

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Monday 12 September 2011

The Speaker (The Hon. Shelley Elizabeth Hancock) took the chair at 1.00 p.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RIVERSTONE AND DISTRICT LIONS CLUB FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [1.00 p.m.]: It is my pleasure to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Riverstone Lions Club providing service to the Riverstone community. As members know, Lions is an international organisation that was founded early in the last century. It has 45,000 clubs worldwide and more than 1.3 million members, making it the world's largest service club organisation. The Riverstone and districts community has been served by the Riverstone and Districts Lions Club since 1971 during which time the club has achieved many significant benefits for the community and district.

The Riverstone club was the first to send a plane load of relief to the victims of Cyclone Tracy back in 1974; it supplied a kidney dialysis machine to Hawkesbury Hospital; it provided a car to a family whose son was badly burnt in a house fire and needed a vehicle to transport him to and from hospital; it supplied several Hart Walkers for children with cerebral palsy to assist them to stand; it supplied a ventilator for a local woman; it supplied local residents with mobility scooters; it supplied play equipment in the Riverstone Lions Park; it sent money and items to Victoria's Black Saturday bushfire victims; and it contributed to Lions funds for the tsunami relief in New Orleans and Indonesia.

These are just a few of the many worthy causes for which Riverstone Lions have raised funds over those 40 years and worked hard on behalf of ordinary people. Community members who volunteer for service organisations such as Lions are the lifeblood of our local communities across the State. People volunteer their time freely without any expectation of return, or even of acknowledgement, because they believe it is good for their community. Volunteers believe that they have benefited from society and wish to return the favour to others in the community. I have met Riverstone Lions Club members at many different events: the Riverstone festival, the Marsden Park Rural Fire Service Open Day, the opening of the recently restored Riverstone Museum or the many other events during 2010 to mark the bicentenary of the Riverstone township, which was first settled in 1810.

Riverstone has a great history and the Lions Club is a proud part of that history having contributed so much to the welfare of ordinary citizens—those who, in areas such as Riverstone, often are hard workers without privilege but who are prepared to dig in and do a good job. I refer particularly to an event known as the Ride 2 Riverstone, which is a relatively recent initiative of Riverstone Lions—for the past two years—in conjunction with the Cyclists' Action Movement West cycle group. On Sunday 1 May it was my pleasure to attend officially as the local member to start the Ride 2 Riverstone for the hundreds of riders who turned up in quite cool conditions to ride around the local area—many kilometres more than I would ride—to celebrate a fit lifestyle and a wonderful place to live.

Funds raised by this event went to the Australian Lions Childhood Cancer Research Foundation, which is supported by many Lions clubs across Australia. The foundation raises funds to continue research into cancer from which 30 per cent of children, unfortunately, do not survive in the current environment. The funds will help towards research to lift the survival rate so that more people have a good life without the scourge of cancer. I pay tribute to Riverstone Lions, particularly to the club president, Lorraine Smith, and office bearer Wal Smith, who have been the backbone of the club for many years. Wal and Lorraine have worked so hard, so thanklessly and so joyfully on behalf of their community that they truly deserve the little bit of recognition I have been able to give them today.

TRIBUTE TO FATHER ATANASIO GONELLI

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [1.05 p.m.]: Today I acknowledge the launch of the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund Inc. In particular, I acknowledge the board members who have taken up the stewardship of the fund, especially the president, Felice Montrone; vice-president, Rosa Peronace; secretary, Bruno Battini; treasurer, Gianni Carelli; and foundation patron, Giuseppe Fin. I acknowledge also the efforts of board members Peter Ciani, Filippo Navarra, Michele Salamone, Susi Schio, Armando Tornari, Nat Zanardo and John Williams. These people have undertaken to carry out the work of a man who has tirelessly committed himself to God by serving the community. An event was held on Thursday 8 September 2011 at the Le Montage Function Centre at Leichhardt—a fitting venue considering the strong connections the Italian community of Sydney has with the inner west.

I was not the only member of Parliament present at the function. The Minister for Citizenship and Communities, the Hon. Victor Dominello; the member for Drummoyne, Mr John Sidoti; the member for Strathfield, Mr Charles Casuscelli; the Hon. Amanda Fazio, member of the Legislative Council; and the Hon. Marie Ficarra, member of the Legislative Council were lucky enough to share in the night's celebrations. I am sure they too would share my sentiments of the night. The sheer numbers of those present did not diminish in any way the reverence and humility that was the undertone of the whole evening. The Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund Inc, as the name suggests, honours and aims to continue the work of a man who, despite his incredible and tireless contribution to the newly arrived Italian migrants of Australia for over 61 years, and the influence he has had on the lives of countless members of the Italian community, still prefers to be known as simply a humble servant of God.

Father Atanasio Gonelli was born on 11 February 1923 in the small Italian village of Catignano. In 1940 he followed a calling to God and joined the Capuchin friar religious order. On 1 March 1946 he was ordained a priest and in 1949 he volunteered to come to Australia to become the apostolate amongst the growing Italian migrant community in Sydney. Father Atanasio Gonelli lived out his Catholic vows. Instead of simply preaching the gospel, he reached out to the community and lived its message day in and day out. As a young Capuchin friar, Father Atanasio helped Italian migrants to settle in Sydney. He provided housing assistance to newly-arrived Italian migrants and helped them to find employment and he visited migrants who became sick and infirm.

So strong was his commitment to comforting the sick that one of the stories recounted during the night came as no surprise. A number of years ago when Father Atanasio was travelling towards Canberra with the Italian Consul to attend a function they came across an accident. Instead of thinking about the function, Father Atanasio stopped to give aid and comfort to victims of a car accident outside Goulbourn and he accompanied them to Goulbourn Base Hospital. It surprised no-one that the climax of the story was that Father Atanasio missed the function in Canberra. He preferred to spend his time at the Goulbourn hospital with the accident victims. As the community expanded so did the services Father Atanasio provided.

Father Atanasio helped to establish migrant welcoming and assistance centres and was instrumental in the establishment of sporting and recreational activities for immigrant children. From 1963 to 1971, Father Atanasio was also the editor in chief of *La Fiamma*, the Italian newspaper in Sydney. It is well documented that it was Father Atanasio's encouragement that led to the establishment of the Committee of Assistance to Italians, more commonly known as Co.As.It. The organisation is known for the assistance it provides to the needy and the elderly.

Today, Father Atanasio Gonelli continues the ministry given to him by the Archbishop of Sydney all those years ago as the chaplain of St Fiacre's Church at Leichhardt. The establishment of a charitable fund under his name is fitting for a man who saw his work as nothing more than his personal calling from God. The Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund aims to embody the missionary zeal of this humble servant of God. Like Father Atanasio, it calls on its members to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy and by sharing their skills and talents with those members of the Australian community in need.

The fund seeks to carry out this calling with respect to the dignity of those it is assisting and by sharing hope and encouraging them gradually to become independent. I thank the organisers, the board of directors of the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund and the team that made the night a great success. I note that \$153,000 was raised for the fund. On behalf of the Italian community in Sydney and our broader community, I take this opportunity to thank Father Atanasio Gonelli for the tireless service he has provided in his 61 years in Australia.

GATE TO PLATE EVENT

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.10 p.m.]: We do many things as politicians and much of it is hard work. However, every now and then we are invited to participate in an event that is truly enjoyable. Yesterday I attended the Grafton Gallery Foundation Gate to Plate event. What a great presentation of Clarence Valley cuisine. We had beautiful food and wine and witnessed demonstrations by the many great chefs in the valley. The foundation has been working for five years to raise \$1 million to buy artworks for the gallery and to support other gallery activities. The Gate to Plate event has been going from strength to strength every year. The chair of the foundation, George Borkitt, was impressed with the efforts of event committee chairperson Lisa Dougherty and her dedicated helpers.

One of the hardest workers was Judy Hackett, the wife of Mark Hackett, one of the leading celebrity chefs in the Clarence Valley. The committee members include Elizabeth Fahey; Sue Ibbott; Sue Hughes, a Clarence Valley councillor; Scott Morscel; John Croft; Rod Watters, James Moloney; Gai Pritchard; Jude McBeen, the curator of the gallery; and Pam Fysch, a tireless worker and well-known artist in the area. Of course I must thank Karl Causley of Causley Fresh and the many other sponsors who made this event happen. The Gate to Plate event is designed to showcase the cuisine of the area and the fine food that is available. It involved a nine-course meal with accompanying wines. Given that I am a keen politician and dedicated to my job, I had to leave half way through the event to fly to Sydney for the sitting week, but I was able to stay until the completion of the sixth course. We enjoyed Woolli oysters—the prime oysters in New South Wales; Yulgilbar beef—

Mr Craig Baumann: What about Port Stephens oysters?

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: We heard about the problems experienced at Port Stephens. We also enjoyed Yamba prawns, which I am sure the member for Keira has tasted. We also had Palmers Island Mulloway, which was provided by Andrew Carol, who was the Young Farmer of the Year in 2009-10. The meal was rounded out with freshly picked Challacombe strawberries. We also enjoyed Enders Olives, produced by Dorothy and Don. Of course, many other producers were involved in and generously made donations to the event, including Kitchen to Table, Ochre Health and Botero Coffee.

The day was all about showcasing the fine foods and producers of the Clarence Valley. George Borkitt told me it was an opportunity to bring together all the producers of fine foods in the valley and to build the community and our economic life. The event has grown from the old markets to a fine food event and local wines from within a radius of 100 kilometres were served. We also had a celebrity cook-off, in which I was involved. There are two things I can do very well: boil water and cook a hamburger. I came second in the event and I was very impressed with myself. The icing on the cake, so to speak, was that Judy Hackett bought my hamburger at the auction to give to her husband because he was too busy to make his own lunch. I asked Mark Hackett whether he enjoyed my effort and he said that he did but that I had forgotten to put any sauce on it. I took that as constructive criticism, but I was disappointed that he did not rave about my culinary efforts in his newspaper column this week.

The purpose of the Gate to Plate event is to promote the Clarence Valley and it has done that magnificently. The *Daily Examiner* captured the day well with the headline "Day to savour valley flavour". Another headline read "In a pickle over burger cook-off", which was a reference to my reaction to coming second in the hamburger competition. The newspaper also ran an article under the heading "Weekend of good taste". The event is not simply fundraising for the sake of it; it highlights the Clarence Valley. It is on a par with the Jacaranda Festival, which is world renowned. Simon Thompson, a leading Sydney food critic, and Michael Moore, a leading cookbook author who runs Towers at Australia Square, judged the event. It was a great weekend and everyone is welcome to attend next year.

INALA ORGANISATION

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET (Castle Hill) [10.15 p.m.]: I congratulate the Inala organisation in Cherrybrook for its continued excellent work for people with disabilities. Established in 1958, Inala, or "place of peace", exists to provide a range of human-centred, individualised services for people with disabilities. Inala was established on a five-acre property by Dr Han Joachim Pohl and his wife, Kyra. They had one house, which was used as a dormitory at night and a classroom during the day. Later, two tramcars were brought to the property to be used as classrooms. I am informed that that led the local newspaper to put on its front page the headline "Only a tram but it puts the children on the right track". While the trams may be gone, Inala's work in our local community for people with disabilities continues.

Our local communities are only strengthened by initiatives such as these and walking through Inala's facilities is all the reminder that I need to assure me and for me to assure this House that the community of The Hills is alive and thriving. I am heartened by last week's budget, which is an example of fiscal responsibility in which Treasurer Mike Baird announced a five-year \$2-billion program for disability services. That is the largest funding commitment to disability services made in this nation's history. As the Treasurer and the Government are well aware, such funding is vital to delivering better outcomes for those with disabilities and their families. The recent official opening of Inala's Dulkara Centre for Life Skills and the Arts has made me realise that more is needed than financial assistance. Rather, commitment, a drive for change and generosity are needed to enhance the lives of those with a disability. I am happy to say that The Hills community has those attributes and more.

The new centre, a dream that began in a fibro cottage in 1971 and was about 40 years in the making, has become a reality primarily thanks to the fundraising efforts of people who just will not take no for an answer. Why would they? Wandering through the purpose-built facility in Cherrybrook it is obvious that the centre will have a dramatic and positive impact—not just on those with a disability but on their families and the surrounding community. The centre has a number of classrooms and each has a different activity for their clients to participate in, from woodwork to pottery, from sewing to card-making. It is a fantastic centre and I know that the clients and many of their family members will have a great time continuing to participate in the activities that it offers.

Almost \$1.8 million was raised to ensure that this project was a success, with those involved dedicated to ensuring that the centre will provide the very best facilities available. I was informed that the builder of Dulkara, a great friend of Inala, was looking forward to retirement before being encouraged to undertake this one last job. I am confident that he is glad he did not turn down the opportunity to be part of such a great project. The Minister for Ageing and Disability, Mr Andrew Constance, was in attendance to officially open the centre. I was encouraged to hear him address the many parents, supporters and clients of Inala. His message of inclusion and the importance of community involvement was very well received. He also spoke of the positive attitude that is needed when addressing those members of our community with a disability. Dulkara does exactly that.

Martin Porteous, the day manager of Inala, sees the centre as a resource not just for Inala but as a community-wide facility for the arts. The dedication and hard work that has gone into ensuring the very existence of this new purpose-built facility was on clear display at the centre's official opening. Speaking with one of the parents of Inala's clients, I was struck by the difference that Inala's services made to her own life and to that of her son. She impressed upon me just how difficult it can be to care for a child, teenager or adult with a disability, but Inala's facilities and staff have allowed her son to experience new challenges and learning opportunities, and to enjoy a general positive attitude that would not be possible without the continued support that Inala provides. John Wilshire, the chief executive officer of Inala, could not speak highly enough of the staff and carers who provide such an essential service for our community.

There was no doubt at the opening that the feeling amongst the clients and their families was great. They even danced to Abba. I did not get involved in that side of the event—I did not want to embarrass myself too much—but certainly it was a great day for those families and it was a pleasure to have been invited and to attend. Inala has come a long way along the tracks since it used trams for classrooms, and in many ways our society's attitude towards those with a disability has also. It is through the work of organisations such as Inala that this is possible. I congratulate Inala on its new Dulkara centre and commend its work within the community.

MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL OF ILLAWARRA

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) [1.20 p.m.]: Last Friday evening, I attended the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra. This organisation has provided support to the multicultural community across the Illawarra for more than 35 years and started in humbling beginnings with a mere \$1,000. It now employs many staff and has many volunteers with huge amounts of turnover, but, most importantly, it provides support and services to our multicultural communities across the Illawarra. The electorate of Keira has the thirteenth-highest number of persons of any electorate who were born in the southern European region. That largely encompasses Italians, a huge number of whom reside in the electorate of Keira. The Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra does a fantastic job of supporting not just the Italian community within the electorate of Keira but all communities of multicultural background across the Illawarra, and it was an absolute pleasure to join the council on this very important occasion.

Some of the things that the organisation has been involved in since 1975 include highly successful day care programs for the elderly and a highly successful dementia awareness program. One of the DVDs about dementia received acclaim and awards for the way in which it was presented. In addition to what the council does for the elderly, it also makes an important difference to the lives of young people. The Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra supports the highly successful Links to Learning Program, which has been established for many years and is designed to encourage those people who are going a little off course, finding that school is not for them, to re-engage with learning. The council plays an enormous role in supporting those young people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds to re-engage in education across the Illawarra and in their personal lives.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that we had the pleasure of having the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Mr Victor Dominello, in attendance. With programs and funding to be decided upon in the next six to 12 months, I cannot emphasise enough that this is an organisation, as the Minister himself said, that is a beacon of hope and an example of what multicultural communities can do across our region. I want to be assured that the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra will receive the funding it needs to continue to support many thousands of people right across the Illawarra, and particularly those in the electorate of Keira. It provides support in a wide variety of services acknowledged by the Minister on Friday night and it is absolutely paramount for that work to continue and for the council to see another successful 35 years going forward that it has the funding needed to ensure that it can provide those vital support services in our region.

I take this opportunity to thank a number of people involved in the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra, starting with Terrie Leoleos, who is someone we know well in the Illawarra. She is an incredibly hardworking woman. She has provided years of service to multicultural communities across the region. She is a tireless worker who does an enormous amount of work within the local ethnic communities and I want to pay my respects to her in this place. I also thank Ken Habak, who is the chair of the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra. Ken has been in that role for some years and continues to be a driving force and a very strong advocate for ethnic communities across the region. I pay my respects to Ken and Terrie and all of the team—the volunteers, the elderly and young people—who have given of their time over the past 35 years to make the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra a fantastic organisation. I urge the Government, and in particular the Minister, to look favourably upon this organisation when funding comes in the next six to 12 months so that it can continue to do this important work across our region.

ROAD AND HELICOPTER MEDICAL RETRIEVAL SERVICES

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [1.25 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to the fact that discussion regarding a 24-hour retrieval service for the Central West took place in this House last Thursday. The matter was raised in this House following a petition of over 30,000 signatures, making it one of the largest petitions lodged here in recent memory. I extend my gratitude to all of those members who took part in last Thursday's debate. They were the Minister for Health, the member for Dubbo, the member for Bathurst and the member for Macquarie Fields. The member for Macquarie Fields made a very constructive contribution to the debate last week and I thank him for that. I shall return to his contribution shortly.

I also wish to thank the councils and councillors of the Central West for their interest in this issue. Mayors and councillors of all political persuasions right across the region have supported this cause. Orange City Council has been particularly active and I acknowledge its efforts. The *Central Western Daily* in Orange and newspapers across the Central West have also actively supported this campaign, and I acknowledge their efforts. It is clear that the *Central Western Daily* has been following this story for a number of years. The television and radio stations of the Central West have also been actively interested, and I thank them for that.

I also take this opportunity to thank all of those people who took the trouble to sign the petition. I think it brought home to this Parliament how important achieving a 24-hour service is to people of the Central West region. The service is vital for people who live in and around Orange, but even more so for people in neighbouring electorates who do not live so close to a major hospital. The people of the Central West are acutely aware of the distances that need to be covered in order to get trauma victims to medical care, and this is why the issue resonates so much with them. That is the point that people west of the great divide wish to make to people east of it. We do not have the same easy access to emergency care. There are often huge distances to be covered in getting patients to the best care and time is of the essence.

I also thank and acknowledge the many people who have contacted my office in recent days and weeks to tell us their stories highlighting the need for this life-giving service. One story that should be heard is from

Vicki Williams, the mother of amateur jockey Reece Potter who died as a result of a race fall at Tottenham Picnic Races at about 5.15 p.m. on 12 March this year. Emergency calls for the helicopter to come to the racetrack were made but no crew was available. Ms Williams travelled in the back of the ambulance that conveyed her son to Dubbo Base Hospital and later spoke of the trauma of the ride as paramedics had to stop several times to work on her son.

Mr Potter was eventually airlifted to Sydney by fixed wing aircraft, arriving there almost seven hours later. Ms Williams is a campaigner for a 24-hour retrieval service and her point is not that her son would have survived his injuries had a helicopter been available; her point is that he should have been given the same chance at life as people with access to a 24-hour service. Nobody at the time knew that Mr Potter would not or could not survive his injuries. On that tragic day his mother saw firsthand how important it is to get patients in the Central West to emergency care in the shortest possible time.

Yesterday I had the pleasure of opening the Cudal Show. At that show many people approached me and wanted to talk to me about this issue and about where we go from here. I think the answer to that is that all options need to be on the table. As I pointed out in the House last week, the only full-scale review into the 24-hour retrieval service was carried out by the Ambulance Service of New South Wales in 2009. That review found that the operating hours of the helicopter should not be extended to 24 hours. As I highlighted to the House last week, the flaw in that report is that if Orange had a 24-hour service it would be as busy or busier than Wollongong, and busier than Lismore, Canberra and Tamworth, which all have either a full 24-hour service or a 24-hour, on-call service. The subsequent Auditor-General's report of 2010 made no new investigation of the matter and simply referred briefly to the 2009 ambulance report. The option of a full 24-hour service should of course be on the table.

However, I note that the 2009 ambulance report did specifically recommend that the introduction of an after-hours, on-call arrangement be explored as an additional resource at times of high workload—in other words, have a look at an on-call service. It is another option that should be on the table. The member for Macquarie Fields made that point on Thursday night as he did the fact that since 2009, when the ambulance service report was prepared, Orange has become the regional trauma centre for the western New South Wales health district—things have changed since 2009. An on-call service could be trialled for 12 months to see whether it was justified and how it affected patient care. Other options that should be on the table include a road retrieval service as an interim measure. The cost of that would be minimal. Exploring the feasibility of introducing that option is one of the reasons I would like to see clinicians involved in the solution to this question.

Of course, if the ambulance service does not have the resources to expand the service any further one option that should be examined is taking the service back to a community-based model, as CareFlight was. This would certainly have wholehearted support in the Central West. Another option that should be on the table is getting the private sector involved. I know of business people in Orange that are championing at the bit to assist in this worthy cause. Maybe their help is now required. Tomorrow the mayors of the Central West meet with the health Minister to share their concerns. I thank the health Minister for meeting with them. To the people of the Central West I say this: The campaign for this life-giving service did not end on Thursday night. Keep the faith. Our work will continue and we shall not let this vital issue die.

CENTRAL COAST SURF LIFESAVING

Mr DARREN WEBBER (Wyang) [1.30 p.m.]: Saturday 24 September sees the start of the 2011-12 surf life saving season volunteer patrols. Going to the beach on a hot summer day is a great Australian tradition. Enjoying a swim in the cool water followed by a game of beach cricket is common to the Central Coast lifestyle. In my electorate of Wyong we are blessed to have access to some of the State's most magnificent beaches, which attract locals and tourists alike throughout the summer. The community of Wyong is privileged to enjoy the likes of Lakes Beach and Soldiers Beach. The Central Coast is a Mecca for beach goers, as our coastline is full of safe beaches. While we are enjoying the surf, sand and sun, a dedicated team of men and women dressed in red and yellow are diligently watching us to ensure our safety and wellbeing.

As an active surf lifesaver I know firsthand the challenges that the surf lifesavers face on a daily basis. Firstly, deciding where to set up the patrol flags, designating a safe haven for swimmers and bodyboarders in an environment with moving rips and sandbars; and, secondly, when conducting a rescue, selecting the equipment to use. Our gear includes rescue tubes, rescue boards, inflatable rescue boats—more commonly known as "rubber ducks"—jetskis and, when needed, the rescue helicopter. Many rescues are performed without any equipment but my preferred choice is the inflatable rescue boat.

A unique challenge male surf lifesavers face every weekend is whether to wear board shorts or Speedos. There are mixed views on this issue but I am happy to advise the House today that I, along with most of my colleagues, are more than happy in Speedos. From my time as a surf lifesaver I have learnt many things such as the importance of community involvement, an active healthy lifestyle and surf safety. We are trained to save lives in dangerous conditions and the satisfaction of pulling someone from the surf is very rewarding, matched only by life coming back to the eyes of a patient you are doing cardiopulmonary resuscitation on.

Surf lifesaving has been a great tradition on the Central Coast for over 72 years, saving countless lives, ensuring safe swimming environments and producing some of the safest beaches in the world. Surf Life Saving Australia is a not-for-profit organisation. The army of red and yellow volunteers are tireless, even working Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day and over the Easter break. These roles are unpaid and require time above and beyond the countless hours devoted to performing patrols every weekend. Last season alone Lakes Beach and Soldiers Beach surf life saving clubs attended to 788 first aid calls for help and completed 93 rescues. The most important statistic in my view is the preventative actions. Seeing a potential risk and acting before the situation becomes a rescue or first aid case is very important and a skill we try to reinforce with our younger cadets.

Surf lifesavers are an iconic image of Australia and are heroic in their actions. They volunteer their time on weekends and regularly place their lives in danger. Surf lifesaving is an important and rewarding calling. The 2011-12 season is about to commence, coinciding with the September school holidays. Surf lifesaving clubs throughout the Central Coast, indeed across the State and nation, are all preparing for a busy summer. Membership sign-up days have occurred, rescue equipment has been dusted off and active patrolling members are preparing for their proficiency examinations, which include a rigorous run-swim-run. This is necessary to ensure that surf lifesavers are competent to carry out their duties and responsibilities and to maintain the world-class service commitment to the beach-going community.

At the end of the day our goal as surf lifesavers is to always protect beachgoers and to finish the season with, hopefully, no lives lost between the flags. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all surf lifesaving volunteers for their dedication and commitment to making our beaches a safer place. I wish all my fellow surf lifesavers right across the State, and in particular in the Wyong electorate and on the Central Coast, a very safe, enjoyable and productive season in the months ahead. To all beachgoers: Remember to slip, slop, slap; swim between the red and yellow flags; and always follow the directions of a lifeguard or volunteer surf lifesaver.

POLISH ASSOCIATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES, CABRAMATTA BRANCH

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [1.35 p.m.]: It was my great pleasure, having been invited, to attend on Sunday 19 June the Polish Association in New South Wales, Cabramatta branch, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Polish White Eagle Hall, at the corner of Bareena and West Streets, Canley Vale. The city of Fairfield and my electorate of Cabramatta have been home to the Polish community for more than 60 years. The Polish community is one of the pillar communities in Fairfield in my electorate of Cabramatta, and continues to be very active in supporting and shaping the future of our city. White Eagle Hall is an important facility, as it serves as a cultural hub for the social life of the Polish community. It serves both the senior and youth groups and is a place where one can interact with friends and celebrate cultural and religious events and a base for folkloric dance groups and choir rehearsals.

It is an example of how multicultural groups in Australia can come together to help preserve important traditions while, in this case, teaching fellow Australians and younger generations about the rich Polish culture. We are fortunate to live in such a diverse city, where people from all nations across the world come together to share and respect each other's culture and traditions. The city of Fairfield is home to more than 130 cultural groups with more than 60 per cent of our residents speaking another language other than English. Fairfield has approximately 70 different religions and 50 different spoken languages. This is what makes our city such a wonderful place. I would like to thank the Polish community for its continued support and work in the city of Fairfield. Their hard work has greatly contributed to shaping the future of our city.

I thank Krystyna Cyron, President of the Polish Association in New South Wales, Cabramatta branch, for inviting me to this important celebration. She is highly regarded not only in the Polish community but also throughout the wider Cabramatta and Fairfield communities. In 2010 Krystyna received the Fairfield City Council Citizen of the Year award in recognition of her continuous support throughout the Cabramatta and Fairfield communities. Her achievements are many and her commitment is admirable. She is a member of a

number of community committees, not all related to the Polish community, run by Fairfield City Council. Krystyna is the voice of all our multicultural communities and her aim is to ensure that they all work efficiently and effectively together.

Once again I congratulate the Polish Association in New South Wales, Cabramatta branch, on reaching such a wonderful milestone and wish it every success for the future. I also thank the special guests who helped to celebrate this special day: George Krajewski, representative, Polish Association in New South Wales; Mrs Sulkowski, Australian Polish Home Care Manager; Ms Dominica Musek, Polish Consulate, Arts and Culture; Ms Elizabeth Cesarska, representative, Polish schools in New South Wales; Mrs Krystyna Cyron, President, Polish Association of New South Wales, Cabramatta Branch; representatives, Polish Consulate General, Sydney; and Holy Fathers Christos and Ted.

VOGUE FASHION NIGHT OUT

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [1.40 p.m.]: The Sydney electorate, as the centre of Sydney's fashion industry, has a number of renowned fashion precincts. The central business district includes our two major department stores and boutiques in the new Westfield Sydney Shopping Centre, Pitt Street Mall, Queen Victoria Building and Strand Arcade. High-fashion stores such as Chanel and Hermes are found in The Rocks and Castlereagh Street. In Paddington small and often independent boutiques span Oxford Street and side streets such as Glenmore Road and William Street, and Crown Street, Surry Hills, has become the place to go for vintage fashion.

