we sold our beloved farm and moved on to another stage of our lives, residing at 1 Squatters Ridge, Clifton Grove via Orange, New South Wales 2800.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are two things my colleagues are sick of hearing within Parliament House and at our party meetings: one is Geoff Provest being 100 per cent for the Tweed and the other is my extolling the virtues of the city of Orange and the best electorate in the State. Since our family arrived in Orange in 1973 we have seen the population nearly double. We witnessed the biggest decentralisation of a government department in New South Wales history when Wal Murray, Garry West and Ian Armstrong were instrumental in having the Department of Agriculture transferred from Sydney to Orange. We witnessed Email in Orange change its name to Electrolux and consolidate into a very viable company, producing more than 2,000 fridges and freezers every week. It is now the only whitegoods manufacturing plant in Australia, employing over 500 people. We have watched the wine industry around Orange grow and, along with our orchards and growing food promotion campaigns, Orange is becoming a household name in Sydney and around Australia. We have seen some enormous benefits from the opening of Newcrest—firstly with Cadia Hill and then the underground Ridgeway—to the current development of Cadia East underground with gold and copper reserves that will see Cadia East being the largest underground mine in Australia.

We have seen some enormous benefits at our university following Charles Sturt University's takeover of the Orange campus. We have seen the opening of the Pharmacy school; the \$30 million development of a school of Dentistry with funding from the former Howard Government; the upgrading of their agricultural sciences and the recent start of a school of Physiotherapy; the development of research laboratories; and now the proposed medical school to be built at Charles Sturt University at a cost of more than \$100 million. The icing on the cake is the \$300 million development of the new Orange Base Hospital, including radiotherapy services, cancer care, accommodation units, Ronald McDonald House and the redevelopment of the Bloomfield mental health services, including children's mental health services, making the combined facility the largest of its type in the Southern Hemisphere. And they say that local members cannot achieve in Opposition.

So where does all this leave The Nationals and their claim to represent country people? At The Nationals State Conference in Gunnedah in 2005, I presented a paper in which I stated that I believed that we should have a policy of growing the population of New South Wales west of the Great Divide by 100,000 people over 10 years. I also proposed that families be given a \$10,000 subsidy to relocate from Sydney to a country town or city, and that cities such as Orange be encouraged to grow to 80,000 or 100,000 people. It is encouraging to note that Andrew Stoner often talks about a 100,000 extra population west of the Divide and that we have had the recent announcement that the Coalition will provide a \$7,000 assistance package for families who sell their home and relocate from Sydney to a country area.

However, whilst we acknowledge the new Orange Base Hospital we must not forget about the urgent need to upgrade health services elsewhere, whether in Gulgong, Wellington, Mudgee or Molong, and we must obtain a 24-hour medical retrieval helicopter service—with a decent chopper—based in Orange. Let us not forget about that other desperately needed project, the Bells Line Expressway—the umbilical cord between Sydney and the Central West. Let us put aside all those cynics who say, "It won't happen in my time!" Let us just get around to building it.

Ladies and gentlemen, it was a very hard decision that I made early this year that the time was right to pass on the honour of being the member for Orange in the New South Wales Parliament. As we know, Sir Charles Cutler and Lady Cutler served this electorate between 1947 and 1975; Garry West and Libby served this electorate between 1976 and 1996; and Russell and Diane Turner will have served this electorate for the past 15 years in March 2011. It has been an honour and a privilege to be one of only three members to represent the

seat of Orange in over 63 years. Andrew Stoner is at a function tonight and hoped to get back here but at this stage he has not been able to, but it has been a privilege to serve under his leadership, as it was with George Souris and previously with Ian Armstrong.

