

ANTI-GANG LEGISLATION	18967
ASSENT TO BILLS	18967
AUBURN COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT MR PARASKEVAS CAPRATSI	18964
BLUE MOUNTAINS AUSTRALIA DAY CITIZEN AWARD RECIPIENT MR PETER FRAZER	18964
BLUE MOUNTAINS LOCAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR CHRISTINE KILLINGER	18966
BONNYRIGG MEN'S SHED	18963
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	18935, 18978, 18986
COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE FUNDING	19006
COMMUNITY RECOGNITION STATEMENTS	18963
COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT REVEREND GEOFF BATES	18966
CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY	18979
CRIMINAL PROCEDURE AMENDMENT (COURT COSTS LEVY) BILL 2013	18935
CRIMINAL PROCEDURE AMENDMENT (MANDATORY PRE-TRIAL DEFENCE DISCLOSURE) BILL 2013	19004
EAST HILLS ELECTORATE FUNDRAISER JOSHUA MCKEOWN	19009
EDUCATION FUNDING	18973
ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF NORTHERN TABLELANDS	18967
ELIZABETH POWELL 100TH BIRTHDAY	18963
ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVES	18974
EVIDENCE AMENDMENT (EVIDENCE OF SILENCE) BILL 2013	19004
FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY SAMOA AID RESPONSE	18966
GAME COUNCIL NSW STAFF ALLEGATIONS	18969
HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE	18981
HOSPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE	18968
MAITLAND ELECTORATE EVENTS	18965
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES	18976
METROPOLITAN STRATEGY FOR SYDNEY	18972, 19009
MOTOR VEHICLE INSURANCE AND REPAIR INDUSTRY	19006
NORTH COAST FLOODS	19008
NSW WOMEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS	18965
ORANGE RELAY FOR LIFE	19007
PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER AMENDMENT BILL 2013	18940, 18957, 18984, 18986
PENRITH FESTIVAL 2013	19009
PETITIONS	18978
POPE FRANCIS	18965
PORT STEPHENS VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENTS	18964
PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	19005
PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES AMENDMENT BILL 2013	18956
QUESTION TIME	18967
RACING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2013	19001
REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND INITIATIVES	18969
RIVERSTONE LOCAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR LINDA STRICKLAND	18964
SENIORS WEEK ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENTS	18966
SENIORS WEEK	19005
SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD WINTER GAMES PARTICIPANT CRAIG MUHLBOCK	19005
SYDNEY LIGHT RAIL PROGRAM	18975
TAFE FINE ARTS COURSES	18970
TORONTO LIONS AND LIONESSES YOUTH OF THE YEAR	18964
TRIBUTE TO JACQUELINE MILLEDGE	18967
UNITED STATES BOWLING CONGRESS WINNER JASON BELMONTE	18966
WALLSEND ELECTORATE VOLUNTEER KEVIN GOODWIN	18965
YAGOONA GIRL GUIDES	18965

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 20 March 2013

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

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE AMENDMENT (COURT COSTS LEVY) BILL 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 28 February 2013.

Mr ANDREW ROHAN (Smithfield) [10.04 a.m.]: I support the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Court Costs Levy) Bill 2013. I commend the Attorney General for the introduction of this bill. Since the O'Farrell Government's election almost two years ago it has been working hard to make sure our State and its systems function more efficiently and effectively. This bill is another step forward to make the operation of our Local Courts consistent and efficient. Presently a defendant can be made to pay court costs, which is generally the amount of the filing fee, if they are convicted in a Local Court. The bill will ensure an automatic statutory court costs levy will apply in respect of most convictions in the Local Court, as well as some orders under section 10 of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 where a defendant is found guilty but the court does not proceed to conviction. This levy will align with the filing fee, which is currently \$83. At present court costs orders that are made under section 215 are being applied inconsistently. Magistrates currently have the discretion to award costs against a defendant at the end of summary proceedings if the defendant is convicted or an order is made against him or her.

The proposed amendment is intended to achieve more consistency in the application of court costs. This will also align with the rationale that those found guilty of an offence should bear some of the costs of conducting criminal proceedings. It is important that offenders take responsibility for the impact of their actions on the community, including the cost of bringing them to justice. The bill will amend the Fines Act 1996 to ensure that individuals who are liable to pay this levy will have a range of payment options available through the court and the State Debt Recovery Office, even if they are financially disadvantaged. These options will include applications to pay by instalments; seeking an extension of time within which to pay; having the debt written off; and participation in the Work Development Order Scheme, which will allow disadvantaged individuals to pay off their fines through unpaid work with an approved organisation or by undertaking certain courses or treatment.

On average, it costs the Government approximately \$750 to finalise a criminal matter in the Local Court. This was a finding by the Productivity Commission in its 2010 report on government services. The levy would therefore represent a modest contribution by the offender towards the community's costs in bringing them to justice. However, there will be exceptions to imposition of the proposed levy as we recognise that there are special circumstances in which the levy should not apply. For example, the levy will not apply in the Children's Court, which will retain its existing discretion to make Local Court costs orders. It will also not apply to findings of guilt recorded in the Local Court regarding traffic offences involving children where the court has chosen to deal with the defendant under the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act rather than at law.

The Local Court will have discretion to exempt a defendant who is under the age of 18 from paying the levy. I understand that prior to implementation of the levy steps will be taken to ensure that there will be relevant information about court costs and other fees that may apply to a defendant in court so people are

advised of such costs before they are incurred. The bill requires that the levy scheme be reviewed after 12 months of operation. In conclusion, this bill will improve efficiency and consistency to the operation of our Local Courts. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [10.10 a.m.]: I support the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Court Costs Levy) Bill 2013. This bill is a common sense measure. It provides a relatively modest change to legislation but nonetheless one in the interests of common sense in support of the broader community. Criminals cost our community an enormous amount of money and it is reasonable to expect that where people are found guilty of criminal offences they should contribute some of that cost back to the community, so that it is not honest, hardworking, tax-paying citizens that are bearing the full cost. While there are limitations and pragmatic considerations about when the costs can be applied to an offender, where it is possible costs should be applied. It is my conviction that the community expects government to use the common-sense test for proposed legislation, and it is clear this bill passes that test and that this bill should be enacted.

I know that criminal activity will always be with us. There are criminals in our community and we need the Police Force to be ever vigilant and looking out for our interests. I would like to take a few moments to report on some positive and proactive police work that has occurred recently which shows what can be done when common sense principles are applied. In the north-western region of Sydney there has been a reduction of 20 per cent in break and enter offences in recent times. It has come about because of good policing and a sensible initiative taken by this Government in its first budget. This Government increased the funding to the forensic branch of the NSW Police Force to allow police to outsource to other laboratories so the forensic turnaround times could be reduced.

In the past it could take months to receive forensic results. If fingerprinting was done in the aftermath of a break and enter it might take the local police months to find out whether they had a match or not to the fingerprints that they collected. The results for DNA testing could be delayed for over a year. I attended a community safety precinct committee meeting at Quakers Hill local area command on Monday and I was told by the local police that they are getting results to fingerprint tests within two days. That has enabled them to quickly find matches with people known to the police whom they can immediately look for as a person of interest in an individual break and enter or a series of break and enters in an area. It has increased the clean-up rates that the police are able to maintain and therefore reduced the subsequent offences that offender may have committed.

Strike Force Focus has been run by Mount Druitt Local Area Command over recent months. As a result of a number of hits from forensic tests it identified a cluster of potential offenders and persons of interest in the Mount Druitt Local Area Command. A strike force was formed to pursue those leads and it has connected those persons of interests with offences across a range of local area commands in metropolitan Sydney and particularly in the north-west. As a result of proactive policing from those leads they have been able to achieve a reduction of 20 per cent in break and enter offences in Quakers Hill, St Marys, Blacktown and other areas. That outcome was achieved as a result of pursuing the information that was available from a faster turnaround of forensic results. It is a story of common sense being applied by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and this Government.

This Government increased funding to the forensic branch of the NSW Police Force in order to dissolve a bottleneck of forensic results, and this has achieved a benefit for the broader community. The bill takes it a step further: it states that the cost that we know is being incurred by the community should at least in part be recovered from the people causing that cost. The principle already exists in legislation with magistrates and judges having discretion to apply these costs. This bill extends that legislation, making it the norm and the standard situation. There are some common sense exemptions in situations where it is logical to assume that either the offender could not pay or making them pay might be counterproductive to the rehabilitation of a minor. It is a sensible bill that we have in front of us, one that I welcome and I congratulate the Attorney General on a small step, but a positive constructive step, towards a safer community for New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHN FLOWERS (Rockdale) [10.15 a.m.]: The objects of the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Court Costs Levy) Bill 2013 are to amend the Criminal Procedure Act 1986 to make certain accused persons found guilty of offences in summary proceedings before the Local Court are automatically liable to pay a court costs levy. The levy will replace the present system under which the Local Court has the discretion to make an order that an accused person pay court costs if found guilty and to amend the Fines Act 1996 to provide that for the purpose of that Act a court costs levy is to be treated as a fine for the purposes of enforcement action. It will

amend the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987 merely to restate the current system that applies to criminal proceedings involving children under which there is no automatic costs levy but the court has a discretion to make an order that an accused person who has been found guilty of an offence pay court costs.

There is currently a discretion which enables convicted defendants to be charged a statutory court costs levy. This bill removes the discretion except in circumstances where defendants would find it difficult to pay. Examples of such defendants include children and defendants who receive sentences of imprisonment. It is desirable that offenders take responsibility for the impact of their actions on the community, including the associated cost of court proceedings. At present court costs orders made under section 215 are being applied inconsistently. The proposed amendment is intended to achieve greater consistency in the application of court costs. In addition, the Government believes that a proportion of the costs of conducting criminal proceedings should be borne by those found guilty of an offence.

According to the Productivity Commission's 2013 report on government services the average cost to government of finalising a criminal matter in the Local Court is \$750 per matter. The payment of a levy would therefore represent a modest contribution by the offender towards the community's costs in bringing that person to justice. The proposed levy will, however, contain a number of exemptions to the following convictions or orders: the levy will not apply in the Children's Court, which will retain its existing discretion to make Local Court costs orders. It will also not apply to findings of guilt recorded in the Local Court regarding traffic offences involving children where the court has chosen to deal with the defendant under the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act rather than at law.

The levy will also not apply to convictions resulting in a sentence of imprisonment, other than a suspended sentence, because prisoners have little opportunity to pay off such a debt while in prison and the accumulation of debts could have a negative effect on rehabilitation. The levy will not attach to convictions or other orders recorded in the Drug Court of New South Wales. At present the judges of that court use their discretionary power and do not impose court costs on offenders. The rationale is that the Drug Court is a therapeutic court and the imposition of further monetary penalties on this group of offenders at the time of completing the program may act as a barrier to their remaining crime free and drug free. Application of a levy might hamper rehabilitation of these individuals and counteract the benefits of the Drug Court program.

The levy will not apply to orders made under section 10 (1) (a) of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act where a court finds a person guilty of an offence but because of extenuating circumstances directs that the charge be dismissed, except where the offence is punishable by imprisonment. The same exception applies in respect of the Victims Compensation Levy. Payment of a levy may be considered by an accused person found guilty of an offence as a double punishment because he or she is required to submit to the terms of the sentence and also to pay a court costs levy. However, the levy is in the vicinity of \$83 and represents only part of the cost incurred by the courts. Payment options are available where appropriate and assistance is available for the disadvantaged.

The bill contains an amendment to the Fines Act 1996 to ensure that individuals who cannot pay the levy in full will have access to a range of alternative payment options available through the court and the State Debt Recovery Office. These include applying to pay by instalment, seeking an extension of time in which to pay, having the debt written off due to serious medical, domestic or financial problems, and participating in the work and development order scheme, which allows disadvantaged individuals to satisfy fine debts by non-monetary means through unpaid work with an organisation or by undertaking certain courses or treatment. This bill is designed to help alleviate the financial burden placed on Local Courts, which is where the vast majority of criminal matters are dealt with. Steps will be taken prior to implementation of the levy to enhance the availability of information about court costs and other fees that may apply if a defendant goes to court so that people are advised of such costs before they are incurred. The levy's commencement will be delayed to allow upgrades to the necessary court systems and for steps to be taken to notify the public. The levy will also be reviewed after 12 months of operation. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [10.24 a.m.]: The Opposition will not oppose the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Court Costs Levy) Bill 2013. The bill amends the Criminal Procedure Act 1986, the Fines Act 1996 and the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987. It makes certain changes to the manner in which court levies are administered. Within our system of government and throughout much of the Western world we have a clear division between the Executive, the Legislature and the judiciary. In recent weeks we have seen one area where responsibilities between those branches of government can overlap; that is, in respect of budgets. State and Federal governments are responsible for the budgets of the courts that fall within their

respective jurisdictions. This can result in some tension when governments make policy decisions about budgetary issues that concern the judiciary. As a legislative body, we should be mindful of that when dealing with these matters.

While this bill makes a series of amendments that I understand are uncontroversial, we must be vigilant to maintain the clear division between the Legislature and the judiciary wherever necessary. The bill amends the Criminal Procedure Act 1986 to require those found guilty of offences in Local Court summary proceedings to pay a court costs levy. This levy will replace the existing system under which the Local Court has the discretion to make an order that an accused person pay costs. The costs are set by regulations as the equivalent of a filing fee, and I am advised that that fee is now \$83. The bill also amends the Fines Act to provide that court costs levies will be considered as fines for the purposes of that Act. This amendment will allow the enforcement of costs levies by the Office of State Revenue. The bill amends the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987 to make necessary consequential amendments.

The amendment will apply the current system to criminal proceedings involving children to ensure that there is no automatic costs levy for children but that the court has the discretion to make an order for costs. I will comment briefly on some of the other key features of the bill. The levy does not apply to persons sentenced to imprisonment, except where the sentence is suspended. The levy is not applicable to sentences imposed by the Drug Court. As I said, the levy does not automatically apply to children, although the court is able to impose the levy if it deems it appropriate. The Government is able to introduce regulations to exempt certain convictions or orders. The court costs levy will be treated as a fine imposed by the court, allowing for enforcement action to be taken and to access alternative payment options such as the work development order scheme.

The Legislation Review Committee reviewed this bill and its recommendations can be found in Legislation Review Digest No. 3 of 2013. The committee referred to Parliament the question of whether the bill might trespass on personal rights and liberties. It raised concerns that offenders who receive provisional sentences will be in custody when the court is carrying out progress reviews to determine whether to impose a final sentence. The committee also referred to Parliament the question of whether elements in the bill might be retrospective insofar as "offences committed before the commencement of the scheme could be dealt with under the scheme". I commend the bill to the House.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [10.28 a.m.]: I am delighted to make a contribution to the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Court Costs Levy) Bill 2013. This bill could more appropriately be titled the "making individuals take responsibility for their actions bill", because that is what this is all about. The community is sick and tired of having to foot the bill for individuals who have committed crimes or who have been taken to court for whatever reason but generally because of their personal actions. I thank the Attorney General, the Hon. Greg Smith, for introducing this sensible bill. Court action costs the taxpayer money: it is always the taxpayer who is forced to pay the costs of operating the courts. That has had a huge impact on the State's ability to provide infrastructure for the court system.

Under the former Government one did not have to look too far to see neglected, unmaintained and unimproved court infrastructure, to which officials, judges and magistrates have drawn attention. This has been the result of no costs recovery or, if there was any, costs recovery at the discretion of magistrates or presiding officers. The bill will make it automatic for a statutory costs levy to be applied in respect of most convictions in the Local Court, and any fair and reasonable person in the community would agree with such a levy. The bill contains provisions that allow courts to make exemptions—for example, where there are grounds of hardship or where someone with a disability has challenges. There is also an exemption for children under the Criminal (Children Proceedings) Act and anyone under the age of 18 years. The bill will make a difference in the area of costs recovery. Almost everything in modern life comes at a cost—from driving on a tollway to get to work and parking in a parking lot to applying for a licence. Most things cost money. It is more than appropriate that individuals pay a levy for the costs they incur rather than the taxpayer bearing all the costs.

This is a straightforward bill; it is not complicated or difficult to understand. The intent is obvious. It now will be a statutory requirement for a levy to apply automatically. Magistrates and others will have provision to waive costs after considering individual circumstances. Again I thank the Attorney General for listening to community concerns and understanding that the payment of these costs by taxpayers has resulted in a lack of infrastructure. I need only highlight the Wagga Wagga courthouse. The judiciary, others and I have long campaigned for a redevelopment of this courthouse and the Attorney General has delivered. Construction will commence in September. The moneys levied as a result of this bill will go towards bricks and mortar, operating costs and infrastructure that our communities demand to enable the justice system to operate and deliver as intended.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping—Attorney General, and Minister for Justice) [10.33 a.m.], in reply: I thank the members for the electorates of Heffron, Tweed, Kiama, Liverpool, Mulgoa, Cabramatta, Newcastle Gosford, Granville, Balmain, Vacluse, Smithfield, Riverstone, Rockdale, Bankstown and Wagga Wagga for their contributions to the debate. I will address some of the matters raised, particularly by the member for Liverpool, who highlighted a number of issues raised by the Law Society of New South Wales. Firstly, the Law Society expressed concern about the impact that this bill will have on people found guilty of multiple crimes.

The Government will not be offering discounts to people who commit more crime. We have carefully considered the impact this levy may have on disadvantaged people and we are concerned to ensure that individuals who genuinely cannot afford to pay court fines or other court costs have a range of options available to them. As such, defendants may avail themselves of systems through the court and the State Debt Recovery Office to alleviate the burden of repayment. These options allow defendants to enter into a time-to-pay agreement, pay by instalment or a working development order or apply to have the debt written off due to serious medical, domestic or financial problems.

Secondly, the Law Society was not sure whether imprisonment includes home detention and intensive correction orders. It also was not sure whether someone who receives a suspended sentence, breaches it and is then imprisoned is liable for the levy. The Government understands that those who are subject to imprisonment have little opportunity to pay off debts and that the accumulation of these debts could have a negative impact on rehabilitation. As such, convictions resulting in a sentence of imprisonment are exempt from the levy, including home detention and intensive correction orders. This is made clear in the bill as drafted and there is no requirement for any further amendment.

The levy applies automatically when a conviction or relevant order is made, including in the case of a suspended sentence. Unlike an individual in, for example, full-time detention, a person who has received a suspended sentence has the opportunity to undertake employment and pay off debts. If a person later breaches a suspended sentence and is imprisoned, the levy will still apply as it did on conviction. However, an inmate can request that the State Debt Recovery Office stay enforcement until after release.

Thirdly, the Law Society questioned whether the proposed subsection 42A (5) could be interpreted as allowing an order for costs to be imposed as a condition of a bond or other community service order. The proposed section 42A of the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987 simply replicates the existing section 215 of the Criminal Procedure Act 1986, which is used at present by the Children's Court to make discretionary court costs orders. Subsection 42A (5) does not change the existing position and the Children's Court has advised that there is no confusion as to how it will operate.

Fourthly, the Law Society stated that there was no prohibition on ordering court costs against a child whose charges are dismissed under section 33 (1) (a) (i) of the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act or dealt with under the Young Offenders Act 1997. As is made clear in the bill, the court costs levy will not apply to proceedings conducted in the Children's Court or to children dealt with in the Local Court in relation to a traffic offence under the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act. As such, it will not apply where a child's charges are dismissed under section 33 (1) (a) (i) of the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act or dealt with under the Young Offenders Act 1997. The Children's Court will have a discretion to make a court costs order, which is the situation that applies at present. That addresses all of the Law Society's concerns.

The member for Balmain raised concerns about whether the bill would result in any significant revenue; essentially, he asked whether the reforms would be worth the trouble. The member for Balmain correctly stated that it is difficult to provide an exact number in relation to the revenue that will be accrued by the Local Court as a result of the imposition of a mandatory court costs levy as this figure is dependent on several variables, including the number of convictions that will be made in the Local Court in the coming years. Based on 2010 figures, imposing the levy in place of section 215 court costs orders could result in a potential increase in income of approximately \$7.7 million.

However, we must also consider that levies may be waived if Local Court magistrates choose to exempt children who appear before them or they are not applicable if the court has chosen to deal with a defendant under the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act rather than at law. In relation to the costs of administering the scheme, it is important to remember that many people will pay the levy to the court before the levy is referred to the State Debt Recovery Office, in which case the State Debt Recovery Office will not bear any cost. The member for Balmain claimed that levies issued at the discretion of the court are recovered at the

rate of about 25 per cent in the first year after the issue of the order. That is not correct, as the 25 per cent figure refers to levies referred on to the State Debt Recovery Office, that is, those levies not paid to the court within the specified period.

It is also important to remember that the levy will apply in addition to any pecuniary penalty imposed in respect of an offence, so that in many cases the State Debt Recovery Office will be seeking to recover the levy together with another penalty forwarded by the court. Even when the variables and the cost of administering the scheme are considered, the Government is in no doubt that the reforms will make a significant, albeit proportionately modest, contribution to the costs of running matters in the Local Court. For these and the reasons already given, I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Motion by Mr Greg Smith agreed to:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER AMENDMENT BILL 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 14 March 2013.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [10.41 a.m.]: I speak on the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. I am not leading for the Government on this bill, but the House is waiting on a member from the other side. I am sure that many of my colleagues will want to make a contribution. The bill amends the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010, the principal Act, to give effect to the Government's response to an inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Office by the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office in December 2011. The bill limits the function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to the preparation of costings of general election promises of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. It also removes the functions of costings of election promises of other parties or members and of providing technical analysis, advice and briefings to the members on budget and economic matters.

The bill limits the appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer for a period before and after a State general election during which election costs and reportings are to be made, and it requires the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to request the Parliamentary Budget Officer to prepare election policy costings for all general election promises that are likely to impact on the current and relevant forward budget estimates. It authorises the Parliamentary Budget Officer to publicly release more than one budget impact statement prior to the State general election and clarifies that a budget impact statement of all the costed policies of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition must show the budgetary impact of all costed policies on a specific core set of financial indicators. Further, it makes a number of other amendments in relation to the reporting of the parliamentary review arrangements of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

The position of Parliamentary Budget Officer was created in the final days of the previous Government. It was a desperate attempt by a government gasping for breath. They realised they were in deep trouble and they wanted a start in the new parliamentary session. This bill provides a sensible policy that will deliver for the community and taxpayers of this State. It is a responsible response to the former Government's desperate and botched attempt to put in place a policy whereby they could utilise the office for their own benefit, not for the benefit of the taxpayer. It was all about them. This bill corrects that botched policy. I commend the Treasurer for this initiative. I am sure that other Government members will have more to say on this piece of legislation.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra) [10.45 a.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. I apologise that I was not in the Chamber a moment ago but I was advised that a second reading would be dealt with before this item of business. As is often the case with governments that acquire a very large majority, almost from the outset, but certainly as time passes, those governments start to act increasingly arrogantly, increasingly with disdain for the processes and the people of the electorates who put them there, and increasingly with unwarranted aggression to their own departments and to other members of the Parliament. That arrogance manifests itself in many different ways. For example, it might manifest, as occurred last week, in a certain Premier walking into a certain Parliament in this nation and making a clumsy attempt to play the race card. It might manifest in a certain Premier walking into this Chamber and making clumsy, sexist and offensive remarks or personal attacks upon members of this Chamber that are demeaning, unedifying and unstatesmanlike in the extreme.

Mr Darren Webber: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. The bill is about the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: To the point of order: Standing Order 129 relates to questions asked of Ministers in question time.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): Order! I thank members from both sides of the House for their assistance.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: It might manifest itself in a WorkCover inquiry. WorkCover is one of the most important schemes in this State which, at its core, operates to look after some of the most unfortunate people in the State, those who have been severely injured and some, whom I have talked to, who feel they have very little left to live for. What does this Government do in relation to the WorkCover inquiry? It sets the committee an impossible timetable and railroads through a report that bears no resemblance to the vast bulk of submissions received and evidence put before the committee. That arrogance manifests itself spectacularly today in this place in the proposition that this Parliament should support the nonsense that is the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013.

In 2010 the former Government established the Parliamentary Budget Officer by means of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010. It was the first time any jurisdiction in the nation had sought to introduce a parliamentary budget office. I note that the concept of a parliamentary budget office has strong support from no less than the man who would be Prime Minister, the Hon. Tony Abbott, and from jurisdictions internationally, and that support was put in evidence before a committee. I will speak about that later. For the first time in Australia the New South Wales Parliament had a Parliamentary Budget Officer. For a time the acting Parliamentary Budget Officer was Tony Harris, a former Auditor-General of this State and a man widely respected as someone who cares about public institutions and who is truthful and honest.

I wish Tony Harris was still the Parliamentary Budget Officer under the terms of the Act that applies today but will not apply in a few hours. The gutting of the Parliamentary Budget Office in this State has a history and a motivation. Its motivation resides inherently in the DNA of this Government—indeed, of Liberal governments of all persuasions throughout history. All their rhetoric about being conservative and caring for the institutions and the courts and the very things that go to make up the backbone of integrity in this State is just lip service. Today they are doing more than just paying lip service. This is Liberal and Nationals belief in action: let us gut the scrutineer.

On 27 April 2011 the Premier issued a press release, which stated, "Budget black hole blows out". The reason I mention that is because it goes to the history of the motivation to get rid of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I will not go into any detail particularly about what is in that press release but it makes claims that there is a \$4.5 billion black hole in the State's finances left by the former Labor Government, which has blown out by an extra \$759 million; that there has been further evidence that "Labor has cooked the books to distort the true state of New South Wales finances"; and that there have been cases of "gross financial mismanagement".

Dr Geoff Lee: The absolute truth.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: Absolutely untrue. I thank the member for Parramatta for his timely interjection. The Government had its own Acting Secretary of Treasury, Michael Lambert, write a report. In his report he stated:

In summary, both the mid year review and the March 2011 update provided to the incoming government accurately reflected available information at the time and were consistent with a robust approach to Budgeting adopted by the NSW Treasury.

That was the first egg on the faces of the Premier and the Treasurer. On 2 May 2011 the Parliamentary Budget Officer responded to a request from the current Leader of the Opposition, the member for Blacktown. On 28 March 2011 the current Leader of the Opposition requested the office to provide a response to claims that there had been a report on the variance between mid-financial year—December 2010—and March 2011 and also an analysis and advice on claims in a media release of 27 April 2007 headed, "Budget Black Hole Blows Out Further" by the current Premier and then Leader of the Opposition. The Parliamentary Budget Officer at the time, Tony Harris, went into some detail. I recommend to all members of the House his report dated 2 May 2011, in which he states:

The media release offers other claims of "gross economic incompetence". Insofar as fiscal policy is concerned, the state's AAA status does not support this claim. A fear that the budget deficit "could grow even further" is merely an assertion made without evidence.

That is, the Premier has made an assertion without any evidence. He continues:

A claim that "Labor had 'cooked the books' to distort the true state of NSW's finances" is not supported either by the report issued by Mr Lambert or by this Office's examination of available data.

There we have it, an independent officer of the Parliament saying that the Premier had engaged in political hyperbole of the highest order without a single shred of evidence to back his claims. That is the second egg on the faces of the Premier and the Treasurer. In conclusion the Parliamentary Budget Officer states:

The above analysis suggests that most of the claims made in the relevant media release of 27 April 2011 are unsupported by evidence or conflict with available information on the state's fiscal position and budgetary processes.

We are reaching the stage of scrambled egg on the faces of the Premier and the Treasurer. In response to that report by the acting Parliamentary Budget Officer the Government goes into shutdown. They love to avoid scrutiny almost as much as they love hiving matters off to committees. The Government then formed a Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office.

Mr Darren Webber: Hear, hear!

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: Hear, hear indeed, because it got the result that the Government wanted, not a result that bears any resemblance to the truth. The Government cannot hide that and it cannot cook that result because mathematics are not on the Government's side. The terms of reference for that report stated:

... the Committee consider:

- (a) the purpose of the Office, and whether the terms of the Act are appropriate; and
- (b) the role for the Office, including and not limited to its:
 - (i) functions and powers;
 - (ii) structure, staffing and resourcing; and
 - (iii) accountability and oversight mechanisms

If the Government were honest it would not have wasted the time, effort and money on a Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office inquiry because, to be very generous to the Government, it was completely and wholly superfluous to a committee. I am told there were 1,000 pages of deliberations and 21 or 22 submissions. Every single one of those submissions, every single shred of evidence put before the parliamentary budget office committee supported the establishment of the Parliamentary Budget Office, and most of the submissions and evidence supported a full-blown Parliamentary Budget Office of the type that was reflected in the Act and is still on the statute books today.

The result of that committee inquiry, just as happened with the WorkCover debacle, was that the Government cooked the books with the committee's report. I note that the member for Cronulla is going to make a contribution to this debate; he was one of the chief authors of that WorkCover debacle. The Government came up with a report that did not resemble a single shred of evidence that was put before the committee. It is like walking into a court or a tribunal and hearing unmitigated evidence that black is black and the judge or magistrate or the jury in this case—a stacked jury—delivering a verdict that black is not black, it is in fact white. That is the extent to which this Government went to wriggle out of having to establish a Parliamentary Budget Office—a cooking of the books of the highest order. The recommendations of that committee bear no resemblance to a single submission.

Members should read the submission to that inquiry from the Acting Parliamentary Budget Officer and former Auditor-General of this State, Tony Harris. It is edifying, truthful and dignified, and it was absolutely 100 per cent discarded and ignored by this Government in its craven haste once again to avoid scrutiny—the type of scrutiny which embarrassed it of the non-existent budget black hole and the type of scrutiny which embarrassed it of its own Lambert report that said there was no budget black hole. This Government was never going to countenance an independent Parliamentary Budget Officer criticising it.

This Act enables the legislative nobbling of the Parliamentary Budget Office. The Act that is currently law states that the Parliamentary Budget Office is to be established and that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is to be an independent officer of the Parliament, and a full-time officer who engages in no external employment and who concentrates his abilities, his efforts and his time on doing those things that section 13 of the Act confers upon him. If every member of this Parliament, both in this House and in the other place, had regard to section 13 of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 they would understand what a valuable resource the Parliamentary Budget Office would have been before it was gutted by the O'Farrell Government. Section 13 reads:

13 Functions relating to advice etc to members of Parliament

(1) The Parliamentary Budget Officer may also, at the request of any member of Parliament—

That is any member of Parliament regardless of political persuasion—

- (a) prepare a costing of a proposed policy of the member of Parliament, and
- (b) provide any analysis, advice or briefing of a technical nature on financial, fiscal and economic matters (including in relation to the costing of proposals included in the State budget).

What a hell of a resource for any member of this place. I would like to see members from the other side say explicitly that they do not think the assistance that would have been conferred upon them by section 13 (1) of the current Act was a valuable resource. That member would be an economic genius—and there are none on the Government side—or the Government is so well resourced by other independent means that the assistance of the Parliamentary Budget Office is not needed. I will be watching with great interest to see if any member walks into this place and says that. Section 13 (2) states:

- (1) The Parliamentary Budget Officer is to inform a member of Parliament who makes a request under this section if the Officer is unable to provide the costing or information requested and provide the reasons why the costing or information cannot be provided.
- (2) If the Parliamentary Budget Officer needs more information for the purpose of responding to a request under this section, the Officer may ask the member of Parliament who made the request to provide that information in writing.
- (3) The functions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer under this section do not extend to:
 - (a) providing any analysis, advice or briefing to committees of Parliament, or
 - (b) developing policy proposals on behalf of members of Parliament.

The Parliamentary Budget Office would have been a valuable resource for all members. Under section 7 of the Act the Parliamentary Budget Officer was to hold office for a period of not less than four years and not greater than nine years. Under section 7 (3) the officer could not hold that office for a total period of more than nine years but could be reappointed for a period of up to nine years. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was also enabled to ask other government departments for information and assistance, and the advice that the Parliamentary Budget Officer was to give to any member was to remain confidential. Who in their right mind could possibly disagree with the principle that an independent officer of the Parliament could provide and educate members on financial and fiscal matters?

Who in their right mind would try to argue that this should not be praised and that its continuation not be supported? Every member on the other side, along with every member of the Government in the upper House, possibly with the aid of the Shooters and Fishers Party and the Christian Democratic Party, is about to say that. The words they speak will forever condemn them because the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 is a tremendous and valuable resource for every member of this Parliament. In particular, it should be a tremendous resource for the Treasurer. He, more than anyone, needs a Parliamentary Budget Office to augment the assistance that he receives from the Office of the Auditor-General in cleaning up the mess he has made of the State Budget. Six months ago the Treasurer could not even inform the House whether the budget was in surplus or deficit.

On 31 October 2012 the New South Wales Auditor-General's Report, Financial Audit, Volume Three 2012 was presented to the Parliament. It focused on the State's finances and identified a total of 37 errors in amounts greater than \$20 million: 19 errors between \$20 million and \$50 million; seven errors between \$50 million and \$100 million; nine errors between \$100 million and \$1 billion; and two errors greater than \$1 billion, including \$1 billion that slipped behind Mike Baird's couch. For the first time in the history of this State we had a Treasurer who had lost \$1 billion. For the first time in this State we had a Treasurer who could not even tell a single member of the Parliament or a single resident of New South Wales whether the State was in deficit or surplus. If any member of this Parliament needs a Parliamentary Budget Office it is the Treasurer of this State—he is making the office of Treasurer a laughing stock. The Treasurer should vehemently support this bill; he needs it more than anyone else.

