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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 13 May 2014

The Speaker (The Hon. Shelley Elizabeth Hancock) took the chair at 12 noon.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

McCALL GARDENS DISABILITY SERVICES

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [12.07 p.m.]: I inform the House of a notable event that took place in my electorate yesterday. I was delighted to represent the Minister for Ageing and Disability Services, the Hon. John Ajaka, at the opening in Riverstone of a new group home for residents moving from the McCall Gardens large residential facility at Box Hill. The event was hosted by Mr Ross Green, President of McCall Gardens, and Mr Mike Blaszczyk, the chief executive officer. The Mayor of Blacktown, Councillor Len Robinson, attended and participated in the official opening. Councillor Alan Pendleton also attended representing the local Federal member. For decades, McCall Gardens has provided a safe and caring home for men with a disability. It was established by the families of men who found many years ago that there was nowhere else for their family members to be cared for properly and to receive the professional care they needed. Over the years it has developed into a strong, caring and substantial institution.

However, as part of the implementation of Stronger Together reforms to disability services in New South Wales the large residential facility model of care is being phased out. In future, residents of McCall Gardens will be cared for in smaller homes located within the community and designed to facilitate maximum engagement with the local community. The New South Wales Government continues to recognise the support that McCall Gardens provides to people with a disability. The New South Wales Government through Ageing, Disability and Home Care provided \$3.37 million in 2013-14 to assist McCall Gardens with the delivery of flexible respite, day programs, community participation programs, active ageing programs, drop-in support programs and the operation of a large residential centre. The opening of the new home, to be known as "Piccadilly", provided an opportunity to highlight the strong partnership that exists between the New South Wales Government and non-government organisations, such as McCall Gardens, to support people with a disability, their families and their carers.

As we move towards full implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme—which is a major reform of how people with disability, their families and their carers are supported to have greater choice in and control of the services they choose—organisations such as McCall Gardens will play a vital role. Under the new policy direction Ready Together, the New South Wales Government is continuing its Stronger Together 2 reforms, which committed \$2 billion over five years to deliver 47,200 new places for people with disability to access support. As part of the reform the New South Wales Government committed to redeveloping all large residential centres by June 2018. In the past 10 years more than 550 people who lived in these homes previously have moved into new community-based accommodation across New South Wales. This has involved the redevelopment of 18 government and non-government centres across New South Wales.

The New South Wales Government has provided funding to redevelop the remaining government and non-government large residential centres. They will be replaced with contemporary, purpose-built, domestic-scale homes located in the community, with greater privacy, flexibility in daily living and opportunities for increased participation in the local community. McCall Gardens is one of the remaining

14 non-government organisations to redevelop its large residential centre. McCall Gardens is well on the way with this process which is evident, given the new home that was opened yesterday. This home is the first of nine new homes that will be built to support the 44 residents currently living in the McCall Gardens large residential centre. Piccadilly will be home to five men: Chris, John, Mark, Glen and Paul. They, proudly, were the first to enter the house after the ribbon cutting yesterday.

The New South Wales Government, through Ageing, Disability and Home Care, has provided McCall Gardens with one-off funding of \$3.4 million to contribute to the purchase of land and the building of these homes. I congratulate McCall Gardens on its contribution in building this beautiful home. Chris, John, Mark, Glen and Paul will receive the support they require to live more independently, to participate in the local community and to develop stronger relationships in this wonderful new environment. They will have the opportunity to invite family and friends around to their home, cook them a meal and be the host, just like any other person. I understand that one of the things Chris, John, Mark, Glen and Paul are most looking forward to is deciding on their weekly menu and having the opportunity to cook the meals themselves, with support, in their new kitchen. These are skills that they may not have had the opportunity to learn otherwise.

It is wonderful to see the opportunities that this new home will provide for a fulfilling life and to know that support will be given to assist its residents to achieve their personal goals. Now that they live within the community and participate in everyday activities such as shopping, banking and visiting clubs, Chris, John, Mark, Glen and Paul will be an integral part of the local community. I welcome these members of the McCall Gardens community to their new home in the town of Riverstone and wish them all the very best for the future.

AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS CENTENARY

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) [12.12 p.m.]: The Australian Red Cross marks its centenary this year with the catchcry "100 Years of People Helping People". This fantastic organisation has spent the 100 years since its foundation doing extraordinary things to help the vulnerable in our community. The Hunter and Central Coast region is blessed to be home to 30 branches of the Red Cross, two of which are celebrating their centenaries this year: the venerable Wallsend and Belmont branches. A proud member of the Wallsend branch, I attend meetings and get a chance to hear first-hand the wonderful work they do. However, as proud as I am of the Wallsend branch and of my electorate as a whole, it would be remiss of me not to talk about the broader history of the Red Cross movement in Australia and the important role that women, especially, have played in it over the past century.

Of course, this year also marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of that most horrendous of armed conflicts that we now call the First World War. The advent of that devastating war is tied directly to the foundation of the Australian Red Cross. Just days after the declaration of war, the wife of the then Governor-General, Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, established the first Red Cross branch in Australia as part of the British Red Cross Society on 13 August 1914. She wrote personally to the wives of the State governors, seeking their support, and so the Australian Red Cross was born. Women have played a pivotal role in the Australian Red Cross since its foundation. As the war wound down, the Australian Red Cross had established member-based branches in each State, including 632 in New South Wales. Most of these branches were run by women, many of whom would go on to devote countless hours and untold energies to the Australian Red Cross throughout their lives.

When a hard-won armistice was declared in 1918, these women did not stop. During two world wars and countless crises between and since, the Australian Red Cross was on the front line at home and abroad, bringing aid and comfort to the wounded and the broken. Their guiding lights have always been compassion and love—two of the greatest and most admirable human attributes. The people of Wallsend, the people of the Hunter and the people of Australia as a whole have been lucky to have the Australian Red Cross by their sides. One particularly noteworthy instance of the Australian Red Cross being there for the people of the Hunter in our hour of need came during the devastating floods of 1955. Twenty-five lives were claimed as floodwaters ravaged Maitland during the week-long Maitland Flood. As rescuers fought the flood to try to save lives, ladies from the Cessnock Red Cross branch fed them and kept them fighting fit, ready to go back into the raging torrents. In the aftermath of the tragedy the Australian Red Cross helped run relief centres, trying to get people who in many cases had lost everything back on their feet.

The Wallsend branch is lucky to have branch members with 60-plus years history of activity in the Australian Red Cross. Lorna Dickson and Joyce Leeman's mum enrolled the sisters as young women with the Wallsend Red Cross in the 1940s as "two bob members". At the time the branch hosted more than 100 members.

Lorna's sister-in-law Helen was also active in the Wallsend Red Cross. So, too, is President Julie Urquhart—a branch member for 25 years. Julie received a special award from the State Government for disaster relief assistance. Julie is also a very successful fundraiser for the Wallsend branch. She organises raffles, street stalls and trivia nights. I take this opportunity, in this auspicious year, to salute the Australian Red Cross for its contributions to Wallsend, the Hunter and Australia. No doubt thousands of lives have been saved and tens of thousands more improved over the years thanks to the diligence, hard work and unending compassion of the organisation and its members. Both in times of great hardship and in the face of the everyday struggles that degrade a person's quality of life, the Australian Red Cross has been, is and will continue to be a source of help, comfort and hope.

MYALL LAKES ELECTORATE COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [12.17 p.m.]: I recently attended two functions involving the Country Women's Association: first, the fiftieth birthday celebrations of the Wallamba Country Women's Association branch and later the opening of toilets for the disabled at the Wingham Country Women's Association branch. At the fiftieth birthday celebrations I was joined by my colleague the Federal member for Lyne, Dr David Gillespie. Also at that luncheon it was lovely to see Audrey Elliott. Audrey is 99 years of age and she turns 100 in November this year.

The Country Women's Association is a very important organisation that helps communities throughout regional New South Wales. It was formed in 1922, and in 1931 the Country Women's Association of New South Wales Incorporation Act was passed by this Parliament. The organisation's core responsibility is to help regional communities in relation to baby health, hospitals and schools and in all manner of worthy causes. The Country Women's Association has more than 10,000 members in New South Wales in more than 400 local branches. Those branches deal with local issues and local needs, which is why the organisation is so important in our communities.

The Country Women's Association is the largest women's organisation and its members are lobbyists, fighters, and movers and shakers in their communities. It is well known that many of the decisions made by men in regional communities are influenced by their lady loved ones. The Myall Lakes electorate has five branches of the Country Women's Association: Bulahdelah, Forster, Taree, Wallambah and Wingham. The Wallambah branch was formed in March 1964. Hazel MacIntosh was the first president of that branch and her daughter, Lucy Weller—an old friend of mine—was present at the fiftieth birthday celebrations, having been at the first meeting of the branch when she was much younger. Thirteen members attended that first meeting and they each donated a cup and saucer to the Wallambah branch. Over the years the branch has been involved in school speech days and hearing for deaf camps, prepared mother and baby packs for women in Papua New Guinea and many other worthy causes.

As I mentioned, I also attended the Wingham branch of the Country Women's Association, where I had the honour of opening its toilet for the disabled. Some people might say, tongue in cheek, that politicians have nothing better to do than open toilets. But this toilet was the result of a grant under the Community Building Partnership program and there is nothing funny or unusual in wanting people with disabilities to have equal access to facilities, which this toilet provides in the Country Women's Association building in the main street of Wingham. Detractors who knock the Country Women's Association and the local member for being involved in the opening of the toilet for the disabled should consider how important it is to look after our disabled people. Certainly members of the Wingham Country Women's Association are very proud that they thought of this facility, that they were successful in their application for funding and that their local member was very happy to be a part of the official opening. I close by reiterating how important the Country Women's Association is across regional New South Wales, particularly in the Myall Lakes electorate.

The SPEAKER: Order! As a proud member of the Country Women's Association, I sincerely thank the member for Myall Lakes for his comments today.

TRIBUTE TO PAUL RAMSAY

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [12.22 p.m.]: In what has been described as the biggest single charitable donation in Australian history, Paul Ramsay has left his \$3.3 billion shareholding in Ramsay Health Care to be channelled through his foundation. Paul Ramsay, whom I met regularly when I was manager of one of his television stations, took his philanthropic role seriously. He is known to have supported organisations as diverse as education, Parent Infant Family Australia—a CatholicCare organisation that supports vulnerable families—

the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, arts and sporting organisations, and the Liberal Party. As we mourn his passing on 1 May, we also cheer his fresh, wonderful gift. It is truly a breathtaking moment in Australian corporate and charitable life. As such, we should celebrate it and reflect on the donor.

Paul Ramsay was a man with a price on his head—that price was \$3.7 billion, as valued by Forbes in March this year. At the age of 78, Paul Ramsay was ranked eleventh on the *Business Review Weekly* rich list. His presence on that list came about through two principal areas of business. In 1964 he began his lifelong interest in health care, founding Ramsay Health Care. The Albury Wodonga Private Hospital was his second surgical/medical hospital in a regional area. Mr Ramsay chose Albury when he heard Gough Whitlam begin to talk up the area in the 1970s. Interestingly, it was built using the same architect and design as were used for his first regional hospital at Coffs Harbour. Today this has become the largest private hospital group operating in Australia. Having expanded overseas, the group is truly global, treating an estimated 1.4 million patients a year in 151 hospitals across the world. A deep commitment to quality care saw Albury Wodonga Private Hospital named the best private hospital in New South Wales in 2010.

His second business success was to be in media. For 29 years he was chairman of the Prime Media network of regional television stations. Starting with television stations in Albury and Wagga Wagga—for which he retained an abiding affection—he spearheaded the development of a media chain focused on regional areas of New South Wales, Canberra, Victoria, the Gold Coast and Western Australia. As manager of Prime Albury I would go to monthly network meetings in Woolloomooloo. At times Paul would attend and address the managers. He was a frequent visitor to Albury, where he would catch up with staff at Prime and at the private hospital. I remember he would provide opportunities for motivated staff to travel throughout Australia, and even overseas, as part of documenting Ramsay Health Care or covering promotional events. That was a great encouragement of talent.

Perhaps lesser known were his forays overseas, having owned radio stations in the United Kingdom, a television station in Argentina, a hospital in Hong Kong and psychiatric hospitals in the United States of America. Not all his ventures were successful, but he had the talent to recognise a poor decision and then address it. For his services to the community Mr Ramsay was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in June 2002. Paul Ramsay might have been a quiet, composed businessman but he has left a legacy of colourful mantras that are remembered fondly by his staff. Those mantras reveal his business mind and strategy:

Offer quality and the rest will follow.

Appoint a good person and get out of their way.

Run my business as though it was your business. Spend my money as if it was your money.

He would work a conference or a function room discreetly, discussing ideas and consulting almost casually. When he began travelling to the United States of America on business he chose to criss-cross the country, flying first class so that he could make conversation and connections with business leaders in what, for him, was a new market. That Paul Ramsay was a successful entrepreneur is beyond doubt. That he was a philanthropist is equally well recorded. But, as a man, he also left a clear mark on those with whom he worked. The general impression is that he was remarkably humble and a true gentleman of integrity and energy.

He was a proud Australian and a man of faith who would drop into local churches for a quick prayer on his business rounds. Cross words and raised voices were not his management style. He was a people person who remembered not just the names of staff but what their children were up to. Paul Ramsay found success and wealth. He gave generously to those in need and to good causes. He gained accolades but he chose to live privately. In life, he achieved much and now, through his careful planning and foresight, even more will be achieved for the people of this nation as year after year unfolds.

This generosity extends beyond money to important things such as the creation of thousands of jobs, the provision of vital and caring health services, and the bringing of news services and entertainment to those of us living in regional areas. It is fair to say that he revolutionised and elevated health care in regional New South Wales. Today let us celebrate the Paul Ramsay Foundation but long may we remember and give thanks for Paul Ramsay the man. I offer my condolences to Paul's twin sister, Anne, his brother, Peter, and the people who knew him at Albury Wodonga Private Hospital, Prime Albury television and, as the member for Tamworth says, at Tamworth television as well.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! Before I call the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research, I thank the member for Albury for that wonderful tribute.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research) [12.27 p.m.]: I speak as the Minister for Health and as someone who has known Paul Ramsay over many years. Paul Ramsay's first or second hospital is directly opposite my house. It is a psychiatric hospital and I am always pleased to tell people who have concerns about a psychiatric hospital being located in their local vicinity that they need only visit the one established by Paul Ramsay to know that such hospitals can be run very effectively and can make very good neighbours. That has always been my experience. I join the member for Albury in acknowledging the wonderful contribution that Paul Ramsay has made to health not just in this State and this country but internationally. He has taken out many awards across the country and his wonderful generosity in providing for his foundation will serve the people of Australia for many years ahead. Vale Paul Ramsay.

DEATH OF COALMINERS JAMIE MITCHELL AND PHILLIP GRANT

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [12.28 p.m.]: I pay my respects to Mr Jamie Mitchell and Mr Phillip Grant, the two coalminers recently killed by a collapsing wall at the Austar Coal Mine in the village of Paxton in Cessnock. On Tuesday 15 April at 9.30 p.m. the first sirens were heard across the city of Cessnock. The sirens continued for the next 90 minutes, joined in their chorus by the sound of the rescue helicopter. All emergency services came in, but none went out that day. The people of Cessnock slept knowing that bad news would meet them in the morning but not knowing what that news would be.

Overnight, at a depth of 500 metres, 10 kilometres away from the point at which they entered the ground, a section of wall about 15 metres long, three metres high and weighing many tonnes collapsed onto Jamie Mitchell and Phillip Grant, killing them instantly. In that same section, just metres away, another six men who worked beside them as they went about their business were, by some random fortune, not also crushed. Two of those six men I proudly call my friends. The colleagues were desperate to try to help the fallen men but they could not possibly have saved them. The entire mine was immediately cleared to ensure that no further injury could occur. This started a 40-hour vigil that would not end until both bodies had been recovered and brought to the mine surface. Dozens of work colleagues manned the site around the clock, providing a guard of honour as each body was recovered and removed.

As one miner who was working on site at the time said, "When you're underground, you look after each other's back ... we are like brothers down there." As the son of a miner, a friend of dozens of miners, a regular attendee and supporter of the retired mineworkers' network and a member of Parliament who represents thousands of mineworkers and their families, I concur with that sentiment entirely. The brotherhood of underground miners is a sentiment that is almost thick enough to touch. It is a brotherhood that few if any who do not go underground could ever understand. It is forged in the face of ever-present danger—the danger of death. When things go wrong in an underground mine, they can go terribly and tragically wrong. That is the place in which our underground coalminers work. That is the workspace in which they go about their humanly unnatural behaviour of digging, burrowing and mining in small tunnels underground.

The families of these two men will never again hold their sons, their husbands, their dads, their brothers or their uncles. The workmates of these two fallen men will not quickly or easily resume their lives. They will not readily want or be able to move on. This is the very dangerous and suddenly fatal environment that many of this State's coalminers work in. While the rest of us simply switch on our lights, open our nice cold fridges and turn on our flat screen televisions, it is the coalminers of this State who make much of our electricity possible. They work in a space that can kill more quickly and swiftly than the time it takes to let out a single scream or cry for help.

I consider the importance of the work of our coalminers as equal to that of our police. I do not make this statement flippantly or lightly, but the truth is that the very fabric and structure of our society depends heavily on the toil of our coalminers. Since 1801 when coalmining began in the Hunter Valley more than 1,800 men and, more recently, one woman have died in the pursuit of an income and a lifestyle for their families. Their pursuits have provided immeasurable wealth and prosperity to New South Wales. This year alone \$1.5 billion, or almost 3 per cent of the State's budget, has come directly from coal royalties. In addition, billions more will come from the taxes, productivity, industry stimulus and GST revenues that are the results of the business created by coalmining.

The recent deaths in a coalmine in Cessnock have reopened many old wounds and memories. I give this pledge to the community that I so proudly serve: I will fight to ensure that the findings of the current inquiry into the deaths of Mr Phillip Grant and Mr Jamie Mitchell, which will no doubt highlight opportunities for further improvements in safety, are implemented in full. To that end, I thank the Minister for Energy and

Resources. He made one of the first phone calls to me on that terrible morning to offer his full support and to let me—a member on the other side of Parliament—know that he stands ready to help and support the community and the findings. I thank the Minister for that. Following the Minister's response I ask that members and officers of this Chamber rise for a brief moment to honour the fallen men.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Resources and Energy, and Special Minister of State) [12.33 p.m.]: I join with the sentiments of my colleague the member for Cessnock, who has displayed remarkable leadership. I thank him for his ability to reaffirm the importance of mining in New South Wales and explain the human side of mining, including the children who watch their parents go off to work each day and hope that they will come home safely. Members on both side of the Chamber support the member's sentiments and express our sadness at the tragic deaths of Phillip Grant and Jamie Mitchell at the Austar Coal Mine near Cessnock last month.

On behalf of all members, I offer my sincere condolences to the men's families and friends. I can only imagine the grief that their tight-knit communities and workmates are suffering. I have personally written to the Mitchell and Grant families to express my sympathy for their loss and inform them that the department's Mine Safety Investigation Unit is preparing a comprehensive report about the cause and circumstances of the incident. I have also asked Mr Steve Orr, who is the acting manager of the investigation unit, to meet with the families to discuss the investigation process and, most importantly, to keep them informed of all developments.

I join with members, particularly the member for Cessnock who has been so moved by these tragic deaths, to reaffirm that the safety and wellbeing of miners is of primary concern to us. Once the report on the cause of the fatal accident is investigated by the Coroner, the Government and I will consider all recommendations to improve mine safety. Members on both sides of the Chamber will work closely together to ensure to the best of our abilities that this type of thing never happens again. I offer my deepest sympathies and prayers to families, friends and colleagues of Phillip and Jamie. I know that they will not be forgotten by their communities. They certainly will not be forgotten by their local member. May they rest in peace.

Members and officers of the House stood in their places as a mark of respect.

PORT MACQUARIE ELECTORATE VOLUNTEERS

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie-Parliamentary Secretary) [12.38 p.m.]: I thank the member for Cessnock for raising the important issue of the deaths of coalminers Phillip Grant and Jamie Mitchell and for providing us with an opportunity to pay our respects to those miners and express our sympathies to their families, friends and community. Volunteers do wonderful work across the State and in my local area. As many members are aware, this week is National Volunteer Week. We all know that without our magnificent volunteers we would not have such wonderful communities. On Saturday I was pleased to attend an event organised by the Port Macquarie Neighbourhood Centre and present the community volunteer awards. The volunteer expo was an opportunity to celebrate volunteering and thank the wonderful people who participate in a wide range of activities in our community.

It was also an opportunity for people who may be considering volunteering to look at the opportunities that are available to volunteer and contribute. Potential volunteers include people who have retired, recently moved to our local area or otherwise found some spare time on their hands. I congratulate all of the award nominees and particularly congratulate those who received awards. The Senior Volunteer of the Year award, which I was pleased to sponsor, was won by Joan Johnson. Erin Meyer won the award for Youth Volunteer of the Year. The Hastings Autism and Aspergers Research Group, which is an amazing organisation that is doing fantastic things, won the Team Volunteer of the Year award. Finally, Paul Skilleter was named Volunteer of the Year.

This afternoon I particularly mention three other groups, including the volunteers who helped on the Driver Reviver Centre at Port Macquarie and at Kew; the volunteer surf lifesavers who again kept our beaches so well patrolled over the past summer; and those wonderful volunteers, some 2,000 of them, who made the recent Ironman event in Port Macquarie and Camden Haven such an enormous success. Over the Christmas-New Year period visitors to the Hastings State Emergency Services [SES] Community Driver Reviver Centre totalled more than 15,000, which was close to 2,500 more than the same period last year. Some 617 volunteers, led by coordinator Gordon Toms, covered all shifts over 27 days. That is an outstanding result by the crew who have been serving drivers and passengers for some 25 years.

I visited the centre on Christmas Eve to thank the volunteers and to give them a gift to say thank you and to recognise the wonderful work they do. The same crews were back at work during the Easter holidays doing what they do best: helping to keep drivers revived and surviving on the Pacific Highway. I also mention the good work being done by the volunteers at the iKew Centre at Kew. For the first time the iKew Centre was open during the Easter holidays, offering a cuppa and a biscuit for drivers who chose to take a break. That centre is run by volunteers and is coordinated by the Camden Haven Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Another group of hardworking volunteers are our mighty surf lifesavers. I am pleased to tell the House that during the swimming season, which ended after the Anzac Day weekend, there were no drownings on patrolled beaches in the Port Macquarie electorate. With higher-than-average crowds at local beaches over summer, more than 600 volunteer lifesavers actively patrolled our beaches on weekends and public holidays. On average the volunteer lifesavers in my area make about 200 rescues a season, with 15,000 preventative actions. Those statistics are amazing. Knowing that we have people volunteering on local beaches whose sole aim is keeping us safe is a great feeling.

