

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Friday 14 October 2011

The Speaker (The Hon. Shelley Elizabeth Hancock) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

ELERMORE VALE MEN'S SHED

Debate resumed from 15 September 2011.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [10.00 a.m.]: It is truly inspiring to visit a men's shed and find a bunch of blokes restoring furniture or toys for a local school or building a cubbyhouse for underprivileged kids, or younger blokes showing older blokes the ins and outs of computers and the internet. This is society at its best. This is people helping other people for no financial gain. Some of these men are amongst society's vulnerable. For them to find camaraderie and friendship at these men's sheds is truly inspiring. In New South Wales, men's sheds are increasing in popularity and why would they not? Newcomers are welcomed with a smile, a handshake and a cup of coffee. They can spend the day at the shed, participate in a few activities and have a chat with other men there. At the end of the day, if they feel that it is just not for them, they are under no obligation to come back. But come back they invariably do.

As men's sheds continue to grow and expand, it is well worth acknowledging the contribution of the NSW Men's Shed Association, an organisation that is run by volunteers, and which provides important information to members. The NSW Men's Shed Association website and its newsletter provide a quality exchange of information so that the men's sheds in each of our communities are always improving and using best-practice models. Helpful information is available such as a step-by-step guide that shows the ins and outs on how to establish a men's shed such as where to find sponsors and sources of funding, finding an appropriate location, key governance issues, and how to publicise a men's shed to the local community. I thank the New South Wales Men's Shed Association for its sharing attitude and desire to help local communities throughout the State. I am advised that the recent 2011 Men's Shed National Conference in Brisbane was an outstanding success and that our delegates from New South Wales did us very proud.

From keeping minds and bodies active to giving a helping hand to schools and local groups, to manning community barbeques, men's sheds and their members make a huge contribution to the local communities of New South Wales every day. I commend all the men who participate in men's sheds, be they as members or instructors, for the outstanding role they play in our society and our local communities. I acknowledge their vital role and wish all the men's sheds throughout New South Wales all the best for the future. On behalf of all of the friends, family and community members whose lives are touched positively every day by men's sheds, I say well done.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [10.05 a.m.]: I wish to make a contribution to this debate and congratulate the member for Wallsend for bringing this very important motion acknowledging the work of men's sheds before the House. They are a phenomenon that has grown in recent times. They began because of an identified need for men to get together for men's health—particularly mental health. I can speak from experience, with the electorate of Wagga Wagga having experienced the growth of a number of men's sheds. They are very welcome projects. Indeed, the whole region has experienced what I would call an enthusiastic embrace of the concept of men's sheds.

Men's sheds have now been established in Cootamundra, Junee, Tumbarumba—Tumut has a district woodworkers club and men's shed—Henty and Ganmain. There is the South City men's shed in Wagga, as well as Wagga Wagga men's shed, and Lockhart and Adelong have established men's sheds. The work of the men's sheds is important in communities, important for a lot of reasons. First, it gives men the opportunity to get together to take on community work. They are doing some wonderful work with projects, building products for pre-schools, repairs for people who are less fortunate. The work that is being carried on around our community by men's sheds and their participants is appreciated.

Recently we suffered a great tragedy in Wagga Wagga when one of the men's sheds burnt down. It was established very quickly with a group that identified the need to build a men's shed with buildings that were donated. I had been to that building just weeks before to inspect the work, and tragically it burnt down. Within days, that group of men and volunteers began to re-establish that men's shed. I say congratulations to all of those people involved, because it shows the way in which men's sheds have drawn together people who perhaps would have sat at home, men who perhaps have come to the end of their working lives and found that they were not participating or getting out in the community as much as they should. Men's sheds provide so many educational experiences as well. Courses are given in welding, in woodworking, in computing, and many men, are updating their skills.

Indeed, men's sheds are not exclusive to men. Women are allowed, and Lockhart is a great example of women being encouraged to come along, have a cup of tea and be part of that organisation. The Government supports and celebrates the initiative of men's sheds. We congratulate all the people who are involved and who are helping to combat the issues of loneliness, depression and social isolation. We note particularly the tell-tale sign of success of the initiative—the organisation is not reliant on government funding. I know that there have been successful funding applications. All groups can apply to obtain funding and men's sheds are no different, but men's sheds are not reliant upon government funding. That shows how initiative and innovative groups of men getting together can establish an organisation that delivers real outcomes for communities.

Men's sheds are used to mentor young people. A lot of young people derive great benefit from the wisdom of experiences of older men in our community who have the time and, through the men's sheds, the facilities to be able to pass on to younger people the experience and skills they gained during their trade training and their working life. I congratulate everyone involved. I indeed congratulate the member for Wallsend on moving the motion. I reiterate the Government's support for men's sheds.

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Postponement of Business

General Business item Nos 46, 50 and 52 outside the Order of Precedence postponed, by leave, on motion by Mr Greg Piper.

General Business item Nos 33, 36 and 38 outside the Order of Precedence postponed on motion by Mr Richard Amery on behalf of Ms Sonia Hornery.

General Business item Nos 32 and 35 outside the Order of Precedence postponed on motion by Mr Daryl Maguire on behalf of Mr Jonathan O'Dea.

NORTHERN TABLELANDS HOSPITAL UPGRADES

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [10.13 a.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Government to support major capital upgrades at Armidale, Inverell, Glen Innes and Tenterfield hospitals.

I am always ready to proceed, particularly when debate relates to health services. I am pleased to move the motion in support of hospitals in the Northern Tablelands electorate. I will comment on the hospitals individually, given that the motion deals with four areas within the Northern Tablelands. The Armidale Hospital is a major rural referral hospital for which every single upgrade or improvement has been a hard-fought battle, which is not unknown within health services. The battle to introduce dialysis services to the Armidale and Inverell hospitals was a hard-fought battle and the more recent upgrade of the intensive care unit of the Armidale hospital, which was well received by the community, also was a hard-fought battle. That highlights how difficult it is to achieve capital funding for improved health services. I am sure that level of difficulty also applies to workforce issues in health services in all electorates.

To be fair to successive governments, I acknowledge that demand for health services is significant. That situation will not ease at any time soon, given the trends and recent projections, and there will always be competing priorities. I will provide the House with background information on the approach that was adopted in

relation to the Armidale Hospital. Together with the New England Division of General Practice and a range of other stakeholders, the New England Alliance for Health was established to bring together clinicians, nurses, allied healthcare workers, Hunter New England Area Health Service employees, community representatives from the joint medical program between the University of New England and the University of Newcastle, representatives of the community and community leaders to consider the whole range of issues around the Armidale Hospital and essentially to establish a voice to exam and deal with these issues.

The importance of the upgrade was highlighted at a series of meetings and workshops. The Health Alliance has maintained its role in discussing health issues and is a wonderful organisation. It came up with a range of options that highlighted the need for a clinical services plan to deal now and in the medium term with health issues and the University of New England's medical program, which involves a network of hospitals that provides support one being Armidale. The project is a staged \$50 million development. Initially it was agreed that an application would be made to the Federal Government under the Commonwealth hospitals plan. I was pleased that the former Government announced that an application would be made, accompanied by a \$10 million pledge from the New South Wales Government, for \$40 million in Commonwealth funding.

It was initially agreed to support a clinical services plan. The clinical services plan that was produced was very detailed. I give credit to a former Minister for Health, the Hon. John Della Bosca, who ensured that the clinical services plan would be drafted. Part funding was obtained from the University of New England. I pay tribute to the University of New England for highlighting the importance of the medical program by working closely within health services throughout the process. A capital development plan subsequently was undertaken by the Hunter New England Area Health Service. I was very pleased with the progress of the project's development. Financial support had been sought from governments and I was pleased that regional priorities were recognised by the funding application having been made. However, I was later disappointed to learn that that application was unsuccessful. From my point of view it was very important for another application to be submitted in a future round of funding allocations, particularly given the support in the community for the upgrade and redevelopment.

The community also was disappointed to learn that the application to the Federal Government was unsuccessful, but the Hunter New England Area Health Service advised a meeting of stakeholders that the Tamworth hospital had received funding. That was very welcome news because thereafter the Armidale Hospital would be the area health service's number one priority. The representatives of the area health service told the meeting that approval would be sought to resubmit the application to the next round of funding. I have kept the Minister for Health informed regarding these issues and forwarded details of the completed clinical services plan. I have made many representations on behalf of the community and extended invitations and requests to have this hospital redevelopment progressed. Given that the area health service has indicated that Armidale is now its number one priority for major upgrade and redevelopment, I hope that the Government and the Minister for Health and her department will progress this request for the next full round of Commonwealth hospitals funding.

The Armidale bid has substantial community support, and to support it I have launched a petition that is about to be distributed. I am confident the petition will receive the minimum 10,000 required. I will send it to the Armidale, Guyra, Uralla and Walcha districts. I think it will underline the community support which I know exists, together of course with the stated number one priority set by the Hunter New England Area Service, the largest geographical health service in this State. It deserves support. I call on the State to make sure that in the next full round a submission to the Commonwealth be undertaken to fund the upgrade.

The Inverell and Glen Innes hospitals have had piecemeal upgrades—to the accident and emergency department at Inverell in particular. They are welcomed upgrades but they have not been part of an overall strategy for those district hospitals. The establishment of renal dialysis services in Inverell was hard-fought but well received and is a very significant contributor to helping so many people not travel such long distances. District hospitals like Inverell and Glen Innes seem to be overlooked. They are not large enough to be major referral hospitals and they are not multipurpose health services. There does not seem to be a structure in which district hospitals have an allocation of funding. I will be very pleased if they received funding and that is what we are pushing for.

I am pleased that Hunter New England Area Health Service has commenced planning processes in both of those communities. I attended two meetings in Inverell and two in Glen Innes. They were led by the chief executive officer of Hunter New England Area Health Service and other senior officials. I am delighted that they take community consultations so seriously. They had meetings with other stakeholders in Inverell and Glen

Innes including the local health service advisory committees, mayors and council members, doctors and clinicians whose contributions were highly valuable. Recently I sat in both meetings in both towns and they met my expectations. I know a further two days in Inverell and two days in Glen Innes of consultations will be held later this month and early next month. I look forward to progressing that planning process to see a clinical services plan developed for both of those hospitals and, indeed, a funding bid made in due course.

I have held a number of community meetings in Tenterfield and met with clinicians, the mayor, council representatives, community hospital advisory committee, community members, staff of the health service, other stakeholders including an aged care representative—which is a major stakeholder as they are in all communities but particularly in Tenterfield—and its very active local area health service advisory committee. I was asked by a resolution of that community to move forward with the process of establishing a multipurpose health service so that community can be properly consulted as to the options and the next steps in that regard. They took a very constructive and positive approach, as I think everybody across the State does with health services. We acknowledge that the system remains under pressure and the workforce issues are significant. But proper planning needs to take place if we are to move forward. That is where government has to step in and help a willing and deserving community that the area health service has highlighted as its priority. They deserve support, and I commend the motion to the House.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [10.23 a.m.]: I thank the member for Northern Tablelands for the opportunity to talk about health in our region. We have neighbouring electorates as Northern Tablelands is just to the north and a little to the east of my electorate of Tamworth. I acknowledge the commitment of the member for Northern Tablelands to his electorate and health facilities at Armidale, Inverell, Glen Innes and Tenterfield. He has been a strong advocate for health services right across his electorate. I can recall in days gone by it was called the New England Area Health Service followed by the Hunter New England Area Health Service. In those days some people described it as a merger and others as a takeover, depending on which side of the fence they sat.

The clinical network and streams that have been set up across the Hunter New England Area Health Service are very valuable. I firmly believe that they are working well with clinical staff, counsellors and medical staff counsellors. The Government acknowledges many hospital facilities around New South Wales need upgrading. There is an infrastructure backlog, as we all know, and the entire Hunter New England Area Health Service is benefiting from investments. Tamworth hospital funding redevelopment was a key plank in the 2011 election in relation to major regional infrastructure investment. The New South Wales Government committed \$100 million and an additional \$120 million from hospital redevelopment funds from the Federal Government, totalling \$220 million, which is certainly most welcome.

The 4 May was a great day when the Minister for Health, who is doing a fantastic job, and I, together with the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, signed the cheque and said, "Let's get on with this. It has been so long in the making. It has been promised and not delivered on so many, many occasions." It was great on 4 May when we were able to say, "Signed, sealed, delivered, I am yours." Four years ago, and I think previously as well, Labor promised funds to Tamworth but it was never, ever delivered. The expectations of the community for a regional hospital were consistently built up and let down again. The Government has given a firm commitment and it will happen. It is a great result for Tamworth. The New South Wales Liberal-Nationals will deliver on this vital hospital for our entire region, and Tamworth is the hub of the old New England Area Health Service. It is the rural referral hospital that feeds my whole electorate, and also extends to the Northern Tablelands.

We share some facilities with the Armidale Hospital. I remember in the early days one manager—Fergus Fitzsimons—worked across both of those hospitals. We have clear links and I certainly support the Northern Tablelands in its bid to get their areas upgraded. I would also like more funding to come generally across the board. The redevelopment of Tamworth Hospital will provide two new operating suites and procedure rooms, four new operating theatre recovery units, six new emergency department treatment bays, an additional emergency resuscitation treatment bay, an increase of 10 beds in overnight bed capacity, an additional labour birthing room, five new special care cots, seven new renal dialysis chairs, an increase in chemotherapy chairs from eight to 14 and a doubling of the number of dental chairs from four to eight. These services are needed in the growing environment that is the New England north-west in which we live. Tamworth is growing at 1.6 per cent and needs an increase in services.

The New England Area Health Service has in excess of 185,000 people living in the combined electorates of Barwon, Upper Hunter, Northern Tablelands and Tamworth. The geographical area is

98,000 square kilometres which is the size of Tasmania, encompassing 19 local government areas stretching from Quirindi in the south, to Tenterfield on the Queensland border in the north, from Walcha to the east to Moree and Narrabri in the west. It has 20 public hospitals doing some great work. A couple of multipurpose services have also been constructed in those areas—Manilla is almost finished, Werris Creek is well underway as well as a number of others. Investment in health infrastructure has been undertaken in our region to help the region grow. On 15 September the Minister for Health answered a question from the member for Northern Tablelands in this Chamber. She noted that:

In relation to the Armidale Hospital, in December 2010 the former Labor Government lodged a submission with the Commonwealth Health and Hospitals Fund, but I am sad to say—and I am reading from the record—that it failed.

Why did it fail? It failed because on 6 April the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing formally advised that the application was one of two New South Wales proposals that did not meet the Health and Hospitals Fund criteria. Specifically it highlighted that there was no demonstration of value for money, that is, there was no increase in service or change in model of care.

Some unsuccessful project proponents were invited to resubmit proposals in round four. As the member for Northern Tablelands knows, the Commonwealth Government did not offer Armidale and New England Regional Hospital the opportunity to resubmit. The former Premier made an announcement about the provision of money for the refurbishment of the hospital only three days, or perhaps a couple of weeks, before the election. She made a commitment to a proposal that she knew the Commonwealth would never consider. It was a furphy; it was a false promise to people in the electorate of Northern Tablelands. The New South Wales Government is considering a small number of proposals to progress under round four, which will close later this month. About \$475 million is available Australia-wide, so our share will be relatively small.

We did well in the last round, achieving 39 per cent of the allocation. That was much higher than the previous Government managed to obtain through any submission. Hunter New England Health recognises the need for redevelopment of facilities at Armidale and supports the work being done by staff, clinicians, the University of New England and the community to achieve that goal. I note that the member for Northern Tablelands just told the House that he will be circulating a petition. If it attracts more than 10,000 signatures it will be the subject of serious consideration, and I wish him well in that quest. A health services plan for Armidale identifying the future configuration of health services required by the community of Armidale and surrounding areas was completed and endorsed in 2010.

The plan recommended that a site master plan be completed to determine the current and future capacity of the site. That plan is being developed to identify priorities for future development in line with recommendations in the health services plan. Consultation in relation to this process has included representatives from all key clinical services, including primary and community health personnel, mental health personnel and the hospital staff. This process will also identify opportunities for a staged redevelopment of the site and will be used to inform future funding opportunities and submissions. The redevelopment of the Armidale campus remains a high priority project for Hunter New England Health and, as such, the board and executive of the local health district will continue to pursue actively all potential sources of funding for redevelopment on the site. I know that the member for Northern Tablelands will back that statement and that he supports it.

In the meantime, I am pleased to report that planning is progressing on the ambulatory care building at Armidale, which is funded by NSW Health. This building will also house the expanded chemotherapy service, which is being funded as part of the New England North West Regional Cancer Centre, and construction of the Tamworth Cancer Care Centre is about to commence. Tenders are being called now and it will be completed in about 12 months. Cancer services need to be upgraded in regional New South Wales, and NSW Health, led by the Hon. Jillian Skinner—a fantastic Minister for Health—is doing just that. These facilities are scheduled for completion in early 2013 and will provide a significant improvement for community members who require chemotherapy treatment.

Armidale and New England Regional Hospital and the University of New England will continue to work together for academic medical officers recruited by the university to have visiting medical officer rights to Armidale negotiated with the individuals as appropriate to their area of speciality and service need. There are exciting times ahead for the Armidale and New England Regional Hospital. This Coalition Government is getting the job done. It is building infrastructure and ensuring that regional communities are being looked after. One of my colleagues will provide information about facilities at Inverell, Glen Innes and Tenterfield later in this debate.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [10.33 a.m.]: I hope that everybody in Armidale reads that speech, which is from the Minister's office and is almost identical to an answer to a question without notice. It was all about Tamworth and reflected the complete absence of will displayed by this Government with regard to the Armidale and New England Regional Hospital. A \$40-million allocation to fix the hospital is one five hundredth of the State's health budget. The question is whether this Government actually wants to do anything about the hospital, not whether it can. If it had the will, it would find a way. Clearly there is no will.

Armidale has a population of about 25,000 and a referral base of about 70,000. The hospital is probably the most important health service in New South Wales for the teaching of future rural doctors at its clinical school. Armidale has a long history of high-quality medical care. I have been involved in many transports to Armidale and I know that it faces unique issues. I spent one long night there many years ago because the aircraft was unable to take off in the fog. The hospital provides high-quality rural care and brilliant teaching. It also has a much sought after nursing graduate program. Medical teaching at the New England Rural Clinical School is vital to the future of rural health in Australia and it has the highest percentage of medical students from a rural background in Australia. They are the future rural doctors of New South Wales and they deserve a refurbished hospital.

The hospital's emergency department is extremely busy and dealt with 12,500 presentations in 2004-05 and 15,500 in 2009-10. Despite the fact that the operating budget has been increased from \$23 million to \$32 million, much more needs to be done. The intensive care unit was refurbished in 2005 and the emergency department was upgraded and a new CT scan was added in 2009. However, the reality is that the \$10 million committed by the previous Government, which would have allowed for the expansion of the emergency department, provided for extra teaching spaces and helped with a further application for Commonwealth funding, could be allocated and should be allocated. New outpatient facilities and oncology chairs are being added to the new clinical school. That is absolutely crucial for the future of health care in New South Wales and the Minister should clarify whether she has the will to do anything about Armidale and New England Regional Hospital today. To date, we have heard nothing and the people of Armidale have a right to ask why.

Glen Innes has a referral base of about 15,000 people but only four doctors work in the hospital. One of those doctors, Dr Trish Mackay, will give up obstetrics on 31 December after 28 years in the profession. We need to hear from the Minister what she is planning to do about obstetric care in Glen Innes. She has months to do something about it. Glen Innes District Hospital teaches students from Newcastle and the University of New England and has a very busy emergency department. Not one doctor at Glen Innes is accepting new patients, who are being redirected to Tenterfield, which is about an hour's drive away. The town needs a new hospital because the old facility is obsolete and it is an ideal site for a multipurpose service with acute beds. The obsolescent Prince Albert Memorial Hospital at Tenterfield has a referral base of about 7,000 people and deals with many patients diverted from Glen Innes.

I have spoken to the admirable Dr Brennan a number of times about the need for more aged care beds and mental health services. He also supports the establishment of a multipurpose service, and Tenterfield would be an ideal location for such a facility. The nearest psychiatrist to Tenterfield is in Tamworth and many more mental health workers are needed. Inverell, which is 90 minutes from Armidale, has a referral base of about 8,000 people. Bundarra has a multipurpose service and Inverell has a 52-bed hospital that deals with 10,000 emergency department presentations each year. It also still performs endoscopies and delivers about 300 babies a year, which is a vital service. Mark Harding, a doctor to whom I spoke about Inverell, is one of the most impressive clinicians I have met and is totally committed to teaching medical students from the University of New England. Staff at the hospital also teach doctors from as far away as Hornsby and Townsville. These are great hospitals and they need the Government's support. [*Time expired.*]

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore—The Deputy-Speaker) [10.38 a.m.]: I thank the member for Northern Tablelands for raising this issue and for giving me the opportunity to talk about medical facilities in our adjoining electorates. Many of my constituents travel to the hospital at Tenterfield. I was amazed to hear the interjections from members opposite asking what this Government is doing about health services. Like the member for Northern Tablelands, I was elected in 1999—which I know was way back in the last century. Health services in the electorates of Lismore and the Northern Tablelands were totally neglected by Labor, whose members today interject and make speeches about what should be going on in country and regional areas. Quite frankly, country and regional areas were continually overlooked until the change of government. Health services in country and regional areas have suffered. Some seem to think if a hospital is an hour away that is okay, but we do not have public transport services that enable people to travel long distances to major hospitals.

The recent budget allocated some \$10 million to commence planning for the Byron District Hospital and the Lismore Base Hospital. Lismore Base Hospital was neglected, but this money will enable us to complete the planning needed to take the project forward to stage 3 and complete the hospital's redevelopment. The McLean District Hospital, in the adjoining electorate of Clarence, and the Riverlands Drug and Alcohol Centre in Lismore received \$202,000. Some \$15.8 million has been allocated for completion of the Lismore Regional Cancer Centre and the Grafton Base Hospital orthopaedic ward and imaging expansion, and nearly \$2 million has been allocated to progress works at Murwillumbah ambulance station, which is appreciated. There will be 39 more nurses in the Northern New South Wales Local Health District, including three clinical nurse-midwife educators and specialists to support nurses, and there will be more planned surgery. So something is happening, but it has only started since the change of government.

Having sought information on this motion, I compliment the Northern Tablelands for what has taken place at Inverell, where the exciting Telehealth project is operating, providing diabetes education to patients from the Inverell Community Health Centre. A six-month pilot scheme has been completed and clinics will be conducted on an ongoing monthly basis. Inverell is the client site and Tamworth is the specialist site. We will probably see a lot more of these projects providing support services to patients, and it is great to see this happening with regard to diabetes education at Inverell. I also refer to the work being done at Tenterfield. The Tenterfield Health Service has been part of a review of health services across the New England region. Tenterfield, like other areas in that region, has a stable but ageing population.

The Tenterfield Hospital Local Health Advisory Committee and members of the Tenterfield community support the proposal for a multipurpose service [MPS]. Over the past two years Kyogle has completed its multipurpose service, which is the backbone of that community in terms of full health service provision. It was necessary because, like many other country areas, it looked as though Kyogle would lose its hospital and the multipurpose service has supported health service provision in that community. I have been honoured to speak to this motion.

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [10.43 a.m.]: I support the motion of the member for Northern Tablelands calling for the upgrade of hospitals in his constituency. I note the comments of Government members in referring to other hospitals, which is not within the leave of the motion—but I suppose that is fair cop when a motion names a region whose hospitals require capital works programs. The member for Northern Tablelands should be congratulated on calling for—and no doubt achieving—more capital works programs for hospitals in his electorate, but I recognise that, since he became the local member, he has made substantial gains regarding health services in his electorate. I was very disappointed by the comments of the member for Lismore, the Deputy-Speaker, who used this debate as an opportunity to say that hospitals in the Northern Tablelands—in fact, throughout rural New South Wales—were neglected by the former Government and it is only now that the Coalition is in office that these issues are being addressed. Nothing could be—

Mr Mark Coure: You had 16 years to fix it.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: That is right, we had 16 years.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Mount Druitt has the call.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: If Government members give me 16 minutes I will give them a list of our projects over 16 years in regional and rural New South Wales. The member for Northern Tablelands spoke about the establishment, before this Government was elected, of six new multipurpose health services in various towns in his electorate, such as Guyra and Tingha and so on. I am sure he will recognise that fact when he responds to the debate. Accident and emergency services in the Northern Tablelands have also been upgraded, and the member for Northern Tablelands tells me that the upgrade has only just finished. I point out to Government members, including the Deputy-Speaker, that the contract for and work on that project did not start on the day after 26 March. The project was lobbied for and achieved by the member for Northern Tablelands, and it was delivered by the former Labor Government. Other projects at Inverell and Glen Innes are also underway.