In addition to the Auditor-General having to trot down to the Treasurer's office to assist in the preparation of the budget, a Parliamentary Budget Officer should be sitting on the Treasurer's right-hand side—someone who is not afraid of the Treasurer and who will not be nobbled by him and his arrogant Premier. It should be someone who will tell the truth and someone who will assist members to better understand fiscal and financial matters as they relate to this State. It is the historical role of members in this place to examine and scrutinise the Executive, and the Executive is making monumental errors—as the Treasurer and Premier are doing with the State Budget. Every member needs the assistance of the Parliamentary Budget Officer as constituted in the Act, not the bastardised version as a result of legislative nobbling that lives inside the wretched bill before the House.

The Opposition will not support this bill. The current constitution of the Parliamentary Budget Office should be retained. The only mistake that the former Labor Government made in promulgating the original Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 was to not make it a mandatory office. The Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 states that the Presiding Officers of the Parliament—the Hon. Don Harwin, and the Hon. Shelley Hancock—may appoint a Parliamentary Budget Officer. For the past two years both of the Presiding Officers have squibbed it, not because they did not want to establish a Parliamentary Budget Officer—the Hon. Don Harwin in particular presides over the Legislative Council with an even hand—but because they were under instructions not to do so. The Premier, the Treasurer and the Cabinet have said to the Presiding Officers, "Don't you dare avail yourselves of the legislative power that lives in the 2010 Act." Why have they said that? Because the first forays of the Parliamentary Budget Officer resulted in egg all over the Government's face and the Government continues to embarrass itself.

This bill should be withdrawn. If the Premier and the Treasurer want to walk the walk, as well as talk the talk of scrutiny and education, they should say to the Presiding Officers, "Go ahead and establish a Parliamentary Budget Officer under the terms of the 2010 Act." I call upon the members of the Shooters and Fishers Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Independents in this place, and The Greens in this place and in the other place, to support the establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Officer under the 2010 Act. Only then will this Parliament as a whole be able to make the statement that its members have resources available to them to potentially make them the most educated parliamentarians in this nation in respect of fiscal and financial matters. With the public view of politicians in this nation at an all-time low, that would make quite a statement. I bet this Government does not make it.

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla) [11.09 a.m.]: If nothing else, the member for Maroubra gets top marks for audacity. He started off by saying how, over time, governments become increasingly arrogant. Well, what did we have after 16 years of the last Labor Government? If we are to talk to electors about transparency and accountability, let us look at the sad and sorry dying days of the last Labor Government. That Government was so arrogant and out of touch with electors that it thought whoever was Premier was the plaything of Joe and Eddie. That Government was so lacking in transparency and accountability that it did not engage in some refinement of a committee or an officer: it closed down Parliament. It decided at the end of 2010 that it did not want an inquiry into its botched handling of the electricity industry and closed down Parliament. So, a lecture from the member for Maroubra about transparency and accountability, and how governments become increasingly arrogant over time, really was an exercise that deserves top marks for hypocrisy and audacity.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 enhances its scrutiny, accountability and transparency, rather than detracting from those principles. This bill will give effect to the Government's response to an inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Office by the joint select committee. That committee made a number of recommendations in relation to the operations and functions of the Parliamentary Budget Office. The bill implements most of those recommended changes. It defines the function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer on the costing of general election promises of both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. The

member for Maroubra waxed lyrical about some other functions of the Parliamentary Budget Office. Those matters can be dealt with already in many other ways by independent outside bodies and by agencies of government and the Parliament.

We have a Parliamentary Library that provides members with extensive research on economic and budgetary matters. We have independent outside agencies that can provide independent critiques of ongoing financial analyses. We have the Public Accounts Committee and budget estimates hearings. We should not be distracting the Parliamentary Budget Officer by requiring the officer to spend his or her time on matters on which a plethora of other agencies provide scrutiny. It is symptomatic of the member for middle management's approach to government and public policy in New South Wales that he wants to create another bureaucracy that duplicates, that wastes public resources instead of redeploys them where possible to the front line to provide more teachers, nurses, police, interns and midwives, as this Government is doing. He wants another bureaucrat and more duplication and waste.

This Government wants to get back to the core business of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, which is independent scrutiny of election promises; and we are increasing accountability and transparency by making that function mandatory for the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition—not optional, but mandatory. We are increasing accountability, not detracting from it. The bill will increase accountability and transparency by stipulating the core criteria regarding the content of budget impact statements. The amendment will require the Parliamentary Budget Officer to show the impact of all costed policies against the following financial indicators: general government sector net operating result, general government sector capital expenditure, general government sector net lending/borrowing, general government sector net financial liabilities, and total State sector net financial liabilities. Those indicators are determined based on New South Wales Treasury's current means of budget monitoring and presentation.

The appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer will be limited to a period before and after a State election. The appointment will commence on 1 September in the year prior to a State election and end within three months following the election. That will allow time to table the officer's report in Parliament and to respond to the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Assembly, to which the Parliamentary Budget Officer is directly accountable. That report will outline the operational and resourcing cost of the Parliamentary Budget Office, the number of costings and budget impact statements completed, issues encountered in undertaking the costings process, and recommendations on operational arrangements and activities for future elections.

I welcome these amendments. They will ensure that the O'Farrell Government is ahead of the pack when it comes to transparent and accountable government in Australia. No other State or Territory has a Parliamentary Budget Office. And Federal Labor misses the mark by a mile with its proposed Parliamentary Budget Office, which will report 30 days after the election. In other words, the supposed champions of transparency and accountability in Canberra do not want the electors to know how much their promises cost until 30 days after the election—when it is too late! That is an insult to Australian voters. In stark contrast, the New South Wales Parliamentary Budget Office will furnish taxpayers with policy costings on the Monday prior to the election day so that they can consider how they want to vote.

It will be an interesting exercise for the Parliamentary Budget Officer when he or she is costing the election promises of that mob opposite. They have kicked, screamed and opposed every measure that this Government has taken to improve the efficiency of public operations in New South Wales. They have opposed our savings to the taxpayer regarding WorkCover. They have opposed everything; it is all care but no responsibility for them. That is why the electors of New South Wales deserve to know how much the policies that are put forward going into an election will cost. They deserve to know, when those opposite complain about reform of the police death and disability scheme, and their promise to undo all of that reform, how much that will cost. This Government is beefing up the powers of the Parliamentary Budget Officer so that the people of New South Wales know how everyone, including the mob opposite, would pay for their promises.

Labor has a pathetic record when it comes to delivering accountable government to this State. The predecessor of the member for Heffron is on record as saying that independent oversight of election promises had her "absolute" support. Yet six months out from the last election Labor was still advertising the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer; even then, only half of its policies were submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office for review. That will not happen next time. Labor has a pick-and-choose approach when it comes to open and accountable government. Their opposition to a bill that will improve transparency and accountability is, sadly, symptomatic of the culture of a party that wants to prorogue Parliament and place its political imperatives above the interests of the electorate.

Day in and day out, until March 2011 we saw State Labor's, and now Federal Labor's, contempt for the voters in their chaotic, back-of-the-envelope approach to policy formulation and reckless financial management. We in this place have seen that with the Rozelle Metro, the stop-go starts on public transport announcements and other things; and we have seen it in Canberra with Federal Labor's back-of-the-envelope approach to the National Broadband Network and other major policy matters. We have seen Canberra's attacks on free speech and the proroguing of Parliament in New South Wales. That mob opposite does not care about accountability and transparency. They would do well to follow the example that we are setting in New South Wales. This is a terrific bill, and I commend it to the House.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [11.17 a.m.]: I too oppose the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. This is a bad bill. It will do nothing to improve the processes of budgetary accountability in this State. It falls well short of this whole premise that the Premier was elected to head a government that was open, honest and transparent. The bill is nothing more than a stunt by the Government. There have been so many stunts by the Government in the past two years that I am surprised Evel Knievel is not sitting on the frontbench, because time after time after time we see stunt after stunt after stunt. At this rate they will be jumping sharks next.

This Government has taken the axe to the Parliamentary Budget Office and has left it unstaffed since May 2011. But this bill goes even further by gutting the capacity of the Parliamentary Budget Office to do anything at all that will be constructive and useful for the people of New South Wales. It takes the Parliamentary Budget Office effectively to the gallows. It is the next part of this Government's plan to finish the job on the Parliamentary Budget Office. This Government is desperate to undermine the Parliamentary Budget Office so that it can avoid scrutiny of its failed economic policies and its mismanagement of the New South Wales budget. When this Government talks about transparency it has zero credibility.

Before the last election, the Coalition released its costings less than 48 hours from polling day. At the time the current Treasurer, Mike Baird, said: "Not a single dollar is going to be taken off the budget bottom line; not an additional dollar of debt is going to be added to the State's balance sheet". Well, where do we find ourselves now and how much have things changed? This is a Government that has now borrowed more than \$10 billion in less than two years and lumped all that debt on the taxpayers of New South Wales. It has forecast a budget deficit of more than \$700 million this year. There we have the record of mismanagement of those opposite in a nutshell. The Government is borrowing heavily at the same time that it is cutting spending on hospitals and schools, but not a single contract has been signed that has delivered an item of infrastructure improvement in this State. Those opposite are driving this State into deficit without anything to show for it and leaving the burden for the generations to come.

The O'Farrell Government wants to nobble the Parliamentary Budget Office so it can avoid the embarrassment of results it just does not like. Upon election two years ago the Premier and Treasurer claimed that the Labor Government had left a budget black hole—a claim that was debunked as rubbish. But had it not been for the independence of the Parliamentary Budget Office and the report it produced, those opposite might have got away with their claim. They did not get away with it, so the answer of those opposite was not to appoint somebody to that office and then, two years later, to gut it, cut it to pieces and say that it will exist in name only. That is effectively what has happened. I quote from the report of the Parliamentary Budget Office of 5 May 2011:

The above analysis suggests that most of the claims made in the relevant media release of 27 April 2011 [*O'Farrell: Black Hole Blows Out Further*] are unsupported by evidence or conflict with available information on the State's fiscal position and budgetary processes.

We have seen how petty the Government is. The Premier has a glass jaw when it comes to criticism. He retaliates whenever he gets picked up on something. When a Government officer does that, the Premier ensures that he does not reappoint that person to that office. In order to make sure that there can be no criticism, the Government brings an amendment of this sort before the House. We have seen what a lightweight the Treasurer is in this State.

Mr Ryan Park: No. 11.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: The lightweight No. 11. The last batsman on the order has been exposed for the fact that he cannot add up. A billion dollars out with his accounting in the State Budget—a billion dollars lost down the back of the couch. So you can see why those opposite do not want someone independent watching what is going on with the State's finances because somebody might point out that there is another billion dollars

down the back of the Treasurer's couch or under his pillow at home. This Government is doing everything it can to avoid scrutiny by an independent Parliamentary Budget Office and the motivation behind this is the fact that they have a lightweight Treasurer who can lose a billion dollars.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Hornery): Order! The Leader of the Opposition does not need a cheer squad. If the member for Keira does not stop interjecting I will have him removed from the Chamber.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: Under the original Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010, the Parliamentary Budget Officer was meant to be a full-time officer to hold continuous office for not less than four years. Under sections 13 (a) and (b) of the Act, he or she was to provide costings, analysis and advice to any member of Parliament on "financial, fiscal and economic matters". This bill makes a mockery of that because, first, it removes section 13—the ability of members of Parliament and minor parties to cost election commitments. The bill refers only to the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. Secondly, the Parliamentary Budget Office will operate for only nine months every four years—from September to election day and for the three months following. For the rest of the Government's term there will be a void.

The appointed officer will be a different person at each point in the cycle. He or she will be deprived of the experience and institutional memory required to offer high-level analysis and to issue authoritative rulings. A government that has completely ignored the operation of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 for almost two years has no credibility to propose these sorts of amendments. It is nobbling the office at a time when the community is crying out for more transparency; it is nobbling an office that would deliver on some of the few promises that the Premier might have delivered on—transparency, openness, honesty and accountability.

The Business Chamber is an organisation that is regularly quoted in this House whenever it has something nice to say. In question time yesterday we had the reciting of how wonderful the Business Chamber thought the performance of the Government was. Even that organisation has said that it believes that it is critically important that the Parliament has an independent source of economic expertise. Those opposite are going out of their way to avoid that, as are Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey. I was interested to hear the member for Cronulla speak about Canberra. In Canberra, even the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer know the importance of and place value on a Parliamentary Budget Office.

In New South Wales the Government has a different view to its counterpart in Canberra when it comes to the establishment and proper funding of a Parliamentary Budget Office. The Premier does not want to take independent advice. He does not want a Parliamentary Budget Office answerable to the people of New South Wales and not to the Government. The bill does not set up an independent body or a person who will not be answerable to the Government because the appointment will last for only nine months. Members know what happens when appointments roll around on a regular basis.

If an officer acts independently and does something that this Premier or this Government does not like, he or she will not be reappointed because he or she did not toe the party line or do what the Government wanted. That person will be out the door. This Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 is a travesty that is not going to serve the interests of the people of New South Wales. It is not going to give the people of New South Wales the information that they rightly deserve in the lead-up to an election. This is nothing more than another stunt from the Evel Knievel Premier of New South Wales. The Opposition will not support a bill that denies people the right to independent information.

Mr DARREN WEBBER (Wyang) [11.27 a.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. I was a member of the committee that inquired in the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I was amazed to hear the member for Maroubra and the Leader of the Opposition speak this morning about openness, accountability and transparency. They are members of the former Labor Government who prorogued Parliament to avoid openness, accountability and transparency. For members on that side of politics to say that we are trying to dodge that process is ludicrous. The Government is putting the Parliamentary Budget Office into place. If it was so important to Labor's core principles—and I am not sure what they are—why did those opposite not put it into place sooner in a 16-year tenure of Government and, if it is a core Labor principle, why have they not done it Federally either?

In June 2011 the New South Wales Government appointed a joint select committee to inquire into the purposes and role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and as to whether the terms of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 were appropriate. I was pleased to be appointed as a member of the joint select committee. As

a newly elected member of Parliament only several months into the job, it was daunting to look across the table in the deliberative meetings to see the former Treasurer and the former Premier of New South Wales, the former member for Heffron. I had seen them on the television and read about them in the newspapers. They knew their task and were there with a purpose. This was the first parliamentary committee I had been a member of.

The member for Maroubra talked about the low standing of politicians in New South Wales and indeed the nation, but one need only look at the committee transcripts to see why that is the case. The way the former Premier and the former Treasurer carried on in that committee was absolutely deplorable—crying over spilt milk, no longer having the trappings of power in the way they saw representation in New South Wales, and no longer being able to go straight to Eddie's office to get him to fix the latest issue. They carried on like absolute pork chops, trying to extend the time of the committee and delaying the appointment of a parliamentary budget officer. I lost every ounce of respect for those two members, one of whom is now a former member, and if I had had an ounce of respect for the Labor Party it went out the door as well.

The committee wrote to a number of stakeholders inviting them to make a submission to the inquiry, including all members of the New South Wales Parliament, major political parties and minor parties, such as the Labor Party currently, parliaments in other States, comparable international bodies, academics and relevant New South Wales Government departments. A media release announcing the inquiry and calling for submissions was distributed to media organisations in New South Wales. The committee received 13 submissions from organisations and individuals, including the United Kingdom House of Commons Scrutiny Unit, Unions NSW—there you go, they did something—CPA Australia, and the former Acting New South Wales Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr Tony Harris.

Unfortunately, given no other Australian jurisdictions have established a parliamentary budget office to date, despite the fact we have had red Labor governments right across the States for years—for 16 years in New South Wales—there were limited opportunities for members of the committee to receive primary evidence from Australian parliaments that had successfully established a similar office. A public hearing was held on 21 September 2011, with the committee taking evidence from the former Acting Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr Tony Harris. The committee process identified several areas for reform. The committee presented a reform agenda to the Government, and I am pleased to say that this Government will implement all but one of the recommendations made by the inquiry. Furthermore, the Government will also make some minor modifications and additional amendments aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill will limit the operation of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to once every four years, with the sole function of preparing election policy costings. In order to accommodate this the officer's appointment will start on 1 September in the year prior to a State election and end within three months after the election. The bill will also make submission of policies for costing mandatory for the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition, an important measure that will ensure the people of New South Wales will be able to make their decision at the ballot box based upon true costed policies. That is the whole concept of a parliamentary budget office: we are ensuring it happens. Both the Premier and Leader of the Opposition will be required to confirm in writing that all their policies that have a budget impact have been submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer will be allowed to release more than one budget impact statement prior to each election. The content of these statements will incorporate a specified core set of indications in line with the current New South Wales budget papers. The Government will also amend the post-election reporting and parliamentary review of the Parliamentary Budget Officer after each election. The Parliamentary Budget Officer will now have to report to the Public Accounts Committee. It is worth noting that the Government has not accepted the inquiry's recommendation to strengthen the confidentiality provisions of the Act. This is because a review found that the current confidentiality provisions are already sufficient in achieving the objective of ensuring confidentiality of submitted papers.

The Government takes the role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer very seriously and is committed to ensuring that during an election all major political parties, whether in government or opposition, even if it is a Labor Party minority opposition, are held to the same standard when producing policies. This is essential to ensuring sensible economic management and avoiding the mistakes of the past when incoming governments have been burdened with unexpected budget black holes and funding shortfalls. The bill seeks to ensure that the electorate has accurate, timely and independent information on the cost of election commitments. The Parliamentary Budget Officer will now have a sole focus on costing election commitments. This change will reduce duplication by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The oversight duties were previously performed by parliamentary committees, other agencies and non-government agencies.

The bill also seeks to ensure greater clarity regarding the content of the budget impact statement. The indicators specified in the bill are currently used by Treasury and are reported in the budget papers to inform the public of the State's fiscal position. This measure will ensure that the public is provided with a core set of information on each major party's policy commitments and what effect they will have on the State's fiscal position. Importantly, these amendments mean that the Parliamentary Budget Officer also will have the ability to release additional budget impact statements. This means parties will not be able to make last-minute announcements without thorough scrutiny of their budget impact. The Parliamentary Budget Officer will be held accountable by the Public Accounts Committee. It is considered that the committee has the necessary expertise to effectively undertake this role and ensure the independence and integrity of the costings process.

In conclusion, the O'Farrell Government was elected on the basis of restoring faith in the governance process. These reforms will ensure that at election time the people of New South Wales have a complete picture of both the State's finances and potential policy impacts on the budget. This is an important part of the democratic process and I am pleased that this Government is ensuring that the measures are put in place. This is on the back of legislating to ensure that never again can a Labor Government come into this place, prorogue Parliament and avoid open, transparent accountability in governance.

This is good legislation. It has taken a Liberal-Nationals Coalition Government to put it in place and ensure that the opposition and government of the day are forced to have their policies costed rather than having Labor put them through Eddie Obeid's office to see whether or not they make a good enough election commitment to win seats for the Labor Party of the day. I support the bill. I condemn the Opposition for opposing it and condemn it for taking so long to bring its legislation to the table in 2010. One would have thought that on such an important issue involving openness, transparency and accountability, Labor would have done this years ago. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) [11.37 a.m.]: Not everything has a political solution. This amendment bill is simply a political tool and a political vehicle. The Opposition opposes the bill simply because it is a political stunt. Politics is not just about governments and oppositions trading insults across the Chamber. There are times when there has to be governance and when elected representatives and leaders must act in a statesmanlike way and adopt a statesmanlike approach. Effective government in a Westminster system requires not only strong government but also strong and effective opposition. Under the Westminster system there is a doctrine of separation of powers between the judiciary, the executive and the legislative arm. Under the Westminster system, of course, the legislative and executive arms of government are in effect merged, although the executive is accountable to this House.

However, to ensure accountability there has to be effective input from members of Parliament, not just from Opposition members who might oppose the Government but from Government members as well. I know a number of Government members sitting on the backbench of this House who are extremely talented individuals who have succeeded in their professions. They should not just be given hand-up briefs to support the executive Government. They should also be used to scrutinise a variety of decisions of the executive Government in accordance with their own functions.

When it comes to the financial functions of the State it is of no surprise to anyone that every State in the Commonwealth of Australia is struggling financially. The buzz phrase is "vertical fiscal imbalance". That means that supply of revenue to the States of the Commonwealth is shrinking in comparison with the requirements of the State's expenditure. Vertical fiscal imbalance has been occurring for more than a decade. As the States are under pressure to provide greater funding, particularly for health and education, other funds and other services are being cut around the country. It does not matter whether they are Labor governments or Liberal governments; there is a shortage of revenue. Every State government and the Commonwealth have been severely cutting their public service sectors in an effort to squeeze more revenue into the basic services that they are required to provide.

I would apprehend that there is not much left, with all the cutting that has been done not only by the current New South Wales Government but also by its predecessors. Where does that leave members of Parliament? They are entitled to not accept the executive Government's assertion about its financial position because, as we know, the material that comes from the Treasurer is not accurate. It was extremely embarrassing for the Treasurer when the Auditor-General reported that instead of the Government having a deficit there was in fact an extra \$1 billion and a surplus. Those errors may well have occurred by bureaucrats, but had there been a parliamentary budget officer those errors may well have been ascertained by individual members of Parliament and not the Auditor-General.

What does a parliamentary budget officer do? I draw the attention of members to the Parliament's own website regarding the enactment of this bill in 2010. The Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 established for the first time in Australia that an independent officer of Parliament cost election policies and proposals that political parties and independent members of Parliament might submit in the run-up to an election. More importantly, the officer is also charged with providing parliamentarians with technical briefings on financial, fiscal and economic matters and to provide costs proposals submitted outside of the election periods. The creation of this independent officer is intended to overcome objections that have been expressed about previous arrangements under which Treasury provided estimates of costs. The New South Wales budgetary officer has counterparts in the United States of America and in Canada, and the equivalent agencies are being established in the United Kingdom.

There is nothing novel about the approach, but it has not been adopted by the Government. As with all executive governments, they do not want scrutiny in respect of their decisions; they do not want scrutiny under the Freedom of Information Act; they do not want scrutiny in relation to their budgetary process; they do not want scrutiny in relation to the operations of their departments. They resent Opposition members of Parliament asking questions. All members of Parliament are not properly resourced. The Remuneration Tribunal has recommended—not only during our period in opposition but also when the Coalition was in opposition—that the shadow Ministers be given additional resources to discharge their duties. Neither this Government nor the previous Government was prepared to resource the Opposition, on the basis that the Opposition might ask questions about public policy.

That seems to be the mentality that existed in this State. However, there are advantages to the State Government to monitor the effective performance of the executive Government, even if the Government wants to avoid all forms of scrutiny and have independent experts provide advice to individual members of Parliament. When the Opposition stands up and says that teachers in New South Wales are substantially underpaid and should be properly remunerated for the huge responsibility that they have, instead of the Government playing hardball, it would be terrific if a member of Parliament could ask the Parliamentary Budget Officer how much that would cost. Every time there is any proposal that requires some form of expenditure there is an effective cost, so why can these debates not occur on a mature basis? Before Government members advocate to their own side of the House that their Government should do something, why should they not have private access to the Parliamentary Budget Officer so they can understand the costing implication of their request?

I can imagine that Ministers would be relieved to know that when one of their own members of Parliament says that Ministers should do so-and-so the member knows a cost is involved in the representations being made. Why does it have to be a secret? Why do we have to be denied independent analysis and financial advice in respect of things that are important to hold the executive Government to account? With great respect, the bill highlights to the Premier the stupidity of the Government's approach. In the proposed amendments to section 18 of the Act the Parliament is creating a law to require a parliamentary leader—and it affects only the Leader of the Opposition—to submit the party's policies. The Government has its policies costed by Treasury before being given to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. That has been going on since the history of the Westminster system, and no doubt since the Magna Carta.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! The member for Heffron does not need any assistance from the member for Keira. Earlier today the member for Keira was warned about the consequences of his outbursts. If the member for Keira has another outburst, I will not refrain from asking him to leave the Chamber. This is his final warning.

Mr RON HOENIG: The proposed amendment to section 18 provides that the subsection does place an obligation on the parliamentary leader that is not enforceable in a court or a tribunal. The section has absolutely no effect. It is creating an unenforceable law. It is an absurdity. It is not something that should be enacted by this Parliament.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [11.47 a.m.]: It has been interesting to see the audition by potential Labor leaders going into the March 2015 election. We have heard from the member for Maroubra, the current incumbent, who is a bit of a pretender and thought he should come down here and bellow on a bit—not about much, but to show he has a bit of gusto and substance beyond what the polls give him credit for. Now we have heard from the member for Heffron, who is also a potential contender for leader at the 2015 election. I suspect that the member for Keira might even have a go if he can contain himself during my speech and not get thrown out of the Chamber. In fact, I would not be surprised to see the member for Toongabbie come down shortly.

This bill amends the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act to give effect to the Government's response to the inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Office by the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office. That inquiry was well conducted and informed in its proceedings. I will touch on some of the points and the concerns that were raised in the debate that I participated in when the initial legislation was brought into this Parliament. I will revisit some of those concerns and some of the principles that the Coalition supported at that time. I will then refer to the current legislation, highlight a few aspects and ask members opposite whether they agree with certain principles in the bill or whether their bluster and opposition extends to some of the valuable elements it contains. I will then highlight what a wonderful job the Treasurer has done in the face of the legacy left by the Labor Government. I will sum up by highlighting some of the advantages of the functions of a parliamentary budget office, which I think both sides of the House agree should exist.

I will first address the original legislation introduced in this House prior to the last election. It was not unreasonably seen as a lifeline being thrown overboard by a Labor Government which had been in power for almost 16 years and which faced almost certain defeat. Members opposite were trying to come up with a way to preserve the resources that they had come to rely upon in government before the election cycle came around again. They rushed in a piece of legislation with literally one hour's notice. I contributed to the debate on the legislation and I spoke to the former Parliamentary Secretary, who was equally disturbed to see the legislation introduced with so little notice. It was a lifeline for the Labor Party in opposition. Members opposite knew that they did not have much skill and that they relied on financial advice from Treasury. They also knew that they were about to be decimated and that they needed to do something to preserve some resources. Not unreasonably, many people saw it as a desperate attempt to maintain resources.

The Shadow Treasurer asked today whether members opposite were comfortable with individual members of Parliament not having access to resources. As a member of Parliament and as the chair of the Public Accounts Committee I am very comfortable with this legislation and not having resources under section 14 of the Act. I do not believe that the status quo is good value for money for the taxpayers of New South Wales. Effective government in this State has existed for a long time before today and it will continue to exist, as will opposition, in the way that it has in the past between election cycles. Both sides of the House agree that it is useful to have resources in the lead-up to an election and immediately following to ensure that we have high-quality and independent election costing transparency and veracity with regard to the policies and promises offered by both sides of the House.

My first concern about the original legislation was the lack of consultation and the fact that it was rushed and was not transparent. The shadow Treasurer is being hypocritical in suggesting that there has been a lack of transparency with regard to this bill, particularly given that he was the person who spoke in reply on the original bill and failed to respond to the six concerns that I highlighted in my contribution to the debate. My second concern related to the appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer for up to nine years. The Opposition has criticised the Government for not appointing someone to date following the election. I still do not understand why members opposite did not take the opportunity to appoint someone on a permanent basis when they had the opportunity to do so. Rather, the Labor Government appointed Tony Harris in an acting capacity. In that sense, members opposite have only themselves to blame. There may have been a very good reason for doing that. However, again, members opposite are not being logical, they do not make sense, they are flying off the handle and they are being unreasonable.

My third concern about the original legislation related to costs and savings that might be made otherwise, including in Treasury, if there were an independent costing process. That issue also was not addressed by the former Minister in his reply. My fourth concern related to time frames for costings and other advice; my fifth concern related to the scope of advice and functions; and my sixth concern related to new taxes and tax implications. None of those concerns and questions was answered by the now shadow Treasurer in reply. That was indicative of the way in which the legislation was rushed into this place in a totally inappropriate and unprofessional manner.

We now have before us legislation that does a few things to improve the situation. It removes the Opposition's ability to draw on millions of dollars worth of resources for financial advice between elections and, importantly, preserves that facility in the six months leading up to an election. That is the time when the Opposition should be costing its promises and policies properly. It has not done it in the past and it should be made to do so. For all the bluster of members opposite, did they use the office? No, they did not. They chose to use it only when it suited them. This legislation makes the submission of policies mandatory for the leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition. It requires the parliamentary leaders to confirm in writing that all their policies that have a budget impact have been submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office. That is crucial and it is something that clearly makes members opposite uncomfortable.

The bill also limits the operations of the Parliamentary Budget Office to once every four years, and its sole function is to prepare election policy costings. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's appointment will start on 1 September in the year prior to the State election—that is, 1 September 2014 for the next election—and it will end within three months after the election. I will highlight one other provision, given my chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee. The post-election reporting arrangements for the parliamentary review of the Parliamentary Budget Office have been changed: it will now report under this legislation to the Public Accounts Committee under section 15. I will highlight the relevant provisions that relate to the Public Accounts Committee. [*Extension of time granted.*]

The role of Public Accounts Committee is set out in subsections (1), (2) and (3) of proposed section 15, which states:

- (1) The Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Assembly may monitor and review the operations of the Parliamentary Budget Officer appointed for a State general election and report to Parliament on any matter relating to that Officer.
- (2) The Parliamentary Budget Officer is to provide to the Public Accounts Committee a copy of the operational plan of the Parliamentary Budget Officer as soon as practicable after it is approved by the Presiding Officers.
- (3) The Parliamentary Budget Officer is required to furnish a report to the Public Accounts Committee as soon as practicable after the holding of the State general election for which he or she was appointed. The report may include recommendations on operational arrangements and activities of the Parliamentary Budget Officer in respect of future general elections.

There is accountability. As a statutory officeholder the Parliamentary Budget Officer obviously plays a valuable role in overseeing and scrutinising the operations of the Executive and the potential Executive. However, there is further oversight of that overseer by the Public Accounts Committee. The committee is a bipartisan or non-partisan committee and, dare I say it, operates in that fashion, even with the shadow Treasurer as a member. There will be plenty of opportunity if the system does not work for that committee, which operates in a non-political way, to recommend changes, if warranted, after the process has been put in place.

I will move now to the Treasurer and his excellent performance, because comments have been made that are totally unwarranted. First I want to highlight that when we came to government economic growth in New South Wales had been the slowest of all States in the nation for a decade. Finances were unsustainable, the triple-A rating was at risk and expenses and the targets for expenses in the budget had been consistently ignored. In fact, if the previous Government had kept to its budget over the 16 years they were in government New South Wales would have been \$20 billion better off.

As the member for Heffron highlighted, vertical fiscal imbalance does exist. That makes Treasurer Swan's attempted intimidation of this State and other States in respect of mining royalty taxes even more outrageous. Under the current Government there has been investment in the key leaders of economic growth, infrastructure and housing, which has helped set the path for recovery. We are rebuilding the New South Wales economy. Over the last two years we have been led by an exceptional Treasurer who has managed the State's finances responsibly and ensured that for the first time in 17 years expenses have come within budget. We have continued to promote employment, with almost 100,000 more jobs created since we came to government, and we now have the second strongest economic growth of all States in Australia.

The saving measures that have been implemented have been difficult, but they have enabled us to invest in more front-line employees, including more than 3,000 new nurses, 520 new teachers and 210 new police officers. We now have seen economic growth, the second strongest of all States, having come from the slowest growth of any State for the last decade under Labor. Jobs growth was the slowest in New South Wales for any State for the last decade under Labor and now we have the strongest jobs growth of any State.

Business confidence in New South Wales is above national average amongst small- to medium-sized businesses; it was the lowest of any State for the last five years under Labor. These are all clear indicators that the Treasury and the Treasurer are doing a great job. The State will move to surplus in 2014-15 and New South Wales will return to its rightful place as the number one State in Australia. The Treasurer has implemented and is driving best practice in financial management in New South Wales. A range of measures are being implemented which will continue to strengthen the State's financial situation—a situation that under Labor was unsatisfactory. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) [12.02 p.m.]: I want to take the House back to a time I distinctly remember. It was a few years back, the start of 2007, just before the lead-up to the election. I will never forget it. Mr Peter

Debnam calls a press conference with his then deputy, the member for Ku-ring-gai. Down they come, a famous moment. All of a sudden, they are being forced to announce their costings. The member for Davidson will remember this well because I am sure he was one of those who shuddered. They are being forced to announce their costings in the lead-up to the 2007 election. That was a reasonable request.

Down they come, they open the door to the press room and they stand there. Everyone is waiting for the document to be handed out. I am looking at the screen thinking, "That is unusual." They talk broadly, as they had done previously, about people drinking recycled effluent and that sort of stuff. Round and round they go, and I think to myself, "Hang on a minute, they have got a problem. There are no costings." All of a sudden we hear that famous line, "The photocopier was broken." That line will go down as one of the most memorable moments for any observer of New South Wales politics: "The photocopier broke down."

Why do you need a parliamentary budget office when you are in government? In case the Treasurer's office did not outline this to the newbies over there, when you are in government a minor, relatively small agency called the Treasury does your costings. Some Government members may say that they will have to put their costings through the Parliamentary Budget Office. That is what the Treasurer's office wants them to say—the Treasurer's office provides advice to members who do not understand and struggle with simple matters—but the fact is that does not happen. Let me remind members about a matter a little closer to home when, just a couple of months ago, the Treasurer mysteriously lost a billion dollars. Why do you need a parliamentary budget office when, through your own talent, you can lose a billion dollars?

This bill goes further than provisions relating to the Parliamentary Budget Office in that it shuts down anyone who has the audacity to disagree with the Government. Who has disagreed with the Government? The former member for Sydney disagreed with the Government. What did they do to the former member for Sydney? They could not beat her so they legislated against her. Tragically for the Government, that did not turn out right. That was a bad move. What do they do when an independent person from the Parliamentary Budget Office debunks the black hole myth a couple of months after they come into office? The Government ensures that such words will never be uttered again and rolls out legislation to debunk the office, in a similar way that they legislated against the member for Sydney.