Retail and fashion are important facets of Sydney's tremendous and diverse creative sector, and a thriving retail industry is also a vital part of our economy. At last count the retail sector employed over 14 per cent of our workforce, accounted for 37 per cent of all businesses and occupied 13 per cent of all floor space across the City of Sydney local government area. It is the largest retail sector in Australia, and it continues to broaden and deepen the scope of its offerings. It reaffirms our place as Australia's face to the world as one of the most innovative, creative and lively cities in the Asia-Pacific. Areas with a strong fashion presence are more lively and engaging places to work and visit.

Last year I initiated a retail advisory panel in the City of Sydney to link the industry with the city and the New South Wales Government in order to provide informed advice and a forum for raising issues of concern to the industry. The City of Sydney has extended this support through sponsorship of Vogue Fashion Night Out, making Sydney one of 17 world cities to hold the event this year. Vogue Fashion Night Out provides an after-hours shopping experience where shoppers can mingle with celebrities, designers and stars as they watch performances, listen to music and have a civilised drink.

Last year I had the pleasure of opening the first Sydney Vogue Fashion Night Out on the steps of the MLC Centre, and last Thursday I was joined by Jessica Gomes, Vogue Fashion Night Out Ambassador, Kirstie Clements, Editor in Chief of Vogue Australia, and Bob Jordan, Westfield Managing Director Australia and New Zealand, to launch the second Vogue Fashion Night Out. This year's event was expanded by two extra hours and about one-third more retailers taking part. More than 600 shops were involved—some shops had queues of people waiting to get inside that could have rivalled the hottest Sydney night clubs. Shops hosted live performances, fashion parades, fashion tutorials on how to tie a scarf, special window displays and other activities. Some stores and some labels offered one-off limited edition pieces made especially for the event that collectors could snap up. Pitt Street Mall, which was recently beautifully upgraded, was alive with activity—I have never seen it buzz quite as much.

Retailers are facing tough economic times. It is great to see so many of them working together to look at new ways to stimulate shopping in the city in order to gain new customers. Some fashion stores can be quite intimidating to visit, particularly high-end boutiques. Vogue Fashion Night Out presents an opportunity to break down barriers between shoppers and retailers and to introduce new patrons to boutiques. People were queued outside of Bally, Armani, Paspaley, Tiffany's, Louis Vuitton, and Farage. The newly opened Westfield plaza was buzzing, and the floral arrangements in David Jones were absolutely beautiful—a destination in themselves. With online shopping a looming threat to the traditional store, Vogue Fashion Night Out gives customers a reason to log off their computers and visit the shops in the city centre, which is great for the economy. I am advised that the evening was a success for retailers. Another great achievement was the fantastic mix of the social and retail experience for those who had a fabulous night out in the heart of a major Australian retail centre.

Vogue Fashion Night Out is in line with what we at the City of Sydney are working to achieve for our late night economy: a range of different options for people to enjoy at night—from shopping to movies or going to an art gallery or bookstore. In light of the violent ugliness seen over the past weekend in some areas of the city, it is important to provide variety that does involve getting drunk and bashing people. I congratulate the organisers, particularly Vogue, on creating an outstanding event and the spirit among our retailers who hosted live performances, fashion parades, special window displays and other activities to promote our global city was terrific.

SHELL COVE BOAT HARBOUR AND MARINA PROJECT

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour) [1.45 p.m.]: The \$150 million Shell Cove boat harbour and marina project is the final piece of major infrastructure to be built as part of the Shellharbour City Council land release at Shell Cove, which will eventually comprise 3,000 lots of land and house 10,000 people. So far 1,500 have been sold and 3,500 people have now made Shell Cove their home. This project is in the electorate represented by my colleague and friend, Mr Gareth Ward, the member for Kiama, and he is one of the most ardent supporters of it, as am I. Our support is an example of the bipartisan support this project has received over the past 25 years. I am being nice to you, Gareth.

Mr Gareth Ward: Nicer than usual.

Ms ANNA WATSON: The Shellharbour City Council, as the developer of this project, has made an application to the State Government for a \$20 million low interest rate loan. The loan will serve two purposes: first, it will provide cash flow to ensure that the three stages of the boat harbour and marina are built as one seamless construction program; and, second, the overall construction program will be shortened by two years. The Government should commit to those funds being made available now so that this job-generating economic game changer can begin. The Illawarra needs three things: jobs, jobs and more jobs. It is acknowledged that Australia needs a more skilled workforce. The Illawarra has no shortage of skilled labour; it has a shortage of jobs. The Illawarra has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. We must not allow a generation to be lost to the horrors of unemployment.

Youth unemployment in the Shellharbour local government area stands at a shameful 36 per cent. Just short of two weeks ago BlueScope Steel announced an additional loss of 800-plus direct jobs in addition to the 300-plus construction jobs. This was a savage blow to the families of the Illawarra. Now, more than ever, the Illawarra needs our help. The Shellharbour City Council is economically responsible. It is not asking the State for a handout—although one could be justified in the circumstances—but it is asking for money to be repaid at a low interest rate. The Government's coffers will also be boosted by the economic activity generated from this project, but the council will not start it without a planned and secure funding arrangement in place.

MacroPlan Australia has estimated that in the 10 years following the commencement of the project revenue streams to the Government will be: \$183 million in income tax, \$34 million in goods and services tax, and \$23 million in payroll tax, and for each of the 15 years following the commencement of the project \$1 million will be generated in stamp duty. In addition, the project will provide public boat launching ramps, trailer parking, boardwalks and share ways—infrastructure normally subsidised by the State, but the State will save several millions of dollars because it will not have to subsidise that infrastructure.

This project is not about the revenues that will flow to government; it is about jobs, economic diversification, a fresh start and hope for the future for the people of the Illawarra. It is on these platforms that the Illawarra can begin to build and find success once again. MacroPlan Australia has estimated that the broader Shell Cove Development will have generated more than 7,200 direct, indirect and supported positions by the date of its completion. The boat harbour and marina element alone will generate an estimated 2,400 jobs. The House would be interested to learn that the council's residential development at Shell Cove has been successful so far using a very simple business plan: developing a small staged and planned area, selling the land, recouping marketing and other costs and using the net profit to provide infrastructure funding for the next staged release. I could go on and on, but I am aware of the time. In the words of John F. Kennedy in his inaugural address:

United, there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do—for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.

This is one such cooperative venture. I leave the House with the words of his brother Robert F. Kennedy:

Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not?

To the people of the Illawarra this is one of those "why not" propositions. The time is now.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.50 p.m.]: I thank the member for Shellharbour for bringing the Shell Cove marina development to the attention of the House and for saying nice things about the member for Kiama, which no-one on this side of the House has done in five months. I know that they are working closely together. The member for Shellharbour would be well aware of the NSW Local Infrastructure Fund. I am sure the council will apply for a grant from that fund, and I wish them all the best in their endeavours.

POPULATION GROWTH PROJECTIONS

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [1.51 p.m.]: Recently I received a letter from the chair of Regional Development Australia-Northern Inland NSW, undersigned by 13 mayors of the New England north-west area, about major concerns with the way the Department of Planning and Infrastructure arrives at its projected population figures, the disparity of its figures with those of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and evidence on the ground. This is an important issue because the department's population projections are used to calculate government spending and investment over a wide range of services in the regions. If a false picture of the population is portrayed showing a decline, funding allocations reduce accordingly. This has major negative implications on the provision of health, transport, education, law and order and other government services in the northern inland.

Today I ask the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Government to undertake a review of the department's forecasting methodology and that the department develop a more accurate way of representing population projections for local government areas in regional parts of the State, particularly the northern inland, much of which is in my Northern Tablelands electorate. Mayors who support a review and signed the letter sent to me represent the Armidale Dumaresq, Glen Innes Severn, Gunnedah, Guyra, Gwydir, Inverell, Liverpool Plains, Moree Plains, Narrabri, Tamworth, Tenterfield, Uralla and Walcha councils. The letter came with an attached issues report prepared by Regional Development Australia- Northern Inland NSW, from which I will quote extensively.

In April 2010 the Department of Planning released a report entitled "New South Wales Statistical Local Area Population Projections 2006-2036". The report painted a grim picture of population decline for the northern inland region from 180,000 in 2011 to around 170,000 by 2036. The scenario is hotly disputed on many grounds but particularly because it fails to take into consideration the burgeoning mining sector, new housing developments and industry growth. The Department of Planning models are based on projections that differ widely from estimates by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and are at complete odds with the Australian Bureau of Statistics population statistics for the region. The bureau's recent figures show that the northern inland population is likely to increase, not decrease.

Its latest report shows an average 0.8 per cent per annum increase in the region's population between 2005 and 2010, from 178,000 to more than 186,000. The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for population growth in the Northern Tablelands, which is part of the northern inland, show a 3.9 per cent increase between 2004 and 2009. The flawed population projections used by the planning department are based on past migration trends, surveys of local governments on likely future development activity in their regions and advice from the Department of Planning regional offices and planning teams. Although the figures are projects and not targets, other State and Federal departments look at those figures to determine spending within a particular region.

If those projections show a false decline in a particular region infrastructure spending will be less than in a region that has a projected increase in population. A better method of calculating population growth would be based on employment growth in key industries. It would be based on known or potential future investments and developments. It has been estimated that even if current trends continue and accelerated growth factors and strategies do not eventuate the population by 2030 is likely to be at least 15 per cent higher than the department's predictions. This would be a more realistic base for calculating the degree of service and infrastructure spend in the region now and in the future.

Today I call on the Government to address these disparities, in particular, as part of its overhaul of regional development programs in this State. The councils in my area are keen to know whether compounding 30 departments into two represents more or less spending by the New South Wales Government on business and industry investment programs. In the light of the difference between the figures of the Department of Planning

and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, it is important that we know which statistics the Government will use to determine funding allocations for services, development programs and infrastructure projects. Initiatives such as the Country and Regional Living Expo, the successful Evocities campaign and the expansion of the mining sector, as well as locally backed initiatives, are some of the factors contributing to regional population growth and need to be accounted for in the statistics. A review by the Government to determine more accurate methods of assessing population projections would be welcomed by all regional communities.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.56 p.m.]: I thank the member for Northern Tablelands for his contribution to the House. It highlights what has been going wrong in this State for the past 16 years. I have serious problems in my electorate in the lower Hunter, where the regional strategy refers to 22,000 blocks. They may have been rezoned but they are still paddocks. As Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Planning I will talk to the Minister about conducting a review of the forecasting methodology. I again thank the member for Northern Tablelands.

TERRORIST ATTACKS ON THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TENTH ANNIVERSARY

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills) [1.57 p.m.]: Today I remind the House of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of September 11 2001. The commemoration should not go unheeded or dismissed because the day has passed. Yesterday I, like many other members—including the member for Castle Hill, who is present in the Chamber—was invited as a guest of the Consul General of the United States of America, together with the former Consul General of Australia to New York, Mr Ken Allen, AM, to be part of the commemoration service remembering the tragic events of September 11 2001. Over the past couple of days the community and media, when recalling the events, have tended to talk about the "nearly 3,000" souls that were lost.

I am concerned that over the last 24 hours people, particularly the Sydney media, have commemorated the "nearly 3,000 souls" that were lost on that tragic day, because there were not "nearly 3,000" souls lost; there were 2,977 souls lost. I raise that as a legitimate concern because those 2,977 had parents, friends, relatives and children. Their mums and dads will never see them again because of the tragic acts of Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban. We cannot just dismiss the loss as "nearly 3,000". For the parents of the person whose body was the 2,977th recovered, it is not a figure that can be dismissed or glossed over.

It is not a number that we can annex to a speech or a press release. The number is real, and it is real to families who are alive today. Ten of those 2,977 souls were Australians. They were remembered yesterday at St Mary's Cathedral at a service presided over by the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell. Those 10 people included a lady who lived and grew up in the area that the member for Castle Hill and I represent. She lived in The Hills district and worked for the Red Cross. She was on a holiday to celebrate her retirement from work. She will be gravely missed in our community, and she will be warmly remembered for her charity.

John Howard, in addressing Congress in 2002, highlighted the fact that retaliation against the Taliban in Afghanistan at the end of these events was something we needed to do not to seek revenge but to seek justice. As a former officer in the Australian Army, I have been fortunate to know many people who have served, and are still serving, in Afghanistan and Iraq in response to the acts of September 11, 2001. I recall the funerals and the commemoration services of some of the soldiers who did not come back. Like the 2,977 souls who were lost, they have parents and brother and sisters, and some of them had children.

As John Howard said, we need to calmly consider the consequences of the acts of terrorism. We need to seek not revenge but justice. The words of the former Prime Minister were important because we are not in Afghanistan and Iraq to wage a war that is unnecessary and without justice; these are just wars. As I call on members to remember silently and to consider the work of the soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq, I ask them to consider also the reasons we are there. We do not need to put down the reasons or dismiss them as unwarranted. For the families of those 2,977 souls, the reasons we are in Afghanistan and Iraq are real. Our soldiers are there because Australia, like every other Western democracy, seeks justice.

Private members' statements concluded.

[The Acting-Speaker (Ms Melanie Gibbons) left the chair at 2.02 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.20 p.m.]

ELECTRICITY ASSETS SALE

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Premier. When will the Premier admit to the people of New South Wales that he is intending to meet the budget shortfall by selling off the State's electricity poles and wires?

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The first answer to that question should be that the only budget shortfall we inherited was the one created by the Leader of the Opposition and his followers—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: —the \$5.2 billion black hole. It is fantastic that finally the Leader of the Opposition has accepted that responsibility.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It is interesting that the Leader of the Opposition asked a question and the kids cleared the gallery. The budget released last week reveals the way in which we will fill that black hole—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: —including a \$60 billion investment in infrastructure but, more importantly, in a way that honours election commitments. I hope to say more about that in my next answer. I was amazed by that piece of psychic journalism yesterday. It was psychic journalism because it was about a report that had not been written and about a Cabinet discussion that had not occurred but never let that get in the way of a good story. The only surprise was that it was not in the usual publication. I did not get to see the 7.30 program on Friday night; I was watching the Tigers put in a great performance against St George. I know that the result is a matter of regret to you, Madam Speaker, but it is not a matter of regret to the people in this Chamber who have the wisdom to support Wests Tigers.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: You are looking out of your red-and-white eye, Madam Speaker. But last night I happened to catch up with a replay of the 7.30 show in which the Leader of the Opposition could not give an answer as to whether he supported the illegal actions of the Teachers Federation.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: It relates to Standing Order 129. The question was not about the Quentin Dempster interview. It is a very simple one: Will the Premier sell the poles and wires? A short answer is required: monosyllabic.

The SPEAKER: The member for Maroubra will resume his seat. The Premier has answered that question.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I am answering the question, and I will come back to more of that answer. But I was particularly interested by the Leader of the Opposition's references when asked by Quentin Dempster—the doyen of the press gallery—about the privatisation of electricity. The Leader of the Opposition said that he was not just ideologically opposed to privatisation; he opposed privatisation of electricity because it led to higher power prices. He said that selling electricity assets inevitably hits consumers with higher prices. He said that of course these assets are owned by the people of New South Wales.

And when you sell them what happens? They end up in the hands of private sector multinationals. I know it has been five and a bit months since the election but I wonder where these strong beliefs of the Leader of the Opposition were last year when the member for Heffron and her crony in the upper House Eric

Roozendaal flogged off part of the State's electricity assets for a song. Where was his ideological concern and beliefs then? Where was his concern for consumers across this State? When did he stand up and stop assets being sold to multinationals, particularly TRUenergy from China? Throughout the election period I campaigned on the promise that we would establish an inquiry not just to get to the bottom of Labor's power sale but to set the future course for this State, particularly in relation to how we would keep prices low.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order and cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: That was the basis on which I campaigned. It was contained within our election launch at Penrith.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: That is the commitment I stand by. I have not seen a Tamberlin inquiry. He has released a brief interim report—there is no final report at this stage. It will come to Cabinet and the report will go out again.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Canterbury to order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Let us have no more psychic journalism. As I said to an editorial board before the election campaign, at some stage they have to start listening to what I say and not make things up.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Pittwater to order. Opposition members will come to order so I that can hear the question. I call the member for Keira to order.

POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr ROB STOKES: My question is directed to the Premier. What action is the Government taking to ban political donations from big business and unions?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I thank the member for Pittwater for his question and commend him for his long-term interest in this area. Once again, my Government is honouring an election commitment. Once again, the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals are moving to restore honesty and integrity to government in this State. We all recall the proposals foreshadowed by the member for Toongabbie in the dying days of his leadership—albeit belatedly, the member for Toongabbie tried to do the right thing and reform political donations across this State only to be struck down almost immediately by those vested interests within his party who had no intention of doing any such thing. Then the member for Heffron had a go, and her changes were of course half-hearted because who were they drafted by?

Of course, they were drafted by Joe Tripodi and Eddie Obeid—characters who had no interest in seeing their influence disappear and who had every interest in ensuring that the system of political patronage continued. The changes of the member for Heffron also contained loopholes to ensure that the Australian Labor Party could continue to receive millions of dollars in support from their union mates. The fact is that Labor has never been genuinely committed to reforming election donations across this State. The fact is this Government is, and it is getting on with the job. We are going to close Labor's loopholes and ensure that once and for all election funding in New South Wales is cleaned up. I have long held the view that the best way to restore confidence in the State's electoral system and system of public administration is to restrict donations to individuals who are on the electoral role.

These are the very people who have a stake in the system. Unions, third-party interest groups, industrial organisations, corporations, overseas citizens and non-residents are not entitled to vote—our laws do not give them the right to vote—and therefore they should not be able to donate. They do not have a stake in the system and they should not be able to influence that system. Under our changes there will a ban on corporate and other donations to political parties. This ban will extend to industrial organisations, peak industry groups and third-party interest groups. So the days of unions hitting their members for fees, which—when they are not being used for other things—are then passed on to support the Labor Party in election campaigns at State and Federal levels, are over.

Ms Anna Watson: Very grubby, Barry.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Also very factual.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order and ignore the interjections from Opposition members.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I agree that the whole affair is grubby. I also note that, whilst this affair has been going on, there has been no comment from those opposite about the women who are exploited in brothels across this city.

Ms Linda Burney: What are you talking about?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Yes, you do not know, Linda. The days of unions hitting their members for fees and then using them to support the Labor Party to fight election campaigns are over. Just as importantly, these reforms will help end Labor's 'decisions for donations' culture and make it a thing of the past—something aided also by the changes made by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure when he scrapped part 3A. We are determined to rid this State of the damaging and unwanted reputation that individuals and groups can gain undue influence and favourable treatment through their donations. If people want to buy a government decision they ought to go to some other part of Australia and look for a Labor government. We are also going to close the loophole whereby Labor's caps on political expenditure by political parties did not include spending by affiliated organisations.

This loophole meant that 22 unions affiliated with the Australian Labor Party were treated like non-affiliated organisations and each was given the ability to spend \$1.05 million, or a total of \$23 million between them, to support the Labor Party. Under our new laws the electoral communications expenditure of a political party and its affiliated organisations will be limited to \$100,000 for each seat it contests. No longer will we have a situation where a party reaches its spending cap only to have a union or a business come in with additional funding. Under our law, the cap will be the cap for all. These new changes will apply at both State and local council elections and we will continue to urge the Federal Government to follow suit so that we have tight, uniform political donation laws across the country. We promised to clean up the State's electoral funding laws, the political donation laws, and we are delivering.

RESTART NSW

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the windfall tax revenues the Government promised prior to the election predictably have not materialised, will the Government now concede that it always planned to sell off the State's electricity poles and wires to fund its election commitments?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Obviously not only some media organisations had problems in understanding and listening to what we were saying. We made no bones about the fact that Restart NSW would be funded from a number of sources. It will be funded first from borrowings and of course the Treasurer has made a great start with the announcement of the Waratah bonds. We indicated that our borrowings would stay responsibly within the triple-A credit rating.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Secondly, we indicated upfront that Restart NSW, our infrastructure investment fund, would also have funds derived from the better utilisation of assets. For instance, the lease of the desalination plant is an example of turning one asset into funds to be used to upgrade the infrastructure backlog—

Mr John Robertson: Just tell us about the other asset you are going to turn into funds.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: In answer to the interjection of the Leader of the Opposition, we announced in the budget that Port Botany would fit into the same camp: an asset that can be realised to invest in roads, highways and other infrastructure across this State. We said also that we would exercise a discipline that those opposite did not exercise. For about all the time Bob Carr was Premier we know that he had rivers of gold running through this State's coffers generated largely by property and construction activity—activity that, coincidentally, on his way out of office he did his darnedest to stop overnight.

Billions and billions of dollars were received each and every year over and above what was estimated in the budget. Those moneys were not put aside for a rainy day or put aside for a time to invest in the infrastructure that this State needed. Our commitment is clear: windfall profits and windfall receipts will be invested in Restart NSW so that we do not have to explain—as the Leader of the Opposition has to do every time he gets up in this Chamber—why we did not invest in the infrastructure that was needed by citizens across this State.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Our commitment is clear. Restart NSW is clear. The Treasurer's budget reply was clear.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: We are determined to get on and fix this State. That means investing in roads, train lines and hospitals. That is why the budget that was announced last Tuesday includes a \$62.5 billion infrastructure package—12 per cent more, or \$7 billion more than would have been allocated if the people of this State had stupidly re-elected Labor at the last election. It will give a start to the North West Rail Link and help to complete the South West Rail Link. Our capital works program for Health over the next four years will see a 50 per cent increase.

We have committed to upgrades of the Pacific Highway and the Princes Highway and there is extra maintenance funding for our school system. Across the State this Government is honouring its election commitments. This Government is doing what the people of this State have wanted for more than a decade: a government that will invest in infrastructure that does not just provide them with the reliable services they deserve but also supports the economy, jobs and the economic activity that is vital to generate the revenue that Bob Carr had and wasted and that this Government needs to get this State going again.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION LAWS

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: My question is directed to the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Heritage. What controls will the Minister put in place to minimise the risk of environmental harm by industry?

Ms ROBYN PARKER: I thank the member for Port Stephens for his question and for an opportunity to outline the O'Farrell Government's plans for the largest hazardous facilities audit program to be conducted in New South Wales. The member for Port Stephens understands because Kooragang Island is in his electorate, which adjoins my electorate. He knows what the Labor Government failed to do in 16 years: to audit these facilities and to ensure that the best possible regulations and licensing were in place. It has been clear over the past few weeks what the Labor Government failed to do about two major pollution incidents that occurred while the Leader of the Opposition was Minister for the Environment—

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

Ms ROBYN PARKER: —and 76 major incidents while Labor was in government. Whereas Labor remained focused on the politics of fear and smear, this Government is committed to protecting local communities and the environment. I am pleased to announce that over the next four months the Office of Environment and Heritage will be auditing up to 42 hazardous facilities in an audit program that will target industries across the State that pose the highest risk of environmental harm. While the former Government sat on its hands and did nothing, we will take action and I will ensure that the regulators are given back their bite that the former Government took away. Forty-two major hazardous facilities will be audited, including those that store toxic or hazardous substances in large quantities or volumes. These include oil refineries and chemical processing plants.

These facilities, located mainly in Sydney, Wollongong and the Newcastle region, have a potential for environmental harm if appropriate controls are not in place. The audit will focus on those facilities—a focus that Labor did not have in the past 16 years. It is clear that the licensing and legislation that Labor had in place were not good enough. We will ensure that industries that pose a high risk of environmental harm have controls in place to manage those risks and have the appropriate emergency response and reporting procedures.

The legislation enacted by the former Labor Government, which provided for industry to inform as soon as practicable, is absolute rubbish. It should have had a duty of care to the people of New South Wales. The people of New South Wales deserve to have a regulator that is strong, licensing that is strong and incentives in place to ensure that the right thing is done. There will be penalty infringement notices, fines and pollution reduction programs during these audits. This is just the start of the measures that this Government will put in place to fix up the environmental mess left behind by the former Government.

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

Ms ROBYN PARKER: This Government is about giving the community confidence that industry can operate safely. Members should not forget that this is not the first incident. As I said, there were 76 incidents when Labor was in government. The former Government failed to do anything in spite of warnings that it received. It was told about Orica. A letter came across my desk today from a resident of Stockton who was concerned in 2007 and who had to move out of the area. He raised his concerns with former Minister Verity Firth in 2007.

The response was that the department was aware of concerns with respect to air and noise emissions from the plant and was working to establish a better understanding of the nature of reported incidents in order for environmental impacts to be addressed adequately in the future. The best thing that happened to the residents of Stockton was a change of government, because this Government will get on and ensure that the regulations and the licensing are strong, and we will fix the mess left by the former Government.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. Government members will come to order.

ELECTRICITY ASSETS SALE

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: My question is directed to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer admit that he has pre-empted Kerry Schott's audit of government services and based future surpluses on an unidentified \$8 billion in savings to cover up for the fact that he is intending to fill his budget shortfall by selling off electricity poles and wires?

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It is amazing that Opposition members would ask a question about the budget. Not only did they hear last week about a fiscally responsible plan to get the State's finances back into order but they heard about a government that is getting on with the job of improving services across this State and building the infrastructure that they promised but never delivered. Opposition members had one chance to respond to the budget, and what did they do? They put up one policy with three bullet points and they got the costing wrong. That was Labor's contribution. After listening to the Leader of the Opposition and the hero of middle management, the member for Maroubra, we do not know whether the Opposition supports any of the savings or is against all of them. We simply do not know. That is not unusual in the case of the Opposition.

Mr Steve Cansdell: They don't understand budgets.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The member for Clarence is exactly right; Labor members do not understand budgets so they do not know where they stand. But I have to say I admire the courage of Labor members asking a question about the electricity industry sale. A great deal of the time of Parliament will be spent discussing electricity transactions under Labor, so I remind the House of some of the views of some people and what they thought about the sale.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: The question does not relate to transactions that occurred in the past.

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

Mr Michael Daley: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The question was very simple: Will the Government sell poles and wires?

The SPEAKER: Order! At the moment the Treasurer's answer is relevant to the question.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The Opposition asked a question about the electricity sale. The director of the Energy Users Association of Australia, Roman Domanski, said that the transaction "is going to leave New South Wales electricity consumers with a very inefficient and very poor outcome in terms of the electricity industry ... and ultimately that's going to put pressure for prices to increase even further." That is what Labor did to the people of this State. A Macquarie Generation director said, "I have never before seen a more poorly handled transaction." He went on to state that, within it, there was "an appalling lack of attention to detail, there was no communication with power companies, and"—this is the most pertinent point—"... a frightening disregard for protection of taxpayers against ongoing financial risk." That is the manner in which Labor handled that transaction and the action Labor took. What has the O'Farrell Government done?

We decided it was about time the issue was handed across to independent experts. We did that, and they said two things: What is the best way to put downward pressure on prices for consumers in this State? What is the best way to protect taxpayers in this State? That is exactly what the O'Farrell Government did and that is what it will stand by. We will look after taxpayers whereas Labor blatantly ripped them off. I am not the only person who has concerns about the electricity transaction.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Who else?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I received correspondence from the member for Mount Druitt. On 7 January the member for Mount Druitt wrote to the then Premier stating that a constituent in his electorate was disillusioned and disappointed with the State Government's decision to privatise. The letter from the member for Mount Druitt stated in part, "I ask that you convey your concerns and give me your comments." That is fair enough. What did the Premier then do? The response was quicker and smarter than Quade Cooper with a football in his hands. The former Premier stated, "As the matter raised concerns about the administration of the Hon. Eric Roozendaal"—the honorary master chef—"I take this opportunity to refer it to him. Be sure your representations will receive close consideration." I have to admire the member for Mount Druitt but did he receive a response prior to the election? No.