I wish to respond to what the member for Lismore said about rural health—I think the shadow Minister for Health also referred to it. Health services throughout the State and the country—in fact, throughout the world—are always under pressure from an ageing population and the high cost of materials and equipment used to treat diseases, some of which were not treated at all just a couple of decades ago. Many regional hospitals now have dialysis services. The Labor Government introduced dialysis services in the electorate of Northern

Tablelands, no doubt due to the good lobbying by the former Speaker, and member who moved this motion. Government members should not use debate on motions such as to mislead the House or to show their ignorance of what has been happening in regional areas for some time.

Mr Thomas George: What is the need for the motion?

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I am getting to that. A lot of work has been going on throughout rural New South Wales. I remember the former member for Bathurst talking about Lithgow Hospital—a brand-new purpose-built hospital. Even the member for Bathurst might concede that that is a rural and regional hospital—and no doubt when he visits the hospital he will try to take credit for it in some way. It was a fantastic project and it was built by the former Labor Government. The member for Wagga Wagga is in the Chamber. Having family that has lived in rural and regional areas, the issue of health services is always one that we in the city—

Mr Paul Toole: Point of order: I hope the speaker is going to refer to Bathurst and all the problems that we have had with the hospital. I also raise the matter of relevance—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! There is no point of order. The member for Bathurst will resume his seat.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I acknowledge the member's point, which is a valid one. The problems with health services in the Bathurst electorate have occurred only since his election. Until a Labor member represents that electorate, those health services will not be fixed. This motion is a good and important one, and it deserves the support of the House.

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [10.48 a.m.], in reply: I thank all members who have contributed to this debate. Despite the banter, it seems to have united the Parliament today. I certainly acknowledge the importance of health services in our communities, in my case in the Northern Tablelands. I thank the member for Tamworth, the member for Macquarie Fields, who is also the shadow Minister for Health, the member for Lismore and the member for Mount Druitt—a new Country Labor member, judging from his contribution to the House today. It is important that we do not trivialise health services. These services are important and the community values them highly. The community also values highly the staff of those health services—the clinicians, nurses and allied healthcare workers and all those upon whom we rely in every aspect of health delivery. My mother is in the intensive care unit of the Armidale hospital and I will be visiting her today, as soon as I can. The people of New South Wales rely on our health services in every possible way and on the hardworking people who run them.

The debate highlighted some things that have occurred in the Northern Tablelands, which I acknowledge the great honour of being elected to represent in this House. I highlight the six new multipurpose health services that have been established in previous years at Emmaville—and let us not forget the Emmaville fete this Saturday. The Guyra, Walcha, Tingha, Bingara and Wialda multipurpose health services are important to the local community. It was collaboration between the Commonwealth and the State—a Federal Coalition Government and a State Labor Government bringing services together—that delivered that outcome. Health should be put above partisan politics and those services should continue to be delivered. Is this motion required? Absolutely. The expansion of Armidale hospital was undertaken through a constructive and objective planning process, a clinical services plan conducted by the area health service, the department and of course the external consultants involved. Feedback was obtained from stakeholders—clinicians, the area health service, the health workers who participated in the process and the community. It is wrong to argue that the proposition is not valid; it is needed.

The shadow Minister for Health highlighted the successful medical program delivered by the University of New England, which specialises in regional general services for general practitioners. That is a fantastic outcome, and our hospital services need to be supportive of, and able to support, that contribution. I remind the House of something the Premier said in the debate on palliative care in this place on 10 August. He was referring to the petition from the residents on the North Shore who felt that their needs were not being met by the previous Government. The Premier said:

They were punished apparently because they lived in a Liberal voting territory. We need to end that sort of political apartheid. We need to understand that the role of government is to provide services, regardless of the way people vote. We need to understand that we provide services according to need.

The need is where the area health service—an objective body established by the Government—says it is, and it says that Armidale hospital is the number one priority. With the support of clinicians and all stakeholders, the

area health service has made that statement objectively based on need and supported by the clinical services plan. It has jumped through all sorts of other hoops in order to show, constructively and objectively, that this is a priority. To argue against the motion is to speak against the comments that the Premier made in this place in relation to a petition about a hospital on the North Shore. This project is a worthy recipient of the next full round of Commonwealth funding. It is based on need, and I urge the House to support it. As for Inverell, Glen Innes and Tenterfield, there is more to come. I will be consulting with the area health services in those communities and bringing their requests to Parliament. I commend the motion to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Routine of Business

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst—Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Infrastructure NSW) [10.54 a.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended at this sitting to permit Government business to commence forthwith.

In the normal course, private members' business would continue this morning until 12.15 a.m. but at this point there are some challenges in managing the program. As members will know, the Legislative Council places time restrictions on the Government legislation that moves through this place in the sense that it must reach the upper House by 21 October. That effectively means that Government business—how we run the State through the legislative program—has to be concluded by next Thursday. The House is sitting today and again on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday next week. On Friday there are other matters, particularly to do with an esteemed member of the Parliament who is retiring, that will take some time. That means the Government has to manage its legislative program on behalf of the people of the State to ensure that legislation passes the Legislative Assembly effectively by next Wednesday. That gives us three days' debate next week and, within the constraints the Legislative Council places upon us, means that this motion is necessary to the business affairs of the Government at this point.

The former Government was familiar with this problem and did the same thing regularly at this time in the parliamentary session. I have tried as far as possible to communicate openly with the Opposition—something that never happened under the former Government's regime. We usually found out what had happened after the event. I conveyed this information to the member for Maroubra in his capacity as the Manager of Opposition Business in the House and indicated that I would need to move this motion. I gave notice of this informally yesterday and again this morning, but I now formally notify the House of that requirement. The motion will permit us to recommence Government business immediately at the conclusion of this matter. I indicate that yesterday I moved to suspend standing orders in order to bring on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011 for debate today. On that occasion I ensured that the Minister fully briefed the shadow Minister. That is also something that did not happen under the previous regime.

However, there was full communication yesterday with the shadow Minister for Local Government. She is well aware of the content of the bill and, with the pressure of this final week or two of the Government's active legislative program, that is the best that can be done. The Opposition knows that this is a requirement in order to properly manage the legislative program for the people of this State, but those opposite wasted 25 minutes yesterday debating the motion and hence we have had to cut into the time allocated for private members' statements today. I expect the member for Maroubra to oppose this motion. I understand that the Opposition has to take a position but if it results in a division that will waste more time. I ask Opposition members to think carefully before they call for a division and waste time on this issue. Each moment in this place is precious at this time of the year.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra) [10.58 a.m.]: I agree that each moment in this place is precious and I exhort the Government, as I have done throughout its term, to arrange its affairs and manage its business a little more efficiently. The policy that the Government has introduced in this place for managing its affairs has given the Leader of the House an almost impossible task in getting Government business passed. In its usual fashion, the Government blames everybody else. The Leader of the House has made mention of the way in which the former Government conducted its affairs. As a former Minister in that Government, I know that

through the offices of the Premier, the Whips and the Leader of the House we managed the number of speakers on each bill and the time limits on debate. Until this week, that had not happened at all with this Government. Debates on the Library Amendment Bill and the Graffiti Legislation Amendment Bill were a complete waste of time. Together, there were more speakers on those two bills than there are members of this place. The member for Hawkesbury doing a book review about former Prime Minister John Howard is one example of how this place has been mismanaged. The two culprits are sitting together, one in a blue tie and one—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Maroubra will resume his seat. Government members are too rowdy. Members should not engage in banter across the Chamber.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I was pointing out the colour of ties, as the standing orders allow me to do. The Government needs some verbosity management so that it does not get into this situation. There are 471 private members' motions on the *Business Paper* dealing with all manner of subjects that are vital to individual members' electorates. Each week a small amount of time is devoted to private members' motions, and it is unfair for that time to be taken up otherwise because of mismanagement. The Leader of the House wants to blame time limits imposed on this place by the other place. The Government has gagged members in the other place. It is running the show. The Government should not blame the other place or the former Government. It should manage its members and its business a little better. This is the sixth or seventh time this week that Government business has been interposed without—

Mr Brad Hazzard: You weren't here for three days. How would you know?

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: Because I read *Hansard*. The Government should manage its time better. If it thinks that the only mechanism available to the Opposition to oppose things—a division—is a waste of time, we are about to waste more time because we do not agree with this motion.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 56

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

Noes, 20

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

Pairs

Mr Bromhead	Ms Burton
Mr Perrottet	Mr Furolo
Mr Provest	Ms Hornery
Mr Ward	Mr Lalich

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

UNIVERSITIES GOVERNING BODIES BILL 2011**Agreement in Principle**

Debate resumed from 11 October 2011.

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [11.13 a.m.]: I speak in support of the Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011. The bill has particular significance for the Orange electorate because it hosts the campus of Charles Sturt University, which includes a world-class dentistry school that trains future dentists for regional practice. This bill will bring the governance of New South Wales universities into line with contemporary governance practice. New South Wales has an internationally respected system of higher education that produces major benefits for individuals, the State and the nation. In 2010 the higher education sector generated \$10.4 billion in export income nationally. In New South Wales, education services generated income of \$6.5 billion during 2010. The Auditor-General's report to Parliament on the New South Wales university sector, released in May of this year, remarks that it is essential that universities have effective corporate governance frameworks to effectively manage and mitigate risk exposures, like those arising due to the complexity of universities' business arrangements.

This bill will equip our universities to compete in an increasingly complex and competitive global knowledge economy and commercial environment. Universities today are required to balance two fundamental characteristics. As much as they remain centres of learning, scholarship and research, universities are also very large and complex business enterprises involved in myriad ways in a variety of educational and research fields. The growing breadth and complexity of university business activity was highlighted in the Auditor-General's 2011 report on the New South Wales university sector. The report highlights that income from business activities totalled \$1.245 billion for universities during 2010. In addition, the 10 public universities in the State control 97 major entities and have many more commercial contracts in place. All of this is occurring at the same time as public funding is reducing. At present, no university in New South Wales relies on Commonwealth funding for more than 50 per cent of its operating revenue.

With this changing funding environment comes the need to diversify revenue sources: with rising expectations of the quality of university programs comes a corresponding focus on increased accountability. Alongside this, universities operate in an increasingly diversified national and international higher education market. A demand-driven system of public funding for Australian universities from 2012 will mean that each university will receive Commonwealth funding primarily for those eligible students it is able to attract. The sector offers an ever-widening range of subjects, increasingly flexible study routes and a broad range of qualifications. Matching what they provide to what students want and the skills needed by employers and the State is yet another important challenge. Students are more likely to be attracted to those universities that are thriving and dynamic, with ambitions for growth founded on a strong financial position and a vision for the future.

While New South Wales universities continue to meet these challenges successfully and to maintain their standing internationally, their capacity to build on that performance is increasingly reliant on strong commercial and investment performance. Business and industry have the capacity for greater involvement in universities beyond their existing role as end users of graduates and beneficiaries of research. This requires an increased involvement in, and contribution to, the sector from business and industry, either through funding and support for research and development or teaching and scholarship. In turn, increased private and industry investment in universities—whether through philanthropic initiatives or collaboration between industry and universities—has implications for the needs and speed required of institutional governance.

The changing balance of public and private enterprise across the higher education sector highlights the flexibility required of universities in the modern context. In order to thrive, universities must successfully negotiate the demands of traditional State regulation and internal university processes, at the same time keeping pace with commercial ventures. Universities are required to respond rapidly to fast-changing international trends, to capture a market niche, to develop new links with external partners or to re-structure operations. In this type of environment it should be possible for universities that desire it to have a leaner, more expert-based board structure, within limits, with a membership that is less unwieldy, less like an assembly, and more like the strategic decision-making body that it needs to be.

Universities in New South Wales have been asking the Government to sanction changes to their governing body size and compositions for some time. The universities argue that they need more flexible governing body structures if they are to have the expertise and high-level corporate experience that will help them diversify and maximise their revenue from non-government sources. The New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee together with the chancellors and governing bodies have expressed their support for a model that gives flexibility in size and composition, while retaining existing categories of representation in governing bodies—official members, elected members, governing body appointed members and ministerially appointed members. The Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011 will assist New South Wales universities to rise to the challenge of increased levels of participation and to remain internationally competitive by providing a quality product. I urge the House to support this bill so that New South Wales universities are well placed to foster sustainable governance and funding solutions for the future.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [11.20 a.m.]: I find myself almost agreeing with the comments made by the member for Orange—almost, but not quite. What is striking about this debate is that I thought the day never would come when I would agree with The Greens, but I find myself in this context agreeing with the member for Balmain. Yesterday he stated something insightful and important in his contribution to debate on this bill. He said that through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme [HECS], students contribute an enormous amount of the funds received by universities, and therefore should have suitable and significant representation.

The governing bodies of universities exist for a number of reasons, not the least of which is to run the business of universities, but universities by nature also have a community responsibility. Sometimes through governance, in many ways and in many places we find that community responsibility is not always about the dollar, not always about turning a profit and not always about making commercial decisions. Sometimes the decision concerns the betterment of the community but not necessarily the betterment of the bottom line. That is the essence of what concerns me and, in representing my constituency, I will express the concerns of constituents of my electorate in relation to changes proposed in this legislation.

The member for Maitland and Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage was chair of the most recent parliamentary committee that posed the question of what we should do in relation to higher educational institutions. As a result there was certainly a push from one particular institution for the size of governing bodies to be reduced. But the committee's report shows that that push was not unanimous, widespread or overwhelming. Having said that, I acknowledge that flexibility in the composition of governing bodies and allowing membership to range between 11 or 12 and 22 is good. In general, flexibility is good, and it is important for universities to be provided with the opportunity to have exactly that. However, my main concern is that we must ensure that that is not achieved at the expense of community need.

In the background papers revealing the process that was pursued in relation to this issue there was discussion about the phrase "the university community". Who comprises the university community? I would think that the students, staff, workforce, neighbourhoods, residents, nearby people and the transport sector would comprise the university community. Certainly if I were putting together a governing body for Cessnock and I wanted community participation, I would not weight that governing body with people from Bathurst, Dubbo or Lithgow. I would want people from Cessnock to be members of that governing body. I am speaking now about the importance of having the university community well represented on the governing body of any university.

To that end I implore this House to ensure that the academic and non-academic staff, the students and the alumni have a significant place on university governing boards. Having said that, I acknowledge that allowances have been made in this legislation and I point out that the Opposition reserves the right to move amendments in the other place. As matters stand currently, the University of New England has 18 members on its governing body of whom seven are representatives from the groups to which I have just referred. That gives

the university community a little less than 40 per cent of the representation. University community representation on the governing body of the University of New South Wales is half, at the University of Sydney it is half, at the University of Technology, Sydney, it is a little under half, at the University of Western Sydney, it is approximately one-third, and there are similar representative proportions for the Macquarie University and other universities.

There are some instances of university community representation on governing boards amounting to less than 33 per cent. By definition in this bill, decisions will be made by two-thirds of the board. If the current university community representation does not constitute 33 per cent of the university's governing board, two-thirds of the governing body will have the ultimate and final say in moving forward. To my mind, that is a matter of real concern. We must remember that the very existence of universities relates not only to the corporate dollar and the bottom line but, rather, to something much more significant and much larger. We must remember that universities are an investment in our future. They do not exist necessarily as an investment for the sake of an immediate financial return.

In conclusion I draw to the attention of the House one more important point. During their presentations both the Minister for Education and the Parliamentary Secretary for Education, the member for Vacluse, suggested that vice-chancellors unanimously support by this legislation. I have to say, based on the documentation available, that that is not necessarily entirely true. On 12 July 2011 the Convener of the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee, Fred Hilmer, AO, wrote an acknowledgement to the Minister for Education conveying support for the legislation from "the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee, except the University of Western Sydney and the Southern Cross University ...". There are 10 tertiary educational institutions in New South Wales that are recognised as universities. Eight of them agreed, but two did not. It is not unanimous support. There are some questions and some concerns.

Ms Gabrielle Upton: You don't have your correspondence right.

Mr CLAYTON BARR: But I have that piece of correspondence right?

Ms Gabrielle Upton: Just get your other correspondence right.

Mr CLAYTON BARR: But I do have that one correct. I acknowledge the interjection of the member for Vacluse—I have that one correct. I had hoped that other members of Parliament representing Hunter electorates would have participated in this debate on behalf of the staff of the University of Newcastle, who have concerns about their position not necessarily having been put with any vigour or being heard. They acknowledge that the vice-chancellors' position has been put with considerable vigour and that it has been heard, but they feel that their position has not, which is a matter of concern. Having said that, I acknowledge that as a member of this House it is my job and my responsibility to represent the needs and the voice of my community. In speaking in this debate today, that is exactly what I am doing. The Labor Opposition reserves the right to move amendments in the other place.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH (Coogee) [11.26 a.m.]: I support the Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011. Within my electorate of Coogee sits the acclaimed University of New South Wales—the nation's leading tertiary education facility. For a number of years universities have been requesting changes to free up their governance models. In fact after I was elected to this House, the first item on the agenda of my first meeting with Professor Fred Hilmer, AO, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, was precisely this issue. For more than three years he had been lobbying the former New South Wales Government without any result, despite the former Labor member for Coogee serving on the university's council.

Each day more than 40,000 students and 6,000 staff make their way to that large yet very compact institution. As a Randwick councillor for more than 11 years, including two years as mayor, I have a sound appreciation of the significant role the University of New South Wales plays in the economic and social life of that part of eastern Sydney. Most people would never be afforded the opportunity to learn of the sheer scale of the task that is the day-to-day management of such a large institution, let alone the strategic planning required to ensure its future development, relevance and prosperity. It is vital to employ the most effective, efficient and contemporary management techniques that recognise the increasingly complex task of managing these modern institutions.

A key focus of the bill is ensuring the introduction of improved, more flexible governance arrangements for our public universities to help them to meet the many challenges and opportunities they are

faced with in their current external environments. The bill takes its place among a number of recent developments in university governance and draws from those when appropriate. The developments include the Howard Government's National Governance Protocols and the 2004 amendments to university Acts made by the previous New South Wales Government to implement key aspects of those protocols.

The 2004 amendments were made to each of the 10 Acts establishing the State's public universities to ensure New South Wales universities could demonstrate compliance with the national governance protocols and thereby qualify for contingent Commonwealth funding. They were also about good governance. The amendments at that time helped ensure a strong national regulatory framework for universities with all States and Territories making the changes. The recently endorsed Voluntary Code of Best Practice for Governance of Australian Universities is another recent governance development in the Australian context. This was shaped on the basis of the previous governance protocols and has been endorsed for implementation by the Australian University Chancellors' Council, Universities Australia, on behalf of Australian vice-chancellors, and by all Australian education and training Ministers on 27 July this year through the ministerial council.

A further development that the Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011 draws on is the 2009 report of the Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 inquiry into the governance of New South Wales universities, chaired by the Hon. Robyn Parker, MLC. The bill effectively implements a number of the main recommendations from that Legislative Council committee report, including allowing university governing bodies to remunerate members; establishing a clear protocol for the removal of a chancellor or deputy chancellor; and providing all governing bodies with the flexibility to either appoint or elect their alumni members. All of these relatively recent developments in university governance in Australia and New South Wales that I have outlined have sought to facilitate improved governance arrangements and processes for universities in the context of the external challenges that they face. This bill does the same.

The current challenges include increasing competition between institutions for students and funding, both nationally and internationally. International students comprise a very large education market globally and Australia is competing for its international student load with other major education export countries, and New South Wales is competing with other States and Territories. Next year also sees the introduction of the Australian Government's demand-driven funding system, which will inevitably lead to competition among our universities for an increased share of the key national university-aged demographic. Our universities now receive less than half their total revenue from public sources. They need to be more entrepreneurial in their approach to attract funding from a diverse range of sources, including teaching and research initiatives with other universities, both local and overseas, and in developing effective commercial arrangements with other providers.

The last New South Wales Auditor-General's report to this Parliament on our universities showed that collectively last year they received \$1.2 billion in income from commercial sources. The Minister in his agreement in principle speech on the bill highlighted that fact and emphasised that our universities are very significant businesses as well as major public higher education institutions of great strategic significance to the State. These elements are all part of the broader context in which universities need to be well-equipped to operate. The Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011 aims to do exactly that by providing them with more freedom in the way they go about their business.

The 2009 Legislative Council inquiry into the governance of New South Wales universities was initially prompted by governance issues at one university but was then widened to consider broader questions of university governance. The committee held three public hearings during this inquiry and received a total of 36 submissions. The inquiry's report contained 12 recommendations covering both matters that could be dealt with through legislative amendment and a range of related issues that were more questions of policy and practice for individual governing bodies. The key issue emerging from the evidence presented to the inquiry was that universities need to tailor their governance arrangements to meet their specific needs.

The bill ensures increased flexibility for universities in determining their own governance arrangements, but this flexibility is not unfettered. There are inbuilt checks and balances that will operate in the arrangements that the bill sets up, and universities will remain, of course, accountable to both levels of government in a range of important ways. As already indicated, the bill implements a number of key recommendations of the 2009 inquiry of the Legislative Council. Other recommendations of that inquiry dealt with matters including induction and professional development of governing body members, the performance evaluation practices of governing bodies, risk management considerations, and the national Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Universities that was being developed from the former national governance protocols.

Those other recommendations involved issues that were at a more operational level for governing bodies and most of them have been incorporated into the voluntary code currently being conveyed to all Australian universities for implementation. The code was developed after national consultation on the implementation of the former national governance protocols. Universities Australia, representing vice-chancellors, and the University Chancellors' Council assisted in the development, and are now assisting in the implementation of the code. It was developed on behalf of the ministerial council by a representative working party and has been endorsed by all the relevant parties. The Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011 therefore forms an important part of a broad context of recent developments in university governance arrangements. It will make an important contribution to the future development of our universities. I am very happy to support the bill.

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [11.36 a.m.]: Overall I commend the general objectives of the Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011, which will provide universities with greater flexibility to determine the makeup of their governing bodies. As stated in the draft legislation, it will attempt to do so by allowing governing bodies of universities to progressively adopt standard governing body provisions allowing greater flexibility in their size and composition; enabling the governing bodies of universities to provide for the remuneration, where relevant, of their members by a resolution passed by at least two-thirds of the members of the governing body; and enabling meetings of governing bodies of universities to be called or held using any technology consented to by all members of the governing bodies.

These changes will have a fundamental impact on the organisation and governance of universities in New South Wales. As such, whilst I provide support to the legislation, I also echo the comments of my colleague, Ms Carmel Tebbutt, the member for Marrickville, who reserved the right of the Opposition to move amendments to this legislation in the Legislative Council. This is because of the short notice given by the Government on its intention to introduce and debate this bill. It is only proper that the concerns of Opposition members are aired only after the legislation has been given due consideration. Universities play an important role in both the education and training of many Australians and make a significant contribution to the economies of New South Wales and Australia. The Australian workplace has changed.

It has become increasingly professional and technical and university qualifications have become the norm not the exception that employers look for in those who make up their workforce. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 35.4 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds in New South Wales have a university qualification at a bachelor or higher level. Further, when mature age employees seek to re-skill or up-skill they turn to universities to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills. Economically, universities in New South Wales play a significant role in Australia's higher education industry. Our universities are some of the most sought-after educational institutions in the world, with families sending their children from all around the globe—predominantly from China and other Asian countries—to get the best education possible in New South Wales.

Factoring in accommodation, living, entertainment and travel expenses, these university students make a significant contribution to the economy of New South Wales. Last year the universities of New South Wales received \$1.2 billion in income from commercial sources alone. The influence and effect of universities on the economic and industrial framework of New South Wales is evident. This legislation will have a significant impact on these institutions as they seek to reform the makeup of their governing bodies and the manner in which they operate. The role of those bodies is important to the functioning and direction of universities. They are charged with ensuring that universities keep up with best practice policies and procedures; that the quality of education meets the expectation of industry; and that universities attract prominent academics, scientists and thinkers to stimulate innovation.