Congratulations to everyone involved in yet another successful Ironman event in Port Macquarie. Despite the windy conditions, which made it even more challenging, the almost 1,800 competitors pushed themselves to the extreme to the cheers of supporters and volunteers well into the night. Elliot Holtham and Melissa Hauschildt were the winners on the day, but as a spectator and volunteer I watched in awe and consider every single competitor a winner, particularly the hundreds of locals and visitors who completed the endurance race for the first time, including my colleague in the upper House the Hon. Niall Blair. The complex logistics in organising such an event involving thousands of athletes and volunteers is phenomenal, and the local organising committee again completed the task with professionalism and distinction. Whether our volunteers are young people or senior residents, we as a society and a community are forever in their debt for the fantastic role they play in making our community a much better place to live.

TRIBUTE TO MELINDA KIM MANIKAS

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [12.43 p.m.]: Today I pay tribute to the life of Melinda Kim Manikas, nee Mustac, who was born on 22 June 1975 and died on 7 May 2014. I put on the record of the House, the permanent record of this State, her life and her passing. This morning I attended Melinda's funeral at St Augustine's Catholic Church in Balmain. The church was full to the brim with people on both levels—a testament to Melinda's life and her achievements: her colleagues from Westpac and Leichhardt Council, her friends and relatives, colleagues from her husband's work as the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Quantity Surveyors and her many friends and supporters from the Liberal Party.

Melinda was born in Canterbury Hospital and died at the too-young age of 38 years. A child of a Croatian immigrant family, she was the mother of Victoria and the loving wife of Michael. I represented the Balmain ward on Leichhardt Council for more than 13 years and I met Melinda during her campaigning for the council elections in 2011. Anyone who met her would have seen her passion for life, and she brought that passion to her commitment for public service. In 2011 she was successfully elected to Leichhardt Council representing the Balmain ward. While she brought exemplary service to the council, her sickness—the cancer that afflicted her body—meant that her participation was cut short.

Melinda wore her heart on her sleeve. She was an energetic, vivacious and—I am sure she would not mind my saying—very stylish woman and she brought a special kind of pizzazz to politics in Leichhardt Council. She had a second chance of life when her cancer went into remission, and she took life by the scruff of the neck and lived it with integrity, honour and courage. I acknowledge the work of the doctors who cared for her, the nurses, in particular those at the Mater Hospital and the Hallwang Clinic and Medical Centre in Cologne, Germany. Politics can be a very divisive business but Melinda was a witness to the love of community that unites us all. Her commitment not only to the community but to her family was clear for everybody to see.

Today in the church service, which was led by Father John Camilleri, we sang hymns, read from scripture and acknowledged Melinda's life. During the service it was clear to all those present, across all the parties represented in the church, that the life of the individual, the life of those who put themselves forward for public service, is often criticised and under a microscope, but there is a sense of unity amongst all of us. We all share a commitment to public service, to representing our communities and to the life and vitality of our local areas. At 38 years old, Melinda was taken from us far too young. Her commitment to the community was clear in her election: pushing her pram throughout the local community with her young daughter, Victoria, talking to everyone who would listen about her policies and her views on what should be happening in our local community.

Today Melinda's husband, Michael, told us of their love. He first met her when she was just a high school student. When he finally summoned up the courage to ask her out, they went out for a wonderful dinner, where she seemed to eat far more than her small frame indicated, and he wondered how he would ever be able to pay to continue going out on additional dates with this vivacious young woman. But they did, and after five years of dating he realised it was time to pop the question. Today Michael told us how he got down on one knee and sang her a song, and she said yes. Their life together was interrupted cataclysmically by breast cancer.

During a general health check during her thirty-fifth week of pregnancy the lump was found. Melinda's child was induced and was born happy, healthy and well, and her fight against cancer commenced. As I said, she was blessed to go into remission for a short time, but the cancer returned aggressively throughout her body and finally to her liver. She fought that cancer with great courage. Today I take the opportunity to wish her and her family the best. May God bless her and her family, and may she rest in peace.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research) [12.48 p.m.]: As the health Minister I thank the member for Balmain for his descriptive message about Melinda and her family, and the importance of all of us joining together, as we all do on occasions, especially when we are looking after our local communities. I share the member's heartfelt message to the family and about her courageous fight against this insidious disease. His comments about the wonderful care that Melinda received are reflected by many comments of patients who undergo treatment for cancer. Fortunately these days most people battle and succeed, but for some it is not to be. I hope we all remember people like Melinda for many years to come. I thank the member for Balmain.

HUNTER REGION BOTANIC GARDENS

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.49 p.m.]: Today I inform the House about a special piece of my electorate, one of the jewels of the Hunter, the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens. I was privileged recently to participate in a ceremony at the gardens to bestow life membership on some dedicated volunteers. It is important to recognise volunteers as they were the ones who transformed a weed-infested bushland site into a botanic collection enjoyed by the community and visitors from around the world. The mission statement of the gardens is: to grow, study, conserve and promote plants, in particular those of the Hunter region. Through the steady work of the volunteers and with support from members and sponsors, the gardens' collections have flourished. The gardens have a visitors centre, an outdoor café, a gift shop and a reference library. Visitors can enjoy Devonshire teas and light lunches or they can picnic in the gardens.

The gardens expand as new displays are developed for recreational, educational and scientific purposes. Easy walking trails provide access to the natural bushland with its mature blackbutt, angophoras and swamp mahogany forests and its understorey of more than 150 native plants. The forests are the natural habitat of goannas, wallabies, lizards, brushtail and ringtail possums, sugar gliders, bats, a small group of resident koalas and many birds. The work of the volunteers has not gone unnoticed and it was wonderful to see the commitment and dedication acknowledged by the board's awards of life memberships.

For the past 16 years, Rear Admiral the Honourable Peter Sinclair and his wife, Shirley, have given the gardens unqualified support. Peter, our former Governor, is patron of the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens. In return for the honour and acknowledgement of Peter and Shirley's patronage, their names have been added permanently to the family of volunteers at the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens by awarding them both honorary life memberships, with great gratitude and thanks. The second recipient was June Davidson, who is regarded as a quiet achiever and was rather shy about receiving the award but who certainly is worthy of recognition. June has worked tirelessly and with dedication and skill in the gardens' herbarium over many years. June has been involved with the herbarium almost all its life, beginning work with Terry Tame and later with Pat Shearston and Harry Jones. June has devoted almost 24 years to the betterment of the herbarium.

Noel Winney also has given the gardens enormous and generous support for 23 years. Noel was instrumental in the creation of the cacti and succulents garden, a garden that is now of national significance. Noel also has been the driving force behind the establishment of the gardens' orchid collection, both temperate and tropical. As a lifelong collector of orchids Noel has amassed a wonderful array of orchids, many of which he has donated to the gardens' collection along with the magnificent building to house them. The gardens, as well as Noel, have been especially fortunate to have had the support of his wife, Delma, over the same number of years. Delma has been there whenever Noel has, and it is fitting that both were given life membership.

Geoff Taylor has been the driving force behind the gardens' cacti and succulents garden for many years. Geoff has been instrumental in creating a garden that is not only significant in appearance but also in the actual

collection of plants. The maintenance of this garden is intensive. Not content with making a garden of national significance, Geoff has also been an integral part of the continuing maintenance and repair of many facets of the day-to-day running of the gardens. Geoff has been very generous over the years with donations and giving his time to install new equipment. Geoff is regarded as one of the "essential services" that the gardens would find difficult to be without.

Bruce Stephenson has been a long-time supporter of the gardens for 18 years. Bruce stepped up when the gardens needed someone to manage the watering systems—without which the gardens would not flourish as they have—and he continues to do so. To say he is dedicated would be an understatement. Bruce has worked under difficulties most of the time while trying to deal with an antiquated and problem-prone system, which tested his endurance and patience, and trying to keep abreast of new installations. Bruce also is an accomplished photographer. He is involved with the annual photographic competition from an administration point of view and as an entrant has won a number of prizes. Bruce's life membership award was accepted by his long-time workmate Jack Mears. I offer my congratulations to those volunteers, who certainly deserve their life memberships, and to all the other volunteers who continue—rain, hail or shine—to make the gardens a unique place to visit and enjoy.

MAITLAND ELECTORATE VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Ms ROBYN PARKER (Maitland) [12.54 p.m.]: I acknowledge that this week is National Volunteer Week, which recognises the work that volunteers do right across our communities. Although we are celebrating National Volunteer Week this week, each and every day and week our communities benefit from the work of volunteers, who selflessly contribute to our emergency services, schools, sports groups, hospitals and parks. The member for Port Stephens, who preceded me, made a statement about the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens. I am very familiar with the gardens and the great work that the volunteers do there. The approximately 20 botanic gardens throughout New South Wales do a fantastic job of collecting plants and seeds and welcoming people to their gardens. Many of them are supported by local councils. I urge councils in the Hunter region to acknowledge and support the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens, as it is a regional asset. Although the gardens are located in the Port Stephens electorate, it deserves support from councils across the Hunter region.

In common with many other members of Parliament, except that perhaps not all of them were able to celebrate Mother's Day as I did, last weekend began with a range of celebrations of volunteer activities, commencing with the East Maitland Olympic Amateur Swimming Club awards presentation night. The event really made me aware of how many people it takes to run a swimming club—to conduct the swimming events, to turn up day after day to coach the students, and to act as timekeepers. A whole range of responsibilities are involved in holding swimming events and training. It was great to be part of the presentation of awards and to acknowledge the recipients of various awards. I congratulate the club, which does such a fantastic job for so many members throughout the year.

Saturday was an exciting day in the Maitland electorate because two new Rural Fire Service sheds were opened. They had been a long time coming. I know that for many years there was discussion about where a new fire shed would be located in Thornton. It took this Government to fund a new shed by providing \$370,000. The volunteers spent a great deal of time lobbying for the new shed. I frequently drive past the shed and see the brigade training. The previous shed was totally inappropriate for the type of equipment now used by the fire service. I was pleased to note at the opening of the new Thornton fire shed that a lot of the new members are young people.

The previous fire season is one that we do not wish to see repeated, but I hope the young members who joined recently will remain as part of that longstanding brigade, of which the community is so proud, and enjoy the new shed. Hopefully the doors are big enough to accept all the new equipment that will be stored there. When one recalls the equipment they were using previously, it is obvious that the new shed was a requirement for the future. The Thornton Rural Fire Service does a great deal of hazard reduction, which is important throughout the year but especially important in the lead up to the fire season.

The second shed to open in my electorate was at the Lochinvar Rural Fire Brigade station. The brigade celebrated its fiftieth anniversary last week and I congratulate all those involved on 50 years of service to the community. The opening ceremony was an opportunity to acknowledge past and present members. The new station is worth more than \$422,000, but \$60,000 of members' contributions collected from fundraising raffles meant that the State Government's funding could spin even further. The celebration also was an opportunity to recognise the service of members who had been involved with the station for a long time.

Long service medals were awarded to Jeffrey Jackson for 11 years of service, Shirley Hooper for 11 years of service, Trevor Kedwell for 12 years of service, Adam Flannery for 19 years of service, Brendan Gazzard for 20 years of service, Peter Drain, who is also the captain, for 20 years of service, Keith White for 21 years of service, and Deborah White for 21 years of service. I congratulate all the award recipients. I acknowledge and thank all the volunteers across the Maitland electorate for the contribution they make to the community. I ask that people nominate their community champions for the New South Wales Volunteer of the Year Award this year.

CANOBOLAS RURAL TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [12.59 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the wonderful work that is occurring at Canobolas Rural Technology High School in Orange. Last Friday I visited the school to participate in the New Beginnings program, which is a free mentoring pilot program that is offered to local schools and delivered by the YWCA NSW. The YWCA was awarded the tender to co-deliver the pilot for the New South Wales Government. The pilot is operating in 29 electorates, one of which is the electorate of Orange. It was a great privilege and pleasure to be at Canobolas Rural Technology High School last Friday to see firsthand what the students are doing. This program involves students working with mentors who help them to develop their understanding of community, personal responsibility and leadership.

The workshops were facilitated by experienced staff from the YWCA NSW. Mentors offer guidance and support to young people as they find their voices and learn to create change in their communities. At the end of the program the mentors work closely with students to organise and present a short project proposal to community stakeholders. In my case I was privileged enough to have those projects presented to me and to other teachers, staff and mentors. It is all about helping young people gain practical leadership skills to become more connected with their communities and to make them more aware of community issues. It also provided the youth involved in the workshop with an opportunity to put their new skills into practice and to receive encouragement and feedback from decision-makers in their community.

The students at Canobolas Rural Technology High School were divided into four groups, each with a separate project. The group one topic was to create a support group for gender-diverse young people at their school and the students involved were Catie Furlonger, Mikayla Banboorne and Molly Daniels-Sheehan. They chose a difficult topic for school students to discuss but they did a marvellous job. The group two topic was to create more affordable activities for youth in Orange and the students involved were Chiara French, Victoria Ruming, Kane Mitchell, Lucy Davis and Torren Burton. They presented their ideas and views concisely and in a way that was easy to understand. The group three topic was to get better access to the internet in rural areas and involved students Harry Betts, Nick Carter, James Goyala and Jack Fliebner. Again the students spoke about the importance of better internet connections in rural areas, an issue that was close to their hearts.

The group four topic was to make the Glenroi area of Orange safer from break-ins and antisocial behaviour, an issue that is close to our hearts and important to make people feel safe in their communities. Shardai McNeill gave a worthwhile and informative video presentation in which she starred as the burglar and she did a wonderful job. I congratulate all students who participated in the program on the high quality of their presentations and on the difficult issues they tackled. The mentors of the program were Sharlene Howarth who did a great job, Nick King, a well-known Orange identity, and Emma Craigo, a caseworker with Family and Community Services. I mention in particular staff from Canobolas Rural Technology High School who supported the students, including Principal Chad Bliss, Deputy Principal Stuart Riles and Year 8 Coordinator Andrew Hetherington. It was wonderful to hear about the issues affecting young people in my community and their ideas for improving issues in their community. I congratulate Canobolas Rural Technology High School and its staff on the wonderful things that are happening at the school. It is only fitting that I acknowledge them in the Legislative Assembly today.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! I congratulate the member for Orange on visiting Canobolas Rural Technology High School and supporting young people in his electorate.

SOUTH COAST ELECTORATE SURF LIFE SAVING CLUBS

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast—The Speaker) [1.04 p.m.]: I acknowledge and pay tribute to the wonderful work being undertaken by our volunteers as part of the surf life saving movement. Last Saturday I had the pleasure once again to attend, as I do each year, the 2013-14 annual presentation evening of

Nowra-Culburra Surf Life Saving Club to acknowledge the hardworking volunteers of that club and the important work they undertake in our community throughout the busy summer period on the South Coast. I congratulate Chad Poland on being acknowledged as the Nowra-Culburra Surf Life Saving Club Person of the Year, Cadets of the Year Dale Glenan and Stephanie Francis, Junior Cadet of the Year Dylan Anderson and Patrol of the Year, Patrol Five, captained by Colin Pakes.

On the evening we acknowledged the significant achievements of the club at branch and country championship levels, State and national levels as well as by distinguished alumni who continue to display the values instilled in them by the Nowra-Culburra Life Saving Club, such as surfing champions Owen Wright and Tyler Wright. I make mention of the retirement, sadly, of club president Roger Mearns, who served in that role for more than 20 years. Throughout Roger's tenure in the role we have seen significant growth in the Nowra-Culburra Surf Life Saving Club, with extensive renovations to the clubhouse and the club reaching upwards of 350 members and 200 nippers. I congratulate Roger on his work with the Nowra-Culburra Surf Life Saving Club and his continued service to our community. I note the contribution of South Coast Surf Life Saving branch president Steve Jones, a member of Nowra-Culburra Surf Life Saving Club and a strong advocate for surf life saving clubs up and down the New South Wales coast.

Mr Gareth Ward: Hear, hear!

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: I note the support shown by the member for Kiama when I mentioned Steve Jones, who is well-known to all in the area. This Government is pleased to continue to support the efforts of surf life saving clubs on the South Coast. Through the Government's Surf Club Facility Grant Program the Nowra-Culburra Surf Life Saving Club has been the beneficiary of \$150,000, which will enable it to proceed with much-needed renovations to its clubhouse. This comes on top of the \$100,000 that was presented to the club in 2012 under the Government's Community Building Partnership program—a total of \$250,000 over the past three years to the club for upgrade works. In 2012 a further \$250,000 was presented to Mollymook Surf Life Saving Club under the Government's Surf Club Facility Grant Program to improve facilities at the club's headquarters, including a new roof, new kitchen, toilets and a new pergola.

The Mollymook Surf Life Saving Club, of which all my children were members, has patrolled north Mollymook Beach and south Narrawallee Beach since its foundation in 1933, and continues to go from strength to strength. Local members of the Mollymook Surf Life Saving Club do an outstanding job patrolling our beaches and are an integral part of the local community, making an invaluable contribution to water safety on the South Coast. Mollymook Surf Life Saving Club is yet to hold its annual presentation evening—this will occur on Saturday 24 May. However, I make mention of last year's recipients: junior and cadet club champions Xavier Lake and James Bewley, and Club Person of the Year Mark Green. I also pay tribute to Mollymook Surf Life Saving Club executive members, particularly long-term club president Rod Austin, for their continued efforts for the southern Shoalhaven community.

I note the contributions of Sussex Inlet Surf Life Saving Club to the local community. Now in its thirty-third year, the Sussex Inlet Surf Life Saving Club provides an essential service for local residents and the thousands of visitors who visit the South Coast during peak holiday periods. I pay tribute to Mr Reg Wood, an elder statesman of local surf lifesaving, who at the age of 87 decided to stand down from active lifesaving. Mr Wood has been a surf lifesaving volunteer for almost 70 years, joining at the age of 18, and has spent the past 25 years fundraising and advocating for the Sussex Inlet Surf Life Saving Club. However, most importantly, Reg used his vast experience to teach others, training new and existing members in surf bronze medallions and other lifesaving awards as well as spending 14 years on the boards of examiners and lifesaving. I pay special tribute to Reg Wood for his extensive service to surf lifesaving and to the South Coast community. I extend my sincere appreciation to clubs across the South Coast and up and down the coast of New South Wales. I look forward to continuing to support their important operations as well as attending events that acknowledge the tremendous work undertaken by so many volunteers, such as the South Coast branch presentation evening.

RANDWICK CITY COUNCIL RECYCLING CENTRE

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH (Coogee) [1.09 p.m.]: Last week the Minister for the Environment, Mr Rob Stokes, the Mayor of Randwick and I visited the Randwick City Council recycling centre in Matraville. Half of my electorate of Coogee is in Randwick. We were there to announce a \$1.15 million grant to Randwick City Council to enable it to redesign its community recycling centre and introduce a new food waste collection system for household units. Around 55 per cent to 60 per cent of the population of the city of Randwick live in

units so this is a major undertaking. This grant has come from the New South Wales Government's Waste Less, Recycle More initiative, which will prevent recyclables from rotting in landfill and help to make a significant contribution towards reaching our ambitious recycling goals.

Across New South Wales we are investing in projects that are expected to recover and divert at least 152,000 tonnes of recycled waste from landfill in New South Wales each year. There are 152 councils in New South Wales, which will amount to 1,000 tonnes per council. The expansion into food organics collection will be rolled out to approximately 35,000 units, providing participant householders with kitchen caddies for the countertop, compostable bin liners and a waste collection service, which will provide new organic bins with maroon lids for the recovery of organic food only. A trial of organic food waste collection was conducted last year in the city of Randwick at 5,000 units, with a 90 per cent participation rate. The trial showed that an average of 43.5 per cent of the waste in the red general waste bins of multiunit blocks was food waste that could be recovered, processed and reused as compost or to generate energy, rather than being sent to landfill.

Residents will now not only be able to recycle their food waste at the new recycling centre but also be able to drop off paint, gas bottles, smoke detectors, oils, batteries, fluorescent globes and tubes, televisions and electronic waste, at no charge at the gate. The recycling centre will greatly benefit the local environment of Randwick and my constituency of Coogee. When I became deputy mayor of Randwick in 2004 The Greens and the Liberals teamed up to reform the council. Together we introduced a five-year 6 per cent environmental levy. In the first five-year period the levy raised approximately \$12 million. At the time the environmental levy was condemned by members of the Labor Party, who voted as a block against its introduction.

Mr Matt Kean: Shame!

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: It is incredible. They even said it was all about studying molluscs on the rock shelves or creating koala corridors. In 2009, after the first five years of the levy, a report was produced. The levy has now been in place for a further five years and it will be continued for another five years. Some of the outcomes of the council's five-year environmental levy program include stormwater harvesting projects in Pioneers Park, Yarra Oval, Military Road in Botany, Burrows Park in Clovelly, Paine Reserve in Kingsford, and Alison Park in Randwick.

Rainwater tanks have been installed at the council's works depot, its administration building and at the Malabar library. Gross pollutant traps have been installed at Clovelly Beach and Neptune Street in Coogee. Solar hot water systems have been placed at the Des Renford Aquatic Centre, Paine Reserve in Kingsford and at the Moverly Children's Centre. Randwick council undertook dune protection at South Maroubra and Yarra Bay, and has planted demonstration native gardens in the local area. These great outcomes under the leadership of Scott Nash, Mayor of Randwick, continue to demonstrate environmental leadership.

Mr Matt Kean: He is a good man.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: He is a first-rate mayor.

HORNSBY ELECTORATE ANZAC DAY SERVICES

Mr MATT KEAN (Hornsby—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.14 p.m.]: Last month we paused as a nation to mark Anzac Day on 25 April and to remember the supreme sacrifice that our Australian and New Zealand troops have made in wartime conflict. It is a day steeped in history when we come together in the wider community to honour the brave men and women who fought so courageously under horrendous battle conditions. This year there were record crowds at Anzac Day services across the Hornsby shire, with services in Hornsby, Berowra, Berowra Waters, Glenorie, Beecroft and Wahroonga. I was honoured to attend four of the local services and to lay a wreath at each ceremony in remembrance of and to pay tribute to the brave men and women of the Hornsby area who served their nation in combat.