Ms Tania Mihailuk: How do you know?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Because the member for Mount Druitt wrote to me and asked me the same question. The answer to the question asked by the member for Maroubra today is pretty simple: By the electricity transaction stunt, Labor sold out the people of New South Wales, but the O'Farrell Government will look after them.

PLANNING REFORMS

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: My question is directed to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Infrastructure NSW. How is the Government proceeding with its review of the New South Wales planning system?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I thank the member for Murray-Darling for his question because, after 16 years of a Labor Government that distorted the planning system for its own ends, he well understands the need to get the New South Wales planning system right. Through five successive Labor Ministers for Planning, the community lost confidence in the integrity and objectivity of the planning system. Today the Liberals and Nationals Government kickstarts the principles that should underpin our planning system. We all recollect the various planning changes under Labor. Some were done absolutely without consultation and some were done with contrived consultation.

The 1997 amendments that came off the back of a backlog of development applications totalling 60,000 were dealt with by the stroke of a pen, but without consultation. The net result was that the backlog of 60,000 development applications blew out to 120,000 applications. Labor managed to double the backlog, so there was no success there. Then along came part 3A, and, needless to say, effectively there was no consultation on that provision either. However, this time there was some success, but only in Labor's fundraising.

[Interruption]

I will tell the member for Maroubra about Eddie Obeid, Joe Tripodi and Kristina Keneally if he keeps asking questions. Today marks the most visible steps in outreach to the community. Today the chairman of the planning review heads to regional New South Wales to commence a listening and scoping tour across the State.

The Hon. Tim Moore and the Hon. Ron Dyer have headed to the Murray-Darling electorate and today are in Broken Hill. What better place than the Silver City to commence this once in a 30-year review of the New South Wales planning system? The review will put New South Wales back on track and ensure that never again will this State be held back by its planning system. The exhaustive two-month road trip across regions and through cities and towns will ensure that the people of New South Wales are heard.

To put into perspective how significant the review is, and how different it is from Labor's approach, I remind members that the last major changes to the planning Act occurred under Labor in 2008. It is informative to recollect the so-called consultative process that accompanied those changes. In essence there was, as stated by the advertising brochure, "a one-day forum, new ideas for planning at the Australian Technology Park in Sydney, Tuesday 14 August 2007." I repeat that there was "a one-day forum". To get into the forum in inner-city Sydney—a forum that was held in no other location across the State—attendees had to pay \$250 and be accepted to attend. They took my cheque but then realised it was me, so they gave me back the money. I am glad because I was wondering where it was all going.

The approach under a Coalition Government is entirely different. Meetings will occur in country and regional areas right throughout the State, such as Broken Hill, Dubbo, Narrabri, Glen Innes, Armidale, Blue Mountains, Lithgow, Bathurst, Orange, Parkes, Taree, Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Ballina, Murwillumbah, Wollongong, Deniliquin, Griffith—it's like *I've Been Everywhere*, and represents a totally different approach from the Labor Party, whose members do not know where most of these places are—Gosford, Tamworth, Muswellbrook, Willoughby, Newcastle, Parramatta, Campbelltown, Bankstown, Liverpool, Nowra, Batemans Bay, Merimbula, Cooma and Queanbeyan. Meetings will occur also in Moss Vale, Goulburn, Yass, Wagga Wagga, Albury, Penrith, Sutherland, Warringah—thank heavens they will be coming briefly to my electorate—Randwick, Ashfield and of course the City of Sydney on Monday 14 November, which will mark the conclusion of the tour. There will be two sessions at each stop on the tour.

For the information of Labor, whose planning and consultation concept always involved activities behind closed doors, our review will be completely transparent. Everything will be documented and everything will be placed on the review's dedicated website—www.planningreview.nsw.gov.au. All media are invited to attend the community forums. On top of community workshops, at my request, the planning review has written to all members of Parliament—Liberals, The Nationals, Labor, The Greens and the Independents—to seek their input into the review process.

Mr Richard Amery: Name them.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Every one of them, even the member for Mount Druitt. Although we do not expect to get much from him, there is always hope we will get something. For the information of members, I point out that the review panel also will be conducting a two-day consultation workshop in Parliament House on the mornings of 19 and 20 October, which all members are encouraged to attend. The Government's review begins the process of restoring business and community confidence to the New South Wales planning system. When we left office in 1995 we were delivering 57,000 new homes per annum. We now have the lowest number of housing starts in 50 years as a result of the Labor Party's actions. I encourage all members of Parliament and all members of the community to come along and have their say. We will end up with a transparent, honest planning system with integrity, something Labor would never understand. [*Time expired.*]

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra will come to order so I can hear the question.

STATE BUDGET AND TRANSPORT

Mr RICHARD AMERY: My question is directed to the Minister for Transport. Given that over the next four years the transport budget has allocated less than a quarter of the estimated cost to build the North West Rail Link, will the Minister admit that she intends to pay for that project by selling off the poles and wires of the State's electricity industry?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I am glad the member has mentioned the transport budget because I have not really had a chance to talk about it and I am pleased to do so. I want to acknowledge the point the Treasurer made earlier because the member for Mount Druitt is a very prolific writer. He keeps writing me letters about reinstating bus services that the Leader of the Opposition cancelled when he was Minister for Transport. I often receive representations from him. I do not know how the member asked that question with a straight face. How many years did Labor promise the North West Rail Link?

Labor members promised it in 1988 and they did nothing in 16 years in government. I know members opposite do not like to hear this but we have been congratulated by many people on what we are doing in relation to both the North West and the South West rail lines. As unlikely as it is, I have a press release from none other than the Rail, Tram and Bus Union. The first line of the press release, which was issued on 6 September 2011, states, "Funding for major rail projects is good news for commuters."

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: It goes on to state, "The State budget delivers on new rail infrastructure and provides essential funding for new trains and buses." This is the union's press release, not mine. It also states, "The funding for the North West Rail Link is a significant step forward and we are looking forward to seeing genuine progress on this important project for Sydney."

Mr Barry O'Farrell: The unions didn't go to lunch.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: That is right; the unions were not at lunch. Other people support the North West rail line. I want to know why members opposite do not support the North West rail line. It is about time they did. The comments do not stop there. So many other organisations have commended the contribution we have made in the budget in relation to the North West rail line. I refer to the Tourism and Transport Forum. Mr Lee said this in a press release shortly after the budget: "It's heartening to see real investment in these projects, especially the North West Rail Link, which had been repeatedly delayed under the previous Government."

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: I think the Minister misunderstands the question. The question was not, "Tell us how good you think you are", but whether the Government was going to fund the North West Rail Link by flogging poles and wires, given the shortfall in funding for the North West Rail Link in the budget.

The SPEAKER: Order! I understand the point of order. The question contained comments about the Transport budget and the Minister has been discussing that issue. As I have said several times before in this Chamber, I cannot direct the Minister to specifically answer the question.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: It is really disheartening that the shadow Minister for middle management cannot see what everyone else in this State can see. We are being congratulated left, right and centre for our record spending on infrastructure, especially on the North West rail line.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Members opposite do not like to hear this. Not only did Mr Lee talk about funding for the North West rail line, he also said it was good to see further investment in the railway clearways project, rail safety technology and communications, restoring ferry services, upgraded bus services and extended park 'n' ride and transport interchange facilities. This is not the Government saying it; this is what people in the community are saying because they know the commitment we have made to public transport is unprecedented. Not only have we dedicated record funding; we will make sure these projects get built. But I want to know why Opposition members will not support the North West rail line. Every time they come into this House—

Mr Richard Amery: Point of order: The Minister seems to be talking about the project whereas the question asked how it would be funded. Will it be funded by the sale of electricity assets?

The SPEAKER: Order! I understand the point of order. I cannot direct the Minister to specifically answer a question. At the moment the Minister's answer is relevant to the question.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I will conclude by saying that everybody in the community supports the project, even people in the Rail, Tram and Bus Union. I urge the Opposition to get on the train and support the North West rail line.

FOSTER CARE

Mrs ROZA SAGE: My question is directed to the Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women. What additional support is the Government giving to help carers protect vulnerable children and their families?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I thank the member for her question and for her ongoing support for services for vulnerable children and young people. This is Foster Care Week and a time to reflect particularly on the fantastic work of our State's carers.

[Interruption]

Madam Speaker, is it tinnitus or is it the member for Canterbury? The voice has got to stop.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Canterbury will be on three calls to order very shortly if she does not come to order. I call the member for Maroubra to order for the second time. The Minister has the call.

Ms PRU GOWARD: Yesterday I was delighted to take my granddaughters to the Foster Care Carnival at Homebush. It was a wonderful day to begin Foster Care Week, with fun for the children and recognition and thanks to the foster parents. I thank the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies for organising the event and the Children's Guardian, Create, the Ombudsman's office, AbSec, Variety, which provided a special swing for children with disabilities, and of course the wonderful staff of Community Services for their voluntary presence and their significant contribution to the carnival. They made excellent and very healthy hamburgers.

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

Ms PRU GOWARD: There were also a lot of providers and corporate supporters who supplied goods, gifts and plenty of fun and music to children and carers alike. There was another organisation at the core of the carnival, preparing food and offering lucky dips to children. They are also at the core of carers' lives. That organisation is Connecting Carers. Connecting Carers' staff and volunteers have served our State for decades by caring for children and young people. That experience and wisdom assists carers across New South Wales every day with support and advice. It helps connect carers with the department and of course provides extremely valuable carer training around the State.

Connecting Carers' work helps Family and Community Services every day and its insights will also help the Government pursue real reforms by working better and smarter to improve services. That is why today we have announced a major funding boost to Connecting Carers. What better time to do it than Foster Carers Week? Connecting Carers will receive an additional \$455,000 to its funding each year, which is an increase in their base funding of 33 per cent. It will be used to run regular Connecting Carers conferences for New South Wales carers. The 2010 conference was only possible due to an underspend in the previous year, but today's decision ensures that carers conferences can take place as a matter of course. Funding for accommodation and travel will ensure that city, regional and rural carers can all gather, network and support each other to discuss the issues they face every day. I am pleased that the next conference will be held at Darling Harbour in the second half of next year.

This funding boost also allows Connecting Carers to continue to offer the successful and popular regional Connecting Carers camps right across the State. They are run for authorised carers and the children and young people in their care, in Community Services regions. Last year 1,152 attended six camps and we expect there will be more. The camps give foster, kinship and relative carers, including grandparents, children and young people, an opportunity to socialise, network, rest a little and have fun in a beautiful bush or coastal setting. The activities are tailored to cater to all levels of physical and intellectual functional ability to ensure everyone enjoys the unique benefits of the programs, and Connecting Carers only chooses locations that have accommodation designed specifically to meet the needs of carers and children.

Finally this funding boost will support Connecting Carers' 24-hour support line, a 1300 number that offers a telephone support service to foster carers, kinship and grandparent carers at all times day and night. This 1300 number receives more than 3,000 calls annually. This service is well worth supporting and developing. This Government is strongly committed to transferring services such as out-of-home care to the non-government sector. The Government will consider expanding the role of Connecting Carers by contestably training carers across the sector aligned to the transfer and reform to improve services. During the next few years the Government will pursue real reform to build the capacity of the whole system to protect children and young people. I thank Connecting Carers and other non-government organisations for their work, and for contributing to improving the lives of children and young people in New South Wales.

STATE BUDGET AND PACIFIC HIGHWAY

Ms LINDA BURNEY: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. In light of the fact that the money for the Government's priority election promise to upgrade the Pacific Highway is not in the budget but is dependent upon the sale of Port Botany, how many other projects are contingent upon the sale of the State's electricity poles and wires?

Mr ANDREW STONER: Another question time, another embarrassing question time strategy from the Labor Opposition. The Premier has already spoken in the House about the psychic journalism in relation to any further privatisation of the electricity industry. One would need a psychic to find out the position of the Leader of the Opposition on this and many other issues. This is a bloke who used to be indecisive. Now he is not so sure. Whether it is sitting around the Cabinet table with the former Government and ticking off on the dud deal of the century—the sell-off of the electricity retailers and the generating rights in this State—or whether it is the carbon tax that will cost literally thousands of jobs—

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: I understand the Deputy Premier does not want to, or cannot, answer the question but Standing Order 73 precludes the member from doing what he is doing right now.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: —or whether it is about the illegal action taken by unions in their strikes last week, one cannot find the Leader of the Opposition taking a position. But in relation to the money for the Pacific Highway I will take him through the budget documents, if he like; it is all there.

SAMANTHA STOSUR UNITED STATES TENNIS OPEN VICTORY

Mr DARREN WEBBER: My question is addressed to the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, and Minister for the Arts. What impact will the United States Open victory of Samantha Stosur this morning have on the Australian Davis Cup team playing an important tie in Sydney this weekend?

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: I thank the member for Wyong for his excellent question. On behalf of the New South Wales Government I congratulate Samantha Stosur on her wonderful victory in the United States Open earlier today. Samantha took out her first major tournament when she defeated Serena Williams, one of the greatest ever female tennis players, 6-3, 6-2 in one hour and 23 minutes.

[Interruption]

Are they not proud? I am proud of it. In winning that tournament Samantha became the first Australian woman to have won the United State's women's singles Open since Margaret Court defeated Evonne Goolagong Cawley in 1973. Again, on behalf of the Government and the people of New South Wales, I congratulate her on her success and thank her for the pride she has brought back to Australian tennis.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I thought Opposition members would be interested in this information. I call the member for Toongabbie to order for the second time.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: I have been advised that every member of the Davis Cup team was glued to the television in the team's Sydney hotel cheering her on, and I am also advised that they have been greatly inspired by her fantastic victory. It is hoped that her victory is the impetus for success in the Davis Cup, which is coming back to Sydney and which has been sold out for two weeks. This weekend the important Davis Cup tie between Australia and the strong Swiss team will be played on the historic grass courts of the Royal Sydney Golf Club at Rose Bay. The return to Sydney of this sporting event and many others that are now part of the New South Wales sporting calendar is all thanks to the hard work done by the dedicated events team at Destination NSW.

The Swiss Davis Cup team will be led by Roger Federer, one of the greatest male players of all time. He is expected in Sydney either tomorrow or Wednesday. We all remain hopeful that the Aussie team to be captained by Pat Rafter, and made up of Lleyton Hewitt, Bernard Tomic, Chris Guccione and Marinko Matosevic, will be good enough to propel Australia back into the world group. We are the second most successful Davis Cup nation in the world, having spent only four years outside the world group since its creation

in 1981. I hope that Samantha Stosur's wonderful victory will inspire our men to greater heights and I wish them all the very best for this vital Davis Cup tie. It has been a fantastic weekend of sport for New South Wales and Australia.

We have seen the start of the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand with the Wallabies carrying the nation's hopes beginning their campaign with a 32 to 6 win over Italy in what was certainly a tough match. In fact, at half time it was six all, but the Wallabies managed to shake off a challenge by the Italians to score four unanswered tries in the second half. The Government and public undoubtedly wish the Wallabies the very best of luck and hope that they return to our shores with the Webb Ellis Cup. In Rugby League we have seen the start of the semi-final series with victories to Wests Tigers over St George, which I know has greatly pleased the Premier. But despite their loss, the Dragons live to fight another day, which I know has caused a huge sigh of relief for the member for Rockdale and the member for Oatley.

The SPEAKER: Order! And also for the member for the South Coast.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: The Manly Sea Eagles' convincing victory over the Cowboys has greatly pleased the Treasurer. The Melbourne Storm win over the Knights has upset the member for Newcastle and the member for Upper Hunter. The Brisbane Broncos win over the New Zealand Warriors has probably had very little effect on anyone. Then the Sydney Swans went to Melbourne and completely outclassed St Kilda on their home turf. It would be great to see the Swans go all the way.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. Hansard is having difficulty hearing.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: In basketball the Australian men's team, the Boomers, and the women's team, the Opals, demolished their New Zealand opponents over the weekend. In surfing, another victory for Australia in the Big Apple with New South Wales surfer Josh Kerr producing what has been described as "aerial brilliance" to defeat 10 times world champion Kelly Slater at the Quiksilver Pro in New York. It certainly has been a great weekend of sport for New South Wales and Australia, with another to come, as the Rugby League and Australian Football League semi-final series, the Rugby World Cup and the Davis Cup tennis continue to keep us all sitting on the edges of our seats.

Question time concluded at 3.08 p.m.

PETITIONS

The Speaker announced that the following petition signed by more than 10,000 persons was lodged for presentation:

Department of Education and Communities Confucius Classrooms

Petition requesting that the House act to remove Confucius classrooms from schools, which will not allow discussion of sensitive topics such as Tibet, Taiwan, Falun Gong or the Tiananmen Square massacre, replace them with an Australian-run organisation, and ensure that the curriculum of Chinese language or culture courses in schools are free from Chinese Government censorship, received from **Mr Jamie Parker**.

Discussion on petition set down as an order of the day for a future day.

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

Walsh Bay Precinct Public Transport

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

Pet Shops

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

Tenancy Agreement Pet Bans

Petition requesting a prohibition on blanket pet bans in by-laws, rules and tenancy agreements, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Mental Health Services

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

La Perouse Headland Planning

Petition requesting community consultation regarding the La Perouse Headland interpretation draft plan, received from **Mr Bruce Notley-Smith**.

The Clerk announced that the following Ministers had lodged responses to petitions signed by more than 500 persons:

The Hon. Brad Hazzard—Wind Turbine Developments—lodged 22 June 2011 (Ms Katrina Hodginson).

The Hon. Brad Hazzard—Greendale Planning—lodged 5 August 2011 (Mrs Tanya Davies).

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

State Budget and Northern New South Wales

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.10 p.m.]: The motion I seek to be accorded priority states:

That this House supports a budget that provides improved services and infrastructure for northern New South Wales.

After 16 years of a totally incompetent Government in disarray that spoke about surplus budgets every year and left the new Government with a big black hole, I am pleased to talk about a positive budget that will produce positive results for northern New South Wales—a forgotten part of the State during Labor's 16 years of government. This motion should be accorded priority because today we have highlighted the total incompetence of the previous Government, which forgot northern New South Wales yet wasted \$1.9 billion on a desalination plant that is nothing but a white elephant. The promised Chatswood to Epping rail link, which was initially to extend to Parramatta, has blown out by a billion dollars and is only half finished.

Mr Ryan Park: Is that in the northern part of New South Wales?

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: No-one will benefit from those types of comments. Northern New South Wales will get everything it wants: I have a heap of stuff to talk about.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Clarence to direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Even though the former member for Balmain spent, or should I say wasted, \$500 million she could not get herself re-elected. The Solar Bonus Scheme, together with public sector wages, was another \$1.2 billion budget blowout. Members opposite should hear about the positive things in the budget for northern and regional New South Wales. The Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance and Services—a whole team on this side—have provided a great budget for northern and regional New South Wales for the first time in 16 years. We can proudly talk about the \$1 billion for the Pacific Highway.

When Labor member Harry Woods represented the Clarence electorate 80 people died on the Pacific Highway, 72 of whom died as the result of head-on collisions that could have been avoided if a dual carriageway had been built. In the eight years I have been the member for Clarence the Labor Government has promised twice to build that dual carriageway and twice it reneged on it. This Government has a lot more to do, but it has provided \$1 billion for that upgrade, something those opposite could not do. Eric "the Red" Roozendaal did not want to do anything about it. We now have a budget that will provide funding for the planning of Grafton Bridge, which was another project promised by Harry Woods and Labor nine years ago that never took off.

Mr Nathan Rees: Point of order: The member cannot insult a good Viking like that.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The member for Toongabbie will resume his seat.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: I am surprised that the member for Keira has not interjected. At one stage he was the director general of transport, but he sits on the backbench. He should be on the frontbench as the spokesperson for transport. He will not discuss those issues. He might have made a difference, but he sits quietly on the backbench concerned about what is happening today. The Coffs Harbour electorate received \$60 million for its police station and the courthouse. The member for Coffs Harbour had pushed the Labor Government for 10 years to get those projects up and running, but he kept hitting a brick wall and hearing promises that they would be looked into.

Labor is now looking through one eye from that side because only half of them remain. We on this side are doing something about that courthouse. The budget has provided funding for hospitals and \$10 billion for disability services across the State, part of which will be allocated to the North Coast. For years the northern regions has missed out on funding for those vital services. Over the past eight years I was unsuccessful in my many representations to the former Minister for Disability Services in getting help for those essential services on the North Coast. This motion should be accorded priority.

Electricity Assets Sale

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [3.15 p.m.]: This motion deserves priority because the O'Farrell Government is engaged in a massive cover-up about its plans to sell off the State's electricity assets. The Premier's plan is not to restart New South Wales; it is to restart the privatisation of New South Wales. This man is in the grip of a terrible addiction to privatisation. The first step in the Premier's recovery is to admit he has a problem. This Premier's problem dates back to before the election when the Liberal-Nationals promised \$5 billion in new infrastructure funding. This wild promise was literally thrown at New South Wales voters on the back of a beer coaster.

Coalition members promised to lease the desalination plant that, according to the Treasurer, would get it \$1.2 billion closer to the infrastructure funding promise. They promised Waratah Bonds, which, valued at about \$300 million, was more like popping a pimple than impacting on infrastructure funding. They promised that the remainder would be funded by something called "windfall tax revenue". Windfall tax revenue is not something that can be budgeted. The size of any windfall tax is learned only after it has been received. If we are to believe this Premier's approach to economic management, we must sit on the balcony, dodge all the bird droppings and wait until a big bag of money falls from the sky.

The next event was the budget. It was a sorry week when the Treasurer sacked 5,000 workers, raised taxes and attacked society's most vulnerable yet still plunged New South Wales from surplus into a \$718 million deficit. Standard and Poor's was not impressed with the Treasurer's bluster. Within hours it sternly noted the absence of detail and that the proposed \$8 billion savings to return the budget to a surplus was ambitious and difficult to achieve—something even the Treasurer acknowledged in his media interview after delivering the budget. This motion deserves priority because no Premier could possibly be so irresponsible as to count on windfall revenue and unidentified savings while global economic conditions remain soft and the stock market plummets. There must be a more sinister explanation and a missing piece of the puzzle.

Coalition members know what happened. Long ago, this Premier and this Treasurer got together in a dark room and decided to privatise electricity poles and wires. They did not have the decency to put their plan to the people before the election. Instead they chose the coward's way: get into government and then soften up the State for the mother of all sell-offs. The softening up has begun because the Government source told the *Sunday Telegraph* that selling electricity is an "absolute no brainer". Was it the member for The Entrance? The Cabinet Ministers have fallen into line like ninepins. The Government pretends to hide behind the Tamberlin inquiry, but then appoints well-known Professor Tony Owen as an expert adviser, a man who believes that when it comes to electricity the Government should have already "sold the lot". The former Pakistani cricket team could not rig an inquiry better than this Premier. Privatising electricity poles and wires is the most crass policy lever this Government could pull.

It is a 24-carat binge. The Government is not simply selling off a few trinkets and brooches but the entire jewellery store. A government cannot privatise a natural monopoly that has inherent price-setting power without hurting the very people who elected it. Members opposite have already signed off on electricity price rises of 18 per cent from 1 July. I can imagine how prices will skyrocket when the only obligation on the new owners of the electricity assets will be to keep the shareholders happy. The Government cannot guarantee regularity of energy supply and quality of service. This Premier has launched himself on a long, dark voyage.

The Premier should come clean about his electricity privatisation plans and the misery they will wreak on New South Wales families' household budgets every week. This Premier has always aspired and now he is conspiring to sell off the State's poles and wires— [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion of the member for Clarence be accorded priority—put and resolved in the affirmative.

STATE BUDGET AND NORTHERN NEW SOUTH WALES

Motion Accorded Priority

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.21 p.m.]: I move:

That this House supports a budget that provides improved services and infrastructure for northern New South Wales.

As I said while explaining the reasons this motion should be accorded priority, it is great to be able to talk proudly about a budget that acknowledges the importance of the North Coast and the Northern Rivers area for the first time in 16 years. The area has been ignored for far too long. The Deputy Premier, The Nationals member for Oxley, has fought hard so that regional New South Wales gets the services it deserves. He, the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, and the Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Katrina Hodgkinson, have worked hard to ensure that jobs are retained in rural and regional New South Wales despite the 5,000 public sector redundancies that will be offered. They made sure that jobs in regional New South Wales, and the North Coast in particular, were quarantined from those cuts because they know that jobs in those areas are vital to our local economies.

The fact that The Nationals have 18 members in the lower House and seven in the upper House means that rural and regional members have strength within the Coalition Government that was lacking in the Labor Government because it had only two Country Labor members. It is good to talk about these issues. As I said, the previous Government wasted a great deal of money on the desalination plant, the Rozelle Metro, the Tcard and the bailout of the Lane Cove Tunnel leading up to the 2007 election. That money could have been spent on desperately needed infrastructure for northern New South Wales and, even more importantly, infrastructure that could save lives. I refer in particular to the duplication of the Pacific Highway, which would make the road safer for truckies, holidaymakers and local commuters.

A long-term friend of mine is a recently retired paramedic who has spent years pulling bodies out of cars and trucks, and consoling loved ones on the roadside. Like all emergency services personnel, he has suffered terrible trauma as a result of attending major highway accidents, and the section of the Pacific Highway in my electorate seems to be particularly prone to accidents. The final section of the highway to be upgraded is the stretch from Wells Crossing south of Grafton to Woodburn. Last week's budget includes \$40 million for the final planning process so that that work can be carried out. The budget also includes funding for the finalisation of the Glenugie section of the highway, which is a terrible blackspot seven kilometres south of Grafton. It will be good to see that work completed and the road opened at the end of this year.

The next stretch of the highway in my electorate to be upgraded is just north of Iluka. The work will involve the straightening of some dangerous s-bends and the widening of areas that are often said by truckies to be no better than a goat track. Many have lost their lives on that stretch of the highway. Twice over the past couple of years I have ridden my pushbike from Ballina to Grafton. During one ride I stopped at every memorial cross on the roadside and it was heart wrenching to read the inscriptions. One epitaph reads, "Daddy, I love you", and there is a teddy bear and a can of beer beside the cross. That is the legacy of not ensuring that this vital road infrastructure work was carried out long before now. Work on the section at the Devil's Pulpit will be commenced this year and hopefully it will be finished next year.

The \$1 billion that the Government has included in this year's budget will ensure that there is no need to erect more crosses and that no family will have to write such a heartbreaking epitaph. About six years ago the Hon. Michael Costa said that the Labor Government would not close the Casino to Murwillumbah railway line, but within three months that great service to the North Coast was shut down. The member for Tweed, the member for Lismore, the member for Ballina and I have been pushing hard for some years for a budget allocation for a feasibility study to be carried out and a route to be determined for a light rail service from Casino to Murwillumbah and on to the Gold Coast. This Government has put \$2 million on the table for a transport study to be carried out emphasising the Casino to Murwillumbah service and an extension to the Gold Coast.