These governing bodies also define the intrinsic student experience. Governing bodies look after provisions that help in the education of university students and determine the shape of student culture by making social programs possible. They are also in charge of ensuring that university premises are a safe place to learn and they make scholarships available to support students who excel at university so that they can concentrate on their studies. I echo the concerns raised by my colleague the member for Marrickville about the reduced voice of staff and students on governing bodies as a result of the enactment of this legislation.

I note again that it seeks to provide universities with flexibility to determine the size and makeup of their governing bodies. Currently students and staff are afforded a voice on university governing bodies. In seeking to implement a more flexible process of determining the makeup of a university governing body there is a danger that a university may opt out of having student or staff representatives on that body. The loss of the perspective of staff and students on these governing bodies would have a detrimental effect on universities.

Mr BRYAN DOYLE (Campbelltown) [11.43 a.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011. I note that we have in the House a Doctor of Philosophy—Dr Geoff Lee, the member for Parramatta—which is one of the highest academic qualifications offered by any university. I am also pleased to see the Parliamentary Secretary for Education, another well-educated member, at the table. We are truly blessed to have such well educated people in this place. Universities are vital to our society and they have a huge impact on our community, including the community of Campbelltown, that opal of the south west. They provide leadership, conduct research and attract international students, including to Campbelltown.

University education has a lasting effect on the community. My father was the first member of his family to study at university—he sat the old Solicitors Admission Board exam—and his five children have seven university degrees between them. That demonstrates the capacity-building impact that universities have and the ability of education to further develop our great nation. I am proud to be a member of the alumnus of three universities. When I started studying at the University of Technology, Sydney it was known as the "New South Wales Institute of Technology". I am also privileged to be a member of the alumnus of the University of Wollongong and Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. So I fully understand the importance of universities to regional centres. I finished my last degree by correspondence.

The University of Western Sydney, which has a proud campus at Campbelltown, will benefit greatly from this legislation. Of particular benefit to the university will be the ability of governing bodies to use technology in the conduct of their meetings, which will enable them to manage their affairs more effectively. The University of Western Sydney at Campbelltown has a wonderful medical school which is training the future doctors and nurses of our great nation and which does cutting-edge medical research. That role has been enhanced by the recent the \$139 million upgrade of the Campbelltown Hospital, which one day will be a full teaching hospital and works in close collaboration with the local university. This bill will assist to ensure the better management of our universities and I am happy to support it.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [11.47 a.m.]: The University of Wollongong has proven itself over many years to be both diligent and exceptional in delivering its objective of providing high-quality education and fostering wider community involvement. I am concerned about the lack of notice given to the Opposition of the introduction of this bill. If we had had more notice we would have been able to examine it more thoroughly. It is essential that we maintain the current level of academic and student representation on university governing bodies. Under the guidance of Professor Gerard Sutton, the University of Wollongong has established itself as a leader in all aspects of development, research and innovation. Under the guidance of Professor Sutton, the Wollongong Innovation Campus has gone ahead in leaps and bounds and it is playing a major role in research, development and employment.

Having heard the contributions of government members, it is important that I put some facts on the record. The former Labor Government commenced this reform process with consultations in March 2010. The self-congratulatory claims made by members opposite are further examples of this Government's taking credit where it is not due. I draw the attention of the House to correspondence about the consultation process sent by the then Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Verity Firth, in which she referred to the report of the Legislative Council committee inquiry into the governance of New South Wales universities tabled on 1 June 2009. The Minister stated she was pleased to provide feedback on the Government's response to the report and related developments regarding governance issues. She also stated that she had written to all university chancellors acknowledging the report and noting the general view of the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee put to the committee that a one-size-fits-all approach to governance does not fit with the broader Commonwealth Government policy objective of greater diversification of the higher education sector.

It was in that context that the Government indicated it was open to considering proposals from university governing bodies that they believed would lead to improved capacity for effective governance. Accordingly, the then Labor Government was willing to consider amendments to university Acts and was supported by the governing bodies and the broader university community. At the same time, the former Labor Government was keen to ensure that overall consistency in governance and legislative requirement was retained across all New South Wales universities. For that reason, a set of draft governance principles was developed and forwarded to all university governing bodies as a backdrop to any changes that might be considered.

I place this on record because it is important to appreciate and accept that the current Government has taken up the mantle and moved forward with it and, in that sense, there is recognition of the changes required, but in putting together the whole story we need to acknowledge where it began, how it continued and where it might ultimately finish. It should also be noted that, whilst criticising the former Labor Government for previous

appointments, in August this year the Minister appointed Arthur Sinodinos to the council of the University of Newcastle. I raise that only to show what I believe to be a certain degree of double standards. For governing bodies to have flexibility in their size and makeup can and probably will be a good thing, but we must be cautious that university bodies should not opt out of student and academic representation.

I conclude by indicating my pride, and I know the pride of the Illawarra, in the University of Wollongong and its outstanding achievements—second to none in the country, let alone the State. We should respect and appreciate the huge impact the university has had on the entire Illawarra. It is a major contributor to business, education, health and every other aspect of our community. Whatever advances we make, we must tread lightly and gently so that we do not inhibit or damage in any way the great advances being made by the University of Wollongong and the Innovation Campus.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.53 a.m.], in reply: I thank every member of Parliament who has contributed to debate on the Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011. There are a number of them: Carmel Tebbutt, the member for Marrickville; Linda Burney, the member for Canterbury; Daryl Maguire, the member for Wagga Wagga; Jamie Parker, the member for Balmain; Geoff Lee, the member for Parramatta; Richard Torbay, the member for Northern Tablelands; Chris Holstein, the member for Gosford; Nick Lalich, the member for Cabramatta; Jai Rowell, the member for Wollondilly; Andrew Gee, the member for Orange; Clayton Barr, the member for Cessnock; Bruce Notley-Smith, the member for Coogee; Guy Zangari, the member for Fairfield; Bryan Doyle, the member for Campbelltown; and, of course, the final speaker Noreen Hay, the member for Wollongong. I thank those members for their valuable contributions to the debate.

The debate has been essential, recognising how important these changes are to the governance of public universities in New South Wales. The good spirit in which both sides of the House have approached this debate shows how important our universities are and how governance and changes to red tape—rolling it back—link with education and research outcomes in this State, and indeed the broader economic development of the State, including our important education export market. The long debate and many speeches have made reference to the important contributions that universities make to our State, and again I congratulate members on their contributions. I also note the agreement in principle from the Opposition and that it reserves the right to move amendments in the upper House.

This bill reduces government regulation of our 10 public universities. It allows universities to take control over some matters that only they are in the best position to manage so that they can focus on their primary functions of research, teaching and scholarship. More broadly, the bill forms part of this Government's commitment to reducing red tape and regulation, in this case allowing our world-class universities more freedom in managing their operations. I remind the member for Wollongong that the Coalition Government has acted. Former Ministers may well have written correspondence to the university sector in relation to governance issues, but there were delays and nothing happened.

Our Government has come, within six short months of taking office, to do something at the request of universities to give them the option of the governance model that they want—and that they want unanimously. The member for Cessnock referred to correspondence from the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee and identified two university members of that group who had not agreed to the opt-in model. They subsequently wrote to the Minister for Education and me and said that they had no objection—I underscore "no objection"—to signing up to the opt-in model. Indeed, they have subsequently confirmed their agreement, as all universities did unanimously at the same time, to the other changes we are making through the bill.

One area raised over the two days of debate on this bill is the possibility that university governing bodies may potentially be able to dilute the representation on those bodies of students and staff. Firstly, the 10 public universities unanimously agreed to the standard governing body provisions put forward in this bill. Their governing bodies include their general staff, academic staff and their students, in some cases both undergraduate and graduate students. Those stakeholders, those representatives on the current governing bodies of the universities of New South Wales, made the decision to make the representation to the Coalition Government that they were happy to sign up to this opt-in model.

The Government also believes that the dilution of staff and student representation is unlikely to occur under the provisions of this bill because there are strong safeguards—and I focus on the words "strong safeguards". The standard governing body provisions in the bill are available only if a university governing body opts into them and universities not wishing to change can still operate under their current governance provisions. They can opt in to change the size and composition of the governing bodies only if at least a

two-thirds majority of the members of the governing bodies vote in favour of that course of action. The requirement for that resolution must be made by at least two-thirds—a super majority, not a plain majority—which is going to protect against any category of member having undue influence over those board proceedings.

The governing body of a university also has to resolve by a two-thirds majority the number of representatives from each category, including students and staff, prescribed in the model that will then make up the governing body. Under these provisions the governing bodies are prevented from diluting the representative nature of their governing bodies. The bill ensures that boards will continue to include academic and non-academic staff members, elected student members and graduate members. In addition, the number of members in any one category of members must not at any time constitute a majority of the total number of members.

The Government recognises that universities engage in commercial activities to support their financial viability and it is important that they have in place the governance structures and a membership that can provide them with corporate financial legal expertise through the appointment of certain members through other categories of membership external to the council. But this bill recognises also that commercial activities are ancillary to the main educational purpose of universities. This is why the legislation contains safeguards to ensure that all categories of the current governing body membership are maintained, that their valued contributions are acknowledged—I have seen these firsthand at the University of New South Wales—and that staff and student representation is maintained on the governing bodies.

Universities can change the size of their governing bodies only if they resolve by a super majority and they also agree by a super majority on the number of members represented in each category. This bill also assists the position of student members on governing bodies by clarifying that they can be eligible to serve and can continue to serve when they are working part time. This clarification was specifically requested by the university governing bodies because some students had had to resign their membership of the governing body when they took on part-time work as tutors or researchers on campus.

In summary, the Government and I are confident that we have struck the right balance between allowing more flexibility for university governance arrangements and ensuring that the governing boards are representative and can be effective. The changes made by this bill will ensure that universities can opt in to more flexible arrangements regarding their size and composition. These changes have been requested by the universities for a long time. They were requests that the former Labor Government might have referred to in correspondence but did not act upon. Now universities have agreed unanimously on the model for their governance and have expressed their pleasure that the Government has taken these issues on board and is delivering what they want.

The size of each governing body will be a minimum of 11 members and a maximum of 22. The governing body of a university can remain at its current level and the majority must be external. The Minister for Education will no longer be able to directly appoint members of Parliament to governing bodies. However, the Minister will retain discretion over ministerial appointments, in consultation with university governing bodies—and that is what happens. The number of ministerial appointments can range from two to six members. Each governing body must include one or more members from the categories of: academic staff; non-academic staff; students of the university, both under-graduate and post-graduate where that is appropriate in each university; and graduates of the university. However, the actual numbers in the categories of membership, including ministerial appointments, governing body appointments, staff, students and graduates, must be determined by the governing bodies by a super majority.

This bill makes three common amendments to the university Acts that will give universities power over matters that should be within their control. First, there is the capacity to remunerate appropriately, if the members of the governing body so decide; secondly, the governing body will be able to dismiss the chancellor and deputy chancellor, again by super majority, if the majority of the governing body decides that it is in the best interests of the university; and, finally, the governing body will have the capacity to conduct meetings by electronic media, which is a feature of modern corporate governance. The universities requested these changes unanimously. We have listened to the universities, considered their requests and, unlike the former Labor Government, we have acted swiftly on them.

I thank members for the constructive and cooperative manner in which they have approached the debate on this important bill. I thank the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee, the chancellors and all members of the governing bodies for working in such a cooperative spirit on these much-needed and agreed

reforms, and for providing valuable feedback as the Government has drafted the bill. Their continued feedback and support will be critical as the provisions in this bill are implemented, given that they are an opt-in model in schedule 1. I also thank the Minister's office and the Department of Education and Communities and Parliamentary Counsel for their timely assistance in getting these important reforms before the Parliament. This bill reduces red tape in the university sector and ensures that New South Wales universities have the flexibility to continue improving the world-class education and research they provide to the New South Wales community. I commend the bill to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 12 October 2011.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [12.06 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011. I place on the record the Opposition's concerns about the speed at which this bill is being moved through this place. It is becoming a habit of this Government to circumvent long-held rules and conventions.

Mr Andrew Gee: Rules that you flouted for 16 years.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: You were not even here so you would not know. Those rules and conventions relate to the time that bills are to sit on the table before being debated. It has long been the rule in this place that bills sit on the table for five full days before being debated. The reason for this is that it gives all members, whether they be from the Government, the Opposition or the crossbench, the opportunity to scrutinise the bill properly and to consider their position. Once again, the Government has robbed members of this right and the end result is the diminishment of this Parliament's historic and traditional role of scrutinising legislation and the proposals it advances and holding the Executive to account. Previous governments have suspended standing orders to deal with urgent matters but this was done sparingly and only in those situations where circumstances dictated urgency.

An example is the Constitution amendment bill, which was passed by the House last year. That bill arose after local advice was received casting doubt on public appointments made over a number of years by the Lieutenant-Governor. Legislation was needed urgently to correct a minor anomaly and to clarify that those appointments were valid. Urgency in that case was legitimate; in this case it is not—and the Government knows it. The Government has not bothered advancing an argument as to why this legislation needs to be passed today. The end result is that this Parliament is unable to do its job properly. The bill proposes major changes to the working conditions of council employees, council structures and rules, and the manner in which communities elect councils. These are not minor issues. It is outrageous that the Government has sought to deal with this legislation in such an unfair manner. While I am advised that staff from Minister Page's office have been good enough to give the Opposition's shadow Minister a briefing on the bill—and we thank those staff members for that—we have not been given enough time to scrutinise the bill independently.

Turning to the bill, I will place on the record some of the Opposition's concerns. The Opposition reserves the right to move amendments to the bill in the Legislative Council. For the time being I will simply place on the record our concerns. First, we have serious reservations about the proposal to corporatise councils. This move opens the door to local government employees being moved into the Federal industrial relations system yet there has been no consultation with workers or their representatives. No advice has been provided as

to what this change could potentially mean for the pay and conditions of these workers. Given this Government's abysmal track record on industrial relations, one cannot help but be suspicious of its motives in putting forward this council corporatisation proposal.

Secondly, we are concerned about the proposal in the bill to reduce protections for council workers affected by council mergers and amalgamations. The present employment protection provisions in the Local Government Act prohibit councils from changing or appropriately adjusting their staff structures for a period of three years when staff transfers occur as a result of an amalgamation or a boundary alteration. The bill proposes a reduction in that period from three years to one year. Such a change carries with it a massive potential to affect the livelihoods of up to 55,000 men and women who work for councils. But again: no warning, no consultation, no information. Thirdly, we are concerned about the potential effect of the proposal to allow councillors to self-regulate when it comes to dealing with conflicts of interest in the making of local environmental plans [LEPs].

The Act currently requires a councillor or a member of a council committee, such as a staff member, to declare orally a pecuniary interest arising in a matter before a meeting of the council or committee and not to be present at the meeting at any time when the matter is being considered, discussed or voted on. To deal with potential problems surrounding quorums, there is a process under which councillors or committee members may apply to the Minister for an exemption. This bill will have the effect of removing this protection—a protection that helps to ensure that decisions affecting local communities are not made in circumstances where a decision-maker is potentially able to advance a private interest. At the very least, the bill could create a situation where the appearance of fair decision-making is undermined. In doing so, it has the potential to undermine community confidence in the process. These are just some of our concerns.

It is important to recognise that this bill makes other major changes, such as changing the electoral system for citizens in 10 council areas—most of them in rural and regional areas. Indeed, one of the 10 councils is Ku-ring-gai Council. One wonders whether the Premier has had the time to scrutinise the bill and realise that major changes are afoot for electors in his own backyard. The bill makes other major changes, which once again have not yet had the benefit of proper scrutiny by members. The manner in which the Government has dealt with this bill is an indictment on the way it is doing business in this place. I suggest to Government members that they seriously rethink their approach to this Parliament and cease treating it with such disdain.

Mr CHRIS PATTERSON (Camden) [12.12 p.m.]: I support the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011. Having 12 years experience in local government, I, too, concur that these amendments will improve local government's ability to deliver a fairer and higher level of services to the communities they serve. The multiple amendments proposed are as follows. First, there are changes to council staff employment protections. The bill proposes to address concerns raised by councils that existing employment protections could act as a disincentive for councils to engage in structural reform through voluntary amalgamations and other shared service arrangements by making changes to council's staff structures where transfers occur as a result of an amalgamation or boundary alteration by reducing the period of operation of the employment protection provisions from three years to one year.

The second amendment redefines councils as bodies corporate. The bill proposes to redefine councils as bodies corporate to address concerns from the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales that body politic status negatively impacts on council's ability to obtain Federal funding for trainees and excludes councils from tendering for federally funded construction work. I must make the point that in light of the amendments to the Federal industrial legislation that expressly excluded local government from its coverage, under this bill the legal status of councils can now be restored to bodies corporate, regardless of whether councils belong to the State or the Federal industrial relations system.

The third amendment relates to the council caretaker period. Prior to the last two local government elections the division of local government advised councils that it expected them to assume a caretaker role during election periods. The expectation was that councils would then refrain from making major policy decisions, such as determining controversial or significant development applications, making new or potentially controversial permanent appointments of general managers, or entering into major contracts or undertakings. It is proposed that these matters now be prescribed in a new regulation that would stop existing councils from making the major policy decisions I have just mentioned three weeks prior to a general election that would have had the ability to bind an incoming council with bad decisions and bad policy.

The next amendment relates to disclosure of non-pecuniary conflicts of interest in relation to the exemption for standardised local environmental plans. A hallmark of this Government is openness and

transparent governance, and this amendment clarifies that the Act does not exempt a councillor from disclosing their non-pecuniary interests in relation to area-wide standardised local environmental plans. This amendment will allow councillors to vote on the adoption of a local environmental plan even when such a plan alters the permissible use of the land. However, to be transparent and accountable the councillor must disclose an interest in the local environmental plan where one exists. If a councillor does not disclose an interest the usual penalties for a failure to disclose such an interest still apply.

The next amendment relates to the suspension of a councillor for misbehaviour not creating a vacancy in civic office. The civic office of a councillor who has been suspended by the Local Government Pecuniary Interest and Disciplinary Tribunal for misbehaviour does not become vacant despite the councillor being absent from three consecutive ordinary meetings of the council. That is necessary as the tribunal will now be able to suspend a councillor for six months, not the usual two months. The final amendment relates to community land—21- to 30-year leases and licences. At the Minister's discretion, councils can apply to grant extended leases over community land for a period of 21 to 30 years to allow for a greater period of amortisation for capital expenditure designed to encourage councils to maximise their capital expenditure on community land.

The final amendment provides for changes to systems for counting votes in local government elections. As only 10 councils will be affected by the amendment, I will not labour the point. However, I simply say that the proportional representation system is the fairest system for use in multi-vacancy electorates. These amendments in the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011 aim to ensure that the Act remains practical, transparent and accountable, and does what it is intended to do—better serve the councils of New South Wales, and hence the people of New South Wales. I commend the Minister for Local Government for his thought and for introducing this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour) [12.17 p.m.]: In my contribution to debate on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011 I express my concerns about an arrogant Government that is dizzy with power. The Government has proven that it is all too willing to take this place and the other House for granted. It has set a shameful precedent with its reckless and arrogant behaviour in passing its industrial relations legislation. Bills such as this should be considered in great detail. There should be wide-reaching community consultation with individuals and stakeholder groups. Once again, the Government has failed to do this and has broken its election promise to the people about honest and accountable government.

The Government has introduced a series of bills regarding councils and county councils, including the corporatisation of these entities and the removal of the current status of body politic introduced by the previous Labor Government, designed to protect local government and county council workers from inferior conditions in the Federal modern award and to provide certainty to the industry as to which industrial system was applicable, not to mention certainty for local government across New South Wales. I know the truth hurts, but members opposite may want to listen to this.

Mr Paul Toole: We're all dizzy.

Ms ANNA WATSON: I know Government members are dizzy with power—we see it on a daily basis.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! If Government members stopped interjecting the process would be less painful.

Ms ANNA WATSON: I agree. The Government's proposed bill seeks to reduce the employment protections legislated by the previous Government after a hard-fought campaign to protect councils, council employees and communities, particularly smaller regional and rural communities, from job losses as a result of amalgamations and/or boundary changes. These protections guaranteed no forced redundancies for three years from proclamation of a new entity, resulting from amalgamation and/or boundary changes. Recently the Minister for Local Government organised a forum called the Destination 2036 workshop.

This workshop was the brainchild of a reference group made up of people from the Department of Local Government and local government employer associations, but which has no direct representation from local government employees, except for the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales. The Minister claims that the 2036 forum was a success and that an agreement to reshape the structure of governance, financing arrangements and the functions and capacity of the local government sector was unanimously endorsed by the leaders of all 152 local councils in the State. Of those who participated in the forum, I find it interesting that there was no United Services Union, Local Government Engineers' Association or Development and Environmental Professionals' Association representation or inclusion—what a shock!

Mr Donald Page: They will be consulted after the outcome of the report.

Ms ANNA WATSON: I will get back to you, Minister. The exclusion from the Destination 2036 Implementation Steering Committee of the three industry unions that represent the overwhelming majority of workers who will be most affected by this strategy and who will be expected to implement it—if they are lucky enough to keep their jobs, which I doubt—undermines the integrity of this whole process. Representation of actual local government employees is therefore less than 1 per cent of the total number of local government employees. The United Services Union represents around 30,000 members in a total workforce of 50,000 employees. This equals approximately 60 per cent of all local government employees. These employees' voices and concerns need to be included in the 2036 process. Their voice—and those of workers in my community and my electorate of Shellharbour—needs to be heard by the Government and taken into consideration.

This workshop was the first step in the O'Farrell Government's Destination 2036 agenda for local government. The workshop has generated a report and it is from this document that many clues about what Mr O'Farrell and his cronies have in store for local government can be found. I will be encouraging all those in my community to read the document thoroughly and carefully. Job losses and the downgrading or outright loss of services are on this Government's radar. In short, this report tells me that employees in local government can be concerned about the following. The first is reductions in workers' rights and conditions of employment via cheaper labour. This means that private contractors will now be able to compete on the wages they pay other than the services they provide—which is a concept that is in the DNA of a conservative government.

The second concern is the removal of employment protections, award rights and industrial provisions whilst at the same time turning general managers into chief executive officers and some councils into board members of corporations. Thirdly, the report anticipates giving greatly increased remuneration to chief executive officers and even contracts to such officers of up to 10 years in duration—again, that is typical of conservative governments. Fourthly, there is a worrying focus in the report on increasing flexibility but the ability to negotiate flexible working arrangements already exists in the Local Government (State) Award.

Mr Donald Page: Point of order: I am reluctant to take this point of order, but the member is not addressing her remarks to the bill. She is talking about a report that came out of the Destination 2036 forum held in Dubbo that is not related to this bill. I ask you to bring the member back to the leave of the bill.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The member for Shellharbour will return to the leave of the bill.

Ms ANNA WATSON: I am aiming to get there by highlighting concerns that have been raised. Fifthly, the creation of corporations will lead to two different levels of local government employees: one group well covered by the Local Government (State) Award and those employed by corporations. They will be left to flounder under the Fair Work Act. Sixthly, basically there is no existing worker willing to transfer to a Federal award system, and this will make it very difficult to retain and attract new staff. Seventhly, nowhere in the report is there even a suggestion to retain or increase staffing levels. There is no mention of maintaining core numbers. This is going to have a huge effect on rural communities. I think members of The Nationals should be very concerned about this piece of legislation. Watch your seats, boys.

Introducing local government legislation regarding the status of councils' corporatisation and reducing employment protections without any consultation with those responsible for representing the current workforce of 50,000 people and pre-empting the submissions sought by the Government and the Department of Local Government from the Destinations 2036 strategy, which is due by 4 November 2011, undermine the integrity and the strategy of this Government. Why call for submissions if the Government intends to seek legislative change without waiting for the submissions to be received, acknowledged and discussed?

I remind those who are listening to, or participating in, this debate today that the United Services Union had the support of the Coalition in its previous campaigns to oppose forced amalgamations and boundary changes, and to secure employment protections—particularly for those in small regional communities. In opposition the Coalition opposed the loss of road funding by the adoption of compulsory competitive tendering and campaigned to oppose energy privatisation. But its support and commitments were based more on political pointscoring rather than dedication to the issues. I oppose the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011, and I condemn the O'Farrell-Stoner Government for having deceived the people of New South Wales by acting in this treacherous way.