Local residents turned up in big numbers to the dawn service in Hornsby, with up to 4,000 people braving the wet weather to watch the processional march from the Hornsby RSL Club to the Cenotaph. As always, the Hornsby RSL Sub Branch organised a wonderful ceremony. It continues to raise the bar and should be congratulated on its remarkable efforts. Special thanks must go to president Rod White, Gary Keenan, John Dean, Tony Mills and Terry James. The service was attended by Federal member for Berowra Philip Ruddock, Hornsby mayor Steve Russell and Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. Following the service the entire community was invited to a free breakfast at the Hornsby RSL Club. The breakfast comprised bacon

and eggs and, of course, a nip of whisky in the coffee. Gary Keenan and John Dean were very liberal with the whisky. Special thanks must go to the Hornsby RSL Club for hosting such a great event. I acknowledge in particular president Col Burke and Mario Machardo and his hardworking staff.

After the Hornsby service I travelled to the Berowra Cenotaph to join the Berowra RSL Sub Branch for a 7.00 a.m. service and a hot breakfast afterwards at the Berowra RSL Club. The team at the Berowra RSL Sub Branch does a terrific job. I congratulate the new president Mal Nearmy and thank him and my good friend and local icon Bob Dobson and other members of the committee—Sandra Hawkins, Jaimie Roberts, Ray Hawkins, Trevor Hanson and Roger O’Kell. The Berowra RSL Club put on a terrific breakfast and I acknowledge the team at the club for its great work, in particular, Greg Fiedler, Garth Lindsay, Johnny Muirhead and Murray Bolan. It was good to see the directors of the club on the barbecue, cooking up a storm. I also thank the hardworking staff at the Berowra RSL Club.

In the afternoon I joined Glenorie RSL Club chief executive officer Bob Frier, The Hills mayor Michelle Byrne, the member for Hawkesbury, Ray Williams, and Hornsby councillor and ex-Navy officer Mick Gallagher at the Glenorie Anzac Day service. This service was attended by a large crowd that was treated to a speech by former immigration Minister Philip Ruddock and a musical performance from a local music act singing Redgum’s famous song *I Was Only Nineteen*. Anzac Day concluded with a small, intimate service at Wahroonga’s Kokoda Track Memorial. This service is special to me as I grew up nearby and every year I attend the service with my family and close friends. I acknowledge event organiser Greg Hodgson for his continued passion and enthusiasm in continuing to develop the dusk service, even though he has now moved to the Southern Highlands.

Greg was the driving force behind the Kokoda Track Memorial and has organised the service for the past nine years. I look forward to seeing him again next year when the Wahroonga community will celebrate the memorial’s 10-year anniversary. During all the services I was delighted to see organisers place a special emphasis on honouring the service personnel from our nation’s recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is important to remember that conflicts across the globe are many and ongoing. There may have not been as many casualties suffered by the soldiers who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq as were experienced during the two major world wars but they also carry the scars of conflict and have important stories to tell. Anzac Day services were also held at two retirement homes in my electorate—the Lakes of Cherrybrook and Rowland Village in Galston.

I congratulate Annette Clark from the Lakes of Cherrybrook and Olivia Harris from Rowland Village, Galston on their hard work behind the scenes to give residents an opportunity to pay their respects. I pay tribute to Rowland Village’s special guest speaker, Lieutenant Geoff Evans. Lieutenant Evans is now retired from the Army but he spoke to residents about his role in Afghanistan and the horrors of war, which will stay with him for the rest of his life. Lieutenant Evans is the latest generation of Anzacs to represent our nation. His service should be honoured in the same way as we honour our troops who fought in earlier conflicts, including Vietnam and Korea. In just a few years these soldiers will remain to march in our services and uphold the Anzac legend.

I am encouraged by the spirit and dedication of the younger generation to get involved in Anzac Day services. This year more than 20 schools sent representatives to attend services in the Hornsby shire. These students represented their schools and the wider community with pride as they joined in the march and delivered speeches to the assembled crowd. I thank the school principals in my electorate for their continued organisational efforts in supporting Anzac Day. Anzac Day continues to evolve each year as those taking part in the various marches and memorial services change over time. It is important that we continue to remember those who have sacrificed much for the freedoms that we enjoy in this great country of ours. It is up to us all to honour and remember them. Lest we forget.

WIRIPAANG PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr ANDREW CORNWELL (Charlestown) [1.19 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House Wiripaang Public School, a primary school in my electorate that was officially opened just over a year ago as a result of the merger between two existing schools, Gateshead Public School and Gateshead West Public School. I highlight this matter because Wiripaang is an outstanding success story of what can be achieved when a school, the community, caring staff and local volunteers work together in the belief that it is possible to turn around young lives through education.

The school has seven mainstream classes and three support classes and is co-located with Hunter Sports High School. When it was officially opened by the Premier in April last year Wiripaang Public School had

192 students enrolled. Today it has 222, an increase of more than 15 per cent. In addition, the school is consistently recording improved attendance rates thanks to a concerted effort to teach students the importance of being at school each day. The school's latest newsletter reports the story that class K/1C has recorded six days straight of 100 per cent attendance, with the whole class cheering when the last student walks through the door each day.

I have been invited to visit the school on many occasions and I am constantly impressed by its welcoming and friendly environment. Under the leadership of its wonderful principal, Lee-Ann Saurins, Wiripaang Public School exudes a positive atmosphere, where the sound of the happy voices of children playing in a vibrant and dynamic playground is the norm. For some students the school provides a safe and comforting respite from troubled home lives. In this setting, dedicated teachers work in close partnership with parents and the wider community to challenge and extend students' learning. The school is well resourced and provides students with access to the latest computer-based technologies. Flexible programs are tailored to individual styles and needs, ensuring educational excellence for each child.

Recently I had the pleasure of officially opening the school's sensory garden. This was created for visually impaired students and was the result of collaboration between the school and the Chuck Duck and Rooster Cluck's Good Life Truck, a charity that provides breakfast for local schoolchildren. This beautiful garden was built from scratch, with materials and time donated by charity, parents and the Windale Men's Shed, which helped out by building the swing. At the opening it was easy to see how much the garden means to the kids and the entire community. It is an amazing, engaging place where the children can feel peaceful and safe. It also has a beautiful water feature that the children can hear and which is full of gorgeous plants that provide a wonderful experience through smells and textures.

Lee-Ann said that last year she had been approached by Chuck Duck founder Charles Webster to initiate the project. She praised him for his incredible job in raising the funds and equipment for the garden. Lee-Ann told me that the garden had brought a real sense of pride to those children who need extra support and how wonderful it had been to see them gain so much from it. I have been lucky enough to be invited into some of the classrooms, where it is easy to see the results of successful, caring and cooperative education at work. Like all schools, Wiripaang has some students for whom learning does not come easily and education may not necessarily be valued highly at home. However, within the school those students are nurtured in a way that brings out their best traits and enables their little minds to be excited by learning. Wiripaang offers them the chance to excel in public speaking, debating, web design and student newspapers, as well as the opportunity to excel in the arts and on the sporting field, where physical activity is valued as a vehicle for social, physical, emotional and moral learning.

It is certainly easy to see the school's motto "Courage and Character" at play at Wiripaang. I am extremely proud of what this school has achieved in its first year and I look forward to seeing it flourish in the future and seeing some fine young Wiripaang graduates continuing their journey into secondary school. Everyone involved can take pride in this wonderful school. It was built from two schools that had falling enrolments yet this unified school now has increasing enrolments. That is a great credit to the principal and staff and is the result of the great school culture they have created. When one walks through the front doors of the school now compared with several years ago the feeling is markedly different. It is an amazing place and I pay tribute to those involved. It is with great pleasure that I bring this wonderful success story to the attention of the House.

ADOPTION LAW REFORM

Mr BART BASSETT (Londonderry) [1.24 p.m.]: Too many children throughout the world are in desperate need of a loving family who can support them financially and nurture them emotionally. On the other hand, in Australia we have too many childless couples and others with an abundance of financial, physical and emotional means to provide stable, loving homes to vulnerable children without families. Therefore, it is fantastic to see that the tireless work of tenacious adoption advocate actress Deborah Lee-Furness has paid off.

While it is an unfortunate fact that many important causes such as this one need the heavyweight involvement of a celebrity to progress, I applaud recent Federal Government reforms that aim to remove the obstacles that prevent those needy children and generous potential parents from enjoying the warmth, security and comfort of family. In fact, the Commonwealth changes announced by Prime Minister Tony Abbott on 5 May complement New South Wales Government reforms passed by this Parliament in March, which include a new transitional support payment to parents adopting children from the out-of-home care system. The

transitional support payment will help families as they begin their journey with an adopted child, helping to cover expenses in their first three years—from \$3,000 in the first year and then decreasing in increments to \$1,500 ongoing until the child turns 18.

The New South Wales reforms allow adopted children to maintain a connection with their biological parents while the Commonwealth action will remove the red tape around providing children from overseas with a safe and loving home in Australia. We in Australia are ideally placed to connect needy children from around the world with loving families and safe homes that provide a nurturing environment and foster their potential. The family is the bedrock of a happy and stable community, a luxury most of us enjoy in this country. Obviously it is a no-brainer for the Australian Government to enable more children to find families, particularly since the number of intercountry adoptions across the world, including to Australia, has declined since 2004. The Federal Government is the main instigator on this international issue. However, we must support the move at this level by working together to ensure consistency across the States.

The Interdepartmental Committee on Intercountry Adoption identified significant barriers facing Australian families wanting to adopt from overseas, inconsistent rules from State to State being one of them, along with costs and the lengthy wait to adopt. These obstacles need to be removed so that children around the world have the same opportunities we have all enjoyed. I urge my colleagues in Parliament to put aside their political differences and to answer the Prime Minister's call to work vigorously with the Commonwealth and the other States and Territories to have a new system operating by early 2015. A new intercountry adoption program between Australia and South Africa is already in place, providing us with an opportunity to begin this important teamwork.

Many children adopted from other countries, including South Africa, will have health needs and would benefit from the caring environment that Australian families can provide. Such children are increasingly older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities, developmental delays or complex medical or social backgrounds—children with challenges for their new home, family, community and nation. But these are children that we in Australia can help and give a better life to, through state-of-the-art medical technology, wealth enough to share, physical space, high hygiene standards, educational opportunities for all and the safety that we take for granted.

The Government will introduce amendments to the Australian Citizenship Act so that obtaining Australian citizenship can occur in a child's country of origin. Problems associated with the visa system, such as it being too complicated and lengthy processing times, will also be fixed. However, kids in South Africa needing loving permanent homes do not care about the new intercountry adoption program with Australia and they should not have to. All they care about is coming to a place where they will no longer have to worry about food, clothing and safety. Let us break down those barriers with other countries as well and provide all the assistance we can to our Federal Government to establish new country programs to help more Australian families to adopt.

At the State and Territory level we can help these children adjust to life in Australia, especially through our health and education departments and by supporting non-government organisations through our State government departmental agencies. Australia has long been recognised as the lucky country and the land of opportunity. It is known as a multicultural haven for those in need of the embrace of peace and opportunity, of acceptance and tolerance. What better place for a child of another race to grow and evolve than in Australia? After all, are we not all immigrants to the paradise that we call Australia? Intercountry adoption is not a new concept. Australian families began to try to adopt children from overseas after World War II, although it was not until the Vietnam War that intercountry adoption really took off. This nation is built on opportunity and second chances. Let us support the freeing up of international adoptions.

ALESCO SENIOR COLLEGE

Mr TIM OWEN (Newcastle) [1.29 p.m.]: The journey from childhood to adulthood has never been easy, but for some young people it resembles a battle for survival. Family breakdowns, mental health issues, poverty and bullying are some of the hardships many adolescents across New South Wales deal with daily. Fortunately, troubled youths in Newcastle have access to an alternative educational path that is tailored to suit complicated backgrounds. Alesco Senior College was founded in 2002 under the umbrella of the WEA Hunter Foundation to provide a personalised educational model that focuses equally on welfare and curriculum. Newcastle students who have become disengaged from mainstream schooling and believe they have no choice but to drop out of school have the option to continue their studies in a more flexible and supportive environment.

The Alesco school is inspected and accredited by the Board of Studies NSW every five years and is staffed by tertiary qualified teachers. In addition to five experienced teachers, the school employs a full-time youth support worker and a teacher's aide. Recurrent funding is provided by the New South Wales Government, with additional funding from the Federal Government and the Association of Independent Schools of NSW. The school has no prohibitive fees and works hard to maintain accessibility so as not to exclude aspirational young people with limited resources. Alesco teachers work with students in years 10 to 12 throughout the most crucial stage of their academic development, providing a positive influence during this part of their journey into the adult world.

Without Alesco, students may have fallen through the cracks and been relegated to a life where they were unable to survive without government assistance. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth research clearly indicates that by staying at school or within an educational environment young people reduce the chance of their dependence on family and social support services. We know that those who remain at school are better prepared for employment, earn a higher income and eventually become stronger participants in the community. An Alesco graduate confirms this research by writing:

After being back at school for a couple of weeks but now at Alesco School I realised this place was great and I love it here. Bullying still exists in my community and life but at least I know when I come to school I don't have to be afraid of people putting me down or bullying because everybody knows and understands that this is not ok.

Since its inception in 2002, the school has been reviewed internally and externally. These reviews included feedback from students, their families, businesses and employers along with tertiary institution appraisals. Academically, Alesco was found to be typical of any non-selective high school, with some Higher School Certificate results well above average, others below average and the majority being middle of the road. However, Alesco's true measure of success can be found in the school's graduation rates. In the past 10 years 450 students have graduated in Newcastle, and student retention rates overall are above the Hunter-Central Coast average. Without Alesco as an option it is likely that a majority of these students would have dropped out of conventional schooling altogether and been on a fast track to nowhere.

Instead, Alesco Newcastle graduates are now standing on their own two feet—studying, working, raising a family and, most importantly, contributing to our society rather than relying on the welfare system to prop them up. I believe strongly that this Government must always look for ways to help those from difficult backgrounds break free from their circumstances and realise their full potential. Alesco is a brilliant example of a joint State and Federal government-funded initiative that is achieving this goal and improving so many young lives. I am extremely proud that it is operating and thriving in my electorate. Finally, one former graduate summed up the school best as follows:

Above all else, Alesco showed me the value of my own self-worth, helping me realise that I can achieve everything I want out of life and more.

Private members' statements concluded.

[Acting-Speaker (Mr Adam Marshall) left the chair at 1.34 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I welcome to the gallery 60 year 6 students and their teachers from St Aloysius' College, junior campus, Milsons Point, guests of the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research and member for North Shore. I welcome to the gallery the father of the member for Dubbo, Mr Ken Grant, and his partner, Kate. They are the guests of the Minister for Hospitality, Gaming and Racing, and Minister for the Arts, and member for Dubbo.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE

The SPEAKER: Order! I report the receipt of the following message from His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor:

T F BATHURST
Lieutenant-Governor

Office of the Governor
Sydney, 10 May 2014

The Honourable Thomas Frederick Bathurst, Lieutenant-Governor of the State of New South Wales, has the honour to inform the Legislative Assembly that, consequent on the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir, being absent from the State, he has assumed the administration of the Government of the State.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of Motions**

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.20 p.m.]

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. I warn members I will place them on a call to order if they continue to interject.

POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: I direct my question to the Premier. Given the donations scandal has spread from the Central Coast into the Hunter, will the Premier guarantee the House that no other campaigns by Coalition members of Parliament were funded by illegal donations?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. I do not appreciate interjections at this stage of question time. The member for Baulkham Hills will come to order. The Premier has the call. I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the first time. I call the member for Baulkham Hills to order for the first time.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I will not be providing a running commentary on the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: What a difference this Government has made to the Hunter.

Government members: Hear, hear!

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Members do recall what it was like when those opposite were in government. Can anyone remember what happened in the Hunter under those opposite?

Government members: Nothing.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Absolutely nothing.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I do recall that for 20 years those opposite talked about urban renewal. The Opposition said, "We need to renew the city, we need to look at the train line, we are going to have to do something about that."

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: What did they do in relation to that?

Government members: Nothing.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: That will not surprise anyone.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order—

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

Mr John Robertson: It was the Attorney General.

The SPEAKER: Order! It was someone who sounds just like the member for Baulkham Hills. I call the member for Wakehurst to order for the first time. The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr John Robertson: I think he is mesmerised by his tie. He is blinded.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not need any extra information. What is the member's point of order?

Mr John Robertson: It relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. The question is specifically about campaign donations, not the Hunter.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Hunter, so the Premier's answer is relevant. Members will come to order.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The member for Cessnock gave notice of a motion about that today, and I will let him explain it. The Government will not provide a running commentary about the Independent Commission Against Corruption's inquiries. It should finish its inquiries and then we will talk about them. The Government is proud of its record in the Hunter and what it will do to the city of Newcastle. We will transform the city.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It will be unlike anything seen before. People across the Asia-Pacific and the world will say, "Look at Newcastle. It has been transformed."

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Members opposite can laugh, but ultimately the Leader of the Opposition will have to make some credible policy announcements. At some point he will have to shock us and say something that is not populist. He has not done it yet, and I do not expect to see him do it often.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation coming from the Opposition benches.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: What response did we get from Michael Costa when the Government announced its proposal to renew the city of Newcastle under the leadership of the member for Newcastle? His response describes members opposite to a tee. He went on the attack, saying that his former party colleagues were out of touch. He said:

... this is a gold-plated solution to the problem that's been vexing Newcastle for decades ... The hurdle in the revitalisation of Newcastle has always been the transport component. This plan fixes it, and Labor will lose all credibility if it opposes it in the Parliament.

Thank goodness the O'Farrell-Baird Government is now in power. The people of Newcastle will have a transformed city as a result of this Government's actions.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. The question was about donations—

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

Ms Linda Burney: —and whether or not—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier remains relevant to the question he was asked. I do not need additional information on the point of order on which I have already ruled.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The Government has taken action in this space. Members opposite certainly do not read the budget papers. One would think they could read newspapers, but they do not seem to do that either. The Liberal Party appointed a former Independent Commission Against Corruption commissioner to look at its processes and systems to ensure that we get our house in order.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Wollongong to order for the first time.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: That is a matter for the Liberal Party and it is being addressed; we have taken action. This Government is very proud of what it has done for the city of Newcastle and the Hunter. It was too often and for too long neglected by members opposite. We will have a transformed city and region as a result of the actions that this Government is taking.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr GREG APLIN: I direct my question to the Premier. How is the Government increasing government transparency and accountability?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I thank the member for that question, for the fantastic work he does in his electorate and for his interest in transparency in New South Wales. Interestingly, members opposite decided not to ask a question about this issue today; they have not asked about lobbying or improving transparency. They are mute. We have all watched the events that have been unfolding in the Independent Commission Against Corruption hearings over the past weeks, months and years and we have been appalled. We must take action to restore trust in government in New South Wales. This Government is determined to clean up politics in this State, which is long overdue. I have said today that we must shine a light on how government does business in New South Wales.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: People across New South Wales have a right to know who is knocking on Ministers' office doors, who is sitting in those offices and who is trying to influence decisions.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I have said this morning that the Government wants to restore confidence across the State and that it is acting in the interests of the people of New South Wales, not in the interests of anyone else. I give that firm commitment to the people of this State. We want to shut the backdoor and shine a light on the front door. Today the Government made a number of announcements about new rules for lobbyists and, indeed, anyone who wants to influence government policy in this State. The Electoral Commission will be the independent regulator for lobbyists and has been empowered to investigate any breaches.

Ethical standards will be established for not only third-party lobbyists but also any organisations that lobby government. That is an important step forward. In addition, the Government was proud to announce that a summary of Ministers' diaries and scheduled external meetings will be published quarterly. The Code of Conduct for Ministers of the Crown will also become an applicable code in respect of the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Over the next 12 months, the Department of Premier and Cabinet will also examine other options that will enhance these measures. The Government is happy to take steps to enhance the system in response to those sorts of directions.

This all comes back to the Government's record since it came to power. Since being elected this Government has delivered record funding to the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Audit Office of New South Wales, the NSW Ombudsman's Office and the Police Integrity Commission. It has also given additional powers to the Independent Commission Against Corruption and increased protection for whistleblowers. We have banned lobbyist success fees in New South Wales and, as I have announced, last week we appointed a former director of the Independent Committee Against Corruption to oversee matters within the Liberal Party.

I would say that we have done more in three weeks than the Opposition did in 16 years in government. In fact, I went back to the archives to get a list of all that the Opposition did in this area in their 16 years in government. It is not going to surprise anyone that the list was empty. The Opposition did absolutely, categorically nothing. It will not surprise anyone in this House that the Opposition did nothing. This is the challenge, because I wonder why they are being quiet on this issue.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Macquarie Fields to order for the first time.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: This is the challenge today for the Leader of the Opposition, and I leave it to him to consider the challenge. While Government members are happy to publish their diaries, will Opposition members publish theirs? I do not know. We know about the Leader of the Opposition's diary. I could go back to that, but I will not. I leave that challenge to the Leader of the Opposition. We are happy to do it, and I would assume that the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Cabinet would do the same thing. They are looking a bit worried. The good news is that we are taking action to restore transparency in government to improve trust from the electorate. We are acting in their interest and no-one else's.

LIBERAL PARTY AND POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Premier. Given Mr Ray Carter confirmed at the Independent Commission Against Corruption yesterday that the Free Enterprise Foundation existed to funnel prohibited developer donations back to the New South Wales Liberal Party, will the Government finally take action and shut down these illegal Liberal slush funds?

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I could give three million reasons why the Opposition should not be asking questions on this. The matter raised by the Leader of the Opposition is a matter for the Liberal Party, and Tony Nutt is addressing those issues.

Mr Guy Zangari: Point of order: My point of order is relevance: The question is about slush funds, Eightbyfive.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I call the member for Fairfield to order for the second time.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The scary thing about that point of order is that it has taken the member for Fairfield six months to come up with it. I would have thought he would be working on policy, but that is a very special effort. As I said, this is a matter for the Liberal Party, the party will be addressing it and Tony Nutt should be addressing it. Does anyone else find it incredible that the Leader of the Opposition is raising questions on this? It is absolutely incredible. I will go back, so the Opposition understands the problem it has.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The *Sydney Morning Herald* commented on the \$3 million bribe.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: It is relevance under Standing Order 129. The question was clearly about the unlawful use of the Free Enterprise Foundation.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier remains relevant to the question he was asked. There is no point of order.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The *Sydney Morning Herald* said:

The impact of all this is that the credibility of the Opposition Leader is terminally degraded on matters of transparency and accountability. His judgment has been lamentable. His silence has been revealing. His rationalisations are implausible.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: It is under Standing Order 73: If the Premier wants to launch into this sort of attack on the Leader of the Opposition, he should move a motion and we will vote. Then we could ask the Premier why he has not shut down the slush funds.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The member for Maroubra did not put much effort into that, did he? I am happy for this to run. These are not my words, or my mum's words, but these are the words of the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the allegation against the Leader of the Opposition:

... leaves him as a toothless inquisitor in Parliament on matters of probity ...