Liberal Party members of the Government have supported the North Coast Nationals in their efforts to ensure that that project gets a guernsey. Once the study has been completed we will come to the table with the costings, the route, a design and a project timetable so that adequate transport is provided not only for commuters but also for tourists arriving at the Gold Coast airport, which has the fastest-growing passenger volume in Australia. Huge numbers of tourists fly into the airport and we should facilitate their travel to the North Coast of New South Wales so that they can appreciate our spectacular sights. The North Coast has many industries, but we need support to boost our tourism sector. [*Time expired.*]

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra) [3.28 p.m.]: The member for Clarence is a mate of mine, but he is pushing that friendship. Friendship is based on respect and credibility, but that contribution was incredible. The member for Clarence has obviously been using the member for Charlestown's speechwriter. Accordingly, I move the following amendment:

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

this House notes that the budget:

- (1) provides neither improved services nor infrastructure for northern New South Wales, nor for anywhere else in New South Wales;
- (2) attacks the most vulnerable in our community;
- (3) provides for sacking of Government workers and cuts to services; and
- (4) foreshadows that the Government will fund its forward capital program by selling Government assets, including the electricity poles and wires.

This budget might as well have been circulated to members of this place with a rear-vision mirror from the wreckers attached to its front cover. Deborah Cameron was quite right in her recent interview with the Premier. She noted, as other members of the press gallery note day after day when listening to this diatribe ad nauseam, that the election result on 26 March saw a huge majority granted to the present Government. Therefore, it should get on with governing, give us its vision, tell us what it is going to do, display some sense of pride and vision, and desist from criticising the former Government—although it does not have to do that, it is making no difference.

I would have thought that upon assumption of office the Government would look to the future, but it seems intent on criticising the former Government, which it does 75 per cent of the time. That shows an inherent weakness on its part. In relation to infrastructure, there has been a \$400 million cut in this budget. In the 2010-11 budget the former Labor Government budgeted for \$15.7 billion of investment. In the budget released last week by this Government that figure dropped to \$15.3 billion—that is, \$400 million less. That is despite the fact that the Government has cut services, has sacked people, is in the midst of a fire sale of massive government enterprises—

[*Interruption*]

I hear the interjection from my colleague on the other side of the House. Selling a monopoly such as Port Botany and the poles and wires of the electricity industry in this State is just a grab for money. The Government is sacking thousands of workers, cutting services and putting up charges. However, one issue that has hardly been talked about—the Treasurer made absolutely no mention of it in his Budget Speech or in any offering to the public thereafter—is debt. On page 7.2 of Budget Paper No. 2 we see that in June 2010 the net debt level of the former Labor Government was \$9.160 billion. It then fell to \$7.889 billion. This Government paid off a bit more than \$1 billion worth of debt. What we have in this budget forecast is \$11.074 billion worth of net debt. That is a 40 per cent increase in one budget.

The alarming thing displayed in the columns thereafter is the plan to plunge the budget into further deficit by borrowing, borrowing and borrowing—\$12 billion in June 2013, \$14.422 billion in June 2015 and \$14.479 billion in June 2015. In the four years of this Government it plans to double net debt. However, the Government still feels it necessary not only to plunge the budget into deficit but also to go on a fire sale of assets. One of the assets that the Government plans to privatise is the desalination plant. Under an agreement that the former Government has with the operator, the desalination plant is not switched on after the two-year warranty period unless dam levels in Sydney fall below 70 per cent. When switched on, the desalination plant continues until dam levels get to 80 per cent. That is not widely known; Quentin Dempster gave it some coverage a few weeks ago.

On 2 May 2011 the Minister for Finance and Services, the Hon. Greg Pearce, wrote to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal saying a number of things, including declaring Sydney Desalination Plant a monopoly supplier. He asked the tribunal to regulate prices from the desalination plant. The effect of his request is that, unlike the arrangement that was entered into by the former Government—the one that the Treasurer said on *Stateline* a week or two ago would not be altered by this Government—the Government has asked for Sydney Desalination Plant to be able to charge for water even if it is not operating. That is akin to people paying electricity bills when they are in bed at night with all the switches turned off.

Sydney Water customers will be asked to pay for water from the desalination plant when it is not even on. That is the sleight of hand that is going on with the desalination plant and the sleight of hand that is going on when we see no mention of poles and wires. I wish I had more time to speak about the Pacific Highway. I mentioned the Pacific Highway in a speech in this House last week. The Howard Government contributed \$1.8 billion to the highway over 10 years. The former Labor Government put in \$2.1 billion over four years. The member for Clarence should take note that in one budget Federal Labor—Rudd, Gillard and Albanese—contributed \$3.1 billion to the Pacific Highway. There was a \$618 million gift from Federal Labor. Those on the other side of the House should be saying thank you to Labor.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore—The Deputy-Speaker) [3.35 p.m.]: I support the motion, which states:

That this House supports a budget that provides improved services and infrastructure for northern New South Wales.

As most members realise, the Pacific Highway does not pass through my electorate. However, I know what the highway means to northern New South Wales and how important it is to finish that project. It was marvellous to hear the member for Maroubra speak about the Pacific Highway and the Federal Government's contribution to the project. I remind the member for Maroubra that it is a State highway. The former Government neglected the highway for so long it had to get Federal Government help. Responsibility for the highway lay fairly and squarely at Labor's feet.

I am pleased that the State Government has contributed money to have the Pacific Highway project well and truly finished within the time line. I pay tribute to all members affected by the highway and to the Ministers involved in recognising what it will do for northern New South Wales. People in the northern part of the State are pleased to see country and regional areas recognised in the recent budget. Labor totally ignored country and regional New South Wales in every budget over the years. Finally, country and regional areas are being recognised.

I refer to the Lismore electorate. Some money is in support of projects that have already commenced. However, if we had listened to the Opposition over the past few months we would have believed that everything was going to be wiped in this budget. Projects have been reinforced with additional funding for their completion and other projects have been enhanced. For example, in 2011-12 the Kyogle High School upgrade will receive \$613,000; Murwillumbah TAFE, \$2,088,000; and supported accommodation throughout the electorate, \$1,008,000. This Government recognises some of the things that were neglected by those opposite for years.

The Lismore Regional Cancer Centre has been funded over the past few years. There is an allocation of \$6,812,000 in the 2011-12 budget, which will enable the unit to be completed. On Friday I will stand proudly with the Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast Minister, Mr Donald Page, at a sod turning for Our House. That major project has received Federal funds of late. I think the member for Clarence and the member for Tweed will be at the sod turning. It is a project that is dear to everybody's heart.

The Murwillumbah ambulance station will receive \$1.965 million for works at the station. Fire and Rescue New South Wales, Lismore regional north 2 zone office will receive \$295,000 for an upgrade. In relation to social housing, \$534,000 is allocated in Lismore Heights for social housing units; \$1.092 million is allocated for upgrades to various social housing in Lismore; \$624,000 is allocated for social housing works in progress in East Lismore; and \$1.476 million is allocated for further work in progress in Lismore—that is all part of a \$3.726 million package. The allocation of this funding has been well received. The member for Tweed and other North Coast members are aware of the funding allocated for the integrated transport study.

Mr Michael Daley: Don't forget the Bannora Point upgrade.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: The member for Tweed recognised that upgrade. This Government's budget was supportive of the Northern Rivers area, especially the North Coast. Representation from the north has finally been recognised.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [3.40 p.m.]: I will speak to the amendment moved by the member for Maroubra to the motion accorded priority. At long last the Coalition Government has released its first budget. A series of unanswered questions remain. This amendment should be passed because the Coalition needs to come clean about whether it plans to privatise the poles and wires of our electricity system. This Government needs to come clean about its plan to sell the Sydney desalination plant and what effect that will have, particularly on water prices. The member for Maroubra has already raised that issue. The Government needs to guarantee that water prices will not go up as a result of its neoliberal agenda and that it will direct any additional dividends back into subsidies for struggling households.

This amendment should be passed. I will tell members why: The Treasurer and Premier need to come clean to the people of New South Wales, particularly northern New South Wales, about how they are going to fund some of the future capital works programs, how they are going to sell State assets year after year. This Government needs to come clean about what it will do to assist struggling households to cope with increased prices, including electricity and water prices. This budget is an assault on the vulnerable people of New South Wales, particularly of northern New South Wales.

I do not know why the member for Newcastle is laughing. If I were him, I would be concerned about the mums, dads and families in the electorates of Newcastle, Clarence and Lismore who now have to pay for public preschools. It is a disgrace that this Government will now demand that parents pay for public preschools—they will pay \$30 per day, \$150 per week, a minimum of \$6,000 per year. Shame. Thousands of parents in northern New South Wales rely on public education. People across New South Wales rely on public preschools. The budget attacks the mums and dads, but also attacks children. It cuts \$266 million from capital works programs in public schools. Again, this Government shows its utter contempt for public education. Shame.

This budget attacks pensioners by raising public housing rent by \$10 a week. That is absolutely disgraceful. The budget attacks public sector workers. We saw the rally last week. The Government has announced that it will cut 5,000 public sector jobs, including public sector jobs in northern New South Wales and across the State. Government members should be utterly ashamed of themselves. Day after day Opposition members watch Government members praise themselves for this deficit that they have announced to this great State. What will be the result? The Opposition is interested to see what capital works programs the Government will implement. The Government will sell a great deal of assets and leave many vulnerable people across this State in very bad shape. The Government knows that. Opposition members know that this Government will not deliver for the vulnerable people of New South Wales.

Mr Guy Zangari: They will kick them in the face.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: That is right; the Government will kick them in the face. We know this by looking closely at the budget. We can see that very little is being done to support thousands of families across the State. It is interesting to look at the community building partnerships. Last year the then Labor Government gave \$58.4 million to community building partnerships. This year this Government has gutted that partnership program down to \$11 million. That is a large reduction in funding to community organisations that channel much-needed funds towards a variety of different organisations and groups that assist families. This Government has gutted that funding and it should be ashamed of itself. I support the amendment moved by the member for Maroubra. All members in their right mind should support the amendment. Looking at the Government benches, it is a little concerning. Sacking government workers can—

Mr Troy Grant: Point of order: In relation to the behaviour in the House, I remind the member for Fairfield of Standing Order 54.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I have heard enough on the point of order. That is not point of order.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.45 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Maroubra, Bankstown and Lismore for their exuberant support. It is such hypocrisy for Labor members to talk about increased electricity prices. The former Government had a five minutes to midnight sale of electricity assets. It blew \$5 million of the State's economy in a quick overnight sale and told no-one. No-one on the Opposition benches wants to talk about that. The member for Bankstown says that people in their right mind will vote for the amendment. I remind her that people in their right mind voted on 26 March. That is why there are only two rows of Labor members in this Chamber—in the kindergarten corner—and the rest of the Chamber is made up of Government. The People of New South Wales woke up and punished Labor for making fools of them for more than 16 years.

Mr Michael Daley: It took you 16 years to get us.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: We got there.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Clarence will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Opposition members have talked about public wages policy. There will be 5,000 voluntary redundancies, and they will be from the city, the backroom bureaucrats. What will we replace them with? No-one has talked about this. There will be 550 more police officers, 2,475 more positions in hospitals and 900 more teachers. There will be \$2.3 billion funding for road upgrades to tackle the blackspots and \$2 billion for disability services. That is something the former Government would never even have thought about. When it cut jobs, it did not matter if they were frontline cops, nurses et cetera. Michael Costa, the former Treasurer, said that 20 per cent of the public sector should be gone—that is 70,000 workers.

Mr Michael Daley: That is why he is former.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: He got the message, mate. The Government will cut 5,000 jobs and everyone is saying that that is too many jobs. The Government has done well with this budget. The Tweed electorate will receive a police station, a fire station and approximately \$100 million for Sexton Hill. The member for Tweed is doing all right. The member for Tweed is fully supportive of our Gold Coast railway study. Michael Costa cut that service, after the former Government promised that it was here to stay. What hypocrisy for those opposite to argue against electricity prices. The member for Toongabbie was fighting very hard to get the knives out of his back—he was the last man standing—but where was the member for Maroubra?

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): **The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Clarence will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: I apologise, Mr Deputy-Speaker. The North Coast has received a good level of funding in this budget. The budget is about saving lives by upgrading our major highway. The budget is about getting better health services and disability services. It is also an acknowledgement of the people who live in rural and regional New South Wales. About 100,000 new jobs will be created through payroll tax concessions in this budget, 40,000 of which will be in regional New South Wales. The Coalition Government recognises the major disparity between rural and regional New South Wales compared with the city—30 per cent of people live in rural and regional areas of New South Wales. The motion acknowledges a great budget and that the Government will look after regional and rural New South Wales. We will never again be forgotten, as we were for 16 years under the former Labor Government.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 68

Mr Anderson	Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli
Mr Annesley	Mr Gee	Mr Provest
Mr Aplin	Mr George	Mr Roberts
Mr Ayres	Ms Gibbons	Mr Rohan
Mr Baird	Ms Goward	Mr Rowell
Mr Barilaro	Mr Grant	Mrs Sage
Mr Bassett	Mr Hartcher	Mr Sidoti
Mr Baumann	Mr Hazzard	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Smith
Mr Brookes	Mr Holstein	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Mr Humphries	Mr Speakman
Mr Casuscelli	Mr Issa	Mr Spence
Mr Conolly	Mr Kean	Mr Stokes
Mr Constance	Dr Lee	Mr Stoner
Mr Cornwell	Ms Moore	Mr Toole
Mr Coure	Mr Notley-Smith	Mr Torbay
Mrs Davies	Mr O'Dea	Mr Ward
Mr Dominello	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Webber
Mr Doyle	Mr Owen	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Edwards	Mr Page	Mrs Williams
Mr Elliott	Ms Parker	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Evans	Mr Patterson	Mr Maguire
Mr Flowers	Mr Perrottet	Mr J. D. Williams

Noes, 19

Mr Barr	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Ms Burney	Dr McDonald	Ms Watson
Mr Daley	Ms Mihailuk	Mr Zangari
Ms Hay	Mr Parker	
Ms Hornery	Mrs Perry	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Keneally	Mr Rees	Mr Amery
Mr Lulich	Mr Robertson	Mr Park

Pair

Mr Bromhead

Mr Furolo

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Amendment negatived.****Motion agreed to.**

The SPEAKER: Order! The motion to be accorded priority having concluded, the House will now consider Government business.

ELECTION FUNDING, EXPENDITURE AND DISCLOSURES AMENDMENT BILL 2011**Bill introduced on motion by Mr Barry O'Farrell.****Agreement in Principle**

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Premier, and Minister for Western Sydney) [4.01 p.m.]:
I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

After 16 years the time is long overdue to restore honesty and integrity to government and politics in this State. I gave a commitment in this House in 2010 that, if elected, a New South Wales Liberal and Nationals Government would introduce legislation to restrict political donations to individuals—citizens on the electoral roll, the people who decide elections. I insisted that this State's approach to regulating political donations and expenditure must:

... ensure that those who exercise executive power in New South Wales understand that they are accountable, that we insist on having standards, and that they should operate with integrity and honesty.

This promise is being met by the New South Wales Liberal and Nationals Government. The Election Funding, Expenditure and Disclosures Amendment Bill 2011 contains two reforms that respond to the community's loud and clear demand for real change in this area. These reforms are consistent with amendments that were proposed by the New South Wales Liberals and Nationals last year during debate on the former Government's 2010 election funding legislation. Regrettably for the people of New South Wales, the former Government refused to support the amendments and allow them to be in place for this year's State election.

This bill will ban donations from other than individuals, including corporations, industrial organisations, peak industry groups, religious institutions and community organisations—in other words, third party interest groups. It will do this by making it unlawful for a political donation to be made or received if the donor is not an individual who is on an electoral roll for Commonwealth, State or local government elections. The bill also will link the electoral communication expenditure of political parties with that of their affiliates to ensure that the effectiveness and fairness of campaign finance rules are not undermined. These reforms are a reasonable, measured and fair way to inject more transparency and accessibility into the State's political processes. It will invest the power to donate solely in those who have the power to vote, those with the greatest stake in the system. New South Wales electors deserve nothing less.

I turn now to the details of the bill. Item [1] of schedule 1 provides for the aggregation of electoral communication expenditure of parties and their affiliated organisations. Under the Election Funding,

Expenditure and Disclosures Act "electoral communication expenditure" comprises a subset of electoral expenditure that relates to certain campaign expenses, including advertising, accommodation and staffing costs. The Act caps the electoral communication expenditure that parties are entitled to incur in the lead-up to an election at both a State and electorate level. It is unlawful for a party to breach the caps. Unfortunately, these party expenditure caps are not currently affected by the expenditure of organisations that are affiliated with a political party. This leads to organisations intimately involved in the governance of a political party, sometimes even with office bearers in common, campaigning on behalf of a party with no corresponding offset to the party's own ability to spend.

The Government believes that this is an unfair loophole that undermines the integrity of the whole scheme. The bill closes this loophole by combining the electoral communication expenditure of affiliates with the expenditure of political parties for the purpose of determining whether a party has exceeded the applicable expenditure cap. It does this by aggregating the expenditure of a political party with that of its affiliated organisations. Under the bill an "affiliated organisation" is defined to be a body that under the rules of the party can appoint delegates to the party's governing body and/or has a role in the preselection of candidates for that party. An affiliated organisation may be incorporated or unincorporated in recognition of the fact that a traditional corporate structure may not always be adopted by organisations that affiliate with political parties.

New section 95G (6) will provide that even if a political party spends less than or equal to its applicable expenditure caps, its expenditure will be treated as exceeding those caps if the combined party and affiliate expenditure exceeds the caps. This aggregation will apply for the overall State cap on party expenditure, as well as the \$50,000 electorate cap. It is unlawful under the Act for a party to incur expenditure in excess of the relevant statutory caps. Item [2] of schedule 1 will implement the Government's promise to ban corporate donations. As I said in this House last year, it is the New South Wales Liberal and Nationals' strong view that:

... the only way that you can ensure that the public is going to have confidence about our electoral system is to limit [donations] to the individuals who are on the electoral roll. It must be limited to those Australian citizens who are enrolled, not overseas citizens and non-residents, because of course those people do not get the vote. They do not have a stake in the system and they should not be able to influence the system—and nor should unions, third party interest groups and corporations ...

I stand by that position. Like the industry-specific prohibitions already in place under the Act, the new general ban on corporate and other donations applies to both State and local government elections. The bill contains a new section 96D (3), which will ensure that the new restrictions cannot be circumvented by corporate entities, union entities or others channelling donations through individuals. Such conduct will be unlawful. However, I will continue to urge the Commonwealth Government to extend these reforms in the Federal electoral context so that the same fundamental principles of accountability and transparency apply at every level of government in Australia. Such consistency will enhance the effectiveness of the reforms we are putting in place in New South Wales today. Finally, the bill does not affect the existing bans on donations by property developers and tobacco, liquor and gambling entities and their close associates, such as, company directors and their spouses.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It will not be possible, however, under the bill for a person to commit an offence under both the industry-specific bans and a new general prohibition on donations by non-individuals in relation to the same conduct. As I announced earlier in response to a request from the Electoral Commissioner, both the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Act and the Election Funding and Disclosure Act will be reviewed in this term. Any recommendations that seek to support the intent of this legislation before the House to clean up State politics will be welcomed. These important reforms are long overdue. They will support a system of democracy in New South Wales that does not operate for the benefit of organisations that have no right to elect representatives to this Parliament. They will end the risk, reality and, under Labor, public perception that donations could buy government influence.

It is inevitable that these laws and, I expect, this bill will trigger discussion and debate about constitutional principles. It has always been a great excuse to do nothing and a way to justify the status quo. I believe that a ban on donations other than those by individuals does not place unreasonable restrictions on the implied freedom of political communication mandated by the Commonwealth Constitution. The measures in this bill are designed to rid this State of the risk, reality and perception of corruption and undue influence. To this end, they are consistent with the principles endorsed by the High Court in the Lange case. The bill's symbolic and practical effect should not be underestimated. I am proud to be able to deliver on the Government's promise for all New South Wales electors. I commend the bill to the House.

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

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**Ninth Day's Debate****Debate resumed from 8 September 2011.**

Mr CHRIS SPENCE (The Entrance) [4.10 p.m.]: I give my address-in-reply to the speech of Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir on 3 May 2011 at the opening of the Fifty-fifth Parliament. Her Excellency is a truly remarkable woman. She is the first female Governor of New South Wales, and I am sure she was delighted to see this Government appoint its first female Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. It is with a great sense of pride that I witnessed history in the making on that day as 69 Coalition members formed the O'Farrell-Stoner Government, ending 16 years of hard Labor. But that day, although historic, was expressed as a day of warning. The election on 26 March was a clear message from the people of New South Wales that, although we have a mandate to deliver on our commitments from the election campaign, it was a warning that if we lose our way the people will remove us, just as they did with the Labor Party.

It is with great pleasure that I can say to the people of my electorate of The Entrance, and indeed the people of New South Wales, that we are delivering on our promises. Before the 26 March State election the now Premier committed us to a Five Point Action Plan, implementation of the 100 Day Action Plan and delivery of our policy document titled "Make NSW number one again". It was the two policy documents that Her Excellency referred to on 3 May this year. She spoke about our five point plan, which is to deliver making New South Wales number one again. New South Wales was once the engine room of the Australian economy and the best place in Australia to live.

The New South Wales Liberal-Nationals team is committed to making New South Wales number one again. We have a strong action plan for government based on that Five Point Action Plan: first, rebuild the New South Wales economy through lower taxes and business growth; second, return quality services in areas such as health, transport, education and community safety; third, renovate the infrastructure that makes a difference to both our economy and people's lives; fourth, restore accountability to government and give people a say on issues that affect their lives; and, fifth, protect our local environment and return planning powers to the community. The document further states:

Outlined in this agenda for change are initiatives and policies that the NSW Liberals and Nationals have already announced over the past 3 years.

We have a strong team and the right ideas to turn NSW around.

The election next March represents the most significant choice in a generation. The choice between a future where we make NSW Number One again—or more of the decline and lost hopes of the last 15 years.

We need you to join us and start the change.

Our document "Let's Make NSW number one again" was introduced with a message from the Leader of the New South Wales Liberals and the then Leader of the Opposition. It states:

Strong Values:
I believe

I believe that good government must understand the aspirations of people and communities if it is to deliver the best possible services, modern infrastructure and public institutions that strengthen people's choices, opportunities and freedoms.

I believe in:

1. **Providing opportunity:** The people of NSW deserve opportunities to shape their own future. A vibrant and strong economy generates the best opportunities for a fulfilling job, choice and financial security. A strong economy allows government to re-build services such as health care and education and to properly protect our environment.
2. **Delivering the best possible services:** The people of NSW are also "customers" of government. They pay taxes. People deserve reliable services and a public service that is ready and responsive. People deserve a government that works as hard as they do and one that respects the efforts that produced the taxes entrusted to government.
3. **Enhancing your quality of life:** People work to improve the quality of life for themselves, their families and their communities. They expect government to do its part. It's about more than economic considerations. It's about protecting our communities, our local environment and our physical and mental health. I want to get government focused on building a better life for the people of NSW.

4. **Talking honestly about our challenges:** I believe in trust. If you trust people they will make good decisions for themselves and others. Honesty is about not fearing accountability. Governments that measure their performance openly and are honest with people about the challenges will be able to do better. The best governments work to deliver for the people, not themselves.
5. **Valuing home and neighbourhood:** Our homes and neighbourhoods are more than just "places". They are where we raise our children and make friends, where we volunteer and help those in need. We strive to make our streets safe and secure. It's time to give people back their sense of place and purpose and to make our neighbourhoods places of positive opportunities.

These are the five values that will shape a NSW Liberals and Nationals Government.

That was the basis on which the Liberal-Nationals committed to making New South Wales number one again at the last State election. We have delivered on that. We worked through the five point plan of rebuilding the New South Wales economy, returning quality services, renovating infrastructure, restoring accountability to government and protecting our local environment. As I worked through the document "Let's Make NSW number one again"—most of it was expressly referred to by Her Excellency—one thing that we committed to was the target of 100,000 new jobs for New South Wales with our Jobs Action Plan. We said:

The opportunity of a job is a significant pathway to choice, quality of life and security for every individual.

To grow our economy, and enable jobs growth, government should remove obstacles to job creation where possible.

This is why the NSW Liberals and Nationals have a **Jobs Action Plan** to target 100,000 new jobs for NSW.

NSW lags Australia when it comes to jobs growth. Over the past decade NSW has suffered the lowest jobs growth of any Australia State and over the last 5 years NSW has had the highest unemployment rate of any mainland State.

NSW also boasts the highest payroll tax burden of any Australian State.

The first priority of the NSW Liberals and Nationals Five Point Plan is to rebuild the NSW economy through lower taxes and business growth.

Under the NSW Liberals and Nationals **Jobs Action Plan** businesses that increase employment levels will not pay any payroll tax on the additional employees for their first year of employment.

The **Jobs Action Plan** will work by:

- **providing a payroll tax rebate of \$4,000 per full time employee for the first 100,000 new payroll tax paying jobs created in NSW;**
- **on paying the rebate in two equal parts, on the first and second anniversary of the hire of a new full time employee. This will encourage long term, sustainable jobs.**

It is estimated that the NSW Liberals and Nationals **Jobs Action Plan** will reduce the NSW unemployment rate by up to 0.3 per cent, and increase economic activity by up to \$3.6 billion.

Another thing we listed in our "Let's Make NSW number one again" document was that the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals will make Sydney more liveable again by addressing housing affordability. We said:

Over the past 15 years Sydney has earned the unwanted reputation as Australia's least affordable city, a place that many families and young people find too expensive to live in.

People living in Sydney are creative, industrious and resourceful. However, they are working harder just to keep their heads above water.

The biggest driver of Sydney's growing cost of living is the cost of homes. Sydney home buyers make higher mortgage repayments as a share of disposable income than any other State. Only 64 per cent of Sydney households own their own home, less than every other Australian capital city except Darwin.

The NSW Liberals and Nationals want home ownership to be more than a dream. We want to make it easier for individuals and families to get into the Sydney housing market and reduce the pressure on household budgets from mortgage costs.

We want to tackle Sydney's housing stress head on.

In government, the NSW Liberals & Nationals will introduce a range of practical measures to make housing more affordable. Our \$630 million Action Plan to Make Sydney Liveable Again includes:

- repealing NSW Labor's \$429 million 'Homebuyers Tax' on property purchases;
- providing a Regional Relocation Grant of \$7,000 to encourage 'whole of NSW' growth;

- extending stamp duty concessions to Empty Nesters who are 55 years old, who choose to move from a house to a smaller dwelling; and
- accelerating land release and reducing infrastructure costs on new developments.

Our Action Plan to Make Sydney Liveable Again will stimulate construction, facilitate better utilisation of housing stock and encourage regional development.

Over the next 4 years our plan will support 40,000 households to relocate from Sydney to regional NSW.

These initiatives will reduce the population pressure on Sydney and provide real economic benefits to regional NSW.

In part 2 of the Five Point Action Plan to Make NSW Number One Again we committed to the following:

The NSW Liberals & Nationals have faith in local communities, and believe they should be involved in making the decisions that affect their area and future.

In government we will empower local communities by giving them better information and genuine data about local health services and let them have a real say in the public health system that is there to serve them.

We will decentralise clinical decision-making, support the role of medical practitioners, nurses and other health care professionals, empower hospital managers and provide a structure for significant community involvement.

As detailed in the NSW Liberals & Nationals '*Making It Work*' health policy, we will:

- replace Labor's huge and out of touch Area Health Services with smaller Health Districts;
- appoint Boards to the Health Districts and make them accountable to the communities they serve;
- restore the decision-making power of Hospital General Managers and give authority back to expert clinicians;
- further develop clinical networks that link medical experts across the system;
- appoint a qualified medical practitioner as Executive Clinical Director in each Health District; and
- publish information about health service management including Budget allocations, the capacity of an institution to undertake treatments and patient care outcomes through an independent Information Bureau.