Why would you want a parliamentary budget office when your own Treasurer is batting number 11 in the order? I played cricket as a young fellow and I am sure people in the public gallery have sons and daughters who play cricket. What is the spot that no-one wants to bat at? Surprise, surprise, it is number 11. No-one asks, "Can I bat number 11, please?" No-one says, "I would love to be number 11 in the batting order. That is a fantastic position. I can see how great it would be and it would help me stay in the field. Please let me bat number 11." No-one wants to bat number 11. This bill further embarrasses the good man that Mike Baird is. Mike Baird has a tough job. He has to deal with not only members of the community but also his own side. They hate the Treasurer so much they put him in that dreaded number 11 position. Mike Baird needs this bill when he has to deal with The Nationals in the budget committee process. For those who do not know how it works, a Government proposal that involves dollars has to go through a budget committee process.

The Liberal members of the budget committee shudder when The Nationals proposals come before them because they are normally characterised by two elements: a massive amount of cost and zero ability to pay. Under the provisions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 introduced by the former Government, the Treasurer can say to members of The Nationals, "The Regional Relocation Grant that pays people \$7,000 to move from one end of a bridge to the other end sounds like a you beaut idea but before you get Treasury to run its eyes over it, how about you go down to the Parliamentary Budget Office and let them have a look at it?" Having done that, the Treasurer can say, "Listen, \$280 million to move people from one end of a bridge to the other end probably is not the smartest thing to do. We might not do that."

Under the current Act, when our friends from the Roads portfolio think it is a fantastic idea to spend \$20 million on rebadging signs around the State—despite the fact that it is confusing to emergency services—the Parliamentary Budget Office can look at the Minister's proposal. The Treasurer can then say, "Before I get my earnest public servants from Treasury to look at this, let's have the Parliamentary Budget Office look at it to see if it is worth spending \$20 million of taxpayers' money on new signage around the State." The answer would be that it is not worthwhile. The role of the Parliamentary Budget Office is to make governments and oppositions accountable, and to ensure that the community can look at the promises and proposals of political parties in general to see whether they are getting value for money. The Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 is a bad bill.

Ms Pru Goward: Because it provides transparency, and we cannot have that.

Mr RYAN PARK: Not only does it lack the ability to provide transparency, it is bad. [*Extension of time granted.*]

Under the bill, as the member for Davidson—one of the few intelligent members on the other side—will agree, it is proposed that someone will undertake this job for nine months. I am sure people will want to leave their full-time positions to undertake this job for nine months. We will end up with a couple of options. First, as the member for Davidson knows, there will likely be a secondment from Treasury. But be careful because while there are some very good people at Treasury we should watch who we get.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: Point of order: I object to the comments of the member for Keira. Thoughts or statements are being inappropriately attributed to me.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! I ask the member for Keira to retract his comments.

Mr RYAN PARK: I am happy to. The member for Davidson is a good man. I do not see anyone putting up his or her hand to do this job for a period of nine months. As we get closer to the next election, the Government will ask this side of the House, and rightly so, to state our policies and proposals. The Government will want to know the Opposition's proposals. That is a reasonable request. But the Government will not allow political parties to have their proposals appropriately costed. Why is the Government exempting the minor parties? Why is the Government exempting our colleagues and friends in the Christian Democratic Party, the Shooters and Fishers Party and The Greens? I understand the Shooters and Fishers Party has some very sensible proposals that it would like costed.

Mr John Williams: Point of order: The member is straying from the leave of the bill. I thought the member for Keira would be more concerned about the books that were taken from his office because he had not finished colouring in one of them.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! The member for Keira will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr RYAN PARK: Why does the bill not include those minor parties? The Minister for Family and Community Services, who is at the table, has said that essentially it does not matter what they say. To some degree she is correct. However, the Government is tending to do a lot of deals with those parties. Why does the Government not want the Shooters and Fishers Party to have its proposals costed? The Opposition wants the proposals of The Greens costed—I do anyway. I want to know, as would the chair of the Public Accounts Committee who is present in the Chamber, why as a robust Parliament we would not want the proposals of all political parties costed? Why is that a problem? For the benefit of The Nationals, under the bill they cannot have their proposals costed. The Liberal Party does not think The Nationals can be trusted. I know the redistribution has caused fractions but it is not right for The Nationals to be exempt under the bill.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.17 p.m.]: I enjoy following the member for Keira in debates in this place because I do not have to say much to appear a lot better than him. The good people of the electorate of Keira would be ashamed if they had heard the absolute rubbish that has gone on in the past 15 minutes in this Chamber.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! Opposition members will listen to the member for Tweed in silence.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: Many of the Opposition speakers have failed to address the objects of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. In so doing, they have failed to recognise the good work being done by the O'Farrell-Stoner Government, which has been reflected in recent polls undertaken in this State. Polls are a very sensitive issue for those on the other side of this House, but that is particularly so of their colleagues in the Federal sphere.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! This is my final warning to the member for Bankstown: I will not hesitate to direct her to leave the Chamber. If the member for Bankstown and the member for Keira continue to interrupt the proceedings, I will direct them to leave the Chamber.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: This bill amends the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act of 2010 with the aim of enhancing the workability of the Parliamentary Budget Office; and workability is the key to this measure. As members know, in 2011 a joint select committee was appointed to inquire into the purpose and role of the Parliamentary Budget Office and whether the terms of the Act remained appropriate. I had the pleasure of serving on that committee, along with its chair, the member for Baulkham Hills, and the member for Wyong and others. I reiterate what was said by the member for Wyong in speaking in the debate on this bill. I was deeply ashamed of the way those from the other side carried on as members of that committee. They were not there to discuss the bill, or to listen to the evidence given about the bill; they were absolutely intent on pulling it apart. Also, I have wanted to say in this House for some time that their treatment of the staff of that committee was an absolute disgrace. I was so embarrassed I apologised to our clerk about the behaviour of certain of my committee colleagues.

I believe the committee did an excellent job in framing its report and making recommendations on whether or not the Act remained appropriate. The subsequent recommendations made by the committee for reform have been accepted by the Government, and the majority of those recommendations are implemented through this bill, with some additional amendments. The bill aims to reiterate the function of the Parliamentary Budget Office, which is solely to prepare for election policy costings, a point that is in accordance with the inquiry's recommendations. Therefore, the bill will limit the operation of the Parliamentary Budget Office to once every four years, commencing on 1 September of the year prior to a State election and ending within three months following that election, as recommended by the inquiry. This is sufficient time for the officer to hand over election costing duties to corresponding parliamentary officers, to table the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report in Parliament and to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to answer questions on the report.

This bill also proposes mandatory submission of policies for costing. The making of submission of policies mandatory for both the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition is aimed at ensuring the electorate has accurate, timely and independent information on the cost of election commitments prior to voting. This amendment means both leaders must submit all election policies that are likely to impact on the current and relevant forward budget estimates for costing by the Parliamentary Budget Office. This process will incorporate the leaders writing to confirm that all their policies that have a budget impact have been submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office.

In accordance with the inquiry's recommendations, the bill proposes amendments that will provide greater clarity in the content of budget impact statements. The bill specifies a core set of indicators in line with current New South Wales budget papers, which provides the public with specific information on a party's policy commitments and how they will affect the State's fiscal position. These indicators are consistent with how the budget is monitored and presented currently by New South Wales Treasury. The bill leaves in place existing arrangements that ensure the confidentiality of material submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office for costing. The bill also proposes allowing the Parliamentary Budget Office to release more than one budget impact statement as required. Current legislation does not allow the Parliamentary Budget Officer to respond to late policy announcements; this amendment will allow the officer discretion to release revised budget impact statements in response to any late policy announcements.

The bill also proposes amendments that will improve the operation and accountability of the Parliamentary Budget Office. Therefore it is required that the Parliamentary Budget Officer develop an operational plan that includes the objectives of the Parliamentary Budget Office, strategies to be used to achieve these objectives, and a schedule of proposed activities. The Parliamentary Budget Office will be required to complete a report for the period that it operated. Currently the Act requires two separate committees to review the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report. The inquiry recommended a single joint committee be appointed to perform this role. Therefore the Parliamentary Budget Officer will be accountable to the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Assembly, which will monitor and review the officer's activities and ensure independence and integrity of the costing process. Integrity is a concept that is lost on those on the other side.

The Public Accounts Committee, under the chair of the member for Davidson, does an excellent job in providing timely and accurate information. It is a pleasure to serve on the Public Accounts Committee. The committee will also consider and review the report on the activities of the Parliamentary Budget Office during the previous election campaign. Overall, the bill addresses the issues that were identified by the joint select committee and it provides a robust way forward, providing the framework for a more effective, efficient and accountable Parliamentary Budget Office. This is a continuation of the transparent way in which this Government conducts its business. That has been shown in the wide level of community support and the large number of ongoing processes that this Government has introduced. The member for Myall Lakes, as he says

regularly, hated the 16 years of Labor. The people want openness and transparency. We are not seeing that at a Federal level; the Federal Government is a disgrace. We all know that. I, for one, commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Clayton Barr and set down as an order of the day for a later hour.

PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES AMENDMENT BILL 2013

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Greg Smith, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping—Attorney General, and Minister for Justice) [12.28 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce this bill, which will strengthen the protections for public officials who make public interest disclosures and enhance the public interest disclosures regime. The Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994 plays a critical role in maintaining the integrity of public administration in this State. The object of the Public Interest Disclosures Act is to encourage and facilitate the disclosure of wrongdoing in the public sector in the public interest. It does this by protecting public officials who disclose wrongdoing in the public sector in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosures Act. The Public Interest Disclosures Act makes it a criminal offence to take detrimental action against a public official substantially in reprisal for making a public interest disclosure.

There have been a number of amendments to the Public Interest Disclosures Act since 2010, including the establishment of the Public Interest Disclosures Steering Committee in 2011. The members of the steering committee are the Ombudsman, the General Counsel of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Auditor-General, the Commissioner of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Commissioner for the Police Integrity Commission, the Chief Executive, Local Government in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Commissioner of Police and the Information Commissioner. The steering committee's functions include providing advice to the Premier on the operation of the Public Interest Disclosures Act and recommendations for reform.

The bill seeks to make the first changes to the Public Interest Disclosures Act recommended by the steering committee since its establishment. The bill will remove the requirement that a disclosure must be made voluntarily in order for the public official who made it to be protected under the Public Interest Disclosures Act. The Public Interest Disclosures Act requires disclosures to be made voluntarily in order for the public official to be protected under the Act. While there are some exceptions, section 9 expressly provides that a disclosure is not made voluntarily if it is made by a public official in the exercise of a duty imposed on that official by legislation. This means that a public official who makes a disclosure of wrongdoing in the public sector under a statutory obligation is not protected against reprisals for that disclosure by the Public Interest Disclosures Act.

For example, a public official who has a duty to report certain corrupt conduct to the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, and does so, is not protected under the Public Interest Disclosures Act. The Government supports the steering committee's recommendation to remove this requirement in order to broaden the protection provided by the Public Interest Disclosures Act. As public officials who report wrongdoing under a statutory obligation also may face the risk of reprisals, they should also be protected by the Public Interest Disclosures Act. As recommended by the steering committee, the bill will also extend the period of time within which proceedings may commence for reprisal action against a person who made a public interest disclosure. Prosecutions for reprisal action must be commenced within two years of the alleged offence.

The bill will extend this period to three years after the offence is alleged to have been committed. This is because the steering committee advises that allegations of reprisal action can be made some time after the action is alleged to have occurred. The bill will also include the Public Service Commissioner as a member of the steering committee. The Public Service Commissioner's principal objectives include promoting and maintaining the highest levels of integrity, impartiality, accountability and leadership across the public sector. The Public Service Commissioner supports this proposal. The bill will also clarify that certain individuals are public officials. To be protected by the Public Interest Disclosures Act, a disclosure must be made by a "public official," as defined by the Act.

To remove some ambiguity about the scope of the definition of "public official", the Public Interest Disclosures Act is being amended to clarify that certain individuals are public officials. This includes certain employees or officers of a corporation that is engaged by a public authority under a contract to provide services to or on behalf of the public authority, volunteer rural fire fighters and RSPCA inspectors. In relation to these particular individuals, the amendment is not intended to broaden the scope of the definition of "public official". It should assist, however, a person considering making a public interest disclosure in the future to understand whether he or she is a public official who can be protected under the Public Interest Disclosures Act. The steering committee has been consulted on and supports the bill. I commend the bill to the House.

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

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER AMENDMENT BILL 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [12.34 p.m.]: I speak on the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 as a committee member of the joint standing committee that was armed with the responsibility to investigate the previous Act and to determine whether it needed to be amended. It did need to be amended—a single-word amendment under schedule 1 [4] section 6 (1). It needed to be amended to say that the Presiding Officers "will" appoint, in exchange for the word "may". That was the size and scope of the amendment that was required and that would have been in keeping with all evidence taken by the joint standing committee and with the rhetoric from both sides of the House about the importance, purpose, intent and transparency required through the Parliamentary Budget Office.

In the take-note debate with regard to the committee report on 16 February, I referred to my concerns about the purpose, meaning, legitimacy and genuineness of the committee process. The reason I am concerned about that is that the committee—after many hours of deliberation, hundreds of pages of submission and plenty of opportunity to speak to the then Acting Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr Tony Harris—produced a report that did not reflect the evidence. More importantly, my concerns about transparency, the intent of the committee and what I felt was a waste of time related to the fact that the report produced almost word for word the debate in this House in October 2010—12 months prior to the committee being established. The member for Murrumbidgee and the member for Wakehurst said there was no reason why the Parliamentary Budget Office should exist for more than six months. That was what we found 12 months later. I say "we found": It was the report from the chair that made those same findings 12 months later, in spite of and in denial of the submissions made to that committee. It is worth noting the timelines. In 2010 we had statements in this House by the then Opposition which are identical to the findings of that committee 12 months later.

There were some significant submissions made from various members of the Commonwealth that also govern under the Westminster system. Those submissions referred to the success of their Parliamentary Budget Officer and the fact that it was intended to increase the resources of the Parliamentary Budget Office in their countries. They spoke about the authenticity the office gave to a political debate founded on facts and figures tested by an independent body. That is in opposition to the mischievous claims that are part of the political debate in Australia and in the New South Wales Parliament, which are unable to be justified.

I remind the House that Mr Tony Harris is the only person in New South Wales to have sat in the chair as Parliamentary Budget Officer and it is worth considering what he contributed to the debate. He appeared at a public hearing and also made a submission in which he referred to the need for transparency. He stated that the authenticity of the Parliamentary Budget Office would only be valid if both major and minor political parties submitted claims to the Parliamentary Budget Office for costing. In his written submission, speaking of the then Opposition, now the Government, he says:

The Opposition's decision not to use the PBO removed the prospect of any claim that the PBO's work gave the electorate confidence in the costs and budget implications of the alternative government's promises. Moreover, the former Government also failed to provide all its announced policies in time for the PBO to report on their budget consequences.

He is critical of both governments. I want to introduce that concept. I am not seeking to bring bias to the debate. As a member who sat on the committee, I want to open up the transparency of the debate because a number of Government members who were also committee members spoke about the process. I have a distinct memory

from my time on that committee of the chair, the member for Baulkham Hills, saying that he had read every word on every page that had been submitted, but that he supposed no-one else in the room had done so. You could hear the sound of crickets in the silence that followed that statement until the member for Cessnock—that is me—spoke up and said, "I've read them all as well." When the report was tabled and we were going through it I made an enormous number of objections because I knew for a fact that the report was not based on the evidence. Indeed, the interventions I sought to make would have had the report reflect the submissions.

I encourage anyone who wants to challenge or question that to go through the minutes from those meetings and they will see repeated interjections by the member for Cessnock constantly asking the chair to ensure that the report reflect the evidence. We spent a lot of time, money and effort on that process but every time an alternative position was put up it was rejected by the weight of numbers—people who had not read the submissions. It was rejected by the now Government and the group of members who had the numbers to control the findings of that committee. For them to come into this Chamber and talk about transparency and the findings of a joint standing committee is a bit disingenuous because that is certainly not what happened.

Indeed, the one success we achieved in that process was for the chair of the committee to recognise in his foreword that not everyone in that room agreed with the findings in the report. That is significant, and it is evidenced in the documentation. No-one in that room agreed with the findings of the report except for the members of the current Government. The process and the report were hijacked and anybody who comments on the report in this Chamber should not give too much credence to the report that has been tabled. They need to understand the history behind it. Part of the testimony provided by the Acting Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr Tony Harris stated:

We had no Opposition policies. There was a time when the Leader of the Opposition—

the man who is now our Premier, Mr Barry O'Farrell—

speculated that he might change the arrangements already indicated publicly and send policies to the Parliamentary Budget Office for costing, but that did not eventuate. There were some complaints by the Opposition—

now the Government—

that the PBO was not in a position to cost that work. Indeed, we had staff available from very early on to undertake costings ...

It is unfortunate that the then Opposition, now the Government, did not take advantage of the Parliamentary Budget Office for the purpose for which it was intended and for the transparency and integrity it might have offered that political process. Members have to realise that some other important aspects have been taken out in this current bill, which makes it distinctly different from the previous bill. Persons other than in the two major parties cannot get their promises costed. The member for Balmain is in the Chamber today and Dr John Kaye in the other place was a member of the committee. I for one am intrigued, willing, eager and keen to see the costings of the promises made by The Greens. I look forward to the day when their promises are costed because I am not sure how they are going to balance the books. Unfortunately, this legislation will deprive us of the opportunity to have The Greens' promises costed because they are not a major party. This is an unfortunate and poor piece of legislation that deserves to be opposed and the Labor Opposition will do exactly that.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Balmain will be removed from the Chamber if he continues to interject.

Mr ANDREW CORNWELL (Charlestown) [12.44 p.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. The purpose of this bill is to amend the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 to give effect to the Government's response to an inquiry in December 2011 into the Parliamentary Budget Office by the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office. I note the presence in the Chamber of the member for Baulkham Hills, who chaired the committee. In particular, the bill limits the function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to the preparation of costings of general election promises of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, and removes functions of costing the election promises of other parties or members and of providing technical analysis, advice and briefings to members on budget and economic matters. The bill also limits the appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to a period before and after a general State election during which election costings and reports are to be made.

The bill also requires the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to request the Parliamentary Budget Officer to prepare election policy costings for all general election promises that are likely to impact on the

current and relevant forward budget estimates. The bill authorises the Parliamentary Budget Officer to publicly release more than one budget impact statement prior to the general State election. It clarifies that a budget impact statement of all the costed policies of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition must show the budgetary impact of all those policies on a specified core set of financial indicators. The bill makes a number of other amendments in relation to the reporting and parliamentary review arrangements of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

By way of background, in June 2011 the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office commenced an inquiry to consider the purpose of the office and whether the terms of the Act were appropriate, as well as the role of the office, including its functions and powers, structure, staffing and resources, and accountability and oversight mechanisms. The committee published its final report on 2 December 2011, which included nine recommendations. This bill addresses those recommendations. Schedule 1 gives effect to the recommendation that parliamentary leaders be required to submit all of their publicly announced election promises for costing by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

A parliamentary leader will be required to advise the Parliamentary Budget Officer in writing on the fifth last day before the election that all those promises have been submitted. Schedule 1 items [4] and [5] give effect to the recommendation that the Parliamentary Budget Officer be appointed before each general State election. The appointment will end within three months after the general election. Currently the Parliamentary Budget Officer is appointed for a period of between four and nine years. Schedule 1 item [8] gives effect to the recommendation that the sole function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is to be the preparation of election policy costings.

The proposed legislation limits costings to the election policies of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, and removes the following functions: the preparation of costings of proposed policies of any member of Parliament at the request of the member at any time during the year; and the capacity to provide to members of Parliament analysis, advice and briefings of a technical nature on financial, fiscal and economic matters. Schedule 1 [10] gives effect to the recommendation that the Parliamentary Budget Officer furnish a report to the relevant parliamentary committee on his or her activities after the general election instead of furnishing an annual report. It also designates the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Assembly as the parliamentary committee that is to monitor and report on the activities of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Currently the Parliamentary Budget Officer reports to a committee of the Legislative Assembly and a separate committee of the Legislative Council. Schedule 1 [20] gives effect to the recommendation that the Parliamentary Budget Officer be permitted to release more than one budget impact statement during the pre-election period.

Currently, the Parliamentary Budget Office may only release a single budget impact statement five days before the general State election. The Parliamentary Budget Officer is authorised by this amendment to publically release revisions of the final budget impact statement following further costings of policies under the principal Act after the public release of the statement. Schedule 1 [17] and [18] give effect to the recommendations of the content of the budget impact statement to be clarified. The amendment requires the Parliamentary Budget Office to show the budgetary impact of costing policies on the following financial indicators: general government sector net operating result, general government sector capital expenditure, general government sector net lending or borrowing, general government sector net financial liabilities, and total State sector net financial liabilities. This sensible legislation will bring clarity and truth to election promises.

When we came into government we were left with a \$5.2 million black hole. This amendment will provide the Government and the Opposition with the ability to have a good look at their opponent's policies and to make sure that the public has clarity in being able to see what those policies are. It gives us the ability to look at some of the impacts of legislation that the Opposition has said it would repeal, which are government policy that it promised to unwind throughout its term. This amendment will give the public a clear idea of what the impact of those policies will be.

I have had a look at some of the policies that we have brought in during this term of government. The 2.5 per cent public sector wage cap was a necessary public policy because our expenditure on wages was growing faster than income growth. The Opposition has opposed the cap and, as a result, the potential enormous financial damage wreaked on the State's economy would be enormous. The Opposition also opposed our reforms to the police death and disability scheme, which was blowing out by hundreds of billions of dollars a year. Unwinding that scheme will have an enormous effect on the State budget that will further damage the State's finances and no doubt put the triple-A credit rating at risk. These calculations will appear quite clearly in the figures being provided by the Parliamentary Budget Office.

The creation of a Parliamentary Budgetary Office that enables us to look at the State's finances under the next term of government will result in clearer public policy. Members of the community can see what they are voting for and understand the impact of the policies of both sides on the State's finances. I note the member for Cessnock identified The Greens member who was in the Chamber earlier and sought to perhaps capture The Greens opinion. We all know that their policies are out of whack.

Mr Clayton Barr: But I want the Parliamentary Budget Office to tell us that.

Mr ANDREW CORNWELL: I acknowledge the interjection by the member for Cessnock. We heard the Minister for Resources and Energy refer to The Greens recent think-tank when they pretended they were aliens. At times we are operating in currencies that are not recognised by major world economies. Who knows what currency The Greens have used for their policy costings. This is a sensible decision. It is good legislation. I acknowledge the hard work of the member for Baulkham Hills. I note that it was a highly political committee, which had dozens and dozens of divisions on a number of topics throughout the committee stage. I look forward to the contribution from the member for Baulkham Hills when he enlightens the House on the workings of the committee, and the trials and tribulations that the committee went through to deliver this legislation. I thank the House for its indulgence and I am happy to support the bill.

Mr TONY ISSA (Granville) [12.54 p.m.]: I am pleased to support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. After listening to debates from both sides of the House I have made a comparison.

Mr David Elliott: It's embarrassing.

Mr TONY ISSA: It is embarrassing. Those opposite have criticised the Government for doing something good for the community. I tried to work out who we are listening to. We are listening to the people of New South Wales—the community. The Opposition is listening to its bosses—the unions. I did a comparison. We are trying to adopt all the recommendations following the 2011 inquiry. This bill amends the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 to give effect to the Government's response to the inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Office. We do not create policy on the run. Unlike the Labor Party, we listen to the people, we consult them and we try to do the right thing for the people of New South Wales. That is why we are in government today. I listened carefully to the member for Keira. His concern that the minor parties are not being consulted surprised me. He is concerned because soon the Labor Party will become a minor party in this House and it will not be consulted. A party with fewer than 25 members should not be consulted. This Government has been fair with this legislation. It is keeping everyone in the loop. It is important for this Government to listen to what the people want.

The object of this bill is to reform the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office to improve its effectiveness in costing election commitments. A lot of promises were made before the election, but not from this side of the House. I have never made promises during my time in politics. The question was asked of me before the election, "What is your promise?" I said, "I will be committed to work with the community. I will be committed to listen to the people. I will be committed to deliver to the people of New South Wales. I have nothing to promise. Whatever my hand can reach, I will deliver." That is why people elected me. My commitment to the people of New South Wales still stands. I am proud to say that this Government is committed to improving the procedure and accountability of the Parliamentary Budget Office. It supports a more effective, efficient and accountable Parliamentary Budget Office.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 provides for the appointment of a Parliamentary Budget Officer every four years, as recommended by the inquiry. This appointment will commence on 1 September in the year prior to a State election and will end within three months following the election. The member for Keira was concerned about the nine-month period. People such as retired judges and lawyers would love to do a job for nine months. A lot of people in this State work in a part-time or temporary capacity. It does not mean that they do not count.

The former Labor Government said there is no room for 5,000 or 10,000 positions; get rid of them. It believed there were no jobs for the unemployed. This Government is serious about the people of New South Wales. It listens to them. This bill will limit the operation of the Parliamentary Budget Office to once every four years. It will make the submission of policies for costing mandatory for the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition. It will require parliamentary leaders to confirm in writing that all their policies have been submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office. It will allow the Parliamentary Budget Officer to release more than one budget impact statement prior to each election.

It will clarify the content of the budget impact statement and amend the post-election reporting and parliamentary review of the Parliamentary Budget Office after every election. These reforms will remove the ability of any political party to mislead the New South Wales people—members opposite have a good record of doing that—and the appropriate penalties will apply if that occurs. This bill addresses the issues identified by the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office and it provides a positive way forward. It will make political parties accountable and provide incentives for them to be up-front and honest about their campaign promises.

I strongly believe that the people of New South Wales deserve to know the truth beforehand about what will take place in this State. The reforms in this bill will ensure that the people of New South Wales have the opportunity to know the true cost of election promises. This Government does not keep everyone in the dark; it tells the electorate what it is doing and how it is addressing the problems left after 16 years of Labor Government. Once again members opposite are being negative. They have opposed every reform measure that this Government has introduced and they constantly criticise it for doing the right thing for the community. I congratulate the Treasurer on introducing this legislation. This is further evidence of the Coalition Government's commitment to making New South Wales number one again. My constituents constantly ask me what is wrong with the Opposition because it always criticises the good work this Government is doing. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [1.02 p.m.]: The Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 clearly demonstrates the difference between the Labor Party and the Coalition parties. The Labor Party established the Parliamentary Budget Office—a ground-breaking institution—to provide assistance to all members of Parliament. Its purpose was to help redress the imbalance in resources available to the Government and all other political parties. This legislation represents payback; it is about revenge. Not long after the sheep opposite were elected in March 2011 the Premier, the real Treasurer and the puppet Treasurer started repeating the mantra that there was a big budget black hole. It was in innumerable media releases and trotted out during every question time. I remind members what the independent Parliamentary Budget Office report stated:

The above analysis suggests that most of the claims made in the relevant media release of 27 April 2011 [O'Farrell: Black Hole Blows Out Further] are unsupported by evidence or conflict with available information on the state's fiscal position and budgetary processes.

The report further states:

The media release offers other claims of "gross economic incompetence". Insofar as fiscal policy is concerned, the state's AAA status does not support this claim. A fear that "Labor had 'cooked the books' to distort the true state of NSW's finances" is not supported either by the report issued by Mr Lambert or by this Office's examination of available data.

That is what the Parliamentary Budget Office stated in May 2011. This legislation is payback. Soon after that report was tabled, the Parliamentary Budget Officer disappeared. He was either sacked or made to resign and that position has been vacant ever since. The member for Baulkham Hills knows that that is true. I can hear him barking in the background. I know from my discussions with the member for Cessnock that the member for Baulkham Hills was prepared to praise the Parliamentary Budget Office in the take-note debate in 2011. I also know that the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office discussed giving the office more authority and praised its work. However, the member for Baulkham Hills was gazumped. He prepared a speech but before he could deliver it he was approached by a minder from upstairs who gave him a different speech to read, and like a good lieutenant he read it. That speech did not reflect any of the committee's discussions. The member is smiling, but he knows that is the truth. He was given no warning and like a good lieutenant he followed directions from the minders.

Mr Christopher Gulaptis: They have their own faceless men.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: They have their own faceless minders. If members opposite say they have faceless minders I will agree. This bill further limits the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office. Not satisfied with reducing its oversight, the Government now intends to use the office for its own purposes. This is yet another betrayal by a Government that has long since abandoned the claim that it is committed to open and accountable governance. This is a Mike Baird bill. We can always tell when he is uncomfortable with what he is doing. First, he does not appear in the Chamber. I wonder how involved he was in this legislation. As the member for Keira said, he is number 11.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Baulkham Hills will not conduct a debate across the Chamber.

Mr Nick Lalich: Throw him out.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Cabramatta will be following him.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: I wonder how comfortable the Treasurer is with this legislation. I am sure there are minders behind the scenes who have been more involved in it. I will provide a brief commentary on the original legislation to draw the attention of the House to the entity that this bill proposes to replace. The Labor Government established the Parliamentary Budget Officer in 2010 as an independent officer of the Parliament. The officer was selected by a panel that included the Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner and the chairman of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal. I am sure everybody agrees that they were appointed because of their independence and because they are above reproach. They are public servants who are dedicated to improving public accountability. With whom does the Government intend to replace these individuals? It wants to replace them with the Presiding Officers. Appointment by the Presiding Officers was offered as an alternative for those few instances in which an interim appointment was required, but that will be the norm under this legislation.

With all due respect to the Speaker and the President, they are ultimately members of a political party who are answerable to the leadership of that party. It beggars belief that the Government would seek to replace individuals such as the chairman of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, the Information Commissioner and the Ombudsman with a member of Parliament. What is more, while previously the Parliamentary Budget Officer served a term of more than four years, he or she will now serve for only nine months from 1 September of the year before an election until no more than three months after the election. That means the officer will be appointed for no more than nine months. Conveniently, that will be the nine months covering the election period.

It is a political truism that incumbency always has advantages when parties are preparing budgets because of the ready access to Treasury it allows. We all know that that is true. The genius of this bill is that it pretends to address that imbalance when in reality it increases it. The practical effect of this bill is to require the Leader of the Opposition to have policies costed prior to the State election. This means that an individual appointed by two members of one party will get to provide an opinion on the policies of another party. In any other circumstance this proposal would be farcical. Furthermore, five days before a general election the Leader of the Opposition is required to provide to the Parliamentary Budget Office advice that all of his or her policies have been notified to the Parliamentary Budget Office. This attempt to control the policies of the Opposition is truly insane. It should be up to the electorate and not the Government of the day to decide whether it is happy with the policies of one party or another.

The other great injustice that will result from this bill is the effect it will have on crossbench members—the Independents, The Greens, the Christian Democratic Party and the Shooters and Fishers Party. In the past the Parliamentary Budget Office could provide costings of policies to those individuals. I wonder whether this Government has consulted any of those individuals. I would suggest that it has not. This Government is now removing the provisions that would have enabled individuals to have their policies costed by the Parliamentary Budget Office. Individuals will no longer have access to the Parliamentary Budget Office—only the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition will be able to access that office.

This bill, which is an assault on democracy, has no place in this Chamber. If all members, in particular the sheep on the government benches, understood these proposals they would oppose this bill. If those opposite were decent members of Parliament they would oppose this legislation, go back to the caucus room and ask questions about the correct path to be taken. The member for Baulkham Hills is not divulging how much he knows but he has already been given his instructions. I am sure we will hear from the member for Baulkham Hills. The Opposition opposes this bill.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [1.11 p.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 and commend the Minister, the Hon. Mike Baird, for introducing this much-needed legislation. It is a great privilege to speak in debate on this bill. However, I am shocked and dismayed by the revelation that the Labor Party—that shattered shell of a party—opposes this legislation. I would have thought that the members of a party who spend so much time in the Independent Commission Against Corruption would have been saying, "Is this legislation not great?" I refer to the disgraceful contributions of members opposite to debate on this bill. In his inaugural speech the member for Maroubra—Eddie Obeid's boy—came into this House and thanked Eddie Obeid.

Mr David Elliott: What?

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: The member for Maroubra, who is beholden to Eddie Obeid, thanked him in his inaugural speech. He had to show his gratitude. At the time of the last election Greg McCarthy, chief executive officer of WorkCover, referred to the economic position of this State and said:

... a combination of the global financial crisis hammering the scheme's investments and the "neglect" of former Labor finance ministers Joe Tripodi and Michael Daley had left the scheme's finances in a parlous state. "They just weren't interested and did not listen to my warnings.

Over the past few years WorkCover's executive management was given no government leadership. When Opposition members want to attack government policies they have to have credibility; they have to have clean hands.

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

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: For years Greg McCarthy said to the Government that it had to do something about the fact that WorkCover was \$4.1 billion in debt as a result of the negligence of the member for Maroubra and Joe Tripodi. The member for Maroubra has no credibility. The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Blacktown, also has no credibility. That great Labor Party luminary, Paul Keating, had this to say about the Leader of the Opposition:

If the Labor Party's stocks ever get so low as to require your services in its parliamentary leadership, it will itself have no future.

Paul Keating made that statement before the Independent Commission Against Corruption commenced its inquiries, which is amazing. What did Steve Hutchins, the special—

Mr Richard Amery: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The member for Myall Lakes has been speaking for three minutes but he has not touched on the bill; he has been referring only to personalities. The member for Myall Lakes should be brought back to the leave of the bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! There is no point of order.