I say to the Leader of the Opposition that if he wants to lead this attack for the other side then he needs to have some credibility to do it and he needs to explain to us—

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: It is relevance under Standing Order 129. The question is very clear. Will the Premier shut it down or is the Premier a lame-duck puppet?

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I have ruled that the Premier is being relevant.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The toothless inquisitor has spoken. When the Leader of the Opposition speaks on these matters, I think that Parliament should turn off. We are very proud of the announcements that we have made today.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The people of New South Wales want to see improved transparency in this State. They want to see the actions that we are taking to restore confidence in decision-making. We give this assurance to everyone in New South Wales: This Government is acting in their interests and no-one else's.

The SPEAKER: Order! There has been far too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Members on both sides who have been called to order on one or two occasions are now deemed to be on three calls to order.

CENTRAL WEST JOBS

Mr ANDREW GEE: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. How is the Government supporting jobs in the Central West?

Mr ANDREW STONER: I thank the member for Orange for his question and his strong advocacy for communities in that beautiful part of our State. Since coming to government, this Liberal-Nationals Government has delivered 25,000 jobs throughout regional New South Wales. These jobs are in a number of industry sectors, but sadly there have been some segments of our industries in this State that have struggled due to a number of factors including the high Australian dollar and high energy costs associated with the carbon tax supported by those opposite. That is why, to assist the industries that have been going through some tough times and are perhaps downsizing or even closing, the Government has implemented a range of strategies to encourage new jobs for affected staff including the Fresh Start Support scheme as part of the Jobs Action Plan.

The Central West is a part of our State that has faced more than its fair share of the pain associated with the job losses to which I referred. These losses include those from the planned closure of the Electrolux plant in Orange in 2016, a downsizing of Simplot, in the electorate of the member for Bathurst, and the closure of Downer EDI in Bathurst. Today I announced that the Government is introducing a Central West jobs action plan to support jobs growth in that region. We have been working for many years on structural adjustment strategies with the aforementioned companies including Simplot and Electrolux. The adjustment packages that we had discussed included a multimillion dollar package for Electrolux that was sadly not taken up by the board in Sweden last year.

We are now making financial support available immediately to eligible projects and eligible businesses throughout the Central West, including Orange, Bathurst and the many other terrific communities in that region, through our Regional Industries Investment Fund. In addition, my agency, NSW Trade and Investment, will work closely with local businesses to build industry capacity and open new market opportunities, using programs such as our Small Biz Connect, Supply Chain Accelerator and Export Accelerator programs, as well as capitalising on that region's strengths including in agribusiness, mining and engineering. We also facilitated a very successful jobs expo in Orange in March this year to help match employees with potential employers. Another way that we are creating jobs in regional New South Wales is by building infrastructure. This Liberal-Nationals Government is currently delivering \$13 billion worth of infrastructure projects throughout regional New South Wales.

Mr Bryan Doyle: Bridges for the Bush?

Mr ANDREW STONER: It does include Bridges for the Bush—a very fine program. Finance for projects in the Central West includes \$48 million for the Bells Line of Road upgrade, \$6.7 million for the Cope Road upgrade, \$1.27 million with matching Federal and local and industry funds for the upgrade of Orange airport, \$2 million for the Mudgee airport and \$10 million to fund a new wastewater treatment plant in Lithgow. Just around the corner is the State budget with more good news on infrastructure projects for regional New South Wales. The Premier spoke about a lack of policy from those opposite. The Leader of the Opposition has put forward a policy on jobs and industry in the Central West. I am sure that members and the public would be interested to hear about that policy. A Unions NSW jobs summit was held in the Central West, and on 12 March the *Western Advocate* reported:

Mr Robertson and his fellow shadow Ministers—

whose diaries we are looking forward to seeing—

focused on the role government could play in creating more jobs. Mr Robertson went on to say, "Government can be talking to people about opportunities that exist overseas.

The *Western Advocate* went on to report:

Shadow Minister for Resources and Primary Industries Steve Whan said Asia would provide future job opportunities.

When he was questioned by the ABC Central West about Electrolux.

Pursuant to standing order additional information provided.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The member for Orange is very interested in this because it is alternative policy to the policy of those opposite. The Opposition leader told the ABC Central West that the high Aussie dollar was just an excuse and that "the Deputy Premier should have gone to Sweden to meet with the Electrolux directors". That is the same bloke who has been strident in his criticism of the trade missions this Government has conducted that have helped to deliver around \$4.5 million worth of investment and create around 14,500 jobs. On one hand the Leader of the Opposition criticises so-called junkets and on the other hand he says the solution for more jobs in the Central West is more trade missions. It is no wonder that this House has come to know that hypocrisy, thy name is Robertson.

LIBERAL PARTY AND POLITICAL DONATIONS

Ms LINDA BURNEY: My question is directed to the Premier. Given his previous answer and given the Minister just told the House of the importance of transparency, will the Premier be transparent with the public and reveal which of his sitting members' campaigns received funding from the Millennium Forum, the Free Enterprise Foundation or Eightbyfive?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: This question has been answered already. Those opposite know that it is a matter for the Liberal Party and it is being investigated.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. An Opposition member asked the question; Opposition members should listen to the answer.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It is quite clear that the Opposition has moved away from the Leader of the Opposition. Maybe the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is making a play for the State. We are very proud of what we have announced today.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: It is relevance under Standing Order 129. The question has nothing to do with what the Premier announced today.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is being relevant. The member for Maroubra will resume his seat.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The member for Maroubra is skating on very thin ice.

The SPEAKER: Order! I place the member for Toongabbie on three calls to order and I direct him to remove himself from the Chamber until the conclusion of question time.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Toongabbie left the Chamber at 2.45 p.m.]

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It is interesting that the member for Toongabbie is leaving the Chamber, because if we go back to the time when the Labor Party was in government—

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: I want to know about transparency.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is being relevant to the question he was asked. The member for Canterbury will resume her seat.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: What did the member for Toongabbie do when he was Premier? He shone a light on some of the practices that were going on. He asked various members to leave, but what did Macca and Joe do?

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: Standing Order 129, relevance.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled on that point of order three or four times. The Premier remains relevant to the question he was asked.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The toothless inquisitor does as Eddie wants him to do, but when, as Premier, the member for Toongabbie stood up to Eddie, what happened? He was sacked.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Macquarie Fields that he is deemed to be on three calls to order.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: There are members opposite who very happily got rid of the member for Toongabbie as Premier because he was standing up against what was going on over on that side. For those opposite to prosecute those sorts of arguments—

The SPEAKER: Order! I place the member for Lakemba and the member for Kogarah on three calls to order.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: We stand very proudly on what we have outlined today and every action we will take to clean up politics in New South Wales, because it is about time that happened. Members opposite mount those sorts of arguments when they know the practices that went on under their Government, and for 16 years they did absolutely nothing. We will continue to take action in the interests of the people of New South Wales and no-one else.

FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Communities. What action is the Government taking to ensure public school parents and communities have a greater say in their school's future?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The New South Wales Government is introducing legislation to restructure what is currently a dysfunctional New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations to turn it into a streamlined properly representative body. Many stories have been written in the media about what has been going on between the various factions in the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales; it has been the subject of much discussion and consultation. In the past two years I have spoken with Opposition members, the shadow spokesman, the former Minister for Education and Training and member for Marrickville, and Dr John Kaye from The Greens, who also has raised issues with me about what is going on in the parents and citizens associations.

I have consulted with the New South Wales Teachers Federation, the NSW Primary Principals' Association, the New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council and the Public Schools Principals Forum—four of the five members of the Public Education Forum. The fifth member is the New South Wales Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations but, because of its dysfunctional state, that is the voice missing in the advocacy for public schools in this State and that is what we are determined to fix. In 2011 the then Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations president and office-bearers commissioned Mr David Roden to conduct an independent review into the organisation's internal conflicts.

Mr Roden's report and recommendations for change were made available to the federation in January 2012. Since that time I have asked the president to provide me with regular updates to show the progress the federation has made in implementing those recommendations. Those progress reports demonstrate that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations did not have the capacity to change itself to end the internal conflicts. As a result, I decided to withhold the 2013-14 Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations 2013-14 grant-in-aid funding from the State Government of almost \$360,000 as I had come to the view that the organisation was not providing quality service to more than 2,000 public schools across New South Wales, and their parents and citizens associations.

The situation deteriorated in November 2013, when a meeting of some members of the federation was held. The existing president and office-bearers were purportedly displaced at that meeting and a new president and office-bearers were elected. The existing president, until at least that meeting, is contesting the validity of that meeting. The matter is now before the Supreme Court. The matter led to the situation where the office of

the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales has been ordered to cease business pending the outcome of the Supreme Court action. The Department of Education and I have now received more than 100 requests from parents and citizens associations, local members and federation members asking for me and the Government to intervene to stop this ongoing public dispute.

It is also evident that school parents and citizens associations are increasingly and inadvertently being drawn into and impacted by this dispute. This is clearly not acceptable. Unfortunately the existing Parent and Citizens Incorporation Act 1976 does not provide me with the power to intervene in this dispute or change the unwieldy and outdated parents and citizens federation governance structure. Parents deserve better representation than they are currently experiencing. They need a modern organisation with streamlined leadership to provide knowledgeable advice and support with insurance regulations and reporting requirements.

Once the legislation is proclaimed I will appoint an administrator who will temporarily take charge of the organisation, its staff and assets, and arrange for the election of a new representative governing body. Elections for the new federation, supervised by the New South Wales Electoral Commission, will be held in the coming months and I expect a new federation governing body to be in place in term 4 of this year. School parents and citizens associations will continue business as usual and they will be asked to participate in the election of a new statewide governing body. I acknowledge the valuable role that school parents and citizens associations play in fulfilling an important role in schools across the State.

As soon as the parents and citizens federation returns to being a well-functioning operation, I will reinstate the annual grant-in-aid funding. I look forward to seeing a revitalised parents and citizens federation that has restored its reputation by providing a positive representative voice for parents. Local school parents and citizens associations do a fantastic job—that will not change—but they deserve a voice in government. That is why we need to reform the State parents and citizens federation.

LIBERAL PARTY AND POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr PAUL LYNCH: My question is addressed to the Premier. Given media reports that the Premier sought assurances from the Independent Commission Against Corruption about his Cabinet members, has he sought assurances from his members that their campaigns were not funded by tainted donations?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It will not surprise members opposite to hear that I will not provide a running commentary on the Independent Commission Against Corruption or reveal discussions I may or may not have had. However, a question remains open today.

Mr Paul Lynch: Have you asked your members of Parliament?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Liverpool should wait for the Premier to answer the question.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Will the Leader of the Opposition and shadow Cabinet members share their diaries? Did anyone hear a "Yes"? I do not think I heard a "Yes". There are tumbleweeds. There is an opportunity for the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Cabinet to take a stand, and we would support that stand.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: It is relevance under Standing Order 129. The Premier is seeking advice from his staff because he does not know how to answer the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has the call and his answer remains relevant. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. There is no point of order.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I still do not think we got an answer. I do not think we got the right answer.

Ms Cherie Burton: Answer the question.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I have answered the question. Members opposite are reticent about their diaries. I remember when I looked at the Leader of the Opposition's diary that it was a bit interesting. Do members remember what we saw? I remember it. It said "Nine o'clock, Eddie".

Mr Ryan Park: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance under Standing Order 129. It was a serious question and it deserves a serious answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is a serious question and the Premier is answering it. Opposition members should listen to the Premier in silence.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I do not know whether the diary shows that the Leader of the Opposition went to see the member for Keira, but 10 o'clock was "Joe".

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 73 regarding an imputation of improper motive—

The SPEAKER: Of whom?

Dr Andrew McDonald: —and personal reflection.

The SPEAKER: Order! There has been no imputation of improper motive or personal reflection at this stage. The member for Macquarie Fields will resume his seat.

Dr Andrew McDonald: I refer to Standing Order 73?

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Premier has the call.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Eleven o'clock was "Eddie and Joe". Sometimes they would meet together or they would have two meetings to make sure the story was the same. Lunch was with Macca. It is a cracker having lunch with Macca, but they do that quite regularly.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent. They are not assisting the Premier.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It was a relatively short lunch; it was only until four o'clock.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Then I was intrigued because at five o'clock the entry said, "Disclose bribe".

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order—

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

Mr Michael Daley: It is tailor-made for Standing Order 73. Members opposite can laugh, but if they want to make accusations that people have accepted bribes they should do so either outside the House or by way of substantive motion.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra will resume his seat. The Premier is straying from the question. He will return to the leave of the question.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The Leader of the Opposition said it, not me. I make this point on the issue: We have taken firm action.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Today we have taken firm action to start the process of cleaning up politics in New South Wales. We have done that since we came to government. We have banned lobbyist success fees.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: We have strengthened the Independent Commission Against Corruption; we have given it additional powers. Today we have announced the disclosure of ministerial diaries and the establishment of an independent regulator for lobbyists. That is exactly what one expects from a responsible Government. We

are taking action to ensure that the people of New South Wales can have confidence in the decisions we are taking in their interests, and we will continue to do so. We also will continue to deliver record infrastructure and improved services, and continue to look after vulnerable people. That is exactly what we have done since we came to government and that is what we will continue to do.

NSW POLICE FORCE LAW ENFORCEMENT LEGISLATION

Mr GLENN BROOKES: My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. How is the Government supporting front-line police?

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

Mr STUART AYRES: I thank the member for East Hills for his question. He is a dedicated representative of his community and knows exactly how important the Police Force is, particularly in his area. As someone who has always taken a practical approach to life, he always wants to ensure that the police have the laws and equipment they need to ensure they can continue to do their job. It is important to acknowledge that today I was on the Central Coast with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister for Police, representing both sides of politics, at the Police Association conference. At the conference we made some announcements about how we will improve the laws to allow police to get on with doing their job. Fundamentally one of those things is the review of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act.

A bill to amend the Act will be introduced by the Attorney General, and will clarify a number of powers governing police operations. The legislation will implement recommendations of a statutory review, which was conducted by former shadow Attorney General, Andrew Tink, and a former police Minister, Paul Whelan. It is important to know that the former Labor Government did not conduct a statutory review. It was due in 2009 but it lapsed through that year; it lapsed again in 2010 and again in 2011. It is important to know that because police were immensely frustrated about the operation of the Act. The urgency to complete the statutory review on time to ensure that police are able to do their job properly—ensuring that the community is safe, undertaking investigations and holding criminals for the necessary period—was never undertaken by the former Labor Government.

The legislation will help to clarify and simplify important work done by front-line police. We are helping the police to do the best they can by reforming the laws that govern procedures and safeguards during searches. We already have implemented reforms to section 99 of the Act, which deals with the powers of arrest, and which were too complex and difficult for police to apply in the field. The proposed overhaul of part 9 will clarify the different safeguards that apply to people under arrest and suspects who voluntarily attend for questioning. It will allow police to be clear about the different procedures that apply to suspects in their company. Police have told us that the initial four-hour time limit for which a person can be detained for investigation is too short. In line with the recommendations of the Tink-Whelan review, this period is being extended to six hours for arrested suspects, but the maximum of 12 hours will remain.

We also will streamline the procedures to apply during the execution of a search warrant so that police in the field do not have to take suspects back to the police station immediately. This Government is creating practical changes to laws so that police can do the work that the community wants them to do. Under our reforms police no longer will have to take a suspect from the scene at which a search warrant is being executed to the police station; a police officer independent from the investigation can oversee the administration of rights wherever the warrant is executed. Reforms to section 201 of Act will ensure inadvertent breaches of this complex section do not lead to evidence being thrown out of court for something as simple as a police officer failing to specify his or her name and station when exercising certain powers. But to ensure the public is protected, the Ombudsman will oversight the compliance of police under the reform of part 15 of the Act.

Recently I read a contribution from the member for Dubbo in last year's *Hansard*. The Minister for Hospitality, Gaming and Racing was a former police officer with 22 years experience. I know that a number of members are former police officers and probably have similar experience. He said that when he was at Tenterfield police station he tried to engage with a suspect and advised the suspect of his name, rank and station and then asked the person to move on. The person moved around the corner and committed another offence. On the second occasion Sergeant Grant, as he was at the time, and who now is the member for Dubbo, did not state his name, rank and station because he had done so only 10 minutes earlier. The case was lost in court because the officer did not identify himself the second time to the same suspect.

Pursuant to sessional order additional information provided.

The statutory review was conducted by two eminent people from opposite sides of politics—something that did not occur under the former Labor Government. Police officers are asking for these changes to the law and the review has given the Government a clear series of 36 recommendations that it will implement, some of which it has identified. Some of the recommendations will clarify search powers and powers to strip-search with an observer present, and expand powers that may be exercised at a crime scene before a crime scene warrant is obtained. These reforms will enable police to get on with their job and ensure that they are in the field catching crooks and are not being caught up in red tape and paperwork. That is exactly what the Police Force has asked of the Government and what the public wants, and that is why we are getting on with the job.

BENTLEY BLOCKADE

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Given a recent report that he, as the police Minister, will make a decision within weeks on whether he will send hundreds of police to move on protesters from a farm at Bentley near Lismore, why did the Minister tell the House that the decision to pull 800 police officers from across the State from their regular duties was, in fact, a decision for the commissioner?

Mr STUART AYRES: We know that those opposite govern by *Daily Telegraph* but we govern by good governance. For the past 150 years of operation of the NSW Police Force a very clear distinction has been made between the political governance of each government and the operations of the police, and that has not changed under this Government or Minister, and it will not change.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Carl Scully was very different. When Scully was here it was different.

Mr STUART AYRES: The Attorney General is absolutely right, it has changed under this Government because the separation between politics and the operation of the Police Force is back in place. I have been advised that there is a significantly large camp of Bentley residents who oppose the Metgasco exploratory drilling licence that is already in place. The Government supports and will continue to support the right of its citizens to protest lawfully. We must be able to uphold democratic practice that allows people to protest lawfully, but we must also maintain the law dealing with access rights. This conflict will continue to exist. My message to those people who are congregating at Bentley is that if they do not break the law and if they protest following the laws of this State they will not be fined. In fact, the police will protect them because they are upholding the law. It is critically important to understand why the police are going to Bentley. The police are responsible for upholding the law regardless of the circumstances.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: Standing Order 129—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has been entirely relevant to the question asked by the member for Maroubra.

Mr Michael Daley: Is the Minister saying the *Daily Telegraph* reports are wrong?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra has asked his question. The member for Maroubra will resume his seat. The Minister has the call and is being relevant to the question he was asked.

Mr STUART AYRES: The police are responsible for upholding the law regardless of the circumstances, including in relation to legitimate industrial mining and forestry ventures. I am sympathetic and understand why people are so passionate about what occurs in their geographical location. Members of this Chamber understand that if something is taking place in their region they do not want they may exercise their democratic right to protest. But it is absolutely critical that through the presence of the police they allow the assembly of a lawful protest. The moment people choose to break the law the Police Force must be allowed to use their operational capability to uphold the law. If we do not do that now, and under other circumstances, when do we roll over? When do we stop? My clear message is simple: If you want to protest, protest legally—wave your placards, tell everyone your message but do not break the law because if you do you will give the police no other choice but to intervene. The police want to help and support people, but the law must be upheld.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: My question is addressed to the Minister for Local Government. How is the Government supporting local councils to build critical infrastructure?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I thank the member for Northern Tablelands for his continuing interest in local government. It is a pleasure to answer my first question as Minister from the member for Northern Tablelands, a former mayor, Chairman of the Country Mayors Association and Senior Vice President of the Shires Association, whom I worked alongside. Many of my colleagues on this side of the Chamber were former mayors or councillors; they have a wealth of experience and knowledge that they can bring to this very important sector.

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

Mr PAUL TOOLE: I am proud to be the Minister for Local Government and I pay tribute to and thank the member for Ballina, the former Minister for Local Government, who has been a member of this House for 26 years. He has served his community with the highest integrity. This sector was calling out for change and finally he listened to, and engaged and formed relationships with that sector so that we are now able to sit at the table with mayors, councillors and executives of Local Government NSW and talk. When I meet with these different stakeholders they sing his praises and thank him for his incredible work. Well done.

In 2011 the former Minister brought 152 councils together for the first time. They met at Dubbo to open up a dialogue about Destination 2036 and what was needed to reform local government. The former Minister oversighted the Independent Local Government Review Panel and the Local Government Acts Taskforce, and was responsible for an audit of all councils across the State. He has been pivotal in ensuring that the Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme was reintroduced, a scheme that has been well received by communities across New South Wales. We will continue to build those relationships. I know from speaking to the Premier and the Deputy Premier that the Government is committed to continuing to ensure that we have a thriving local government sector, which is so important for the growth of this State—whether it be business, industry or the communities we represent.

Local government is crucial; the 152 councils in New South Wales employ around 45,000 people who oversee budgets of about \$10 billion each year. They control assets to the value of \$134 billion. It is critical that councils deliver necessary infrastructure and services in our communities. In 2013 a local government infrastructure audit looked at councils across the State and identified a \$7.4 billion infrastructure backlog—something that Labor neglected for so long. This Government is working with local government to deliver the infrastructure that is required. Almost \$100 million has already been injected through the Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme, which has generated about \$680 million worth of infrastructure.

In round one 64 councils were involved in 81 projects. They were given a 4 per cent interest subsidy. In round two 49 councils were involved in 57 projects and they were given a 3 per cent subsidy. By the end of round three almost \$1 billion worth of infrastructure will have been built in this State. I point out that the excellent member for Parramatta has already had \$20 million delivered to his community for roads, bridges and buildings. The electorate of Myall Lakes—an area that has been flooded—has received almost \$18 million worth of funding under the road and bridge rehabilitation program. Next week we will be visiting Cootamundra in the electorate of the Minister for Primary Industries to open a brand-new pool, and the community is thrilled about that.

Ms Noreen Hay: How much was it?

Mr PAUL TOOLE: The member for Wollongong should be quiet. I will come back to her program, which is called the missing links program. It is \$38 million.

Pursuant to sessional order additional information provided.

Mr PAUL TOOLE: In round three of this valuable program that is delivering infrastructure to the State, another 69 applications have already been received and are currently being assessed. This equates to \$523 million worth of infrastructure projects. By the end of this year we will announce those valuable projects, which the communities deserve. We understand that a lot more work needs to be done but finally this Government is addressing the problems that Labor neglected for so many years. We will continue to work with the local government sector to ensure that the people of this State get the services they deserve.