There is an old saying that we are all born equal. That is one of the most misleading and false statements ever thought up by mankind. Throughout this wonderful world we are born with an amazing variation of opportunities—of colour, genetics, intelligence, religious beliefs and backgrounds. I was one of the lucky ones. I was blessed with good health, a little bit of common sense, a work ethic and a belief that I should assist others who have not been so fortunate. In my 15 years as a member of Parliament I have met with literally thousands of people from all backgrounds: those who would appear to have been blessed with everything; those who have been blessed with good health; those who have crippling diseases, both physical and mental; those who would appear to be simply bludging on society; those who, despite their best efforts, do not seem to ever be able to make it to wherever they may have wished to be; those who are leaders and those who are happy to be led. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I have mentioned the wonderful things that are happening in the electorate—Orange Base Hospital, Charles Sturt University, the population growth and the wonderful people who make up the best electorate in New South Wales. However, when you help or attempt to help those who deserve just that little bit of assistance and who do not have the knowledge or the confidence to pursue the issue themselves, when you visit someone in their home and you are told you are the first politician to ever visit them, you start to understand what the job of being a politician is all about.

I have often stated that the role of a politician is twofold. We sit in this wonderful building here in Macquarie Street, passing or opposing legislation that comes before us, and most importantly we represent our constituents as their local member back in our electorate. Listening, lobbying and supporting our farmers, our business owners, our police, our community leaders and our families, who are the backbone of any community, and our Aboriginal community, who continue to be so tragically marginalised, is a daily part of the life of a local politician.

The issue that without doubt has had the most profound impact on my life as a pollie has been equal rights for gay and lesbian members of our society. We as a society have come a long way in the past two to three decades in recognising that we are not all born equally. We are not all redheads or blondes; we are all shapes and sizes; we all have different personalities, levels of intelligence and aims in life; and some in our society may have a different sexual orientation. I thank my son Scott, who has come down to Sydney especially for this evening, for helping me to have a better understanding of the issues of homosexuality. I am proud of my involvement and the part that I have played in changing the thinking and the philosophy, but not necessarily the vote, of most of my Nationals colleagues on this issue.

May I thank the Almighty Being who created this wonderful world with all its wonders, its beauty, its oceans, its deserts, its animals, birds, insects and its flora, and whilst I do not particularly pass on my thanks for the droughts, floods, famine or diseases, I acknowledge that it is mostly mankind itself that brings on the tragedies that beset us almost on a daily basis somewhere in this wondrous world.

I thank the staff here at Parliament House: the attendants, the cleaners, the catering staff—especially for little things such as the birthday cake that was brought out tonight in the dining room for my mother, who was 93 yesterday. It is little things like that that make this whole building part of a big family. I especially thank my fellow members of Parliament both here in the lower House and in that other place. I especially thank the Clerk, Russell Grove, for his support and wisdom during my 15 years in this place. I thank the media, which includes PRIME and WIN television, our local radio stations, and especially the print media for what could be described as reasonable to even generous coverage at times. I say a special thank you to the teams at the *Central Western Daily*, the *Wellington Times* and the *Mudgee Guardian*.

I thank my personal staff, Beverley Glover and Lachlan Paix—I know Bev is probably still panting from trying to get here this afternoon; she could not drive because the Macquarie River was flooded at Bathurst, and there were other reasons, but she got here and I thank her very much. I also thank my former staff, Robyn McCarthy and Carolyn Priest. I thank all our friends who are still hanging around despite having politics being continually thrown at them, especially for the last 15 years.

I especially thank my family: Scott, Karyn—who is unable to be here—Simon and his wife, Steph, who are in the gallery tonight, and their families for all their ongoing support and understanding. I thank my mum,

who turned 93 yesterday, as I said. I did not think mum was going to make it because she started coming up with all these excuses. But she is sitting in the middle of the gallery—good on you. I also thank my father, without whom I would not be here tonight. However, I especially thank my number one supporter—the girl I met at the Presbyterian Church Hall in Beacon Hill 51 years ago; the girl who followed me over the Blue Mountains in 1973 with little idea of what was in front of her; the girl who has stood by me through countless dramas, council elections and National Party preselections, and who was in this Chamber when during my proudest moment I was sworn in as the new member for Orange on 18 June 1996. I say to Diane: Thank you for everything.