There is consensus between most health stakeholders, including the Federal Government, that the NSW health system needs a flatter and more locally focused management structure that better utilises the expertise of medical practitioners, nurses, other health care professionals and the community.

Only a NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will restore confidence in the public health system, re-engaging medical practitioners and once again give local communities a strong and direct voice in local patient care.

We also went on to commit that the New South Wales Liberals and Nationals will improve the literacy and numeracy of students through our Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan. We committed to the following:

The NSW Liberals & Nationals will ensure children develop the foundations for success in literacy and numeracy at an early age. We believe every child has the right to achieve in reading, writing and maths.

The **Literacy & Numeracy Action Plan** will invest \$250 million in early intervention by individually targeting those students most at risk. It includes:

- providing an additional 900 teachers for the Reading Recovery Program and expanding it to include both literacy and numeracy;
- reallocating more than 300 K-2 Support Teachers Learning Assistance (STLA) to provide more intensive support to students in Years 3-10;
- moving responsibility for preschools from the Department of Human Services (formerly the Department of Community Services) to the Department of Education;
- using Kindergarten screening assessments and other data to identify K-2 students at risk of not meeting the literacy and numeracy standards; and
- establishing a Ministerial Working Group comprising educational experts to report annually on the performance of our Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan.

[Extension of time agreed to.]

With one in five year 9 students at or below the minimum standards in reading, writing and maths, it's time to change our approach towards literacy and numeracy.

Under Labor almost 13,000 students across NSW every year are unable to adequately read, write or count by the time they finish primary school. Sadly for most of these children, by the time they reach high school it is almost too late for them to recover these skills.

Only a NSW Liberals & Nationals Government will deliver a strong education system that promotes equity, as well as excellence.

The NSW Liberals & Nationals Action Plan will help develop children's literacy and numeracy skills and ensure a seamless transition from preschool to primary school and then onto high school.

We also committed to create an Integrated Transport Authority. The Government's Five Point Action Plan states:

The NSW Liberals & Nationals have committed to an ***Integrated Transport Authority***. It will improve the delivery of public transport services by better co-ordinating different transport modes, and enabling more efficient delivery of major transport infrastructure projects.

The ***Integrated Transport Authority*** will be responsible for transport policy including planning, infrastructure, fares, ticketing and customer information. It will ensure that different transport modes work together, and that the interests of the travelling public are put first.

Under this structure, the operational transport agencies, such as RailCorp, the State Transit Authority and Sydney Ferries, will be focused on front line service delivery.

Each frontline agency will play a lead role in their specific transport mode. These agencies will be required to focus on their core role—delivering clean, reliable, safe and efficient transport services, while the Integrated Transport Authority is responsible for planning and policy.

An Independent Board comprising a panel of experts will oversee the new Authority. The Board will be at 'arm's length' from the day-to-day running of transport services but will play a critical role in keeping the State Government accountable on transport policy and providing expert advice.

Specifically, the new Authority will:

- provide a central point of management for the provision of public transport services across Sydney and NSW;
- be responsible for transport planning including the development of workable transport interchanges;
- deliver better co-ordination between transport modes;
- provide a central point of accountability for the planning and delivery of major transport infrastructure projects; and
- put commuters first by providing more accessible real time information about services and ticketing.

For the first time since the 2000 Olympics, Sydney will have an intelligent, strategic and responsive public transport system to give its customers the service they expect and deserve.

I could go on and speak about how we will fix Sydney's ferry services, how we will introduce new NightRide bus services and how we will increase funding for community transport. I could go on and speak about part three of the Five Point Action Plan, which is entitled "Enhancing your Quality of Life". We have established Infrastructure NSW—and what a fantastic piece of legislation that was. I could also go on and speak about how we are building the North West and South West Rail Links—more projects that the O'Farrell-Stoner Government is delivering for the people of New South Wales. Part 4 of the Five Point Action Plan is about restoring accountability to government and giving people a real say on issues that affect their lives.

Just before I began this contribution the Premier introduced new legislation that will restore accountability, transparency and honesty to the New South Wales Government. We will also strengthen whistleblower protection; eliminate taxpayer-funded political advertising; and restore trust in our public service and establish a public service commissioner. We have strengthened Independent Commission Against Corruption laws and we have examined the potential to recall elections in New South Wales—something I am sure the people of New South Wales would have appreciated had it been in place before 26 March. As the Premier mentioned today, we will reform election campaign finance laws.

Part 5 of the Five Point Action Plan is entitled "Protect Our Local Environment and Return Planning Powers to the Community—Valuing Home and Neighbourhood". We will rewrite the State's planning laws. We will give school communities a greater say over local school infrastructure. We will tackle the graffiti cycle in

local communities and we will do that when those in the other place decide not to play games with legislation that will stop graffiti in New South Wales, which is a blight on councils and is unsightly for our communities. Those in the other place should seriously reconsider their position on graffiti, because the people of New South Wales elected this Government to introduce legislation to fix things such as graffiti.

Those in the other place were not elected to stop us doing that; they were elected to look sensibly at proposed legislation. Their actions are certainly not sensible. The previous Government had over 6,000 days to focus on making New South Wales the premier State. This Government has had just over 100 days and is committed to delivering for the people of New South Wales. I too am committed to delivering for the people of my electorate and we as a Government will make them and this State number one again.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast—The Speaker) [4.30 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I contribute to the Addresses-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech made on the opening of this, the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales, on 3 May this year. Tomorrow members will proceed to Government House and I will deliver the Addresses-in-Reply to Her Excellency, the Governor, and I will take great pleasure in doing that. Since we are referring to the newly elected Government, I take the opportunity to congratulate all the newly elected members of this place, who were extremely excited and proud that first day, which is several months ago now. In particular I congratulate the new members for the Illawarra, Mr Gareth Ward, the member for Kiama; Mr Lee Evans, the member for Heathcote; Mr Ryan Park in Keira and Miss Anna Watson in Shellharbour. Congratulations to that part of the team, as we see ourselves, in the Illawarra and the South Coast.

I acknowledge also, and I am sure I say this on behalf of all members in this place, the Governor, Her Excellency the Hon. Professor Marie Bashir, for her absolute and professional commitment to the people of New South Wales over a long period. Since being appointed on 1 March 2001 Her Excellency has indeed served the State of New South Wales in a most gracious, passionate and dignified manner, having had her term extended in 2004 and 2007. On behalf of the people of this State, as Speaker of this place, I say how grateful we are indeed for her dedication and longevity in the position.

As the member for The Entrance mentioned, Her Excellency was the first woman to be appointed Governor of New South Wales and I, as the first female Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, note Professor Marie Bashir's significant role in advancing the role of women in government and public service. Professor Marie Bashir taught at the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales, increasingly working with children's services, psychiatry and mental health services and, of course, Indigenous health programs, and is widely respected and much loved, along with her husband, Sir Nicholas Shehadie.

The Governor in her address outlined the O'Farrell Government's plans to rebuild New South Wales through the 100 Day Action Plan, revitalising our State and delivering real benefits to families, businesses and individuals. This plan will rebuild the New South Wales economy through lower taxes, cutting the costs of living and business growth. It will return quality services in areas such as health, transport, education and community safety. It will renovate infrastructure and make a real difference to both our economy and people's lives. It will restore accountability to Government by giving people a say on issues that affect them and, of course, protect our local environment and return planning powers to the community.

The O'Farrell Government has already begun to implement these changes in this Parliament: first with the introduction of the Health Services Amendment (Local Health Districts and Boards) Bill 2011, the first piece of health-related legislation by the O'Farrell Government. It has delivered on a key election commitment made by the Liberal-Nationals Coalition, a devolution of responsibility and accountability in the health system, a return to decision-making at our hospitals. I commend the Hon Jillian Skinner, Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research—no stranger to the South Coast electorate, of course—on her continued work with our health professionals and front-line workers.

At last we have a Minister who listens to doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and other stakeholders in order to deliver better outcomes for patients across the South Coast and indeed across New South Wales. A commitment to major reform of the New South Wales health system was at the front and centre of the last election campaign, and the Minister implemented the first of many changes within the first days of this Parliament. Within the Illawarra many residents were dismayed at the lack of publicly elected officials within the Wollongong and Shellharbour local government areas. I certainly felt that pain after the sacking of Wollongong and Shellharbour councils and on many occasions visited meetings in those areas.

The O'Farrell Government has returned democracy to the Illawarra and Shellharbour areas by bringing forward local government decisions and the elections. These elections were held on 3 September, very recently.

I congratulate all of the newly elected councillors and wish them well in their new roles and, of course, the challenging role they have ahead in returning democracy to those regions—a very important power for regions. I also commend the Minister for Local Government for the introduction and subsequent passing of the Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Bill 2011.

This bill ensured that a range of appropriate and measured reforms important to restoring democracy and good governance to councils in the Illawarra were implemented and will continue to be implemented in the future. An important step in the O'Farrell Government's Five Point Action Plan is to ensure accountability in government. The Constitution Amendment (Prorogation of Parliament) Bill 2011 introduced by the Premier has amended the Constitution Act 1902 to restrict the discretion of the Governor acting on the advice of the Executive Council to prorogue Parliament in the six months prior to a fixed-term election except on or after Australia Day. As the Premier noted in the introduction of the legislation:

This bill is a reassurance the public can have that work will be finished, information will be provided and there will be no attempt to ever again hide from the public of this State the sort of information that the former Government sought to hide before the election.

As noted by Her Excellency, one of this Government's priorities is to address the cost of living, one of the most important priorities facing residents all across New South Wales. The Government has established a special commission of inquiry into the partial electricity privatisation undertaken by the Labor Government and is determined to do whatever possible to ease the pressure of living costs on families across this State. In relation to this the low-income household rebate has been introduced. It replaces the energy rebate. It is available to eligible customers who hold one of the following concession cards: a pensioner concession card issued by Centrelink or the Department of Veterans' Affairs or a gold card issued by the department, a war widow or war widower pension, a total and permanent incapacity disability pension, or a health care card issued by Centrelink to the recipient of one of a number of income support payments from the Commonwealth.

The rebate started at \$200 on 1 July 2011. It will automatically increase on 1 July each year. It is expected to be \$235 by 1 July 2014. The Government will also implement a family energy rebate on 1 July 2012. Customers will be eligible to receive the rebate only as long as they continue to be eligible to hold one of the above cards and the electricity account is in their name. It is also available to long-term residents of caravan parks. Other rebates which the O'Farrell Government has implemented to assist families and pensioners with increasing electricity prices are the life support rebate, the medical energy rebate and energy accounts payment assistance. These rebates, fully costed from identified savings made by the Government, will greatly assist low-income households struggling with the rising costs of electricity.

By extending the empty nester transfer duty concession to those over 55 the O'Farrell Government has assisted seniors wishing to downsize their property. The Duties Amendment (Senior's Principal Place of Residence Duty Exemption) Bill 2011 will save seniors relocating to a new home up to \$22,490. As well as extending exemptions for seniors, the Treasurer has introduced the Real Property Amendment (Torrens Assurance Levy Repeal) Bill 2011, repealing the former Labor Government's tax on homebuyers. The bill will remove a stealth tax without sacrificing the integrity of the Torrens Assurance Fund, which will continue to underpin the security of land titles in New South Wales. These O'Farrell Government bills passed in only a few short sitting days fulfil commitments made to New South Wales residents in the 100 Day Action Plan.

These almost immediate changes prove that this Government can be trusted, that it has the commitment necessary to restore accountability to this State and address the cost of living, particularly the cost of electricity, which is causing much stress to many communities and constituents around this State. I note particular Coalition commitments made to the South Coast electorate during the election period. As always, the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals have a comprehensive plan to upgrade the Princes Highway at every election. The Princes Highway is the spine of the South Coast, linking important communities from Sydney, Wollongong, Nowra, Ulladulla and further south to Batemans Bay and Bega.

The Princes Highway is an essential route for freight to access coastal communities and for the growing business sector on the South Coast. The Princes Highway also carries thousands of tourists each year visiting the pristine waters of Jervis Bay, the beaches of Huskisson or Vincentia or camping at popular destinations at Coolendel and along the Shoalhaven River. Premier Barry O'Farrell visited the region prior to the State election to announce the Coalition's commitment to the Princes Highway, including the South Nowra duplication. The Government's commitment includes \$74 million to start construction on the duplication of the Princes Highway at South Nowra. The O'Farrell Government will upgrade 6.3 kilometres of the Princes Highway to four lanes between Kinghorne Street and Forest Road at South Nowra. The O'Farrell Government has also committed to delivering this project in its first term.

I was pleased that the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, MLC, visited the South Coast region on Tuesday 26 July to announce that NACE Civil Engineering had been awarded the tender for the project. Also pleasing was that the O'Farrell Government was able to commence this project, with a projection to complete the upgrade under budget by \$12 million. Along with the South Nowra duplication, this Government is also committed to delivering the Gerringong to Bomaderry Princes Highway upgrade. An amount of \$500 million has been committed to commence stage one from Mount Pleasant to Toolijooa Road, with completion within the first term of the Government.

The Government will also undertake to start construction on stage two, the Berry bypass, within the next four years. Last week's State budget allocated over \$30 million to road projects throughout the South Coast electorate, including \$18 million to commence construction of the South Nowra Princes Highway duplication. It is anticipated that this project will be completed by 2013. The Minister for Health, the Hon. Jillian Skinner, has also committed the Government to easing parking pressures at Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital by providing an additional 117 car parking spaces.

This has pleased me immensely because it has concerned the residents of the South Coast ever since the upgrading of the Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital. There have never been adequate car spaces at the hospital and we will now have 117 additional spaces, which will make an enormous difference. In my role as the member for South Coast I made numerous representations to previous health Ministers requesting that funds be made available to fix this simple problem. Shoalhaven City Council even took the extraordinary measure of offering the previous State Government a loan and a commitment to undertake the work itself. This was refused by the Labor Government. In fact, there was never any sensible response by the former Government to this request.

Minister Skinner has listened to my concerns and those of the local community and of staff and health professionals at Shoalhaven hospital and has committed to this project. I was pleased that the Minister visited the South Coast electorate on Monday 15 August to restate the Government's commitment to providing residents of the Shoalhaven with this additional parking. As always, the Minister has taken her commitment one step further. Not only has the Government allocated over \$1 million to this project, it will also involve an upgrade of the existing parking facilities and integration with the soon-to-be-commenced South Coast Cancer Care Centre. Completion of the project is expected within the first half of next year.

The Government is also seeking to commence construction of the \$34 million South Coast Cancer Care Centre, allocating \$9.8 million in last week's State budget. It is expected that this project will be completed by 2014. This Government is committed to improving health services across the South Coast by delivering improved facilities at Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital, delivering the South Coast Cancer Care Centre to provide cancer treatment to South Coast patients and announcing an additional 82 nurses this year for the local health network.

The Government has made many more commitments to benefit residents of the South Coast electorate and communities across New South Wales and has delivered on its 100 Day Action Plan. As well as the bills I mentioned in my speech during the Address-in-Reply debate, it is important to note that this Government has passed 62 pieces of legislation and regulations. I have time to list some of them. This Government has introduced the Court Security Regulation 2011, Destination NSW Act 2011, Drug Misuse and Trafficking Regulation 2011, Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Part 3A Repeal) Act 2011, Industrial Relations (Public Sector Conditions of Employment) Regulation 2011, Infrastructure NSW Act 2011, Insurance Premiums Order 2011-2012, Lobbying of Government Officials Act 2011 No. 5, and Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Act 2011.

The list goes on and on. Anybody who criticises this Government for not getting on with the job of delivering for the people of this State is sadly misinformed and ill informed and is conveying untruths to whomever they speak to. With that in mind, I conclude my contribution to the Address-in-Reply debate. I look forward to all members proceeding to Government House tomorrow, when I will present to Her Excellency all the speeches made during the Address-in-Reply debate.

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour—The Assistant-Speaker) [4.45 p.m.]: Before I commence my speech in the Address-in-Reply debate I also put on record in this House my appreciation of the gracious manner in which Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir performs her duties in New South Wales, ably supported by Sir Nicholas Shehadie. They are two fantastic people who have served this State well, with grace and poise, over the past few years. In speaking to the Address-in-Reply debate I remind members of what Her Excellency said to Parliament in her address. She said:

Honourable Members gather for this Parliament justifiably proud of their representative roles, but equally, deeply conscious of the new responsibilities bestowed upon them.

The people of New South Wales have asked this Government to secure the future of our State not just through honest service, wise judgement and sound decision makings—those qualities are the building blocks of good Government and they are fundamental requirements for all Members who serve here.

I emphasise that point because the program put forward by Barry O'Farrell and his team in their first 100 days is something we did not see under Carr or any other previous Premiers. A major plank of the Government's program that reflects directly the Governor's remarks is the new laws to tackle graffiti, with fairer measures to bring graffiti offenders to account and foster relevant and innovative solutions with local groups, and community service orders to help offenders face up to the personal and social consequences of their actions. The upper House's rejection of legislative provisions that the Government clearly took to the election and that were widely and warmly received by the community flies in the face of what the Governor said to the joint sitting when opening Parliament. I ask members in the other place to consider the Governor's remarks and to remember the mandate that I believe this Government has in relation to the new laws it has produced to date and will produce into the future.

The Government plans to rebuild the New South Wales economy through lower taxes, cutting the cost of living, business growth, returning quality services to areas such as health, transport, education and community safety, renovating infrastructure and making a difference both to our economy and to people's lives, restoring accountability to the Government by giving people a say on issues that affect them, protecting our local environment, and returning planning powers to the Government. Anyone who has had an interest in what this Government has been doing over the past six months—which I suggest is the vast majority of people in New South Wales—will appreciate and understand that we have moved in the direction we promised. In spite of adverse media reports—the media have to find something to pick at around the edges—the graffiti laws, hospital boards and Infrastructure NSW are examples of this Government delivering on its plan.

I am one of those members who, like the Minister at the table, was in this place when the Carr Government was in power. When Bob Carr was elected Premier in 1995 he decided to put a two-year hold on all infrastructure projects. It did not matter what those projects were—he put a two-year stop on them. As a result, the people of Coffs Harbour had to wait until 2001 for a new hospital to be opened. The Coalition Government under John Fahey purchased the land for the new hospital and the Labor Government claimed the credit. But Labor failed to remind the people of the Coffs Harbour electorate and surrounding areas that it delayed the process for two years initially and then put off the project until 2001, when it was completed.

That was appalling. The former Government cut the number of beds and services that should have been provided to the people of Coffs Harbour, who then had to wait a long time for new facilities. The reality is that that not only created a delay in service provision but also cost the State a lot of money. It is more expensive to access services outside the Coffs Harbour electorate, in places such as Sydney. Consequently, that attitude resulted in increased burdens on both the taxpayers and the State's health system. Infrastructure NSW is an absolutely independent body that will report back to the Government. By request of the Chairman of Infrastructure NSW, Nick Greiner, its procedures will be made public. There will be no opportunity for any government to take away or reallocate funding for a political purpose, as the previous Government did. In 1994-95 a new justice centre in Coffs Harbour was identified as necessary infrastructure by the previous Coalition Government, but only after presentation of the 2011 State budget has funding for that project finally been made available.

Approximately \$60 million has been allocated for a new police station and a new courthouse on a site in Coffs Harbour. For the past 16 years I had been asking for funding for that project, but my pleas fell on deaf ears as the former Government was interested only in propping up marginal seats in inner Sydney. I welcome the formation of Infrastructure NSW. I welcome also its independent role in overseeing infrastructure development and its scope for getting on with the business of rebuilding New South Wales. As the Premier stated today during question time, Bob Carr oversaw rivers of gold running through this State—the Pacific Highway, the Princes Highway, and the Newell Highway—but infrastructure needs of Sydney and the North West Rail Link were totally ignored. This begs the question: What did the previous Government do for 16 years?

Mr Tim Owen: Not a lot.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: That is right. I compliment the member for Newcastle on his election victory in the March State election. I was born and raised in a Newcastle suburb and I was amazed at the swing against the Labor Party in the Hunter region. When I speak to members of my family who still live in Newcastle they tell me the reason that Newcastle, Charlestown, Swansea and other Hunter electorates voted for Coalition

members was that the former Labor heartland had become sick and tired of lies and non-delivery of promises. All they ever got were never-never promises—they were never, never fulfilled. I urge members of the Labor Opposition to take that message on board because good governments need good oppositions. If we do not have a good Opposition, we will not have a good Government.

Labor members need to understand that the people of New South Wales were fed up with empty promises. Members of the Labor Party need to start rebuilding, just as the Coalition Government has begun to rebuild New South Wales. It will be a long time before there is again a State Labor government. Her Excellency the Governor referred in her speech to a new planning system and a revision of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. Part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act was repealed by the Government during its first 100 days of action after witnessing the climate for corruption and the corruption that resulted from doing favours for mates.

I was the shadow Minister for Local Government and saw the rot setting in at Strathfield, Liverpool and all the other basically Labor councils. At that time it appeared that anyone who had cash in their pocket and was seeking development approval simply had to grease the right palm to get it. We saw the mess that was created in Wollongong, so the Coalition Government has moved to ensure that similar corrupt activity does not occur in the future. I am sure Barry O'Farrell and his Cabinet team will proceed as they began and achieve that objective. Currently the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act is being revised. Today we listened to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Infrastructure NSW speak almost ad nauseam about the list of centres that will be involved in consultation.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Oh, he is a wonderful man.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Exactly. He read a list of centres in which public forums will be held. I am pleased that one will be held in Coffs Harbour. Already I have had a brief discussion with the Hon. Tim Moore, a former member of the Legislative Assembly, whom I remember well.

Mr Chris Hartcher: We clashed swords with him many times.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Yes, so I will ensure that I give evidence at the forum in Coffs Harbour. Mr Deputy-Speaker, as the member for Lismore you would know about the primary habitats and corridors strategy that is now being presented by the Department of Planning to local governments. Some local councils, such as the Lismore City Council, have embraced it with open arms and grabbed it with both hands. However, the reality is that it will have a huge impact on farming communities in regional areas, especially on the North Coast. I hope that the issues will be well and truly addressed during investigation of protections under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. I note the presence in the Chamber of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. I am glad he is here so that he can listen to my complaints in relation to the primary habitats and corridors strategy.

The Government recognises that the State needs planning that is designed for local communities by local communities, hence its repeal of part 3A. We need to provide scope for communities to make their own decisions instead of having decisions imposed upon them. When a local environmental plan is submitted by a council, it is appropriate for the Department of Planning to confer priority local environmental plan status subject to inclusion of clauses containing specific provisions, which was the case in relation to those submitted by Lismore City Council and Coffs Harbour City Council. As Mr Deputy-Speaker knows, the regulations drafted by the former Labor Government, which assured councils that they were not expected to be implemented, were some of the most draconian regulations ever seen. I appeal to the Hon. Tim Moore and the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure to ensure that we get it right.

Since presentation of the budget, there have been some complaints about the new home owners grant. It has to be said that in communities such as those in Coffs Harbour and on the North Coast, which have increased population densities, targeting grants to new homes will do great things for local economies. It will result in the building industry becoming strong again. If the building industry is strong, the whole local economy works well. We must remember that small business is the engine room of the New South Wales economy. If small business is not doing well and employing people, taxes are not paid and the economy does not thrive. The slogan that the Coalition took to the 2007 election in relation to small business was getting government off the back of small business and out of its pockets, especially its hip pocket. The Government's intention is to rebuild the economy, assist small business and develop economic growth throughout the State. The Government has already appointed a small business commissioner and is advising all government departments and agencies that owe money to small businesses to pay within 30 days.

The infrastructure renewal scheme will assist local councils. I commend the Government for allocating more money to the former Neighbourhood Watch program, which is now known as Eyewatch. I could speak for another 20 minutes on what this Government has achieved already and what it will achieve in the future, but instead I will commend the speech made by Her Majesty's representative in New South Wales, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, who is a fine woman. As I stated at the outset, I ask all members of this House and the other place to remember what she said during her speech:

The people of New South Wales have asked this Government to secure the future of our State not just through honest service, wise judgement and sound decision-making—those qualities are the building blocks of good government and they are fundamental requirements for all members who serve.

When legislation is passed by this House, I ask members to remember those words and that the Government has a mandate to govern for the next four years. I commend Her Excellency's speech to the House.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst—Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Infrastructure NSW) [5.00 p.m.]: At the outset of my comments on the Address-in-Reply debate it is appropriate to express a sentiment that is shared by many, which is that Her Excellency Marie Bashir continues to fulfil her role as the Governor of New South Wales in an outstanding way, as does her husband, Nicholas Shehadie, in supporting her. She has done the job for some years now and it does not matter where one goes in New South Wales, one usually finds that Her Excellency has been there. That applies right across the regions of New South Wales. I place on record the appreciation of members of this House for Her Excellency's work.

The people of Wakehurst have faced many issues over the years. Thankfully we have worked through many of them and addressed most of them, but a number remain. I place on record some of those concerns. First, I refer to our hospital facilities. Manly Hospital and Mona Vale Hospital are the two hospitals that service the northern beaches. The staff at both hospitals do an amazing job regardless of the conditions in which they work, but considering the poor state of both hospitals and their physical capacity after 16 years of a Labor Government the staff certainly are to be commended. Manly and Mona Vale hospitals have both seen better days. Recently, Mona Vale Hospital has had some issues, particularly with the delivery of maternity services. I am very pleased, along with the member for Pittwater, the Mayor of Pittwater, Harvey Rose, and other community members that we have seen a change from the pre-election period to the post-election period in that there is now a clear commitment from this Government to return maternity services to Mona Vale Hospital.

It should not be a constant battle to provide a reasonable level of hospital services, but it has been the case for many years. I look forward to the next stage when a new hospital will be built on the northern beaches. The Government has committed, as it did in opposition, to constructing a new northern beaches hospital. I put on record my absolute commitment to ensuring that that hospital is built. Obviously, it takes time to plan such facilities but the former Government took its time because it was not at all committed to getting the hospital built. As a result, very little was done in the way of hospital planning. The members for the electorates of Pittwater, Davidson and Manly, and I, are absolutely committed to getting this hospital built. We recognise the need for it.

The advantage of being in government is that we are now able to say with certainty that the Royal North Shore Hospital upgrade was predicated on the existence of a new hospital on the northern beaches. In other words, the design of Royal North Shore was predicated on an understanding that the new northern beaches hospital would be completed. That did not happen due to the previous Government's reluctance to do anything in its period in office. It constantly represented that it was doing something, but in fact it did nothing. I confirm to this House that the Government is absolutely committed to getting the hospital built. It is necessary; people on the northern beaches need a new hospital.

I know that doctors sometimes have doubts; I hear regularly there are discussions that indicate the doubts continue. I say to them clearly that we are every bit as committed as they are to getting this hospital built. However, because of the lack of planning over the preceding years there clearly has to be a period of planning and environmental matters have to be considered before we can move on to the work stage. The Government has committed \$125 million over this four-year estimates period. It may well be that we will need to put in considerably more than that, but those are the issues that need to be resolved as we work through the design of the hospital. We are committed to getting it done.

The rapid bus transit system that has been promoted by members of the Government on the northern beaches is an important and significant step forward. Obviously, the funding has been allocated in the budget to

ensure we can make a proper appraisal of a rapid bus transit system for the northern beaches. It has been disappointing in recent years that although there have been a number of reviews of the bus service, each time the review has taken place there have been changes that have often been to the detriment of the residents of the northern beaches. Having said that, I acknowledge that the workers at both Mona Vale and Brookvale depots do their very best with very limited resources to deliver the services we need. I assure the community I am committed to ensuring we get improved bus services.