Question time concluded at 3.13 p.m.

DEATH OF REGINALD WILLIAM "REG" GASNIER, AM**Ministerial Statement**

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Western Sydney) [3.13 p.m.]: I pay tribute to the late Reg Gasnier, AM, who passed away last Sunday evening at the age of 74. Reg Gasnier will go down not just in the annals of rugby league history but also in the pantheons of Australian sport as one of its greats. Named as one of *Rugby League Week's* original "Immortals" in 1981, his record speaks for itself: 39 Tests for Australia in which he scored 28 tries, as well as playing 127 games for St George and scoring a phenomenal 130 tries—a try rate that I doubt will ever be beaten—during the St George Dragons world record run of 11 consecutive grand final victories.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Canterbury will come to order. They should be mindful of the nature of the statement being given by the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Mr STUART AYRES: Reg Gasnier was also inducted into the Australian Rugby League Hall of Fame and the Sport Australia Hall of Fame, and he was named in the Australian Rugby League's Team of the Century. Reg Gasnier began his career with St George in 1958 after being recruited from local club, Renown United. Amazingly, after just five first grade games Gasnier was selected to represent New South Wales in 1959—the first of 21 appearances for his State. Later that year he made his test debut for Australia. Bursting onto the international stage, he scored three tries in his second test, against New Zealand, three tries in his first match on the 1959-60 Kangaroo tour, and three in his test debut against Great Britain. Reg Gasnier became Australia's youngest captain, at just 23, in 1962. He represented his country with great skill before his career was cut short in 1967 at the age of only 28 when he broke his leg against a French provincial team in a tour match. He finished his career having played a total of 233 senior matches in which he scored a phenomenal 219 tries.

After his retirement Gasnier spent some time as a commentator with the ABC and he was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1989. Reg Gasnier was widely referred to as the "Prince of Centres" and he was fondly known by St George fans as "Puff the Magic Dragon"—a testament to the lasting impression he left on supporters of that great club. As one of the younger members of this House I did not have the privilege of watching Reg Gasnier play football. I think it is apt, therefore, to defer to two of his fellow Immortals, Johnny Raper and Bob Fulton. Following Reg Gasnier's passing, former Dragons teammate Raper said:

He was just a phenomenal player—the best I played with.

He used to just say give me the ball, we'd give it to him and he'd score.

He was a rare genius. I saw Clive Churchill play and always wanted to play with someone as good as him.

I think I did that by playing alongside Reg Gasnier.

He was an ornament to the game, a man who led by example and was a great captain.

Away from football he was a great man, a wonderful citizen. We will miss him dearly.

Fellow Immortal Bob Fulton had this to say:

He was my hero when I used to come to Sydney and watch St George play at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

I remember in 1967 we both got selected in a City side together but Reg was injured and had to pull out.

It would have been a career highlight to play alongside him.

To be selected as one of the original Immortals alongside him was a humbling experience.

As well as being one of the greatest players to ever lace on a boot, Reg Gasnier will always be remembered as a great man by those who knew him. On behalf of the New South Wales Government, I offer my sincere condolences to his wife, Maureen; his son, Peter; his daughter-in-law, Angelique; his daughter, Kellie; his son-in-law, Peter; and grandchildren Sheri, Jack, Bryce, Erin and Mitchell.

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [3.17 p.m.]: On behalf of the Labor Opposition, I join the Minister for Sport and Recreation in offering my condolences to the Gasnier family. Reginald William "Reg" Gasnier, AM,

was born on 12 May 1939 and died on 11 May 2014. He passed away just short of his seventy-fifth birthday. He was a St George junior and grew up in Mortdale. He started making a name for himself in rugby league and cricket at Sutherland Intermediate High School. Those who were not around then have heard the great stories about Reg Gasnier. I know that many Labor members have spoken today about the efforts of this great man, who contributed so much to the sport of rugby league and the wider sporting community of New South Wales and our great country.

Reg later attended Sydney Technical High School in Bexley and at the age of 13 earned selection in the New South Wales Schoolboys side in a curtain-raiser to the 1952 Australia versus New Zealand test match. While at Sydney Technical High School, Reg was not just an excellent sportsman; he went above and beyond and excelled in both cricket and rugby league. Reg also had the honour of representing New South Wales in juniors teams in both rugby league and cricket. Reg Gasnier debuted for the St George Dragons in 1959 after just five first grade games and was selected to represent New South Wales—an amazing feat in itself. Reg was awarded an Order of Australia not long after his retirement, when he took on roles in the media. Reg was a great advocate for the sport, as I am sure all members agree. After retiring from the playing field in 1967 Gasnier was involved in the media side of rugby league, becoming a sportswriter and broadcaster.

Reg provided expert analysis on the ABC's *Grandstand* television coverage during the 1970s, and I am sure that many in this Chamber will recall those broadcasts. The Minister has described him as the "prince of centres" and he earned the nickname Puff the Magic Dragon. Yes, Puff the Magic Dragon was real and we saw him in this State. Reg Gasnier had an amazing work ethic on the field and it has been noted that his speed and electric footwork will never be seen again on the footy fields in this country. Reg Gasnier was one of the original post-war Immortals, alongside the great Clive Churchill, Bob Fulton and Johnny Raper. In light of such an amazing record I am sure that members could sit in this Chamber for hours acknowledging the achievements of Reg Gasnier.

Some of those achievements include: 39 tests, scoring 28 tries, and three world cup games; 125 matches for the St George Illawarra Dragons during their record 11 straight premierships wins in the 1950s and 1960s; and six premierships. It does not matter what team you follow in rugby league, we can all imagine what it would be like to have been present in the 1950 and 60s to witness such a great player. Reg Gasnier was included in the National Rugby League's list of the 100 greatest players and the honorary Team of the Century. Reg was the uncle of retired star, Mark Gasnier, who proudly followed in Reg's footsteps playing as a centre for the St George Illawarra Dragons and winning a premiership. Reg Gasnier was a tremendous player and fighter on and off the field.

The Minister repeated the simple words that his team mates recall, "Just give me the ball." When they heard those words from Reg they knew a try was imminent. Those magic words, "Just give me the ball", have been recalled in this Chamber and in other forums over the past few days. In 2010 a bronze statue of Reg Gasnier in action was unveiled at the Sydney Cricket Ground and a plaque in the hall of honour commemorates his career. Many greats in the game agree that Reg Gasnier's unparalleled skills made him stand out from his peers. Reg was not only one of the greatest players of his era but one of the greatest players ever to have played the code. On behalf of the New South Wales Labor Opposition, and I am sure the Government, I offer my sincere condolences to Reg's wife, Maureen, the extended Gasnier family and the legion of St George Illawarra Dragons supporters from Kogarah all the way down to the Illawarra and across New South Wales. Reg's legacy will live on through his wife, Maureen; his son, Peter; his daughter, Kellie; and four grandchildren. Rest in peace, old mate.

MOBILE DEVICE USE IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The SPEAKER: Order! I have received a complaint that during question time a member was noted to be taking photographs or using an iPhone to take photographs of other members within this Chamber. I remind all members that mobile devices are not permitted to be used in this manner in question time. If this occurs again I will review the use of all mobile devices during question time.

OMBUDSMAN

Report

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to section 49 of the Surveillance Devices Act 2007, of the report entitled "Report under section 49 (1) of the Surveillance Devices Act 2007 for the period ending 31 December 2013", dated April 2014, received out of session and authorised to be printed on 9 May 2014.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Report**

Mr Stephen Bromhead, as Chair, tabled the report entitled "Legislation Review Digest No. 55/55", dated 13 May 2014, together with minutes of the committee meeting regarding Legislation Review Digest No. 54/55, dated 6 May 2014.

Report ordered to be printed on motion by Mr Stephen Bromhead.

PETITIONS

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

Kings Cross Late-night Transport Services

Petition calling on the Government to provide late-night transport services in Kings Cross, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Companion Animals on Public Transport

Petition requesting that companion animals be allowed to travel on all public transport, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Pet Shops

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

Pig-dog Hunting Ban

Petition requesting the banning of pig-dog hunting in New South Wales, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Slaughterhouse Monitoring

Petition requesting mandatory closed-circuit television for all New South Wales slaughterhouses, 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 Notice of Motion (General Notice) No. 2805 lapsed pursuant to Standing Order 105 (3).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Bills**

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Resources and Energy, and Special Minister of State) [3.25 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the passage through all stages, at this or any subsequent sitting, of the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra) [3.25 p.m.]: I indicate to the House that I have spoken to the shadow Minister for education and the Opposition will accede to the motion.

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

Motion agreed to.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [3.26 p.m.]: I speak in support of the Government reforms to the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales to create an efficient, transparent and accountable organisation to represent the interests of public school parents and communities. This motion deserves priority because our children's education and welfare are too important to be hindered by petty squabbles within the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales. Parents and citizens associations generally do great work. They rely on volunteers, who can often need guidance in tricky areas. Information based on media reports, information from the Minister and feedback from communities indicates that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations has not been delivering that support. The issues have existed for more than a decade. The 2012 Roden report identified problems as far back as 2002. That report found a climate of bullying, gangs and factions, with a focus on self-interest rather than delivery of services and support to parents and citizens associations around the State in all our schools.

The Roden report found that inadequate advice was being provided to parents and citizens associations. That advice included subjects such as tax, the goods and services tax, superannuation and employment relations issues. Parents and citizens associations are not experts; they comprise parents and volunteers who wish to support their school community to the best of their ability but they need support from the federation. The federation was also found to have provided inadequate insurance, which resulted in some school fetes being cancelled due to insufficient coverage. On 15 March 2014 the *Sydney Morning Herald* gave examples of mismanagement, such as a \$20,000 fine by Fair Work Australia for the dismissal of a canteen worker by a parents and citizens association. I am sure that situation was bungled due to lack of support from the federation rather than deliberate mismanagement.

Another parents and citizens association was fined \$4,000 by the Australian Taxation Office for failing to pay superannuation to a person running a uniform shop for three hours a week. These issues, with the proper support, should not occur. There should be someone to advise how to carry out the business. Changes to legislation concerning privacy and changes in technology have rendered advice from the federation behind the times. The federation has been too busy with infighting to keep schools up to date with what they need to know in these fields. There is now a situation where rival presidents, as result of disputed meetings, are before the Supreme Court. They are facing off against each other, closing down the Granville office of the federation and not supporting the parents and citizens associations that do fabulous work in our schools. The situation is untenable and must be addressed. This Parliament must debate this motion today.

Bentley Blockade

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [3.29 p.m.]: My motion deserves to be accorded priority because I am very worried that this Government is planning to move hundreds of police officers from their regular duties to break up a peaceful protest. People of the Northern Rivers region—from Lismore, Tweed and Ballina—may be a long way from Macquarie Street, but today Labor stands on their side in opposition to the expansion of and exploration for coal seam gas and coal seam gas activities that are being proposed and wheeled out in the local area. The men and women at the ongoing Bentley blockade are protesting against the expansion of the coal seam gas and unconventional gas industry on the North Coast. They want to see a freeze on exploration activity because they are concerned about what it will do to the local economy and to the local beef farmer who is exporting cattle to China but who has been told that if this coal seam gas activity goes ahead his cattle will no longer be able to be sold in China.

They are also concerned about the impact on the newly established dairy operations that for the first time are exporting fresh milk from the Northern Rivers to China, which is paying \$8 to \$9 a litre for it. Those exports are now being put at risk because of the expansion of coal seam gas activities and because this Government is madly rushing to send in police officers to break up a peaceful blockade. I note the attacks from the Minister for

Resources and Energy on the farmers and locals who are protesting against coal seam gas exploration on the North Coast. He called them "extremists". They are not. I met with a number of them last week, some of whom said they were the Minister's neighbours. A letter from Mr Paul O'Reilly of Lillian Rock states:

I am a local businessman and my wife is a teacher at our local school. We attend the dawn vigil at Bentley before going to work each morning. We stand with doctors, lawyers, farmers and grandparents with a common belief that this industry will irreparably damage our land and water resources on which we all depend upon.

The absurdity is that the standing orders have been suspended to allow the passage through all stages today of a bill dealing with the same topic covered by the motion for which the member for Riverstone is seeking priority. Members opposite want a chance to suck up more oxygen in this place and to waste the time of this House on a topic dealt with in a bill that will be debated later today and subsequently passed. The Leader of the House moved the suspension of standing orders, which was agreed to, and the bill will be dealt with today. If the motion of the member for Riverstone is given priority members opposite will be able to waste time rather than debate an issue of substance.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 56

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

Noes, 24

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Motion Accorded Priority

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [3.40 p.m.]: I move:

That this House supports the Government reforms to the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales to create an efficient, transparent and accountable organisation to represent the interests of public school parents and communities.

Earlier I briefly outlined some of the problems that have occurred as a result of a dysfunctional federation. That has caused problems for school communities across the State that depend on its support. I did not have time to

mention that the annual grant the Government gives the federation has had to be withheld because it has not been possible to determine who runs it. So \$338,000 is frozen and withheld from the people who need that support until we work out how the federation is to continue. That is in addition to the funds it already has in its own account that are frozen. Recently one faction claiming to be in control of the federation entered the premises in Granville, had the locks changed and camped there overnight to occupy the office in defiance of the other faction. I have no idea who is right, who is wrong and who should be in control, but clearly it is not serving the interests of school communities for people involved in the federation to be carrying on in this manner.

While they are playing games school communities are not being supported. The chaos that is evident in the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales means that generous volunteers who support associations across the State are at risk of making mistakes through inexperience or a lack of expertise. These people should be benefiting from a government grant and they should be supported by staff of the federation, but none of that is being delivered. In some cases the good work that is carried out by parents and citizens associations may not be happening as local groups are uncertain about their capacity and what they can do. Worse still, there is no credible statewide voice for parents and citizens association groups. It is an embarrassing farce that means there is no input to the Board of Studies. The position on the Board of Studies that should be occupied by a representative of the federation is vacant.

In 2012 the Roden report identified a better model based on equal representation for regions and focusing on parents and caregivers at federation level. The bill proposed by the Government that will be debated later today puts in place the model recommended in the Roden report. I note that all parties in this House and virtually all stakeholders throughout the New South Wales school system agree with the action proposed by the Government—principals, teachers and everybody other than parents representatives whose voice is not being heard at this time. The model involves the creation of 16 electoral areas throughout the State comprising parents and citizens associations in each of those regions. These areas will be created with approximately equal representation of parents and citizens so there is a voice at the State level. One councillor and two delegates from each area will be elected to represent those districts. The office bearers of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales will be chosen from those 16 councillors and there will be elections every two years.

In the bill proposed by the Minister it is necessary for an administrator to be appointed until the new structures can be created and put in place. Once that is done there will be three years of supervision by the Minister to ensure that the new structures perform and deliver the desired outcomes. At the end of that three-year period a sunset clause in the bill will ensure that the Minister steps back and once again allows the organisation to be autonomous, as it should be. I will take a few moments to refer to a couple of parents and citizens associations in my electorate that, despite the chaos at State level, are doing extraordinarily good work. I refer to the associations at Hambledon Public School and Quakers Hill East Public School.

I have run out of time to mention all the good things that they are doing, but they have provided things such as air conditioners, literacy resources, sporting equipment, computers, printers, projectors, donations to supplement cultural and sporting events and interactive whiteboards. They have been responsible for the building of a covered outdoor learning area and playground facilities, as well as upgrades to lighting for their schools. I commend the motion to the House and will say more during the second reading debate on the bill. *[Time expired.]*

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) [3.45 p.m.]: The Opposition supports the Government on this motion. We will move an amendment when the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014 is debated. So that members know, we are having a debate before the debate. We said that we generally agree to this motion. I understand that things on the opposite side are a bit slow, but I am confused about why we are debating a priority motion when we have given permission for the bill to go through all its stages. I feel for staff members who are preparing multiple speeches for Government members. They will spend their time cutting and pasting speeches, but I assure everyone that the speech of the member for Granville will not be mistaken for the speech of the member for Baulkham Hills, and the speech of the member for Kiama will not get mixed up with anyone else's speech because I understand that they are all clearly labelled.

The functioning of parents and citizens associations is extremely important. During the second reading debate on the bill I will acknowledge that I have worked closely with the Minister and his staff, and in particular Clare Cotton. I thank my good friend the former Minister for Education and former shadow Minister for Education, Carmel Tebbutt, for her assistance, advice and involvement in this challenging process. I also

acknowledge the Hon. Adam Searle in the other place. This issue, which has gone on for too long, desperately needs to be sorted out. I wish it had already been sorted out. Members in this place, parents and the parents and citizens associations with whom I have discussed this issue think it should have been sorted out long before now. We are seeing a very proud institution go through a difficult period. I acknowledge all office bearers and stakeholders of parents and citizens associations for their genuine efforts, in particular, those who have continued to work hard while these issues have been going on in the background.

It is now time for the Parliament to step in and address this issue. I do not think any of us is particularly pleased to be debating this motion. Those who have relationships with parents and citizens associations at any level—and that should include all of us, but some of us have closer relationships than others—would be dismayed by what they have read about what has happened to these associations over the past few years. The Minister made it clear in answer to a question today that this issue is of grave concern to everyone with an interest in public education—and that should be everyone in this place. This issue needs to be addressed. It is of great importance not only to public schools but also to every person with an interest in quality education. Parents, citizens and community groups play strong roles as part of the fundamental pillars of delivering a good education in New South Wales.

We cannot have a system in which a parent advocacy group, which is meant to advocate for some of the most important stakeholders in the education system—the parents of our young people who attend schools—is obsessed with its own infighting. We must sort that out. The Opposition has already said that it will support the legislation that is to be debated today but that it will move an amendment. I hope that the Government has realised that Opposition members have approached this issue with a great sense of bipartisanship. We acknowledge that the Government has been open and we hope that this issue can be resolved as quickly as possible.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa) [3.50 p.m.]: I am pleased to support the motion moved by my colleague the hardworking member for Riverstone. As members have heard, the Minister for Education proposes to introduce a bill that hopefully will proceed through all stages of this House. Other members have already outlined the history of the current situation involving the executive of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. What is occurring must cease quickly because thousands of students and parents are not being appropriately supported by the federation.

The proposed bill will end the public and embarrassing leadership deadlock and enable the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations to become a functioning body with a workable structure that all students and parents deserve. It is important that the bill that will be introduced in this place proceeds through all its stages to avert the Supreme Court proceedings that are scheduled for next week. The new governance structure will make for a more accountable, more functional and more representative Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. Appropriately, only parents or carers with a child at a New South Wales public school will be able to serve in a reconstituted federation.

The proposed bill also will provide for a tenfold increase to \$20 million in public liability insurance that is available to local parents and citizens associations. The reformed Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations will return to its position as a credible, efficient and transparent voice that offers support to school communities and represents their interests, not personal political interests. I take this opportunity to speak about a number of local parents and citizens associations in my electorate and to highlight the outstanding work they are doing in local high schools despite the carryings on of their dysfunctional federation.

Shane Conlon, president of the St Clare High School Parents and Citizens Association, has two daughters who attended the school and as a business owner he has financially supported the school by offering an annual scholarship. He is a dedicated and sincere member of that school community. Cecil Hills High School Parents and Citizens Association president Mrs Sherryl Aplitt is consulting the school community to establish the best time and date for its meetings. Mark Geerin, president of Glenmore Park High School Parents and Citizens Association, continues to do outstanding work for his school community. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville) [3.53 p.m.]: The Government indicated that it will be introducing the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporated Amendment Bill 2014 at the conclusion of debate on this motion. I place on record my support for the important role that parents and citizens associations play in education in New South Wales. We all know that parents are the most critical influence in a child's education and that they are important partners in the education process. Therefore, we must ensure that we have

a strong body that can speak on behalf of parents in New South Wales. It is a sad day when the Minister has to intervene by introducing legislation to ensure that parents in New South Wales have a strong and effective voice.

I support the legislation and I support the motion moved by the member for Riverstone, which was necessary for a number of reasons—some of which I understand and some of which are beyond me. The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations has been unable to sort out its internal difficulties. The role of the federation in New South Wales is far too important to allow this to go on. All the local parents and citizens associations—parents sitting in cold school halls organising fundraisers, sitting on selection committees making sure that their schools run as effectively as possible in the interests of their children—deserve a body that is able to advocate effectively on their behalf.

There is no doubt that the Supreme Court is no place for the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. I do not cast aspersions on any of the individuals involved. As shadow Minister for Education I worked closely with Lyall Wilkinson and I have met him on many occasions. He seems to be to be a good and decent man. When I was Minister for Education I also worked closely with Sharryn Brownlee, president of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. Sharryn was a dedicated and articulate representative of parents with children in public schools. The reality is that this issue is far bigger than those individuals. For those reasons the Opposition will support the Government and the legislation that will be introduced by the Minister. As the shadow Minister indicated, some amendments will be moved. I have concerns about some aspects of the legislation; for example, I am anxious that community members who do not currently have children in public school do not play any role in the statewide federation. Having said that, we have to fix this issue quickly, which is why it is incumbent on us to act.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [3.56 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Keira, the member for Mulgoa and the member for Marrickville for their contributions to debate on the motion and for the broad support of all members for the bill to be introduced today. We must speak loudly and clearly in support of our children and our families. Community members strive hard to support education and to provide schoolchildren with the best opportunities in life. That is what the educational structure is supposed to provide and that is what we all want to see but, sadly, it is missing. A structure that was set up and that in many cases provided solid support over the years has gone awry, is failing in its role and sadly has ended up in this situation.

Today we must support practical and sensible measures to restore the trust of school communities across this State in the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations—a body that once again will provide practical, tangible, intelligent and articulate support for school communities and present any case that parents have to the Board of Studies, to the Minister and to the wider community so that they are given a voice and their case is heard and taken seriously. My motion, which calls on the House to support the Government's reforms in this area, will result in an efficient, transparent and accountable organisation that represents the interests of public school parents and communities. I believe all members are on the same page in supporting that goal. I thank Opposition members and those who contributed to debate on the motion for supporting an important goal that will ensure that children in this State are given the best start in life. I commend the motion to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

Pursuant to sessional order Government business proceeded with.

PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION AMENDMENT BILL 2014

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Adrian Piccoli, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Education) [4.00 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is proud of its commitment to public education and to the parents and carers and community members who do so much to support our schools. These people play a vital role through their time, efforts and

understanding of the needs of their local school. Nearly a century ago a number of local parents and citizens associations—P and Cs—from across New South Wales came together and formed a federation to provide service and advice to its affiliated members. The arrangement worked well for a long time. But in recent years the nature of the federation of parents and citizens associations, with its unwieldy governance model, has led to a situation where, despite all best intentions, the organisation has become paralysed.