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

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION STATEMENTS

ELIZABETH POWELL 100TH BIRTHDAY

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [1.15 p.m.]: Ms Elizabeth Powell, one of the wonderful senior citizens in my electorate of Myall Lakes, celebrated her 100th birthday in February. Elizabeth has cause to be congratulated on reaching this fantastic milestone and on doing so much in her lifetime. Elizabeth was born in Indonesia to Dutch parents and her early life was filled with luxury, servants, fine clothes, regular family holidays and even a pet monkey named Tarzan. When she grew up Elizabeth married an Englishman, John Powell, with whom she had two children, Robert and Jimmy, and they all had a happy life together. This perfect picture changed with the outbreak of World War II and the Japanese invasion of Indonesia. Elizabeth, John and their sons were placed in a concentration camp with other Europeans. Although Elizabeth was interred for four years her family played a large role in the local resistance movement with her brothers-in-law both undertaking various forms of guerrilla warfare. This included bombing buildings and working with Australian forces on the ground.

BONNYRIGG MEN'S SHED

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [1.16 p.m.]: I congratulate Bonnyrigg Men's Shed on its successful gathering on 4 March 2013 and acknowledge the hard work, dedication and community involvement of all the men at the Bonnyrigg Men's Shed. I acknowledge Mr Sid Hugen, President of the Bonnyrigg Men's Shed, as well the members of the Men's Shed for their ongoing commitment to providing and organising services for local men to keep busy whilst working on local projects.

RIVERSTONE LOCAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR LINDA STRICKLAND

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [1.17 p.m.]: Today I congratulate Linda Strickland, local Woman of the Year for the Riverstone electorate. Linda is a deserving recipient for this award because every weekend since September 2011 she and her 10-year-old daughter, Cassidy, have been going to McQuade Park, Windsor and feeding the homeless and needy. Linda and Cassidy spend their Saturday afternoons preparing home-cooked meals for between 30 to 40 people who are then served dinner at McQuade Park. Linda funded the cost of providing the meals from the first year that she started feeding the homeless. I am pleased to report to the House that the community has rallied behind her and is now donating various foodstuffs for the important charity work undertaken every week by Linda. Linda is a treasure in the Windsor community whose simple generosity enriches us all.

AUBURN COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT MR PARASKEVAS CAPRATISIS

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [1.18 p.m.]: I acknowledge the outstanding contribution that seniors make to our community. Mr Paraskevas Capratisis, one of the seniors in my community, has been duly recognised by being nominated for a community service award as part of Seniors Week 2013. I know that he does not seek recognition for his work but it is important for us to acknowledge this voluntary service and its value to our community. Mr Capratisis' contribution to the Girl Guides Association has been recognised over many years. He has given of his time so willingly at a time when people are time poor and his service has been exceptional. I thank him for his contributions and for his giving spirit.

BLUE MOUNTAINS AUSTRALIA DAY CITIZEN AWARD RECIPIENT MR PETER FRAZER

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [1.19 p.m.]: I congratulate the recipient of the Blue Mountains Australia Day Citizen Award, Mr Peter Frazer from Springwood, for making an outstanding contribution to changes in road safety. From March to September 2012 Peter lobbied the New South Wales Government for safer roads in the event of a breakdown. The campaign began after Peter's daughter, Sarah, and Geoff Clark lost their lives when a truck collided with the pair as Mr Clark was assisting Sarah at the side of the road where her car had broken down. In May 2012 a petition was gathered with 23,000 signatures which was presented to the New South Wales Parliament. On 13 September 2012 the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, and Peter Frazer held a joint media conference on the release of the New South Wales Government's breakdown safety strategy which was a direct result of the Safer Australian Roads and Highways [SARAH] campaign. The SARAH Group has been set up to campaign for changes to policy and legislation to ensure that no more lives are lost in preventable and clearly foreseeable situations such as the one that took Sarah Frazer's life.

TORONTO LIONS AND LIONESSES YOUTH OF THE YEAR

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [1.19 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the outstanding performance of the young people in my electorate in the Toronto Lions and Lioness Youth of the Year quest. This excellent contest is designed to encourage, foster and develop leadership and other citizenship qualities in our youth. The candidates spoke for five minutes on a subject of their choice and also had to address impromptu questions on the issues most relevant to them in the upcoming Federal election, and the influence of the internet on modern society. The *Lakes Mail* reported that the Youth of the Year winner for the Lions Club this year was Bridie O'Shea, representing St Paul's Catholic High School, Booragul, and the Youth of the Year winner for the Lioness Club was Karolina Leszczynski, also representing St Paul's Catholic High School. The public speaking categories were won by Jaca Ridgeon from Toronto High School and Bridie O'Shea. Bridie and Karolina went on to win at zone level, and Karolina then won the public speaking award at the regional level. Luke Coleman from Warners Bay High School, representing Valentine Lions, was named regional Youth of the Year. I congratulate them all.

PORT STEPHENS VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.20 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the valuable contribution made by Maria Sharp from Salt Ash to the community through her volunteering efforts. I acknowledge her involvement with the NSW Rural Fire Service and Williamtown Salt Ash Brigade, Salt Ash Tennis Club, Salt Ash Church of Christ, Salt Ash Public School and St Philip's Christian School. I thank Mrs Sharp for her volunteering efforts in her local community and I congratulate her on being a finalist in the 2012 Port Stephens Volunteer of the Year Awards. I also draw the attention of the House to the valuable contribution made by Diana Souter from Corlette to the community through her volunteering efforts.

I acknowledge her involvement with the Seaside Singers Community Choir, which she formed in 2009, and with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. I thank Mrs Souter for her volunteering efforts in her local community and I congratulate her on being a finalist in the 2012 Port Stephens Volunteer Year Awards.

POPE FRANCIS

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [1.21 p.m.]: Today, on behalf of the Bishop of Wollongong, Peter Ingham, and my local priest, Father Francis Trang, I congratulate Cardinal Pell and the other Cardinals who elected Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina as Pope of the Roman Catholic Church on behalf of all the Catholics in my electorate of Wollongong, and indeed across the Illawarra. Taking the name Francis I, His Holiness is the first non-European pontiff in nearly 1,300 years. Pope Francis, who is the first Latin American and first Jesuit pope, was announced by French Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran with the Latin words "habemus papam"—we have a pope. Francis is the 226th pontiff in the church's 2,000-year history. He is known for his concern for the poor and is expected to bring a radical change of style to the church leadership, as evidenced by his choice of the name of St Francis of Assisi.

MAITLAND ELECTORATE EVENTS

Ms ROBYN PARKER (Maitland—Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage) [1.22 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to thank some of our hardworking and enthusiastic Maitland event organisers for the contribution that they have made to our community. Special congratulations go to the Maitland Harness Racing Club on the fiftieth anniversary of the Inter City Pace harness racing series. The final, which was held at Maitland Showground on 5 January, was won by four-year-old colt Scandalman, trained by Ian Wilson and driven by Jim Douglass. Maitland Showground was also the venue of the 152nd Maitland Show, which ran over three days from 15 February. London Paralympic multi-medallist, Maddi Elliott, officially opened this year's show. It was also a big weekend for Kelsey Lucas of Thornton who was named the 2013 Maitland Showgirl. I congratulate Kelsey on her achievement and wish her all the best for her future endeavours. Plenty of sunshine over the weekend of 9 and 10 March saw Maitland's Heritage Mall host 10,000 "foodies" for the annual Maitland Taste: Food, Wine and Music Festival. The star attraction was Maitland's own MasterChef Andy Allen.

YAGOONA GIRL GUIDES

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [1.23 p.m.]: Today I inform the House about the annual general meeting and barbecue of the Yagoona Girl Guides held on 8 March 2013. I was thankful for the invitation to attend the event, which gave me the opportunity to meet so many outstanding young women. I congratulate leaders Julie Cook and Dawn Clilverd for their tireless efforts in nurturing the skills of all members of the Yagoona Girl Guides. I congratulate also District Leader Janelle Harding, Secretary Keith Humphries and Treasurer Pam Mastin on being re-elected in their respective positions. I acknowledge the contribution of the Yagoona Girl Guides in the Bankstown community in developing mentoring programs for young women. Australia-wide—the Girl Guides movement has 30,000 members. The mission of helping girls and young women become confident and responsible members of the community is an admirable one. I was honoured to show my support.

NSW WOMEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH (Coogee) [1.24 p.m.]: The NSW Women of the Year Awards were held on Thursday 7 March 2013. This wonderful initiative celebrates the achievements of women in New South Wales. Margaret Coles was the candidate for my electorate of Coogee in the awards. I nominated Margaret for her work with various charity groups in her roles as chairperson of the Global Illumination Committee of the National Breast Cancer Foundation, deputy chairperson of the Inaugural Eastern Suburbs Relay for Life and a voluntary tutor with the Adult Literacy Program. I congratulate her on her nomination and on her valuable work with these organisations. Margaret is a truly outstanding individual.

WALLSEND ELECTORATE VOLUNTEER KEVIN GOODWIN

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) [1.25 p.m.]: Yet another untapped diamond from the Wallsend electorate is the caring Kevin Goodwin.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Who has not got an award in Wallsend?

Ms SONIA HORNER: Everyone; that is why I am such a good member. With his generosity of spirit, for over 20 years Kevin has mentored young children from Shortland, Glendore, Jesmond and Heaton public schools in the art of literacy. This program was set up by the Community Care Branch of the admirable St John's NSW, of which Kevin is a star volunteer. I congratulate Kevin on his commitment to the education of Wallsend's children, to St John's NSW for its foresight and to the beneficiaries of the future. Well done.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT REVEREND GEOFF BATES

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [1.25 p.m.]: I congratulate Reverend Geoff Bates of Quakers Hill Anglican Church, a recipient of the 2012 Community Service Award, for his service to the community in the aftermath of the Quakers Hill Nursing Home fire. Reverend Bates is a deserving recipient of this award, which recognises the service that was provided by Quakers Hill Anglican Church to survivors, family members and volunteers affected by the fire and to rescuers as well. Reverend Bates and about 100 of his congregation spent the day assisting rescue workers, distressed victims, family members and staff. The NSW Police Force used the church to make announcements, and support was provided from the church in the form of nourishment, comfort and assistance to grieving families. In the aftermath of the fire Reverend Bates remained in close contact with staff, relatives and rescuers as they tried to come to terms with what had happened.

SENIORS WEEK ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [1.26 p.m.]: The Minister for Ageing advised me that a number of persons in my electorate were recognised for their community work in the NSW Seniors Week Achievement Awards 2013. At the awards ceremony held on 17 March Ms Marjorie Mead, of Acacia Terrace, Bidwill, was recognised in the highly commended category for intergenerational understanding. I am also pleased to place on *Hansard* the excellent work of three nominees for community service awards: Mr Charles Catania of Wattle Street, Rooty Hill; Ms Claire Jordan of Memphis Street, Mount Druitt; and Ms Dorothy Knight of Tangaloo Crescent, Lethbridge Park. As the responsible local member I am proud to acknowledge that their hard work has been recognised by the Minister and the community.

UNITED STATES BOWLING CONGRESS WINNER JASON BELMONTE

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [1.27 p.m.]: The City of Orange has been a nursery for many great sportspeople over many years, from Olympic gold medallists to cricket players, umpires and footballers. But in recent years it has been tenpin bowler Jason Belmonte who has turned heads on the international stage. Jason has been a leading player internationally for some years, but his performance in the final of the United States Bowling Congress held at North Brunswick, New Jersey, on 25 February ranks as one of his greatest wins, and one of the best wins by an Australian sportsperson on the world stage this year. What makes Jason's game different to the traditional tenpin bowler is his unique two-handed delivery style. Jason Belmonte now sits at the top of the rankings of the tenpin bowling Professional Bowlers Association. There is no doubt that Jason's high profile in his chosen sport brings great credit to his country, State and the City of Orange. I wish Jason Belmonte further success in the wonderful sport of tenpin bowling.

FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY SAMOA AID RESPONSE

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [1.28 p.m.]: I wish to commend Fairfield East residents Apulu and Lessie Petiaia for organising a container load of much-needed goods for cyclone-ravaged Samoa. Samoa was devastated by Cyclone Evan last December and many families lost everything. After visiting Samoa in January Lessie Petiaia put out a call to her family, friends and the Fairfield community to donate goods, including basic housing needs, so that they could be sent to Samoa. I am heartened to hear that the Fairfield community responded to her calls. Cabra-Vale Diggers Club was generous enough to donate \$5,000 for the shipping container, as well as pieces of furniture. One container full of goods has already been shipped and I understand there are more donated items to be sent to Samoa.

BLUE MOUNTAINS LOCAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR CHRISTINE KILLINGER

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [1.29 p.m.]: I congratulate Christine Killinger for being awarded the 2013 Blue Mountains Local Woman of the Year. Christine is a very active volunteer in the upper Blue Mountains community and has been involved with many community organisations. Christine is on the board of the Blue Mountains Retirement Village and is an active member. She is on the board of Blue Mountains Cancer Help, is the volunteer coordinator and volunteers her services in the op shop. She is on the board of the Blue

Mountains Health Trust and is an active member of the Upper Blue Mountains Sunshine Rotary Trust. In the past Christine has held positions on the Blue Mountains Tourism Accommodation Association and still finds time to take art classes for fun. Her attitude to life is that she loves being involved in the community and sharing her many talents. Not only is Christine a prolific contributor to the community, she is also a warm and caring person who is very highly regarded and respected by all her peers. I extend my congratulations to her.

TRIBUTE TO JACQUELINE MILLEDGE

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) [1.29 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House Eastlakes resident and Local Court magistrate Her Honour Jacqueline Milledge, who has been President of the Botany Historical Trust since September 2011. Her Honour has been a tireless worker for the trust and, despite enormous pressures in her role as a Local Court magistrate, she has given her time, energy and knowledge to documenting, preserving and celebrating the city of Botany Bay's fine history. Her Honour has a unique ability to engage with all sections of the community with her good humour and boundless energy and enthusiasm. It is very rare for judicial officers to volunteer their spare time to serve the community. I know many would like to but the constraints of their office make it difficult. On behalf of the community I wish to pay tribute to Her Honour and thank her sincerely for her service to the community.

Community recognition statements concluded.

[Acting-Speaker (Mr Lee Evans) left the chair at 1.30 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills was reported:

Crimes (Serious Sex Offenders) Amendment Bill 2013
Liquor Amendment (Small Bars) Bill 2013
Local Court Amendment (Company Title Home Unit Disputes) Bill 2013

ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF NORTHERN TABLELANDS

Resignation of George Richard Torbay

The SPEAKER: I inform the House that on 20 March 2013 I received a letter from George Richard Torbay resigning his seat as member for the electoral district of Northern Tablelands.

Vacant Seat

Motion by Mr Brad Hazzard agreed to:

That, in accordance with section 70 of the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Act 1912, the seat of the member for Northern Tablelands be declared vacant by reason of the resignation of George Richard Torbay.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.22 p.m.]

ANTI-GANG LEGISLATION

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question without notice is to the Attorney General. Given that it has been one week since the Attorney said he would study the High Court decision upholding Queensland anti-gang laws, can he now advise when his Government will finally move to ban criminal gangs in New South Wales?

Mr GREG SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I notice he seems to have a great interest in these matters. The Government that he was part of—the one that collapsed at the 2011 election and was almost decimated—did nothing and brought in invalid legislation which the Government has had to mop up and sort out. The Government is well advanced in its examination of the Queensland decision and we ask him to watch this space.

HOSPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr BRYAN DOYLE: My question is addressed to the Premier. What progress is occurring with commitments made prior to the last election to rebuild hospitals across New South Wales?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I thank the member for Campbelltown for his question. I note that his question was about "commitments" plural—theirs and ours but more of theirs later. The great Minister for Health and I were delighted to join the jewels of the Macarthur earlier today, the opal, diamond and emerald that represent the seats of Campbelltown, Wollondilly and Camden. We were there to kick off construction of the centrepiece of the \$139 million upgrade to Campbelltown Hospital. That centrepiece is a new clinical services building, a multistorey building that will include state-of-the-art inpatient wards, ambulatory, outpatient, allied health and pathology services. It will provide more beds for patients, more treatment areas and more state-of-the-art facilities to assist doctors and nurses to get on with the job of providing the best possible health care for the people of south-western Sydney.

I was delighted, as we were walking towards the site, to run into the former member for Wollondilly, Phil Costa, together with his grandchild. I am delighted to say that he is in the best of health. I am also delighted to say that he told me I was doing a great job. In 16 years sitting on the opposite side of the House and listening to Labor Ministers I never knew Phil to tell a lie. I cannot say that about Bob Carr, but I suggest we all watch this space in Canberra in the next couple of days. The upgrade of Campbelltown and Camden hospitals is long overdue and I am delighted that it is being delivered by this Government and by the Minister for Health. The redevelopment also includes a new, upgraded helipad to allow 24-hour access.

Ms Linda Burney: Never had it so good, eh?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: If the member for Canterbury finds it impossible to stop speaking I am sure that they would find a treatment for her at the hospital. The redevelopment includes a new 24-hour helipad. It will also provide an additional 235 car spaces for patients, their families and medical staff. Lack of parking is a source of frustration and the provision of parking spaces is important to hospitals. The Government is delivering improved health services in an area of Sydney that was identified by those opposite as a continuing growth area. We are determined that as the population grows so too does the health system.

There was much talk in this place over many years, particularly under former Premier Bob Carr, about Bob the builder. When it comes to health across this State and across this city, it is Jillian the builder—Jillian Skinner, the Minister for Health, who is delivering the health infrastructure that is long overdue and that was too often promised but not delivered by those opposite. In 2010 Paul Gibson, the member for Blacktown, decried the failure of his Government to invest in Blacktown Hospital. However, under Jillian the builder a \$300-million upgrade at Blacktown and Mount Druitt hospitals is underway. We know—for the benefit of the member for Hornsby—there were promises made by those opposite but never delivered in relation to Hornsby hospital. I drove past on Saturday and saw that work is about to start. The Northern Beaches hospital will also be developed. I can barely go to a country area without seeing progress on upgraded country hospitals.

Ms Linda Burney: When?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: For the member for Canterbury, who cannot keep her mouth shut long enough to actually hear an answer—"where", did you say?

Ms Linda Burney: When.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: What about Wagga? What about Forbes? What about Parkes? What about Dubbo? What about Tamworth? What about Port Macquarie? What about Lismore? What about Bega? Would you like some more, member for Canterbury? [*Extension of time granted.*]

I say to the member for Campbelltown that what we promised in the election campaign was a \$40 million upgrade of Campbelltown Hospital. What is being delivered is a \$139 million upgrade. What did those opposite say? Something called "Country Labor Dialogue" has fallen into my hands. It is full of photos of people who used to sit in this House. I do not know what it is about Tamworth; it is a place I love. I love to go to the country music festival in Tamworth. I could not get there this year. Three times the former Labor Government promised an upgrade to Tamworth Hospital, firstly by Morris Iemma, who sat here both as Minister for Health and Premier and said that our side of politics would never build it. We are getting on with the job.

Reba Meagher—thank God she has gone—promised it would be delivered in her term. She has come and gone and the upgrade did not start. It is being delivered by us. It was also promised by the member for Toongabbie—Kristina Keneally's best friend—and was not even delivered by him. It is being delivered by us. Wagga Wagga Base Hospital was promised by Labor and not delivered; Dubbo health service stage 1 was promised by them and not delivered, and Tamworth Hospital was promised by them and not delivered. We are getting on with the job. Jillian Skinner is the builder. We are building because, unlike that dysfunctional mob in Canberra and unlike the dysfunctional mob we had here for 16 years, we are focused on public interest and there is no greater public interest than public health.

GAME COUNCIL NSW STAFF ALLEGATIONS

Ms LINDA BURNEY: Madam Speaker—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: She speaks.

Ms LINDA BURNEY: I speak alright. My question is to the Minister for Primary Industries. Can the Minister confirm that the Internal Audit Bureau has found graphic video footage on Game Council computers showing an ongoing pattern of illegal hunting activity and cruelty to animals?

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: As you can see, Madam Speaker, this is the first page of my book so the question was fairly "unpredictable". What I can say about the Game Council in relation to the suspension—

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

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: It is quite a serious issue.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: The suspension of two Game Council employees was carried out by Mr Brian Boyle, the Chief Executive Officer of the Game Council, on my request. This followed a report that came to my office and me in January.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Which you initiated.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: Yes, I did. Mr Boyle is the division head and he is the most appropriate person to carry out the suspension. It was at my request. Given police are continuing to make their inquiries, I am unable to comment any further regarding this incident.

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND INITIATIVES

Mr PAUL TOOLE: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. How have regional communities seen real change over the past two years?

Mr ANDREW STONER: What a beaut question from the member for Bathurst. On this day two years ago a number of my Nationals colleagues and I were about to embark on a last-minute bus blitz across regional New South Wales in the lead-up to the election. From Monaro in the south to Tamworth in the north-west we rode the crest of a wave of popular support for change.

Ms Linda Burney: You didn't get off the bus.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: The people wanted change and if there is any proof of the reason, it is the member for Canterbury with that shrill interjection. People wanted real change. Yes, they wanted to get rid of a government that was rotten to its core after 16 long years, but what they wanted also was real change that would put regional New South Wales back at the heart of government in this State. I stand in this Chamber today a proud member of a Cabinet with 12 members who live outside metropolitan areas, the highest number in more than a decade, and part of a government with 25 other regional members, including you, Madam Speaker. This is a government that understands regional New South Wales because we live there. We live in communities that have been run down as a result of those 16 long years of neglect of regional New South Wales by Labor.

For example, the people of Tamworth and surrounding areas were crying out for a redeveloped hospital, which was simply never going to be delivered despite promises from three Labor Premiers, as the Premier indicated, with the so-called Independent member for Tamworth in the previous Parliament raising the issue on no less than 102 occasions in this place. They could not deliver, but earlier this year the current member for Tamworth and I were able to inspect the site of the redevelopment and meet some of the staff and patients who will see real change as a result of our commitment.

Already we are delivering where that mob opposite could not. The same story can now be told about hospitals in Dubbo, Parkes and Forbes, Wagga Wagga, Kempsey, Lismore, Bega and Port Macquarie. Also, in the electorate of Port Macquarie, the community at Lake Cathie, one of my favourite surfing spots, could not get any attention from the previous Government when it came to a new school facility, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Later this year the member for Port Macquarie and the Minister for Education will turn the first sod on a new school at Lake Cathie.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Another promise.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Another promise being delivered. It will save many children in Hastings and Camden Haven from having to spend more than an hour a day travelling to and from Port Macquarie just to get to school. In Bathurst we are also delivering. After nearly two decades of Labor saying a daily train service could not happen because of patronage, no rolling stock and every other excuse except "The dog ate my homework", thanks to the great work of both the Minister for Transport and the hardworking local member the Bathurst Bullet was introduced on 21 October last year. What has been the reaction from the local community? I quote from a great newspaper the *Western Advocate*:

The popularity of the daily return passenger rail service between Bathurst and Sydney continues to amaze even its most ardent supporters. The 10,000th passenger boarded the Bathurst Bullet last Friday bound for the big smoke in what was another milestone in the short history of the service.

Again, we are delivering for regional New South Wales. We can tell a similar story in relation to those regional communities benefiting from our commitment of \$1.5 billion for the Pacific Highway, \$595 million for the Great Western Highway, \$472 million for the Princes Highway and \$145 million for the transformative Bridges for the Bush program. It is not just the big ticket items that this Government is delivering. Whether it is the farmer from Bourke who is no longer buried by stupid regulations restricting his ability to transport stock or produce or the mother from Jindabyne and her five-year-old daughter with disabilities who now has continued access to the Monaro Early Intervention Service, this Government has put common sense back into the delivery of services for regional communities. This is a Government with regional New South Wales at its heart. *[Extension of time granted.]*

I thank the member for Bathurst for his interest in this matter. Of course, this impressive range of achievements for regional New South Wales has not been easy given the state of the budget left to us by those opposite. As my colleague the Treasurer has said, Labor left behind an \$85 billion fiscal hole for the citizens of this State—\$55 billion in debt and a \$30 billion infrastructure deficit. These are big dollars; despite that, we are delivering. The State's finances were under additional threat from their apparent genetic inability to control government expenses. Had we lost the triple-A credit rating, this State would be facing another hit of \$3.75 billion in increased interest expenses over 10 years.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: It relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. I have waited over a minute. This answer in no way relates to real change in New South Wales or regional New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: The Minister is being relevant to the question asked. There is no point of order.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Dealing with this fiscal challenge is one of our biggest achievements so far. It provides the platform from which all future reforms will flow. We are halfway through our first term in Government and I say to the people across the State that we are delivering on the commitments that we made and the rebuilding of regional New South Wales has begun.

TAFE FINE ARTS COURSES

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: My question is directed to the Minister for Education. Given more than 25,000 people have signed a petition to restore funding for TAFE Fine Arts courses and the Government's own Creative Industries Task Force also calls for this ill-considered decision to be overturned, will the Minister now reverse his decision to cut funding to TAFE Fine Arts courses?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I thank the member for Marrickville for the question. We have made no secret about the difficult choices that we have had to make as a government. That is what the people wanted on 26 March 2011 when they voted and decided who would govern this State and be responsible for spending the more than \$50 billion of their money. None of these decisions is easy, including the decision to charge commercial fee rates for Fine Arts courses. However, we have a responsibility to prioritise the way that we spend taxpayers' money. The families, the mums and dads, across this State who work hard and pay their taxes expect government to spend their money properly in priority areas.

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

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: Those involved with fine arts are great defenders of ceramics. TAFEs now have to pay the actual cost of running fine arts courses, although not all the fine arts courses are run at a commercial rate. The Government has made a decision that we will continue to subsidise the vocational educational training courses that have greater relevance in respect of employment and skills shortages in New South Wales.

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

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: Why does the Opposition not refer to the \$15,000 it costs to undertake an enrolled nurse course? It costs \$600 to undertake a course in ceramics and \$15,000 to undertake an enrolled nurse course. It is not easy to solve the problem of the high cost of an enrolled nurse course. However, a couple of weeks ago the Minister for Health and I announced scholarships for 350 enrolled nurse places across the State with a guaranteed job upon completion of the course. That is what the public wants. They know where there are skills shortages. The public wants their money put into areas of high priority. It is not my money or the Government's money.

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

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The independent task force made comments about restoring funding, but I remind the other side what the "I" in ICAC and in IPART stands for. It stands for "independent".

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

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: We would expect the Opposition to put proposals that the Government does not agree with. That is the rigour behind decision-making. We do not want or expect every bit of advice we receive to tell us that the Government is wonderful. That is how we come up with good decisions. On the ABC a couple of weeks ago Eddie Obeid said that every member of Parliament acts in self-interest. That is not true—every Labor member of Parliament acts in self-interest. The Government seeks independent advice and that advice will not always be what the Government wants to hear.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: It relates to Standing Order 129. The question is about whether the Minister will reverse his decision to cut funding. Judging by his long-winded response, I assume the answer is no.

The SPEAKER: The Minister is being relevant to the question asked.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The answer is no. This Government is in the business of making the right decisions for the people of New South Wales. How we prioritise expenditure and where we spend it are decisions made not only by me as the Minister for Education but by all Ministers. This is about good government. It is not about what used to happen: someone would be unhappy or the government wanted to please a sectional interest and the decision would be changed based on politics. Governments must not govern by placating unions or donors. I am proud to be part of the O'Farrell-Stoner Government. We make the tough decisions and not everyone is happy about them.

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

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The member for Marrickville and the member for Canterbury are proposing that we unwind those measures. If we continue to subsidise those programs, where does the money come from? Will we add another couple of thousand dollars to the cost of an enrolled nurse training course? That will make

it more difficult to get nurses in New South Wales hospitals. A choice has to be made. The choice we have made is to prioritise our training spending on the areas of skills shortages. I will always defend that decision. The answer to the question from the member for Marrickville is no.

METROPOLITAN STRATEGY FOR SYDNEY

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: My question is addressed to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Infrastructure NSW. What has been the reaction from industry and the community to the Government's bold new blueprint for the future growth of Sydney?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I thank the member for Baulkham Hills for his question. The member's electorate is in the centre of the new delivery of infrastructure for Sydney. The north-western railway is heading right through the Baulkham Hills electorate to service the people of that area, which was long ignored by the former Labor Government. Infrastructure worth \$8 billion is heading to north-west Sydney.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Canterbury and the member Maroubra will come to order. I call the member for Canterbury to order.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, I say with great pleasure that yesterday I launched the Government's draft metropolitan strategy for the next 20 years of growth in Sydney. We are expecting 1.3 million people to want to live in Sydney over the next 20 years. About 70 per cent of that population will be made up by our own families. The Government is determined to deliver jobs and housing. Since the draft strategy was launched—and the community has until 31 May to have their say—it has been looked at closely by various industry and community groups and we have seen overwhelming acceptance and support for the agenda set out in the strategy.

Mr John Robertson: I saw all those people on Old Windsor Road.

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

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What was the Leader of the Opposition doing on Old Windsor Road? He spends most of his time in areas much closer to the inner parts of Sydney.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. Several of them will be out of the Chamber soon if they continue to interject.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You blokes hate good news. A press release from the Property Council of New South Wales states:

Sydney is within reach of a platform for strong and sustainable growth with the release of the draft Metropolitan Strategy, according to the Property Council of Australia.

Ambitious targets for jobs and housing position Sydney as a city geared for growth.

The draft plan sensibly aligns itself with strategic transport and infrastructure plans—hopefully ending the mismatch of policy signals sent in the past.

When it says "in the past", the Property Council is talking about the past 16 years of the Labor Government, which failed to plan and deliver infrastructure. Opposition members get excited about some of these groups.

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

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I will mention one they used to support, Urban Taskforce Australia. Mr Chris Johnson said—

Mr Michael Daley: He's independent.

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

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The member for Maroubra has indicated that Mr Johnson is independent. That is certainly true and that is why I am going to quote him. Others might have slightly different views. Mr Johnson said:

Along with housing, Sydney needs jobs, particularly in Western Sydney and the Metro Strategy says that 300,000 new jobs will be created for Western Sydney, making it an economic driver for New South Wales.

This is excellent news for western Sydney and New South Wales. They are the words of Chris Johnson, who is an independent voice.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Toongabbie will not shout at the Minister.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Mr Johnson is someone members opposite all know very well. What about Infrastructure Partnerships Australia? This important group has been working with both sides of politics for many years to ensure that they understand the need to deliver infrastructure as the city grows and as we evolve through the twenty-first century. Brendan Lyon, the Chief Executive Officer of Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, stated:

Good planning leads to good infrastructure, and today's release of the Draft Metropolitan Strategy gets a tick for its mature, long-term planning vision for Sydney.

He went on to state that "industry welcomes today's announcement and looks forward to working with the Government to implement the metro transport and Infrastructure NSW strategies". That is an important point. The Government has ensured for the first time in this State's political and public policy history that there is a confluence between the draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney, the Long Term Transport Master Plan and the infrastructure plan. There has never been an infrastructure plan before. The plan was produced just prior to Christmas by Infrastructure NSW. What does the business sector think? John Symonds of Aussie Home Loans stated:

Housing is one of the most powerful stimulators to an economy and the package will provide much-needed housing to young families and couples, who have been starved of housing supply for many years.

[Extension of time granted.]

Mr Symonds also stated:

NSW has been lagging behind other states in economic growth and the stimulus will provide a strong fillip to builders, developers and mortgage lenders.

Business is at one in its support for the draft metropolitan plan. Others have also offered their support.

Mr Michael Daley: What about Harry Triguboff?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The member for Maroubra can talk about Harry Triguboff, but he is building the homes that the people of New South Wales need. The rump of the Labor Party sitting on the Opposition benches may recognise these sentiments:

The NSW Government has identified the right properties in the draft Metropolitan Strategy and that is more jobs in Western Sydney—the place where Sydney's growing population live but many may have to leave to find a job.

They are the words of a former Labor Minister, David Borger. That is a member of the Labor Party supporting what this Government is doing. I looked far and wide to find someone who does not believe the Government is doing great things. The member for Maroubra is waving his hand, but that is him saying, "Notice me! Notice me!" Contrary to what Julia Gillard said, The Greens and the Labor Party are still joined at the hip and they are still complaining together. Mr David Shoebridge—that constant naysayer—said that announcing hundreds of thousands of jobs in western Sydney without putting aside a single dollar to deliver the promise is empty politics. He is whingeing, whining and wrong. The Government has committed \$481 million for housing over the next four years and \$50 million for urban activation precincts. Labor and The Greens are wrong—again.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms SONIA HORNERY: I direct my question to the Minister for Education. Given that it has been more than five months since consultation commenced in Newcastle, Wagga Wagga, Coffs Harbour, Tamworth, Wollongong and Dubbo and that regional communities are still in the dark about the future of their local education offices, will the Minister now reverse the damaging \$1.7 billion cuts to the Education budget?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I am pleased to be asked that question. The short answer is no, it is not being reversed because it cannot be reversed. The Government has had to fix the problems left behind by the Labor Government. Why has it taken five months? There is a perfectly good reason. As I said in answer to the question about TAFE, this Government makes decisions after it has consulted. I point out that, despite the predictions of the doomsayers opposite, TAFE enrolments have increased compared to the same time last year. That is a good outcome and I congratulate the TAFE sector on the excellent work that it continues to do. As I said, when this

Government makes decisions about policy changes and the way it spends taxpayers' money it consults. The draft of the restructure plan was released in October or November last year, and that was followed by a period of consultation, which is required. The Government consulted with the unions and a draft was released.