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.25 p.m.]: I speak in support of the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011. I have been involved with local government for more than 17 years and this issue has certainly raised a lot of concern amongst councils right across New South Wales. In my time I have been a councillor, a deputy mayor and a mayor, and I know that the Minister's announcement is very welcome. The bill fulfils the Government's ongoing commitment to improve efficiency and effectiveness in local government. The Government and the local government sector both agree that there is a need to reshape the structure, governance, financing arrangements, functions and capacity of the local government sector. Recently this agreement was endorsed unanimously at the historic Destination 2036 conference held in Dubbo. I note that the member for Cabramatta is in the Chamber. As a mayor, he was in attendance and I am sure that he will speak in favour of the announcement as well.

The member for Shellharbour claimed that the unions were not represented. Representatives of the United Services Union and others attended the 2036 conference as observers, so they were not excluded. They were invited to come along, to take part in the consultation process and to hear about the reforms that are occurring. The proposals in the bill allow councils to create favourable conditions for them to engage in structural reform and to achieve a strong and sustainable local government sector now and into the future. Today I will speak particularly in relation to councils and their legal status as bodies corporate. The proposal to change the legal status of councils from a body politic of the State to a body corporate was requested by the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales as a part of their New South Wales election 2011 priorities. Once again, this Government has listened and is delivering.

In support of that request, the Local Government and Shires Associations made representations that the change in the legal status of councils to a body politic in 2008 had an adverse impact on a number of council activities. For example, councils experienced difficulty in obtaining Federal funding for trainees and apprentices because the funding was available only to corporations and not individuals. Also, according to the Local Government and Shires Associations, councils complained that they were excluded from tendering for construction work on Australian government funded projects. This proposal will remove any impediments arising from their current status and enhance councils' ability to work together to improve service delivery through resource sharing and other innovative arrangements.

Members may recall that the 2008 amendments to the Local Government Act were necessary to address the uncertainty around the jurisdictional coverage of local government. The question was whether local councils met the definition of a constitutional corporation within the meaning of section 51 of the Australian Constitution and were therefore covered by the Commonwealth industrial relations jurisdiction. That definition is based on the sources of income for each individual council and whether that income is the result of trading activity, or other forms of revenue. Therefore the issue for local councils and their employees was whether they were in the Commonwealth or New South Wales industrial relations systems.

The situation was resolved by conclusively removing councils from the Commonwealth's industrial coverage by changing the status of councils to a body politic of the State. Members will be aware that in 2009 the Federal Government made significant changes to its industrial relations laws. One of the outcomes was that local government in New South Wales was expressly excluded from coverage by Commonwealth industrial laws. The Local Government and Shires Associations argue that in the light of the express exclusion of local government from the Commonwealth industrial relations system by Commonwealth legislation, the legal status of councils now can be restored to body corporate without impacting upon whether councils belong to the State or Federal industrial relations system. The proposal responds to the Local Government and Shires Associations' request by providing that councils will be categorised as bodies corporate. Yesterday I received a copy of a memorandum from the Local Government and Shires Associations addressed to all local government general managers and human resource managers in New South Wales, which states:

Councils are advised that on 12 October 2011 the Hon. Donald Page, NSW Minister for Local Government, gave notice of a motion to introduce the *Local Government Amendment Bill 2011* (the bill).

The Bill seeks to amend various provisions of the *Local Government Act* ...

The memorandum goes on to state:

As you may be aware, the removal of the "body corporate" status created a variety of practical and legal problems for councils.

The Associations understand that there has been speculation that the Bill, if passed, will result in councils and county councils being transferred to the federal industrial relations systems. Such speculation is incorrect.

I repeat: "Such speculation is incorrect." That is the advice from the Local Government and Shires Associations. I thank the House for the opportunity to participate in debate on this legislation. I congratulate the Minister for all his hard work with local councils. It is important to have a Minister for Local Government who is listening and responding to the needs of local councils throughout New South Wales.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [12.31 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to participate in debate on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011. Local government is large and complex. Any overreaching changes to the governance or operations of local government should be carefully considered. As many members of this House know, I have a background in local government: I presently serve as a councillor on the Bankstown City Council. Previously I was the Mayor of Bankstown. I note that the Bankstown deputy mayor and a director of the council attended the Destination 2036 conference at Dubbo in August. It is their understanding that submissions in response to the matters discussed at the conference were not due until 4 November. Interestingly enough, the council intends to discuss the formulation of submissions at a meeting next week. Sadly, that will probably be a waste of time. That leads me to ask why the Minister would request submissions and then rush the related legislation through Parliament more than three weeks before the submissions are due to be submitted.

Not once during the Minister's lengthy agreement in principle speech did he mention urgency, yet the Minister must consider the bill to be urgent because the Government plans to push this bill through all stages in probably the next 30 minutes. That is disturbing. It seems to me to indicate a pattern of behaviour by this Government. Either this House is presented with too little legislation and we find ourselves listening to Government members drone on about libraries, or we are given too little time to consider major legislation and find that important reforms are being pushed through this House at breakneck pace. Both behaviours display an absolute disdain for the functions of this House. The Government may have a majority in this place, but that does not give it the right to treat this House with contempt.

I will briefly address issues that arise from the introduction of this legislation. The bill proposes a reduction in employment protections—there is no doubt about that—presently enjoyed by local government workers. We know that the O'Farrell Government is illiterate when it comes to industrial relations, but we would expect a little understanding that any changes to industrial relations arrangements should be given time to be considered in detail. As local councils are bodies politic of the State, at present New South Wales local government employees are covered by the New South Wales Industrial Relations Act. My concern, which I am sure is shared by others, is that councils becoming bodies corporate creates the possibility of local government being put under the Federal industrial system, and as such their industrial instrument may be amended.

Local government has long been controlled by the State Government. Therefore it makes no sense for local government employees to be covered by a Federal instrument. It would be the equivalent of the New South Wales Police Force or New South Wales nurses being covered by a Federal instrument. At present local government workers are exempt from the draconian public sector legislation implemented by the O'Farrell Government. However, I note that the O'Farrell Government had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to amend its previously all-encompassing legislation. That legislation opened the door to reducing pay and working conditions of local government workers. Of course Labor expects nothing less. I reiterate my concern that this legislation is being rushed through.

The bill also proposes to make changes to the voting system that applies to the election of councils. I will not comment on the merits of that change but simply point out that regardless of whether that is or is not a good idea, it represents a significant change for almost a dozen councils across the State. Of course it will require considerable consideration by those particular councils and their electors. That is further evidence that this bill is being pushed through this House far too quickly. Because of the very nature of our democracy, changes to industrial relations arrangements at any level should never be undertaken lightly. This bill should remain on the table of the House so that it can be considered in great detail. Councils also should be given the opportunity to provide submissions and have their say on the content of this bill. While the Opposition does not oppose the bill in this place, I note that we have grave concerns about the content of the bill and will seek to make amendments in the other place.

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [12.36 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I participate in debate on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011. This bill is another example of this new energetic Government passing the legislation that is required to bring New South Wales back on track. The contrast between the performance of the Opposition and the performance of the Government could not be more stark. A few weeks ago in this House

I referred to the member for Cessnock as steaming in off the long run when he was addressing the House. To continue the cricketering parlance, the Opposition is chucking pies today. They have been chucking them all morning, and I imagine the member for Cabramatta will be sending a few more pies down shortly.

The bill provides key reforms in a number of areas including returning body corporate status to councils. It is this proposal to which my remarks will be addressed. Unfortunately this issue has been the subject of another scare campaign by the Leader of the Opposition and his union controllers. The proposal was requested by that bastion of conservative politics, the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales as part of their "New South Wales Election Priorities 2011" document. The background to this bill is that the Local Government Act was amended in 2008 by the Local Government Amendment (Legal Status) Act. The effect of that legislation was that the legal status of general purpose and county councils changed from a body corporate to a body politic of the State. That was carried out in response to the big union scare campaign over WorkChoices. The union wanted to make sure that local government employees were not caught by it.

In December 2009 the then New South Wales Minister for Industrial Relations, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, declared that all councils were non-national system employers. That was agreed to by the then Federal Minister for Workplace Relations, Julia Gillard. Therefore councils are subject to the State-based system. Now the Opposition is attempting to whip up a scare campaign about workers being switched to the Federal system. We have rounded up the usual suspects. They are out in force. The United Services Union is whipping up a scare campaign. Of course the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister for Industrial Relations also are whipping up a scare campaign. They are trying to scare workers when really that is totally unjustified, unwarranted and, quite frankly, totally irresponsible. But the funny part, as very ably pointed out by the member for Bathurst, is that the Local Government and Shires Associations want these changes and support this amending legislation. At the bottom of the memo to which the member for Bathurst referred earlier another salient quote appears. It states:

The Association understands that the bill will have no effect on the order/endorsement and that a restoring of NSW council status to a body corporate will have no effect on the industrial relations jurisdictions that councils belong to and will not mean a transfer to the Federal industrial relations system.

Mr Paul Toole: Will you read that again?

Mr ANDREW GEE: The member for Bathurst wants me to read it again, "...will not mean a transfer to the Federal industrial relations system". Those opposite are engaging in a typical scaremongering campaign, chucking pies to the detriment of the people of New South Wales. Things are a little foggy for members of the Opposition at the moment but it will be okay. As the member for Bathurst pointed out, maybe they have reason to be concerned about their Federal colleagues because it is quite clear that the Federal Government is no longer in control over what happens in Canberra.

Mr Paul Toole: They're out of control.

Mr ANDREW GEE: They are out of control. They are controlled by The Greens and a couple of dingbat Independents. I am talking about the Federal Independents. I share the concern of the Leader of the Opposition about the inherent instability of the Federal Government. It introduced the carbon tax whilst promising during the election campaign that it would not do so. We know that the Leader of the Opposition has had a lot of sleepless nights over the carbon tax. It is fair to say that the Gillard Government is likely to do anything with Federal industrial relations, particularly when it has had input by that crazy, mixed-up kid, the member for Lyne. We all know that for the member for Lyne it is all about outcomes, outcomes, outcomes. Recently I was in Port Macquarie and I think it's fair to say that at the next Federal election a certain outcome will come to the member for Lyne. It will be very ugly for him, but for the rest of us there will be a certain beauty in that ugliness. We are all looking forward to the next Federal election.

Mr Nick Lalich: Point of order: We have been asked to limit our speeches to five minutes and the member for Orange has exceeded that.

Mr ANDREW GEE: I have had enough of dodging the pies that have been chucked by the other side. I commend this bill to the House. I congratulate this fine Minister for Local Government on this important reforming piece of legislation.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [12.46 p.m.]: The Local Government Amendment Bill 2011 makes a number of changes to the provisions of the Local Government Act 1993 and to a number of subsequent

amendments, notably from 2004 in respect of employment protections and 2008 in respect of the definition of a council's legal structure. The bill incorporates changes as to how a council can manage community land. The provisions would allow, with the concurrence of the Minister, a council to enter into a lease or licence over a parcel of community land for a period up to 30 years. This extends the period from a maximum of 21 years and in my opinion is very sensible.

I note in his agreement in principle speech, the Minister acknowledged my interest in this matter, and I thank him and his staff for assisting by incorporating these provisions into this bill, which will make redundant a private member's bill, the Local Government Amendment (Community Land) Bill 2011 standing in my name. I will therefore seek to withdraw that bill following the passage of this bill. My consideration of this matter and the preparation of a private member's bill included discussion with then Minister Barbara Perry and her staff under the former Government. A starting point for any discussion on the matter would be to examine the basis for a 21-year limitation incorporated in the 1993 Act. No-one has been able to present any basis for the use of that period, but it would appear that in drafting the legislation and in the absence of any previous period as a guide or reference that 21 years was chosen. While 21 years is culturally significant for many things, it is not necessarily a useful period for these purposes.

Community land is rightly protected by special provisions. The lands that are categorised as such are typically parks, playgrounds, bushland and drainage reserves, land preserved to meet the recreational, cultural, health, social, welfare and similar needs of the community or for the general enjoyment of the public. They are effectively held in trust for the community's current and future needs. This does not mean that there are not examples of some other use being appropriate for a period of time. Many parcels of community land have been leased or licensed by councils allowing for an acceptable time-limited use while returning a financial dividend to the council. The occupation of community land by clubs such as bowling clubs or not-for-profit community-based organisations is not uncommon. Many of these uses predate the creation of the categorisation system in 1993.

Lake Macquarie City Council has a number of examples where this is the case but one case exemplifies the need for a more realistic period of tenure for a lessee. The Valentine Bowling Club has occupied publicly owned land on the foreshore of Lake Macquarie since at least 1975. The club has sought to have the land reclassified to operational land to facilitate a purchase—a proposal widely rejected by the community and the council. I understand that the current position of the club is that it would not wish to purchase the land but rather would prefer to have a lease of up to 50 years. This period is unavailable under the previous provisions of the Act and will not be available from this amendment.

While I understand the desire of the club for long-term tenure, I do not accept that the period should, or needs to be, extended beyond what would be a typical term for a commercial loan and the amortisation of that loan. Such an outcome can be delivered only by re-categorising land to operational land, a situation which, regardless of the intentions of the current board or the current council, would allow for a future sale without the tests of community acceptance and need as are guaranteed under the categorisation of community land. This amendment allows for a lease or licence corresponding to a viable period for commercial investment.

By allowing for an extension of the period from 21 to 30 years, with the consent of the Minister, a lessee's commerciality is enhanced while the public interest is protected. I believe that this amendment delivers on undertakings that were given by me and the member for Swansea, Mr Garry Edwards in his dual role of State member and councillor, to pursue changes to the Act that allows options for a fairer and more realistic period of lease to clubs or not-for-profit organisations. I thank Hunter Councils, Wyong Shire Council and the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales for their support.

New section 220 of schedule 1 [5] to the bill deals with how councils are described or recognised in law and seeks to redefine councils as bodies corporate. This amendment has been sought by the Local Government and Shires Associations and to my knowledge is fully supported by councils across New South Wales. The change to the Act in 2008 that defined councils as bodies politic was always contentious and poorly understood. The intention of using this mechanism to remove council employees from the provision of the then WorkChoices legislation was understood, though whether that was the best method was and is debatable. Regardless, changes at both Commonwealth and State levels now ensure that council employees are considered under State industrial relations systems.

Councils have been concerned that a body politic is hindered in its dealings with the Commonwealth in a number of areas, including their ability to seek funding for a number of purposes, and in their ability to tender

for construction work on federally funded projects. The reality is that a body politic in this sense was a construct for an industrial relations purpose for which it is no longer necessary, and which impacts unduly on council relationships in a way in which the well-known form of body corporate does not. Reinstating councils as bodies corporate is sensible and strongly supported across the sector.

I recognise that the changes in relation to employment protection is also contentious and is being hotly contested by members of the Opposition and by other parties, including unions associated with local government, the intention of which I support. The community and modern practice would say that three years is an extraordinary period of time to provide protection when councils may need to amalgamate. It is an undue hindrance, but not undue in terms of the type of expectation that we have seen under the previous Government that fettered local government for its own purposes through its 16 years of government in New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.50 p.m.]: I refer to the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011. I was first elected to Port Stephens Shire Council, as it then was, in 1997 and went on to serve on the council for nearly 17 years. I was fortunate enough to serve for two years as deputy shire president and 3½ years as mayor. During those 17 years there were nine local government Ministers. I remember when Ernie—the fastest milko in the west—or more formally known as Kerry Hickey was Minister. At that time I thought "We have to be able to improve on him", so I ran for State Parliament. Although it took four years longer than I thought it would, after 16 years in the wilderness we finally have a Minister who is worthy of the title, a Minister who relates to local government and carries the respect of councils throughout New South Wales.

I can think of no more obvious demonstration of this partnership between the Government and the 152 New South Wales councils than when the Minister for Local Government, Mr Don Page, recently held a press conference in Parliament House with the President of the Local Government Association, Keith Rhoades, and President of the Shires Association, Ray Donald: their mutual respect and trust was genuine. I cannot remember any of the previous six Labor Ministers having anything in common with New South Wales councils, which is a huge difference to the current relationship. I congratulate the Minister on introducing this bill. Like the other legislation that passed through this place recently, this will also be a huge benefit to councils, their elected councillors and councils' shareholders—the ratepayers.

Unlike the Labor Government, this Government will not force amalgamations. However, should councils decide to amalgamate or adjust boundaries, it will reduce the period of operation of the employment protection provisions from three years to one year. This will remove the disincentive for councils to engage in structural reform through voluntary amalgamations and other shared service arrangements. This bill reflects the Government's commitment to providing an effective legislative framework for the administration of local government in New South Wales and to improving the effectiveness of local government generally. In 2004, the Local Government Act 1993 was amended to insert a new employment protection regime—found in Part 6, Chapter 11—that effectively precluded councils from restructuring their workforce for three years.

Councils that underwent amalgamations for the purpose of improving their efficiencies and providing better services to their ratepayers expressed concerns that this regime stalled their ability to benefit from structural reform because they were unable to adjust their organisational structure and to rationalise their workforce soon enough. This legislation will allow councils to adjust their staff structures after one year, rather than three years, following amalgamations or boundary adjustments. This in turn will provide incentives for councils to engage in local government structural reform through increased shared arrangements and other innovative service delivery models. The legislation will also assist councils in complying with the requirements of the integrated planning and reporting framework, which requires them to determine their organisational structure in accordance with their workforce management plan.

All councils should do the best they can for their ratepayers and I encourage all councils in New South Wales to look dispassionately at their boundaries. Many were defined by geographical barriers that were in place at the time, and I encourage tweaking boundaries that are no longer optimal. For example, the Port Stephens-Great Lakes boundary is along the high water mark of the body of water known as Port Stephens and was determined in an age when the port was a geographical impediment to land transport. That impediment no longer exists, so perhaps both councils should look at a boundary adjustment that puts the whole Myall Lakes catchment and the port in the same local government area.

At the request of the Local Government and Shires Associations, this bill will reinstate councils as bodies corporate and will address their concerns that body politic status negatively impacts on councils'

activities, including obtaining Federal funding for trainees and being excluded from tendering for construction work on Federal Government funded projects. The bill also contains caretaker provisions designed to regulate councils' activities before ordinary elections and it will prevent a council from making major or controversial decisions during an election period that would bind an incoming council. This bill will make the voting system in a council contested election optional preferential where only one councillor is to be elected and proportional representation where two or more councillors are to be elected, which will give minority groups a better chance of being fairly represented. This is a great bill that will be of benefit to our 152 councils, which until March this year were bashed to death by 16 years of hard labour. I once again congratulate the Minister and commend the bill to the House.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [12.54 p.m.]: Once again we see this O'Farrell Government suspending standing orders and defying convention to ram legislation through this House. As we all know, there is a good reason that bills usually sit on the table for five full working days before being debated. Members of Parliament should have the opportunity to consider legislation thoroughly and to consult with their communities and any relevant stakeholders so they can form a position on the bill in question. Time and again under this Government legislation is being rammed down our throats without appropriate time for consultation. One must question what this Government has to hide. By dealing with legislation in this fashion, the Government is effectively circumventing the raising of any concerns by stakeholder groups.

I attended the historic Destination 2036 conference in Dubbo earlier this year in my capacity as Mayor of Fairfield City Council. It was agreed at that conference that reform was needed. That is why a steering committee was set up and that is why the Destination 2036 Outcomes Report is being reviewed in preparation of the first draft of the action plan. That is also why the action plan will be released for consultation in November of this year. By the end of January, it is anticipated that the draft action plan will be presented to the Minister. The Destination 2036 conference did not give the Minister a mandate to shove this legislation down the Parliament's throat. All those strategies were planned so that careful considered advice and plans prepared after appropriate consultation could be presented to the Government. Local government is treating the Minister with the proper respect that is required when giving advice. That same respect is not being shown by the Government to this Parliament.

The O'Farrell Government has already amassed a poor record when it comes to industrial relations. In contrast, the New South Wales Labor Opposition is committed to protecting the rights of all workers. These legislative changes, such as corporatising councils, raise some concerns. If these amendments are carried, local government employees will be moved to the Federal industrial relations system. There has been no consultation with workers or their representatives about this move. Once again, the Premier and his Government are showing a complete lack of respect for workers and their rights.

I also raise concerns about the reduction of protections for council workers affected by council mergers. While cost-saving measures are a necessary fact of life for councils, appropriate employment protection provisions must always be upheld. Provisions in the Local Government Act prohibit councils from changing or appropriately adjusting their staff structures for three years when staff transfers occur as a result of an amalgamation or boundary alteration. This bill proposes to reduce that period from three years to one year. That could have enormous ramifications for the livelihoods of up to 55,000 hardworking men and women who clock in at councils throughout New South Wales. Consultation is needed and more information is needed.

Concerns have also been raised about the potential for self-regulation when dealing with conflict of interests in the making of local environment plans. The Act provides that if a councillor or a member of a council committee, such as a staff member, has a pecuniary interest in a matter before the committee or council, he or she must declare it orally beforehand. Such a person must not be present at any such meeting when the matter is being considered, discussed or voted on. These provisions are in the interests of public confidence in our councils. In the event that this causes problems with quorums, councillors or committee members may apply to the Minister for an exemption.

This bill removes the protections that ensure decisions affecting local communities are not made when a decision-maker is potentially advancing a private interest. The public needs confidence in their local councils and councillors and this bill may create the impression that fair decision-making is being undermined. This bill is another symbol of how the Premier treats this Parliament—with a complete lack of respect. Appropriate time was not given to digest this bill properly. This Parliament should allow elected representatives of communities appropriate time lines to form positions and to consult widely so that they can be confident that legislation passed in this House has been well thought out. Hopefully this bill will be scrutinised at greater length in the other House.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [12.58 p.m.]: I support the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011. This bill contains a number of commonsense and practical improvements that have emerged as being necessary and that this Government is now enacting rather than allowing them to fester. It was interesting to hear members opposite talk about lack of time for consideration of the implications of these amendments. Prior to local government elections in 2004 and 2008, the Division of Local Government issued circulars to councils advising them of the need to implement a caretaker period. The Act contains no provision authorising such a measure. I assume the Division of Local Government read it into the legislation despite the fact that it was not in the text. If that were considered necessary then, why did the former Labor Government not legislate to ensure that it happened? Why was the situation not addressed when the need was recognised? Now, seven years later, this Government is bringing the legislation into line with those expectations.

Referring to the changes relating to area-wide local environmental plans, naturally and understandably the Local Government Act requires that in order to be elected as a councillor a person must be either a resident of the council area or a ratepayer in that council area if he is to own property. The likelihood immediately flowing from that assumption is that the person is going to have pecuniary interests somewhere in that local government area. It is almost unavoidable. When we are talking about area-wide local environmental plans—local environmental plans that affect the whole of the council area—it is almost inevitable that every councillor will have a pecuniary interest to declare and every time a council deals with an area-wide local environmental plan they have to write to the Minister to get an exemption to do something. It is just common sense.

This amendment allows for the declaration of that interest to be made public so that everybody can see the very commonsense assumption that a councillor in a particular area, who lives in that area and owns property there, is declaring that interest for everybody to see. In my own case, I own my home in Bligh Park in the Hawkesbury council area. When I vote on Hawkesbury council's local environmental plans, I am going to declare that. It is a fairly commonsense standard provision and I do not think anybody in the community is going to get terribly excited or worried about it because in each case every councillor is going to declare all of the pecuniary interests they have that could possibly be affected by the local environmental plans. It is inevitable that every councillor in every council area is going to have a pecuniary interest because of their status as residents or ratepayers in that council area.

I turn my attention to what I suspect is another area of misinformation. In the time allowed, I need to focus briefly on the redefining of councils as bodies corporate. The history of the need for this definition goes back to the introduction of WorkChoices in the Federal sphere, the definition by the State Government of the time, of councils as bodies politic so that they did not fall within the definition of WorkChoices, and the subsequent actions by both State and Federal governments to confirm the status of councils as being outside of the Federal employment relations sphere. Those actions were taken in 2009 and I have in front of me a copy of the Fair Work (State Declarations—Employers not to be National System Employers) Endorsement 2009 made by the Commonwealth Government. In its schedule it lists every one of the 175 New South Wales councils at the time. I also refer the House to the Fair Work (Transitional Provisions and Consequential Amendments) Amendment Regulations 2011, which confirmed those actions taken in 2009 to ensure that the bodies specified in those schedules do not cover and can never again cover an employer and employees excluded under subsection 14 (2) of the Fair Work Act.