The recent problems with the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations have been widely publicised in the media. My office and the Department of Education and Communities have received representations from more than 100 school parents and citizens associations, local members and members of the federation. Their concerns have been myriad, but the message has been the same—namely, while the people behind the federation may have the interest of schools, children and school communities at heart, the nature of the organisation and its structures needs modernisation to keep up with what is a very complex job. To put it bluntly, as an organisation the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations is not working. Something has to be done. And, to its great credit, the federation has, over the years, made attempts to fix its own problems.

In 2011 the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations commissioned, at its own expense, an audit of its activities and functions and, specifically, ongoing internal tensions. The federation's executive asked David Roden, a widely recognised expert in public affairs and governance, to examine the way the organisation was functioning and to make recommendations about its activities and functions and how it could improve. The final report, handed down in 2012, concluded that internal tensions had reached the point where the federation's structure required radical surgery if it were to remain viable. The report called for a number of reforms: a new organisational structure with clearer, more practical and modern allocation of roles and responsibilities; and a new legal framework to support the structural and organisational changes and to provide the federation and affiliated parents and citizens associations with enhanced accountability and governance and increased flexibility of operations. This legislation will take these steps.

Over the past several months various groups within the federation have, in an effort to reform the organisation, invested a considerable amount of time and money. But because of the existing constitutional limitations, they have hit a wall, with the Supreme Court being called upon to adjudicate on a very public dispute. Many hardworking parents are frustrated by an out-of-date structure and constitution not suited to representing their effective school parents and citizens associations. This legislation will create a new governance structure, where parents and carers are represented by their fellow parents and carers, where all parts of the State have a voice, where politics and personality disputes are left at the door, and where all school communities are supported. At the moment, of course, this is not happening.

The federation has closed its doors while competing claims are heard in the Supreme Court. In the meantime, service delivery to school parents and citizens associations has ceased. This litigation may be a symptom of the federation's issues, but because of the way the organisation is structured it will not be a cure. Crucially, with the passage of this legislation, nothing will change about the way individual school parents and citizens associations go about their day-to-day business or manage their affairs. They will continue to do the important work they do on behalf of school communities. Their activities will not change, their insurance coverage will continue and their individual governance structures will not change. Only the State body is being revitalised, not school parents and citizens associations.

I acknowledge the hardworking parents and citizens associations within my electorate, which play such a crucial role in their communities by organising, supporting and raising money to enhance their schools. At Temora High School, thanks to the tireless efforts of the school's parents and citizens association, almost \$30,000 was raised for a variety of projects, including contributing to a new Performing Arts Centre, which has become a mainstay of the school's dance, drama and exercise programs. At Wade High School in Griffith the parents and citizens association helped to raise \$130,000 for a new covered outdoor learning area, which has become a hub for school activities, assemblies and community ceremonies.

These are just a few examples of the many fantastic projects across all electorates that have been made possible by dedicated parents, carers and community members who volunteer their time and expertise on behalf of their schools. These are the people who will be served best by these reforms. So what will the new, reconstituted Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations look like? The legislation allows for the division of the State into 16 electoral areas to ensure that parents in Albury are represented equally as parents in Abbotsford are represented. In the coming months each school parents and citizens association will cast a vote for two delegates and one councillor for its electorate. These elections will be conducted by the NSW Electoral Commission, and the successful candidates will attend and vote at the new federation's annual general meeting.

The 16 councillors will also serve as members of the board, and internally they will select seven individuals—all parents or carers of children in New South Wales public schools—to serve as members of the executive committee as president, secretary or other office holder with responsibility for the day-to-day running of the federation. Crucially, only parents and carers with a child currently enrolled in a New South Wales public school will be permitted, under this legislation, to hold office in the reconstituted Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. Many prominent community members, including grandparents, local retirees and former teachers continue to play an active role in their local parents and citizens association once their children have left school. The participation and goodwill of these citizens at a grassroots level is vital, and they will be able to remain members of school parents and citizens associations. However, it is also important that those who represent the interests of parents and carers at a higher level are parents and carers themselves.

We anticipate that during term 4 of 2014 the elections will have been completed and the new executive team installed. All of this will take place under the supervision of an administrator, who will have responsibility for the federation—its seal, its assets and its staff—until such time as the new executive is elected. I will ask the administrator to consult with the Public Education Alliance, representing principals' groups, the Teachers Federation and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group to ensure that the proud history and traditions of the federation are not lost in the transition to the new executive. The legislation has a sunset clause of three years from its commencement. During this time the reformed and reconstituted Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations will return to operating as a fully independent, representative, and self-governing body working on behalf of the parents, carers and students of New South Wales public schools.

The department and I have consulted with the Teachers Federation, the Primary Principals Association, the Secondary Principals Council, the Public Schools Principals Forum and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group about these changes. There has also been consultation and discussions between me as Minister, the shadow Minister for Education, the former Minister for Education, the member for Marrickville, and Dr John Kaye of The Greens about the difficulties of the federation over the past few years. I appreciate the feedback that has been given to me as part of that consultation. Everybody has a unified interest in ensuring that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations continues its proud tradition over the past 100 years or so of representing parents and carers of children at public schools. We need their advocacy role.

In the three years that I have been the Minister for Education we have undertaken substantial reform. We need the voice of parents in that reform, not only as a constructive partner providing us with advice but also to provide necessary criticism of what the Government or the Minister is doing or not doing. An important part of a robust democracy is ensuring that we have opposing voices. That is why parents play an important role. We all have an interest in ensuring that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations at a State level is a well-functioning and representative organisation of the interests of parents and their children who attend public schools. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) [4.10 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014. As outlined in the motion to be accorded priority debated earlier and in discussions I have had with the Minister and his staff, the Opposition will support the bill. I foreshadow that I will move amendments to the bill. I particularly acknowledge Claire Coulton from the Minister's office. Having been a staff member in a previous life I know the challenges and difficulties of that position, particularly when faced with dealing with those opposite. She has performed very well and I think it is important to acknowledge such people in this place.

Mr Gareth Ward: Hear, hear! That is uncharacteristically generous.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Kiama will come to order.

Mr RYAN PARK: I also acknowledge my colleagues the Hon. Adam Searle in the Legislative Council, who has a legal background and has been working on this issue for some time, and also the member for Marrickville, a former Minister for Education and Training and now shadow Minister for Education. We are all disappointed that this issue is being debated on the floor of this House. I, and everyone involved in the Federation of the Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, wish this matter had been sorted out some time ago. It is frustrating that it has taken so long to sort out. I am concerned that as at lunchtime today the two warring, for want of a better word, parties were not given a proper briefing from the Government about this bill. I also acknowledge that we are in uncharted waters and in a very difficult situation.

This legislation aims to streamline the parents and citizens federation and, I make it clear from the outset, will not impact on parents and citizens associations at a school-based level. This legislation is designed

to deal with the way in which that very important parents and citizens federation, a peak body, has not been able to operate for some time. Tonight the Federal budget will reveal whether important funding that was committed by both sides of politics in the lead-up to the last Federal election will be delivered for schools in New South Wales. I think all members of this Chamber will be watching very closely. If that funding is not forthcoming we would all support a very strong and robust parents and citizens federation arguing the important role that the Gonski reform will deliver for our children.

I come from a family that has the parents and citizens association in our veins. My father was president of the parents and citizens association throughout my time in primary school and in high school. He is a life member of the parents and citizens association, something my family is very proud of, and that is why I debate this legislation with a very heavy heart. We really should not have to debate legislation to restructure an organisation that has delivered substantial reform and has been a very proud institution for New South Wales public education for many years. My colleague the member for Auburn and I talked about that earlier. I am sure that as a former Minister, and a person who has been in this place for some time, the member for Auburn would agree that when Labor was in government that organisation delivered frank and fearless advice, and advocated passionately on behalf of parents.

We all want a parents and citizens federation that is all about children, that supports parents who support children. We do not want a parents and citizens federation that is obsessed with its internal machinations. We want the men and women involved in the federation to get on with the job of advocating on behalf of their schools, children and communities for a strong, robust and well-resourced public education system in New South Wales, something that members on this side of the House feel very strongly about. I have spent a considerable amount of time reviewing this legislation. I have deliberately taken a great deal of time to meet with stakeholders and parties on all sides of this debate. During the past five months and as the shadow Minister for Education I have met with multiple groups associated with the issues faced by the New South Wales parents and citizens federation on multiple occasions.

I would like to think those involved feel that I have an open-door policy, and that they can talk to me about these issues. Whilst I do not take sides, I have said to all of them that we must resolve this matter. The parents and citizens federation was planning on holding a conference in two months to attempt—for the final time—I suspect, to sort out this issue: It would have been nice if that had occurred. However, I understand and acknowledge the comments of the Minister for Education and the challenges he faced in trying to get an assurance that internal reform was occurring. Comments have been made to me on multiple occasions that the parents and citizens federation stretched out its arm to seek assistance, and that perhaps assistance and support from the Government could have been more forthcoming.

The Minister or other speakers may provide me with some clarity on the following issues. I understand that the bill allows for an increase in public liability insurance to \$20 million, which is good given today's litigious society and the types of issues the parents and citizens are dealing with. Will that lead to additional cost at a parents and citizens local level? We all know that generally they are not flush with cash. I certainly do not want an additional administrative burden placed on local parents and citizens, who are raising funds by selling sausage sandwiches, and holding lamington and pie drives, and fetes for the children in their school. The Minister spoke about his electorate. All members have similar stories about various parents and citizens groups in their electorates. Yesterday I visited the great Keira High School that shares its name with the great Keira electorate. I talked about funding for that school to improve a shaded, covered area.

In addition, I am concerned about the implementation of an administrator. Whilst I understand completely the need for an administrator to be appointed for a time, my foreshadowed amendments deal very much with clarity about the time an administrator will spend in the organisation. We are leading up to a very important election in 2015. Tonight will deliver, or otherwise, a promise made by the Abbott Government on one of the largest reforms to be introduced into schools in New South Wales, perhaps throughout Australia, through the Gonski reform. Tonight we will see whether the commitment to a unity ticket is accurate.

Mr Gareth Ward: It is in New South Wales: the first State to sign up.

Mr RYAN PARK: Tonight the community will see whether the unity ticket is a unity ticket or one to get through a campaign. Tonight, with the Federal budget to be announced in a matter of hours, we will see how fair dinkum the Liberal-Nationals Federal Government is on this reform. Tonight we will see whether New South Wales school students will benefit from any money. What we want in the lead-up to the 2015 election is not a Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations run by an administrator but a federation that is back on its

feet as soon as possible. I understand it takes time but I will move amendments to introduce a 90-day period to allow for the administrator to be put in place. In addition, the foreshadowed amendments will give the Minister a 30-day extension, allowing a total of 120 days for the administrator to be in place.

Every member, whether he or she sits on the Opposition benches, the crossbenches or the Government benches, would agree that the federation should be operational as soon as possible. For once I do not make the accusation that the Government is trying to muzzle the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. However, we must be careful to avoid the perception that a strong and robust advocacy group does not have the capacity to advocate strongly, loudly and without fear or favour in the lead-up to an election that will be very much focused on education. After tonight, regardless of who signed up to what, we will know whether the commitments made by Mr Pyne and Mr Abbott in the lead-up to the last Federal election—

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: Point of order: We have been flexible in allowing some comments, but the member for Keira continues to make comments about Commonwealth matters and about the Federal budget. I ask that you bring him back to the leave of the bill.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The title of the bill is the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014. I ask the member for Keira to return to the leave of the bill.

Mr RYAN PARK: I will return to the leave of the bill, but given the role that the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations has played in supporting the reform that will be announced, passed or otherwise tonight and that the Minister has stated today that he wants the federation to be a strong advocacy group, it is reasonable we acknowledge that we cannot have a federation that is hamstrung and does not have the ability to advocate for issues such as those to be announced this evening.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! That is not incorporated in the overview of the bill.

Mr RYAN PARK: I draw your attention to the Minister's second reading speech. I state, however, that the Opposition will support the bill but will move amendments to it. Unusually we have agreed—and I appreciate shadow Cabinet's agreement—to allow the bill to pass through all stages quickly. We normally do not like to see this happen, given that we are strong believers in people having appropriate time to review legislation. However, we acknowledge in good faith and on the advice given by the Minister, his office and the department, and in consultation elsewhere, that this situation cannot continue. We all hope for a strong and robust Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. We hope that the federation can return to the days of being frank and fearless advocates for teachers, students and the communities the federation represented. We hope—and we will monitor this—that this bill can achieve that. We certainly hope that we are not debating this type of legislation in the future but debating legislation that reflects the great advocacy and role that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations has played, and hopefully will continue to play.

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.25 p.m.]: For four decades from 1378 the Roman Catholic Church was in turmoil. It was the time of what was variously called the Western Schism, the Papal Schism or the Great Schism. Two Popes and two Papal curias existed simultaneously for those four decades in Rome and Avignon. Here in New South Wales our public education has had its own version of that schism. Two people now purport to be the president of the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations and the two of them are planning two separate 2014 annual conferences. The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations has descended into ongoing and destructive dysfunction.

Long-term internal conflict within the federation has affected the ability of the federation to support school parents and citizens associations. In August 2011 the then president and office-bearers commissioned David Roden to conduct a review of those internal tensions. Although the 2012 Roden report provided the federation with a blueprint for positive change, the organisation has not been able to act on recommended reforms or to end its internal dysfunction. Since 2013 the Minister for Education and the department have been asked to respond to more than 100 representations from school parents and citizens associations, local members and federation members.

Those representations have asked for a timely intervention to break the current deadlock that has led to the federation shutting its doors, ceasing service delivery to affiliates while the Supreme Court considers contesting claims for leadership. Because of this dysfunction and complaints about poor service and infighting

from parents and citizens affiliates the Minister withdrew the annual \$358,800 grant in aid funding to the federation and in November 2013 referred the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Unfortunately, the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Act 1976 does not give the Minister the power to intervene or to change the organisation's unwieldy governance structure. The Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014 will amend the Act to reform the governance structure of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales and provide a new constitution, thereby ending the current public leadership deadlock and ensuring that the organisation returns to a representative body that delivers what parents need. The new governance structure will make for a more accountable, functional and representative Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. That new governance model has the support of primary and secondary school principal groups and the Teachers Federation.

Under the new constitution the State will be divided into 16 electorates. Each of those electorates will, via an election supervised by the New South Wales Electoral Commission, send one councillor and two delegates to represent their area at the annual general meeting. Elections will occur every two years from that point on. The 16 councillors will choose from within their number a seven-member executive from which the president, the secretary and other office-bearers will be selected. Only parents or carers with a child in a New South Wales public school will be able to serve in this reconstituted federation. A parent or carer of a student currently enrolled in a school in the electorate and who is a member of the parents and citizens association at that school will be eligible to participate in the election and be able to nominate to be a delegate or councillor. Citizen members, of course, have an active interest in a government school and can be members of a school parents and citizens association. That can continue, but they will not be able to nominate or vote for delegates or councillors.

However their ongoing commitment to their local school community will be acknowledged and recognised by ongoing participation in school parents and citizens associations. Upon enactment of this bill an administrator will be appointed to take stewardship of the federation's assets and staff until elections are completed and finalised. It is expected that the administrator will be in place until late 2014. That will be when the federation has elected a board of management and an executive committee. The bill includes a tenfold increase to \$20 million in public liability insurance for local parents and citizens associations. These changes introduced by the bill will not affect the operation of skilled parents and citizens associations. They will continue business as usual, though they will be asked to participate in the election of a new statewide governing body. The Minister withdrew \$380,000 of funding because of the dysfunction of the organisation. That funding will be reinstated when the organisation returns to being a well-functioning representative body that supports school parents and citizens associations.

The bill will enable the Minister to oversight the establishment of the new federation. He will withdraw his involvement after a three-year period, once the federation has returned to being a well-functioning representative body. Once established, the new body will be self-governing and independent. As I stated previously, the federation is beset by dysfunction and discord, and has ceased to provide any services to the constituent bodies. The reformed parents and citizens federation will return to its position as a credible, efficient and transparent voice offering advice, advocacy and support to school communities and representing their interests to the Department of Education and Communities. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [4.31 p.m.]: I will make a brief contribution to debate on the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014. I join with my colleagues in supporting this bill. The Opposition has been demanding that something be done about the parents and citizens associations for quite a while. Finally, the Liberal Party and The Nationals have decided to do something about the parents and citizens associations. The aim of this bill is to amend the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Act 1976 to ensure that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales continues to exist; to establish proper governance procedures for the board of management and executive committee; to set up new procedures for the election of councillors and delegates to the federation; and to allow for the appointment of an administrator until the new elections for councillors and delegates.

For years the federation has been plagued by reports of bullying, nepotism, mismanagement and factional infighting. The bitter power struggle has now made its way to the Supreme Court. This dysfunctional state of affairs has gone on for too long and is bad for parents, children and the public school system. Our public school parents and children deserve better. While the federation is focused on its own internal political battles, parents and children were left without a united voice against the State Coalition Government's savage cuts to the

public education budget and its dismantling of the English as a Second Language program. Late last year there were widespread complaints from local parents and citizens associations about a lack of service from the federation.

The federation head office has been closed while the warring factions are fighting each other in the Supreme Court. This week the federation was dissolved. Now I think of it, the federation's continuing dysfunction was a boon for this Government. There was one less group to cry out against its attacks on public education. That is another reason to support creating a stronger more representative parents and citizens federation. This long-awaited bill will be a good step towards that goal. While encouraging everyone to be members of the local parents and citizens associations, this bill stipulates that only parents and guardians of current public school students can hold executive positions. Under this bill, to ensure fair and equal representation, the State will be divided into 16 areas.

Through transparent and open elections overseen by the Electoral Commission a new governing body will be elected. That body will then elect a seven-member executive committee that will be responsible for running the federation. The bill will also limit the number of people attending the federation's annual general meeting to 48 and increase the public liability insurance available to local parents and citizens associations to \$20 million. These are all welcome reforms to the federation that I fully support. However, I join my colleagues in voicing concern about the lack of community consultation and the ramming through of this bill in one or two days. On this side of the Chamber we feel strongly that it is appropriate to give the community time to look at the bill.

I know that some stakeholders have asked for time to digest the contents of this bill properly to consider whether the reforms go far enough. After years of sitting on its hands it is not right that this Coalition Government rams through this bill in one or two days with little or no community consultation. I share my colleagues' concerns that there is no time limit for the administrator's contract included in this bill. I recall that during question time the Minister stated he would have the new board in place by the fourth term of this school year. I hope he holds to his word because we need a strong voice to resolve this issue. I believe the Minister will keep his word.

For public school parents and students to get fair and proper representation it is imperative that the federation gets back on its feet as soon as possible, with properly elected representatives and executives at the helm. Public school parents and students have been left without a voice for long enough. To conclude, while the Opposition supports the bill it is not right that it be rammed through so quickly without the community having time to examine it properly. The Labor Opposition has been urging this Government to act for some time. There should be a time limit on the contract of the administrator to ensure that the reformed federation is up and running and representing public school parents and students as soon as possible.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [4.35 p.m.]: I will make a brief contribution in support of the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014. I acknowledge the support for this bill by the Opposition. As the previous speaker, the Minister and the shadow Minister have stated, these reforms are welcome. However, it is with a heavy heart the Parliament has to revisit this issue because of the inability of both of the warring parties to come to an amicable outcome in the interests of students in our schools.

This bill will provide benefits to the public education sector and the voice of parents groups right across the State. The amendments will go a long way to strengthening our local public schools. They will reform the body that represents parents and citizens associations and ensure that the peak body becomes a functional representative organisation that works on behalf of the students and their schools and does not have its time taken up dealing with internal matters, removing the focus from students and schools, which is rightly where the focus of the peak body should be.

As we all know and have heard in this debate, parents and citizens associations across the State, and their volunteers in all electorates, dedicate hours of their time each week for the benefit of schools and students. They raise money at various events for resources to support students, who may not otherwise be able to afford it, to represent their school and region at statewide sporting carnivals. These volunteers raise funds that allow a school group to go on an excursion to a metropolitan area, Canberra or other sites in this wonderful State and beyond. I pay tribute to three parents and citizens associations in the electorate of Northern Tablelands. In my 11 months as a member of Parliament I have had the pleasure to work with a number of parents and citizens associations across the electorate on a number of important issues.

I acknowledge Ashford Central School Parents and Citizens Association, Bundarra Central School Parents and Citizens Association and Emmaville Central School Parents and Citizens Association. Together we lobbied the Minister hard to maintain the Ashford-Bundarra-Emmaville Distance Learning Program. I thank president Leza Luckett, treasurer Alison Mackay and secretary Sally Thompson of the Ashford Central School Parents and Citizens Association. They did a magnificent job of placing this issue on the agenda during the by-election campaign in April and May last year, and then working hard afterwards to ensure a good outcome. I thank Jill Turner from the Bundarra Central School Parents and Citizens Association and president Joanne Hill, treasurer Leanne Calthorpe and secretary Mary-Lou Doe from the Emmaville Central School Parents and Citizens Association for their efforts. All three parents and citizens associations play an important role in our schools and also in the general community conversation about the value of public education, fighting for more resources for our students, and ensuring that country students, in particular, get a much better deal. That is why I and my Nationals colleagues strongly support the Gonski education reforms.

The Kelly's Plains Parents and Citizens Association, under the leadership of Shane Pickett, organised the school's sesquicentenary celebrations last year and raised a large amount for this wonderful 33-student school. The association plays an integral role in the school community. The Sandon Public School Parents' and Citizens' Association is led by Courtney Ryan, who is assisted by Rebecca Bainivalu, Grant Clark and Nathalie Van der Veer. They do a magnificent job and have held a number of trivia nights and fetes over the past 11 months to raise money for their school, which caters for children in the Armidale community with disabilities. The association plays an important role in giving those students access to the resources and facilities that are enjoyed by other students.

I had the great pleasure of opening the Armidale City Public School fete on Saturday. I congratulate Leanne Cooper, Katrina Llewellyn, Angela Girard and other members of the parents and citizens association committee who organised the fete. Last year's fete raised well over \$18,000. The figures are still being collated for Saturday's fete, but I am sure it was just as successful. I welcome the school's new principal, Matt Hobbs. He coached me in cricket and soccer when he was teaching at Curlewis Public School and I was at Gunnedah South Public School. Given my career in soccer and cricket, I am glad that he is principal of Armidale City Public School and not coach of the Australian cricket team. He is a great bloke and I am sure he will do a great job.