Every now and then I get the message that my departure is finally becoming a reality. This morning I had breakfast with Richard Torbay and I was presented with a lovely certificate that I will certainly have framed. However, when I received a lapel badge that has on it the words "former member" I knew that the writing was on the wall. Thank you, Richard, for that thought this morning. I wish Andrew Gee, our preselected candidate, all the best. I have said to a number of members that Andrew will be different from me. I am sure many members will say, "Thank goodness for that." I am confident he will be the next member for Orange and that he will continue a tradition of 63 or more years. Finally, I thank everyone who granted me the privilege and the honour of being the State member for Orange in the Legislative Assembly of the New South Wales Parliament.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): On behalf of the Speaker and the Speaker's team, I thank Russell Turner for his contribution to this House. He has given a wonderful résumé and story of his life as a member of the New South Wales Parliament.

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [10.12 p.m.]: It is a privilege and a pleasure to have been a member of this Parliament for 23 years. Before I commence my valedictory speech I make mention of the fact that some people in Northern Ireland who are close to me are watching and listening to my speech. I would like to say hello to them.

Mr David Harris: The IRA!

Mr PAUL GIBSON: It is not the IRA. Twenty-three years ago, when I became a member of Parliament, we did not have that sort of technology. How quickly we have caught up with new technology. Unlike other speakers, I will commence my speech by thanking a number of people before I forget to do so. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to be a member of Parliament for 23 years. I thank the members of my family—my four children and my 12 grandchildren—who have put up with a great deal. I thank all the members of my staff. Kieran Macri has been with me 14 years and Lisa Magill has been with me six or seven years. In the 23 years that I have been a member of Parliament I have been fortunate—I have had only a handful of staff members in that time. I sincerely thank those loyal and decent people.

I thank also the members and staff of the Public Accounts Committee. In particular, I thank Ian Faulks—about whom I spoke earlier today in the Chamber—a former staff member of the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety, or the Staysafe committee. Many members who are present in the Chamber tonight have been members of the Staysafe committee. I thank Russell Grove and the parliamentary attendants. I thank Richard Torbay and Joe the attendant, who is in the Chamber tonight. For many years Joe and I have shared a standing joke: I do not call him Joe; I call him Calamari. Nobody knows what we are talking about but Joe and I do, which is all that matters. I thank the lovely Lourdes Gutierrez, the cleaner who looks after our offices upstairs. I thank all the other cleaning staff. I thank the boys on level 6 in the coffee shop. I am certain everybody knows what great joy and pleasure they give to us all.

I thank all those who work in the Strangers Dining Room. I thank Jan Clifford, whom I love dearly, in the Whip's office, and all my colleagues past and present. In particular, I thank all the people in my electorate. Members speak often about their electorates, but without our electorates we are nothing. I have said often that I represent the Australian Labor Party. I love the Labor Party but something that I love more than the Labor Party are those whom I represent—the people of Blacktown. I have fought long and hard to establish Blacktown as one of the greatest cities in this nation. It should be remembered that one in 73 people in this nation lives in Blacktown. It is now referred to as one of the leading cities in this nation.

I would like to mention some of the things that I have been able to do in my time as a member of this Parliament. In those 23 years, with the help of Kevin Rozzoli, two new hospitals have been built—one in Blacktown and one in Windsor. Escalators have been provided at Blacktown railway station. A toxic waste

dump at Castlereagh was closed. For 10 years I asked the Government to close the toxic waste dump at Castlereagh where over one million tonnes of toxic waste is buried in clay cells. No-one knows what was spewed into those cells in the early years. When the chemicals are placed into those clay cells they can change the pH factor of those cells and they leach. As I said, it took the Government 10 years to close that dump, which contains a million tonnes of toxic waste. However, it will take much longer to cleanse that area of toxic waste, which will cost millions or billions of dollars.