There has been legislation and regulation to ensure that councils in New South Wales are defined at State and Federal levels as not being national system employers for the purposes of Commonwealth industrial relations legislation. The information running around recently that somehow this redefinition is going to change is simply false. There is no concern in that regard. Local government employees will remain covered by State industrial relations legislation. I feel the need to finish my comments fairly rapidly, so I will sum-up simply by saying that the other changes that I have not yet referred to are basic good housekeeping, commonsense measures that this Government is taking action on to ensure that the law keeps up to date and allows councils to function properly.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH (Coogee) [1.03 p.m.]: I support the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011 and wish to speak particularly to the change to optional preferential voting. I am a member of Randwick City Council and when it was controlled by the Labor Party, which had outright control, we were expecting that the number of councillors per ward would be reduced. The Labor Party was led by Dominic Sullivan and his able deputy was the leader of Opposition business, Michael Daley. They dropped the ball and did not manage to get it in on time, so today Randwick still has three councillors per ward, but that is unlike Botany, next door, where two of the last three elections have not been held because nobody contested the election.

Mr Nick Lalich: Saving money.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: Saving money, the member for Cabramatta says, but it is depriving people of the opportunity to participate in the democratic process locally. The fact is that optional preferential voting discourages other people from standing for council and we find that there is a lack of diversity of representation in those areas. I know that The Greens have been concerned that the only way to address this is by having three councillors per ward, but this bill put forward by our very able Minister will require optional preferential voting for those voting for just one councillor per ward or proportional representation for two councillors per ward.

Voting for one councillor per ward would be unique, one would think, but there is one council in New South Wales that has a system of one councillor per ward and six wards, so six councillors, and that is Botany Bay City Council. Most people in Botany would be completely unaware of it. Apparently it was advertised in 2008 in the *Sydney Morning Herald* somewhere in the back pages in the classifieds. This was the public consultation that Botany Bay City Council undertook. The member for Heffron was in this House yesterday proclaiming she was a great advocate of community consultation and criticising this Government, yet in her own seat the council, by stealth, passed this in 2008 and reconfirmed it after the last local government election in 2008. Most, if not all, people in Botany—except the councillors—would be unaware that it is the only council in this State that has one councillor in each ward. It was so hidden away that there is nothing about it on the website except in the schools resources section.

I am fully supportive of this change to the voting system. I know it will address those concerns held by The Greens, who believe that there is not the diversity that should be seen in our local councils, and I congratulate the Minister on this bill. The bill is about transparency, good governance, and long-needed reforms. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro) [1.07 p.m.]: In support of the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011 I will speak to a number of key points that the bill will clarify and resolve. These amendments go a long way towards making local government stronger, much more sustainable, and transparent and open. Local government is the front line of government for many communities and therefore it needs to have the flexibility, support and structure that will allow it to be the professional organisation that is required in the changing landscape of government today.

One amendment relates to the council caretaker period. The introduction of a caretaker provision is to regulate council's activities before ordinary elections, which will prevent a council from making major or controversial decisions during an election period three weeks prior to a general election that would bind an incoming council. Prior to local government elections in 2004 and 2008, the division of local government issued circulars to councils advising them that they were expected to assume a caretaker role during election periods and to refrain from making major policy decisions, such as determining controversial or significant development applications, making new or potentially controversial permanent appointments or entering into major contracts or undertakings. Of course, caretaker periods can be abused, but they draw a regulatory line in the sand that the wider community so widely accepts and is aware of.

Unfortunately, governments like to make decisions right on the eve of elections. To highlight this, the best example I could find in recent times was when the Keneally Labor Government prorogued Parliament and, in its dying days, flogged off the State's electricity's assets, changed regulations to weaken a court case challenging the Barangaroo development and made more than \$100 million worth of financial commitments. It is a form of sabotage and contempt of the duty of care given to our elected officials and has played a large part in producing the mess that the O'Farrell-Stoner Government is attempting to fix.

Another important amendment is the redefinition of councils as bodies corporate. This proposal was requested by the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales and the amendment will address their concerns that body politic status negatively impacts on council activities, including obtaining Federal funding for trainees and being excluded from tendering for construction work under Federal Government-funded projects. This is an important amendment. It will return to councils the ability to seek funding for extra services through Federal Government channels as corporations. An important area is in relation to seeking funding from the Federal Government in regard to trainees.

Councils deliver a range of important front-line services and it is important to have skilled personnel. Councils have overcome the problem of local shortages of qualified staff by implementing initiatives such as

scholarship programs for students interested in taking up a profession, at a cost to local ratepayers. The amendments to the bill will allow councils to seek Federal funding in order to alleviate the financial burden of addressing this skills shortage. We have again seen a union scare campaign that these changes are an attack on pay and conditions. Like a broken record, we hear the same message and false claims. My colleagues have previously stated that the proposed amendment will have no affect on the pay and conditions of the local government sector.

In line with the wishes of the wider community and all stakeholders, the proposed amendments have the support of the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales and are an example of a responsible government, one that is willing to listen and that is committed to a future of sustainable and viable local government. Other amendments such as community land leases, suspension of council disclosure and non-pecuniary conflicts of interest are commonsense amendments that are about empowering, strengthening and giving local government more flexibility and the ability to deliver for their communities with less red tape. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra) [1.13 p.m.]: I address two of the proposed amendments to the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011. First is the change in the status of councils from bodies politic to bodies corporate. I stated yesterday that this Government has an appalling record of dealing with employees, regardless of their character. Government employees, whether State Government employees or local government employees, have every reason to be afraid of this Government. I notice that the members for Orange and Riverstone have sought to reassure the 55,000 employees of local government that there are legislative mechanisms, both at State and Federal level, that protect them from being brought into the Federal industrial relations system. That is tantamount to a political expression of "trust us". I do not trust those opposite; members on this side do not; the 35,000 State Government employees who marched in the Domain do not; their counterparts, amounting to 300,000 State Government employees do not; and nor do 55,000 local government employees.

If the *modus operandi* was simply to say "trust us", the Government would have done a simple thing: it would have rung Graeme Kelly, rung the United Services Union, consulted with councils and assured them, prior to the introduction of this bill, that that was what it was going to do. But alas, that is not how this Government operates. The Government says to the employees of local government "trust us". I trust that statement as much as I trust the statements made prior to the election by the Hon. Greg Pearce. He said there would be no change to the industrial relations jurisdiction, either in the occupational health and safety legislation or government sector wages and conditions. He made those express statements before the election. They turned out to be false.

We do not trust this Government when it comes to tinkering with employees' wages and conditions. If there is a change in Federal Government, somebody like Tony Abbott might seek to reintroduce WorkChoices. The only way to keep the Government's tendrils off the 55,000 local government employees is to keep the status of councils and allow them to remain as bodies politic. There is no reason for change except for a possible future design by the Government. I say to the members of Riverstone and Orange, I do not trust you and nor do local council employees.

I want to respond to statements made by the member for Coogee. He sought to attack the Mayor of Botany Bay City Council, Ron Hoenig, but only managed to clumsily attack the residents and voters in the city of Botany Bay. The member for Coogee said there is a conspiracy to gerrymander the boundaries and number of councillors per ward in Botany Bay in order to protect the regime of mayor Ron Hoenig. Ron Hoenig has been in office for 26 years. The member is right, there is a conspiracy; it is one that has been effected time and again by the voters of the city of Botany Bay. How else can you effect, time after time, year after year, election after election, a primary vote that exceeds 80 per cent, without the voters of your council thinking you have done at least a reasonable job? This is a case of political sour grapes.

The member for Coogee—who as mayor effected a deal with The Greens in Randwick City Council so that he and The Greens could hang on to power there—looked across the boundary of Botany Bay with envy because mayor Hoenig is one of the most successful mayors, and his council is one of the most successful councils, in the history of this State. If that were not the case, he would not get 80 per cent of the primary vote, election after election, and it would not be the case that no-one has bothered to stand against him or his council for the last two elections. That is not because there is some expression of participatory democracy lacking in Botany but simply that mayor Hoenig and the Botany Bay council have done a good job. The Opposition opposes the bill.

Mr JAI ROWELL (Wollondilly) [1.18 p.m.]: The Local Government Amendment Bill 2011 will work towards creating favourable conditions for councils to engage in structural reform in order to achieve strong and sustainable local government. My electorate of Wollondilly is fortunate to include two council areas—Wollondilly Shire Council and Campbelltown City Council. I have always had a great relationship with both councils prior to my election to this place and have continued this relationship as an elected member. It is important that all levels of government work together for the betterment of our communities and this is something I personally believe we enjoy in the Wollondilly-Macarthur region.

I have regular meetings with Wollondilly Shire Council General Manager, Les McMahon, and his deputy general managers, Ally Dench and Luke Johnson. These regular meetings ensure that any questions or concerns are resolved in a timely manner. My election as a councillor to Campbelltown City Council for the last seven years has ensured I have a thorough understanding of the importance and practical workings of local government and has given me the utmost respect for General Manager, Paul Tosi, and his assistant, Hazel Neville. When this bill was introduced by the Minister for Local Government, Don Page, I was eager to speak about the amendments contained in it and I will go briefly through some of those.

The proposal to redefine councils as bodies corporate was requested by the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales of which I was a proud member, having been elected a number of times to that body. I know they have been requesting body corporate status for some time. The proposed amendments will restore the legal status of councils to body corporate without affecting whether a council belongs to a State or Federal industrial relations system. The introduction of caretaker provisions to regulate a council's activities before ordinary elections will prevent any major decision-making or controversial actions in the three weeks prior to a general election—an important change.

The voting system used by councils will be changed under the proposed amendments to optional preferential voting where only one councillor is to be elected and proportional representation where two or more councillors are to be elected. Proportional representation is considered to be the fairest system in multivacancy elections. It is estimated that approximately 10 councils will be affected by that amendment. There will be 21 to 30 years leases and licences for community land. With regard to the suspension of a councillor for misbehaviour not to create a vacancy in civic office, a clarification in relation to suspension of a councillor by the Local Government Disciplinary Tribunal for misbehaviour will also be provided. The civic office of a councillor will not become vacant, despite the councillor being absent from three consecutive ordinary meetings. The amendment will also allow the tribunal to suspend a councillor for six months instead of the previous maximum of two months.

I turn now to the disclosure of non-pecuniary conflicts of interest. In the interests of open and transparent governance it is proposed to clarify that the Act does not exempt councillors for disclosing their non-pecuniary conflicts of interest. A number of speakers have referred to the pecuniary interest exemption for standardised local environmental plans [LEPs]. This matter is important. The proposal will assist with area-wide standardised local environmental plans. The amendment will allow councillors to discuss and vote on the adoption and amendment of local environmental plans, even when the local environmental plans alter the permissible use of land, without seeking the Minister's prior approval. Transparency and accountability will be retained and the usual penalties for non-disclosure will apply.

The bill is the Government's response to a request by local government representative bodies. I commend the Minister for his approach to the bill. Consultation is an important part of reform. These amendments will benefit not only local government but also the towns, suburbs and villages in Wollondilly and New South Wales as a whole. A number of Opposition speakers said that there has not been time for consultation. There certainly has been time for consultation. As a former member of the Local Government and Shires Associations, which represents 152 councils, I cannot think of a better time when the Government has consulted local government.

That is certainly the view of many members of the association. I made a telephone call to the general manager of my council, Paul Tosi; only an hour ago he told me that he wholeheartedly supported the amendments and that the legislation is a step in the right direction. I have spoken to several Wollondilly councillors and they said that this is great stuff and much needed. Members opposite had 16 years to deliver this reform. They failed. While we are getting on with the job, members opposite have the hypocrisy to criticise us. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr TONY ISSA (Granville) [1.21 p.m.]: Before I commend the bill to the House I commend the Minister for his hard work, commitment to and knowledge of local government. After 16 years of

mismanagement of the State, it is time we had a Minister who is looking forward and introducing these changes to local government. I have been in local government for 24 years so I understand the concept and importance of this bill. Local government is about sharing services, resources and staffing to cut costs and provide better services. There is no better way to do that than by reducing the period of employment protection from three years to one year. This amendment addresses concerns expressed by councils about the existing employment protection. Councils will be able to engage in structural reform through voluntary amalgamations to share services.

Local government is the voice of the community. The only way the community voice can be heard is through local representatives. Many other members and I represent sectors of the community. It is proposed to return councils to body corporate status. This change was requested by the Local Government and Shires Associations. The amendment addresses the concern that the body politic status negatively impacts on council activities, such as obtaining Federal funding for trainees and excluding tendering for construction work on projects funded by the Federal Government. The introduction of the caretaker provision to regulate council activities before ordinary council elections prevents councils or councillors from making major controversial decisions. This will keep councillors honest in terms of the job they do. Councillors should listen to the community and make decisions that produce the best outcomes for the community. In the last two or three weeks before an election they should not make decisions on issues such as controversial development applications that might have an impact on the community, permanently appoint a new general manager or enter into any major contracts.

Importantly, the bill provides for leases and licences relating to community land to be extended from 21 years to 30 years. It is important for councils to be able to apply for approval, under special circumstances, to grant a 30-year lease on community land. That is a long-term strategy and commitment to provide financial assistance to maintain a local community asset. I know time is short. I have looked at the provisions relating to the disclosure of non-pecuniary conflicts of interest and the pecuniary interest exemption for standardised local environmental plans. We could not have two better Ministers than the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Local Government working together on this issue. I am sure the Minister for Planning will take into consideration and monitor how councils operate when it comes to local environmental plans and planning instruments. For those reasons I commend the bill to the House.

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast) [1.24 p.m.], in reply: First, I thank the members representing the electorates of Auburn, Camden, Shellharbour, Bathurst, Bankstown, Orange, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens, Cabramatta, Riverstone, Coogee, Monaro, Maroubra, Wollondilly and Granville for their contributions and their cooperation in keeping their contributions brief so that as many members as possible could contribute to debate on this legislation. I make the general observation that there was a complaint about consultation. The reality is that, due to the timeframes required by the upper House these days, we must put the legislation through as quickly as possible in order to have it considered in the other place.

Having listened to the contributions by members, I was struck by the contrast between Government members—and I must add the member for Lake Macquarie—and Opposition members. Unfortunately, members opposite did not seem to understand what the bill is about, compared to Government members, who fully understand what it is about. There is nothing in these amendments that negatively impacts on what we are doing with Destination 2036. Indeed, it is all positive. I look forward to having an ongoing and cooperative arrangement with the local government sector as a result of what will come out of the outcomes report from Destination 2036 and as we move forward with an action plan for the long-overdue reform of local government.

I shall make some brief comments about the two most contentious issues. One relates to the reduction in staff protection from three years to one year in the event of an amalgamation or a boundary change. The Government's policy is no forced amalgamations, which is in contrast to the previous Labor Government, which forced several amalgamations on councils. In the modern context it is inappropriate to hogtie an amalgamated council for a period of three years, during which it cannot make any staff changes. The reduction from three years to one year is practical, sensible and fair. I note that the amendment enjoys broad support across the local government sector and in particular the Government speakers in the debate.

Many members referred to the amendment redefining councils as bodies politic rather than bodies corporate. The scare campaign by the unions, backed by the Labor Party, is nothing more than that: a scare campaign. There is no substance to what the unions are saying. The Fair Work legislation requires that local government employees be treated as non-national employees; therefore, they come under the State industrial

relations system. The Government has no intention of changing that arrangement. So no jobs are under threat as a result of that change to the definition. I point out to those who expressed concern about consultation that this is Local Government and Shires Association policy, which was released in November of last year, and when we were in Opposition we agreed to support it.

So we are delivering on an election promise to change the definition back to body corporate status. That will enable local government in New South Wales to be able once again to access Federal funding for apprenticeships and training, and for construction works, including roadworks. I would have thought that if the Labor Party was interested in jobs in the local government sector it should support this legislation and not get behind a union scare campaign. Yesterday the Local Government and Shires Association indicated that the union concerns about the legislation affecting employee entitlements is not accurate. Basically, the association debunked that scare campaign. Given the time constraints and the standing orders, I will not refer to other sections of the Act.

However, I acknowledge again the contribution of the member for Lake Macquarie in relation to the extension of leases and licences on community land from 21 years to 30 years. The member brought that to my attention. It is a good amendment. Further discussion about these amendments can wait for another time in the other place. Suffice it to say that in my view these amendments are sensible and practical and they have the support of the Local Government and Shires Association. Obviously they also have the support of many members who have been in local government. Everyone who spoke today in this debate has long experience in local government. Members on this side in particular and even members opposite gave support to this legislation. 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.

[Assistant-Speaker (Mr Andrew Fraser) left the chair at 1.30 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I offer a very warm welcome to a delegation seated in the public gallery headed by the Honourable Michael Frendo, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Malta, guests of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council.

I acknowledge also the presence in the gallery of Mr Peter Topura, Executive Officer to the Clerk of the House of Representatives of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, who is here on attachment under the Parliament's Twinning Program. Welcome to the New South Wales Parliament.

ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF CLARENCE

Issue of Writ

The SPEAKER: I advise the House that it is my intention to issue a writ for a by-election to fill the vacant seat of Clarence. Particulars of the by-election are as follows:

Issue of the writ, Friday 28 October 2011
Close of nominations, Thursday 3 November 2011
Polling day, Saturday 19 November 2011
Return of the writ, on or before Friday 2 December 2011.

RUSSELL GROVE, PSM, CLERK OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The SPEAKER: Next Thursday is the last sitting day that this Parliament will be graced with the presence of Mr Russell Grove, Clerk of the Legislation Assembly. It is difficult to believe that we will be

without him after 40 years of commitment and service to the Parliament. I announce for the information of members the following sitting arrangements for that sitting day. At 11.15 a.m. a morning tea will be held in the Speaker's Garden at which all members and staff of the Parliament can say their farewells to Russell. Preceding that morning tea there will be an opportunity, from 10.00 a.m. for members to contribute to debate on a motion paying tribute to the Clerk's 40 years of service to the New South Wales Parliament. Members who wish to contribute to that debate should advise the Government Whip. I expect that it will be a big day and that many will want to contribute. We will take as much time as necessary to allow all members to participate.

REPRESENTATION OF MINISTERS ABSENT DURING QUESTIONS

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: In addition to the ministerial arrangement I announced yesterday relating to the Minister for Education, I inform the House that, in the absence of the Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Healthy Lifestyles and Minister for Western New South Wales, the Deputy Premier, Minister for Trade and Investment and Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services will answer questions today about Western New South Wales, and the Minister for Health and Medical Research will answer questions in relation to mental health and healthy lifestyles.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.20 p.m.]

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Treasurer. In light of the most recent figures indicating that the unemployment rate in New South Wales has risen from 4.8 per cent to 5.5 per cent since the Coalition took office, and given that the Coalition was elected on a platform of creating jobs, when can the people of New South Wales expect to see these figures improve?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I was beginning to wonder when this question would be asked by the Leader of the Opposition because we know he is interested in unemployment. He has asked questions about the subject on other occasions. But it begs the question: Has anyone in the Opposition actually picked up the newspaper in the past three or four months? Have they paid any attention to what is going on around the world? I do not think they have. They have not even paid attention to what has been going on in New South Wales.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Had they been paying attention, they would understand that there is a global downturn; there is a sovereign debt crisis going on; the credit rating of the United States of America has been downgraded.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: If anyone wants insight into what New South Wales would be like if Labor were still in office, all they need do is look to Greece and Italy.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Greece and Italy lost control of their budgets, just like State Labor did.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: If one wanted to find a poor record on employment, one would need look no further than the record of State Labor. We all remember what Labor did for 16 years—nothing. If, during its term in government in New South Wales Labor had matched the employment growth experienced in Victoria in that time—no more, no less—our State would have 193,000 additional jobs.

Mr John Barilaro: A missed opportunity.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It was a very big missed opportunity. Where Labor goes wrong often becomes clear when we examine the details. There have been numerous examples. For example, we know that its

members did not get to page 3 of the budget papers. They got through the first two pages, but forgot about page 3. We also know that the one policy that Labor costed during the budget debate it got wrong—but only by about \$100 million. Even though the answer was stated on page 3 of the budget, Labor got it wrong by \$100 million. Employment statistics provide some hope. Last month in New South Wales 7,500 additional full-time jobs and more than 8,000 part-time jobs were created. There have been some positive moves in full-time employment.

Mr John Robertson: When are we going to see your efforts?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The last time that the Leader of the Opposition asked a question on unemployment statistics was 9 September.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The question was not, "Who are you blaming for all of your woes?" It was, "What are you going to do about employment?"

The SPEAKER: Order! Standing Order 129 relates to relevance. The Treasurer's answer is relevant to the question.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It is great to see the member for Maroubra has returned after having been absent for two days this week. I understand that he was unwell, so it is good that he has returned. I wondered what he was doing over those two days. I will tell the House. He was watching replay after replay of *The Office*.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Treasurer to return to the leave of the question.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: He was watching that because he is modelling himself on the hero of middle management of that show, David Brent. The member for Maroubra wants to know everything that David Brent does. If the member for Maroubra were to remove his glasses, I reckon he would bear some resemblance to David Brent. I look forward to lessons from *The Office* because the member for Maroubra is all over it. On 9 September the Leader of the Opposition asked in a very gravelly voice:

In light of yesterday's announcement that the unemployment rate in New South Wales has risen from 4.6 per cent to 5.4 per cent since he took office, when will the Premier stop blaming others ...

He asked that question, but the problem is that the unemployment rate was not 4.6 per cent when the O'Farrell Government took office—it was 5.1 per cent. If the Leader of the Opposition uses seasonally adjusted figures on one side, he must use seasonally adjusted figures on the other.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: People cannot take anything that Labor says on economics as gospel. We have seen Labor's economic record. That is why the O'Farrell Government has put measures in place to get jobs back into this State. That is why our Jobs Action Plan is helping to weather the economic storm that is circling this country. The Government will pay \$4,000 in relation to every new job created in this State to help to protect this State from economic storms. We are very proud that we have also provided in the budget a record infrastructure spend that will attract more jobs to the State.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Despite the challenges, the O'Farrell Government is taking action to create jobs in New South Wales and to protect the future.

SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

Mr GLENN BROOKES: My question is directed to the Premier. What action is the Government taking to assist small business in New South Wales?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I thank the member for East Hills for his question. By his own life journey he has shown how important small business is to this State and this nation as well as how successful small business can be. That stands in stark contrast to members of the Opposition. The only part of small

business that Opposition members understand is the small part. After the contribution of the member for Heffron during the 2011 State election campaign, Labor's understanding of "small" is not confined simply to small in number but, after 16 years, small in relation to this nation's leading State economy being turned into the nation's laggard State economy.

The truth is that for more than 16 years Labor's record on small business was woeful. The fact is that Labor simply did not understand small business. The truth of my assertion is evidenced by Labor's cavalier approach to Ministers. Over the past four years, in the previous term of Parliament, six small business Ministers had an average tenure of eight months. Tenures ranged from intellectual pygmies such as the former member for Monaro, Steve Whan, to notorious people like the friend of the member for Coffs Harbour, Joe Tripodi.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: The Premier has used unparliamentary language. It is okay to be funny, but that was smart and insulting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Premier not to make personal comments or reflections on other members of this House.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I am content because I did not refer to the member for Canterbury as either an intellectual or a pygmy. In the dying days of the former Labor Government, the Sensis Business Index found that business support for government policies was lower in New South Wales than in any other State of the nation. That was not a one-off glitch. The fact is that New South Wales consistently scored lowest in that index for all but one-quarter of the previous seven years. That was a disgrace given that, as the member for East Hills knows, small business is the lifeblood of the nation.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Labor never realised that without business confidence, there is no investment, no employment and no economic growth. As I said, Labor neglected that for 16 years. This Government acted quickly to support that important sector and to cut the red tape that it faces on a daily basis. In our first six months in government we have initiated, through the Minister for Small Business, a series of initiatives to get small business going again. At the top of the list, of course, is our payroll tax rebate of \$4,000 to businesses to encourage them to create additional jobs. We have also appointed the State's first Small Business Commissioner, Yasmin King, who will be an independent advocate—

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the third time. I remind members that if they are removed from the Chamber, they will remain out of the Chamber for the rest of the day.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Actually it will be longer than that, Madam Speaker; they will be out for the entire weekend, will they not?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is correct.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I know. I used to be subject to those rules.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier remains subject to those rules.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I think I hold the record among current members for being thrown out on the most occasions, and that was because I was doing such a great job as Opposition leader.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I was not thrown as far, of course, as the Government of the member for Heffron was thrown. But I digress. We have appointed the State's first Small Business Commissioner, Yasmin King, who will be an independent advocate for the State's 650,000 small businesses. She will stand up for their rights within government to ensure that the reforms we are putting in place are pursued across the bureaucracy. She will be an advocate at the heart of government to ensure that small business gets a better deal. She is

currently undertaking a listening tour across the State in places that those opposite do not know exist, such as Grafton, Lismore, Ballina, Albury and Wagga Wagga. Opposition members have to rely on their sole rural member, the member for Keira, to explain things to them.