One of the problems was that the Labor Government made sure we had one of the oldest fleets anywhere in the Western world. I asked a question on notice about this and found that the average age of the buses at Brookvale bus depot was about 20 years. We were variously promised while in opposition that buses would be upgraded and we would get new compressed natural gas-run buses, but in the end the Labor Government delivered none of that. Now is the time for equity and fairness and to make sure there is some improvement to bus services on the northern beaches.

I acknowledge the fantastic work done by schoolteachers in our area, whether in primary school or secondary school. Again, various services have been cut back over the years and I intend to address those in my period in government. An initiative I have been keen to see for some time is the upgrading of some science laboratories in schools in the Wakehurst electorate. I am very pleased to announce that the first step in that upgrading process has been facilitated through the budget this week. Killarney Heights High School has desperately needed an upgrade of its science laboratory facilities for some time. The Minister for Education and the Treasurer have both indicated to me that the science laboratories at Killarney Heights High School will be upgraded, and I thank them for that.

However, science laboratories in other high schools in the electorate and indeed in the broader area outside the electorate boundaries require close examination with a view to upgrading them. Of course, it has to be done in the context of responsible State budgeting, but I will be arguing that case over the next couple of years and hoping to impress the Treasurer and the Minister for Education regarding the schools' priorities. The public servants on the northern beaches do a very good job. I thank the police particularly. The police at Dee Why police station work in crowded and difficult circumstances and at some stage I would like to see that police station upgraded. I understand the hierarchy of management in the Police Force is being revisited at the moment, but I place on record that the community expects the police to have first-class facilities.

The Dee Why police station was built as a station only and not the command centre for an entire local area command which is what it now services. That issue needs to be addressed as soon as possible. I also place on record my thanks to the firemen who keep us safe on the northern beaches. Our fire stations are not perfect but they are made to do the job by the firemen and the Rural Fire Service. I particularly thank the nurses at both hospitals. Nurses, police, teachers and firemen are all doing a first-class job on the northern beaches. This afternoon I will not go into the broader details of my portfolio responsibilities but I will say this: the one thing that was missing under the Labor Government was a sense of integrity and transparency. That disappeared during the 16 years of Labor Government.

I want integrity and due process about decision-making to return to planning in New South Wales. For that reason, as the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, I am making a number of changes to ensure openness and transparency. This Government has initiated a number of changes to successive issues which to this point have not had a lot of media exposure. For example, under the Australian Labor Party the Department of Planning would make an assessment of a major development that no-one would see until the Planning and Assessment Commission had made its decision.

As a result of this Government's initiatives, in the first week of August the Department of Planning put all the reports on its website so the community across this State would know what was happening with a major development and it would know exactly what the Department of Planning was doing. Therefore, those who opposed the developments would understand the issues and those who supported them—perhaps the proponents—would have a sense of whether they needed to address certain issues or whether the department was necessarily supporting them. I have also asked the head of the Planning and Assessment Commission, Gabrielle Kibble, to ensure complete openness and transparency in decision-making so that hearings are conducted in an open forum. If there is anything more than minimal opposition the whole process must be open to enable people to come in and be heard, which is important.

We have initiated also similar openness and transparency in relation to the joint regional planning panels. This Government wants to ensure that members of the joint regional planning panels and the Planning Assessment Commission understand the importance of people believing that they have been heard and not

ignored. That was not a priority under the former Labor Government but it is a priority for the O'Farrell Government and me. I say to developers and to those who want to provide housing in this State: You are welcome in New South Wales. Only three or four weeks ago I met with one large development company which said that it had stopped doing business in this State because the former Government was not prepared to listen to it. The Liberal-Nationals Government is prepared to listen, with all due probity and transparency.

This Government has indicated that if any developer or anybody who owns large parcels of land wants to provide the housing that we need—bearing in mind that New South Wales has had the lowest housing starts in 50 years—we will listen when they talk to us. We are setting up a framework so that can be done with all due probity and I will make the announcement in due course. Right now developers across this State and people with land who can reverse the lowest housing starts in 50 years and ensure that we have new housing should contact the Director General of the Department of Planning and ensure that their names are in the mix. I will make sure that we move forward in every possible way to get that housing on the ground.

Anyone who has land that is located close to infrastructure or that will not cost taxpayers a fortune to provide vital infrastructure should talk to the Government because it wants that land to provide housing. We want New South Wales to go back to where it was in 1995 as the leading State on all economic indicators. I thank the House and Her Excellency for her excellent presentation to the House. Tomorrow when all members of Parliament attend the residence—albeit notional these days—of Her Excellency, I look forward to making our formal presentation.

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) [5.15 p.m.]: I speak in reply to the address of Her Excellency the Governor, Professor Marie Bashir which was delivered on Tuesday 3 May 2011 in the Legislative Council Chamber at a joint sitting of both Houses. The opening of the Fifty-fifth Parliament was an exciting occasion. As a new member of Parliament this occasion holds personal significance for me and my family. I appreciated having my parents present to witness the start of this most amazing journey. There are only a few moments in one's life that truly make a permanent impression. I will never forget seeing the excitement on the faces of my colleagues, the feeling optimism and the aspirations that were expressed for the future of New South Wales.

For me, signing into Parliament on my first day was a dream come true. Having served as a Shoalhaven city councillor since 2004 the opportunity to play my part in the governance of our State, fighting for our fair share of resources for important local projects and ensuring that our voice is heard in all areas of State administration is an opportunity matched only by the significance of the responsibility for which the community has every right to hold me and this Government to account. I was pleased on this important day to meet Her Excellency the Governor who commands a deep level of respect and regard in our community. Her Excellency is often referred to warmly as the people's Governor—a reflection on her commitment to the people she so diligently serves, and the manner in which she so humbly goes about her most important role in the administration of our State. I pay special tribute to the Governor and to her partner, Sir Nicholas Shehadie, for the outstanding job that they have done over the course of their tenure.

I am pleased to advise the House that Her Excellency has accepted an invitation to visit Kiama on 18 November 2011. Whilst in our electorate Her Excellency will be opening the Berry Men's Shed which is located on the grounds of the Berry Uniting Church. I know how excited the Berry Men's Shed is about hosting this gubernatorial visit, and how pleased I am that these dedicated local volunteers will receive a most fitting recognition by the Governor of our State. I am conscious of my role and responsibilities as a member of Parliament. My commitment, first and foremost, will always be to the people of my community who elected me. To quote Mark Twain, one has to "Dance with the one that brung ya". It is an enormous privilege to serve the community in which I grew up. In every sense the goals of my community are my shared ambitions. Her Excellency made mention in her Speech of the Government's new commitment in a number of key areas.

In my contribution to the Address-in-Reply debate I wish to highlight how I believe the electorate of Kiama has been served or will be served by these initiatives. When I stood for election I made a commitment and a promise to deliver real action in relation to our embattled and beleaguered Princes Highway. For me an article of faith in this Government is that the calls of our communities will be answered after years of neglect, talk and promises and, more tragically, the lives that have been lost on this notorious highway, I am proud to report that the Government's commitment to supporting regional infrastructure, which was outlined in the Governor's Speech, has already been realised.

The New South Wales Treasurer has allocated funds to commence real work on the highway, with stage one of the highway upgrade to commence next year. Stage one will involve the duplication of the highway

from Mount Pleasant to Toolijooa. I am grateful to the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, MLC, for his support in seeking to review the previous Government's proposals in order to ensure that the community has delivered to it the best possible highway project that can be provided. At this point I pay special tribute to the Premier, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, MP, for his strong personal support for this project. I have no doubt that had the Premier not answered my calls and the calls of Mrs Shelley Hancock, the member for South Coast—who is now the first female Speaker of the Legislative Assembly—this project would still be yet another plan rather than an incoming reality.

Part of the highway upgrade project will involve also the long-awaited Berry bypass. Since the 1950s locals have talked about the town of Berry being bypassed. As part of the Government's commitment to revitalise regional infrastructure, as outlined by Her Excellency, I will continue to campaign for funds to complete the Berry bypass and the duplication of the Princes Highway all the way to Bomaderry. As part of this process the Government must consider planning for the future growth of the Shoalhaven. To this end it is vital for the Government to commence discussions about the placement of a third Shoalhaven River crossing.

With Shoalhaven City Council working assiduously on its riverfront master plan it makes sense for the Government to commence discussions about the placement of a third bridge so that council and the community can make better use of the most underutilised asset in the Shoalhaven district, that is, the Shoalhaven River front. The Shoalhaven needs a third crossing for a number of reasons, the most obvious of which is the high volume of traffic crossing between Bomaderry and Nowra. Secondly, the old railway bridge was never built to contend with the thousands of motor vehicles that cross the Shoalhaven River every day. Most notably, the third crossing should be assessed with the bypassing of Nowra in mind in order to allow for better land-use planning and traffic management.

Before I leave the topic of local roads I must address the measures already undertaken by the Government to improve safety on the Kiama bends. I thank the former shadow Minister for Roads, the current Deputy Premier, Andrew Stoner, and the new Minister for Roads, the Hon. Duncan Gay, for ensuring the Kiama bends received important attention. On 2 March the south precinct committee called a meeting in Gerringong Town Hall. Having spoken with locals Darryl Clingen and Wayne Wells and so many others in the lead-up to this meeting, it was clear to me that action needed to be taken to improve the safety of motorists on the Kiama bends. Going into that meeting I took a commitment that a Coalition government would fund the establishment of intelligent speed warning signs to advise motorists when their speed was excessive.

I am delighted to advise the House that that commitment has been delivered by this Government. This may seem like a minor approach, but to the many people in the Gerringong and Kiama communities who have witnessed the loss of life, particularly young lives, on the Kiama bends, these lights were a sign that this Government will honour and deliver its promises and plans. Her Excellency outlined the Government's commitment to protect our local environment. As a committed conservationist and environmentalist, I support these plans. I remind the Government that this includes a commitment to protect important public open space in my electorate.

Families and communities are sceptical of governments that seek to privatise community-owned land for the benefit of a privileged few. One such important parcel is Killalea State Park in the north of my electorate. The previous Government attempted to develop large sections of Killalea State Park in stark contrast with the community's view. Given the number of young families in this part of my electorate and the manner in which this land came into the ownership of the State, I will continue to advocate for the preservation of this and other important land for which there is an important community purpose.

I commend the Save Killalea Alliance, the South Coast Labour Council and its secretary, Arthur Rorris, as well as the community that fought the battle for the preservation of Killalea. Whilst I am the State member for Kiama I will continue to stand up for its preservation. The Government also committed to reforming our State's planning system. I am delighted that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure already has commenced work on this root and branch review, comments about which he made in this place just moments ago. As Her Excellency enunciated, the most important element in planning is certainty. We have come a long way from the original Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 to the current planning system, which discourages investment, offers inconsistent approaches and outcomes, and removes the role of local communities in making important decisions about the future of their urban environment.

The Government already has abolished the affordable rental housing State environmental planning policy that often saw developments twice the size, bulk and scale of what a private developer could lawfully

construct. This State environmental planning policy confirmed my view that the previous administration felt it could create laws that provided for a regime where the Government knew more about the future of local communities than the people who lived there. This State environmental planning policy has resulted in many more issues with inadequate tenders, resulting in a number of unfinished and unoccupied projects—a lasting monument to the disastrous administration of the previous Labor Government and remnants left for the Coalition to repair, as with so many other aspects of State administration. Even more shameful is Labor's mismanagement of yet another stimulus package scheme in waiting lists for those who desperately need access to affordable housing.

I welcome this Government's move to abolish part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. We were told that part 3A would streamline the planning system and improve the processing times of major applications. However, the result was the loss of community input into important planning decisions and loss of integrity in the planning system, but the opportunity for Labor politicians to solicit donations from property developers. No greater example is the Calderwood project where the Illawarra regional plan was ignored by former Ministers leapfrogging major land releases in the Dapto area. Former Minister Tony Kelly approved the concept plan and was about to approve the rezoning when I and Nicole Hasham from the *Illawarra Mercury* revealed the true extent of donations to Labor from the applicant just prior to Minister Kelly making a decision on the matter. In an embarrassing public backdown, the then Labor Government was forced to refer the planning decision to the independent Planning and Assessment Commission.

Mr Ryan Park: Come on Gareth, you're better than this.

Mr GARETH WARD: Yes, we are much better than this. We changed the law because those opposite corrupted the system when they were in government. The Planning and Assessment Commission will now be the decision-maker.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting. The member for Kiama will make his comments through the Chair.

Mr GARETH WARD: Of course, they do not want to hear about reform of the planning system because they never reformed it; they only made it worse. The March floods remind me of how devastating floodplain development can be for a local community. Given the level of inundation of water at Albion Park, no doubt things would have been worse if the Calderwood project was approved. The facilitator of the project, which could have created an extraordinary encumbrance on our community, rests squarely with the instigators of part 3A and a Labor Government that put the communities' interests second to planning, environment and community social needs. The Governor's speech included plans for local government. As I said in my inaugural speech in this place, I believe that this Government must reform the local government system in New South Wales. Whilst it is important to improve the State's planning system, revitalising and reforming the system governing the practitioners who implement the system is just as critical.

Sydney simply has too many local authorities and this results in the duplication of municipal services. Governance changes are critical and should reflect similar requirements for company directors, involving such prerequisites as due diligence and fiduciary responsibility being exercised by decision-makers. The duplication of highly paid senior local government bureaucrats across the Sydney Basin are not in the interests of a global city where strategic planning synergies are central to the future viability of the major metropolitan area of New South Wales. I note Her Excellency's reference to the local government infrastructure renewal scheme. I flag my support for this long overdue initiative. I support entirely the comments of my friend and colleague the member for Shellharbour about the Shell Cove marina.

The Shell Cove marina is forecast to generate 7,000 jobs during construction and 2,000 permanent jobs. Many people bought properties at Shell Cove under the assumption that the marina would be developed. Given the tragic loss of jobs at BlueScope Steel and the effect on our local economy, I strongly support the marina project and believe that this local initiative will assist the Illawarra in its new inevitable path towards diversification and the vertical integration of our local economy. Having assisted with the care and support of my mother during her struggle with breast cancer, I am delighted with the Governor's remarks about the Government's objectives for healthcare. This Government already has announced its commitment for the establishment of a Shoalhaven cancer care centre. This funding will support the significant community effort of charities, community groups, council, and local families and individuals who have given so generously to this important local project.

Having witnessed firsthand the effect on my mother as she trekked to and from Wollongong Hospital for treatment, words fail me to fully explain my emotion towards delivering this important local health infrastructure. I am also pleased that the new Government has increased funding to acute and cancer care at Wollongong Hospital. Whilst it may seem small in contrast, I also commend the Minister for Health, the Hon. Jillian Skinner, for answering the calls of our community to upgrade hospital car parking at Shoalhaven Hospital by providing an additional 117 spaces. Calls for this upgrade in the life of the last Government fell on deaf ears. However, this Government will deliver on this commitment. My attention was first drawn to this issue by local nurse Kylie Everson when she encountered parking problems while working shifts at the hospital. Some nurses and doctors were fined because they were unable to locate parking spaces close to work.

Apart from the obvious concerns of the sick and elderly having to walk long distances to their cars, nurses and staff having to walk to their vehicles along dark streets at the end of their shift is completely and utterly unacceptable. I shall reflect also on the Government's commitment to education. The 900 reading recovery teachers already outlined for implementation by this Government are critical to the building blocks of education. I support those initiatives. I will continue to campaign for improvements to the hospitality, design and technology classrooms at Kiama High School as well as the need to improve air-conditioning and passive cooling at Minnamurra Public School. This Government already has honoured its commitment to transparency and accountability of government.

As a result of the corruption and incompetence in Wollongong and Shellharbour councils, it was up to this Government to call elections on 3 September, thus restoring democracy to the Illawarra, which was taken away by those who sit opposite. Because of the corruption and incompetence of their councillors, it was left to the Liberal Party and The Nationals to ensure that the people of the Illawarra had a say in the future of their local democracy. Their decision was delivered with a resounding thud to Labor, which lost control of both councils on 3 September. I am glad to say that for the sake of the people of Wollongong, their councils will not be controlled by anyone. I thank the Governor for her Address. I look forward to the future of this Government with passion, optimism and enthusiasm knowing that this side of the House has the leadership credentials that those opposite lack. *[Time expired.]*

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa) [5.30 p.m.]: I congratulate the Governor, Her Excellency Marie Bashir, AC, CVO, on her Speech to open the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales on 3 May 2011. I thank the Governor for her knowledgeable and challenging Speech exhorting the Government not only to apply honest services, wise judgement and sound decision-making, but also to deliver positive change to rebuild, revitalise and re-energise the great institutional, economic and human resources of our great State. The Governor made mention of the great spirit of optimism in this Parliament. An election victory of this magnitude achieved by the New South Wales Liberals-Nationals on 26 March 2011 has never been achieved before and such an opportunity for change has never before been delivered by the people.

We on this side of the House carry a great weight of opportunity, responsibility and accountability that has been entrusted to us by the people of New South Wales to adhere to our election promises and to lead New South Wales in being number one again. Her Excellency remarked that members of the Fifty-fifth Parliament are justifiably proud and I can certainly attest that I am most proud, yet humbled, to represent the electorate of Mulgoa. Mulgoa is an environmentally and wonderfully socially diverse electorate in Western Sydney. It mixes urban, rural and agricultural lands; it mixes cultures, backgrounds, life experiences and abilities. It has 33 schools and small shopping centres blended with the old-world charm of the local corner shop. It mixes the M4 motorway and old fashioned country roads.

However, most significantly, it is the wealth of the people and their innovation, creativity, determination, community spirit and hard work that I am most proud of. I am proud to represent community organisations like Nepean Riding for the Disabled, the Mulgoa Landcare Group, the Glenmore Park Action Group and the Luddenham and Mulgoa Progress associations. I am proud to be an active member of the Residents Against Industrial Dump group, which represents residents of Glenmore Park, St Marys, St Clair, Luddenham and Orchard Hills who have, for more than 12 months, fought against an inappropriate, environmentally damaging and unwanted industrial dump proposed for their rural community.

I am also proud to be an active member of the Residents Opposed to Active Radiation group, which fought against the former Government's secret plans to illegally transfer radioactive waste from Hunters Hill to Kemps Creek. I am proud of the strong local community fight led by Duncan McDonald and Ron Sullivan against the overnight assault on their Greendale rural community by five large-scale, unwanted, environmentally and economically damaging development applications for crematoria, cemeteries and places of worship. These

three major planning and environmental issues had their genesis under the former Labor Government and demonstrate the devastating impact of a lack of statewide strategic planning and the undemocratic part 3A planning legislation.

This Government has taken action and repealed part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, but there is much more to be done. In our New South Wales 2021 plan, this Government will implement a new planning system that will be introduced to Parliament by November 2012 after extensive community and stakeholder consultation. We will also develop strategic regional land use plans by 2014 to provide local communities with far greater certainty about how their areas manage future change. I am proud also to represent individuals in Mulgoa, such as talented 11-year-old Taylah Stevens, who won gold in the Kata competition of the Go-Kan-Ryu Karate world titles in Birmingham, England.

I am also proud to represent Christopher Bunton from St Clair, who has won medal after medal at Special Olympics in China and Athens despite having Down Syndrome; Peter Leek from St Marys, who has set regional, national and world records in butterfly, backstroke and individual medley despite suffering from ataxic cerebral palsy; 14-year-old Cameron Shamsabad from St Clair, who recently won the New South Wales police and community youth club title fight; 17-year-old Jake Stein, who won Australia's first gold medal in the octathlon at the 2011 International Association of Athletics Federations world youth championships in Lille France; and Laura Archibald from Glenmore Park, who was selected and sponsored by the University of Western Sydney to attend the University Scholars Leadership Symposium in Thailand in August.

I am equally proud to represent Tom and Norma Thorburn, who have been staunch community people in St Marys for decades and who initiated the St Marys Spring Festival more than 35 years ago and continue to be involved in the organising and running of the event; Dorothy and Ray Radford of St Marys, who are so well revered in the local community for their selfless service to others one could go close to calling them the mum and dad of St Marys. There are many more incredibly dedicated, talented and hardworking people such as small business owners, tradespeople, teachers, trainers, medical staff, emergency workers, mums, dads and carers who all contribute to the wonderful community that is Mulgoa.

As the people of the community of Mulgoa work diligently for personal and community goals so, too, their Government must work as hard, if not harder, to support and enable their enterprise. To this end, the New South Wales Liberals-Nationals Government presented a five-point plan for New South Wales, which it is already delivering. It will rebuild the economy, return quality services, renovate infrastructure, restore accountability to government and strengthen our local environment and communities. The Government is already rebuilding the economy by lowering taxes. Our Government has passed the Real Property Amendment (Torrens Assurance Levy Repeal) bill 2011 to axe Labor's homebuyers' tax. In my electorate of Mulgoa young people and families have found it harder and harder to get into their own home. That has been made increasingly difficult with the slowing of land release, and complex and lengthy planning approval processes.

In addition to repealing Labor's homebuyers' tax, this Government will accelerate the release of an additional 10,000 Landcom lots over four years to put downward pressure on the price of land. It will also streamline development approval processes and is well down the track with a review of the 1979 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. To facilitate the release of existing homes into the market, this Government has already passed the Duties Amendment (Senior's Principal Place of Resident Duty Exemption) Bill 2011 to extend the eligibility of existing stamp duty concessions for empty-nesters to include those over the age of 55. This will deliver a saving of up to \$22,490 for New South Wales homebuyers. Our Government is cutting the cost of living by offering incentives to train commuters to purchase monthly, quarterly and annual tickets. The commuters at St Marys have taken this offer up with great gusto.

The Minister for Transport, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, is in the House and I commend her for her initiative in saving money for the people of western Sydney. Our Government is stimulating the New South Wales economy by delivering a competitive tax system and streamlining planning frameworks. The Jobs Action Plan will provide a reduction in payroll tax for the first 100,000 real jobs created to encourage business growth and investment. In our Government's continuing direct support of small and median businesses we will pay all bills on contracts up to \$1 million within 30 days. We will also reduce red tape by introducing a one-on, two-off policy. We have recruited a small business commissioner, who will be the direct voice of small business to the Government. New South Wales is now open for business. In returning quality services to health, education, transport, family and community services and community safety a range of bills has been passed by this Parliament.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! If Opposition members wish to contribute to this debate they can do so by following the normal procedure. The member for Mulgoa should be heard in silence.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: Clearly they are finding it too painful to listen to how this Government is turning around New South Wales. They simply do not want to listen. The introduction of local district boards to place more autonomy and responsibility in the hands of the health system will enable hospitals to tap into the local knowledge and needs of each district. In forming these local district boards, the former clusters within the health system will be abolished. This will see around 8,000 staff from this layer of management devolved to the local health districts and it will release more than \$80 million for front-line services. A major issue for the residents of Mulgoa are road and rail networks. Significant disruption to employees and business owners occurs when a major accident occurs on the M4 during peak hours. This Government will make it a goal to clear major road incidents within four hours by establishing motorway breakdown response teams. It will develop a free Live Traffic New South Wales mobile application to provide up-to-date travel time information.

To improve rail services, this Government will deliver more express services to the western Sydney line. This Government is committed to improving education and learning outcomes for all students. I congratulate the Minister for Education, the Hon. Adrian Piccoli, on the target that all children in New South Wales have access to a quality early childhood education program in the 12 months prior to formal schooling by 2013. The first five years in a child's life are critical to his or her future and ability to reach his or her potential. I will digress for a moment to tell the House about Rhonda Brain, a former principal from Parkes. Rhonda initiated Paint the Town Read, an early literacy program that is going gangbusters across New South Wales. It is also being implemented in Queensland and Victoria.

The program is dear to my heart and together with Penrith City Council and Mission Australia I have been championing it in the Penrith local government area. A very sad fact is that in the United States of America the Government contacts schools in two States to make enquiries about the number of children in years 3 and 4 who are struggling in literacy and with reading. When it gathers the figures, it predicts the number of prison beds to plan for in the future. Such is the strong link between poor literacy and poor life outcomes that education of our young people and solid quality education cannot be more highly revered.

Our Government will renovate and build infrastructure to make a real difference to both our economy and people's lives. The establishment of Infrastructure NSW will take the politics out of infrastructure announcements and delivery in New South Wales. Infrastructure NSW will lay the strategic direction for the much-needed infrastructure investment that our State needs to further stimulate the economy, business and jobs growth. The establishment of Transport NSW will deliver a new DNA to transport in New South Wales. This DNA will focus on customer service. Transport for NSW will streamline policy and timetabling to ensure that the customer receives a much more improved public transport experience.

In restoring quality services to our most vulnerable, our Government will focus on prevention and early intervention to strengthen families, help them to remain together, and reduce the risk of harm to children and young people. In restoring accountability to government, our Government is bringing democracy back to the people of New South Wales in creating the people's petition. Any petition with 10,000 or more signatures will be debated in Parliament. Regular Cabinet meetings will be held across the State. The Government Advertising Bill 2011 has passed and will clean up government advertising to be, most notably, apolitical advertising prior to elections.

Who will ever forget the un-Australian early prorogation of Parliament in November 2010 in an effort by the former Labor Government to hide the investigative blowtorch into its midnight sale of the State's electricity assets? Our Government has quickly acted to pass the Constitution Amendment (Prorogation of Parliament) Bill 2011 to stop the early prorogation of Parliament in the future. Finally, our Government has passed the Lobbying of Government Officials Bill 2011, which bans success fees for lobbyists. In supporting local environmental and Landcare groups, we will develop a tailored action plan for the expenditure of \$500,000 per year for four years on Landcare in consultation with Landcare, catchment management authorities and primary industries.

The O'Farrell Government has set a clear course to get New South Wales back on track to becoming number one again and, to quote the New South Wales Governor, to "lift more than its own weight". The strength of our vision and unreserved determination to achieve this objective will see our great State become the formidable powerhouse it is destined to be. The people of New South Wales now have representatives in this

place—on this side of the House—that are working for the benefit and advancement of the people. Good government is not delivered upon the people; good government is delivered with the people. The New South Wales Liberals and Nationals will work with the people of New South Wales by leading them to see New South Wales number one again.

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

Motion agreed to.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Presentation

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): I have ascertained it to be the wish of Her Excellency the Governor to receive on Tuesday 13 September 2011 at 10.30 a.m. at Government House the Address-in-Reply to Her Excellency's Speech.

VETERINARY PRACTICE AMENDMENT (INTERSTATE VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS) BILL 2011

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 24 August 2011.

Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote) [5.44 p.m.]: I support the Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011. Currently vets are forced to jump through unnecessary hoops before they can work in New South Wales. I am glad that this bill will change that. It will end the requirement for vets to be registered separately in each State or Territory, which has created an administrative nightmare and an enormous burden for an otherwise increasingly mobile workforce. If highly trained, highly qualified workers want to come to New South Wales from other parts of Australia to fill gaps in our workforce and provide services, I say we should not make it harder for them.

As far back as 2007 the Primary Industries Ministerial Council called for national recognition of veterinary registration, allowing vets registered in other States and Territories to be deemed registered in New South Wales. Not surprisingly, the former Labor Government did not lift a finger on this issue in the years following. Once again, we will act where those opposite languished. This is not an earth-shattering change to legislation, but it is the kind of change that should be made without delay to remove unnecessary hurdles for those in business. Can members imagine the level of waste and unnecessary administration there would be if motorists were forced to apply for registration every time they drove to Melbourne or to the Gold Coast? Unfortunately, those opposite were only vaguely interested in reform when they thought it might win them votes. We will continue to deliver the changes that Labor failed to deliver to make life easier for the people of New South Wales.