At some time in the future this Parliament must address that important issue. Years ago five or six children in one street were born with cleft palates. People witnessed their ducks going for a swim in the dam after heavy rain but those ducks never returned as they had died. At the time I could not convince the Government that the waste had to be incinerated or disposed of. After 10 years the Government finally decided that it should close that waste dump. Years ago I was able to assist some children in my electorate who were burned. At that time, with the help of the Government, they were provided with burn suits. Back in those days burn suits cost \$2,300 a suit. As the children developed they quickly outgrew those \$2,300 suits and every six months another one had to be purchased. I campaigned in that area and the children were provided with burn suits.

With the help of my good mate and squash partner Nick Greiner—Nick has been mentioned a few times tonight—and with the help of Kerry Packer, defibrillators were installed into every ambulance in the State, again after another long campaign. Members would be aware that more people are killed in road accidents than have been killed in all the wars in which this nation has participated. The members of the Staysafe committee were fortunate enough to take a trip overseas. Members of the media referred to that trip as an overseas junket and asked us what we did while on that trip. Some of the members who are present in the Chamber who were members of the Staysafe committee went overseas with me—sometimes in good times and sometimes in bad times.

After one of our overseas trips committee members promoted the idea of the Brifen wire rope, as people were crashing into cement barriers in the middle of our main highways. When a car hit those barriers it would bounce back out and cause more accidents. The Brifen wire rope, which has now been installed on every highway right across the nation, has saved hundreds if not thousands of lives. For 10 years the Staysafe committee asked this Government to introduce a 50-kilometre speed limit. We now have a 50-kilometre speed limit—something about which committee members can be proud. The new licensing system we have for young drivers is regarded as the best system in the world. On many occasions in this Chamber I have referred to intelligent speed adaptation, or ISA, which will probably be implemented soon and other members will be able to continue our legacy. Even forklift trucks have ISA controls so that drivers cannot speed. That is the only silver bullet left in the road safety area. It does not matter where a car is, the speed is controlled by a satellite and the driver cannot break the limit. I am sure that it will be implemented worldwide within the next six to eight years.

Ronnie Mulock once said to me, "You've got this new seat of Londonderry. You've already promised that you are going to seal The Driftway. I was the Deputy Premier and I couldn't get the funding to do it." After two or three games of squash with my mate Nick, The Driftway was sealed.

The Staysafe committee focused on the road toll a few years ago and its recommendations have brought it down from 1,500 to about 500 a year. Of course, that is 500 too many, but it has been a great effort. The committee's great achievements should be acknowledged. In Blacktown in the past eight to 10 years we have managed to get \$144.9 million for road programs, \$78.3 million for network development, \$17.7 million for infrastructure, \$37.1 million for traffic and transport, and \$11.8 million for road safety.

I have been fortunate. I have had 13 years as a rugby league player and 23 years as a member of Parliament. There is a story I have not told publicly before and I will tell it now. I stood for The Hills electorate in two or three elections against Max Ruddock—God love his soul—and Freddy Caterson. The last time I stood we were 30 votes in front with the votes from one school still to be counted. I thought I was in with a chance. However, I did not realise that the school was Castle Hill Primary School. We were beaten by about 3,000 votes. The seat was even safer after that election so I dropped out of politics for about 10 years.

I noticed that preselection for the new seat of Londonderry was being held and I decided to have a go. I did not know the proper procedure and went ahead and indicated my interest. I was called into town by the one and only Richo—Graham Richardson. He said, "Mate, what do you think you are doing?" I said, "I'm going to have a run for this seat." He said, "Mate, I've got the numbers. You haven't got a hope." I said, "Mate, I'm going

to run." He said, "I'm telling you, Faye Lo Po's got the seat." I said, "I'm still going to run." He said, "How many people do you know?" I replied, "I don't know any." He said, "The preselection is in three or four weeks and you don't know anyone." I forget the exact numbers, but he said, "There's 167 people out there and you don't know anyone and you are going to run. You're a fool." I said, "Yes, I know."