[*Interruption*]

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Keira will not respond to the Premier's comments.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: As recently as yesterday the Minister for Fair Trading announced reforms in relation to cutting red tape for plumbers, that is, establishing NSW Fair Trading as the single plumbing and drainage regulator across the State. I am pleased to announce we are also starting our one-on, two-off policy, wherein for every regulation we put on, two must come off. We want to cut the cost of doing business in New South Wales, support the small business sector and get this State going again.

ADOPTION

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: My question is directed to Minister for Family and Community Services. Why has the Minister made it harder for foster mums such as Fiona, who was quoted in today's *Sydney Morning Herald*, to adopt children in their care, including those with severe intellectual disabilities?

Ms PRU GOWARD: I thank the member for Auburn for her question. We all agree that adoption is a great permanent solution for children looking for a stable and loving household for whom out-of-home care is not a desirable option. Adoption means that such children and young people can become part of a carer's family; they take the family name and become part of that family. Labor failed such children in New South Wales through budget waste and mismanagement, lack of service and an appalling failure to increase the number of adoptions.

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

Ms PRU GOWARD: The only downside to taking a question without notice is having to listen to interjections from the member for Canterbury.

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

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is indeed true that Labor managed to double the number of adoptions when it introduced the allowance. The number doubled to 48. With nearly 18,000 children in out-of-home care Labor could only manage 48 adoptions. That appalling number reflects the fact that Labor has never understood that the answer is not just to throw money at a program. We have to change the processes.

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

Ms PRU GOWARD: Why do we have between two and 10 times the number of overseas adoptions in New South Wales, with families spending a lot more money applying for their adoptions and not getting any allowance at all? International adoptions are at between two and 10 times the number of local adoptions and families do not receive any allowance. That tells us that it is about the process and not the money.

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

Ms PRU GOWARD: The better promotion of adoptions—which we see internationally—and reducing obstacles to adoption are key goals being pursued by this Government. We must reduce the number of steps involved. All members have had the experience of families approaching them complaining about the difficulties of adopting a child in our system. Every member will say that it is not about the money. Forty-eight adoptions do not amount to a budget measure of any significance.

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

Ms PRU GOWARD: Do the maths. This is about changing the paradigm for adoptions. We have to get those steps out of the way and reduce the waiting time.

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

Ms PRU GOWARD: For example, we need to stop continually upsetting carers unnecessarily who we know full well are perfect candidates for adoption. It is ridiculous that Labor left a system in which foster carers who had already been approved for foster care had to go through the whole process again. That is why the former Government only arranged 48 adoptions. Labor members should be ashamed of themselves. They never looked at the systems, they never looked at the processes and they never did the maths. I emphasise that adoptive families who deserve support from Disability Services are just like any other family, and Community Services obviously will work closely with those carers considering the adoption of a child with a disability with the provision of ageing disability and home care services to ensure that the right support is given to those children.

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

Ms PRU GOWARD: The changes to the allowances that were announced on 6 September will not impact on carers who have been waiting for years under the system of the former Government to commence, let alone to finalise, assessments that have been in place. It will certainly not disallow new adoptions. It relates to carers who started to discuss adoption with Community Services just before the budget but who had not yet proceeded to an assessment. They are still on their journey. It is clear that we need to give these children their childhoods; we have to give them a chance of a better life. And clearly the preferred way to do that is through adoption. That is not possible if we continue to put hurdle after hurdle before them, as Labor did. It is quite clear: 48 adoptions is absolute proof that it is not about the money. These families love their children and they want to care for their children and make them part of their family. [*Time expired.*]

SOCIAL BENEFIT BONDS

Mr CHARLES CASUSCELLI: My question is addressed to the Treasurer. What progress has the Government made to deliver social benefit bonds?

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that many of them are already on one or two calls to order.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I thank the member for Strathfield for his question. As well as being known for his style and qualities the member for Strathfield is also well known for his hard work. He is working up a storm in his electorate. His constituents love him for his interest in them and the way he represents them so ably in this House. We are delighted that the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals are getting on with the job of making New South Wales number one again. All we hear from the Opposition is talk while we on this side of the House are delivering. The O'Farrell Government has been delivering. I note that we are implementing Labor's wages policy. Labor spoke about implementing savings, whereas the O'Farrell Government will deliver \$1.96 billion in savings during the next four years.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: They talked about it; we are delivering. They talked about reducing the tax burden; the O'Farrell Government is doing just that. We have abolished Labor's homebuyer's tax—an initiative that will return \$400 million to the housing sector. We have announced a payroll tax concession that will give a \$4,000 rebate for new jobs in this State. Labor talked about cutting taxes; we are delivering. We also heard repeatedly about railways. Under this Minister for Transport—

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: We are no longer simply talking about the North West Rail Link; we are delivering it. That is what the O'Farrell Government is doing: It is delivering for the people of this State.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The Labor Government talked about social benefit bonds, but this Government is delivering them. Expressions of interest were invited this week and the first meeting attracted a deluge of interest. People came from across the State, including representatives of non-government organisations, financial services companies and investors, looking to invest in social services in this State. Two pilot programs have been proposed involving out-of-home care that are designed to keep more families together and fewer

children in foster care. As the Minister said, that is good for families, for kids and for the people of New South Wales. This Government is also looking to reduce recidivism. We want to give former prisoners new opportunities to get their lives back on track. That is better for them and for New South Wales.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: A promising trial has been conducted in the United Kingdom involving \$5 million bonds targeted at offenders who have served less than 12 months in prison and offering one-to-one support to reduce recidivism. The final outcomes of that program are not available, but they appear to be positive. That is why this Government is delighted to be undertaking a similar trial. The deadline for submissions is 24 November and I encourage everyone to consider participating in this program for the good of the State. Preferred proponents will be notified in early 2012. This is an exciting time for New South Wales because the benefits will be enjoyed by community groups and taxpayers as we address the key social challenges facing New South Wales.

Ours is the first government in Australia to implement this initiative and it is great to be a member of a government that is leading the nation in tackling real problems that have been ignored for a long time. The member for Heffron talks and tweets about these initiatives, but this Government implements them. I have already given credit to her Government for proposing this measure and I acknowledge that it was a good idea. Not everything the Labor Government did was bad. However, if a government has a good idea it must implement it, and that is what this Government is doing.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: When talking about social benefit bonds, Toby Hall, the chief executive officer of Mission Australia, stated:

They are a very smart way for government to deliver solutions today that deliver meaningful outcomes and benefits in the future. We believe that this is the start of a growing trend that is much needed in Australia and it is great that the New South Wales Government is leading the way in this area.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: A representative of the ANZ bank also said that it is a positive innovation, and Jonathon Wolfe of Social Finance stated:

We see the Social Benefit Bonds as an opportunity to shift perception on how to solve these intractable social problems by attracting new money and new participants.

The O'Farrell Government is delivering for the people of New South Wales. These social benefit bonds will provide opportunities to solve long-term problems, to make New South Wales number one again and to give people every chance to get ahead.

COUNCIL AMALGAMATIONS

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: My question is directed to the Minister for Local Government. Why is he reducing the period that workers are protected when councils amalgamate to encourage councils to reduce their workforce?

Mr DONALD PAGE: I am lucky to get two Dorothy Dixers on two consecutive days. When I first came into this place Dorothy Dixers were asked by members of the Government.

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

Mr DONALD PAGE: As members know, this Government's policy states that there will be no forced amalgamations. What was the Labor Government's policy? It was to force amalgamations. In fact, it organised several forced amalgamations without any consultation. Prior to the lunch break we debated amendments to the Local Government Act. Members opposite repeatedly stated that there had been no consultation with regard to councils becoming bodies corporate rather than bodies politic. Last November the Local Government and Shires Associations asked the then Government and then Opposition to comment on their desire to convert councils

from bodies politic to bodies corporate. The then Government failed to respond to that request, but the former shadow Minister told the associations that a Coalition would implement that policy. The associations wanted that change so that they could access Federal funding.

Ms Anna Watson: That's not the question.

Mr DONALD PAGE: I will come to the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am sure the Minister is coming to the answer.

Mr DONALD PAGE: As I indicated yesterday, the Federal Fair Work Act clearly states that local government employees will continue to be covered by the New South Wales industrial relations system. That has not changed, and the Government does not intend to change it. The Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Minister and the unions are simply involved in a scare campaign. I put that to bed once and for all.

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

Ms Anna Watson: You are misleading this House.

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

Mr DONALD PAGE: In relation to the issues that—

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

Mr DONALD PAGE: In the event that a couple of councils want to amalgamate, this Government will be happy to assist them. That is the way of the future. Members opposite who went to Destination 2036—and a few did—got a huge shock. They found that the local government sector had no regard for the former Labor Government but that it has a great deal of regard for this Government. That is because we are talking to local government and we know that it knows that reform must take place.

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

Mr DONALD PAGE: I have already indicated that there is no threat to the pay and conditions of local government employees from this Government's changes. The furphy—

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

Mr DONALD PAGE: —peddled by the union movement is nothing more than that—a furphy.

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

Mr DONALD PAGE: The Labor Government legislated to prevent any council involved in an amalgamation from reducing staff numbers for three years. That is ridiculous and unbelievably out of touch with modern management principles.

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

Mr DONALD PAGE: Councils were prevented from reducing duplication and getting a better deal for their ratepayers. This Government's legislation is all about providing better services and getting a better deal for those ratepayers.

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

Mr DONALD PAGE: This Government has introduced a commonsense amendment to reduce that period to one year. That is a much more intelligent approach. Members opposite wanted to hobble councils for three years after an amalgamation. This Government wants to help the local government sector to move forward

with these reforms. One year is much more practical and sensible. Such a time frame will not be the disincentive that the Labor policy was. No council would amalgamate if it could not make changes to its staffing for three years. That was the disincentive that members opposite imposed.

CITYRAIL PATRONAGE

Mr BART BASSETT: My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport. What steps is the Government taking to improve the calculation of patronage on the CityRail network?

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind Opposition members that several of them are on three calls to order.

Mr Nathan Rees: All of us?

The SPEAKER: Order! No, the member did not even listen to me then. I said "several" members.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: This is a very important question because efficient rail services are all about good planning. I put this question to the House: How many Labor Ministers for Transport did it take to count CityRail's annual patronage? The answer is none, because they never got it right.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: It gives me no pleasure to have to advise the House that Labor transport Ministers were using an outdated and inaccurate patronage counting method that systematically overstated the number of passengers on our train network. In fact, Labor's method of counting rail patronage was so inaccurate that it was inflating the passenger numbers by as many as 17 million journeys per year. That is how much Labor got it wrong. It had no idea about what customers were doing. As the Treasurer says and we all know, Labor liked cooking the books, but this attempt at CityRail patronage would make even Eric Roozendaal blush.

Under Labor's system, patronage figures for trains were calculated in a variety of ways, including free ticket estimates and predictions of multi-modal ticket use. For example, under Labor's system, if a passenger bought a MyMulti 1 or a yearly ticket, it was estimated that he or she would take 520 journeys during that year. That is 10 trips every week for an entire year. This calculation made no provision for public holidays, annual leave or other times when passengers would not make their regular journey to and from work. Labor's system was counting commuters as travelling on trains while they were actually away on holiday. Labor's system clearly overestimated the number of trips that a single commuter would make in a year. This was multiplied across the entire rail network.

But there was more Labor incompetence. Every year there is an official estimate of how much unpaid travel takes place on the rail network. This includes staff travel and travel by police officers and school students. Labor was so lazy that it used the same guesstimate for the official unpaid travel patronage figures for 10 years. It has since been proven that Labor's guesstimate was inflating the figure by 30 per cent. I am pleased to say that those questionable practices are coming to an end. We are getting rid of them. We are introducing changes to the way that rail patronage is counted to make the official numbers accurate. This is being done by making more realistic assumptions about people's travel patterns, by using real data instead of guessing and by updating these calculations annually, not every 10 years, as Labor did.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: For example, under the new patronage counting system, it will be calculated that a MyMulti 1 ticket purchaser would travel 449 times instead of 520. This makes allowances for annual leave and public holidays. The Bureau of Transport Statistics has confirmed that this approach is better. RailCorp's 2010-11 annual report will report on patronage figures under the revised method of calculation. One of the reasons we have to count train patronage at all is that Labor failed to introduce the Tcard, which we were supposed to have for the Sydney Olympics. Labor failed to do that, which is why patronage counting on the rail network has been such an issue.

An integrated electronic ticketing system would, of course, provide highly accurate patronage counts to Government—and not just for trains, but for buses, ferries and light rail, anywhere that commuters are moving around this great State. Accurate patronage information helps the Government to see where public transport use is growing fastest and allows it to plan where new services and spending should be directed. It makes perfect

sense. This is exactly what the Opal card, our electronic ticketing system, will deliver. In the meantime, we will continue to clean up Labor's mess and the incompetent legacy it left us. We will continue to clean it up because commuters in New South Wales deserve so much better. They need accurate information. They need to make sure that we are providing services where they are needed. I again thank the member for asking this very important question.

PRISON OFFICER TASER USE

Mr CLAYTON BARR: My question is directed to the Attorney General.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order so that I can hear the question. The member for Cessnock has the call.

Mr CLAYTON BARR: Yesterday the Attorney General said that prison officers do not need tasers because he is looking at ways of trying to generate more respect and decency towards prisoners. Can the Attorney General provide examples of where prison officers would not have been assaulted if they had adopted his suggested approach?

Mr GREG SMITH: The question refers to a hypothetical situation. The prison officers sought to have a taser demonstrated but, unfortunately, the guy who was supposed to bring the taser did not turn up. He had a better offer in Melbourne. They tried the same stunt the previous year in Darwin, and had a taser test there. They rely on Western Australia, saying that tasers are used there. But the problem is that a big inquiry is going on in Western Australia into the abuse of tasers by prison officers. The Crime and Misconduct Commission in Western Australia has been looking into that issue for over 12 months. I think they should have done a bit more research on Western Australia.

As to my comments about changing the culture of prisons, I certainly want to change the culture that was created under Labor because under Labor the Ministers generally sat back and did nothing—including the Leader of the Opposition. They let the commissioner run the place. I am not saying that he ran it badly, but nevertheless Ministers did not take responsibility for the organisation. As a result, from time to time we have security problems. There were a lot more escapes in the 12 months prior to our coming to government than there were before. There were also other security problems. Sadly, there is an inquest at the moment into the death of a prisoner who appears not to have been looked after properly at the time.

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

Mr GREG SMITH: I want to change the culture so that prisoners are looked after.

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

Mr GREG SMITH: But I want to make sure also that prison officers are safe and well looked after—the media failed to report the other comment I made. I want prison officers to be safe, but they have given me no justification as to why they should have tasers.

RECREATIONAL FISHING

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: My question is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries, and the Minister for Small Business. How is the Government improving opportunities and resources for the State's one million recreational fishers?

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: I thank the member for Vacluse for her question and for her undoubted interest in this very exciting project. Recreational fishing is enjoyed by more than a million anglers every year in New South Wales—they love nothing more than dropping a line in and hoping for the best. From inland areas to the coast, we in New South Wales undoubtedly boast some of the best fishing locations in the world. As of this week, I am pleased to announce that the State has a new fishing hotspot with the deployment of the State's first offshore artificial reef, right here off the coast of Sydney. This purpose-built offshore artificial reef is the first and largest Australian-designed artificial reef structure to be deployed in this country. The construction of the \$900,000 artificial reef was awarded to a Sydney-based company that specialises in major maritime infrastructure projects and it was manufactured here in New South Wales.

The large steel structure was constructed in Scone in the Hunter before being trucked to White Bay at Rozelle. A barge was then used to somewhat dramatically transport the reef to its final destination. There was a lot of media attention surrounding the transportation of this barge. Its final destination was approximately 1.2 kilometres off The Gap at Vacluse and 1.9 kilometres off South Head. The artificial reef unit is made of steel. It stands 12 metres high and weighs approximately 42 tonnes. It is designed to provide a highly complex habitat for a range of marine species. The reef structure will have a lifespan of over 30 years. I know that some members opposite enjoy fishing and are interested in this project. Certainly everyone on our side is enthralled by this answer.

The reef structures will have a life span of over 30 years and they have been specifically designed to withstand what can be sometimes heavy New South Wales coastal conditions, while also minimising ecological impact. It is my pleasure to announce that the reef is now open for recreational fishing—well ahead of schedule. It was not due for completion until just before Christmas but this wonderful Australian company is ahead of time and on budget in the laying of this artificial reef.

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

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: The artificial reef is now up and ready for use. This is the first of three offshore artificial reefs planned for New South Wales over the next five years. It is expected to greatly improve recreational fishing opportunities off the coast of Sydney. Coastal councils from the Tweed to the Central Coast and from the Shoalhaven to Eden are welcome to nominate for either of the two remaining artificial offshore reefs that are yet to come.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Oxley.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: I hear some nominations from our side of the Chamber already. This new offshore artificial reef is great news for tourists and locals alike who want to go for a spot of fishing offshore during the summer months. We expect that the reef will soon be home to a range of fish species, such as snapper and yellow-tailed kingfish. Monitoring of the deployment site and the nearby natural reef has already begun. It will be monitored in detail for the next three years, to demonstrate the benefits of the artificial reef for the environment and for fishers. The New South Wales Department of Primary Industries is also developing a user guide for the reef that will provide guidelines for all potential users, whether they be fishers, scuba divers, snorkellers or anybody else using the reef.

I am sure that the hardworking member for Vacluse is as excited as I am about the terrific tourism opportunities and the economic spin-offs for New South Wales that will result from this new project and will be happy for her electorate because this will be a terrific boon for small businesses. Once again, I encourage coastal councils who also want to experience the tourism and economic joys that an offshore artificial reef can bring to a region to let me know if they are interested in having an offshore artificial reef deployed off their coast. Two more will go down in the next five years, one between the Queensland border and Sydney and the other between Sydney and Eden. But we only want them to go to communities that want them.

GREENWAY PROJECT

Mr JAMIE PARKER: I direct my question to the Minister for Transport. In light of the strong community and council support for the now deferred inner west GreenWay, can the Minister confirm whether the Government is committed to implementing this important integrated active transport project?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murray-Darling will come to order.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I thank the member for Balmain for this important question and for organising a productive meeting between me and representatives of Leichhardt, Marrickville, Ashfield and Canterbury councils yesterday afternoon to discuss this issue. Labor's failure to conduct any engineering design work before rushing to announce the GreenWay or to properly assess how it would impact on the Inner West Light Rail Extension was a lesson in how not to deliver active transport projects.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: Why do you not take responsibility?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Why did not you do something when you were the Deputy Premier of this State?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Marrickville will come to order and cease interjecting.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: Stop blaming everyone else.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: The member opposite loves to interject but was a member of the Labor Government for years and years and did nothing.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: The member opposite did nothing about light rail. She can interject all she likes but her electorate knows that she did nothing to deliver active transport. The New South Wales Government made clear during the election campaign that we suspected this was the approach that Labor took to the GreenWay, and subsequent investigations by the Department of Transport have proven this to be correct. Our approach to public transport planning is based on sound analysis and integration. I want to make this point clear: The New South Wales Government is determined to deliver an integrated transport master plan that includes active transport including cycling and pedestrian access. We are also determined to deliver the Inner West Light Rail Extension and we will ensure that the construction of the light rail extension will make allowance for future construction of the GreenWay as part of a wider active transport policy. This is something we have said consistently.

Transport for NSW, the new integrated transport authority, will guide the Government's approach to public transport, including our light rail and active transport strategy. The vacuum created by Labor's lack of leadership on cycleways forced councils to pursue their own plans for active transport, resulting in many gaps in those vital links. Labor's disorganisation resulted in bike lanes all over Sydney and our State that did not link up. It also resulted in bike lanes all over Sydney looking different, operating in different ways, being marked differently and generally making it confusing for cyclists, motorists and pedestrians alike. Our plan will be integrated, properly prepared and achievable—unlike the many failed plans put forward by those opposite. I will not bore members by going into all their failures. It is Friday afternoon and we will leave that for another occasion. Labor's Action for Bikes 2010 plan was released in September 1999. It contained a map showing where all Labor's new bike lanes and separated cycleways were to be built over the next decade. That was released in 1999.

Labor had 10 years to build the new cycle network. Did those opposite deliver it? Of course they did not. After failing to deliver on their first bike plan, what did they do? What do you do when you fail to build everything? You put out another plan, of course. So after they failed to deliver the first, they put out another plan called the New South Wales Bike Plan and it had yet another map showing where all the new bike lanes and separated cycleways would be built. But it looked similar to the one they had released in 1999. There was little difference. When you compare the two maps—produced 10 years apart—they look identical. In the first and the second bike plan Labor promised a number of things that it never built, such as the Naremburn to Harbour Bridge cycleway and the North Ryde to Macquarie University cycleway, which never eventuated. Did the Prospect to Blacktown bike plan happen? No. What about Lidcombe to Strathfield? Did that happen?

Government members: No.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: What about Blacktown to Parramatta? Did that happen?

Government members: No.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Chatswood to Artarmon?

Government members: No.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Botany Bay to Maroubra?

Government members: No.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Guildford to Chester Hill?

Government members: No.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: And on top of all that those opposite have the hide to talk to us about bike plans. Labor thought it could simply just dust off the old bike plan because it had not done anything and put up a new one. That is a disgrace. Labor treated active transport, whether it be cycling or pedestrians, as a joke. As opposed to Labor's strategy, we are focused on delivering a transport master plan that includes active transport. We are getting on with the job of doing the proper planning that this process demands. I thank the member for his question.

INDIGENOUS HEALTH

Mr TROY GRANT: My question is directed to the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research. What is the Government doing to help promote community health within the indigenous community?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I thank the member for Dubbo for his question and for his very strong commitment to members of his community. I seek the indulgence of the Speaker for my colourful football jersey.

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

Mr Troy Grant: Point of order: Members in the back of the Chamber could not see the Minister's shirt.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: It is not my usual habit to wear a football jersey into the House.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am proud to wear this jersey today.

The SPEAKER: Order! This is a very important subject. Opposition members will come to order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: It is indeed a very important subject. This jersey was given to me by Eunice Grimes and Nathan Merritt, members of the Aboriginal community and ambassadors for the One Deadly Step campaign in partnership with Australian rugby league. Aboriginal league players, who are role models, are joining with the Government to promote this program to encourage Aboriginal communities to be involved in preventative health and better management of chronic illness. I cannot think of a more important program. My colleague the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will join with me in welcoming this program.

The program, which will be rolled out across the State, encourages people to take part in a 12-step program of health checks that identify whether they may have an illness; then they are referred to general practitioners and others for follow-up. As I said, it is a 12-step screening program. The program is necessary because Aboriginal people have much greater hospitalisation than non-Aboriginals. Their rate is 140 per cent higher for conditions for which hospitalisations can be avoided. There are things like diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease and lung disease. The program aims to increase awareness of these chronic illnesses, promote prevention and self-management, early detection of these diseases, timely referrals to specialist services and improve follow-up of people with chronic diseases.

At the launch today I was joined by the Chief Executive of the Australian Rugby League, Geoff Carr, as well as Nathan Merritt and Eunice Grimes. For members who do not know, Nathan Merritt is a Rabbitoh. Eunice Grimes is a wonderful female league player and a member of the Redfern All Blacks. They are impressive young people. We were also joined by Ricky Walford, who will be known to many members, and Lachlan Wright, who is the project officer for the New South Wales health system. I was proud to be there and to take up the challenge to wear my football jersey because there is nothing more important.

Ms Tania Mihailuk: Like a pin-up girl.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am a pin-up girl for this program. Let me outline the steps. The first step is registration, following by a mini health assessment. People have their weight and height measured and their

body mass index is tested. They have a kidney health check. They get involved in initiatives addressing drinking and smoking. They have lung and breath health checks, heart and blood pressure tests, chronic disease education, diabetes and cholesterol health tests, and an emotions checklist. That is an important aspect of this program. They then have referrals and follow-up needs. That completes the 12 steps to good health. I can advise the House that the program will be rolled out across the State. The program will start at Campbelltown in October, then at Wyong, Kempsey, Griffith and Redfern. I am pleased to inform my friend from Dubbo that Dubbo will also be included.