I personally spoke to representatives of three groups of principals—the Primary Principals Association, the Secondary Principals Council and the Public Schools Principals Forum. They raised some concerns and said how they thought the plan could be improved. I asked the Department of Education and Communities to withdraw the draft and to consult with the groups of principals and others to see whether we could come up with a better model that was more strongly supported by principals. That is what it did and it takes time. I am sorry that we do not live in a Dr Who vortex where time stands still while we consult. As much as I would like that—and I am sure that we would all like our own TARDIS—that is not how it happens. There were originally 58 education director positions and there will now be 65 because the principals told me and the department that they wanted fewer principals reporting to directors.

Each education director will now be responsible for, on average, 34 schools. The education director in far western New South Wales, where distance is a much bigger factor, will be responsible for only 22 schools. That person clearly will spend a lot of time in a car. Given the nature of New South Wales, there is nothing we can do about that except to make that person responsible for fewer schools, and that is precisely what has been done. This Government listens so that it gets the best possible outcome. Under the current model, education directors have responsibility for about 28 or 29 schools and also a portfolio. That portfolio might cover Aboriginal education, disabilities and so on. Under the new draft model education directors will be responsible for 34 schools, but they will have no portfolio responsibilities. Under the current model half their time is devoted to their portfolio responsibilities and—

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: That is rubbish. It is not true.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I think the structure was set up by the member for Marrickville when she was the Minister for Education. I know that was some time ago and perhaps it is a time she would rather forget. I assure members that it is true. School education directors now have responsibility for schools and for a portfolio. Under the new structure, they will have responsibility for an average of 34 schools but will have no portfolio. Therefore, they will have more time to spend in their schools and to give them the support they need.

Yes, the Government is abolishing regions, and it is doing so because teachers and principals have said that they want to get rid of the layers of bureaucracy established by the Labor Government. That is precisely what we are doing; instead of 10 regions there will be 65 regions. It is similar to the local area command structure. As a local member, if I have a policing issue I go to the local area command—I think there are about 80 in the State. The 65 education directors will report to four executive directors, two of whom will be based in regional New South Wales and two of whom will be based in western Sydney. [*Time expired.*]

ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVES

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: I direct my question to the Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage. What steps is the Government taking to care for our environment and, in particular, what is being done to help any whales that get into trouble along the coast during the migration season?

Ms ROBYN PARKER: I thank the member for Coogee for his question. I was pleased to visit Clovelly Pre-School with him this morning to see sustainable education at its very earliest. It was a fantastic visit. Also today I have been looking at the whale migration season, which starts in late May. It is important that we protect whales. The O'Farrell Government has delivered or is on track to deliver all of its environmental election commitments. That was the promise we made to the people of New South Wales and that is the promise we are keeping. Our Government has effective management of our natural environment and engagement with the community in protecting and accessing our national parks. It is clear that last year more than 1,700 humpback whales were recorded passing Sydney during their migration. That is almost triple the number recorded a decade ago. It is a great success story. I know the member for Cronulla has a number of volunteers in his electorate who come out in the cold, all through the whale season, to help record those numbers.

This Government is taking action to protect the whales; we have to make sure that the number of whales interacting with our human environment is protected. Just this morning I was observing a training session for one of the National Parks and Wildlife Service whale rescue teams. The public can engage as well with our whale watching through our Wild About Whales website and also our app. This year, 2013, is the

second year for whale protection teams. The operation that they have been undertaking is quite complicated and quite dangerous. I was certainly delighted to see the training that was going into helping them to fund their work, which involves the disentanglement of whales.

Despite the former Labor Government creating new national parks, we saw continuing decline in many species across the State and a proliferation of pests, weeds and a base of species choking off our ecosystems. The recent State of the Environment report demonstrated that since 2008 there has been an increase in the number of infestations of more than 20 noxious weed species, and a number of new weed species have emerged. We are addressing these management problems through taking a landscape approach to pest and weed management—something that no government has addressed. We are improving the health of these areas by allocating an additional \$40 million to improve the maintenance of national parks, support education and improve access. In addition, the Government has delivered an additional \$62.5 million over five years for hazard reduction in national parks. We are already seeing the results of our focus on that management.

For example, as the member for Bega is aware, we have eradicated a base of species from Montague Island in his electorate leading to a return of the first breeding pair of Gould's petrels for many years. Pygmy possum populations are now on the increase in Kosciuszko as a result of concentrated pest baiting programs. We have also managed to halt the spread of hawk in the Kosciuszko National Park and we continue to make progress in the removal of bitou bush. We have declared Dharawal National Park, something that Bob Carr committed to delivering in his first term of Government but never did. We have declared six new parks so far.

But creating parks is not just about adding hectares, it is about good management and it is about an effective conservation strategy. That is what is important. That is what this Government delivers. It is about strategically adding to our biodiversity hot spots; those sites are often high cost but environmentally valuable. That is where our program focuses rather than simply adding hectares and poorly managing them. The best way to secure the future of any protected area is to ensure the surrounding community has a stake in it. That means access; that means involvement; that means we now have a new website we are very proud of that has attracted 550,000 visitors and led to a 10 per cent increase in campsite bookings.

We have increased volunteers working on all our programs, including a 20 per cent increase in coastal conservation. In 2012 we abolished entry fees to Mount Annan and Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens, and visitor numbers have increased by a quarter of a million just in the last year alone. We are increasing visitation through more walking tracks, more mountain bike tracks, and a carefully controlled expansion of horseriding. We have passed new legislation to give the Environment Protection Authority back its bite. We are on track to deliver our election commitments with the waste and recycling package. That is the report card for this Government and I am proud to present it.

SYDNEY LIGHT RAIL PROGRAM

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Given that residents are distressed that the Devonshire Street route for the proposed south-east light rail will divide Surry Hills, destroy homes and parklands, and create pedestrian and cycling risks, and given the multipartisan opposition for this route by the City of Sydney Council, will the Minister commit to a public forum with residents to provide information and respond to concerns?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister does not need any assistance in answering the question.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I thank the member for this question because it does give me the opportunity to comment on this very important project for Sydney. I place on record that our Government is absolutely committed to extending light rail from Circular Quay to Kingsford and Randwick, through the Sydney central business district and, of course, to that very critical south-eastern precinct. This is on top of the light rail extension that is already underway in the inner west. The 12-kilometre line will be built in parallel with the implementation of a redesigned bus network that I had the opportunity to speak about last week. In fact, we will be able to remove 220 buses that currently clog up the central business district.

We also know that it will provide fast and reliable links to key destinations like the Sydney Cricket Ground, the Sydney Football Stadium, Moore Park, Randwick Racecourse, and, of course, Central and Circular Quay. Also, not only will it deliver these benefits to people attending major events in that precinct from other parts of Sydney and other regions, but it is also a key transport link to the hospital and university destinations, the Prince of Wales Hospital and the University of New South Wales. We also know that light rail has a

reliability of 97 per cent versus buses, which regrettably, due to congestion and other reasons, have reliability of between only 19 per cent and 34 per cent. We also know that light rail vehicles can carry up to 300 people each compared to the standard bus, which only carries 60 people.

We know this is an important project. In fact, as the member for Sydney would know, back in 2011 we consulted through the round table process with the City of Sydney and Randwick councils, the Sydney Business Chamber, the Property Council, health and education providers and also event and recreation precincts in the central business district, as well as in the south-east. My focus is on delivering the best project for the people of New South Wales, and that is what we are doing. The final light rail route has been determined and is outlined in a document we put out called "Sydney's Light Rail Future". I urge every member of this place who cares about public transport and light rail to actually have a look at that document.

We have made it clear that whatever the final alignment is, it will have impacts around Surry Hills. However, light rail will also bring many positives to Surry Hills such as improved amenity and access. I can assure the residents of Olivia Gardens and Devonshire Street, and their neighbours, that they will be consulted as the design work is progressed. I have always said that. Already Transport for NSW has met with representatives of Olivia Gardens and I have also arranged to have meetings with some residents in Surry Hills. But let me stress, these are informal discussions until the wider and formal consultation takes place, which is imminent. Once our plans are confirmed we will ensure that all affected parties are advised.

There is no doubt that when you are building a major public transport infrastructure project there are disruptions, there are challenges, but that is why governments are there to make those decisions. Unfortunately, this State has not experienced what it is like to have a number of major projects on the go because for 16 years those opposite did not build anything. In fact, it is very interesting because last year the shadow Minister in the other place was criticising me for not expanding the light rail network when she said, "The Government's record on light rail expansion has been atrocious." She also said, "No real money has been committed for light rail extensions elsewhere in Sydney by the O'Farrell Government despite Labor having put up \$500 million on the table prior to the election." I raise this because last year the shadow Minister was saying I was not doing enough to expand light rail and last week the member for Keira asked me a question criticising me for building light rail.

Mr Alex Greenwich: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. I share the Government's support for light rail. My question was about a public forum.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member for Sydney will resume his seat.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I welcome the support of the member for Sydney, which he has put on the record today. I also welcome the fact that the member for Sydney has re-confirmed his support for the project. But I wonder what the Opposition's position is? The shadow Minister for Transport says that I am not doing enough about light rail, while the member for Keira says I should not build light rail. I do not know what the position of the Leader of the Opposition is, but I wish he had one.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: The Opposition has different positions all over the place. But I want to give the hardworking people of New South Wales the message that those on this side of the House are committed to building major public transport projects. [*Time expired.*]

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr DARREN WEBBER: I address my question to the Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Healthy Lifestyles, and Minister for Western New South Wales. How has the Government delivered on its election commitment to give mental health the focus it deserves?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES: I thank the member for Wyong for his question and his interest in the Government's commitment not only to reforming mental health but also to improving it. When the O'Farrell-Stoner Government came to office two years ago the mental health system in New South Wales was classified as broken. One of the reasons for that was that it was difficult to tell where the funding allocated for mental health was going. Not only was funding misdirected but it was also misguided. Shamefully, the former Labor Government propped up its wages policy by not filling community mental health positions across the State. In some cases community mental health teams had vacancy rates of up to 40 per cent, which

was an absolute disgrace. People in dire need were forced to attend emergency departments because they could not access the community-based services they were entitled to, which put more pressure on our hospital system.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Canterbury will come to order. Her interjections are inappropriate and disorderly.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES: We were elected with a clear mandate for change and reform to make mental health services accessible and accountable, and to deliver where those opposite clearly failed. I am proud to say that two years into its first term of office the O'Farrell-Stoner Government is leading the nation in mental health reform. We have taken a broken system and we are making it work better. We went to the last election with a commitment to improving outcomes for mental health patients, their families and carers across New South Wales and we are delivering on that commitment. We have delivered on our election commitment to establish the Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, which stands as perhaps the single greatest mental health reform in the history of this State as we give mental health back to the community.

The Government has continued its on-going reforms of the State's mental health system with the appointment of four deputy commissioners last week. I was pleased to announce that two of the four deputy commissioners have lived the experience of serious mental illness, which will help to provide the commission with a unique insight into the challenges of reforming the State's mental health system. This will be invaluable to the commission in its ongoing work. It also sends an important message that people with a mental illness can not only recover but also get back on their feet and make a valuable contribution to their communities.

The list of what the Government has delivered for the people of New South Wales in just two years is not a short one. We have delivered on our election commitment to provide \$2 million per year to Lifeline to ensure that great organisation is able to reach more people at risk of suicide. We have expanded the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative, with a new \$57.6 million Commonwealth agreement to target those with mental health problems on the margins of our communities. This program aims to support people to live well in their communities while providing the Government with greater opportunities for diverse models of care.

The Government has provided beds and vital mental health infrastructure where it is most needed, including 12 new beds at Goulburn, 31 new beds at Penrith Health, 10 new adult beds at Wagga Wagga, 10 new beds at Royal North Shore Hospital, 10 new adult beds and 12 new child and adolescent beds at Hornsby, eight beds at the Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, and a 64-bed purpose-built mental health unit at Nepean Hospital. Under the Council of Australian Governments' subacute program we are delivering 116 new beds at an estimated capital cost of more than \$65 million in places like Broken Hill, where we opened the subacute unit two weeks ago; 10 beds at Dubbo, which will be opened in the coming weeks; 20 beds at the Wagga Wagga unit; 20 beds at Blacktown; 16 beds at St George Hospital; 20 beds in the Shoalhaven; and 20 subacute mental health beds at Liverpool Hospital. This is a good list. The Government is delivering.

However, the most important achievement is that the Government has met its election commitment to give mental health the focus it deserves. That commitment is shared by all my colleagues in this place. It has been evident time and again, but most notably when so many of my Cabinet colleagues, led by the Premier and the Minister for Health, were present to celebrate the launch of the Mental Health Commission last year. It goes without saying that people do not choose to have a mental illness but with the reforms that have been put in place over the past two years it is now easier to access services and treatment no matter where one lives in this State. This is particularly true for people in regional areas whose unique mental health needs fell into the too hard basket under those opposite. Many members in this place are familiar with the challenges of living in rural and regional areas, where people face what can often seem like a constant battle against the forces of nature. *[Extension of time granted.]*

Couple this with the difficulty in accessing timely and appropriate services, as well as the stigma in identifying someone living with a mental illness. As the first Minister for Mental Health in a New South Wales Government, and as somebody who has lived in regional communities for most of my life, I am committed to continuing to drive this reform. In the past two years we have ensured that for the first time, with the establishment of a 24-hour telephone support service, every resident of New South Wales has direct telephone access to expert mental health advice; we have established a statewide perinatal mental health service for regional women; and invested \$2.3 million a year in the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program to support regional communities in times of trouble. That has been done in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries and NSW Farmers.

Through these initiatives over the past two years the Government has heralded a new era of mental health care in New South Wales. It is also pleasing to see positive headlines around mental health. Through those reforms the Government is showing that mental health is not all doom and gloom; there is good news. That is important for many reasons, but mainly because it will help remove the stigma that has surrounded mental illness for too long. I am proud of this Government's commitment to mental health and suicide prevention. I am also proud to be the first Minister for Mental Health in a New South Wales Government. I take this opportunity to thank the dedicated mental health staff across the State who, day in and day out, work tirelessly to help some of the most vulnerable and desperate amongst us. Most of all, I am proud to say that by making the State's mental health system accessible and accountable we are improving the lives of those touched by mental illness.

Question time concluded at 3.18 p.m.

PETITIONS

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

Albion Park Aeromedical Services

Petition requesting the retention of aeromedical services at Albion Park, received from **Mr Gareth Ward**.

Sydney Electorate Public High School

Petition requesting the establishment of a public high school in the Sydney electorate, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

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 **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Inner-City Social Housing

Petition requesting the retention and proper maintenance of inner-city public housing stock, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Pet Shops

Petition opposing the sale of animals in pet shops, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Duck Hunting

Petition requesting retention of the longstanding ban on duck hunting, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Container Deposit Levy

Petition requesting the Government introduce a container deposit levy to reduce litter and increase recycling rates of drink containers, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Business Lapsed

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) Nos 2369 to 2377 lapsed pursuant to Standing Order 105 (3).

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) Nos 2378 to 2385 will lapse tomorrow pursuant to Standing Order 105 (3).

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

Health Infrastructure

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [3.19 p.m.]: The motion that I seek to be accorded priority is that the House notes that the Government is getting on with delivering health infrastructure for New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: Order! There should be no interjections during the giving of reasons as to why this motion should be accorded priority.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: The reason that the Government is getting on with delivering health infrastructure is that the people of New South Wales have called for progress to continue. They want this Government to continue to deliver solid health infrastructure because they know that we need to deliver quality health services to a growing and changing population. Our population is ageing: approximately one-third will be aged more than 65 years by 2016, and more than half of our hospital beds are occupied by those aged over 65 years. Our service needs are changing. Three-quarters of those aged more than 65 years have a chronic disease.

Under previous Labor governments there was significant under-investment in our health infrastructure: 40 per cent of health infrastructure stock is 50 years old, and there is a lack of car parking for patients and families. The former Labor Government did so little that we are now left to clean up the mess and make up for its lack of investment. Previous Labor governments continually promised but did not deliver on many health projects under their watch. This motion deserves to be accorded priority because previous Labor governments were cruel; they treated the community they represented with contempt. While they were promising good things, in reality they were doing deals behind closed doors.

This motion deserves to be accorded priority because the people of New South Wales expect and deserve the very best health system that we can give them. The progress made over the past two years by this Government has been staggering. We have a Minister who cares about the health system. The Minister understands what is needed not only in metropolitan areas but also in regional areas. The motion deserves to be accorded priority because the clear difference between the former Labor Government and this one is the stability and support of the Executive that allows them to get on with the job, in this case with the Minister for Health, who was previously the shadow Minister for Health. It was a natural progression for her to take over this portfolio.

This State needs stable leadership. The people want a government that can take them forward and can deliver the health infrastructure, not a government focussed on constantly fighting and jostling for leadership. Labor did not care about health. When they had power people were involved in corruption and that leads to dysfunction—that was the former Labor Government. This Government delivers on public infrastructure, and will continue to progress. This motion deserves to be accorded priority because we are getting on with the job of delivering the health infrastructure that the people New South Wales deserve and expect.

Preschool Education Affordability

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville) [3.22 p.m.]: I seek priority for my motion, which calls on the Minister for Education to release the Brennan review and condemns the O'Farrell Government's failure to improve preschool affordability, participation and teacher salaries in New South Wales. This motion should be accorded priority because the release of the Brennan review of government funding for early childhood education is long overdue. The Government's failure to release the review is causing enormous uncertainty in the preschool and early childhood sector. Just today we have once more seen the Minister for Education talk up his commitment to preschools, as he has done in so many other areas. He likes to talk big, but he actually delivers very little.

The Brennan review remains unreleased. I would like to know what the Minister is afraid of. I would like to know what the Government is hiding. But I am not the only one who would like to know; the early childhood sector would like to know that. This sector has repeatedly asked the Government to release this review. The matter is urgent. The review, which was commissioned in August 2011, was to inform new funding arrangements in 2012. We are now a third of the way through 2013 and the Government still has not released the report. Preschools are still uncertain about what is happening, and the early childhood sector still does not

know what is going on. We know that the Minister has the report; it is not as if the Minister does not have the report; he has the report, but he refuses to be open, he refuses to be honest, and he refuses to tell the sector what is in the report. This is causing enormous concern for preschool services as they try to set budgets and fees in this environment of uncertainty.

This is a matter of priority as there are enormous challenges confronting New South Wales preschools. Every member of this House knows that to be true. Every member of this place would have received a visit from preschool service providers and early childhood teachers, telling them about the crisis in the sector. Preschools are going under as we speak. I have heard so many reports of preschools that are struggling to survive, of preschools in small regional communities that can no longer service their communities. This Government refuses to transfer funds to other preschools, leaving those communities without services.

The Government has provided no new State funding for preschools, and it has underspent Federal funding provided for preschools. We know that in New South Wales children are missing out because their parents cannot afford preschool fees. This motion is urgent because the sector is having enormous trouble attracting and retaining teachers as a result of salary disparity with teachers in the government sector. Under this Government we have seen fees imposed for government preschools, and a refusal to release the Brennan review. The Government must act on this matter urgently.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 66

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

Noes, 22

Mr Barr	Mr Lynch	Mr Robertson
Ms Burney	Dr McDonald	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Daley	Ms Mihailuk	Ms Watson
Mr Furolo	Mr Park	Mr Zangari
Mr Greenwich	Mr Parker	
Ms Hay	Mrs Perry	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hoenig	Mr Piper	Mr Amery
Ms Hornery	Mr Rees	Mr Lalich

Pair

Mrs Williams Ms Burton

Question resolved in the affirmative.**HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE****Motion Accorded Priority****Mr KEVIN ANDERSON** (Tamworth) [3.33 p.m.]: I move:

That this House notes that the NSW Government is getting on with delivering health infrastructure for New South Wales.

Let it be known that those opposite voted against building health infrastructure; they voted against building hospitals; they voted against redeveloping hospitals; they voted against capital investment in subacute beds; and they voted against health infrastructure in general. They are consistent, because they failed to deliver on hospital commitments across a wide range of electorates during their time in government.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! Members who wish to have private conversations should do so outside the Chamber.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: Tamworth 2007, promised but not delivered; Bega 2008, not delivered; Dubbo 2002, failed to deliver; Parkes and Forbes 2006, failed to deliver; Port Macquarie, failed; Northern Beaches 1999, failed; Blacktown pre-election 2011, failed; and Campbelltown pre-election 2011, together with the Prince of Wales cancer centre, failed. If a government builds infrastructure that allows services to flow, staff will populate the areas, causing regions to grow. For example, the recent upgrade of the Gunnedah emergency centre—a \$300,000 upgrade of the much-anticipated emergency department—is now complete. The new emergency department has its own dedicated waiting room, two private consulting rooms and a larger and improved resuscitation area. That has provided the community with theatres that can operate four days a week. Visiting general surgeons, an orthopaedic surgeon and a gastroenterologist can now service the Gunnedah community and surrounding districts. It is a case of build the infrastructure and they will come.

The development of health infrastructure around the State in the two years since the Government was elected is staggering. Dubbo hospital, \$79.8 million; the Dubbo mental health facility, \$7.6 million; Parkes hospital, \$42.5 million; Forbes hospital, \$25 million; South East Regional Hospital at Bega, \$170 million; and the Port Macquarie Base Hospital, \$110 million. In my own electorate, the Tamworth hospital will receive \$220 million. That magnificent development is due to be completed by 2016. It was promised by the previous Government in 2007. Those opposite were cruel because they built up the expectations of the community but failed to deliver. The Government is building in Tamworth the \$42 million cancer care centre and on the Central Coast the \$38.6 million Central Coast regional cancer care centre. A sod-turning ceremony marked the beginning of its construction and the cancer centre will be commissioned by early 2013. The Woy Woy rehabilitation centre has had \$14 million allocated and the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital has had \$270 million allocated. Works are currently underway on the development at Wagga Wagga.

The people of New South Wales have called for progress to continue. They want the Government to continue to get on with the job of building the health infrastructure, and redeveloping and repairing the hospitals that suffered under a lack of investment by the previous Government. In my electorate in past years hospital theatres and emergency departments had leaking roofs. Operating theatres could not operate because of leaks or lights that were not working. The lifts in the maternity section of Tamworth Base Hospital were not operating and it is inconveniently situated a long way from the operating theatres. Thank goodness the Government is getting on with the job of building the health infrastructure that the community of New South Wales wants. The Government is getting on with making New South Wales number one again.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [3.38 p.m.]: This is the self-congratulatory motion that governments usually move at some stage into their time in government in an attempt to paper over the cracks. "New South Wales has one of the world's better health systems." Those are the words from the Garling report of 2009. To the majority of people who work in the system or who use its services, those words are still true. There were 2,270,081 visits to emergency departments in New South Wales in 2012 and 212,763 surgical procedures. Probably around 90 per cent of patients who used the system rated their care as good, very good or excellent according to the last figures I had, from 2009-10.

New South Wales has one of the world's better health systems. The question is: Are things better since the election of the O'Farrell Government in March 2011? Members know that if they were to go into a New South Wales public hospital today and were to approach the first health worker or the first patient they met to ask if they had noticed a significant improvement over the last two years or if their job was any easier very few would say yes. Even fewer will agree with the health Minister's words last week in Parliament when she said:

Those opposite can rabbit on as much as they like; the reality is that the report of the independent Bureau of Health Information, which Labor established, shows that we have never had it so good.

The Bureau of Health Information was established by the previous Government after the Garling report because far too often what we have seen in Health for many years has been spin rather than fact. This motion is a classic example of one that contains spin and selective quoting rather than fact. For example, the Federal contribution to the hospitals mentioned by the member for Tamworth, such as Bega, Parkes, Forbes, Blacktown, Campbelltown and Prince of Wales, has not even been mentioned even though in most cases it was significant and in many cases comprised the majority of the funding. Not a brick has been laid on Bega Hospital and not a brick has been laid on the Parkes and Forbes redevelopment. Under the Labor Government work was due to commence in 2013-14 on the northern beaches hospital but that project has been kicked into the long grass yet again. This was going to be a \$400 million hospital but it has no identified timetable or source of funding and most likely will be a fully private hospital with some public beds similar to Port Macquarie hospital, which was built and paid for twice to bring it into the public health system.

There has been no commitment from the health Minister as to when the first patient will ever be admitted to any of the hospitals that have been mentioned such as Bega, Parkes, Forbes or northern beaches. A simple question to which the member for Tamworth can reply is: When will any of these new hospitals see a patient being admitted? The cancer care centre mentioned by the member for Tamworth was built largely with Federal money and the \$10 million of New South Wales money was agreed to by the previous Government. It is a very necessary, high-quality piece of infrastructure for the people of Tamworth. It is well deserved but well overdue, yet it was designed, budgeted for and commenced under the previous Government. Not a word from the member for Tamworth about that, and his whole speech selectivity quoted facts and timetables.

It is time to tell the people of New South Wales the truth about the health system because only when they know the truth can they make the rational decisions that need to be made for the future sustainability of the system. At 28 per cent of the State budget, the amount consumed by health is increasing at a faster rate than government revenue. I note also that the member for Tamworth did not mention the closure of beds in various units such as the cardiac beds at Mount Druitt and those at Prince of Wales. This Government has announced \$3 billion worth of health cuts, which means that many non-nursing health workers are leaving. Patients are waiting longer for surgery than in any other State in Australia and waiting longer in emergency than they ever have in the past.

Mr BRYAN DOYLE (Campbelltown) [3.43 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure on this historic day to speak in support of this motion that notes that the New South Wales Government is getting on with delivering health infrastructure. Today I stood with the Premier, the Minister for Health and my colleagues the member for Camden and the member for Wollondilly when we turned the first sod for the centrepiece of the new clinical building at Campbelltown Hospital, part of a \$139 million investment. Uncle Ivan conducted the smoking ceremony and as the burning ashes from the gum leaves were placed inside the first hole dug on the building site one could sense the community appreciation and thanks that finally, after 10 years, something was being done to improve services at Campbelltown Hospital.

Ms Noreen Hay: You dug a hole.

Mr BRYAN DOYLE: The expansion of Campbelltown Hospital, which you never delivered, represents a significant improvement in the treatment and care of patients in south-western Sydney.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Wollongong will have an opportunity to make a contribution to the debate.

Mr BRYAN DOYLE: Every aspect of this redevelopment directly benefits patients in Campbelltown and the greater Macarthur, from the clinical care they will receive to the ability to park their car, which reduces the stress of a hospital trip. We have been boosting health services across the State through a massive hospital rebuilding program. Since the election we have delivered 3,000 more nurses and

900 more doctors. Patients, their families and staff will benefit enormously from the state-of-the-art additions to our hospital at Campbelltown. When the member for Macquarie Fields finishes his parliamentary career he will probably return to practising medicine there and he will thank this Government for delivering a state-of-the-art hospital for the people of Campbelltown. I am delighted that the construction of our new clinical building is under way.

This is a Government that delivers on its commitments and listens to the people. There are 90 new in-patient beds with capacity for a further 30, 11 new emergency places, four birthing rooms, two cardiac catheterisation laboratory intervention rooms, and a co-located and expanded floor comprising ambulatory care, outpatients, antenatal, allied health consulting rooms and treatment spaces. There is also an expanded loading dock. This Government is spending \$4.7 billion to rebuild hospitals at not only Campbelltown but also at Blacktown, Mount Druitt, St George, Wagga Wagga, Hornsby, Tamworth, Wollongong, Dubbo, Port Macquarie and Bega and to build the northern beaches hospital. The Campbelltown Hospital redevelopment is scheduled for completion in early 2016. Members can drive around and see that the work mentioned in this motion is under way today. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [3.46 p.m.]: Once again I point out to Government members that self-praise is no recommendation. Taking credit for the work of others in a university environment or any other environment would be considered plagiarism, but this lot opposite cannot even give credit where it is due. Federal Labor money has been ignored in all their speeches. Work commenced under the State Labor Government has been ignored. An \$86 million extension at Wollongong Hospital was budgeted for by Labor but there is no recognition from this lot. They come in here and pat themselves on the back time and again for the wonderful things they are doing. We have just heard how wonderful it was and how everyone was so moved that the Government dug a hole at Campbelltown Hospital. Well done! I will congratulate members opposite when I see the project completed.

What about what the Government did at Bulli Hospital? What about the commitment given during the election not to close the emergency department at Bulli and its closure after the election? What about the fact that surgical nurses at Wollongong Hospital have taken industrial action because of the Government's cuts? That is virtually unheard of. What about the fact that paramedics have been forced to take industrial action, which also is unheard of? These unprecedented funding and staffing cuts to hospitals and clinics across the State will only end in disaster, with an already struggling health system being pushed to the brink. The member mentioned \$700 million or whatever the figure was; what about the \$3 billion cuts to the health system?

In 2008 the now Minister for Health said in this place that \$200 million worth of backroom cuts could not be made without dramatically affecting front-line health services. Now the Minister for Health in the O'Farrell Government is cutting \$3 billion out of the health system and claiming it will not affect front-line services. What hypocrisy! Cuts of \$3 billion to New South Wales hospitals will mean fewer beds, longer waiting times and compromised patient care. In Wollongong Hospital trolley block is getting worse and the paramedics, the Ambulance Service and the nurses are under huge pressure. They need increased investment in their services rather than this constant pressure being placed on the very dedicated workers that we rely on. This Government should hang its head in shame when it comes to its activities in the health area.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [3.49 p.m.], in reply: I inform the member for Wollongong of a couple of fantastic infrastructure projects regarding the Wollongong Hospital car park that she may not be aware of, given the fact that the Labor Government spends so much time with internal faction fighting.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Wollongong has already made her contribution.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: They are so busy jostling for the leadership position that they are forgetting to look into their own electorates. I remind the member for Wollongong that the Wollongong Hospital has been allocated funding under the 2012-13 budget for a new car park. The car park project has a capital budget of \$27.8 million and will consist of 600 new spaces in a multi-deck car park. The member for Wollongong might like to take note so she can inform her electorate and simply say thanks to the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research.

Other members opposite have been complaining bitterly. Blacktown Hospital will also receive 600 new car parking spaces. The member for Macquarie Fields was talking about the Bega Hospital. That involves a \$170 million project and the main works tender award will be coming up in a couple of months, with the main

works to commence in mid-2013. We are expecting the Bega Hospital development to be completed around 2016. The \$110 million construction of the Port Macquarie Hospital is expected to be completed by 2015. The \$220 million construction of the Tamworth Hospital is to be completed by 2016.

The Minister for Health has done a great job negotiating a fair share of Government funding from the Health and Hospitals Fund to assist the New South Wales Government to build the long-awaited health infrastructure that the communities of New South Wales have been crying out for. Only the current Minister for Health has sat down with whoever the Federal Health Minister of the day may be—it may be changing as we speak—to negotiate and she has got a fair share of health and infrastructure funding to ensure that the key projects can progress. Build it and they will come. New infrastructure, redeveloped hospitals: that is what the people of New South Wales are calling for. This is a Government getting on with looking after and caring for the people of New South Wales and making New South Wales number one again.

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

Motion agreed to.

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER AMENDMENT BILL 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [3.55 p.m.]: This morning we heard from speakers for the Opposition. To preach to the Government, one has to have clean hands and credibility—and Opposition members have no credibility. I spoke earlier about the Leader of the Opposition. It is within the DNA of the Labor Party to say whatever it takes, promise whatever it takes. Whatever the people want to hear, just say it, even though there is no basis for it. The member for Heffron said that the Government does not want scrutiny, but the scrutiny of the Government is done by the Auditor-General. We are talking about the scrutiny of the election promises.

This is the problem for Labor members. They do not like that it will be mandatory that the promises made by both sides in the election campaign will be submitted for costing. The mandatory submission seeks to ensure that the electorate has accurate, timely and independent information on the cost of election commitments. The mandatory submission provision focuses on the two main parties that are likely to form government. The Labor Party does not want to be accountable. For the first time in the history of New South Wales the Labor Party is going to be accountable before the election and at the time of the election for the promises it makes. I heard the member for Cabramatta yelling out "four elections" as if for some reason winning four elections is a badge of honour. We have to remember that Labor made promises before the election and then axed the promises after the election.

There was a promise for the Rozelle metro. Promises for dams and roads were made before the election. The electorate believed the Labor Government and accepted the promises. But now its promises will be scrutinised for the very first time by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The member for Bankstown spoke about vengeance and payback. It is called projection, as any amateur psychologist will know. The way an individual sees things is projected onto others. So the Labor Party is projecting what it would do. The member for Bankstown should not be speaking about such things. She is the factional warlord. Because of what she is presently doing to the member for Auburn, she is one of the worst offenders when it comes to vengeance and payback.

This legislation was brought about as a result of the report of the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office. In June 2011 it commenced an inquiry to consider the purpose of the office and whether the terms of the Act were appropriate, as well as the role of the office, including its function and powers, structure, staffing and resources and accountability and oversight of mechanisms. The committee published its final report on 2 December 2011, which included nine recommendations. This bill addresses those recommendations. The bill amends the Parliamentary Budget Office Act 2010 to give effect to the Government's response to inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Office by the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office. In particular, the bill:

- (a) limits the function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to the preparation of costings of general election promises of the Premier and Leader of the Opposition, and removes the functions of costing the election promises of other parties or members and of providing technical analysis, advice and briefings to members on budget and economic matters, and

- (b) limits the appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to a period before and after a State election during which election costings and reports are to be made, and
- (c) requires the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to request the Parliamentary Budget Officer to prepare election policy costings for all general election promises that are likely to impact on the current and relevant forward budget estimates, and
- (d) authorises the Parliamentary Budget Officer to publicly release more than one budget impact statement prior to the State election, and
- (e) clarifies that a budget impact statement of all the costed policies of the Premier and Leader of the Opposition must show the budgetary impact of all costed policies on a specified core set of financial indicators.