He called me back two weeks later and said, "Have you decided to pull out? You must know that we have the numbers." I said I was still standing. He said, "Have you met everyone?" I replied that I had met everybody once. He said, "How many votes do you think you're going to get?" I said, "Out of 167, I think I will get 149." He replied, "You're mad." Of course, I was; I did not get 149 votes, I got 148. I will recount that tale in my book because the best way to win a preselection is to stand when no-one knows you.

My dad always told me that I should never try to be something I am not. I remember that after I made one of my first speeches in this place Bob Carr said to me, "I've listened to your speeches and they are good. But you have to change the way you talk." I asked him what he meant. Of course, Bob is an academic and I have no education whatsoever. He replied, "I will give you an example. Today you said that the Government is trying to throw kids into the clink. You should have referred to 'juvenile delinquents in custody'." I said, "Bob, let me tell you something. You are an academic and I am not, but I speak like 99 per cent of the population. You tell me who is in the right!" Of course, he never mentioned it again. We cannot pretend to be something we are not. People can see through us if we try to. I am lucky; I do not think I have changed since the day I arrived in this place. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Diane Beamer said that she could not conclude her valedictory speech without telling members about her time as a Minister. I will tell the House about my time as a Minister! The news was out that I was about to be appointed as a Minister. My first duty was to attend the Golden Slipper at Rosehill. I love having a punt, but that was not possible because I had to do the honours with the slipper. That was the Saturday and on the Monday I got the slipper!

We can all tell stories about our electorates. A bloke ran into my office one day before the last election and said, "Hey, boofhead!" I was the only one there so he must have been talking to me. I said, "What's up?" He said, "I'm not going to vote for you." I said, "Listen here you little rat, if you vote for me and I find out, look out!" The week after the election he ran back into my office and called out, "Hey, boofhead!" I said, "What?" He said, "I voted for you!"

I was at Doonside railway station at 5.00 a.m. during another election campaign handing out how-to-vote cards. I offered a card to a well-dressed woman. There were hundreds of people around. She turned around and said, "I wouldn't vote for you." I had just been caught driving 10 kilometres an hour over the speed limit and it was splashed across the front page of that great newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*. I said, "Why?" She said, "You're a speed hog and a thug." She was halfway down the stairs and I called out to her. She said, "What's up?" I replied, "You forgot womaniser!" She came into my office after the election and said, "Do you remember me?" I said, "I do." She said, "Guess what, I voted for you." I asked her why and she replied, "When you told me that I said to my husband, 'This bloke's an honest man.'"

I was on John Laws' program and one thing led to another. We were talking about the Castlereagh tip. He said, "Paul, what is the real danger at the tip?" I replied, "John, you've got to know a fair bit about this subject. It's the orgasms in the air that you have to worry about." Lawsie nearly fell off his chair. He asked again, "What do we have to worry about?" I replied, "The orgasms in the air." I meant to say the "organisms". Michael Photios was at a function I was addressing the other day and he interjected. I said, "Michael, that is the crutch of the matter." He said, "Do you mean the crux?" I replied, "Yeah, that too."

On another occasion we decided draw attention to a situation in Londonderry by symbolically burying it. I convinced the local Liberal-voting undertaker to lend me one of his coffins. He agreed, but he made me promise that it would not be damaged in any way. I assured him that everything would be fine. It was pouring with rain on the day in question but a few thousand people turned up. We had them so stirred up that when we put the coffin in the grave to symbolise the end of Londonderry everyone started throwing in rocks and smashed the coffin. Of course, we had to come up with a new coffin.

Jones and Hadley have been mentioned. They have been tremendous to me and stuck by me. I take people as I find them, and I find them to be two great people. Someone asked me the other day who was the best journalist I had come across. In my opinion it is Peter Grimshaw, and he is closely followed by Malcolm Farr. They did their research, wrote the story and then decided on the headline. Today we do it the opposite way.