Questions concluded at 3.13 p.m.

MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS

Ministerial Statement

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Premier, and Minister for Western Sydney) [3.13 p.m.]: I wish to make a ministerial statement, of which we have advised the Opposition. This weekend is a huge sporting weekend for Australia, with big matches for the Wallabies, the Diamonds and the Kangaroos. On Sunday the Wallabies play the All Blacks in the Rugby World Cup semi-final. It is a match worthy of a final, and surely the winner of the game will go on to take the cup. I happened to listen to Ray Hadley recite an interest statistic this morning, which was that World Cup history shows that the team that beats the defending champion goes on to win the tournament. So let us hope this continues after our win over the defending champions, South Africa, last weekend.

But there is another statistic that does not go our way, I am sorry to say. The last time the Wallabies defeated the All Blacks at Eden Park was in 1986—a very long time ago, when the coach was Ray Hadley's colleague Alan Jones. After the scare against the Springboks, I am sure the magnificent defence of David Pocock and the magnificent grace under pressure of James O'Connor will get us through Sunday's match. The Wallabies have asked us all to be bold and wear gold, so I hope that along with the Minister for Sport and Recreation we see others this weekend wearing gold to support our national union team.

There is another trans-Tasman clash this weekend, and I am not talking about rugby league. The Sydney Kings are taking on the New Zealand Breakers. Yesterday, along with the Minister for Sport and Recreation, I was fortunate to present the Kings with their 2011 playing singlets in the Speaker's court. Also, our winning netball team, the Diamonds, face England this Sunday at Sydney Olympic Park, in a match that promises to be an exciting conclusion to the current three test series. After winning the first two matches in the series I am confident that the Diamonds can go on and finish with a clean sweep of the series.

And last, but certainly not least, on Sunday afternoon the Kangaroos will take on New Zealand in Newcastle on the second leg of the Bill Kelly Cup series. This will be Darren Lockyer's last game in the green and gold on Australian soil, which I am sure will inspire the team to perform even better and harder against New Zealand. Although he is a Queenslander, Darren Lockyer has been a fine ambassador for rugby league. In addition to wishing the Kangaroos all the best for Sunday, I extend my best wishes to the Kangaroos for the upcoming four nations series to be played in the United Kingdom against Wales, England and New Zealand. That starts at the end of October. We are all hoping for a green and gold white-wash this weekend. Go the Wallabies. Go the Diamonds. Go the Kangaroos. Go the Sydney Kings.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [3.16 p.m.]: I join with the Premier in wishing the Wallabies well this Sunday in the Rugby World Cup semi-final against the All Blacks. I also congratulate the Diamonds. On Wednesday night the Diamonds continued their great form by securing a test series win against England. Their dominance of the English was again demonstrated by their thumping 67-36 defeat in Canberra—a game where clearly the skills of the Diamonds outshone—

Mr Andrew Stoner: There's another game in Canberra.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: The Deputy Premier should not talk about Canberra. I hear that The Nationals want him to rush down there.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: The Deputy Premier raised Canberra.

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

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: The Diamonds are the dominant netball team in the world. They know how to win a world championship. They have won 10 out of 13 world championships and they know how to defeat their main rival, New Zealand. They are an inspiration. We hope that they inspire the Wallabies to what will need to be a stunning performance this Sunday night. No doubt the All Blacks are going into this weekend's game as the favourites. As the Premier said, the Wallabies have not won at Eden Park for 25 years. I will be wearing gold on Sunday. As we know, the pressure is all on the All Blacks. They have not won a Rugby World Cup since 1987, and the locals expect nothing else but victory in next week's final.

But, unlike the All Blacks, who are the great chokers, the Wallabies are big game players. They know how to rise to the occasion and they can never be underestimated. In last week's quarter final against the Springboks the Wallabies showed that they are the best defensive team in the world. In terms of their dominance of possession and territory, some say the Springboks should have won but they were unable to break the solid defence of the Wallabies—something that put them in good stead for the conclusion of that game. As the Premier said, David Pocock was the hero last week, demonstrating that not only is he a match for the All Blacks captain, Richie McCaw, but he is arguably better and will outshine him on Sunday.

No doubt to defeat the All Blacks our attack needs to improve, as must other aspects of our game. It is going to require a performance worthy of the Diamonds to secure victory. I also wish the Kangaroos well as they play in Newcastle this weekend. I am sure they will send Darren Lockyer out on a high and deservedly so. He is someone who has represented rugby league at all levels of the game fantastically. He has been a great ambassador for this State and for this nation when it comes to rugby league. I wish the Wallabies, the Kangaroos and the Diamonds well. [*Time expired.*]

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Membership

Motion by Mr Brad Hazzard agreed to:

That Andrew Robert Gee be appointed to serve on the Legislative Assembly Committee on Economic Development in place of Stephen Rhett Cansdell, resigned.

UNPROCLAIMED LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER tabled, pursuant to Standing Order 117, a list detailing all legislation unproclaimed 90 calendar days after assent as at 14 October 2011.

PETITIONS

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**.

Animals Performing in Circuses

Petition requesting a ban on exotic animals performing in circuses, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

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

The Hon. Katrina Hodgkinson—Animals Performing in Circuses—lodged 6 September 2011 (Ms Clover Moore)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of Motions****General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.****PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS****NIRIMBA EDUCATION PRECINCT**

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [3.25 p.m.]: I inform the House of some exciting work being done by the students, teachers and staff at the Nirimba Education Precinct in Western Sydney. The Nirimba Education Precinct is a multi-institutional educational campus comprised of co-educational secondary providers Wyndham College—where one of my daughters recently graduated from high school—Terra Sancta College, University of Western Sydney College, part of the University of Western Sydney, and Nirimba College, part of the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE. I recently had the privilege of visiting the TAFE campus at Nirimba to witness some of the exciting and innovative work they are doing there.

I will inform the House of the unique educational value of the practical training provided by Nirimba College. Nirimba College has in excess of 5,000 students studying in more than 140 courses across the vocational areas of building and construction, civil engineering, architectural drafting, children's services, community services, music, information technology and transport and logistics. Other study areas include administration services, business services and foundation studies. These are the skill sets our society needs to grow and develop, to build homes and form communities, and it would be a tragedy if these skills were to be lost.

TAFE colleges across New South Wales provide world-class education and training opportunities to hundreds of thousands of young people every year, with more than 500,000 enrolments each year. TAFE has always been a place for people to go, whether they are looking for their first job, a promotion, a career change or a pathway to a degree, increasingly working hand in hand with employers to link up skills with jobs and to meet industry demands. TAFE NSW works closely with employers and industry in the development of all its qualifications, and these are updated regularly to ensure currency and relevance. When students graduate with a TAFE qualification, they will have gained skills and knowledge closely linked to their chosen industry's needs. This allows employers to be confident that TAFE graduates will be ready to perform tasks at required industry standards. This keeps our economy strong and allows industry to combine with Government to address skills shortages before they occur and to support the jobs of tomorrow.

While I was visiting Nirimba College I had the opportunity to tour their state of the art Green Skills Hub, a cutting-edge \$6 million building made possible through a joint project between the Federal Government's Training Infrastructure Investment for Tomorrow initiative and the private sector. This building is designed to equip students for the use of advanced technologies in the modern workplace, as well as sustainable practices and techniques applicable to their vocational training. With everything from an energy friendly to low energy use touch screen computers, you cannot help but be impressed by the sheer volume of information and training being provided. These facilities allow for multidiscipline interrelated training across a range of areas including electrical, electrical engineering, plumbing, refrigeration and information technology, and the benefits of learning these skills in the environment provided by the Green Skills Hub is immeasurable. This is because the Green Skills Hub does not simply talk the talk in its commitment to the values of sustainability and resource management, it walks the walk in every single aspect of its facilities.

The Green Skills Hub is equipped with four rainwater tanks that provide for the facility's water needs, two major solar panel arrays that have delivered more than 10,000 kilowatt hours of electricity to the grid since their construction last year, and a practical and eco-friendly design, which takes full advantage of the natural environment to minimise the need for heating and cooling, with only the function centre having air conditioning installed. The educational opportunities provided by this facility provide real, practical vocational training to young men and women in our community. I can see these skills at work every time I see a new home being built for a young family to move into and start their lives together.

The O'Farrell Government must guarantee that no TAFE college will be forced to close and that tuition fees will not be sent skyrocketing as part of a sectoral restructure in New South Wales. The Government must

also rule out making all vocational education funding fully contestable. TAFE colleges provide practical and affordable education to students right across New South Wales. Prior to the election the Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli, signed the "Invest in TAFE for a Better State" pledge and promised not to compromise the education provider because of outside competition. Any proposal to restructure the vocational education sector must not come at the expense of TAFE and students around New South Wales.

To make matters worse, the wages and conditions of more than 10,000 TAFE teachers and 3,800 support staff are now at risk as a result of poorly thought out and sneaky legislation being rushed into Parliament by the O'Farrell Government. TAFE colleges across New South Wales will struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff, so in the end it will be students who lose out as teachers exit the system. This is not only the O'Farrell Government's latest attack on public sector workers, but yet another knife in the back for our TAFE colleges. TAFE NSW is the largest provider of vocational and educational training in Australia and it plays a vital role in addressing skills shortages. The O'Farrell Government must reaffirm its support for TAFE colleges throughout New South Wales and guarantee that no college will be forced to close so that institutions, such as Nirimba College, can continue to provide world-class education opportunities to our community.

Mr TROY GRANT (Dubbo—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.30 p.m.]: I too congratulate students at the Nirimba Education Precinct and applaud their achievements, as outlined by the Leader of the Opposition and member for Blacktown. I wish them well with their innovative work. I wish the 5,000 students, who are undertaking a broad range of subjects and skill sets, all the very best for the future. I draw attention to job opportunities that will be available in the near future.

TRIBUTE TO KEITH HOLMAN

TRIBUTE TO DICK THORNETT

Mr GRAHAM ANNESLEY (Miranda—Minister for Sport and Recreation) [3.31 p.m.]: It is with regret that I advise the House of the sad passing of one of rugby leagues great players and great gentlemen, Keith Holman. Keith passed away earlier this week in a nursing home in my electorate of Miranda. I knew Keith. Members of the House who enjoy the sport of rugby league will agree, I am sure, that all good half-backs love to have their say on the field. I can assure members that Keith earned his nickname of "Yappy" for very good reason.

Keith's career with the Magpies covered a total of 203 games from 1949 to 1961 and he was a very loyal one-club player. He was born in 1927. During his school years, Keith made friends with another legend of the game, Bernie Purcell, whom he would later play against and alongside for his State and his country. Both sought careers with the Rabbitohs, and Purcell went on to have a magnificent career with that club as a goal-kicking second rower while Keith Holman was turned away because of his small stature. Keith also missed out on a contract with Manly. But, undaunted, he ultimately landed a contract with the Magpies in 1948.

Like other talented players of his era, Keith went on to combine playing with a coaching career. In 1954 he became captain-coach of Wests. His representative career saw him play 33 matches for New South Wales and 32 matches for Australia, making his Test debut in Australia's first Ashes conquest in 30 years. He was named New South Wales Player of the Year three times—in 1951, 1956 and 1958—and when his playing days were over, he turned his hand to refereeing in which he also had great success. Keith controlled the 1971 Rugby League Grand Final between South Sydney and St George. He went on to referee Test matches between Australia and New Zealand in 1972.

But it is as one of the great players of the game that Keith will be mostly remembered. He was selected as one of Wests Tigers Team of the Century and the Western Suburbs Magpies Team of the Century. In 2003 he was admitted into the Australian Rugby League Hall of Fame. In 2007, Keith was selected by a panel of experts in an Australian Team of the 1950s. In February 2008, Holman was named in the list of 100 Greatest Players of the Century. Keith Holman had a very distinguished rugby league career, as a player, a coach, and as a referee, but there was much more to Keith Holman than his achievements on the field. I read a comment by Ron Coote in which he described Keith as a person forever coaching kids, refereeing, and helping others. Keith's funeral will be held on Monday at 1.45pm at St Catherine's Church, Gympie.

I also offer my condolences to the family and friends of another great Australian sportsman, Dick Thornett, following his passing last Wednesday. Dick was one of only five Australians to have represented their country in three sports—rugby league, rugby union and water polo. He played 11 Tests as a Wallaby, touring

both South Africa and New Zealand in the early 1960s. He later switched to rugby league and had nine seasons at Parramatta. He made his Australian test debut in the same year and played a leading role in the triumphant tour of Great Britain.

As a water polo player Dick achieved three New South Wales premierships with the Bronte Water Polo Club and was subsequently selected to represent Australia at the 1960 Rome Olympics. Dick was the youngest of three brothers. Dick, Ken and John all reached international status as players. Ken is a legend at the Parramatta club. Dick Thornett's death came just a week before a tribute dinner for him at the Sydney Cricket Ground [SCG]. I am sure those who will be in attendance will take that opportunity to remember and celebrate his wonderful life. To the family and friends of both Keith "Yappy" Holman and Dick Thornett, I offer my sincere condolences. Both are great losses to sport and to this country.

Mr TROY GRANT (Dubbo—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.35 p.m.]: On behalf of the Government I thank the Minister and member for Miranda for bringing to the attention of the House the sad passing of Keith Holman and Dick Thornett. The Government recognises their great contribution to sport and the community that has been outlined by the Minister.

BALLINA ELECTORATE COMMUNITY BUILDING PARTNERSHIP GRANTS

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast) [3.36 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of the New South Wales Government's Community Building Partnership program. I am pleased that the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government is funding this program, which benefits non-profit organisations such as charities, sporting and environmental groups and councils across the State. I congratulate the New South Wales Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Leader of the Nationals, and the Treasurer on the allocation of \$35 million this year's budget, which is a vital source of infrastructure funding for many organisations that do some great work in the community.

In the past, grants have been made to a wide range of community groups in the Ballina electorate, such as the Spastic Centre, RSL Lifecare, the Bangalow Historical Society, Byron Youth Service, Ballina Jet Boat Surf Rescue, Alstonville and District Cricket Club and the Ballina Australian Rules Football Club, to mention a few. The \$35 million provided as part of the Community Building Partnership program is used to build or improve community facilities and help to stimulate local economies and provide jobs. The New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government has allocated \$300,000 to each electorate in New South Wales as part of the program. However, the Ballina electorate has a high rate of unemployment and receives an additional \$100,000.

In the past, the Ballina and Byron shire councils applied for funding to help with projects such as the new Byron shire library. Last year that project was allocated \$200,000, but only on the proviso that that figure was matched by the Byron Shire Council. Turning of the sod for that project occurred two weeks ago. I have been advised by the mayor that the \$200,000 State funding was critical to the project proceeding. Applications for the 2011 Community Building Partnership program opened in mid-September and will close on 31 October, which is just two weeks away.

I acknowledge the former Government started this program. It has been very successful in electorates such as Ballina that have a large number of non-profit community organisations. The Liberal-Nationals Government is honouring its election promise of supporting communities, particularly in regional areas. In recent years, I have had the great pleasure of attending the opening of many projects that have been funded as part of the Community Building Partnership program. They include projects such as the completion of a new workshop for the Richmond Valley Woodcrafters Club Inc.

I was pleased to be able to help secure approximately \$40,000 in funding for a new workshop at the House With No Steps at Alstonville. The Richmond Valley Woodcrafters Club Inc. had humble beginnings in a small temporary workshop. A brand new workshop has now been finished and it houses a large work area as well as an onsite wood drying and storage shed. This club has more than 130 people on its books—men, women and children—who all enjoy the satisfaction of working with wood. It is not only a place in which to learn and refine skills but also provides a venue for social interaction between people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. The Community Building Partnership program gives non-profit organisations the opportunity to seek funds for infrastructure improvements they could not afford to undertake themselves. Other examples of groups that have been successful in receiving grants include the Ballina Jet Boat Rescue service, the 1st Bangalow Scout Group and the Byron Bay Basketball Association.

I am confident \$400,000 of funding for the building and improvement of vital infrastructure in the Ballina electorate will be well received by community organisations. Access to this program takes some pressure off local fundraising activities. I know how hard it is to raise money in small communities where businesses and individuals are, more often than not, asked to help not just one community group, but all organisations from preschools and schools to sporting clubs, service clubs and everything in between. One of the best attributes of the Community Building Partnership program is the fact the money has to be used for infrastructure—for buildings and work that will provide long-term benefits to communities across New South Wales. Often the cost of this infrastructure is out of the reach of non-profit organisations and a Community Building Partnership grant is the only way of securing, for example, a new clubhouse, workshop or meeting place.

Whilst some organisations receive fairly substantial grants, others receive more modest amounts. I know all these funds are put to good use and I am constantly reminded by my constituents of how thankful they were to receive the funds and the difference the money has made to organisations such as the Lennox Head Junior Rugby League Club, the Mullumbimby Little Athletics Centre and the 1st Byron Bay Scout group. I know a wide range of community organisations in my electorate of Ballina apply for these grants every year. I wish the applicants for 2011 every success, and I look forward to notifying the successful winners of the 2011 Community Building Partnerships Program.

Mr TROY GRANT (Dubbo—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.41 p.m.]: I acknowledge and thank the Minister for Local Government, the member for Ballina, for bringing this program to the attention of the House. I also acknowledge that it was introduced by the former Government. It has a significant impact and keeps the flame of hope flickering for a lot of our smaller community organisations; it keeps the organisations vibrant and operational. It is well worth supporting the Community Building Partnership Program, which is vital for regional areas. I thank the Government for continuing this program and look forward to the wonderful outcomes this current round of funding will provide for those many wonderful, small not-for-profit organisations right across regional New South Wales.

CANTERBURY BOYS HIGH SCHOOL PREFECTS' INVESTITURE

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury) [3.42 p.m.]: Every year since being elected as the member for Canterbury I have been invited to and have attended the prefects investiture at Canterbury Boys High School. I say genuinely that it is one of my favourite events to which I look forward each year. I thank Canterbury Boys High School for continuing to have me as a friend of the school and enabling me to participate in the investiture ceremony for prefects and captains. This year's event, on 7 September, was particularly significant in that I have known the young men who are taking on leadership roles at the school in 2012 since they started at Canterbury Boys High School in year 7, which says a lot.

I was proud to hear about the leadership goals of the young men. They said they will strive to stamp out bullying, share their leadership duties and mentor other students. The boys plan to set up a new homework centre, embark on environment projects, promote healthy lifestyles and help young students and, importantly, work as a team. It is remarkable that they came from all parts of the world. Some of them arrived at the school as teenagers and did not speak English but now they are taking on leadership roles. The event brought a tear to my eye and made everyone proud. It is also wonderful that their mums and dads, and often grandparents, were in attendance. Some made the big decision to leave their home countries and bring their families to Australia for many different reasons, but all to have a better life. That is such an Australian story and a part of the Canterbury electorate. The member for Lakemba shares that part of the world with me and I am sure he understands that story.

As members have heard in the media, Canterbury Boys High School was a recipient of a donation from Oprah Winfrey earlier this year. I acknowledge and thank her for her well-known generosity in that regard. Oprah's surprise was the promise of a laptop computer for every student and teacher at the school. Oprah said that there would now be no excuse for them not to do their homework. I assure the House that the young men who were made prefects and captains on that night would never fail to do their homework. I was proud to hear them speak about what they wanted for the school. They understood their roles as captains and prefects. Part of their responsibility, and a culture of Canterbury Boys High School, is to support students who come from primary school into year 7. The school has a buddy system and focuses on not tolerating bullying. All parents and members of Parliament know that bullying is an extraordinarily distressing part of the lives of young people at school. An experience of bullying can travel with a person throughout their whole life. Canterbury Boys High School is well and truly on top of it, making sure that does not happen.

I congratulate incoming captains Shahbaz Jamal and Mitchell Healey and wish them every success in 2012. I also commend outgoing captains Filipe Dias and Max Pavone on a job well done and wish them every success in the future. My thanks and best wishes go to the current and future vice-captains, senior prefects and sports captains for their great efforts. Canterbury Boys High School has a proud history of academic and sporting achievement and a proud cultural record. It was wonderful to see big strapping young men playing guitars or singing hymns and love songs. I look forward to next year's investiture of young men at the school. I know that both Shahbaz and Mitchell and their fellow prefects will do a wonderful job.

PS I LOVE YOU CAMPAIGN

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.47 p.m.]: I want to speak about an innovative and unique new campaign in my electorate of Port Stephens—PS I Love You. While some in this Chamber who are old enough will immediately think of the Beatles song released in 1962—the member for Mount Druitt is the only member who would—as the B-side for their debut single *Love Me Do*, the phrase is now part of the vernacular in tourism circles to describe my electorate. I was honoured to speak on behalf of the Minister for Tourism, Major Events Hospitality and Racing, Mr George Souris, at the launch last month of the \$175,000 second phase of the campaign, which is the first integrated campaign for Port Stephens in eight years.

Destination NSW, the State's new statutory authority combining the talents and resources of the former Tourism NSW and Events NSW, is proud to be a part of the campaign. Destination NSW, under the Regional Tourism Partnership Funding Program, is supporting this campaign with funding of \$77,000 being matched by Mid-North Coast Tourism and local industry. Supporting regional tourism is a key commitment of this Government, as evidenced by the Minister's announcement of the additional \$5 million in funding to develop new tourism products and enhance existing tourism products throughout regional New South Wales.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Hansard is having difficulty hearing.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: This significant investment, available to regional tourism organisations and the tourism industry, is in addition to the \$5.1 million already provided by Destination NSW in working with regions and industry on their marketing campaigns and local initiatives, such as this wonderful PS I Love You campaign. We are delighted to be able to get right behind the second phase of this new campaign, working in partnership with Mid-North Coast Tourism, and I congratulate them on their initiative. I also commend all the local tourist operators who are involved in PS I Love You. The Government's goal for tourism is to double overnight expenditure in this State by 2020, and its commitment to grow regional tourism is a key part of achieving that goal.

Tourism is an important industry in the mid North Coast region, attracting, in the year ending June 2011, more than 6.4 million domestic and international visitors, who stayed 12.7 million nights and injected more than \$1.9 billion into the region. With this new campaign aiming to increase accommodation and attraction and tour sales by around 3 per cent to 5 per cent and increase website traffic by 10 per cent, the results for 2012 should tell an even better story. Tourism is the lifeblood of our region and this additional funding will help to grow tourism, create local jobs and breathe fresh life into our local economy.

Tourism-skinned buses and more visitors from China and Japan form part of phase two of the PS I Love You campaign. PS I Love You stickers, shirts and banners and the incorporation of the PS I Love You logo on the uniforms of thousands of tourism operators in the area help provide a consistent image for Port Stephens. Anyone who has visited Port Stephens knows that people fall in love with the place, just as I did 25 years ago. Whether visitors stay in a luxury apartment, a cabin, a caravan or a tent, Port Stephens has something to offer. For those unlucky few members who have not been to my electorate, I will show them paradise, as described on our tourist information site:

Port Stephens, an easy two and a half hour drive north of Sydney, is known for its nature and abundance of aquatic and land activities on its uncrowded sandy beaches, sheltered bays and unspoilt national parks. The resident population of 140 bottlenose dolphins has earned Port Stephens the tag of Dolphin Capital of Australia. Plenty of dolphin cruises are available each day and it's the premier spot along the NSW coast for whale watching from May to November.

Experience the excellent surf beaches in nearby Anna Bay, especially One Mile Beach which is a favourite for all those wanting that perfect wave. Nearby is the clothes optional Samurai Beach, a hidden oasis which can be found via a series of sandy paths that lead to the secluded beach.

Explore the majestic and almost surreal sand dunes of Stockton Beach, the largest coastal sand dune system in Australia, a 32 kilometre stretch of sand with dunes that are at least 30 meters high. Uncover the remains of the Sygna Shipwreck that was wrecked off the coastline in 1974 and Tin City made up of several tin squatters' huts that are located in the dunes, owned by weekend fisherman.

The aquatic reserves in and around Port Stephens are unparalleled in terms of beauty, variety and ease. Fly Point and Halifax Park offer great scuba diving with colours that rival the Barrier Reef. In fact, the whole port is so special that it was declared a marine national park in 2006.