The bill provides:

Schedule 1 [14] gives effect to the recommendation that parliamentary leaders be required to submit all of their publicly announced election promises (that are likely to impact on the budget estimates) for costing by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

That is what Labor hates. That is the reason it is not supporting this bill. That goes to the core and the DNA of Labor. For years Labor members have got away with making promises that they had no intention of delivering. They were making promises that the State could not afford. They were unable to get the budget balanced and, for those reasons, they axed the promises after the election. This legislation will force them to take those promises to the Parliamentary Budget Officer to be costed so that the people of New South Wales will have accurate, timely and independent information on the cost of election commitments.

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

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: That is the reason we will not have ratbag groups such as The Greens. They will never form government and they are totally irrelevant. Who wants to waste taxpayers' money on costing their promises? The days of The Greens attracting votes are over. Most people have seen through the Labor Party's alliance with The Greens. That goes to the nub of this bill and that is why the Opposition hates it so much. Items [4] and [5] of schedule 1 give effect to the recommendations that the Parliamentary Budget Officer be appointed before each State general election and that the appointment end three months after the election. The Auditor-General oversees the budget for the other three years and three months and the Parliamentary Budget Officer then costs the election promises and reports. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) [4.01 p.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 and I commend the Treasurer for introducing it. What a good Treasurer he is. He is getting New South Wales back on top of the game after 16 years—and I use those words on licence from the member for Myall Lakes—of waste and maladministration by the Labor Government. The only reason members opposite will not support this bill is that they have something to hide. What are they hiding? Their approach to open government and accountability has been on display at the Independent Commission Against Corruption over the past six months. The ratings have been so good that I believe there will be a sequel over the next few months. The modus operandi of members opposite is backroom deals, backroom costings and backhanders. The only time that they are interested in finance is when they have to fork out for the suckling pig after having negotiated a backroom deal.

The objective of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 is to reform the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office to improve its effectiveness in costing election commitments and to give the public confidence going into an election. No-one will be able to say that there will be no carbon tax under a government they lead and then impose one immediately after being elected. By way of background, a joint select committee was appointed in June 2011 to inquire into the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office and whether the terms of the Act—the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010—were appropriate. The committee made a number of recommendations and the Government has accepted most of them. This bill implements those recommendations and makes some additional amendments.

The principal amendments of the bill are, first, to mandate that the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition submit all election policies that are likely to impact on the current and relevant forward budget estimates for costing by the Parliamentary Budget Office. The public of New South Wales expects and deserves that. This will ensure that the electorate has accurate, timely and independent information

on the cost of election commitments prior to voting. As part of this process, the parliamentary leaders will be required to confirm in writing that all their policies that have a budget impact have been submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office.

Secondly, as recommended by the committee, the legislation provides for the appointment of a parliamentary budget officer every four years. The officer's appointment will commence on 1 September in the year prior to a State election and end within three months following the election. That will allow the Parliamentary Budget Officer sufficient time to discharge his or her duties regarding election costings, to table a report in Parliament and to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to answer questions on the report. That will improve the operation and accountability of the Parliamentary Budget Office and will give the public confidence that election promises can be funded. Thirdly, and again as recommended by the committee, the bill provides for the development of an operational plan as soon as practicable after the establishment of the office. The scope of the operational plan includes the objectives of the Parliamentary Budget Office, strategies to achieve those objectives and a schedule of proposed activities.

Fourthly, the committee also recommended that the Parliamentary Budget Officer be required to furnish a report on the activities of the Parliamentary Budget Office as opposed to providing an annual report for the period that it operated. The report is expected to include, as a minimum, the operational and resourcing cost of the office, the number of costings and budget impact statements completed, issues encountered in undertaking the costings process, and recommendations on operational arrangements and activities of the Parliamentary Budget Officer in respect of future general elections. Fifthly, the bill provides that the Parliamentary Budget Officer will be accountable to the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Assembly. The Act now requires two separate committees to review the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report.

The committee recommended that a single joint committee be appointed to perform this role and that is precisely what this bill achieves. At the beginning of each Parliament the committee will consider and review the report on the activities of the Parliamentary Budget Office during the previous election period. There is nothing more transparent than that. Sixthly, the bill gives the Parliamentary Budget Officer the discretion to release revised budget impact statements in response to any late policy announcements. This bill addresses that shortcoming in the current legislation and it was recommended by the committee. The committee also recommended amending the Act to provide greater clarity regarding the content of budget impact statements. The bill specifies a core set of indicators of budget impact for inclusion in the Parliamentary Budget Office budget impact statement.

These indicators are consistent with how the budget is now monitored and presented by New South Wales Treasury. The bill leaves in place existing arrangements that ensure the confidentiality of material submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office for costing. One of the core promises given by the O'Farrell-Stoner Government was to provide the people of New South Wales with more effective, efficient and accountable government. There is no better way of doing that before an election than by reforming the Parliamentary Budget Office. This is the strongest independent election costings unit in the country. The bill addresses the issues that were identified by the joint select committee and it gives the people of New South Wales confidence to go forward. I commend the bill to the House.

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Divisions and Quorums

Motion by Mr Brad Hazzard agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to provide that from 7.00 p.m. until the rising of the House no divisions or quorums be called.

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER AMENDMENT BILL 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr CHRIS HOLSTEIN (Gosford) [4.09 p.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013, which was introduced by this Government's very effective Treasurer whose stewardship

is helping to restore the State to its rightful position as the engine room of the Australian economy. The bill seeks to implement almost all of the recommendations of the joint select committee inquiry and provides a framework for a more efficient, effective and accountable Parliamentary Budget Office. It seeks to reform the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office and improve its effectiveness in costing election commitments. The joint select committee, which was established in June 2011 and of which I was a member, identified a number of areas that required reform. The inquiry recommended mandatory costing of election commitments. The bill will limit the operations of the Parliamentary Budget Office to once every four years with its sole function being to prepare election policy costings.

The bill will mandate that the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition submit all election policies that are likely to impact on the current and relevant forward budget estimates for costing by the Parliamentary Budget Office. This will ensure that prior to voting in a State election that the electorate has accurate, timely and independent information on the cost of election commitments. A very important part of this process is the requirement of the parliamentary leaders to confirm in writing that all of their policies that have a budget impact have been submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office for costing. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's appointment will begin on 1 September in the year prior to a State election and will cease within three months following the State election.

This period of appointment is to allow sufficient time for the Parliamentary Budget Office to discharge its responsibilities regarding the election costings and to subsequently allow for the Parliamentary Budget Officer to table the report in Parliament and to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to answer questions on the report. The bill will require the Parliamentary Budget Office to develop an operational plan as soon as practicable after the establishment of the office. This plan should include the objectives of the Parliamentary Budget Office, the strategies to be deployed in achieving those objectives and a schedule for proposed activities or an operations plan. Also, the Parliamentary Budget Office will provide a report on its activities rather than an annual report, as previously required. The activity report is required to include as a minimum the operational and resourcing costs of the office, the number of costings and budget impact statements completed, the issues encountered in undertaking the costing process and the recommendations on operations of the Parliamentary Budget Office in respect of future elections.

The bill will require only a single joint committee to be appointed rather than two separate committees as currently required under the Act. Its task will be to review the Parliamentary Budget Office's report. The bill will allow the Parliamentary Budget Office to release more than one budget impact statement prior to each election. This provision is very important because it permits the Parliamentary Budget Office to take into account any late policy announcements that may impact on the budget. Under this bill the Parliamentary Budget Office will be accountable to the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Assembly. This committee has the expertise to monitor and review effectively the activities of the officer and to ensure the integrity and independence of the costing process. At the commencement of the following Parliament the committee will review the previous report on the activities of the Parliamentary Budget Office.

The bill contains the existing provision to report on the costings on the Monday prior to the election, approximately five days before the election. It specifies a core set of indicators of budget impacts, and these indicators are consistent with how the budget currently is monitored and presented by the New South Wales Treasury. The bill also leaves in place the existing arrangements that ensure confidentiality of material submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office for costings. I am proud to be part of a government that delivers on its promises. This side of the House argued for this change when in opposition and now that we are in government we have introduced this legislation, which delivers the strongest, independent election costing unit in Australia. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [4.14 p.m.]: I would like to make a couple of comments on the Parliamentary Budget Officers Amendment Bill 2013. The overview and explanatory note have been read to the House by Government members about 14 times already. I do not think I need do any more than make a couple of points in relation to the bill. Some of the rhetoric and comments of Government members in support of the bill have been interesting. One of the consistent points that has been raised by Government members is that the bill in effect is implementing the recommendations of an inquiry held into the Parliamentary Budget Office, which, of course, was already in existence prior to the bill coming into Parliament. Around about now, in the next week or so, the Government will have been in office for two years. The Government has totally sidelined the Parliamentary Budget Office and not used it at all.

I am fascinated that an inquiry conducted by members of Parliament would come up with a recommendation that limits access by the Parliamentary Budget Officer to just the Premier and the Leader of the

Opposition. Previously a parliamentary leader meant the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, a member of Parliament who was a recognised parliamentary leader of a registered party and an Independent member of Parliament. I cannot understand why a parliamentary inquiry into an oversight person or an officer who can cost election promises would come up with a recommendation that excludes the head of a political party, such as the leader of the Christian Democratic Party, Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile—I think the longest serving member of Parliament in New South Wales—and the leader of the Shooters and Fishers Party, which is now an established political party in the Legislative Council. The Greens have been mentioned, and of course maligned in some areas, and even The Nationals are excluded from the bill. One wonders about the objectivity of an inquiry that results in such a proposition.

As the Leader of the Opposition has said, the Government does not like the wide-ranging powers of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Why would the Government like an independent and unattached parliamentary budget officer? This officer has debunked nearly every speech made by Government members in the first six months of the Government's term. Do members remember the black hole? I am sure it is recorded many times in *Hansard* the \$5 billion black hole that this Government was supposed to have inherited. They said the State was in a mess and they needed to implement funding cuts. That scenario, of course, was completely laid waste by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and by many other financial experts. Now we never hear about the \$5 billion black hole that previously was a part of every Government member's speech—yours and yours and yours—in the first couple of months of the Government coming to office.

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

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I will direct my comments through you to that lot over there. Government members no longer use that particular argument because the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer explained—not in these words, of course—that it was nonsense and not justified. The member for Davidson contributed to this debate. I do not agree with some parts of his speech, that is, all the words after, "Mr Acting-Speaker". No other aspect of his speech had much substance. Every Government member who has spoken in this debate has used this bill to attack the Labor Party or the former Government. They seem to be enjoying themselves. Yet, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, they cannot attack the previous Government or our party on the financial management of this State.

The legacy left by the former Labor Government was one of the key components of the member for Davidson's contribution. The O'Farrell Government was left a legacy by the former Labor Government but it was not the \$5 billion black hole that has now gone into fairy land. Because of who I am directing my comments to I will keep them short and simple, but those opposite should remember two things in particular. First, the former Labor Government left those opposite a triple-A rating, a rating they have been struggling to hang onto. I will come back to why that is so. Secondly, in the words of the Treasurer—he has already lost \$1 billion so perhaps I should not be using him as an example.

Mr Paul Lynch: An unreliable witness.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I note the interjection of the member for Liverpool. In the 2011 Budget Speech the Treasurer said that as at 30 June 2011, about 12 weeks after the election, New South Wales had a budget deficit of \$1.3 billion. One year later the Treasurer tried to change that but the Auditor-General laid waste to his claim when he reported that \$1 billion had been miscalculated. The Treasurer was saying we were in deficit when we were actually in surplus. In all of the criticisms of the former Labor Government, whatever figure was claimed, it never lost \$1 billion and no Treasurer ever miscalculated the State Budget by \$1 billion. The Government has no grounds on which to lecture us on finance because its record has been trashed by the Auditor-General, the Parliamentary Budget Office and public opinion.

The public now know that they were hoodwinked into accepting all of the cutbacks in portfolios such as Education and Health based on a non-existent deficit. The Opposition will not be lectured by a mob that cannot even count its own budget with the assistance of the bureaucracies of Treasury and so on. That makes the criticisms made of the former Labor Government pretty shallow. In conclusion, the member for Myall Lakes used all but three minutes of his time attacking the DNA of the former Labor Government and only about 1½ minutes on the bill. That was because those opposite have little to say about the bill. Labor has been in this Chamber since 1891 as a parliamentary party.

Dr Geoff Lee: I will take some notes.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I suggest you read the *Hansard* because you will have trouble spelling some of the words. In that time the Labor Party has expelled its own Prime Minister and Premier. The Premier of a Labor Government has also been sacked by a State Governor at a time when three political parties were formed out of the one party. In the 1950s there was a sectarian split that tore every State branch of the party down the middle, except for New South Wales. We have gone through an education crisis in relation to State aid and since 1975 we have been through a situation in the Federal Parliament. The Labor Party has recovered from all of those events and it will get through the silly nonsense of those opposite using bills such as the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill to attack Labor when they do not have the credibility or the credentials to comment, let alone talk about the history of the Labor Party.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills) [4.24 p.m.]: It is galling to have a Labor Party member of Parliament lecture this side of the House about finance. It is extraordinary for the member for Mount Druitt to suggest that those on this side of the House do not have a better record than Labor in providing economic stability. I remind him that under Labor one million people were unemployed. So much for the party that purports to represent the working man; there were no working men under the Labor administration of the 1990s. If it was not one million unemployed or giving us a hard time through its management of the economic growth of this nation, it was the 17 per cent interest rates they whacked us with. What did that give us? That gave us the recession we had to have.

Labor members have engaged in rhetoric during this debate. I remind those opposite that they have the benefit of claiming the economic trifecta in Australian politics: unemployment, high interest rates and a recession. Having been the chair of the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office, it gives me great satisfaction to support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. I was disappointed by the remarks of the shadow Treasurer, the member for Maroubra, who led for the Opposition in this debate. He even managed to surprise me in how horribly misinformed he is about both the bill and the committee's inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Office. I note that none of the Labor members who took part in that inquiry is present in the Chamber.

I could not have agreed more with the reflection of the member for Cronulla that the so-called shadow Treasurer's contribution was nothing but audacious. The member for Maroubra appears to be an avid enthusiast of conspiracy theories. I am waiting for E.T. to appear. It is estimated that approximately 25 per cent of the population believe in unidentified flying objects. Recent polling indicates only 20 per cent of the population are prepared to vote for the Labor Party. That means that 5 per cent more of the population believe in the existence of unidentified flying objections than are prepared to vote for Labor. Regardless of those facts, we can always be certain that the shadow Treasurer will wander into this place and cry foul without fully examining the facts.

The shadow Treasurer seems unshakeable in his belief that this bill forms the cornerstone of a grand conspiracy to deprive the people of New South Wales of open and transparent government. I am amazed that those opposite should lecture us on open and transparent government. One only has to look at the New South Wales press gallery's coverage of the current Independent Commission Against Corruption hearings to understand the importance of open and transparent government. The shock value of this proposition coming from those opposite is awe inspiring. The Opposition must believe that the people of New South Wales have collective amnesia about their disastrous 16 years in government. Those opposite should be the last to lecture on open and transparent government.

Having been the chair of the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office let me put the mind of the member for Maroubra at rest. Both he and the Leader of the Opposition should be comforted by the committee's inquiry. If they had bothered to read the committee's report before they cried wolf in this place, they would have saved themselves some embarrassment. I can assure the House, the shadow Treasurer in particular, that the committee's inquiry was not—in the words of the shadow Minister—"completely superfluous". He should be more careful before he stands in this place in future and condemns the work of a committee as a waste of time. Such an attitude only illustrates his disdain not only for the committee process but also for the principle of transparent government in general, a principle that he professes to support.

The committee's report was the result of a prolonged process of receiving submissions and engaging with relevant stakeholders, including political organisations, business groups, unions and international agencies. The committee also held a public hearing into the Parliamentary Budget Office. I noted with interest the horrendously inaccurate assertion by the shadow Treasurer that the committee completely ignored the submission of prominent public servant and former Acting Parliamentary Budget Officer Mr Tony Harris. I draw the attention of the member for Maroubra to the transcript of the committee's public inquiry in which the

evidence of Mr Harris prominently featured. The committee worked well and I was proud to be involved in its deliberations. From my perspective, its inquiry and deliberations were far from superfluous or a waste of time. To the contrary, it produced a well-considered and insightful report that I am very proud to support.

I do note, however, that the behaviour of some members of the committee towards the committee's staff was beyond embarrassing. The conduct of the Hon. Eric Roozendaal of the other place, who now is an Independent, Kristina Keneally, who has seen the light at the end of the tunnel and has departed this place, and the Hon. Walt Secord was remarkably disrespectful. I understand one of those members was even chipped by officers of this Parliament for breaching parliamentary protocols. Their conduct was compounded only by the fact that two of those three individuals once held some of the highest offices in this State.

Members on this side of the House have no doubt noticed the inherent contradiction in the position of those opposite. They pop up one by one to say that this bill is some death knell to transparent government in this State; yet at the same time they claim that the committee's inquiry was a waste of time. Talk about hypocrisy. What a flimsy commitment to transparent government. Would they rather that the committee never had an inquiry? I know that is how they used to run this State, ramming important legislation through this House without consultation; one would have thought that they would have learnt something from 26 March 2011. If they really believed this bill to be so horrendous, surely they would support the committee inquiry and process.

One of the most important results of the committee's inquiry was that there should be a Parliamentary Budget Office. Every submission supported the existence of a Parliamentary Budget Office; not one submission supported its abolition. Naturally and unsurprisingly, the committee's report supported this position as well. This bill affirms the Government's commitment to the existence of a Parliamentary Budget Office. The ravings of those opposite seem to be coming from fantasy land. Again, they did not do their research; if they had, they would know that the existence of the Parliamentary Budget Office is not in danger. The Opposition's concerns are exaggerated and poorly informed. The committee was keen to seek common ground from all stakeholders about how the promises made by political parties could best be costed and tested by a reliable and independent authority prior to a State election. This bill is that common ground.

The protestations of those opposite merely represented a desire for taxpayer-funded largesse. The committee could find no evidence in support of an expensive style of Parliamentary Budget Office—apparently the deepest desire of the Labor Party. Listening to those opposite, one could be mistaken for thinking that we get absolutely no support in this place; that we have no staff and that we are completely left to our own devices, without assistance. That is simply not the case. Individual members of Parliament have access to their own research staff and the Parliamentary Research Service, as well as their own party machines. Why should the Government provide any special advice on how the State budgetary process works outside the existing options already available? If Opposition members do not understand the budgetary process, they should go to TAFE. A permanent Parliamentary Budget Office is simply unnecessary throughout an entire parliamentary term. I have better things to do with \$10 million.

That brings me to the most astounding of the assertions made by the member for Maroubra: that somehow we need the Parliamentary Budget Office to educate members about the budget process. Surely the public expects members of Parliament to have some basic understanding about economics and budgets before they get here. Being a representative of the people is not a learn-on-the-job vocation. If they have no idea what is going on, do not stand for Parliament. If they are so selfish that they stand, knowing that they are not adequately qualified, the onus is on them to fix their deficiencies. Inept members of Parliament should not depend on the taxpayer to teach them the basics of modern life. This is a ridiculous, nanny state position that the Opposition obviously supports. I thank the Government for accepting the committee's report and codifying our recommendations. The amendment will ensure that this Parliament has access to an efficient and effective Parliamentary Budget Office, one that is capable of fulfilling its core functions. I commend the bill to the House.

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [4.34 p.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 which has a number of objects. I note the more important top three which are that the bill:

- (a) limits the function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to the preparation of costings of general election promises of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, and removes functions of costing the election promises of other parties or members and of providing technical analysis, advice and briefings to members on budget and economic matters; and
- (b) limits the appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to a period before and after a State general election during which election costings and reports are to be made, and
- (c) requires the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to request the Parliamentary Budget Officer to prepare election policy costings for all general election promises that are likely to impact on the current and relevant forward budget estimates.

I commend the Treasurer for introducing this bill because it is a pragmatic way in which to manage for a government that does not have a lot of money; it is not wasting taxpayers' money. The position of the Liberal-Nationals Government is to do its best with the little money that it has and to make responsible decisions. This is not the Government's money; it is taxpayers' money. It is important that there be proper management of the Parliamentary Budget Office to ensure that the State gets the best bang for its buck. During past elections both sides of politics have made various promises and commitments, but those made by the Liberal, National and Labor parties must be costed to achieve full transparency.

The Parliamentary Budget Office is perfectly positioned to provide transparent costings and to assess the impact on forward budget estimates. In the 2011 election that was particularly important for the community of Parramatta because a number of commitments were made by the Liberal-Nationals Government to the people of the Parramatta electorate. I am pleased that after two years in office the Government has honoured all those pre-election commitments. With the indulgence of the House, I note that the achievements include upgrades of the intersections at Clyde and Victoria streets, Rydalmere, and Darcy and Cumberland streets. One of the bugbears for the people of western Sydney, but especially the people of Parramatta, is transport; 93 per cent of those in the area use the road system. Of course, improving those roads and black spots is essential to make Parramatta and the whole of western Sydney work better.

During the last election a commitment was made regarding the Parramatta Mission. That also has been delivered, with an allocation of \$200,000 to the mission. That has allowed that organisation to produce more than a million meals for those in need, expand the mission's facilities and provide continuity of service—really helping those who need help most. I congratulate Reverend Keith Hamilton on his fantastic service in Parramatta looking after those people. I commend all the people of the Parramatta Mission, not just the paid staff but also the volunteers. Some bigger ticket items on which this Government has delivered include \$20 million for the Children's Medical Research Institute, allocated by the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research. That shows the Minister's great commitment to her portfolio of medical research.

Anyone who visits the institute will see the world-leading research on the genetics of children and how genetic relationships can be improved to overcome difficulties that arise from genetic disease. That certainly will improve people's lives, right from birth to adult life. Smaller commitments on which the Government has delivered include flashing lights at Our Lady of Mercy College, the Arthur Phillip High School and Melrose Park Primary School. These may be smaller-ticket items in the scheme of pre-election commitments, but they are very important for the parents and children who use those busy intersections every school day. I again commend the Hon. Duncan Gay, the Minister for Roads and Ports, for his commitment to delivering those election promises. The people of Parramatta have expressed their thanks for the provision of those flashing lights.

Another \$200,000 has been provided to the Police Citizens Youth Club in Parramatta, which has been used for the restoration of its roof. The club does a fantastic job in encouraging young people who could otherwise slip through the cracks of society and end up on the wrong side of the law. It provides those young people with activities, mentoring, education and a connection with the police and with community leaders. Those young people are assisted in staying on the straight and narrow, and are given a positive future direction. I commend the Police Citizens Youth Club for its work and look forward to working with it in the future. I have been involved in discussions about how the club can expand in Parramatta and I support its ambitions.

Another pre-election commitment was for \$2.4 million to fund the Parramatta loop bus, which has been an outstanding success, not only in alleviating the Parramatta council of that \$2.4 million cost over the four years but for the more than one million people who use the Parramatta loop bus every year. To build a connected and vibrant city we need walking trails but we also require effective public transport. The loop bus is a free public transport system that is well patronised that runs seven days a week. The loop bus will expand its area of service as Parramatta develops as the capital of western Sydney. I draw the attention of the House to an article published today by Di Bartok, a senior journalist with the *Parramatta Advertiser*.

Mr Anthony Roberts: An excellent journalist.

Dr GEOFF LEE: The Minister for Fair Trading agrees that Di Bartok is an independent and critical, but fair, media journalist. Her article in this week's *Parramatta Advertiser* states, "Lee passes mark in term". I thank her for her good wishes. She writes:

While Mr Lee has done well during his first two years, he still needs to make sure that projects such as the heritage precinct, Westmead Hospital parking, railway station lifts and changes to planning laws go ahead.

Ms Bartok has prepared a list of "Honours". They include \$2.4 million for the Parramatta loop bus, \$20 million for Children's Medical Research, \$4.8 million for the Westmead emergency department, 29 new NightRide services, \$1.3 million for various community programs, 10 new peak hour rail services from Parramatta station, \$55 million for the Millennium Institute, money allocated by the Premier to the Parramatta RSL Navy sub-branch for its seventieth anniversary, 14 new probationary constables for law and order for the Parramatta and Holroyd commands, and close to \$400,000 in community grants.

Mr Anthony Roberts: You've been busy.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I thank Minister Roberts for acknowledging that we have been busy. Without the support of the Minister for Fair Trading, none of it would be possible. He is the one of the biggest supporters of Parramatta—perhaps the biggest. I look forward to the expansion of any services he can deliver for western Sydney. I know the Minister is a passionate advocate of western Sydney and a champion of small businesses. He sticks up for the rights of those who cannot stand up to big business. As I look around the Chamber I see many members expressing admiration for the Minister on his continuing achievements. I finish by joining with the Minister to thank Di Bartok for her outstanding, fair but balanced report card on the Government's progress at the two-year mark. I look forward to serving the people of Parramatta in a fair and equitable way, fighting for their rights and ensuring that they get their fair share of resources.

Mr CHRIS SPENCE (The Entrance) [4.44 p.m.]: I support the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. The member for Parramatta referred to a list of achievements in his electorate. The successes I have achieved in my electorate would take more than the 10 minutes I am allocated, so I will speak about them on another occasion. The Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 is borne out of the findings of the parliamentary inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Office, which was carried out by the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office.

The committee was appointed to inquire into and subsequently report on the Parliamentary Budget Office, established under the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010. The committee considered the purpose of the Act and whether the terms of the Act are appropriate. It also considered the role of the office including, but not limited to, its functions and powers, structure, staffing and resourcing, and accountability and oversight mechanisms. The committee also considered the establishment and operation of comparable offices in other jurisdictions. In his foreword, the chair of the committee, the member for Baulkham Hills, says of the report:

I believe the recommendations offered by this Committee have the balance right. The recommendations provide transparency and value for money.

I am pleased that the response by the Government is to adopt almost all of the recommendations made by the committee. This bill will result in providing a successful, responsible and competent Parliamentary Budget Office. The bill limits the operation of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to once every four years, from a period commencing in September of the year prior to an election through to three months following the election. This is in response to recommendation 2 made by the committee. The officer will cease by 30 June, after reporting to and appearing before the relevant parliamentary committee. That is in accordance with recommendation 6 whereby a single committee is to be appointed to review the report and the activities of the Parliamentary Budget Office during the preceding election period.

In making the submissions of policies for costings mandatory for the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition, this Government is creating greater transparency and accountability in election promises. It will ensure that, electorate by electorate, accurate information assessed independently will be available on the cost of any commitments made during the election period. This may have been a good thing to have in force during the period of the former Labor Government for things such as the solar bonus, the CBD Metro and the Tcard. Over a billion dollars was wasted on those three things, two of which never came to fruition and one of which blew the budget whilst being overseen by the Leader of the Opposition when he was Minister. It is fair to say that any proposed policies that will impact the budget estimates should be submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In its report, the committee noted:

The election policy costing function of the NSW PBO was an essential function of the Office. It was described in the agreement in principle speech on the Parliamentary Budget Officer Bill 2010 as "an important and critical role" for the PBO. The speech further explained that the previous Charter of Budget Honesty (Election Promises Costing) Act 2006 had provided a framework for costing election promises in the lead-up to the 2007 State election. However, it had been criticised due to a perceived bias by Treasury towards the incumbent Government. The Parliamentary Budget Officer Bill 2010 was intended to overcome this perceived bias and "ensure that there is a high-quality and independent election costing process in place that is beyond any criticism concerning impartiality or independence".

This Government is committed to transparency and efficient accountability on both sides of this House. That is why, in response to the committee's findings, we are strengthening the system of accountability in an election period. As noted earlier, the intention of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Bill 2010 is to overcome any perceived bias. The amendments outlined in this bill will further strengthen fairness and ensure an independent review of any proposed costing. The former Labor Government intended many things, but intentions and actual outcomes are different things. Like many of the things the former Labor Government did, it intended to remove bias but it did not come up with the goods. This Government is intent on delivering and that is why we have, after thorough investigation by the committee, followed through and ensured that fairness and transparency are tantamount to election policy costings.

The committee also investigated and weighed up the advantages and costs associated with continuing to hold a Parliamentary Budget Office on a permanent basis and determined that, to be most effective and also most cost effective, the Parliamentary Budget Office should exist on a temporary basis, as required, in the lead-up to any election. It is well documented that the former Labor Government was very good at spending money. It is how this State got into the situation it is in now. The Liberal-Nationals Government is intent on being fiscally responsible and I commend the hard work of our Treasurer in ensuring that occurs. While the Act provides for functions in addition to assessing and reporting on the proposed policy costs during election periods, other parliamentary committees, agencies and non-government agencies duplicate these functions. As it stands, the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 does not provide value for money.

The committee noted a submission by Mr Stephen Bartos, who stated, "The present NSW Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010 concentrates almost exclusively on ... policy costings." He went on to say, "The ongoing existence of a PBO in the periods between elections is harder to justify if election policy costings constitute its predominant function." The most important function, and what will now be the sole function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, will be to prepare election policy costings. This is adopted in line with recommendation 3 made by the committee. During this time the Parliamentary Budget Officer will be able to release more than one budget impact statement during the pre-election period. The recommendation made by the committee that is now being adopted by this Government is an appropriate one.

The committee found that the Parliamentary Budget Officer had released only one budget impact statement in the lead-up to the 2011 State election and that that statement contained less than half of the relevant party's election policies. The current Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010, however, enables the Parliamentary Budget Officer to make only one statement. It is, therefore, under the current Act, too restrictive to be able to have a holistic view of the election policy proposals and their impact when only one statement can be made. This amendment will now mean that as policies are amended, added or removed the Parliamentary Budget Officer can take those amendments, additions or removals into account and provide statements accordingly. The committee noted that:

During the 2011 Election the PBO took the view that a report on the budget impact would not be satisfied if only the costs or other financial implications of the promises themselves were shown in isolation.

The report went on to say:

The Committee agrees that clarity regarding the content of the budget impact statements produced by the PBO is required. Therefore the Committee recommends that the Act be amended to ensure there is clear guidance on the content of budget impact statements.

In response to this recommendation, the Government's proposal is to amend the Act to specify a core set of financial indicators of budget impact that are consistent with how the budget is monitored and presented currently. The Public Accounts Committee will be responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operations of the Parliamentary Budget Officer as it has the necessary expertise to undertake this role and ensure the independence and integrity of the costing process. The bill is a reflection of a lengthy inquiry into the function and efficiency of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and the effect of the amendments will be to create a far more effective, efficient and accountable framework under which it will operate. I thank the members of the Joint Select Committee on the Parliamentary Budget Office for their insightful report and I commend the bill to the House.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [4.52 p.m.]: While members of this House will disagree about the various merits of the Premier, any objective observer would say that he is a master of the long game. This bill is all about the long game. The bill effectively throttles the Parliamentary Budget Officer and, as they say, this is where ideas are taken down a cul-de-sac and quietly strangled. The bill is all about

strangling the Parliamentary Budget Officer and preventing that body from doing the job it was meant to do, which is to provide the people of New South Wales with an objective measure of the economic impact of the policies of any member they have elected to this place. What the bill really does is limit the scrutiny to just the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition and let the minor parties off the hook completely. They are literally able to promise the world and deliver nothing because the scrutiny of the Parliamentary Budget Officer no longer applies to them.

This is yet another deal done dirt cheap to allow the minor parties to escape the scrutiny of the people of New South Wales. The Minister for Fair Trading, who is at the table, is a highly intelligent man and, I understand, a Latin scholar of some repute. He and various lawyers and highly educated people here can interpret the word "hubris". Any objective reader of the speeches of those opposite will recognise them for basically meaningless hubris, rhetoric and party politics. Objective scrutiny of the promises of the government of the day will no longer be possible. I would love to see whether this bill would win a conscience vote among those opposite. To all members here, many of whom are new, I say: Be careful what you wish for, for you may just get it.

This is not a good day for the governance of New South Wales because the bill effectively strangles the open and transparent government that many of them profess to believe in. For example, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has already made one enormous mistake, which was effectively to identify the budget black hole for the myth that it is. Whenever governments of the day are subject to scrutiny their mistakes sometimes are picked up and sometimes their deliberate spin and hiding of the truth also are picked up. For example, the discovery by the Auditor-General of the billion dollars that was somehow missed in the budget statement is what happens when there is an independent umpire providing scrutiny of the government of the day. The Treasurer, who is an honourable and decent man, has recognised that and that is why he has got the Auditor-General to help with the scrutiny of future budgets. When the Parliamentary Budget Officer goes, all members and the people of New South Wales will have to take the Government's word that what it says is fact.

Regardless of who is in government and who is in opposition, we know that governments always put a spin on their facts. It does not matter whether it is the Liberal Party or some other party in future, this is not good for the people of New South Wales because it removes a layer of scrutiny. While those opposite talk ad nauseam about Labor's 16 years, how good would it have been had there been a Parliamentary Budget Officer during the Port Macquarie Hospital public-private partnership, the Eastern Creek Raceway and the Sydney airport rail line projects? It does not matter who is in government; governments make mistakes and if there is a Parliamentary Budget Officer to bring those to light it is good for the people of New South Wales. All members need to know why on earth the Government is doing this. Not one electorate office in this State has been visited by a constituent who has said, "You need to get rid of the Parliamentary Budget Officer."