Veterinary science is one of the most technical and complicated professions one could choose, requiring immense dedication and a comprehensive knowledge of several species of animals. This is reflected in the minimum five-year university course required for anyone wanting to become a veterinarian. The importance of veterinarians in our communities is often underestimated. In addition to providing care to domestic animals, many vets provide a range of vital services free of charge, including working in organisations such as the RSPCA, Guide Dogs and the Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service. The help they provide to these organisations includes desexing animals and providing care and treatment to sick, injured and stray animals.

The veterinary profession includes animal neurologists, ophthalmologists and specialist surgeons. These specialists carry out orthopaedic, spinal and heart surgery between more regular procedures such as desexing dogs, cats, ferrets, rabbits and guinea pigs. The last thing they need after all of that study and extremely hard work is to be bogged down by excessive bureaucracy and red tape. It is completely unnecessary for each State and Territory to require separate registration of vets because the standard across Australia is already extremely high. Every jurisdiction and every veterinary board around the country requires near identical qualifications and practical experience. This bill will essentially recognise that and bring the profession under one national standard. There is absolutely no danger that New South Wales will be inundated by substandard practitioners because a qualified vet is well qualified, regardless of what part of Australia they come from.

Under the current cumbersome system it would cost a vet as much as \$1,700 in fees to be registered in every Australian State and Territory. This is a significant and unnecessary cost for a profession that already requires specialised instruments and materials, and has other expensive overheads. Removing this burden will help the 9,800 vets currently registered in Australia and benefit the hundreds of thousands of people who require the services of vets each year by easing pressure to increase prices. In addition to financial hindrance, patchwork jurisdictions cause major delays in having interstate vets join response teams during emergencies such as animal disease response. For example, it would have been extremely beneficial to have this legislation in place during the Hendra virus and equine influenza outbreaks in 2007. At that time, vets were the ones identifying and isolating infected animals and vets were the ones vaccinating tens of thousands of horses. Because of the current inadequate system, the only vets available to do this important work were those registered in New South Wales.

The inevitable shortfall left us dangerously underequipped and left those responding stretched to the limit. The time it takes to process the paperwork for a new registration could make all the difference in the world for stopping a future outbreak in its tracks. The passing of this bill will allow vets to quickly cross borders and get where they need to be to combat the spread of disease. Inevitably the Veterinary Practitioners Board will lose revenue as a part of this proposed amendment bill. However, as the board will receive fewer registration applications and fees it will realise some savings under the new scheme as there will be a drastic reduction in administration expenses. The board is willing and able to absorb this loss without needing to increase fees for veterinarians now or for the foreseeable future. The Australian Veterinary Board Council has already created a national database for the details of all registered vets in participating States and Territories.

Each State and Territory has introduced legislation similar to the bill before the House. The details of every registered vet in any part of the country will automatically appear on the national database. The Australian Veterinary Board Council will be responsible for maintaining this database. These amendments have received overwhelming support among stakeholder groups in New South Wales, including those working in livestock industries and veterinary professionals. The president of the New South Wales branch of the Australian Veterinary Association said that the present registration system no longer provides the most appropriate and efficient mechanism for the regulation of modern veterinary practice. Dr Julia Crawford said that the national recognition of veterinary registration is one of the vital reforms needed for the profession to meet existing and future market demand for veterinary services.

This vital reform can essentially be achieved with the stroke of a pen. The national registration system could not be simpler to implement, it improves mobility for these valuable professionals and it maintains the existing State and Territory veterinary boards. This proposal is exactly the type of reform the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government promised it would champion: valuing mutual recognition and the reduction of red tape while meeting the objectives of the national competition policy. These sensible amendments will allow vets to practise across Australia without paying an arm and a leg for the privilege each time they cross a border. Vets across the nation have long adhered to an impeccably high standard in their work and this should be recognised through the legislation regulating their work. We should be proud and supportive of our vets and the vital work that they do in our communities.

Victoria became the first State to implement a national model in January this year. If this bill passes, as it should, New South Wales will become the second State to implement the national model. I am sure I am not alone in my disdain for coming second to our southern cousins. If we do not make this necessary change quickly, we will only fall further behind, as all States and Territories are expected to pass similar legislation soon. The bill will make sure that all conditions placed on a vet registered interstate will apply in New South Wales unless the Veterinary Practitioners Board modifies them.

Importantly, it will allow the board to suspend or cancel a deemed registration where a vet is suspended or deregistered in another jurisdiction. It will enable the creation of a national register of vets, allowing New South Wales to access and contribute to the register. These changes have been developed in consultation with the board and other jurisdictions. Relevant bodies and individual vets were invited to comment during the review process. This consultation was of vital importance to ensure we are giving the industry the framework it needs for enduring prosperity and effectiveness. I commend this amendment bill to the House.

Mr BART BASSETT (Londonderry) [5.55 p.m.]: I support the Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011, which establishes a national framework to allow interstate vets to practise in New South Wales. The bill cuts unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy that in the past has been costly for rural and regional communities, such as parts of my electorate. Vets are a vital service; they are important to

the social fabric and economic viability of local communities. This bill also provides organisations and individuals with the flexibility to provide veterinary services across State boundaries without the additional cost and time involved in multiple State registrations.

While it is important to reduce unnecessary red tape and open up choice and flexibility for the provisions of veterinary services, it is vital that there are adequate safeguards to ensure quality assurance. This bill contains provisions that provide for safeguards through the veterinary board, which will oversee and monitor the industry. It can suspend or cancel a registration that has been suspended or deregistered in another jurisdiction. There has been extensive dialogue and discussion with the stakeholders from across the industry to hear feedback that has been considered and included in the amendments that are before us and are strongly endorsed by the profession.

Recently I, along with the member for Penrith and Senator Marise Payne, visited the Darley thoroughbred training facility in my electorate. It is a fantastic facility. Millions of dollars have been spent putting in place a world-class training facility. We were there during the morning training. The people who work there enjoy it just that little bit more than people who work at an average racetrack. They do not have to get up at the crack of dawn. They have their own racetrack for training purposes so they live a more civilised life when it comes to the time they are involved on the track. They all get together afterwards and have breakfast. It is a fantastic organisation. The morale in the place is high and the staff are proud to be doing the work they are doing. I commend the Darley establishment as a fantastic resource for young people who want to work in the horse training industry.

The Darley thoroughbred business is a multimillion dollar operation, providing more than 300 jobs for people in regional and rural communities and many others in spin-off industries. It is important that it gets the best quality services available. Businesses and employers such as Darley will benefit from provisions in the bill that standardise the veterinary services across the country. A single vet providing his or her services will have a detailed understanding of the unique needs and requirements of these businesses. It will save money and time, improve efficiency measures in the industry and allow the business to reinvest the money saved into improving facilities and creating more employment.

We all saw the immense damage and devastating consequences that equine influenza had across the industry four years ago—the impact is still being felt today. Hawkesbury Council allocated significant funds and resources to assist in the control of the outbreak in our area. The Hawkesbury has a vast array of equine industries that were very hard hit. During this period we had difficulties resourcing vets within New South Wales; they were spread thin on the ground and they were exhausted. They were unable to be backed up with significant numbers. The existing legislation prevented fully qualified vets who were willing and able to assist the fight to combat the influenza outbreak from travelling to work in New South Wales from other States because of unnecessary red tape and regulations.

Over many years in local government I have developed good relationships with stakeholders in the agricultural and service industries that involve animals. The Hawkesbury Race Club is one of those organisations. It will benefit from this legislation. The industry in the Hawkesbury electorate and Londonderry electorate is working closely with Technical and Further Education New South Wales to develop specific courses for strappers, stablehands and jockeys who are working at places such as Darley. It is helping them to obtain qualifications—in particular, certificates—and receive financial advice so they can invest the money they earn to look after themselves in the future.

Over a number of years I have had discussions with, and received feedback from, the men and women in the industry. This bill contains the provisions that they require. I strongly support it. Victoria led the charge. New South Wales is now pushing this national change as well. I hope that with New South Wales backing Victoria the changes will occur across the nation. Such change will provide benefits to the veterinary industry and the industries that rely on vets to go across State borders. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GLENN BROOKES (East Hills) [6.00 p.m.]: I support the Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011. Whilst those on the other side will argue against the bill, no right-minded person could possibly find reason to delay its passage. The bill will ensure that New South Wales veterinary practitioners are able to fight outbreaks of any disease that may threaten the livestock industry not only of this State but of Australia. The freedom to cross State borders and practise as veterinary practitioners without the need to obtain registration in another State has the potential to save New South Wales millions of dollars. The bill represents exactly what this Government is about.

In the lead-up to the March 2011 State election, the Liberal Party and The Nationals campaigned hard on the need to reduce red tape, unnecessary administration and costs, and to restore New South Wales as the premier State. The Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011 is a clear indication that the O'Farrell Government will meet its election commitments: it will reduce unnecessary administration and turn back the tide of Labor's waste and mismanagement. Each Australian State and Territory has its own veterinary board and specific legislation to administer its veterinary practice. Each State and Territory maintains the highest standards of education and registration requirements before a person can practise as a veterinarian.

A uniform national standard for those veterinary practitioners wishing to work in more than one State is possible because the qualifications and practical experience required in each State is about the same. It makes no sense that they must obtain separate registration in each jurisdiction in which they wish to practice. Currently an interstate veterinary practitioner is not able to provide assistance in a veterinary emergency in New South Wales if they are not registered here. That could mean either the emergency will be over or the outbreak will have spread beyond containment before they can obtain registration. That makes no sense when the cost of such an outbreak could be hundreds of millions of dollars.

The New South Wales veterinary practitioner registration model will cut red tape for veterinarians and the Government. The implementation of this model is consistent with the Government's commitment to reducing regulation whenever possible. The bill is about simplification of registration, regulation, administration and associated cost reductions. Allowing veterinarians to practice in any State will not result in a reduction of standards, given the high standards of education and registration requirements of each of the Australian veterinary boards. In addition, if a veterinarian's registration is cancelled or limited in one State; it will also result in that registration being cancelled or limited in other States. That will ensure that interstate veterinary practitioners meet the same high standards as those registered in this State. The amendments proposed will reduce administration costs, provide cost savings to industry and the community, reduce market barriers and increase mobility for veterinary practitioners. The amendments are sensible and useful. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.05 p.m.]: I make a brief contribution to the Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011. The bill will allow veterinary practitioners from New South Wales and Victoria to work in both States. In the thoroughbred racing industry, for example, many of the trainers who regularly travel interstate would prefer the assessment of their preferred veterinary practitioners when their race horses are injured. It would be remiss of me not to name some of the many distinguished veterinary practitioners I have had the pleasure of working with over the years in my involvement with the thoroughbred racing industry. The member for Camden mentioned the equine facility at Cobbitty where Professor Dave Hutchins practised for many years. That facility was one of the forerunners to many of the commonplace equine establishments across the country today. Professor Dave Hutchins was a miracle worker and leader in technology to assess injured horses. Much of the groundbreaking work undertaken 20 or 30 years ago by him and his team has now resulted in everyday surgical practices in the industry, including the removal of splintered bones from a horse's knees and operations on tendons and suspensory ligaments.

The Hawkesbury Equine Veterinary Centre at Clarendon—formerly Parbery and Robson's—was one of the facilities opened after Cobbitty, and it is still operating today. It was established probably 25 years ago by John Parbery and Trevor Robson. The breakthroughs in medical equine technology in that time are beyond belief. I pay tribute to John Parbery and Trevor Robson for their work. I also pay tribute to Derek Major and Ian Duckworth, who also practised at Clarendon but who went on to establish the wonderful Agnes Banks Equine Clinic. Derek Major also advised the former Government during the equine influenza outbreak and the member for Londonderry has referred to the devastating effect that disease had in our electorates.

I spoke about it in this place on numerous occasions and when it ravaged the New South Wales thoroughbred industry I called on then Premier Morris Iemma to establish a state of emergency—as Premier Anna Bligh had done in Queensland—in recognition of the significant contribution made by thoroughbred racing to this State. Eventually—although a little late—the former New South Wales Government declared a state of emergency and we were able to get on top of the equine influenza outbreak. The necessary procedures were put in place to minimise the spread of the disease and we were able to get racing in New South Wales going again sooner than would have occurred had the state of emergency not been declared.

Veterinarians that I and my father had the great pleasure of utilising and working with included my father's great mate Jack Francis and those who practised under him, such as Robbie Watkins, as well as veterinary surgeon Arthur Sternhill. I could not conclude without mentioning the great Percy Sykes and the role

he played at Randwick on behalf of the great trainer the late T. J. Smith and many other trainers. Percy Sykes was an institution in bringing medical practices and medicines to Australia on behalf of the equine industry. The amendments in this bill—which follows the Victorian legislation amending its Act—will mean that vets will be able to move between States more easily. That will be of benefit to not only the thoroughbred industry but the equine industry generally and animals across the State. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck—Minister for Primary Industries, and Minister for Small Business) [6.11 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members who have contributed to the debate, in particular, the members who represent the electorates of Charlestown, Granville, Camden, Tweed, Blue Mountains, Wollondilly, Heathcote, Londonderry, East Hills and Hawkesbury. I also thank the member for Mount Druitt, a former Minister for Agriculture, for his generous support of the bill and his clear understanding of the significant role that veterinarians play in biosecurity.

The primary purpose of the bill is to allow veterinarians who are registered in another State or Territory to practise as a vet in New South Wales. The amendments in the bill enable the national recognition of the veterinary registration model to commence in New South Wales. The model is consistent with the principles of mutual recognition. Veterinarians across the nation will benefit from these amendments. Importantly, the amendments will reduce red tape and costs for vets. They will be particularly useful for vets in regional areas who work across borders. Once the other States introduce similar legislation, New South Wales vets will experience the same benefits in those States.

An important aspect of these amendments is that they will ensure New South Wales can call on interstate vets at a moment's notice during animal emergency situations. The member for Charlestown expressed clearly the important contribution these amendments will make to improving the ability of New South Wales to respond to emergency outbreaks. He referred to the most significant of these in recent years, the equine influenza outbreak. Crises such as that involved with this fast-moving, devastating disease are the precise reason we need to ensure that vets from other States can quickly assist in responding to emergency situations. At the same time, we pay tribute again to the amazing contribution New South Wales vets made towards controlling this disease. I add that New South Wales is virtually the only place in the world not just to have controlled the disease but to have eliminated it. That is a most remarkable achievement.

The member for Tweed illustrated why these amendments will be so beneficial to New South Wales. Livestock producers and owners of companion animals alike need access to vets, often quickly, in different circumstances. Currently a vet across a State border, perhaps just a few short kilometres away, cannot come to the aid of an animal and its owner without having registration in New South Wales. Yet that vet may be the only one available in the whole district. Both the owner and the animal are left without access to a much-needed service. Cattle tick is one of the cross-border issues that face New South Wales. Considerable controls are in place to reduce the risk of tick being brought into this State. This includes the need for permits when bringing any livestock from tick-infected areas into New South Wales, surveillance of specific border crossings, tick inspections and, where necessary, a tick treatment facility at Kirra in Queensland. In addition, Queensland and New South Wales conduct training together every year to provide vets from both States with information on the diagnosis and control of cattle tick.

The professional standards of the service our veterinarians offer are ensured by the quality of the training they receive. As the member for Camden rightly pointed out and the member for Hawkesbury reinforced, the University Veterinary Teaching Hospital at Camden is a good example of this training, setting world-class standards. The veterinary profession supports the amendments we are making today. They are sensible and progressive amendments that clearly are of benefit to New South Wales and all users of veterinary services in this State. 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.

IDENTIFICATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2011**Agreement in Principle****Debate resumed from 25 August 2011.**

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [6.15 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the Identification Legislation Amendment Bill 2011. The Opposition does not oppose the bill. The objects of the bill are: one, to amend the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002 to allow police to require a person's face covering to be removed and to require a person to disclose their identity prior to being given a move-on direction; two, to amend the Court Security Act to allow a court security officer to require a person to remove a face covering; three, to amend legislation to allow an authorised officer to require a visitor to a correctional centre to remove a face covering; four, to amend legislation to allow a juvenile justice officer to require a visitor to a detention centre to remove a face covering; and, five, to amend the Oaths Act to provide for identification procedures to be followed by persons taking or receiving statutory declarations or affidavits.

The bill amends five statutes and two regulations. The bill has had a broad and difficult background dealing with burqas, or the Arabic equivalent niqab. Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile in the other place has given notice of a motion to introduce a bill to prohibit full-face covering. Liberal Senator for South Australia Corey Bernardi also has called for a ban on the wearing of burqas in public. They have been supported by extremist and tabloid media and commentators, who often make reference to overseas events, in particular, proposals in France. In January 2010 the parliamentary leader of the ruling French party proposed the draft of a law to ban the full body veil from French streets and all other public places.

Whilst wearing a burqa or niqab is not done by a large number of women in this country, nor even by a majority of Islamic women, that of itself is not a reason to prohibit the use of face coverings generally. It is a voluntary decision of some women who consider it a valuable, meaningful act of personal religious expression. It seems to me unacceptable to propose that our society tell women generally what they can and cannot wear or prescribe how they should express themselves. Sumptuary laws died, I thought, with the transition from feudalism. Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, in a real sense, is a representative of the Dark Ages.

In the French context, people such as Sarkozy and his ruling party sometimes argue to ban the burqa or the niqab on the basis of human rights. As commentators have noted, it is interesting that upon interrogation this argument, supposedly put on the basis of universalist human rights values, degenerates into a particularistic defence of a particular way of life—that is, some people dress up in human rights rhetoric a position that is simply anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic. That is inconsistent with the bipartisan interests in, for example, Islamic finance in Australia, as set out in a recent article by Ann Black and Kerrie Sadiq on "Good and bad Islamic law".

The anti-Islamic position is fundamentally inconsistent with contemporary multicultural Australia, where people are allowed to hold their own beliefs and practice their own religions. Those who rail against multiculturalism and want to generally prohibit the wearing of the burqa or the niqab really do not understand contemporary Australia. If one wants to abolish multiculturalism one cannot do so without abolishing Sydney, particularly western Sydney. Railing against multiculturalism is as absurd as that proposition. Following that logic poses interesting issues over the last two centuries: What would Indigenous Australians make of two centuries of non-Indigenous migration and non-Indigenous culture and beliefs?

I have had extensive discussions with members of the Islamic community about this legislation. The most common view put to me is that this bill is not opposed but that is where it should end. It should not go any further. Communities would vehemently oppose extending powers in relation to scarves or hijabs. They also would oppose a generalised extension of powers to require the removal of a facial covering whenever someone felt like they wanted to demand it.

It reflects the fact that there are two conversations going on around this legislation. One conversation is about this precise bill with precise and specific provisions. There is another less informed, more vitriolic discussion about Islam in Australia. The existence of facial coverings in this State is hardly new. As a serious issue for public consideration, as opposed to tabloid rantings and minor party posings, there have been few instances of its having arisen. The instance that is ascribed as the origin of this bill is a case involving Carnita Matthews.

On 7 June last year Ms Matthews was stopped for the purpose of a random breath test in North Steyne Road, Woodbine. Following that a complaint was lodged at Campbelltown police station. The complaint

involved allegations concerning the removal or attempted removal or lifting of the complainant's veil. The complaint was lodged in the form of a statutory declaration. Ms Matthews was charged with making a false complaint under the Police Act. She was convicted of that offence before the Local Court at Campbelltown. She appealed against that conviction and on 22 June this year Judge Jeffreys overturned the conviction in the District Court.

Interestingly, the judgement of Judge Jeffreys shows that the niqab is not in fact the issue. Indeed, the complaint was physically handed to the police by a man, not a woman, and he was not wearing a veil. The issue was whether the signature on the written complaint was that of Ms Matthews. Interestingly, no expert handwriting evidence was called by the prosecution, and that was commented upon by the judge. Even if that evidence had been called and it had been established that the signature was indeed that of Ms Matthews, the judge said that that still would not have established a conviction in the circumstances of the case, given the lack of proof beyond reasonable doubt about the applicant's actual belief about the police officer's actions.

Turning to the details of the bill, the proposed insertion of section 19A of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act gives the police power to require a person to remove a face covering worn by the person to allow that officer or another officer to see the person's face. This applies where the person has been lawfully required to provide photographic identification or to identify himself or herself, or provide other identification particulars. Section 19A (6) defines "lawfully required" to mean:

... lawfully required or requested to provide the identification or information concerned in circumstances where a failure or refusal to comply with a requirement or request of that kind may constitute an offence.

There are a number of things to note about this structure. While the express power to require the removal of facial coverings is new, it seems to be largely limited to only those circumstances in which the police already have power to require identification and it is a criminal offence not to comply. So it is not intended to be a carte blanche provision allowing police to demand removal of face coverings in a dramatically widened range of circumstances. That is, it is certainly nowhere near the nonsense that Fred Nile talks about. However, the precise circumstances in which the demand can be made to remove facial coverings are not spelt out in the bill.

I understand why, for the purpose of drafting, that is the case. If a list of circumstances were included in the bill there would be the risk of some situation being left out by oversight. Likewise, if new circumstances were subsequently legislated that would require a further amendment to this Act. The elegance of this drafting avoids those problems. However, it results in the somewhat unsatisfying situation that we cannot actually know precisely what the bill means and precisely the circumstances to which it applies. If this bill passes into law and one of my constituents asks me, or other members' constituents ask them, in exactly what situation the police can demand removal of a facial covering, I or any other member will not, on the basis of the text of this bill, be able to give an exact and precise answer.

That is not ideal. In a sense, it means that the Parliament will not know exactly what it is putting into legislation, although the reasons for the method of drafting are fairly obvious. The point was neatly made when I asked departmental officers for an exhaustive list of the legal situations to which this legislation might apply. They were unable to guarantee that any list they prepared would be exhaustive. I am not being critical of them in this; I understand precisely their problem. However, it means that we do not know what we are being asked to legislate in precise terms. As well as anything else, there is always the risk of unintended consequences. The departmental officers did provide me with a list of indicative offences but not an exhaustive one. I thank them for their courtesy in providing that list to me and, indeed, for the briefing they provided to me. For the record I indicate the 40 or so offences that have been indicated to me that could trigger the additional powers under section 19A.

They include section 43 of the Animal Diseases (Emergency Outbreaks) Act 1991, section 96 of the Casino Control Act, section 31 (1) of the Casino, Liquor and Gaming Control Authority Act, clause 43 of the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust Regulation, section 12D of the Child Protection (Offender Registration) Act, clause 35 of the Combat Sports Regulation, section 69G of the Companion Animals Act 1998, section 35A of the Crimes (Criminal Organisations Control) Act, section 341 of the Criminal Procedure Act, section 167 of the Crown Lands Act, section 104 of the Fines Act, section 258 of the Fisheries Management Act, section 38A of the Forestry Act, section 47 of the Game and Feral Animals Act 2002, section 53 of the Gaming Machines Act, section 11 of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act, section 680 of the Local Government Act, clause 104 of the Management of Waters and Waterside Lands Regulation, sections 119, 120 and 121 of the Marine Safety Act and section 157 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

The list also includes section 19 of the Parliamentary Precincts Act, section 27 of the Parramatta Park Trust Act, section 55 of the Passenger Transport Act, section 28 of the Photo Card Act, sections 24A and 24B of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, section 104 of the Rail Safety Act, section 33 of the Recreation Vehicles Act, section 67 of the Registered Clubs Act, section 171 of the Road Transport (General) Act, section 27B of the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act, section 229 of the Roads Act, section 132 of the Rural Fires Act, sections 140F and 140G of the Rural Lands Protection Act, section 10 of the Sporting Venues (Invasions) Act, section 11 (5A) of the Summary Offences Act, clause 14 of the Sydney Cricket Ground and Sydney Football Stadium By-law, clause 22 of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority Regulation, clause 29 of the Sydney Olympic Park Authority Regulation, clause 13 of the Sydney Opera House Trust By-law, section 16 and 26T of the Terrorism (Police Powers) Act, section 79 of the Tow Truck Industry Act, section 40 of the Unlawful Gambling Act and clause 5 of the Western Sydney Parklands Regulation.

I would appreciate it if the Attorney in his reply could indicate whether any further thought has gone into this aspect of the problem. Additionally, I note that the Act also includes in proposed section 11 (2) a specific power for police officers to require a person to disclose their identity to a police officer where the officer proposes to give that person a direction to leave a public place. Those provisions are dealt with in sections 197 to 200 of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act. These provisions are subject to a requirement that the viewing of the person's place be conducted with reasonable privacy and as quickly as reasonably practicable. They are both governed by a further proviso that it be reasonably practicable. The aspiration is appropriate but in practical terms the reasonably practicable identification could include a plethora of different situations.

The penalty for failing to comply with a direction to remove a facial covering connected with section 14 of the Act, which relates to officers requesting the disclosure of driver or passenger identity, is \$5,500 or 12 months in jail. In other cases it is \$220 or two penalty units. There is also a lengthy section 242B that deals with the monitoring of this new section by the Ombudsman. Indeed, it is the longest single section in this amendment. The next portion of the legislation deals with detention centres. A juvenile justice officer may require a visitor to remove a face covering. There are aspirations of reasonable privacy and acting as quickly as practicable, also subject again to reasonable practicability. There are special provisions relating to children under 12 years of age, and if possible people over 12 years of age are to be viewed by a person of the same sex.

A person who does not comply with a requirement under this clause may be refused a visit to the detention centre. So the legislation is not criminalising not removing a facial covering. There are also amendments to the Court Security Act. They require that a court security officer may require a person who is wearing a face covering to remove it if the person is seeking to enter court premises or if the officer arrests or has grounds for arresting the person under the Court Security Act. There are provisions relating to reasonable privacy and speed, children under 12 years of age and same-sex viewing if practicable for people over 12 years of age. If a person is required to remove a face covering and fails to do so or to leave the premises the security officer can repeat the requirement, and if the person does not comply or leave they are guilty of an offence with a maximum fine of five penalty units, or \$550.

If it is a situation covered by section 13A (1) (6) there is no option to leave, but the warning must be repeated for an offence to have occurred. There are also amendments to the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999 and the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2008. The Act is amended to incorporate references to the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act and to allow regulations to be altered to allow authorised officers to require a visitor to correctional premises to remove facial coverings. There are what I now call the usual provisions as to privacy, speed, same-sex viewing of people over 12 years of age and children under 12 years of age and the special justification provision. The amendments to Regulation 89 mean that if a person's facial covering is not removed a visit to a correctional centre may be refused.

The final amendments relate to the Oaths Act. These amendments deal with situations when a person makes a statutory declaration or affidavit before what is termed an authorised witness. The witness must see the face of the person making the instrument, must know the person or confirm their identity, and certify it on the document. It is a criminal offence not to do so, with a maximum penalty of \$220. The witness may request a person to remove a face covering, and the failure to do so will mean that the document cannot be witnessed. I have consulted with the New South Wales Justices Association in relation to that particular part of the bill and the association raises no objection.