I also acknowledge the people who have genuinely performed roles as officeholders in the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales. The electorate of Northern Tablelands is home to a well-known officeholder, Rachael Sowden, who is the federation's Uralla-based publicity officer. Since my election I have enjoyed many conversations with her about issues pertinent to the State body and public education. Those conversations have allowed me to get her perspective and we have been able to work together on a number of projects. I acknowledge the genuine efforts she has made throughout this process to bring about a positive outcome for students. Both Rachael and I regret that to date that has not been achieved. Nevertheless, I am sure she will continue her involvement with the local parents and citizens association, and I hope that after the passage of this legislation she will continue her involvement in the peak body. I have benefited from hearing her views on many issues affecting our schools.

The detail of the bill has been addressed by many members, and I am sure others will reiterate their comments. I am keen to see the passage of this legislation, which will bring this sorry situation for the peak body to a close. We should have one peak body with one president and a united executive that can truly focus on students and public education. It is vital that we have strong voices and strong organisations lobbying governments of all persuasions and local members of Parliament. We need the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales to be strong and to provide pastoral care, advice and insurance cover, and also assistance to its affiliate members at the local level. I reiterate that nothing in this bill affects the operations of local school parents and citizens associations. They will continue to operate as they always have, and people need not be concerned. I applaud all parents and citizens who are involved in their local associations. It is great to see people supporting their local schools, and it is particularly great to see them supporting public education. There is no better education system in this State.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda) [4.43 p.m.]: I do not think any member underestimates the important role that parents and citizens associations play in our communities and schools. It is not uncommon—in fact, it is almost a weekly occurrence—for members to receive a letter from a local parents and citizens association about a school funding issue, school parking and so on. As the member for Northern Tablelands said, parents and citizens associations have an important role to play in guiding the management and care of our public schools. During my relatively brief break from Parliament, I had the privilege of being elected as president of the Kareela Public School Parents and Citizens Association. It was a particular honour because both of my children attended the school and my two granddaughters, Taylah and Lucia, attend it now.

I could not have had a more committed and dedicated executive working in the interests of the school and supporting me and the community. They include vice-presidents Wendy Fradd and Dani Anderson; secretary Valda Taylor, who succeeded me as president; and treasurer Chris Easton. We had a new and innovative principal in Mr David O'Connell. All were committed to working together in the best interests of the school. The association was involved in more than simply raising funds; it also examined the curriculum and the syllabus. We had people working in the canteen and in the uniform shop. We organised the biggest fete the school had ever held and raised enough money to improve the sound system in the hall. We also successfully applied for grants to purchase soft fall for the play equipment and an oven for the canteen. I pay tribute to the executive, the other members of the Kareela Public School Parents and Citizens Association, and members of parents and citizens associations across the State.

This bill will not affect the operation of local parents and citizens associations. That said, it is important that we have a peak body representing associations throughout the State that is responsible and which acts in the best interests of its members. Sadly, the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales has been engaged in a long-running conflict. It is a disgrace that that conflict has found the federation in the Supreme Court. People are putting their personal interests before the interests of the parents and citizens associations and their members. In 2011 David Roden conducted a review of the federation and outlined a way forward. However, it has become apparent that the organisation cannot reform itself effectively and unfortunately government intervention is now required.

Last year the Minister withdrew annual funding of \$358,000 as a result of the widespread complaints from local school parents and citizens associations about the lack of service from the federation. The federation's constitution is out of date, as are many of its procedures. It has shut its doors while the legal action is underway and while the presidency is determined. Members of an alternative group allegedly broke into the federation's premises. What a shame that is for hardworking school communities. The bill amends the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Act 1976 to continue the existence of the federation, to establish new procedures for the board of management, to establish new procedures for the election of councillors and delegates, and to provide for the appointment of an administrator of the federation in the lead-up to new elections for the first councillors and delegates.

It is hoped that the reformed federation will be a credible voice and an efficient, transparent and accountable organisation representing the interests of public school parents and their communities. The federation and its staff will be under the control of a capable administrator until elections are held. The new executive will be installed by the end of 2014. While I support the legislation, the Opposition has proposed an amendment. The new governance model has the support of primary and secondary school principals groups and the NSW Teachers Federation. It is extremely important that those groups have been consulted.

The annual general meeting will be open to the 48 parent representatives of geographical areas of the State. Community members will be encouraged to play an active role in parents and citizens groups but only parents and guardians of New South Wales public school students can contest executive positions on the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales. It is hoped that this will result in a more transparent organisation. In that respect, the Australian Electoral Commission will supervise the elections. The changes are supported by the Opposition, subject to an amendment. I am pleased to see this bill before the House, and I commend it to the House.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [4.50 p.m.]: The Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014 will reform the governance structure of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales to provide for a new constitution. The new governance structure will enable the federation to be more functional and representative. I note the presence in the gallery this afternoon of a group of people who are very interested in accountability and governance. The group is from the State Audit Office of Vietnam, and they are accompanied by the Consul General of Vietnam and representatives of the New South Wales Public Accounts Committee, who are hosting them.

[Business interrupted.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! I interrupt the member for Davidson to welcome the Consul General of Vietnam and delegation to the oldest Parliament in Australia. The Parliament is well conducted and well run, as the member for Davidson is demonstrating.

PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION AMENDMENT BILL 2014**Second Reading**

[*Business resumed.*]

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: It is particularly well run by the Assistant Speaker. The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales has become a dysfunctional organisation. The bill will end the current public leadership deadlock and allow the federation to have a more functional and workable structure that enables it to represent the almost 2,000 parents and citizens associations across New South Wales. We have heard from some people involved in those associations. All of us with children have relied on the associations in various ways, and I continue to do so. I particularly value the role of association volunteers. We want associations to operate effectively and to be supported by an umbrella organisation that not only plays a valuable advocacy function in lobbying and commenting on policy issues but also plays a role in providing valuable services to various associations operating within New South Wales.

The dysfunction that has been evident in recent years reached beyond the warring camps within the federation. There have been deficiencies in management, constitutional issues and provision of services. In that vacuum various organisations emerged. The Voluntary Parents Services Cooperative, for example, is in the process of trying to source and arrange some of the valuable grassroots services that can be provided to parents and citizens associations. I would like the administrator to encourage or explore the possibility of cooperative groups providing more effective and efficient services to parents and citizens associations in New South Wales. We must recognise that elected representatives can perform a valuable advocacy role—I acknowledge that the shadow Minister talked about this role, although he went a little far in some regards. That advocacy role is the prime responsibility of an elected parents and citizens organisation.

This bill facilitates the election of a group of councillors and delegates to form a board of management. The advocacy role can be performed by that group, but that does not mean its members are business minded or have the skills and attributes needed to perform the service-provision function. I would like a clearer distinction or delineation between the advocacy and lobbying role and the role of service provision. Both roles are very important, but in the past the federation has not adequately engaged in service provision because, by all accounts, it did not have the necessary skills set or focus to do so. There may be further scope for the administrator to outsource that function to a cooperative or not-for-profit group operating outside the strict management function of the federation. This may cost nothing.

Mrs Barbara Perry: Outsourcing?

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: The word "outsourcing" can be misinterpreted and seen as privatisation—obviously red lights are flashing for Opposition members. But I am suggesting that the elected body and the representatives or management of that organisation in the past have proven dysfunctional in providing services, including sourcing insurance and providing out-of-hours care, discounted laptops and organisational advice. Those valuable functions were not supplied under the previous administrative arrangements. There should be a clearer distinction between advocacy and service provision. Services could be provided through a not-for-profit or cooperative type of arrangement—whether within the federation or outside it—and professional service delivery should be encouraged. That has not happened in the past.

Not all the deeper problems of the parents and citizens associations have been resolved. They cannot be resolved by this bill as there are other grassroots issues that parents and citizens associations continue to find frustrating. But there is no doubt that this reform is both welcome and necessary in light of what has happened in recent years. I commend the Minister for his leadership in bringing this bill to the House. Like other members, I want a vibrant and strong Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales either overseeing or directly providing advocacy and other services for parents and citizens associations to effectively deliver to our school communities the services that children and parents deserve.

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [4.58 p.m.]: On behalf of The Greens I speak in debate on the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014. I acknowledge the discussion on this bill that has identified issues concerning parents and citizens associations. The Greens support the bill. A strong and united voice for parents is essential, particularly as there appear to be dark days ahead for public education, with issues around Local Schools, Local Decisions, high-stakes National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy testing, and the ongoing fight to implement fully the Gonski reforms.

As members have indicated in this debate, we work with and are proud of our local parents and citizens associations. They are great fighters for public education and school communities. A question has been raised about whether this bill provides enough protection for the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales to maintain its independence from the Government and to allow the federation to criticise the Government. The Greens believe that, on balance, there is enough protection in the bill. The bill reforms the governance structure of the federation to allow for a new constitution. It divides the State into 16 electorates. Each will have a delegate, elected under the supervision of the New South Wales Electoral Commission, to an annual general meeting from which a seven-member executive will be selected.

The appointment of the administrator has exercised the minds of some members. The administrator will take stewardship of the federation's assets and staff until the elections are complete, which I understand is expected to be around the end of this year. It is clear that the infighting in the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations has been quite destructive and has gone on for too long. There is a power struggle within the organisation. We have seen that happen with various organisations and community groups in our electorates but I think it is pretty clear that the issue within the federation has reached the point where there is significant community concern.

I visit the parents and citizens associations in my electorate regularly and I am always asked the same question: What is going on with the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations? I tell them that issues are being worked through and that there are ongoing discussions, but now the matter is before the court it has generated even more concern as two groups are claiming to lead the federation. A question has been raised as to whether the Minister has done enough. I think it is clear that the Minister has done the best he can with the powers he has without resorting to appointing an administrator under this legislation. An independent reviewer examined the problems and the Minister made it pretty clear that if they were not sorted out the federation's funding would be withdrawn—and, as we know, that funding was withdrawn.

The matter was referred to the Independent Commission Against Corruption but there is still no end in sight to the power struggle. It is clear that the Government believes it had legitimate grounds to take these steps. As I have mentioned, parents and citizens associations deserve support and guidance from their State body but currently that is not happening in an optimal way. Most of the parents and citizens associations in my electorate are quite independent. They raise significant amounts of money, they have very good structures and strong participation and they probably do not need the sort of ongoing support that many other parents and citizens associations would gratefully accept. I understand an argument was raised that more time was needed to have these matters sorted out without resorting to legislation, such as a new constitution, online conferencing and so on.

In some situations that view would be supported, but the Government has brought forward this legislation and we have to make a decision about it. While it would be preferable to have more time to resolve the matter, we will support the Government's action. Too much time has elapsed and time has run out to fix the issues. If the new constitution had not been consulted on widely with local parents and citizens associations it might have failed and many other issues could have arisen in the future. But the issue came to a head when another group claiming to be the real Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations entered its building in the night and tried to change the locks. It is Liberal Party black ops stuff.

Mr Guy Zangari: Not the National party.

Mr JAMIE PARKER: Not the National party.

Mr Guy Zangari: Rule number one: There are no black ops.

Mr JAMIE PARKER: And rule number two?

Mr Guy Zangari: Rule number two: There are no black ops.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! I remind the member for Fairfield that he is on three calls to order. If he continues to interject he will be removed from the Chamber.

Mr JAMIE PARKER: I fear that I may have been inciting the member for Fairfield. The Supreme Court is currently hearing the case to decide which is the real body overseeing parents and citizens associations and the federation has shut its doors and ceased operating while that is happening. The situation is completely

unsatisfactory. It appears to me that there are clear and decisive reasons that the Government has acted. I trust that the process for the election of new members to the newly constituted Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations will liberate the parents and citizens associations from this turmoil and allow the true representatives to put forward their case and have it supported. There has also been criticism of the Minister, which is often well founded in relation to other issues. The Opposition's amendment seeks to put a cap on the length of time for which the administrator is appointed.

The Opposition does not trust the Minister. It is clear that by foreshadowing this amendment the Opposition is concerned that the Minister may not withdraw the administrator and may let the federation go out of business. That concern does not hold too much weight with me. If the Minister wanted to control the federation he would let it continue as normal, because currently the doors are closed and no-one is home. If the Minister were serious about wanting the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations silenced he would let it cannibalise itself for the next 12 months, two years or five years while it wastes an enormous amount of money going through the courts. There are 2,000 parents and citizens associations in this State and it is important to ensure that those associations have adequate time to be notified, for elections to be called and so on. I am prepared to give the Minister the benefit of the doubt and say that he is working with goodwill.

The Greens believe there should be strong oversight not only by the Opposition but by all of us in this place to ensure that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations works effectively. If we take the Minister's comments at face value we can see that they are pretty strongly in support of vibrant and vigorous parents and citizens associations, and we can be confident that this will be a good process. The current situation is not optimal, and I believe we all agree that is a major problem. We must remain vigilant and ensure that the Minister is doing the right thing—we know there are a few problems in relation to TAFE and we must make sure the Minister is on top of that issue as well as other matters raised previously in the House.

I conclude by saying, as all speakers have, that parents and citizens associations are amazing organisations. I feel very proud when I visit the schools in my electorate and speak to the parents and citizens associations. They raise fantastic amounts of money—some of them regularly raise more than \$100,000 a year—through sheer hard work and through small donations that are made as a result of engaging the whole community. Thousands of people go to fetes and events such as art auctions that are arranged by parents and citizens associations. Mums, dads and carers make a huge contribution to their school communities. Whether they raise \$5 or \$50,000, they are all committed to public education and we should be proud of their contribution.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [5.07 p.m.]: I speak in debate on the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014, which amends the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Act 1976. Not that long ago an Act established the parents and citizens associations that we all value in our local communities. The shadow Minister, the member for Keira, outlined the role of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. It is necessary to acknowledge the important history of the federation in this State. One important issue, from the point of view of parents and of school communities, is the federation's historical empowerment of local parents and citizens associations. Those associations are effective because of the guidance that they receive from their peak body. For example, the healthy canteens campaign was introduced in schools across the State.

It is unfortunate that we are in this position today. Today is a sad day for members of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, whether they are delegates from local parents and citizens associations in my community, people who are currently on the executive or people who are in dispute with the executive. Despite the issues raised in the debate, they are distressed that this has happened. But perhaps this will lift the burden from them because they know that at the end of the day something will be put in place to ensure the continuity of the federation's work. I will make a couple of points. First, it is important for the Government to consider imposing a time limit on the administrator. That is not about trust. It is quite the opposite to what the member for Balmain said; it is about ensuring that democracy happens, to which the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations and local associations are entitled. That is what the issue and the amendment are about.

The parents and citizens conference is listed for July, but we now know that it probably will not happen. However, nothing should stop democracy happening before the end of this year. The Minister said that the administrator should be a short-term appointment. I hope that is the case because democracy should flourish. The federation is an independent organisation and it should continue to be so. It is important for the advocacy and educational work of the federation to continue, and to continue quickly. I hope the administrator will sort that out by virtue of conducting the appropriate elections sooner rather than later. I hope the Minister's guidelines, which no doubt will be published in the gazette, will include the terms that will expedite such elections, and that the administrator will do everything in his or her power to expedite the elections. That might suffice but it also gives a clear indication to the administrator of his or her duties.

The member for Davidson talked about outsourcing; he rightly said that the word is bandied about. When he clarified his comments it became clear that he meant that the future advocacy role of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations and the other roles—the educative role and other roles that the federation plays—should be separated. He said it was unnecessary for one parents and citizens association to undertake both roles. My response is this: the role the federation plays in all its functions informs its advocacy. So in my view its business role informs its advocacy role. That is what makes the federation a good advocacy body. I am grateful for the parents and citizens associations in my local community. I particularly mention the Auburn Public School Parents and Citizens Association.

The vice-president of that association is a lady whose children have not been at the school for many years. The principal of Auburn Public School and the school parents and citizens association are so concerned about many local issues that they have been advocates in our local community on those issues. The Regents Park Public School Parents and Citizens Association is fighting for a school fence. The Auburn North Public School Parents and Citizens Association was instrumental in ensuring that the school received a school fence. Berala school parents and citizens association is unrivalled in its fundraising. All these local parents and citizens associations are amazing. They show the incredible volunteer spirit that exists, and continues to exist, in our local communities, as evidenced by parents and citizens associations.

I support the amendment not because of a lack of trust. This is about ensuring that the Minister portrays to local parents and citizens associations that this is an exercise about not only sorting out the issues but also returning democracy to the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. This is not about local parents and citizens associations; it is about their peak body. However, they have great input in the federation and they have the ability to make the decision themselves sooner rather than later.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [5.16 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak in debate on the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014 and thank the Minister for introducing the bill. In early 2012 I first wrote to the Minister about concerns from a constituent in my electorate regarding the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, the peak State body. I am fortunate to have Mrs Mary Lawson as a constituent because she has served on the peak body for more than a decade. Indeed, she has served on parents and citizens committees at the local school level, the district level and the State level for more than 35 years. Mrs Lawson came to see me because she had some serious and significant concerns about the disturbances and disruptions at the State peak body. Unfortunately, all her concerns have come to fruition, and the federation has not managed to wrestle out of that.

At a recent meeting members of the federation—the validity of the vote and motion passed at that meeting is being contested in the Supreme Court at present—sought to get the ship back on course. I fully support and endorse the position of the Labor Party and our shadow Minister on this issue. As I have such an outstanding and long-term member of the local parents and citizens association in my community, I want to add some flavours to the legislation and fatten the fabric of exactly what we are talking about today. Importantly, I start with one issue of concern to me; it does not reflect the position of the Labor Party. After the passing of this bill it will no longer be the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. The name will remain the same but citizens will no longer be able to participate on the peak State body; only parents can participate. I hark back to the example of Mrs Lawson in my electorate who has been there for some time, and I think about the members in this Chamber in that regard.

Indeed, I think about the Assistant-Speaker, the member for Coffs Harbour, and the new member for Northern Tablelands, who was given guidance and instruction by the Assistant-Speaker. At some stage the Assistant-Speaker may wander off to a greener pasture and hand over the reins to the young fellow. On our side of the Chamber we have the father of the House, the member for Mount Druitt. Whenever he speaks or takes a point of order the reverence that he is shown in the Chamber is wonderful. We all look to him for guidance. On a serious note, sometimes there is capacity to have wisdom and knowledge, including corporate knowledge, in the room while we are making decisions. To that end, I roll into that conversation the concept of the life stages that we go through.

For example, I think about my family situation and that of many families where one parent is working or both parents are working, potentially if one is still lucky enough to have both parents at home. The federation played a significant role in the implementation of that policy in New South Wales schools. I acknowledge the work that historically was undertaken. Parents are time poor and it is difficult for them to make contributions to their local parents and citizens associations. Mrs Lawson could not make a contribution at the Hunter and State level until her children were old enough to be in high school. I am concerned that this

legislation will restrict her from participating in parents and citizens associations at the highest level. In future parents and citizens associations in New South Wales might be able to hold on to such corporate knowledge.

I am aware from conversations I have had that the State body includes about 2,000 registered parents and citizens associations. As the Minister pointed out, each group is entitled to send three delegates to the State conference, so in theory there could be 6,000 participants. I am informed that at the most recent annual general meeting there might have been close to 100 or 200 people in attendance. Six of the 10 delegates on the current Hunter council no longer have children at school, so only three delegates would be sent to the conference. By default three of the four delegates who have children at the school would have to attend the conference. Which parents will put up their hands to participate at that conference? All four delegates who have children at school will have to attend the conference. I certainly hope that does not discourage them from participating.

Currently as many as 75 per cent of delegates on the peak State body no longer have students at school but they continue to serve as councillors in their communities. I strongly refute the suggestion that they attend the conference to benefit from a free lunch. Mrs Lawson visits all the parents and citizens associations in my area, puts out small grassfires, gives guidance and leadership and is very active. On those occasions that she comes to the city for work she does not claim for meals because she believes she has to eat somewhere anyway and the federation does not have to reimburse her. I understand that members of the council and the executive have continued to come to Sydney to hold meetings during this period of uncertainty. They have not had access to grant-in-aid funding to be reimbursed for their travel, accommodation and meals but because of their dedication to the parents and citizens movement they have continued to meet.

I am not casting aspersions as I understand why the Minister is withholding grant-in-aid funding at this time. I want only to indicate that those in the parents and citizens movement pay their own expenses. New part 3A deals with the cost of future elections that are to be borne by the federation. It is possible that the Electoral Commission also will be involved in the election process. Money is tight but we know that \$358,000 in grant-in-aid funding is available to be used by the federation. Will the federation's budget be increased to meet the cost of conducting those elections? Earlier the shadow Minister flagged a potential increase in insurance costs which rightly will be increased from \$2 million to \$20 million. It will fall to the federation to find that money either from its existing budget or from grant-in-aid funding, or will it need to be allocated additional funding?

I would hate money that is allocated for cricket pitches, tennis courts, textbooks, pencils, textas and laptops for schools to be used to pay for an election process simply because that is provided for in this bill. I welcome the bill and hope that the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations is back on its feet by term four as the Minister said, although the bill provides for as long as 12 months. I join the shadow Minister in stating that I hope it is on its feet within 90 days as it would be fantastic to hand over to parents a body that represents all the students in our great State.

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [5.25 p.m.]: The object of the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014 is to amend the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Act 1976 to establish new procedures for the board of management and executive committee; establish new procedures for the election of councillors and delegates to the federation; provide for the appointment of an administrator of the federation in the lead-up to new elections for the first councillors and delegates of the federation; and ensure the existence of the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. As all members are aware, the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations is engaged in a long-term internal conflict between two separate groups with no immediate resolution in sight.

Members of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations have expressed concern about the fact that this issue has gone on for too long. Stakeholders have requested that this legislation be delayed until their conference in July but the Minister's office is not prepared to wait until that consultation is completed. Although this Government is keen to ram this legislation through the House today, the Opposition firmly believes that consultation with key stakeholders is necessary to ensure that the legislation meets their needs and responds to any concerns that are raised. Although this legislation aims to appoint an administrator, no time frame has been given to indicate how long he or she will act in that role.

Parents and citizens are fearful that the administrator will subsequently take control and muffle their voices when they attempt to speak out on key issues that they believe need addressing. Today in question time the Minister said that the administrator would act in that role until the fourth term. However, that message has

not been conveyed to key stakeholders. The changes in this legislation will ensure that all community members are encouraged to play an active role in their local parents and citizens groups. Additionally, only parents or guardians of current New South Wales public school students may contest executive positions. Through the proposed amendments the State will be divided into 16 electorates and each electorate will send one councillor and two delegates to represent that area at the annual general meeting. Additionally, attendance at the annual general meeting will be limited to only 48 individuals. The election will be supervised by the Electoral Commission to ensure that everything is handled correctly. Once elected those 16 councillors will subsequently elect a seven-person executive committee.