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: No-one has complained. It hasn't been there for about two years.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: This is all about the long game. As the member for Davidson said, it has not been there for two years. This Government has not appointed a Parliamentary Budget Officer because it does not believe in objective scrutiny of what it is doing. The committee's report did not reflect the balance of the submissions. It was a doctored report from a doctored committee that got the answer the government of the day wanted. The eight members in the Chamber who are trying with great difficulty to look interested in this bill know very well that this report was doctored to reflect a pre-determined outcome. This is not democracy; this is the government of the day getting its way by using the numbers. Even though members opposite are in government now, that is not permanent and they will rue the day when there is no Parliamentary Budget Officer to scrutinise the promises of future governments as well as minor parties such as The Greens and Independents. In marginal seats those minor party votes are important. With exhaustion of preferences it means that parties can get a significant percentage of the vote on promises that are never going to be delivered and have never been costed.

This seven-page bill will bring a change to the way in which the State is governed for many years. Nobody in his or her right mind will take this job for nine months. The people with the skills are already working. This will be a secondment from Treasury. This is an attempt to use politics close to the election. Item [1] proposed section 3 will remove the ability for any member of Parliament to get ideas costed; that has gone for everyone. Under proposed section 18 (1A) the request for the election policy does not place an obligation on a parliamentary leader that is enforceable in a court or tribunal. I am not a lawyer but that sounds to me like a stunt. What is the point of having a law that places no obligation on any parliamentary leader and that is not

enforceable in a court or tribunal? I thought that laws had to be enforced. This non-enforceable law is a stunt in an attempt to strangle democracy—nothing more and nothing less. One could be forgiven for thinking: Why on earth are they doing this? As I mentioned earlier, the Premier is a master of the long game. This bill is designed to reduce scrutiny in relation to what this Government does during the electoral cycle but also in an election period. It is to be used as a club to beat up the Leader of the Opposition. This is not good governance; it is a political stunt. The damage to the Parliamentary Budget Office is something that all members of this House and the people of New South Wales will rue for many years to come.

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) [5.01 p.m.]: There is no doubt that the public are sceptical about promises made by politicians at all levels of government and on all sides of the debate. Is it any wonder when governments and oppositions have been all too frequently coy about their true intentions? The Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013 seeks to reform the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office and improve its effectiveness in costing election commitments. If nothing else, this bill requires that the major parties place their cards on the table in the lead-up to an election and ensure that the public can be protected from rubbery commitments and misleading claims.

The joint select committee was appointed in June 2011 to inquire into the purpose and the role of the Parliamentary Budget Office and whether the terms of the current Act, the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010, are appropriate. Early in my term I wrote to the Auditor-General calling for a review of this office and its functions. The committee identified a number of areas that required change but one of the key changes the inquiry recommended was mandatory costing of election commitments. In response to some of the comments made by the Opposition, I have the utmost respect for the member for Macquarie Fields but I will not be lectured by a member of the Labor Party on hubris. Aristotle defined it, Odysseus worked it out and so too did New South Wales Labor—

Dr Andrew McDonald: Please give us the definition.

Mr GARETH WARD: I can give members the definition. It is a bit lewd, but we need to go back to ancient Greek times. Members of the Opposition were so bad when they were in government that the Greeks would blush. I mean no disrespect to the Minister in the chair. When this group of people occupied the Treasury benches what sort of financial performance did we see from them? We saw \$500 million spent on a metro project that was drawn up on the back of an envelope when a press conference was going on simultaneously down the road in Governor Macquarie Tower. We saw \$127 million spent on Tcard. Of course, we had to change the government and bring in a Minister for Transport who introduced the Opal card which is to her great credit.

The member for Macquarie Fields mentioned the Parliamentary Budget Office as if we could not live without it. One only needs to look at the first Act to see that it was introduced in 2010. This is not something that has been around for years as part of the Westminster system; it was introduced as a stunt by the former Labor Government. If Opposition members want to talk about stunts and lies and misleading people I will refer to the debate between the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition prior to the last election. There was a commitment from Kristina Keneally to allow the budgetary commitments of parties to go to the Auditor-General. In that debate she said, "Yes, absolutely. Let us send them to the Auditor-General." Of course, they marched back into the Parliament and withdrew that commitment, yet we have just received a lecture from the gentlemen and ladies opposite relating to transparency and accountability in government.

Oh, deary me! I could not believe the lecture that we were getting. I will not be lectured by the Opposition on transparency and accountability in government. They are past masters at covering it up, and it is for good reason that an inquiry is occurring at the Independent Commission Against Corruption into cover-ups. There is a reason that 700 pages were allegedly withheld from a call for papers from the upper House, which will be investigated. These are extraordinary statements from members opposite. This bill mandates that the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition submit for costings by the Parliamentary Budget Office all election policies that are likely to impact on the current and relevant forward budget estimates. The mandatory submission is to ensure that the electorate has accurate, timely and independent information on the cost of election commitments prior to voting.

As part of this process the parliamentary leaders will be required to confirm in writing that all their policies that have a budget impact have been submitted to the Parliamentary Budget Office. As we are talking about policies I thought it was appropriate to look at Labor's policies to see what it would do. These are from the people who left us with a \$5.2 billion deficit, including a \$55 billion debt left to the State and an infrastructure

backlog of \$30 billion. It did not take me long to find a link on Labor's website entitled, "The Jobs & Economy Policy Commission". So we are going to have a discussion about it. We will not do anything about it, but we will have a talkfest to see how it can work out. This statement is on the Labor Party's website:

The Jobs & Economy Policy Commission will seek to provide policy ideas for Labor to take to the 2015 NSW election that will provide a clear economic direction for the state. These policies must be aimed to achieve a growing economy with full employment, good jobs and long term opportunities for investment in equity that will see our state play its leadership role as the engine room of the national economy meeting the needs of our communities in the 21st Century. The Commission will inquire into and report upon:

1. The current drivers of economic prosperity in New South Wales, with particular regard to jobs, public services, investment, living standards, regional communities, gender participation and equality and fairness, including an assessment of how influential these drivers will remain into the future, and whether new drivers of economic prosperity will emerge.

What a motherhood statement of extraordinary proportions. Labor talks about jobs and prosperity. This State is one of the leaders in job generation. Almost 100,000 jobs have been generated, which is something we said we would do in our first full term in office and it has been achieved in less than half that time. I quote further from the website which states:

2. The quantity and type of jobs likely to be created by these drivers, with a particular focus on knowledge jobs, service sector jobs, green jobs, independent contractors, and small business.

It is only in point 2 that Labor mentions small business; it took it all that time to get to what drives this economy. The website also states:

3. The economic policy tools that have historically been available to state governments, and how these and any other policy tools should be used in future.

Looking back at the mess that Labor left is a good way to learn from its mistakes. Perhaps that is a good point, so I will give that one a tick. The website continues:

4. The composition and direction of state income and expenditure, and the options available to state governments for financing major infrastructure.

The Labor Government left major infrastructure languishing, and that is why the Treasurer is confronting a \$30 billion infrastructure backlog. Unlike the Labor Government, this Government is investing \$820 million in the Princes Highway over the next six years. The Minister for Transport has also committed \$770 million to make rail services more accessible for the people who need them. The Labor Party did not concern itself with those things when it was in government, but it did talk about them at the discussion forum. I have not found any policy yet, but I am sure I will. Point five states:

The impact of technological change and globalisation on the NSW economy and jobs for the future.

That is yet another nebulous statement. Point six states:

The funding options for the infrastructure needed to allow NSW to realise its full economic potential.

Point seven states:

The role of public sector and State Owned Corporations' procurement in shaping and delivering good local jobs.

It also states:

The Policy Commission will seek input from key stakeholders within the party and the wider community.

This is Labor's policy talkfest. It continues:

The final report of the Policy Commission must embrace Labor values of economic and social equity.

Does anyone know what Labor values are these days? Who chairs such an august, amorphous, intellectual think-tank of greatness designed to return to the State the vitalisation and aspirations that we so desperately want? It is Michael Daley—Mr Middle Management himself. He will lead the charge. Thank you, oh Lord, we are saved! Michael Daley is here to save us with yet another committee. I will refer to The Greens' policies, but I will be brief because their website makes no reference to dealing with the economy or finances—nothing,

nada, zip. The Greens are not interested in generating jobs or getting the balance right. Even our Social Democratic friends sitting opposite understand that the economy is important, but they do not know how to make it work. The Greens' website contains some motherhood statements about work, but there is nothing about finance and the economy. I seek an extension of time.

Extension of time not granted.

I am delighted that the committee recommended real changes to the legislation. The Treasurer has been subjected to some serious attacks during this debate. He is trying to reform the Parliamentary Budget Office and he has one of the most difficult jobs in this State. I am pleased to know that the finances of this State are being looked after by such a capable and competent man who is delivering for New South Wales and making this State number one again.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [5.11 p.m.]: I am amazed at the contributions of members opposite to this debate on the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. Anyone would think it is a rewrite of the Magna Carta. This legislation demonstrates the Government's determination to restore honesty and integrity to the election process. That is what members opposite wanted to do when they were in government. When we were in opposition they said that they wanted us to cost our election promises. It was important then but apparently it is not important now. They are using every diversion they can to avoid the fact that an important part of the election process is ensuring parties do not make magnanimous promises about what they will do if they are elected when they have no money to fund them. We are continually reminded about the 16 years of Labor mismanagement. The member for Macquarie Fields even mentioned it and showed that he realises how devastating it was. Governments must stick to their election promises and not run amok making off-the-cuff decisions to build a metro system in the city and blowing \$1 billion in a blink in the process.

I acknowledge that this will never be a scientific process. However, the Coalition has kept all the election promises it made before it came to office. It has kept focused on those promises and it is funding them. It is hard work, but we are doing it. We obviously want to avoid any repetition of the Kevin Rudd strategy of forgetting every promise he made during the Federal election campaign. He changed his mind every day and his decisions about how he would spend taxpayers' money depended on what pair of socks he was wearing. He inherited a \$30-billion surplus and turned it into a \$150-billion deficit in a blink as a result of utter stupidity and waste. We must prevent that happening again and we can do that by ensuring honest election campaign promises.

We do not want parties promising wild-arsed schemes to ensure they are elected. We also do not want governments making decisions on the run that will put the economy into deficit. This country has a \$250 billion deficit, which will undoubtedly be \$300 billion before the Federal Government is tossed out. We were promised a balanced budget this year, but a couple of days ago we were about \$14 billion short. That is a sizeable gap and it demonstrates how governments can be elected having made a range of promises that they have no hope of funding. It also highlights the type of government we can get if reckless promises are made. This legislation will ensure that the major parties are more professional in their approach to campaign promises. Mention has been made of The Greens in this debate. Their policies are a rewrite of the *First Testament*.

We cannot budget for Doomsday, and that is what we will have if The Greens are ever in a position to form government. The Greens want to ensure that New South Wales has no revenue, because their policies are about closing down everything. The only thing they will be able to do is set the price of candles, because that is all we will have to burn if they ever form a government. We do not need to deal with the crazy notion of costing minor party policies. The Greens have no policies; they simply run interference and hinder good government. This legislation does nothing more than clean up some shabbiness around the edges. I am amazed that the Opposition has come up with so many wild, crazy notions.

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [5.19 p.m.]: I will make a brief contribution to debate on the Parliamentary Budget Officer Amendment Bill 2013. The Greens are not satisfied that this bill responds to the community's legitimate need for scrutiny of election promises. It is important that parties other than the two major parties have their policies examined rigorously and costed and that they are able to stand or fall on the basis of factual evidence. I feel compelled to speak because members have said, "The Greens do not have costed policies. They are all airy-fairy." So what is the Government solution? Do not give them any resources to help them cost it. If the Government speakers think that it is airy-fairy and they think promises should be costed we would welcome a full and useful Parliamentary Budget Officer that actually responds.

In the Federal sphere the Greens have been very active in utilising the services of the Australian Parliamentary Budget Office, and there is no doubt such an office will be equally useful here for smaller parties. The Parliamentary Budget Office is a good idea. It took a hung Parliament to get it federally because traditionally the major parties have not been keen on putting these matters forward. I understand also that there is an opportunity at this time for the Government to consider how we can support parties in the rigorous investigation of their work.

My last point, because I understand that time is short, is that while looking at the financial numbers on all the policies that the Greens have, on all the policies that the political parties have—whether it is the Greens policy on multiculturalism, mining, agriculture or community affairs—we should be looking at the triple bottom line. Let us look at the financial costs and the implications. It would be useful if bodies such as parliamentary budget offices could also give good details on the social and environmental impacts. Then we could understand the full impact of the decisions, the major projects that are developed and the promises that are made. While there may be a positive financial impact, the action may well be environmentally or socially regressive. I thank the House for the opportunity to make that brief contribution. I look forward to the Government improving its position on this office in the future.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly—Treasurer, and Minister for Industrial Relations) [5.21 p.m.], in reply: I thank those members who have contributed to this debate. I particularly thank those constructive members that have made points in this debate—the members representing the electorates of Wagga Wagga, Wyong, Davidson, Tweed, Charlestown, Granville, Myall Lakes, Clarence, Gosford, Parramatta, Baulkham Hills, The Entrance, Kiama, Murray-Darling and also the member for Balmain. While I do not always agree with the member for Balmain, and not on the point that he made in this debate, I think that he tries to address the issue constructively and in a public policy context. I certainly applaud that. I cannot say that about those opposite. I honestly have to say that their attitude is incredibly disappointing.

Some of the words that were given to me on the way into this place directly from former Prime Minister John Howard, and it was pretty simple, were, "You follow good policies, good principles and you let the politics take care of itself." In relation to this bill, I genuinely think standing in this Parliament today that that is exactly what I am trying to do. In opposition I argued very strongly that we needed an independent election costing process. The argument went back and forth, back and forth, back and forth before every election. We needed an independent body to give opposition parties competence in costing promises without interference from the government of the day.

That is what this model does. It is setting up an independent Parliamentary Budget Office for the purpose of election costings to give competent assistance to oppositions as they put forward policies so that they can be presented to the community in a sensible way that is consistent with the budget. The Opposition, in attempting to become the government of this State, will be able to put forward policies knowing that they are affordable. All members, Opposition and Government, can go to their communities knowing that the process has been gone through and the policies are costed appropriately and affordable.

From what I heard from those opposite it appears that they do not support those principles. I do not think that those opposite have learnt from the events of the recent election and some of the challenges of the former Government. This is not a political comment. I will make some, but my tip on this is: If members follow the substance they have a chance to regain the credibility that they are seeking. Merely making political grandstanding comments will go against them. As shadow Treasurer I introduced a bill for the appointment of a parliamentary budget officer because in its 16 years the Labor Government had not done so. Labor overturned my bill and introduced its own.

In the February before the March election, Labor still had advertisements in the *Australian Financial Review* looking for someone to run the Parliamentary Budget Office: it did not even have anyone in place to run it. It provided no capacity for the Coalition to engage. Our policies had been costed many, many months before and we had a former auditor-general oversee it and help us with the costings. It was impossible to get to a position to comply with it. Less than six weeks before the election Labor still did not have someone in place to run the Parliamentary Budget Office. When it finally got someone in, on the day that the costings were due only half the policies were submitted. Given the way that those opposite treated the process as a complete farce, it is unbelievable hypocrisy for them to be on their moral high horse in this debate.

The member for Maroubra criticised a whole range of things. He started with WorkCover. The former WorkCover chair, Greg McCarthy, described the neglect of the member for Maroubra and former Labor finance

Ministers. In relation to the problems that were in WorkCover he said, "They just were not interested and did not listen to my warnings." I am not going to stand here and take lectures from the former finance Minister who oversaw a WorkCover scheme go close to \$5 billion into deficit—greater than \$4 billion, heading towards \$5 billion. And he did not listen; he did not care. That was a challenge that the O'Farrell Government had to pick up. Under Labor WorkCover was deteriorating at \$9 million a day. Labor members talk about protecting the workers, but how will the scheme protect workers if it goes bust? There will be no money to provide support, as we want to do. That is another reform we had to undertake.

There were all types of claims from Labor members. The black hole was mentioned. They can call it whatever they like, in whatever way, shape or form they want to spin this. Mr Harris and Mr Lambert confirmed that there was a massive deterioration in the finances that the O'Farrell Government inherited. In the last week before the election, on Monday 21 March, the former Treasurer, Eric Roozendaal, and the former Premier, Kristina Keneally, put out a press release—one would have thought that the Premier and Treasurer would be speaking for the Government—in which they said that over the next four years there would be a surplus, a surplus, a surplus, a surplus: \$834 million in surpluses. That is what they said: no problems, all under control.

Yet the day after the election the Treasury books showed there was going to be a small surplus, a \$405 million deficit, a \$1.1 billion deficit, then a \$2.3 billion deficit. Within 24 hours of the election we found that that was what we inherited. I asked Treasury, "How did these numbers come out? How did they have all these surpluses the week before the election and then actually there were deficits?" I was told, "The above information was not sourced from Treasury but was, as we understand, prepared in the Treasurer's office." The moral high horse has been tied up out there in the foyer for this whole debate. Labor members should be absolutely ashamed of themselves talking about this issue, because their record is unbelievably appalling.

I have been aware of hypocrisy in many cases, but it is blatant in this instance. The Opposition talked about financial management errors. Being lectured by Labor on financial management is like being given honesty lessons by Eddie Obeid. I will not be taken down that road by those opposite; suffice to say the Auditor-General reported that "problems ... have plagued the State's finances for the past decade". The member for Mount Druitt raised the issue of the \$1 billion. In its last full budget, the former Government was \$900 million off forecast. The Auditor-General said, "I am again calling on the Government to implement recommendations [that] my office has been making for a number of years." A problem was identified, but what did Labor do? It did absolutely nothing. Hello ostrich, here is a bucket, stick your head in the sand. The then Treasurer Roozendaal said, "The Government is considering those recommendations ... we have the respect of many other parts of the world because of our [solid] reporting." Those opposite knew there were problems but they tried to pretend otherwise. They said to the rest of the world, "Everything is fantastic, do not worry about it."

What has the O'Farrell Government done? We have got on with the job of fixing up the mess and making New South Wales number one again. While the Government is attempting to improve financial management reporting and recruiting experts, the member for Maroubra is saying in the press that it is an obscene waste of money. Essentially, the real criticism by those opposite is that the Government is taking too long to fix problems created by them. It is unbelievable that they would raise these matters. The Government is pleased with the progress that is being made, but more work needs to be done. Unlike those opposite, we will continue to improve financial management reporting. Those opposite deny it; we fix it. New South Wales now has the highest level of scrutiny of financial management reporting in this country. Only last month the Auditor-General said, "I am pleased that action is being taken to address my concerns."

The Leader of the Opposition commented on how much things have changed under the O'Farrell Government. I agree with him; things have changed immeasurably for the better. The O'Farrell Government is looking after the people of New South Wales, not the political interests of those opposite. The New South Wales economy is now growing faster than almost any other State economy. We have jobs growth, increased housing supply and improved confidence. Where does the list end? The Leader of the Opposition has criticised the Government for not building infrastructure. I refer to the list of infrastructure that is being delivered under the O'Farrell Government: the North West Rail Link is underway; the South West Rail Link is underway; the Northern Sydney Freight Corridor is underway; the WestConnex Motorway is underway; the Camden Valley Way upgrade is underway; the widening of the M2 is almost done; the Erskine Park Link Road is underway; and the Pacific Highway duplication is underway.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! I call the member for Mount Druitt and the member for Liverpool to order.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The Princes Highway upgrade is underway, and the Central Coast Highway upgrade is underway. Those opposite have said no infrastructure is being built. They should pay attention because I am telling them about all the infrastructure projects. The difference between the O'Farrell Government and the former Labor Government is that now, everywhere one turns, infrastructure is being delivered. In the portfolio of Health the infrastructure list goes on: Wagga Wagga; Bega; Tamworth; Port Macquarie; Blacktown; Campbelltown; Dubbo; Hornsby; Lismore and Kempsey. Where does one stop? Infrastructure is being delivered throughout the State. In the portfolio of Education the list includes Cabramatta High School, Hurstville Public School and Oran Park Public School.

Surely there could not be more but there is, including police stations at Parkes, Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour, Parramatta, Riverstone, and more coming. It is not the easiest challenge and it takes discipline and determination, but the O'Farrell Government is delivering infrastructure. The member for Maroubra acknowledged that the current Act did not make it mandatory to appoint a Parliamentary Budget Officer. This legislation does make it a mandatory requirement. The member for Bankstown said there was not an independent panel member. There is an independent panel member. I note that the submission of policies for costing will be mandatory for the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition. This period will extend for nine months and the costings will be released the week before the election.

Treasurer Swan thinks that costings should be released after the election, but I have the strong sense that the community will be interested to know that the policies being put forward by both the Government and the Opposition have been costed and are affordable. This costing regime is sensible and in the interests of every person in this State. It is the strongest in the nation. Indeed, it is only in place in this State. Those opposite do not support it because they are hiding something. The next election feels like a long time away, but between now and then the Opposition will make many more promises and the Government will give many more commitments. Under this system the community will clearly understand that those policies have been costed and are affordable.

This legislation is not based on a political whim or a political opportunity. I consistently argued for this change when in opposition. I remember a Labor candidate saying that the Spit Bridge would be widened for a particular amount of money, leaving aside the merits or otherwise of the proposal. Three weeks after the election the then roads Minister, the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, visited the electorate and said that the project would not go ahead because it would cost too much. When in opposition I argued that an independent election costing process was good for this State. Today the Government is putting forward a bill that implements that process. The bill proposes an independent election costing process to provide surety that policies put forward are affordable, are costed and can be delivered. That is why I proudly commend this bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 62

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

Noes, 20

Mr Barr
Ms Burney
Mr Daley
Mr Furolo
Ms Hay
Mr Hoenig
Ms Hornery

Mr Lynch
Dr McDonald
Ms Mihailuk
Mr Park
Mr Parker
Mrs Perry
Mr Rees

Mr Robertson
Ms Tebbutt
Ms Watson
Mr Zangari
Tellers,
Mr Amery
Mr Lalich

Pair

Mrs Williams

Ms Burton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Motion by Mr Mike Baird agreed to:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

RACING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2013**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 20 February 2013.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [5.45 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition in this place in debate on the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2013. The Opposition spokesperson with carriage of the matter for the Opposition is the Hon. Steve Whan in the other place. I can indicate that the Opposition supports the bill. The objects of the bill are:

- (a) to provide that Racing NSW may impose sanctions on a registered race club for a breach of conditions of the club's registration that are consistent with sanctions that may be imposed for failure to comply with directions or minimum standards for the conduct of races and race meetings, and
- (b) to allow licensed bookmakers to offer totalisator odds on bets taken at a licensed racecourse (whether or not the other party to the bet is also at the racecourse).

As is clear from the objects of the bill, there are two primary elements of the proposed legislation; in a sense, it is something of an omnibus bill, though there are only two elements to the omnibus. Both propositions are, in the Opposition's view, sensible and rational. The bill amends the Thoroughbred Racing Act 1996 and the Totalisator Act 1997 to allow Racing NSW, as the regulator, to impose a wider range of sanctions on race clubs for failing to comply with a condition of registration, and to allow New South Wales licensed bookmakers to offer bets based on totalisator odds in certain circumstances. This process will further deter unlicensed people operating outside or conducting off-course bookmaking activities.

Through amendments to the Thoroughbred Racing Act 1996, the bill will provide Racing NSW with additional sanctions to manage the conduct of race clubs and ensure the continued viability of the industry. It includes new powers to seek fines in relation to facilities and safety at racecourses, quality of training facilities, the financial management of race meetings, prize money paid on races conducted by a race club, and so on, in accordance with section 29A (1) of the Act. Currently the only sanctions available to Racing NSW are either a reprimand or removing the licence. This bill will allow a civil penalty of 50 penalty units and up to 100 penalty

units for further breaches. This has been proposed by Racing NSW. It is to be expected some clubs might resent having penalties imposed, but it does seem to be a reasonable proposition in that there is provision for imposition of more flexible sanctions.

It does not have to be the ultimate sanction; the sanctions can be more graduated and therefore provide more sensible ways to deal with particular problems. The second part of the bill removes the prohibition for bookmakers offering "tote odds". That prohibition effectively has become outmoded as it does not apply to interstate and online bookmakers. As I understand, that puts people in New South Wales at something of a disadvantage in respect to the proposed totalisator odds measures. I understand the Government has indicated that there is support from Racing NSW, Greyhound Racing NSW and Harness Racing NSW. The Opposition supports the bill.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.48 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak in the debate on the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2013. For those in the gallery who are passionate about racing, especially New South Wales racing, some might say that this is one of the most important pieces of legislation to be introduced in the Fifty-fifth Parliament. It gives me great pleasure to again acknowledge the Minister at the table, the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, and Minister for the Arts. I am pleased to acknowledge the role that the Minister has played on behalf of the New South Wales racing industry. I have participated in the racing industry throughout my life. My uncle and father were trainers and I was a trainer between 1985 and 2005. Between 1997 and 2007 the industry was decimated, especially in country areas. The Minister has taken it upon himself to guide the future of New South Wales racing. The maximum prize money in country races—at Bathurst, Orange, Mudgee and other areas in the central west—was \$5,000. After the Coalition Government came to power it was raised to \$15,000, a 300 per cent increase.

The racing form guides show that the rise in prize money has had the effect that, on any given day, the average race fields number 11-plus horses per race. According to the TAB, the maximum industry benefit from gambling is derived when there are 11 horses or more in a field. In 50 per cent of bush races, "emergencies" are coming back. The maximum number of horses in a field may be 12 or 14 runners. The races will program additional horses, known as emergencies, in case of scratchings. If there are 14 runners in a race and four emergencies, they are able to have up to four scratchings. Consequently, it is now common to have maximum race fields in country and provincial areas. More horses at the races entices more people to come back to racing, and it is due to the great work undertaken by our Minister and the Government. It is terrific news for racing in New South Wales.

The Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2013 confers upon the Minister the discretion to impose sanctions on behalf of a race club, as opposed to closing down a race club if it fell into hardship or for other reasons. The last thing the Government and the Minister want to do is close down a club. The imposition of sanctions by the Minister is a positive move. The second aspect of the bill allows bookmakers to offer totalisator odds that fluctuate. Rather than offering fixed odds, bookmakers will be able to offer a better product on course at a race meeting. Under this legislation, bookmakers will be able to offer fluctuating totalisator odds to gamblers on and off course. This will increase the viability of the bookmaker. With this legislation the Government can improve the situation for all race participants—horses, trainers, jockeys and the many thousands of people who participate and are involved in the racing industry—and also for bookmakers, who add flavour and character to race meetings.

I thank Minister Souris for giving me the opportunity to represent him at events throughout New South Wales. I recently represented him at the 2013 Inter Dominion Ball held at The Star casino, where I also represented Premier Barry O'Farrell. The master of ceremonies was Alan Gaskell, who introduced Mr Rex Horne, Chairman of New South Wales Harness Racing. Rex welcomed guests and highlighted another successful year of harness racing. This was the prelude to the Sunday afternoon meeting at Menangle Tabcorp Park with the running of the 2013 Inter Dominion. Mr Kevin Seymour, AM, was presented on the evening with the Inter Dominion medal by Mr Geoff Want, Chairman of Harness Racing Australia, in gratitude for his support of harness racing over many years. A highlight of the evening was the induction into the Inter Dominion Hall of Fame of Im Themightyquinn, the sixth horse in the history of harness racing in Australia to be given this prestigious recognition. His Hall of Fame induction was put beyond doubt on Sunday afternoon when Im Themightyquinn won his third straight Inter Dominion.

Mr George Souris: From last position.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: From last position, as the Minister says. It is a remarkable horse. An interview was conducted on the night with Gary Hall Snr and Gary Hall Jnr. They reminded us that Im Themightyquinn was purchased in New Zealand for \$180,000 and has gone on to win \$4 million in prize money. He is a remarkable pacer: he sits off the speed, he gets well back in his races and he has a finishing burst that has been unwitnessed in the history of harness racing. It is likely that Im Themightyquinn will go on to run in his fourth Inter Dominion next year, which would be a major achievement.

Another champion harness racing hero of the past was the immortal Hondo Grattan, which has also been inducted into the Hall of Fame. Known as the Bathurst Bulldog, we will never forget the exploits of that champion horse from the Central West. Hondo Grattan took on another great pacer in Paleface Adios and thrilled the racing crowds throughout the 1970s. We were joined at the Inter Dominion Ball by the trainer of Paleface Adios, Tony Turnbull, and his son Steve Turnbull. They also gave an interesting interview in front of the crowd. They are great characters of the Central West. One of my constituents, Johnny Tapp, OAM, has had a distinguished career in race calling and is a celebrity on Channel 9 on Saturday afternoons. He is now a harness racing trainer and was joined on the night by his lovely wife, Anne. It was a splendid night and a great prelude to the Inter Dominion. [*Extension of time granted.*]

I want to mention the greatest equine sprinter in the world, the great Black Caviar. Before this great mare finishes her career mention should be made in this House of her exploits. Black Caviar is not only the greatest sprinting racehorse to ever race in the world, it may be the greatest sprinter that we have ever seen. Generations to come may not see the likes of this horse's exploits and the ease with which she wins her races. She wins so effortlessly that I was concerned that she may go into the racing annals without having broken a track record. Black Caviar returned to racing after a long spell and after defeating all before her in England, where she won the Jubilee Stakes, quite controversially, by only a small margin. Black Caviar accomplished that after completing an arduous campaign in Australia, travelling for 25 hours, racing on a wet track over 1,200 metres and being drained by the need to acclimatise to the Northern Hemisphere.

She came back, had a spell and returned to racing over the 1,000-metre strip and broke an extremely longstanding race record. It had been held since 1988—25 years ago—by another bonny mare named Special. If memory serves me right, Special was trained by the late great Colin Hayes. She was a phenomenal sprinter and on that special day Special ran 55.5 seconds for the 1,000 metres. It was a remarkable run. The perfect track conditions that day enabled her to run at that speed. That record was unbroken until Black Caviar returned to racing and set the world 1,000-metre record at 55.42 seconds. It was a remarkable achievement. I wanted to mention that fact because Black Caviar has now won her thirteenth Group One race, equalling Sunline and Tie The Knot, and is only one win shy of the great Kingston Town.

Black Caviar gets her opportunity to equal that record on Friday night when she contests the William Reid Stakes at Moonee Valley. That will be a phenomenal event. She does not race until the last race, at 9.55 p.m., but that will certainly attract a crowd. We wish her all the best. Many members will know that my very good friend Neil Werrett owns Black Caviar. He has put a lot into racing and I wish him and all the other owners all the best. On behalf of Nelly, we look forward to clocking up the twenty-fourth win. It would also be remiss of me not to mention my home racecourse, Hawkesbury, a place I have attended since I was a child, and the wonderful work being undertaken there by Brian Fletcher, the chief executive officer, and his able committee in the reconstruction of the racetrack and the grandstand.

I know further mention will be made of it during the debate so I will not dwell on it now. However, it was my happy hunting ground and I attended a function there only a week ago to look at the new course proper. It would be fair to say that Hawkesbury probably now has the longest straight in this country. That has involved a phenomenal effort and it will be wonderful to see that come to fruition and the great Hawkesbury Racecourse being able to service the needs not only of Hawkesbury trainers but also city trainers when such great feature events as the Hawkesbury Guineas and the time-honoured Rowley Mile are held. It is a great pleasure to speak in support of this legislation and to mention the great racing champions I have referred to. I give full credit to the Minister for bringing forward this legislation and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith) [6.03 p.m.]: I apologise to Peter Fletcher, the Chief Executive of the NSW Bookmakers Co-operative, who is in the gallery and has just had to listen to seven minutes of tribute to Black Caviar, which has given bookmakers all over the country nightmares over the past three years. The Minister has been quite progressive in relation to racing. It is always good to hear my racing colleague in this House talking about improvements to racing in New South Wales. One of the key things that this legislation will do is to bring New South Wales into line with a number of racing jurisdictions by allowing bookmakers to wager at totalisator rates on course.

There is something unique about the role of the bookmaker in Australian culture. Being able to go to a country, provincial or even city racetrack and stand in a ring with other people and participate in the opportunities presented by the betting ring has been the exclusive domain of the racetrack bookmaker. Over time, as racing and wagering opportunities have changed, particularly with the proliferation of online wagering, the poor old bookmaker has been squeezed out a bit. One of the positive things about this legislation is that it is an attempt by the Government to make sure not only that New South Wales does not get left behind when other jurisdictions make changes but that the culture of Australian racetracks continues. That is an important part of Australian racing.

The Minister, who is the member for Upper Hunter, will have his local race carnival take place at Scone in May. Members from around Wollongong will be able to go to Kembla Grange on Sunday for the Keith Nolan Classic, which is held on that area's main race day. If members drive around Sydney at present they will see the fantastic flags promoting the Sydney Carnival. There are plenty of opportunities for people to participate in racing and go to their racecourse to enjoy the on-course experience. The bookmaker is really important to that experience. The bill will ensure bookmakers can continue to operate in a really competitive environment. It is not only the TAB they have to compete against now but also all the online wagering operators. We want to make sure those guys are out there adding to the culture on course and to the family atmosphere that exists on racecourses throughout New South Wales. They still have a place in a fantastic part of life in New South Wales.

We have heard from many industry stakeholders that racing creates about 50,000 jobs in this State. Many millions of dollars of revenue come to the State through racing legislation, and much of that is ploughed back into racing. We need to continue to support the industry and we need to continue to look after the traditions associated with racing. That is essentially what this bill does. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge a number of the regional areas that rely on their racecourse. If members go to a country town such as Orange, Bathurst, Cowra, Corowa or Gosford they will find the race carnival that takes place in that city is the highlight of the year. Quite often it is on a public holiday so that people can attend their local cup meeting. The Australian way of life has been built around the horse and there has always been the opportunity to have a punt on what is taking place. It has always been a friendly environment. The bill seeks to maintain that.