I came into this place in 1988 with Wayne Merton, who spoke earlier, and with a few more members who are in the Chamber now. In those days the House used to have extremely late night sittings, until 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the morning. We went all night on a couple of occasions. On one of those nights a division was called, which was not expected, at about 4 o'clock in the morning. Wayne is in the Chamber, so he will remember this event. He heard the division bells and as he was in his pyjamas, he put his suit coat over the top, put his shoes on and raced out of his office to come in here. In those days when members entered the Chamber they had to pay their respects to the Speaker. On this occasion Wayne flew in that quickly that he paid his respects to our mate up on the wall!

In the short time I have remaining I can tell the House that I am not deserting a sinking ship. If I were to remain for another term, I would be 71 at the end of that term. I am certain at that time I will not have the opportunity to ask to leave. So, I have taken the opportunity to leave now. I have said before that if a Government tells the truth, it will remain a Government for as long as it wants. We have a volatile electorate, but the people are smart; they know as much about politics as we think we know. They cannot be fooled.

We have heard a lot about alcohol consumption and whether the age restriction should be lifted. Of all the alcohol consumed in this State, 72 per cent is not consumed in the hotel, club or pub; it is consumed in the home. The simple solution to this problem is to put the responsibility back on to the person consuming the alcohol. Make it an offence: if you are drunk you get thrown in the clink—it is as simple as that. We are trying to shift the bar all the time. Anybody today who drinks to excess wants to blame the pub, the restaurant or the club. The person who is drunk should be blamed. That will fix the problem overnight.

I have talked about free public transport for a long time—I have no doubt it will happen. Once free public transport is costed properly it is a positive, not a negative. We can build another 20 expressways into the city, but this city is flanked by the harbour. When drivers get into this town, there is nowhere to go and there is no parking. Another tunnel under the harbour to provide a second access to rail transport would solve many of our transport problems. I have said also to do away with mobile speed cameras. Whoever is in this place after the March election should forget about mobile speed cameras. The place where more fines have been imposed using these mobile speed cameras is Blacktown Road, Blacktown, opposite the hospital. I have never seen a prang there in 23 years.

The party elected to government after March has to cap electricity prices. For too long we have said, "It's not done by us, it's IPART." That is just an excuse. Remove the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal and give the people something they want. And please stop talking about the triple-A credit rating; it has never built a matchbox. It is better to have a manageable debt for building infrastructure than to have a triple-A credit rating. A triple-A credit rating is only good if you are paying off large loans. We missed the opportunity to do that and we missed the opportunity also to buy money when it was cheap. I have been talking about those issues for a long time; I would not be fair dinkum if I did not mention them again tonight.

I love the electorate and the people. I love the branch members that stick by me. I wish Kristina and all Government members all the best. I wish Barry and Opposition members also the best for the future. Before I finish I have to say thank you to a few people. Some people have said to me, "Oh, you're the publican's friend." I earned a living from pubs for 20 years before I came into the Parliament. I will tell the House why I support the pubs. Today pubs employ 55,000 people. Every pub across this State averages 28 employees. The amount of money those hotels return to the New South Wales economy is somewhere between \$12 billion and \$13 billion a year. That is why I stick by the pubs. I thank the Australian Hotels Association, particularly Scott Leach, who is the president, Brian Ross, who is a great friend, Arthur Laundry and George Thomas, who are two great mates and, of course, John Thorpe.

Many people here know Thorpey. He has been probably my best mate for a very long time. One would never meet a more sincere bloke. I thank them all for everything they have done not only for us but also for many members in this place, in addition to the amount of money pubs give back to the community. As I have said already, it is easier to blame someone else or everyone, but let us start putting the onus on the person who is breaking the law. I have been very proud to have a great mum and dad, Betty and Bernie Gibson. It has been a great ride. Thank you.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): The member for Blacktown can only be described as a very colourful but respected member in his contribution not only to this place but also to the Staysafe committee. I congratulate Mr Gibson on his contribution.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to resolution, at 10.35 p.m. until
Thursday 2 December 2010 at 10.00 a.m.**