I commend the Government for its exciting developments in tourism and encourage anyone who has not yet been to my electorate to visit. I promise you will love it too.

COAL SEAM GAS EXPLORATION

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie) [3.52 p.m.]: This afternoon I want to talk about community concerns in my electorate about coal seam gas drilling. This issue has been the subject of a great deal of debate and speculation over the past few months. Soon after being elected I was contacted by and met with members of the Camden Haven Anti-fracking Group and I have written subsequently to all their members to keep them informed about coal seam gas issues. To my surprise, I read in the *Manning River Times* that according to a group called the Manning Alliance I had been "absent from the community debate on the issue". Being the person I am, I picked up the phone, called one of the members of this group and travelled to Taree to meet with them.

At the same meeting were members of the Manning Clean Water Action Group. After a long chat I understand that these members have legitimate concerns that areas of the Manning and Hastings valleys will be targeted for drilling. To the best of my knowledge only survey work has been conducted. The Manning Alliance Group is not averse to coal seam gas drilling; they just do not want it in the Manning Valley. The Manning Clean Water Action Group has similar concerns. They have asked me a range of questions in relation to the legal rights of property owners when and if it comes time to negotiate with coal seam gas companies, as well as the impact on property values.

The group considers that our area has many older farmers and battlers who are worried about any uncertainty of how coal seam gas drilling will be rolled out and the potential effect it will have on prime agricultural lands. Despite the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government putting a ban on the use of BETX [benzene, ethylbenzene, toluene and xylenes] additives during coal seam gas drilling, including fracking, putting in place a regulation that requires a water access licence for extraction of more than three megalitres per year from groundwater sources and introducing a ban on the use of evaporation ponds relating to coal seam gas production, of which the details are in the process of being finalised, both groups are concerned about the fracking process.

The effect that coal seam gas drilling will have on aquifers and surface water, together with the level of safeguards to protect the environment, is a concern of the Manning Alliance. The Manning and Hastings valleys are home to a range of agricultural production. These groups have raised concerns about the protection of food production industries, such as, beef, milk, fruit, vegetables and seafood. As I have highlighted previously in the House, our local area boasts some of the most beautiful landscape in New South Wales. That is why so many people choose to live there. I understand why these groups have raised these issues with me. This is just a snapshot of the many and varied list of issues they want answers to. They are to be commended for bringing their concerns to the attention of the community and their local representative in Parliament.

When new technology or a new process is introduced to areas such as the mid North Coast there will always be a level of concern. The Manning Alliance and Manning Clean Water Action Group wanted me to declare outright that I oppose coal seam gas drilling. I will not do so—because, clearly, there must be a balance for both farming and mining. It is our job as legislators to develop a way for both to coexist. However, I will continue to make strong representations on behalf of my constituents to the Premier and the Ministers overseeing the development of the New South Wales Government's Strategic Land Use policy. I will ask them to proceed with caution and to continue to implement environmental safeguards for all types of mining. Through the Strategic Land Use policy, the New South Wales Liberals and Nationals are delivering a balance, involving all members of the community in decision-making and giving farmers and industry greater control over their futures. That is why we are delivering the most stringent environmental standards for coal seam gas in Australia. It is also why we are further developing rigorous groundwater regulations, reviewing fracking standards and reviewing access arrangements.

The former Labor Government failed to do this during the past 16 years. In fact, for 16 long years the former Labor Government was happy to grab cash from mining companies by accepting mining royalties and exploration licence fees. Yet it sat on its hands and blatantly ignored the important issue of mining on agricultural land. Some 10 days prior to the election in March we saw a typical last-minute attempt to muster a

few votes by Labor releasing a scoping paper for a New South Wales coal and gas strategy. Labor had plenty of time—in fact, 16 years—to come up with something better than a scoping paper. The people of New South Wales were not fooled by Labor's last-minute election announcement. It was a lamentable attempt to pretend Labor was protecting prime agricultural land.

Last week at The Nationals annual conference, which was held in my electorate of Port Macquarie, I moved a motion supporting the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government in developing the strategic land use policy that seeks to strike the right balance between agriculture and mining. The motion also acknowledged the concerns of many regional communities about the potential impacts of mining, particularly coal seam gas. Further, the motion supported the appointment of a mineral resources ombudsman to be responsible for educating landholders and private citizens about their rights in relation to mineral exploration and extraction and representing the public interest by investigating and addressing complaints in relation to the industry.

On Monday 31 October 2011 the New South Wales parliamentary inquiry into coal seam gas will hold a hearing in the Manning Valley at Club Taree. I understand that more than 1,000 submissions have been made to the inquiry and that some local residents will be called upon to give evidence. I also am advised that the three groups I have mentioned—the Manning Alliance, the Manning Clean Water Action group and the Camden Haven Anti-fracking Group—have all made submissions. I encourage local residents to attend if they have concerns about coal seam gas exploration.

ST BRIGID'S PARISH, MARRICKVILLE, 125TH ANNIVERSARY

Ms CARMEL Tebbutt (Marrickville) [3.57 p.m.]: Today I make a private member's statement to congratulate St Brigid's Parish, Marrickville, on its 125th anniversary, which was celebrated in magnificent style with a dinner at Marrickville Town Hall. The dinner was presided over by Bishop Brady and Father John Pearce, the parish priest, and attended by many parish members and supporters. It was a wonderful evening with great food, performances and company. St Brigid's Church, with its distinctive cream facade and stunning blue cross, is an iconic landmark for the Marrickville area. It is the headquarters and central administration for the Passionists and the parish for countless people and families who have grown up in Marrickville or who have settled here, from both near and far. The parish has had many distinguished members, including the late Fred Daley and J. J. Cahill.

The parish of St Brigid's is a family for all, as outlined in the pastoral plan. It is a parish that is enriched by the involvement of all, where young people are supported and cultural richness is celebrated, and it has a strong commitment to justice in the local community and beyond. For the parish of St Brigid's, these are not just words on a page but the lived experience of those who lead the parish and its parishioners. This can be seen in the support provided to those who are needy, the programs for the many refugee families in the inner west and in the way St Brigid's actively embraces the diversity of the Marrickville community. The Passionists first arrived in Sydney in 1887 and the original church was in Despointes Street, Marrickville, after Cardinal Moran separated the present parish of St Brigid's from the parish of Newtown.

In March 1888 the first public ceremony in connection with the establishment of the Passionists community in Marrickville took place, with the blessing of the new bell by the Cardinal. By the early 1900s the population growth in Marrickville made it important to look for a new church and in 1915 the property "Shrubland", on the corner of Marrickville Road and Livingstone Road, was acquired by Mr Brennan of Brennan Stores in Newtown on behalf of the Passionists Fathers. Tribute must be paid to Father Alphonsus, who worked tirelessly to build the new monastery and church. Unfortunately, he died a year before the foundation stone was laid.

St Brigid's was opened in 1921 without the facade or belltower, which were added in the 1950s. Since then the church has gone from strength to strength, with its beauty and attractive gardens noticed by all who pass by. In fact, it won the second prize in the best commercial garden section of the Marrickville council garden competition. This remarkable history and the contribution that St Brigid's parish has made and continues to make to the Marrickville community was celebrated on 17 September in the first of many events held to mark the 125th anniversary. As so many said on the night, St Brigid's is not the building and church, as magnificent as they are; St Brigid's is the lives and stories of the men and women who make up the parish: The founding fathers, all the parish priests who have kept the traditions alive, the brothers and sisters and the members of the parish who all do so much to make our community a better place.

I congratulate the St Brigid's Cultural Committee and all who worked so hard to make the dinner a great success. In particular, I congratulate the masters of ceremonies, Pedro Moreira and Liz Haddad, who did a

great job in keeping the event moving. I also thank the chair of the committee, Maria Barlow-Sawaszenko. I also pay tribute to and congratulate Father John Pearce, the parish priest, on the leadership and spiritual guidance that he provides to the Marrickville community. He has a long history at St Brigid's: his parents were married there and he was both baptised and ordained there. He has returned in the role of parish priest, so he has come full circle. I wish the parish of St Brigid's all the very best for the next 125 years.

GRANVILLE SOUTH CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

Mr TONY ISSA (Granville) [4.02 p.m.]: I acknowledge the Granville South Creative and Performing Arts High School, which was officially gazetted in May this year. This unique school, which is in my electorate, draws strength from the culturally diverse backgrounds of its students, with 75 per cent coming from a non-English speaking and low-socioeconomic background. In 2011 the school has seen an increase in enrolments, which is indicative of the community having more faith in the school and the changes taking place. The introduction of a selective and specialised creative and performing arts program at the school provides a tremendous opportunity for students at the school and within the wider community.

The Granville community of schools includes Blaxcell Street Public School, Granville South Public School, Guildford Public School, and Granville Public School, together with Granville South Creative and Performing Arts High School. These schools have a strong and supportive relationship that focuses on the development of the creative and performing arts talents in the local area. The new creative and performing arts selective program will only further strengthen these local community school links.

Granville South Creative and Performing Arts High School has been given the title "creative and performing arts high school", but has also inherited the financial challenge of functioning as a selective creative and performing arts high school without additional funding or resource assistance. To perform at an elite professional level students need an appropriate and specialised facility to do so. I had the privilege of being invited to the school on 27 July to launch the official Ramadan program. I saw firsthand the pride of the school displayed by the teachers, led by the principal, Warren Finn, and the students. I pay tribute to the Parents and Citizens Association chairperson, Georgina Zaineddine, and Karen Tookey, who play an active part in the school and worked with other schools in the area to ensure the establishment of the school as a performing arts centre.

The school has only one music room and it has no soundproofing. It has an out-dated sound system and limited musical equipment. The school offers two functional art rooms, which unfortunately are in need of refurbishment to allow students to achieve their potential. Students are operating out of one drama room, which is also shared with the mainstream and support unit students and the gifted and talented creative performing arts stream. For the students to reach their full potential the parents and community want equity in resources, including specialised teaching spaces and performance studio that have been part of the building blocks of other selective creative and performing arts high schools across the State.

With the right resources and a specialised creative and performing arts building Granville South Creative and Performing Arts High School will be able to deliver the premium standard of education that is expected of this type of school. We have already seen the generous support of the Coalition Government, which has provided appropriate resources and facilities to schools such as Nepean High School. It is important that this Government gives the same consideration to Granville Creative and Performing Arts High School by providing it with a specialised creative and performing arts centre. I look forward to continuing to work with the Minister, the school principal and the parents and citizens' association to have new facilities made available to the students at Granville.

TRIBUTE TO BROTHER PATRICK HOWLETT

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [4.07 p.m.]: I welcome this opportunity to publically recognise the achievements and contribution of Brother Patrick Howlett to the Catholic Church and Marist education over the past 50 years. For all his abilities as an educator—these are formidable and I will speak of them later—it is Brother Pat's character that has had the greatest impact on me personally, on the staff he has led and taught alongside, and the hundreds of students who have been privileged to be under his care. I extend to Brother Pat what I believe to be the highest compliment: that he is someone who practices what he preaches. As Paul Fensom, the Principal of Trinity College Auburn, said at the wonderful golden jubilee dinner held to recognise Brother Pat's achievements:

Pat is a man of deep faith. He once told me his father rarely spoke about religion, just lived it. Pat is the same. He has given his life for God and for Catholic education, but he does not bang on about it. He just lives it and the quality of his example is there for others to emulate.

That sums it up beautifully. It is Pat's character, which has come out of his deep faith, that has impacted the schools he has taught at and everyone who meets him. I believe it is this deep character that has made its mark on the many institutions in which he has worked, from his first teaching postings at St Gregory's College, Campbelltown, Marist North Shore, Marist Pearce, Canberra and Marist Ashgrove, Brisbane, to his appointment as Principal of Benedict College, Auburn, Marcellin College, Randwick and Parramatta Marist.

From that deep character springs a remarkable energy and a zest for life that comes from his deep engagement in the world around him. Brother Pat gives his all. He is not afraid of the new, he embraces innovation and he uses it to spur on and motivate those around him. As he said in his golden jubilee speech, he is not one for saying that school is not meant to be entertaining; you are there to learn. He is interested in the challenge of motivating students and in focusing on not only what is taught but also how it is taught. He has thrown himself into innovative teaching methods and programs such as the project-based learning methodology used by New Tech Network in California and he has explored best practice in Singapore and the United States. The schools at which he has taught have benefitted greatly from his curiosity and his innovation.

I first met Brother Patrick through my husband, Michael. My sister was educated by him and he was at our wedding. I had much to do with him when he became principal of Benedict College, Auburn and we have been friends ever since. He is now a very close friend to my family. It was at that time that I first witnessed the impact that he has on all the institutions that have been fortunate enough to have him on their leadership team. I have seen the way that communities flourish where he is and I have witnessed his advocacy and his dogged and tireless efforts to lobby government representatives in order to improve facilities and to make sure that the best possible learning environment is provided for the children and young people in his care.

Brother Pat is in many ways an innovator, and he is a great builder not only of physical structures but of community, relationships and friendships. He is a brilliant educator and has had a long history as a skilled administrator and manager of staff and school resources. It is because of all these things I have mentioned that Brother Patrick has initiated and overseen marked improvements in the academic standards and performances of all the schools he has been associated with. He embodies the spirit of the man who started the Marist order—Marcella Champagnat. The educational philosophy of Champagnat was simple: To teach children one must love them, that education must be holistic and not in the exclusive hands of the elite. Champagnat saw God at the centre of life. Today in this House I congratulate Brother Patrick on his golden jubilee. But most of all I thank him for his friendship, for his example, for his leadership and for his 50 years of service. I will conclude with one of Brother Pat's favourite quotes, which is something Nelson Mandela said:

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

In the strong hands of Brother Patrick Howlett education is indeed a most powerful weapon. He has impacted and changed many worlds, both big and small. Long may that weapon be wielded.

MORISSET AMBULANCE STATION

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [4.11 p.m.]: I raise the issue of ambulance provision in Morisset. I am concerned that residents of southern Lake Macquarie may have been placed at risk due to the transfer of administrative responsibility for Morisset ambulance station to the Central Coast sector of the NSW Ambulance Service. A disparity in services with this change was predicted by ambulance staff and there is some evidence that their concerns and those of the community were well founded. These recent lapses in service at Morisset may not be due to the administrative change per se, but under the new system Morisset ambulance crews now spend extended periods away from Morisset and there has been a reduction in local service.

I was contacted in August 2010 by ambulance staff concerned that transferring Morisset ambulance station to the Central Coast would allow that area's resources to in turn be deployed to meet demand from northern Sydney. Given that there was only one vehicle deployed at Morisset, this was a realistic concern that has since been vindicated. At that time Morisset staff cited a longstanding agreement that Hunter ambulances would be available to respond to Central Coast emergencies, but would neither respond to nor be on standby for routine work. The agreement sought to ensure an appropriate level of service to Hunter residents, yet this element of fairness has now been set aside.

When the proposal to transfer Morisset ambulance station became public knowledge there was an outcry by residents concerned about the prospect of losing access to this life-saving service. Public concern was heightened by an incident that occurred on 4 December 2010 in which the Morisset ambulance was away from

the area and unavailable. Service from elsewhere in the Hunter was unacceptably delayed and the incident was rightly harshly criticised by the community and the media. Despite such failures, Morisset ambulance station was reassigned to the Central Coast on 1 January 2011. This marked the start of a new disparity by which Morisset's single ambulance is deployed to the Central Coast for increasingly significant periods and the Morisset ambulance station is unattended more often.

I wrote to the Minister for Health about the impacts of the new system and received a reply dated 8 July 2011 assuring me that Morisset would have continuing 24-hour access to both emergency and non-emergency services. However, the problem remains that Morisset's remoteness can mean unacceptable delays. Significantly, the Minister's reply related Morisset's re-assignment to its remoteness within the Hunter and its reliance on Wyong Hospital. The letter also advised that turn-out times for Morisset station had improved by 22 per cent. However, this relates only to a crew's first response and not the actual time taken for a crew to reach its destination. In this regard that piece of information fails to provide assurance of timeliness.

Guaranteeing an equitable and timely service for residents in the natural catchment of the Morisset ambulance station will rely on more accurate information, and I trust that the Minister will gain this from the independent review to which she referred yesterday in this House. Weighty arguments have already been provided in this House and directly to the Government showing that Morisset deserves better health services, and that naturally extends to having adequate ambulance coverage. The 2006 census shows the population in the five postcode areas surrounding Morisset as 23,038, but this figure has grown rapidly. The proportion of people in Morisset aged over 55 is significantly above the national average. Obviously, this is a population with a significant need for ambulance services. However, Central Coast control of Morisset ambulance station has been a retrograde step.

In all other administrative ways, Morisset is part of Lake Macquarie and, in turn, part of the Hunter. Residents of suburbs around Morisset ambulance station deserve a local ambulance service but instead find themselves increasingly isolated with the Morisset station unmanned and crews detained on the Central Coast. There would be a lot of sense in realigning Morisset ambulance station's operations with the Hunter New England Local Health District and this could reinstate an equitable level of service. With the rapid growth both in Morisset and the northern areas of the Central Coast, the real need is for adequate resourcing of health services of both the Hunter and Central Coast regions.

As always, the Minister must use the best information available to determine whether services in the Hunter have been affected by the new administrative arrangements and to determine how the Morisset ambulance station can best serve the needs of its natural catchment. In this regard I ask the Minister to consider the needs of the Morisset community and their concerns about the Morisset ambulance station being so often unavailable. Current arrangements are inequitable and the people of Morisset are depending on the Minister for action on the matter.

KU-RING-GAI PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [4.16 p.m.]: My electorate of Davidson is blessed with cultural diversity. How many electorates could boast a strong association with a local philharmonic orchestra? Very few, I suggest. This year the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra celebrates its fortieth anniversary—an outstanding accomplishment. It was founded in 1971 to provide an opportunity for amateur players of good standard to perform major orchestral works. Today it is one of Australia's leading community orchestras, with a membership comprising professional players, amateurs and students from throughout the Sydney metropolitan area. It is an active, innovative orchestra which does much to educate and entertain the community in the classical music genre.

Artistic Director and Chief Conductor Ronald Prussing is one of Australia's leading brass players. Amongst many achievements, he has played principal trombone since joining the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1980. During 2006-07 he held the post of Artistic Administrator and Chief Conductor of the Sydney Youth Orchestra, leading it on a very successful tour of Spain. Typically, the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra's annual concert calendar comprises three concerts, each featuring a major symphony, a concerto and usually an Australian composition or a modern work. There is also a family concert, featuring a lighter style of music, and the New South Wales Secondary Schools Concerto Competition, providing young musicians with the opportunity to perform concerto repertoire, with the finalists performing in concert with the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra.

The Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra also stages an annual composer workshop for three emerging composers to hone their skills writing for orchestras, and an annual fundraising concert for the Rotary Club of St Ives. The orchestra additionally reaches out to the younger members of the community through Kids Proms concerts, which are themed concerts aimed at pre-school and primary age children, enabling them to view the inner workings of the orchestra. Last year the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra commissioned Damian Barbeler to write a three- to four-minute work based around a tune familiar to young children. The work was to be appropriate for performance by a community orchestra so that other community orchestras around Australia could also use it for similar educational projects. The result was *Hide and Squeak*, based on the tune of *Three Blind Mice*.

Since then the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra has commissioned composer Brendan Collins to write a new work called *Eeensy Weensy*—and, not surprisingly, it is based on a spider story—which had its successful world premiere at St Ives Uniting Church on 18 September. Due to the commissioning of *Hide and Squeak* and the staging of the Kids Proms concerts, the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra was selected as a finalist in the prestigious 2011 ART Music Awards in the category of Excellence in Music Education. In August my wife and I enjoyed the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra's Vive La France concert, which celebrated such French composers as Berlioz, Bizet, Debussy and Offenbach, and including—perhaps not surprisingly—a medley from *Les Misérables* and *La Marseillaise*.

I also recently attended the opening of Willoughby council's new Chatswood Cultural Centre. This impressive new facility might prompt consideration by Ku-ring-gai Council of improved community performance space for use by community groups such as the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra. Next year the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra will mark the fortieth anniversary of its first concert with a series of special events, including an opening celebratory concert on 17 March. Planning is also underway for an outdoor community concert and a cello concerto has been commissioned, suitable for the finalists of the annual New South Wales Secondary Schools Concerto Competition.

I acknowledge the work of President Anne Cahill, who has served on the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra committee for more than 20 years, along with past President Louise Keller, Graeme Gee, Lewis Cornwell, Anne-Marie Braid, Martin Brown and Suzanne Cattell. On the occasion of its fortieth anniversary, I congratulate the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra for its many achievements, including the opportunity it provides up-and-coming musicians, its educational outreach, its fundraising and the entertainment and culture it brings to my local community as a whole.

HABERFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOL: "TIMELESS INDIA EVENT"

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [4.21 p.m.]: I wish to speak about a local event I recently attended at Haberfield Public School the theme of which was "Timeless India: A Bollywood Night". The evening was a celebration of Indian food and culture, and an opportunity to experience the colour, life and joy of India, with incredible food, music and dancing. It was a fantastic night. I wholeheartedly thank and congratulate the Haberfield Public School parents and citizens committee and all of the members of the school community, particularly those from India who made this event so successful and enjoyable. The theme of the evening was "unity in diversity", which was admirably demonstrated in the evening itself and in the spirit in which it was organised by the community.

Haberfield Public School celebrated its centenary year in 2010 and at that time the parents and citizens committee noted the opportunity that such celebrations provide for engaging the wider community in the life of the school—and a very lively school it is. The parents and citizens committee then resolved to take this spirit of community engagement and put together a stand-alone event showcasing the rich diversity of the Indian subcontinent. This was the first stand-alone multicultural event celebrated in the school's rich 100-year history.

Dr Kalpesh Gandhi, the president of the parents and citizens committee, also expressed another reason for planning this event—to show the children of the school that no matter how busy their parents are they still prioritise their children, the local school and the local community. The willingness and initiative of parents in ensuring that the event was a success provides us with a great example of community spirit, volunteerism and genuine commitment to family, culture and community. The parents and citizens committee and volunteers worked tirelessly for more than two months leading up to the event.

It was wonderful to see such a broad cross-section of the community come together and get into the spirit of the event. Most guests also took the opportunity to dress in colourful Indian clothes. With the richness

of Indian cuisine, the menu was elaborate and included delicious options, from north Indian to south Indian, with many dishes cooked and donated by parents. I can attest to the fact that there was absolutely delicious food on sale, with all the funds going to the parents and citizens committee.

The event included a number of traditional cultural performances from the talented children of Haberfield Public School as well as several of their parents, who did quite a spectacular job in terms of their performances. I was delighted to see how the children were showcasing the colour and vibrancy of their cultural background and sharing it with the broader community. Many of the younger children had never performed on stage before and I am told there were many weeks of committed and rigorous practice. The dances ranged from Bharatnatyam in the south to Bhangra in the north and Garba in the west. Again, the obvious dedication involved and the commitment to sharing the diversity of Indian culture with the broader community were a great credit to all those involved.

The evening included a fashion show, which included mums, dads and children showcasing the latest Bollywood trends. And what would a Bolly night be without dancing? It was great to see everyone on the dance floor—children, parents, teachers and community members. I too participated. It is also worth noting that event organisers included strong principles of sustainability in their planning by organising a donation of biodegradable plates and cutlery. In emphasising the importance of incorporating principles of sustainability into the planning of this event, the parents and community members involved also set a great example for the children of the school. Children saw the importance of recognising and addressing the impact that our activities have upon the environment. The atmosphere of the evening was truly overwhelming.

I was joined by the recently elected mayor of Ashfield council, Mr Lyall Kennedy. We had a most enjoyable time together on this wonderful evening. The bindis, the Indian clothes, the henna, the music, food and dancing—it was great to see such a broad cross-section of the community embracing Indian culture, and with children not only of Indian heritage but of a range of different nationalities, all coming together as Australians celebrating, dancing and enjoying the evening. The story of timeless India was narrated and supported by elaborate posters and showbags donated by the Sydney office of the Indian Ministry of Tourism. The event was attended by approximately 400 people and raised more than \$6,000 for the school. I congratulate Haberfield Public School parents and citizens committee and the broader community on setting such a wonderful example for their children in promoting the value of community and culture.

Private members' statements noted.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 4.26 p.m. until
Monday 17 October 2011 at 1.00 p.m.**