Another provision in the bill will ensure that Racing NSW can impose sanctions so that there is an appropriate level of oversight across all the clubs that host race meetings throughout New South Wales. This is a small but a very important piece of legislation, particularly for those bookmakers who are playing such a great role throughout the racing industry. They started the wagering component of racing and they have been the cornerstone of wagering in Australia basically since Governor Macquarie was asking people to barrack off the wall at Hyde Park. We want to make sure they have an opportunity to wager and do not lose out to the internet betting providers that we see so much of.

It is important for all members to meet the people involved in their local race clubs—the strappers, trainers, clerks of the course, those involved in hospitality and the local bookmakers. They should talk to them about the people who are coming to their racetracks. Members will be amazed at the things they learn about their local community by talking to people involved in the racing industry. They are pretty genuine: whatever you hear from them is pretty much the word on the street. You are not going to get any airs and graces from people involved in racing. You will get a straight-up view of the world. That is the way I like it; that is the way I was brought up. I suppose that is one of the reasons I am a strong supporter of the racing industry. This is a good piece of legislation by a reformist Minister and I am sure we will see racing go ahead in leaps and bounds over the next decade.

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Tania Mihailuk and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

EVIDENCE AMENDMENT (EVIDENCE OF SILENCE) BILL 2013

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE AMENDMENT (MANDATORY PRE-TRIAL DEFENCE DISCLOSURE) BILL 2013

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

[The Assistant-Speaker (Mr Andrew Fraser) left the chair at 6.09 p.m. The House resumed at 7.00 p.m.]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD WINTER GAMES PARTICIPANT CRAIG MUHLBOCK

Mr GRAHAM ANNESLEY (Miranda—Minister for Sport and Recreation) [7.00 p.m.]: Today I highlight and acknowledge the recent performances of Craig Muhlbock, a special young man from Oyster Bay in my electorate of Miranda. He exemplifies everything good about our community, our State, our country and our spirit in so many ways. On Australia Day a small but select team of athletes boarded a plane bound for the Special Olympics World Winter Games in South Korea. The Special Olympics is a worldwide organisation that promotes the benefits of sport and recreational activities for those with an intellectual disability. It was the first time that Australia has sent a team to compete in snow sports at the Special Olympic World Winter Games. It was an opportunity for Craig to compete with 2,300 athletes from 127 countries.

Craig Muhlbock is a shire local and was a proud member of the snowboarding team that created history. He is the first and only snowboarder to represent Australia at the Special Olympics World Winter Games. To date he has enjoyed a long and distinguished career as a result of his passion for sport. Craig joined the Special Olympics in 2002. Since then he has carved out an accomplished career in many sports such as athletics, football, futsal, swimming and winter sports. He has also competed as a representative in other national teams. A snapshot of his efforts to date includes bronze medals for Australia at the 2005 Special Olympics World Athletic Championships in Canberra and the 2006 Far Eastern South Pacific Games for the disabled, which were held in Malaysia.

Over the past seven years Craig has competed in Germany, Brazil, Italy and France. He loves sport and, according to his father, Peter, Craig is a shy guy who prefers to allow his performances to demonstrate his focus and his commitment. On 7 February the Australian team returned home from South Korea with an extraordinary total of 13 medals: three gold, six silver and four bronze. Craig received three silver medals. I am sure everyone in the House joins with me in congratulating Craig on his performances. It is an outstanding achievement to represent Australia against the best in the world. Craig is a wonderful ambassador for the shire, for New South Wales and Australia. I look forward to following his many more achievements.

SENIORS WEEK

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.05 p.m.]: This week is Seniors Week. It is a great way for our community to come together and say thank you to the seniors in our communities who make our communities a better place to live and enjoy. Seniors Week is a great time to celebrate and reflect on the incredible contribution that so many seniors make to our community and indeed to our families. They are a generation of Australians who are extraordinary and unique. Many of them continue to work tirelessly as volunteers, mentors and carers, fulfilling roles that no others can. Their vitality and commitment are immeasurable. Without these special people in our lives many community organisations could not function.

Seniors are now relied on as volunteers more than ever to drive community buses, operate kiosks at hospitals, develop programs for youth, and care for the disadvantaged through pastoral visits. They continue to make an impact on identifying the needs of the ageing in our community. They are the greatest lobbyists for their generation and they still make time to care for children of busy parents when the need arises. Where would we be without them? This week gives us the opportunity to acknowledge and applaud those quiet achievers who do so many extraordinary things. Last Sunday I helped launch Seniors Week with Monica Morse, the Mayor of Bathurst, at the Senior Citizen's Centre. This was a great opportunity for more than 100 residents to attend the launch.

I recognised many people in the room: those I had worked with in retail, those I had grown up with and those who had been my babysitters. These people shared a day of entertainment in their honour to acknowledge and thank them for their contribution to our community. They make our community a greater place to live. Many people from my electorate rang my office to collect tickets for the Premier's concert, which took place this week. It was an outstanding success. One constituent called my office to let me know that it was "the best concert ever". I will pass that on to the Premier. I am sure he will be happy to receive that feedback. It is always a pleasure to witness the enjoyment that our seniors experience when taking part in this event.

I acknowledge a number of seniors in my electorate who have been nominated through the 2013 New South Wales Senior Achievement Awards. Three citizens in the Bathurst electorate received awards. Norma

Fowler is from Lithgow. Norma does an incredible amount of work for the community of Lithgow. She has been involved in the Treeview Estates, the Lithgow arts, the Red Cross, the Lithgow Highland Pipe Band, the Mitchell Conservatorium, and the Lithgow Private Hospital. She often visits those less fortunate and shares her talents by singing or playing musical instruments. I also acknowledge nominees Julie Ann Maher and Paul Haysom, who come from Bathurst. They have both been involved in the Bathurst Health Council. Julie Ann has also been involved in the cathedral parish. Ours is a better community because of the contribution they have made. They are exceptional citizens and inspiring role models. It is wonderful that they have been recognised as distinguished members of the community. They have worked selflessly and I thank them for their contributions.

MOTOR VEHICLE INSURANCE AND REPAIR INDUSTRY

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [7.10 p.m.]: Last month I and several hundred motor vehicle repairers attended a meeting of the Motor Traders Association of New South Wales at the Greyhound Club to discuss industry concerns. A strong, equitable and diverse motor vehicle repair industry is in everyone's interests—motorists, motor vehicle repairers and their workers. I am a strong support of consumer choice and that is why I was troubled to hear reports of consumers being coerced into choosing a particular smash repairer by their insurance company. This is an issue of broad concern that has attracted the attention of both major parties. I commend the member for Hawkesbury—who also attended the meeting—for raising the issue in this place. He has a particular expertise and interest in this industry because he is a qualified motor vehicle repairer.

As members are undoubtedly aware, insurance companies have preferred repairer policies. These policies, and more specifically their implementation, are a cause of serious concern to many people in the industry. The Motor Vehicle Insurance and Repair Industry Code of Conduct provides guidelines for both repairers and insurers. The code states that insurers must "not refuse to consider an estimate on unreasonable or capricious grounds". It also requires insurers not to "knowingly ask claimants to drive unsafe motor vehicles for the purpose of obtaining alternative estimates". The reports that I have received from a number of reliable sources within the industry suggest that these guidelines are being breached. It has been reported that the repairs undertaken by some preferred repairers are substandard and that cars must be repaired again subsequently.

I have also been told about major insurance companies delaying payments of insurance claims and refusing lifetime warranties for those customers who choose to remain with the motor vehicle repairer of their choice rather than have repairs done by the insurer's preferred repairer. Often these decisions are made on the basis of cost rather than the quality of the repairs. The result of these policies is potentially locking motor vehicle repairers out of the industry, particularly the small- to medium-size businesses. There is a further dimension to the issue because a number of insurance companies also own motor vehicle repair businesses. That is obviously a conflict of interest and a matter of grave concern for the industry and consumers.

I would like the Government to establish whether there is scope for NSW Fair Trading to review this issue. However, I suspect that it would be more appropriate for the New South Wales Government to assist the Federal Government to make inquiries. Ultimately, the best way for these matters to be resolved is for NSW Fair Trading to undertake a formal investigation to get to the bottom of the issue. I call on the Government, if it has not already done so, to request the department to undertake such an investigation. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Motor Traders Association of New South Wales Body Repair Division Chairman Tod Sarina and the executive for their advocacy on this important issue. I also acknowledge council member Sam Solano for his advocacy.

I commend the Motor Traders Association for taking such a strong stand on behalf of its hardworking members. I am sure that members on both sides of politics would welcome the opportunity to address some of the inconsistencies in the motor repair industry. I thank the association for its kind invitation to attend the rally. I was impressed by the attendance—several hundred men and women from the smash repair industry took time to attend the rally. They are clearly concerned about some of these practices and where the industry is heading. Obviously that affects their livelihood and impacts on consumers' right to have a choice. I welcome the opportunity to work with the Government to ensure a fair and transparent motor vehicle repair industry for all.

COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE FUNDING

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [7.15 p.m.]: Members understand and appreciate the need for people to access legal aid. It is something that those of us at the coalface in this place appreciate but members in the other place never will. The law is a complicated thing. While legislators like ourselves have tried earnestly in Parliament after Parliament to make it fair and equal, one's ability to access legal representation, and in turn

to have the best chance to achieve justice, still depends heavily on one's financial position. Unpleasant though it may be, that is a fact. It is crucial that we continue to assist community legal centres generously through the Public Purpose Fund to ensure that we make the law accessible to everyone in this State. That is really what this fund is about.

I refer specifically to the Hunter Community Legal Centre. The staff wrote to me recently to express their fears about the future. The centre oversees the Hunter Children's Court Assistance Scheme, which helps young people who are facing the daunting prospect of a court appearance, and specifically those attending the Worimi Children's Court. I repeat: Everyone in this State needs to be able to access justice. The Children's Court Assistance Scheme provides that opportunity. Staff provide information and advice and link young people to other services, and a specialist youth worker attends the two Hunter children's courts to offer assistance. The service gives young people the opportunity to feel more confident and supported before the law. It is funded through the Public Purpose Fund. If the funding disappears the Hunter Children's Court Assistance Scheme disappears.

The Public Purpose Fund allows dozens of schemes such as this around the State to exist. Our Parliament is well furnished with lawyers. However, not everyone has a law degree and not everyone can afford a solicitor or, heaven forbid, a barrister. If that situation arises suddenly the law does not seem so equal. Lawyers often have a bad reputation in the community, but the people who work in these legal centres do not fit the stereotype. They give free legal advice, perform casework and offer expert advice on public policy. We cannot let another public body fall victim to this Government's mean-spirited slashing.

We have talked a lot about corruption in this State in recent times. How can we on one hand seek to eliminate corruption while on the other hand remove the funding provided to bodies that ensure public accountability and equal access to the law? It is counterproductive in the extreme. There is concern in the community—and well there should be. The message is simple: Attorney General, please do not take the hatchet to the Public Purpose Fund. It does too much good for too many people in my electorate, and particularly young people. The law must be equally accessible to all.

ORANGE RELAY FOR LIFE

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [7.19 p.m.]: Every year in New South Wales 36,000 people are told that they have cancer. That is about 100 people every day. That is why events such as the Relay for Life are so important in our community. The eleventh Orange and district Relay for Life was held on 9 March 2013. Like previous relays, it was a great community event. The event kicked off on Saturday afternoon at the Waratahs sportsground. It commenced with the survivors walk, which is always a very important part of the event, where cancer survivors walk the first lap with their carers. A number of people walked on that first lap, including the Mayor of Orange, John Davis, who is a cancer survivor, and also the likes of Terry Betts, who was on the organising committee for the Relay for Life and who walked with his son, Harry.

The target this year was to raise \$150,000 towards cancer research and support. This year's relay is well on its way to achieving that. As I speak in the House tonight, over \$148,000 has already been raised. One of the highlights of the event was the candlelight ceremony of hope, featuring the lone piper. Don Peck carried out those duties very admirably and ably as he always does at community events around Orange and surrounding districts. The organising committee did a simply outstanding job this year. I make special mention of Nicole Downey. She had a team who worked tirelessly, not only throughout the two days of the relay but in the weeks and months leading up to it. She was ably assisted by a team too numerous to mention but I will just mention that I spied Fiona Rossiter, former Orange city councillor, who was helping out on the day, as well as Kerry and Graham Harris, who organised all of the catering for the afternoon tea for survivors. Kerry was there at the crack of dawn organising breakfast for everyone. It certainly was a great community event.

For the first time this year I actually camped out, which was quite an experience. I have to say I felt a bit dusty the next morning, but all for a good cause. Participants in the relay included Matt Brackenridge and Scott and Steve Vandenberg. I have already mentioned the walkers and survivors. Part of the Relay for Life also involved a head shave, which occurred at about the time of the relay. I make special mention of the Dudley Private Hospital staff who gathered for a head shave to raise badly needed funds for the Cancer Council. Chief executive officer Trevor Matheson, along with Jodie Crossman from the hospital's sterilising department, took centre stage as they had their locks shaved. Jo Whiley from the Uniting Care Bears team also shaved her head and there was a memorable picture in the *Central Western Daily* of her with Libby Ryan, Maureen Ensor and Dorothy McCarron, who were looking on.

The Cancer Council team at the western office included Annemaree Binger, Justin Cantelo, Jocie Johnston, Kate Maloney, Camilla Barlow, Emma Pratten and Tarah Syphers. It really was a true community event and I think one of the great features of it was the number of young people who participated. School teams from Orange High and Canobolas Rural Technology High School were there. The enthusiasm that the young people brought to the event was outstanding. The World's Greatest Shave for Leukaemia is also occurring at this time. It is a separate event from the Relay for Life. I make special mention of the team from Cadia Valley, which has already raised more than \$32,000 to fight leukaemia. It has been certainly an outstanding effort. I thank all of those involved in these great community events.

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.24 p.m.]: I reiterate the remarks about the wonderful work that is occurring across our electorates in relation to Relay for Life events. In Bathurst last weekend the Relay for Life event was held at the Bathurst showground. As the member for Orange stated, it is a real community event. Over 800 walkers were involved at the Bathurst showground. I congratulate the organiser, Camilla Barlow. We had an afternoon tea for survivors and carers and a late night movie marathon for kids and families to be involved in. At last count they had raised \$93,000 and they were expecting to be able to get close to \$100,000 with donations that were yet to come in. It is great to see our communities trying to fight this dreaded disease of cancer. Let us hope this is one way of going forward and making sure we can eliminate this dreaded disease in the future.

NORTH COAST FLOODS

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) [7.25 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to rise in this House and to speak about the visit to the Clarence electorate by the Minister for Primary Industries and Minister for Small Business, the Hon. Katrina Hodgkinson. Last Friday I had the pleasure of the Minister's time in my electorate from one end to the other end. The Clarence electorate is 13,000 square kilometres so it is fairly expansive. We were able to meet with a number of industries that have been affected by the flooding in the Clarence. Those industries include fishing—through the Clarence River Fishermen's Co-operative—cane, dairy, beef and timber. We were accompanied by Councillor Jeremy Challacombe, who is a member of the Clarence Valley Council Disaster Recovery Committee.

We started off in the morning with a visit to the Clarence River Fishermen's Co-operative. We obviously discussed the flooding but also discussed structural reform of the fishing industry. We met the general manager of the co-op, Danielle Adams, the chair of the co-op, Don Mowbray, and former chair, George Baker, who is a retired fisher. They clearly enunciated their concerns in relation to the flooding and its impact on fishing, as well as their concerns with structural reform going forward. The Minister has been kind enough to arrange a meeting in the future to discuss those issues with the fishermen.

The next meeting was with the representatives of the cane growing industry. We met at the corner of a property that is owned by cane growers Greg Gallagher, John Moloney, Harry Green and James Moloney. Also attending were the Chairman of the Clarence River Canegrowers Association, Ross Farlow; Vince Castle, the chairman of the Clarence Valley branch of New South Wales Farmers Association; Anthony Young, agricultural extension officer attached to the Harwood Sugar Mill; Alistair McFarlane, a local canegrower from Woodford Island; and John Young, a local canegrower from Harwood Island. The meeting site showed how extensive the flooding was: a hundred acres of cane had been destroyed and will have to be ploughed out when the water recedes further. It is an enormous expense to cane farmers and they certainly are looking for assistance from the Government.

The next visit was to Jim Carlton's dairy farm on the Pacific Highway at Ulmarra, where we met with dairy farmers Trevor Want, Jo Duckworth, Rod Madden, Reg Barnier, Scott Elem, Michael Grainger, former Federal member Ian Robinson and Peter Graham. This was a very touching moment because it was only during that week that Jim Carlton had buried his daughter. It was a tragedy: she committed suicide because of the problems that they had been experiencing on the farm, the flooding having exacerbated the problems. The dairy industry gave us the same message that was given to us by the fishermen's co-op and the canegrowers: they needed help. When we met with the beef producers they said the same thing. They needed assistance, and the category C assistance which was announced that day certainly will benefit many of the farmers in the industry.

However, we need to ensure that the criteria for eligibility to access these funds include our farmers. Farmers should not be precluded because their off-farm income is greater than their farm income. As I have said before in this House, when you have five major floods over four years one's on-farm income basically becomes zero and if one does not have an off-farm income one does not have a farm. The way in which disaster funding

is considered and distributed in this country should be reviewed by both Federal and State governments as a matter of urgency. The timber industry also gave us the same message. It was great to meet with Spiro Notaras and other millers to discuss the future of the timber industry.

PENRITH FESTIVAL 2013

METROPOLITAN STRATEGY FOR SYDNEY

Mr BART BASSETT (Londonderry) [7.30 p.m.]: Tonight I inform the House about the Penrith Festival 2013, which was held last Saturday in High Street, Penrith—the main street of the Penrith central business district. This year the festival was themed "Rock and Rowing" to coincide with the World Rowing Cup to be held at the International Regatta Centre from 22 March to 24 March 2013. Together with Stuart Ayres, the member for Penrith, and Fiona Scott, the Liberal candidate for Lindsay, I manned the stand in High Street for quite a few hours. Crowds flocked to the occasion and were four deep.

As we heard in this week's announcement of the draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney to 2031, Penrith is a major regional city that has strong links with many western Sydney electorates, including the electorates of Londonderry, Blue Mountains and Mulgoa. It was great to talk to many of my constituents from north St Marys, Werrington, Werrington County, Werrington Downs, Cambridge Park, Cambridge Gardens, Castlereagh, and Londonderry—a few even came from the end of the Hawkesbury local government area in my electorate. This grassroots community event included floats with many young boys and girls from the mini-bike club, local dance studios, sports clubs, the fire museum and vintage cars clubs. Stuart, Fiona and I rode on the back of a ute during the street parade.

The Penrith City Council and the local business community supported the festival, as did the NSW Police Force. In fact, police led the parade in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the NSW Police Force. There were vintage police cars, police on horseback and PolAir flew overhead during the street parade. The festival was organised by the Penrith City Centre Association. Manager Gai Hawthorn did a terrific job, ably supported by Sue McNally, who not only is one of my constituents but was also a fantastic employee in my small business for many years. I take this opportunity also to acknowledge the awards ceremonies that I recently attended at the St Marys Local Area Command and the Hawkesbury Local Area Command. St Mary's Local Area Commander Superintendent Ray Filewood and Hawkesbury Local Area Commander Superintendent David Jones did an excellent job in presiding over those ceremonies, which were well organised and a fitting tribute to the men and women of the NSW Police Force.

At that event it was noted that in years gone police award ceremonies had not taken place. Police of all ages appreciate being acknowledged by their peers and those in the community who attend these ceremonies. It was humbling to hear some of the things that police deal with on a daily basis. They cannot always please everyone. People are quick to criticise if they think police have done the wrong thing but the great work they do to keep our communities safe should not be overlooked. These professional men and women need the support of their peers and our communities, and that is why I am always keen to attend these ceremonies. As I have said, the draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney to 2031 was announced this week. This strategy builds on issues developed over many years under the former Labor Government but the former Government did not follow through to ensure that projects were completed and land was available to be rolled out.

Importantly, members should talk to their local communities about the infrastructure plan and the transport master plan that will work in conjunction with this strategy. I am thrilled that the work that I and others have done over many years in talking up the need for cross-regional links and ensuring that corridors in western Sydney are protected for the future has been included in this strategy. As I have said before in this place, we need to ensure that all people in New South Wales benefit from transport and road links and we need to find corridors to provide economic and social benefits while not directly impacting on sensitive land areas. We need to ensure an outcome so that future generations can build things in a much more cost-effective way than we are at present because corridors have not been preserved.

EAST HILLS ELECTORATE FUNDRAISER JOSHUA MCKEOWN

Mr GLENN BROOKES (East Hills) [7.35 p.m.]: Tonight I bring to the attention of the House the story of a young champion in my electorate. In recent times Joshua McKeown, who is only eight years old, has been through quite an ordeal. Joshua's father was diagnosed with cancer in the Christmas period of 2011. His dad, an unsung hero who worked as a fireman for 30 years, was diagnosed with throat cancer at the age of 49. It

must have been a tragic ordeal for this youngster to see his father go from a hardworking and energetic individual to a sick and bedridden man, but he did not let it get the better of him. Joshua did not dwell in his sorrows. When the opportunity came knocking he stepped up to the plate and decided to shave his head to raise much need funds for cancer research.

On Saturday 6 April, with the help of his family and friends, Joshua will be holding a fundraiser at Panania Diggers. This event, which is scheduled to start at 1.30 p.m., will no doubt be a success, as I have seen firsthand the effort that is being put into its organisation. Joshua lives at Picnic Point. He is the grandson of two of the most passionate and community-minded grandparents in my electorate—Kenneth and Lorraine Thomson. Joshua's mother, Debra-Lee Thomson, and twin brothers, Ky and Zac, are also helping to support this great cause. With the East Hills community behind him, Joshua is set to champion this cause not only now but long into the future. At eight years-of-age, no matter how much money he raises, this little fellow has done his father proud. I know his nanna and pop are very proud of him and, as his local member, I too am very proud of him. To champion a cause such as this says a lot about his upbringing and just how strong he is.

Private members' statements concluded.

WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY

Matter of Public Importance

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [7.40 p.m.]: Tomorrow is World Down Syndrome Day. It is a day when people with Down syndrome, their friends, families, workmates and schools celebrate the strength and achievements of people with Down syndrome. It is also a day to raise awareness about the strength of diversity and the need for inclusion for all people with disabilities. Down syndrome, or trisomy 21, is a genetic condition in which a child is born with an extra chromosome. However, this does not mean that people with Down syndrome should be lumped and labelled into special categories.

One of the aims of World Down Syndrome Day is to educate people that people with Down syndrome are unique, like us all, and they deserve to be treated as we would all like to be treated, as unique individuals. In New South Wales there will be two high teas over the next weekend to celebrate the day, organised by Down Syndrome NSW, one on Parramatta and one in the Hunter at Ducks Crossing in Eleebana. I wish them the very best for those occasions. Down Syndrome NSW is also running a campaign called T4321, an abbreviation for Tea for Trisomy 21, where morning teas and afternoon teas will held around the State.

The idea is that participants invite a group of friends or colleagues with a cup of tea and a bite to eat to raise awareness of Down syndrome and to collect donations to support the work of Down Syndrome NSW. I am particularly proud that a local school in my electorate, St Joseph the Worker Primary School, will be holding a morning tea tomorrow for a little girl called Maree who attends that school. I wish them all the best and pay tribute to the work they do to make that school a place where individuals are celebrated for who they are. I want to briefly read something by a girl, who just happens to have Down syndrome, called Melissa Riggio:

When my Mum first told me I had Down syndrome, I worried that people might think I was not as smart as they were, or that I talked or looked different.

I just want to be like everyone else, so sometimes I wish I could give back the extra chromosome. But having Down syndrome is what makes me "me".

And I am proud of who I am.

I am a hard worker, a good person, and I care about my friends. I am a lot like you and my life is a lot like yours.

Those are just absolutely incredibly moving and powerful words by Melissa. People with Down syndrome, their families and friends are a lot like us and they want their lives to be a lot like ours. That is why they are so keen for the National Disability Scheme, or what has become known in the past 24 to 48 hours as DisabilityCare Australia, to become a reality. They know that such a scheme, if it is implemented in the way it should be implemented, has a huge potential to impact their lives in a profoundly positive way. Not only does it promise more funding and more choice, but also it has the potential to ensure that people with Down syndrome and other disabilities take their rightful place in our society. It has the potential to be a force in breaking down the barriers that keep people with disabilities locked out of participating in our society in the way they should. That is what is incredible about the National Disability Scheme, or DisabilityCare Australia as it now becoming known. It is a revolution for people living with a disability or acquired disabilities; but it has the potential not just to break down barriers but actually revolutionise the attitudes of our community.

I am very proud to be part of the party that has initiated the National Disability Insurance Scheme—I note the level of bipartisanship on that, particularly here in New South Wales—and I am very proud that the legislation recently passed through the House of Representatives with bipartisan support. I pay tribute to all those who sought to make that bill better through their submissions and involvement in the process. I am pleased that the bipartisan effort in making that scheme the best it can be is continuing. No doubt there is still a great deal of work to do in that regard. I am sure all members of this Parliament will join me in wishing those participating in World Down Syndrome Day the very best.

Mr MATT KEAN (Hornsby) [7.45 p.m.]: I am delighted to speak on an issue that is very close to my heart, World Down Syndrome Day, which will be celebrated tomorrow. I thank the member for Auburn for her contribution to discussion of this matter of public importance and for her continuing interest in it. World Down Syndrome Day is actually celebrated not just in Australia or in our electorates but right across the globe. It is an international awareness day officially observed by the United Nations since 2012. It is important that members of Parliament and community leaders recognise that people living with Down syndrome or some other disability are not disabled people; they are people living with a disability, and they have the same hopes, dreams and aspirations as the rest of us.

Too often we focus on the word "disability" rather than the ability of people living with a disability. I know from visiting my local school, Clarke Road Special School, that this school does a remarkable job in promoting individuals not as disabled people but as people living with a disability, and helping them realise their hopes, dreams and aspirations. I know the wonderful work that they do in helping these young people realise their potential. But whether it be Clarke Road Special School or the school in the electorate of the member for Auburn, or the schools in many communities right across this State, I acknowledge the wonderful work done by the teachers and the carers who support people living with a disability, people living with Down syndrome, and help them to realise their dreams.

I put on the public record tonight particularly the leadership and vision of the principal of Clarke Road Special School, Diane Robertson, and the assistant principal and my great friend, Debbie Howell, and all of the school's dedicated teachers. Clarke Road has become a unique educational role model for special schools across the State. It has become so because the school recognises that each student, whether they have Down syndrome or autism or some other disability, is gifted. The staff work hard to help students realise their potential so that they will be able to realise their hopes and aspirations. It is important that the potential of a person with Down syndrome is seen not just by parents and carers but by all of us in the community and we recognise them as no different from rest of us. They have the potential to make a difference, to live happy and fulfilling lives, as the rest of us should be able to aspire to.

As policy-makers we need to ensure that we create an environment and platform for that to happen. World Down Syndrome Day puts into focus the need for that to happen: for us to reflect on challenges that people living with a disability face every day of the week, and how we as community leaders can help overcome those challenges. Whether that be by providing adequate funding to enable people living with a disability to access the services they need, or by providing an education system that enables them to develop their talents and the skills to live their lives outside educational institutions, we as policy-makers have a responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for people living with a disability. As a member of this House I am committed to that aim. I am so glad to rise here tonight and join the member for Auburn and members on the other side of the House, in a bipartisan manner, to achieve those objectives.

One thing we must do is ensure that people, regardless of their ability or disability, regardless of their gender, sexuality or the circumstances of their birth, have the same opportunity to realise their potential. I am committed to that as a member of Parliament; indeed, I hope all members of this Parliament are committed to it. I acknowledge the tireless efforts of not just the educators at Clarke Road Special School and educators of people living with a disability right across the State; I acknowledge the pivotal role of carers. I acknowledge the role that loved ones play in the development of those with Down syndrome, people living with a disability. Tomorrow, on World Down Syndrome Day, I would like everyone to pay attention to the challenges faced by people with a disability and their carers. We as policy-makers in this Parliament should ensure that we protect their rights and create opportunities for them.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [7.50 p.m.]: It is a privilege to speak on this matter of public importance. World Down Syndrome Day has been observed on March 21 each year since 2006. The United Nations has observed it since 2012. Down syndrome occurs approximately once in every 860 babies born. It is

caused by an extra chromosome, chromosome 21, in each of the body's cells. In the West families are leaving childbirth until later and as the risk of Down syndrome increases the older a mother is we may be seeing more Down syndrome children in the future.

I want to recognise the wonderful work done by the Down Syndrome NSW. It is an independent registered charity established in 1980 and run by the families of Down syndrome children. As is often the case with most health and wellbeing issues, a group of people with a similar issue or interest will form an organisation to present a united front. Down Syndrome NSW is excellent at advocating for government assistance and providing information about the syndrome to medical professionals, families and the general public. The association assists families that need support and helps to take the mystery out of dealing with Down syndrome children. Children, young people and adults with Down syndrome face medical issues such as low muscle tone, congenital heart defects and pulmonary hypertension. Half of all children with Down syndrome have hearing and vision impairment and a range of other issues. It is not an easy syndrome to deal with and it is present for life.

Prior to coming to this House I spent most of my life working with young people. When dealing with young people it is drilled into us—and rightly so—the rule of no touch, hands off, do not manually handle the children. One of the wonderful things about working with young people with Down syndrome is their absence of inhibitions. Whether taking part in a dance session or a game of ten pin bowling, they show their excitement, vibrancy and enthusiasm. As a leader I was at first put off by their desire to give me a massive big hug. It took a while to get used to it but once I did I learnt a lot from those young people and wished that I also had their energy for life. We can learn a lot from people with Down syndrome. I commend this matter of public importance to the House.

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Menai) [7.53 p.m.], by leave: Tomorrow, 21 March, is World Down Syndrome Day. It is the eighth anniversary of this day but the first anniversary since it has been observed by the United Nations. Until this year I did not know of this special day, but now that I know about it I want to help raise awareness with my work colleagues, my family and friends and, importantly, through my role as a member of Parliament. It is thought that approximately 6,000 people with Down syndrome are living in New South Wales and about 22,000 in Australia. For these people and their families we need to raise awareness of Down syndrome, what it means to have it and the role people with Down syndrome can play in our society and in our lives.

I have been fortunate to know a few people with Down syndrome, through my school days, my work and a close friend but I had never really thought about what I can do to help them. I hope that the celebration of World Down Syndrome Day will assist people in our society to see that everyone should be given the chance to live their lives to the fullest and to be included in workplaces, sports and the community as a whole. This year I will be joining in events for World Down Syndrome Day. This day is held on the twenty-first day of the third month to signify the uniqueness of the triplication of the twenty-first chromosome which causes Down syndrome. There are many "It's T4321 Time" events occurring tomorrow, with high teas being held throughout New South Wales, including an important one being held by Down Syndrome NSW.

Down Syndrome NSW was established in 1980 as a not-for-profit association when family members got together to provide support and a wide range of information to people with Down syndrome and their families, carers, service providers, students, the media and the wider community. This information ranges from supporting people with Down syndrome and their families throughout the stages of their life, an extensive Down syndrome-specific catalogue of library resources, and opportunities to participate in research and publications, including a newsletter and a blog. This financial year Down Syndrome NSW will receive a total funding of over \$200,000 from the New South Wales Government to provide information and referral services and under the Independent Living Support Initiative to help clients move into independent living arrangements.

It is important to consider living arrangements and what to do when family is no longer available to assist on a daily basis. I am pleased that the Government is helping Down Syndrome NSW and locally the Sutherland Shire Disability Accommodation Action Group to look at ways to fund these options. Late last year Mr Andrew Constance, the Minister for Disability Services, announced \$3 million for the Sutherland Shire Disability Accommodation Action Group as a capital funding grant to provide accommodation options for people with a disability in the Sutherland shire. I hope that this assistance helps to bring peace of mind to families who are struggling to deal with the needs of a disabled family member, or are getting tired or simply getting older. I wish everyone a very happy World Down Syndrome Day tomorrow and I thank the member for Auburn for bringing this matter of public importance before the House.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [7.56 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members for the electorates of Hornsby, Cessnock and Menai who have spoken on this matter of public importance. A common thread in our speeches was our wish for individuals with Down syndrome to live as full a life as possible and our support for World Down Syndrome Day, a day that is now known around the world and celebrated in different ways in our local communities. It is important to bring awareness of Down syndrome to the community because it is through awareness that barriers are broken down. Those barriers can be caused by the stigma that sometimes goes with having a disability.

As the member for Auburn I have attended a number of Down syndrome functions and I have seen the hard work that goes into organising them. Tonight we pay tribute to the work of the Down Syndrome NSW. Since the 1980s volunteers, families and carers have worked to make our community better informed about Down syndrome and the needs of the people they love. Their advocacy is important in shaping government policy and in changing attitudes throughout our community. As the member for Cessnock said, the hugs that he initially found difficult he came to love. I have also had that experience. Approximately every second year I attend what was formerly the Roselands Aquatic Centre Group, now the Recreation, Sports and Aquatics Club, which greatly assists people with disabilities. The vibrancy and love that flows from the people with Down syndrome are infectious. As the member for Cessnock said, they have a sense of no inhibitions. People with Down syndrome deserve to be supported so that they can live the lives they so richly deserve.

Discussion concluded.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 7.59 p.m. until
Thursday 21 March 2013 at 10.00 a.m.**