In conclusion, I return to the point I raised about two different conversations going on in relation to this topic. There is the conversation about this legislation and the provisions of this bill—and, as I have indicated,

the Opposition does not oppose the bill—and there is an entirely separate conversation going on in the community that is far less-informed than some of the discussion that will take place in this place and is based on an objection to people with the Islamic faith. That is contrary to contemporary, multicultural Australia, and that sort of ranting and rhetoric should be condemned and rejected by any sane and rational person in this society and by every member of this House. As I indicated, the Opposition does not oppose the bill.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [6.30 p.m.]: I support the Identification Legislation Amendment Bill 2011, which is a very sensible, balanced and responsible action taken by the O'Farrell-Stoner Government to an identified problem that has arisen in the community. It is an example of firm, direct action, yet a matter of balance and prudent judgement to correct only that problem and not cause others. I commend the Premier and the Attorney General for responding so quickly and in such a measured and appropriate way to this issue. I welcome the news that the Opposition does not oppose this bill. That is a very positive development. It is unfortunate that in his reply the member for Liverpool has chosen to muddy the waters somewhat with issues that are not directly related to this bill.

This bill is not about Muslim attire, it is not about the Islamic faith—it is not about religion at all—and it is not about one sector of our community. This bill is about a very practical and sensible response to the matter of identification in situations where identification assists with enforcement of the law, the upholding of a legal responsibility or the protection of community safety. On that basis this legislation should not be seen as anything else and it should not be at all alarming to any sector of the community that may have heard comments broader than that or of a different nature from either the member for Liverpool or from other people. The bill amends five New South Wales statutes and two regulations and is therefore a considered, coherent and coordinated approach for not only police but also for court security, corrective services and juvenile justice staff to properly identify people for legitimate purposes.

The legislation is emphatically not aimed at infringing upon the liberties of any section of society, and those who perceive that it is have been fully consulted. The bill contains not only the relevant provisions for granting these powers but a significant number of safeguards, including the requirement that only so much of a person's face is to be revealed and only for as long as is necessary to make the identification; the requirement to advise the person of the desirability of cooperation and to warn them that non-compliance represents an offence; the right to decline to comply with the removal of a head covering under very specific circumstances, such as compelling medical reasons; the right to privacy if the removal of a head covering in public would cause offence and the opportunity to do so in a more private setting; and the right for an alternative officer to provide the identification, such as a female police officer, even if the direction had originally been given by a male.

Further, if an offence is committed the penalty is proportionate to the circumstance. In most cases two penalty units is the consequence, which amounts to a fine of \$220, but the penalty is higher when the refusal to identify impedes an investigation into a more serious offence. The occasion to provide identification may arise not only when the person is wearing religious headgear such as a niqab but also if the person is wearing a motorbike helmet, a balaclava, a ski mask, a wraparound pair of sunglasses or even a costume or character mask such as a Mickey Mouse mask. A bandanna worn around the face in some situations may attract this requirement also. The Act is certainly not about religious clothing; it is about the need to be identified in certain clearly defined circumstances. The proposed powers are not new or draconian; they build on existing powers already held by police to identify people when it is suspected that an indictable offence has been committed.

The O'Farrell Government undertook significant consultation with the Muslim community in the development of these new laws, including through a multi-stakeholder working party, to identify any concerns and experiences in relation to religious head coverings. The new legislation announced by Premier O'Farrell shows the willingness and dedication of the Muslim community to work positively with the Government. The Attorney General and the Minister for Citizenship and Communities met with Muslim community leaders on several occasions to discuss the Government's policy. In particular, sensitivities in relation to the impact of new identification powers on women wearing a burqa or a niqab were discussed during the consultation.

It should be noted that in June 2011, at the time of the controversy around the Carnita Matthews court case, both the Australian National Imams Council and the Islamic Council of New South Wales demonstrated exceptional leadership and issued media releases clarifying circumstances where a woman must show her face to verify her identity. The Muslim community is to be thanked for its hard work and commitment in working with the O'Farrell Government on that development. Organisations such as the Islamic Council of New South Wales and the United Muslim Women's Association have indicated their support for the Government's approach.

It should be reaffirmed that freedom of religion is the law in New South Wales and that the new laws ensure a balance between the need for identification and respect for cultural and religious practice. People will only be required to remove a face covering for as long as it takes to identify themselves, and our commitment to ensure identification occurs as quickly as possible remains part of the legislation. Furthermore, only the face needs to be shown and those who want to be identified privately for cultural and religious reasons can request to have that opportunity afforded them. It is also important to note that the O'Farrell Government remains opposed to suggested bans on Islamic religious dress. This legislation does not countenance any unnecessary or further restriction on people's right to dress as they choose in accordance with the general law and only seeks to protect a particular important need for identification in defined circumstances.

The underlying philosophy of this bill is to accord proper authority, with safeguards, to delegated officers of the law to identify people, balanced with the proper respect for what the Minister termed an individual's right to dignity and privacy. The bill contains definitions of the extent of the human face, the minimum threshold of behaviour for compliance with the bill and a specific process by which officers must conduct their powers under this bill, which will be strengthened by the police commissioner's directive on the meaning and implication of the powers. The bill contains well-defined parameters for what represents infraction and the consequences of infraction, ranging from fines and imprisonment in the most extreme cases down to the refusal of entry for visitations to jails and the obligation for a justice of the peace witnessing a document to refuse to do so if the identity of the applicant cannot be clearly and visually made.

To this end the Act amends the Oaths Act 1900 to require a witness to see the face of a person making a statutory declaration or affidavit, to see identification documentation if the witness does not personally know the person, and to certify these requirements on the document. The maximum penalty for non-compliance with these requirements is two penalty units, or a fine of \$220. From my experience as a justice of the peace, I believe this is a very practical step. I am frequently asked to witness signatures on documents and often I do not know the person who is asking for the witnessing to occur. It seems a very appropriate and sensible step to ask that person to provide photo identification so that I can verify it is that person signing the document, as has been presented to me.

These reforms are a reasonable and sensitive response to the need for our law officers—including security staff at courts, jails and juvenile justice facilities—and justices of the peace to be able to identify individuals in the course of their work. The bill's principles balance the rights of the individual and the community to ensure that the law can be upheld by authorised officers of the law in various circumstances. By establishing a common-sense bottom line the bill prevents circumvention of the law and an undermining of respect for the police who are required to enforce it. It makes us all safer by enhancing compliance with reasonable expectations expressed by the community. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [6.40 p.m.]: I support the Identification Legislation Amendment Bill 2011 which will ensure that police, juvenile justice officers, Corrective Services officers and court security officers have the power to require that persons remove their face covering to enable their faces to be seen for the purposes of identification. The bill also provides that a police officer proposing to give a move-on direction to a person can request that person to identify himself or herself. There is currently little legislative authority for police or other government officials to require a person to remove a face covering. We need to ensure that police and certain other officers—for example, juvenile justice officers, officers authorised by Corrective Services and court security officers—have the power to require that a person remove a face covering to enable the officer to see that person's face for the purpose of identification.

This legislation will allow police to see a person's face for the purpose of identification. As the Attorney General has pointed out, it will be sufficient compliance with this legislation if the person only removes so much of the face covering as prevents a person's face from being seen, or the person removes the face covering only for as long as is reasonably necessary in the circumstances to enable an officer to see the person's face. This is a very balanced and reasonable approach to take. It is reasonable in that persons will be compliant if they enable a police officer other than the officer who has given them the direction to see their face—for example, persons may reveal their faces to a female officer even if a male officer gave the direction.

In the bill "face" is defined to mean the area from the top of the forehead to the bottom of the chin and between, but not including the ears. "Face covering" is defined as an item of clothing, helmet, mask, or any other thing that is worn by a person and prevents the person's face from being seen, whether wholly or partly. So the definitions in the Act are very clear and the meaning of the Act is also very clear: Anyone who has his or her

face covered and a police officer asks for identification can be asked to take off the face covering. The legislation also makes it an offence to fail to comply with a direction by a police officer to remove a face covering.

The bill defines "lawfully required" to mean lawfully required or requested to provide the identification or information concerned in circumstances where a failure or refusal to comply with a requirement or request of that kind may constitute an offence. In most cases the penalty for failing to comply with a police requirement to remove a face covering will be two penalty units, or a \$220 fine. Where police are exercising a power when requiring identification in relation to vehicles used in indictable offences the penalty matches the higher penalty that non-compliance with section 14 attracts, being 50 penalty units or a fine of \$5,500 or 12 months imprisonment. The legislation also amends the Court Security Act 2005 to allow a court officer to require a person to remove a face covering if the person is seeking to enter a court. This is an eminently sensible provision.

Security is important in our courts and this legislation will enable court officers to identify people entering courts by asking them to remove face coverings for that purpose. The bill also enables authorised officers to require a visitor to a correctional centre or a juvenile justice facility to remove a face covering to enable identification. The face covering is to be removed only for so long and so much as is necessary for the face to be seen. All officers will be required, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ask for the person's cooperation, conduct the identification in reasonable privacy if requested and make the identification quickly. In addition, juvenile justice officers, officers authorised by Corrective Services and court security officers will be required where reasonably practicable to ensure that the identification is carried out by an officer of the same gender, if requested.

Failure to comply with the requirement made by a court security officer carries a maximum fine of \$550. Failure to comply with a requirement made by a juvenile justice officer or officer authorised by Corrective Services may also result in denial of access to the facility. Amendments to the Oaths Act 1900 also require a witness to see the face of a person making a statutory declaration or affidavit, to see identification documentation if the witness does not personally know the person and to certify these requirements on the document. The interesting part of this legislation is that it puts an added burden on those witnessing statutory declarations and affidavits that is not unwarranted. If a witness does not know the person swearing a statutory declaration his or her identity must be confirmed in accordance with the regulation. If a person swearing an affidavit refuses to remove a face covering the witness will not be able to witness the document. People swearing false affidavits and statutory declarations commit very serious offences and the administration of justice demands that they be able to be identified.

Many people in this State were very concerned by the experience of a police officer involved in a recent incident that received so much publicity. This legislation should ensure that such incidents are not repeated. The bill is not aimed at any one group. That incident only served to highlight that there were generally inadequate laws to enable police or other government officers to require face coverings to be removed for the purpose of identification. As the House has already heard, the O'Farrell Government undertook significant consultation with the Muslim community in developing these new laws. I also note that the Attorney General and the Minister for Citizenship and Communities met with Muslim community leaders on several occasions to discuss the Government's policy. Perhaps the Premier summed it up best when he said:

This is not about banning a piece of clothing. This is about ensuring whether if someone is wearing a motor cycle helmet, a burqa, if they're in the snow wearing a balaclava, if they're wearing some other face mask, if police have concern and reasonable grounds for suspecting that breaches of security or laws may have occurred or will occur, that they can require those people to make their identification clear. So this is not about discrimination in favour of any religion or against any religion, in favour of any racial background or against any racial background, it's about giving police the powers consistently for the whole community in relation to identifying people suspected of criminal breaches.

In summary, this legislation is about enabling police and other government officers to do their jobs consistently and effectively. It will facilitate the efficient and fair administration of justice, and it will be welcomed in the Orange electorate and in other electorates around New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne) [6.48 p.m.]: I support the Identification Legislation Amendment Bill 2011 which has as its purpose to amend a number of Acts to give police, Corrective Services officers and court security staff the authority to request the removal of face coverings in certain circumstances. From the outset, I make it clear that this debate is not about banning the burqa, as has happened in France. The changes will require a person witnessing a statutory declaration or an affidavit to identify the person swearing the declaration or affidavit.

The case of Carnita Matthews highlights the problems associated with face coverings and the inadequacies of the legislation regarding the capacity of police to ask someone to remove a head covering or burqa. Police have the right to identify a person's face for lawful reasons. This law is also about being reasonable. These amendments require persons not to remove their face coverings permanently but to remove them for so long as is necessary for their faces to be identified. The Carnita Matthews case, where a police officer was accused of tearing off a veil during a random breath test, highlighted the ineffectiveness of the current laws under which a person can deliberately, ruthlessly and falsely claim racism. Mrs Matthews escaped a six-month jail sentence on appeal before the District Court.

Ironically, appeal judge Clive Jeffreys could not be certain beyond reasonable doubt that it was Mrs Matthews who had lodged the complaint against the serving officer because she was wearing a niqab when she arrived at Campbelltown police station. Somebody told untruths. If it were not for a 20-minute in-car police video the police officer's career could have been in jeopardy. Note how the person enforcing the law becomes the accused. There will always be a minority who will claim it is about discrimination or about being divisive or intolerant. That is simply not the case. I will also say that one person like Carnita Matthews could not claim to be representative of the entire Islamic community. In a Western Australian court the matter of the burqa came up when a witness requested to keep her whole head covering during her time on the witness stand. The judge ruled that for proper justice to be served she would have to remove the burqa so that the jury could see her.

This was a good, commonsense decision that meets community expectations. The judge, the jury and the lawyers should be able to witness the facial expressions that constitute so much of communication. It is logical. The judge said that in the interest of a fair trial the witness should not be allowed to wear a burqa. In Australia we have an effective law and order system. Why would anyone risk undermining the very thing our society is based on: the rule of law? The key to this legislation is being reasonably practicable. We have freedom of religion in this country and the new laws ensure a balance between the need for identification and respect for cultural and religious practices. This is general legislation that applies to all headgear for police purposes of identification. The Commissioner of Police, Andrew Scipione, has said:

We need to take action to close this potential loophole and strengthen police powers to demand identification.

He went as far as to say:

We are not in the business of trying to exploit some racist position, because that is counter-productive to the community.

I applaud the Premier for his recent statement in which he said:

I don't care whether a person is wearing a motor cycle helmet, a burqa, niqab, face veil or anything else, the police should be allowed to require those people to make their identification clear.

At present I believe the law is a little vague. I do not agree with the views of Cameron Murphy, President of the New South Wales Council of Civil Liberties, who said:

It's a totally unnecessary change to the law. Next they'll probably try and ban the burqa.

That is not the case. The O'Farrell Government remains opposed to suggested bans on Islamic dress. But at present the law hinders police officers and officials in doing their job effectively. The changes to the Law Enforcement Act have the backing of the Islamic Council. In fact, the Muslim community is to be thanked for its hard work and commitment in working with the O'Farrell Government. Organisations such as the Islamic Council of New South Wales and the United Muslim Women's Association have indicated their support for the Government's approach.

It is important to note also that the NSW Ombudsman will conduct a review of the new laws after 12 months. Again, I stress that the chairman of the Islamic Council of New South Wales, Mr Khaled Sukkarieh, agrees that it will have minimum impact on the Muslim community. This bill is about giving police and other law enforcement agencies powers to identify people and keep the community and its citizens safe. I commend the Muslim community for its leadership on this issue. This legislation is long overdue, and I commend it to the House.

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [6.54 p.m.]: I support the Identification Legislation Amendment Bill 2011, and I commend the Attorney General, Greg Smith, for introducing this important legislation. I also commend Premier Barry O'Farrell for his commitment to making New South Wales safe. The bill allows police

to require anyone to remove a face covering, including a helmet, burqa, niqab or mask, for the purpose of establishing identity. Under the laws police will not be able forcibly to remove a face covering if the wearer refuses to remove it. However, those who refuse the request will be charged, and may face a fine of \$220. For motorists the penalties may be even greater, with a year in jail or a maximum fine of \$5,500. Refusing to remove a head covering in a courtroom will carry a fine of \$550. Those who want to be identified privately for cultural or religious reasons can request to go to a police station.

The NSW Ombudsman will conduct a review of the new laws after 12 months to ensure that everything is working correctly and appropriately. The law also extends to prison officers, court officials and people who certify statements. This bill is not about religion, and I was disappointed to hear that link being made. The law respects all religions and is no threat to any political or religious group, nor is it targeting any group. The legislation does not allow police to abuse their powers. The bill addresses the situation whereby police lack the legislative power to make people remove face coverings to establish their identity. It is the missing link in police powers and will give police the tools they need to do their job and establish a person's identity.

It will give police the ability to enforce the law. It improves people's perceptions of their safety to know that police have the right tools and abilities to ensure that they are safe. The bill is about treating everybody equally regardless of race, religion or politics. Whether it is the member for Parramatta, the Premier or a 15-year-old youth, everybody should be treated equally under the law. Regardless of whether someone is wearing a balaclava, bandanna, niqab, mask or motorbike helmet, there will be no special treatment. Media reports in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sun-Herald* and on the ABC and Channel 7 have referred to the new legislation. They report that the Islamic Council of New South Wales accepts the decision and its chairman, Khaled Sukkarieh, has said that the tough laws will have minimal impact on the Muslim community.

It is also reported that the United Muslim Women's Association has no problems with the bill if the powers are exercised sensitively. Police have also welcomed the new laws that require people to remove face coverings or risk a fine or jail time, and say that officers will no longer be hindered in their job. Police Association President Scott Webber said in the media that the new laws were overdue and would help officers deal with "multicultural issues in a sensible way ... It is about making sure police officers can do their job and make the community safe." I have talked to people in my electorate of Parramatta and they also support the legislation. I will briefly outline three quotes that reflect the sentiments of the Parramatta community. The first states:

In regards to the Bill, I see there is nothing amiss with the provision that all face coverings be removed when requested for identification purposes by those required to, such as the Police. It is a shame that this needs to be placed into legislation when it is a matter of common sense and common decency.

May I suggest that it also be extended to other areas where identification is also important such as within banks, schools and pharmacies.

Another resident, who is a lawyer, stated:

The majority of Australians are very happy to show Police or Public Officials their face and take no issue with producing some identification to correlate this with other programming evidence of their facial features ... Those that insist on covering their face must understand that the Police must have the legislative authority to check identity ... this parliament must now respond to these changes and society must also respond, not in terms of what an individual might lose but in terms of how the community must stand together and ensure that the NSW Police have the legislative support to administer justice in this State.

Finally, another constituent summarised the majority opinion of the electorate by saying:

G'day Geoff,

Just to let you know I support the legislation. This is no different to having a person wear a full bike helmet. In such a case the police can ask you to remove the helmet ...

Pursuant to standing and sessional orders business interrupted and 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.

NATIONAL STROKE WEEK

Matter of Public Importance

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [7.20 p.m.]: I ask the House to note as a matter of public importance that from 12 to 18 September is National Stroke Week. Why is this a matter of public importance? Stroke is Australia's greatest killer after coronary, or heart, disease and one of the leading causes of disability amongst adults in Australia. The statistics are quite sobering. Every year 20,000 people in New South Wales alone suffer strokes. One in six people will have a stroke at some time in their life. One in three people die within a year of having a stroke. Almost 20 per cent of people who experience a stroke are under 55 years of age. Stroke kills more women than breast cancer and men are more likely to suffer a stroke at a younger age.

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain is blocked, leaks or bursts thus disrupting the blood supply to the brain. Without blood and the oxygen it carries the affected part of the brain starts to die within a few minutes. Brain damage can begin in this short time but with quick treatment damage can be limited with an increased chance of full recovery. Stroke is always a medical emergency. There may be only slight debility or, if a large stroke, death may occur due to the extent of the injury. If there is brain damage that part of the body controlled by the damaged area does not work properly. This is where the incidence of disability comes from.

During the Living My Way Disability Forums held recently by the Government in my area I met a young woman who had suffered a stroke; she was wheelchair bound and had a serious speech impediment. So serious was her disability that she required a full-time carer. There remains a poor understanding in the community about the effects of stroke and the risk factors associated with a stroke. It is important to understand that stroke is preventable. There are some risk factors that cannot be controlled, such as age, gender and a family history of stroke. Taking steps to control the other risk factors can dramatically lower the risk of having a stroke. These risk factors are high blood pressure, smoking, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, poor diet and inactivity, excessive alcohol consumption, and atrial fibrillation.

National Stroke Week is designed to raise awareness of such issues in the community. Indeed the New South Wales Government is committed to raising awareness and providing services to reduce recurrent strokes and hospital admissions for people with minor symptoms. Today the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research officially opened a new clinic at Royal North Shore Hospital that will do precisely this. Patients presenting at Royal North Shore Hospital's emergency department showing signs of having suffered a minor stroke are referred to the new clinic and treated as outpatients by a multidisciplinary team of clinicians. This clinic has been operational for about three months and the results it has achieved in helping victims of stroke are remarkable.

The cost of stroke to the Australian community is estimated at a staggering \$2.14 billion a year. Encouraging people to understand their risk of stroke, and outlining the steps to reduce a stroke and recognising the symptoms of a stroke when it is happening are integral to the prevention and management of a stroke. The National Stroke Foundation will use this week to raise awareness about the prevalence of stroke, that is, that one in six people will suffer a stroke in their lifetime. The National Stroke Foundation is urging all Australians to take steps to reduce their risk of stroke: know the personal risk factors—high blood pressure, diabetes and high blood cholesterol; be physically active and exercise regularly and moderately for 30 minutes daily; maintain a healthy weight range and balanced diet; limit alcohol consumption—maximum of two standard drinks per day for men and one standard drink for women; and, importantly, know the stroke warning signs and act fast.

The acronym FAST is an easy way to remember and recognise the signs of stroke. "F" is face. Has the person's mouth drooped? "A" is for arms. Can the person lift both arms? Often only one side of the body is affected by stroke with some weakness or loss of movement. "S" is for speech. Is the person's speech slurred? Does the person understand you? "T" is for time. Time is critical; the faster someone receives treatment the better the outcomes. Anyone who sees any of those signs should call 000 immediately. It is said that if treatment is received within 90 minutes of suffering a stroke, some strokes can be completely reversed.

The State Government, through NSW Health, provides a "Get Healthy" information and coaching service. It is a free telephone-based service for New South Wales adults providing information and coaching to change behaviour in relation to healthy eating, physical activity, and achieving and maintaining a healthy weight—all critical factors in stroke prevention. Some of the National Stroke Week activities include activities run by the National Stroke Foundation and the New South Wales Stroke Recovery Association. This morning the National Stroke Foundation launched the beginning of National Stroke Week at the New South Wales Library.

The Stroke Recovery Association of New South Wales, which has been operating for 34 years, is a voluntary organisation providing information and support on stroke prevention and recovery. It is a non-profit organisation and supports 52 stroke recovery clubs across New South Wales, providing valuable assistance for the many victims of stroke in our community. As can be seen from the information I have provided, stroke is a major medical problem in our community. People must realise that they have to take individual action to prevent stroke, that is, to keep up a healthy lifestyle and keep fit. The same advice applies to maintaining a healthy heart, which we discussed during National Heart Week. Everything should be done in moderation. That is why I commend National Stroke Week as a matter of public importance to the House.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [7.26 p.m.]: A stroke causes death of the irreplaceable brain cells due to disruption of the blood supply. Most strokes are due to a blockage of the arteries, the so-called ischaemic stroke, but others are due to haemorrhage, the so-called haemorrhagic stroke. The difference is important as the best form of treatment for ischaemic stroke—clot busters or thrombolysis—has the potential to harm in haemorrhagic stroke. Stroke is a rapidly changing field, and that is why National Stroke Awareness Week is so important. Today a wonderful clinic has opened at Royal North Shore Hospital. I use this time to pay tribute to Dr Tim Ingall for his stellar career at the Mayo Clinic. His success is a tribute to his decency, talent and hard work.

The first and most important and cost-effective aspect of stroke treatment is prevention, which is why this clinic is so vital and cost effective. It is a model that should be rolled out to other areas of the State. The risk factors for stroke are similar to those of heart disease and they are preventable. Regrettably, far too often this prevention does not occur. Blood pressure, cholesterol, lack of exercise, smoking and obesity are all eminently preventable risk factors. Twenty to 30 per cent of patients seen in many stroke units have atrial fibrillation—a condition where the heart beats irregularly. Clots can form in the atria of the heart, which then break off and cause strokes when they lodge in the arteries to the brain.

As well as preventing other risk factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes, there may be a place for blood thinners, such as aspirin, and very occasionally surgery. An operation called carotid endarterectomy may significantly reduce the risk of stroke in people who experience symptoms of stroke warnings and 75 per cent blockage of the carotid arteries. The Stroke Recovery Association recommends the mnemonic "prevent" for the prevention of stroke. "P" is for a low fat diet and regular exercise. "R" is for reducing blood pressure and cholesterol. "E" is for eliminating stress. "V" is for viewing diabetes and heartbeat irregularities as high risks. "E" is for ending the smoking habit. "N" is for never neglecting stroke warning signs. "T" is for taking medication as prescribed.

Another major problem is the lack of awareness of both initial symptoms of stroke and stroke prevention. Thrombolysis—the so-called clot buster, which is the treatment of choice for stroke—can only be started within 4.5 hours of the initial symptoms. However, many clinicians estimate that only 10 per cent of patients with stroke actually receive thrombolysis, due mainly to patients presenting too late for thrombolysis to be effective. Clinicians urge that stroke be referred to as an acute brain attack, like a heart attack, and stress the need for urgent transfer to a hospital. The earlier after symptoms start that one arrives at hospital, the better the treatment that can be given and the more effective it is.

However, unlike a heart attack, the initial symptoms of stroke may not be recognised until it is too late. Most hospitals have acute stroke teams, which are activated as soon as a stroke patient arrives at triage because before thrombolysis can start, some form of brain imaging is needed—such as a computerised tomography scan but, preferably, a magnetic resonance imaging—to confirm that it is not a haemorrhagic stroke. All stroke symptoms need immediate medical help even if they disappear because they may recur without warning. For example, the symptoms of a transient ischaemic attack, or TIA, disappear in less than 24 hours.

Transient ischaemic attacks are like mini strokes with brief attacks of weakness, clumsiness, numbness, pins and needles, speech slurring or blurred vision. Transient ischaemic attacks do not cause loss of consciousness and can be missed easily. However, they are a medical emergency because sufferers have a 10 per cent risk of stroke in the next 12 months and require urgent investigations of the carotid arteries and the heart, which is provided at this innovative North Shore clinic. New drugs are available for atrial fibrillation, such as Thromboxane, and these drugs are helpful in stroke prevention.

Pursuant to standing and sessional orders business interrupted to permit the adjournment of the House.

The House continued to sit.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD, by leave: The drug Rivaroxaban will soon arrive in Australia. Only last Thursday it was approved by an advisory panel to the American Food and Drug Administration for the prevention of strokes in patients with atrial fibrillation. These new drugs are important because Warfarin, which is the blood-thinning drug usually prescribed, requires the patient to undergo regular blood tests and the dose is difficult to get correct. The third major improvement in stroke care over the past few years, but which needs further expanding, is the designated stroke unit. Stroke units dramatically improve recovery time and the quality of rehabilitation. These units need to be properly funded and staffed because the best stroke care is via a multidisciplinary team, which includes social workers, physiotherapists, speech therapists and occupational therapists. These treatment procedures result in dramatic improvements in recovery quality.

For imaging after a stroke, magnetic resonance imaging scanning is superior to computerised tomography scanning, but is not as rapidly available in many centres. The diffusion weighted image sequence on magnetic resonance imaging allows clinicians to tell within minutes rather than hours whether someone has had a stroke. After stroke, appropriate rehabilitation remains an issue. There is a shortage of rehabilitation beds as well as beds suitable for those patients whose stroke severity means that they are not able to return home. The recognition of stroke has never been more important. Prevention and recognition are the mainstays of best treatment, and thrombolysis is best used when people present early to hospital.

The Stroke Recovery Association mentioned by the member for Blue Mountains aims to maximise the recovery of individuals who have suffered a stroke. The association was established in 1977 and provides telephone counselling, stroke information kits, seminars, library facilities and a newsletter. The association also has stroke recovery clubs in regional and metropolitan New South Wales. This wonderful association can be supported by people making a donation, becoming a member or buying an entertainment book. I commend the Stroke Recovery Association and National Stroke Week to the House.

Pursuant to standing and sessional orders business interrupted and matter lapsed.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 7.32 p.m. until
Tuesday 13 September 2011 at 10.00 a.m.**