For years the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations has been plagued with infighting and mismanagement which resulted in inaction and people losing their faith in the body. I have had discussions with parents and citizens in the Fairfield electorate, including Mr Vic Melly, president of the Fairfield Public School Parents and Citizens Association, and Suzie Boyd, a representative from the parents and citizens peak body in the south-west region. We all agree that something needs to be done. It is not fair that representative bodies do not have a voice. They have no-one to speak to about their concerns and their issues fall on deaf ears.

This issue should not have been allowed to drag on for so long; action should have been taken some time ago. Parents and citizens in my electorate have spoken to me about this issue. This Government waited until the middle of 2014 before it took action in relation to this issue and its solution is to ram legislation through both Houses without consulting with necessary stakeholders. Although I speak in support of the bill, I firmly believe that Government members should liaise with key stakeholders throughout this process and take on board their concerns. The Opposition firmly believes that community stakeholder consultation is paramount when implementing legislation that will have such an effect.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [5.30 p.m.]: The description of the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations by the Minister for Education on 12 March this year as an unacceptable rabble is one with which most of the wider community would agree. The Minister had no option but to act, although in this case it should have happened earlier. In the electorate of Macquarie Fields many of our most disadvantaged schools struggle to set up a functional parents and citizens association. They have struggled to do so for some years and they would have benefited enormously from the support of a functional Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. All members involved in this unseemly dispute need to be aware that they have failed these children and that they are as responsible as anyone else for the failure of the most disadvantaged schools to have a functional parents and citizens association.

These families need the support of this bill because in 2014 in New South Wales the future of every child will be predicated by the results of the year 3 National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]. A functional parents and citizens association is vital at the local school level to support the school and teachers in addressing this balance. Education is the great equaliser. At a State government level, a functional parents and citizens federation is pivotal in calling any government to account. This bill is being passed in one session with unseemly haste because the Minister has had to act before the annual general meeting even though the evidence for some time has been that this action needed to be taken before today. It would have been better if the legislation had been drafted earlier, with stakeholders and the Opposition having an opportunity to peruse it carefully for any loopholes so that the families of this State would have certainty that this issue was to be finalised once and for all.

I support the notion that the elected representatives must have children currently enrolled in a State government school. This is important to ensure that people in the peak body have the best possible knowledge about the current situation of public education in New South Wales. There is no-one better than a parent of a currently enrolled child, regardless of any professional qualification, to make this judgement. This may, however, mean that as children graduate from school there is a loss of corporate memory in the organisation. The Department of Education and Communities and the Minister must understand that so that ongoing support from the department is provided to new members to ensure that they are adequately orientated and briefed about their responsibilities in a very complex role.

Like all Opposition members I am concerned about the appointment of the administrator. If the amendments are not successful I am reassured by the Minister's speech that a new board will be in place by term 4 this year. I ask him to confirm this in his reply and to confirm that this will be the start of term 4 rather than some time during the term because the election is due before the end of term 1 of 2015 and a functional and outspoken parents and citizens federation is vital to politicians on all sides as the arbiter of what is best for our

children. I need the Minister to confirm that the newly elected parents and citizens board will be well and truly up and running by the start of term 4 in 2014. I commend the bill to the House and commend the Minister for acting, albeit a little late.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Education) [5.33 p.m.], in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to debate on the Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2014, in particular the members representing the electorates of Keira, Cronulla, Cabramatta, Northern Tablelands, Davidson, Miranda, Balmain, Auburn, Cessnock and Macquarie Fields. It is clear from the debate that members agree that action needed to be taken and that this bill will end the current public leadership deadlock and allow the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations to become a functioning body with a workable structure able to represent the almost 2,000 school parents and citizens associations across the State. The new governance structure will make for a more accountable, functional and representative Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations.

I will address briefly a couple of the issues that were raised. One matter related to the timing of the decision to introduce this legislation. I have been Minister for Education for three years and these problems have been around for longer than that. Not long after I became the Minister the Roden report was commissioned following suggestions to the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations that something needed to be done to fix the constitution and internal problems. David Roden completed his report and made recommendations. The federation, quite fairly, was given the opportunity to implement those recommendations, make changes and change the constitution through the normal processes. Attempts were made by some members to make those changes but because of internal problems the changes could not be brought into effect. I said then that the federation should make it very clear to its membership that if the changes were not made the grant-in-aid funding of almost \$400,000 would be frozen, which I thought would be sufficient encouragement to make those changes. I gave the federation the opportunity to fix its problems but it was unable to do so.

I acted on my threat to withhold the grant-in-aid funding that is normally given to the federation. For a long time the State Government has given grant-in-aid funding to parent associations representing parents of individual schools and parents of Catholic schools so this funding is not unique to the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. When it became clear that despite withholding the funding the necessary changes would not be made, and following other unacceptable conduct between members of the executive and others within the federation, I sought legal advice about my options as Minister to take necessary steps to change the constitution. Legal advice was put together but legal advice of that nature cannot be provided within a week. The legal advice given was that the best option was to introduce special legislation. Parliamentary Counsel was then given instructions to draft the legislation, which all takes time. That was completed a couple of weeks ago and it went through the normal Cabinet processes, and we now have the bill that has been introduced today.

It is important that the bill goes through all stages in both Houses this week because next week Supreme Court action will continue. Although this bill will not in any way affect that court action, I hope the protagonists in that action will get the message that it is time to put away the gloves and for everyone to take a cold shower. An administrator will be appointed, there will be a new constitution and there will be an election by the end of the year. If people are eligible to stand as council members representing the parents and citizens association they should stand and act according to this legislation and the new constitution to be developed. I note that the Opposition has foreshadowed an amendment.

As to comments about the timing of the finalisation of this legislation, it is not in my interests in any way to hamper the federation. In the first couple of years I had a good relationship with past presidents, who played an important role. If the Government wanted it to be hamstrung, it would allow the dispute to continue and dismiss any advice or criticism by saying, "They are rabble; you cannot believe a word they say." The Government is seeking to fix this issue so that the federation has a unified voice on behalf of the parents and children who attend public schools, and so that they can be part of the decision-making process and the advice that is given to Government and to the Board of Studies. Currently they do not have a representative on the Board of Studies because who has the power to appoint a representative, given the state of the federation? This bill will give them that voice. As I stated during question time, criticism is an integral part of the process. The Government is appointing an administrator for a period of up to 12 months and will sign a contract to that effect. I note and understand the Opposition's amendment; Opposition members want it over as soon as possible.

Mr John Williams: There is no conspiracy.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I acknowledge that interjection, there is no conspiracy. If the Government wanted to hamper the process it would not intervene, instead it would sort out the matter. The Government

will not support the amendment because if the bill limits the administrator to 60 days and for whatever reason it takes longer, we would have to come back to Parliament to amend the legislation. If, for whatever reason, this is not sorted out by the end of November or December when Parliament sits for the last time prior to the election it may be four or five months before Parliament sits again. As a result, the federation will be paralysed because there has not been an election and an administrator cannot remain in place due to the legislation.

It is a mistake to limit the tenure of the administrator. There are a number of tasks the administrator has to undertake, such as reopen the closed federation, regularise the employment of staff, ensure the accounts are in good order and advise on the new constitution to ensure it is an effective organisation ready to hand over when the election is declared. With any one of those tasks the administrator could find irregularities and then have to deal with them. Following consultation between the Electoral Commission and the Department of Education and Communities I am advised that it would be impossible to hold an election within 90 calendar days without disenfranchising many local parents and citizens associations. Once nominations are known it will require 75 calendar days to ensure that every parents and citizens association has a normal meeting in which to conduct its vote after nominations are known.

The Electoral Commission will have to establish an electoral role of member parents and citizens associations and call for nominees for the positions of councillor and delegate in each electoral area, which will require at least one month during school term taking into account school holidays. It will take up to seven days for the Electoral Commission to close nominations and check that nominees meet the eligibility requirement. Ballot papers are then sent out to each parents and citizens association requiring at least two months during school term to ensure that each parents and citizens association is able to hold a normal meeting in which they can conduct an election. That process can take up to 75 calendar days. Following that there is counting and the declaration of the ballot. This is not a quick process and the last thing we want is the reconstituted federation plagued with the same problems it had in the past. A solid and credible federation will not be established if the first election is half-baked or some parents and citizens associations feel disenfranchised because they did not have enough time to schedule meetings and participate.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I remind the member for Murray-Darling that he is on three calls to order.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The Government will not support the amendment. I conclude by thanking the hardworking staff of the Department of Education and Communities for their assistance. In particular I thank Debbie Hockings, Michael Waterhouse and Lee Rayner. I take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Office of Parliamentary Counsel who deal with the complex task of drafting legislation. This bill is important and has the support of the broad community making sure that parents have a reliable and reputable voice as part of the policy-making processes within the Government. Critical debate by both the Government and the Opposition is an important part of any robust democracy. I am sure Opposition members would have had a say on the policy announcement made last weekend by the shadow Minister for Education. I commend the bill to the House.

[Business interrupted.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Order of Business

Motion by Mr Anthony Roberts agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to provide for the following routine of business for the remainder of this sitting:

- (1) Government business;
- (2) private members' statements;
- (3) matter of public importance; and
- (4) the House to adjourn without motion moved at the conclusion of the matter of public importance.

PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION AMENDMENT BILL 2014**Second Reading**

[*Business resumed.*]

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail requested by Mr Ryan Park.

Consideration in Detail

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): By leave, I will propose the bill in groups of clauses and schedules.

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) [5.46 p.m.], by leave: I move Opposition amendments Nos. 1 and 2 on sheet C2014-035B in globo:

No. 1 Page 15, schedule 1 [9], proposed definition of *administration period* in clause 2 of schedule 2, line 40. Omit all words on that line. Insert instead:

administration period means the period during which the administrator holds office under clause 3.

No. 2 Page 16, schedule 1 [9], proposed clause 3 of schedule 2, lines 8-11. Omit all words on those lines. Insert instead:

(2) Subject to this Act, the administrator holds office for the period of 90 days.

(3) The Minister may, before the period referred to in subclause (2) expires, extend that period by not more than 30 days.

I will be brief and reiterate that all members have shown maturity in this debate. Each member has the best interests of the parents and children in mind, regardless of the political divide. Despite what the member for Murray-Darling said during a previous debate, I do not believe there is a conspiracy theory. The Opposition is attempting to instil discipline into the administrative process. The Opposition understands and accepts that these issues will not be resolved overnight. Having spent time working in large government agencies I have seen the odd thing slip and perhaps not receive the full attention of a Minister. It is with that in mind that the Opposition introduces these amendments and cautions that it does not want to move forward without dealing with this issue.

Labor wishes to limit the time that the administrator holds office to ensure there is discipline in the process of putting a robust federation in place as quickly as possible. It is not a conspiracy theory, but a way to ensure discipline in the process that will ensure a functioning federation. The time line is three months, plus another month for the Minister, which is 120 days. The Opposition understands it will take time to resolve these issues, but it also recognises that, if prioritised, things can move quickly, and that would be appreciated by everybody.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Education) [5.50 p.m.]: The Government does not support the amendments for the reasons I stated in my speech in reply.

Question—That Opposition amendments Nos 1 and 2 [C2014-035B] be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 19

Mr Barr
Ms Burney
Ms Burton
Mr Collier
Mr Daley
Mr Furolo
Ms Hay

Mr Hoenig
Ms Hornery
Mr Lynch
Dr McDonald
Ms Mihailuk
Mr Park
Mrs Perry

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

Noes, 57

Mr Anderson	Mr Gulaptis	Mr Roberts
Mr Aplin	Mr Hazzard	Mr Rohan
Mr Bassett	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Rowell
Mr Baumann	Mr Holstein	Mrs Sage
Mr Bromhead	Mr Humphries	Mr Sidoti
Mr Brookes	Mr Issa	Mrs Skinner
Mr Conolly	Mr Kean	Mr Smith
Mrs Davies	Dr Lee	Mr Souris
Mr Dominello	Mr Maguire	Mr Speakman
Mr Doyle	Mr Marshall	Mr Stokes
Mr Edwards	Mr Notley-Smith	Mr Toole
Mr Elliott	Mr O'Dea	Ms Upton
Mr Evans	Mr Owen	Mr Ward
Mr Flowers	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Fraser	Mr Parker	Mrs Williams
Mr Gee	Ms Parker	
Ms Gibbons	Mr Patterson	
Ms Goward	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Grant	Mr Piper	Mr Cornwell
Mr Greenwich	Mr Provost	Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the negative.

Opposition amendments Nos 1 and 2 [C2014-035B] negatived.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Consideration in detail concluded.

Third Reading

Motion by Mr Adrian Piccoli 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.

OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENT (ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS) BILL 2014**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 18 March 2014.

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury) [5.59 p.m.]: On behalf of the Opposition I speak in debate on the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014. The Opposition will not oppose this bill. I can, however, indicate that the Opposition will move an amendment to the bill. The object of the bill is to amend the Ombudsman Act 1974 to provide for the monitoring and assessment by the Ombudsman of designated Aboriginal programs, being those programs funded under the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment [OCHRE] package in the Aboriginal Affairs plan. It is my understanding that those services within the package will be the only services evaluated.

The services to be evaluated include, first, Connected Communities, the 15 executive principals in regional schools; second, Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, the language preservation program targeting five languages delivered via schools, TAFE and universities; third, Opportunity Hubs, a four-site trial of a jobs pathway program for young people; and fourth, the Local Decision Making project currently operating in one urban, one regional and one remote community. The proposed oversight and evaluation provided by the bill are

extremely limited; however it will provide opportunity for an objective assessment of the New South Wales Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs. Unfortunately, the bill does not provide for a broader examination of service delivery to Indigenous communities. This is regrettable, because it means that money for Aboriginal communities expended in health, education and other agencies will not be evaluated or overseen by the Deputy Ombudsman. Instead, the money is being directed to programs within the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment package.

The bill will do little to protect Indigenous community service providers from what appears to be a brutal Federal budget for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that will be delivered this evening. It may be argued that the mainstreaming of Indigenous service provision has an evidence base, but this bill will not provide one. Decisions about what works and what does not work in Indigenous affairs will be made by a non-representative, handpicked prime ministerial council. The impacts will flow past State governments and directly into Aboriginal communities. The impact will land directly at the feet of Aboriginal people. This bill will do nothing to protect them.

The suite of services contained in the Council of Australian Governments agreement to close the gap is due to expire within weeks. One of the "Close the Gap" initiatives is the Aboriginal Child and Family Centres. This bill does not afford any consideration to the effectiveness of Aboriginal Child and Family Centres in New South Wales. The centres utilise childhood learning environments as hubs in promoting child and maternal wellbeing. They co-locate services and provide easy access in Indigenous communities. Reportedly well received and popular in communities, these centres will likely disappear by the end of June with no evaluation and no consideration of outcome or effect. They are victims of the budget emergency.

This bill will provide no opportunity to examine the contribution of the First Peoples Education Advisory Group, which will just disappear. This bill will not provide the opportunity to examine how many extra Aboriginal children end up in prison because of Canberra's \$42 million cut to Indigenous Legal Services. There is no rigorous examination of cause and effect, but the State Government will pick up the cost of Prime Minister Abbott's cuts through incarceration, and the lives of young Aboriginal people will be destroyed along the way. I think the Minister understands this dilemma.

No opportunity existed to examine the results of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. It was abolished without any examination of the evidence for its retention. So much for a representative Indigenous voice—it has gone. Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning has gone. "Better alignment" was the reason given. There was no examination of information held by public authorities; there was no assessment; there was no benefit from independent improvement plans. There was no evaluation of the contribution that fine organisation has made to educating Koori children over the past two decades.

The Commonwealth did this as it abandoned Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning, and recommended it seek money from the New South Wales Government—such a suggestion is galling. Abolishing the Community Broadcasting Program will have a devastating impact on bush radio stations. There has been no examination or evaluation of the role played by remote broadcasters in language preservation. These programs have been abolished on a whim, without consideration of the impact on remote parts of the country. This bill, unfortunately, provides no protection to bush broadcasting.

This bill limits evaluation to the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment services. Clearly, I support the independent evaluation of these services and initiatives, but this bill has missed the opportunity to build the capacity and capability of the Ombudsman to look more broadly at the role of New South Wales Government service delivery in contributing to ongoing Indigenous disadvantage. Interestingly, the Minister had previously committed to appointing a coordinator general to chair an independent Aboriginal council and broker cross-agency delivery. The appointment of a deputy ombudsman is a substitute oversight structure for the previously announced coordinator general.

We appear to have reached a place in Aboriginal Affairs where dramatic change is the order of the day. Whilst some things clearly need to change, we must recognise that many of the changes we seek will take time—we need consistent, measured responses. A long-term, consistent approach to the reduction in smoking rates in the community will pay the greatest dividends in a generation. So too will the early childhood education strategy. Consistency and incremental improvement have moved out of favour of the Minister's Federal counterparts. Better realignment has coupled with new priorities, and radical change is the new vogue.

Radical shake-ups disrupt delivery, disrupt trust, disrupt participation and disrupt the attainment of an outcome. I can only hope that caution and common sense prevail, and the impending new strategies and

priorities for Indigenous affairs receive the same independent assessment and evaluation that is proposed in this bill. My real fear is we are about to see 40 years of hard work in building the capacity of Aboriginal organisations—much of which I was a part of—destroyed in a few short years. I worry when I read in the National Commission of Audit that:

There are now too many disparate and fragmented Commonwealth Indigenous programmes. There is too much duplication and a creeping overlap of responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the States. There is also a critical lack of robust evidence and evaluation about the effectiveness of Indigenous programmes at all levels of government. Finally, in some essential areas, such as primary health care and early childhood education, Indigenous Australians are under-utilising available mainstream services.

Whilst I appreciate that this is not the State Minister's responsibility, I am afraid of what will be delivered in tonight's Federal budget and that is influencing my position on what we can do at the State level to make sure we have as much evaluation as possible, including as many Aboriginal voices as possible. Where is the heading "Under-utilising Primary Healthcare"? I know the Minister supports our Aboriginal medical services. Will this Government stand up and support Aboriginal-controlled health organisations? Much will be made of duplication and creeping overlap. Has the New South Wales Government been informed where this overlap lies? I suspect it has not.

Where will the cuts fall? What Indigenous services will become the sole responsibility of State governments when they have been previously, and rightly, the responsibility of the Federal Government? It is not feasible for the State Government to pick up every service the Federal Government stops supporting. I appreciate that, but I am afraid that will be the expectation. Which services will we lose to redirect money towards bursaries? The Commonwealth seems to be taking money out of Aboriginal community control and putting it into bursaries so Aboriginal children can attend elite private schools. I believe that is misdirected and a disastrous way to view Aboriginal programs. But we are faced with such a choice and at times it begs the question: Are we committed to ensuring that Aboriginal children in home communities have the same access to support and a quality education as Aboriginal children in boarding schools?

I will return to the issue of the proposed deputy ombudsman but I felt I needed to make those comments about what is going on federally because the consequences of those disastrous decisions will end up squarely the responsibility of the State Government. The bill provides for the appointment of a deputy ombudsman. The Minister has indicated that that person will be Aboriginal, although it is not specified in the bill. The Opposition will move an amendment to have the deputy ombudsman position identified as requiring an Aboriginal occupant. Never before have we so needed the critical eye of Aboriginal academics and leaders upon the activity of government. The "new priorities" deserve thorough examination and independent testing of their scope and impact. The "new priorities" need to be based on evidence.

A guaranteed Indigenous deputy ombudsman will strengthen the oversight by Indigenous people over our affairs. Never has the need for strong Indigenous voices been more necessary. I have a great deal of respect for the Minister, for the way in which he has dealt with the issue and for the hand that he has offered me in relation to briefings. I appreciate that very deeply. But I am most concerned about what is happening federally. State governments are going to have a terrible mess to clean up in relation to incarcerations, children not finishing school—particularly in remote communities—and the low number of Aboriginal children attending preschools. I believe the Commonwealth is vacating the field, but I put on record my appreciation of the State Minister's efforts. I thank him for what he is doing. As I have indicated, the Opposition will not oppose this bill. However, I have foreshadowed that I will move an amendment to the bill to ensure that the proposed deputy ombudsman is an Aboriginal person.

Mr CHRIS HOLSTEIN (Gosford) [6.12 p.m.]: I am pleased to support the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014. In doing so I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I pay my respects to elders past and present, and I also pay my respects to the elders of all the First Nations of New South Wales. I am proud to step up and acknowledge my local Darkinjung land, from the Decrubbin to the Awaba, from Mount Yango to the sea. As a civic leader, it is important to do that in my community, and I am proud to be one of the first Government members to speak on this bill.

My education in Aboriginal matters and Indigenous issues in my community comes from my 20 years as a local government councillor. Many people have contributed to my knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people and the issues they face. I acknowledge David Pross, Alan Vandenberg, Chubby Hall, Sean Gordon of the Darkinjung Aboriginal Land Council and Dr Bob Morgan—a great mentor and tutor. There are

others I would like to mention but, in keeping with tradition and respect for cultural beliefs, because they are deceased I will not do so. My community knows who they are and knows they assisted me in learning more about local Indigenous people.

I am proud to say that during my time in local government we were instrumental in relocating the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association [NAISDA] to Gosford in 2005. Having attended only last week its graduation ceremony, I am proud that we had a part to play in the association's relocation to the Central Coast, as well as the appointment of the Aboriginal Development Officer within my council at Gosford; the council's Development and Reconciliation Plan; programs such as the Walgett Cultural Exchange, which was well received not only by our community but also by the Walgett community; the Deadly Young Indigenous surf carnivals; and our Five Lands Walk. A few years ago I was privileged to be only the second non-Indigenous person awarded the Darkinjung medal for my contribution to the local Aboriginal community. Because of the background, the learning, the knowledge and the assistance I have received from many people I can stand here proudly today to talk about this significant bill for Aboriginal people in New South Wales.

The Auditor-General's performance audit of the former Government's Two Ways Together 10-year plan for Aboriginal Affairs found that the policy had failed to deliver its intended improvements for Aboriginal people. The Ombudsman's report in 2011 entitled "Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: the need to do things differently", gave us a detailed report of the deficiencies of those Aboriginal programs in New South Wales. This became the driving force behind the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs. By way of background, and despite modest improvements in some areas, we know that even though young Aboriginal people constitute only 4 per cent of the general adolescent community in this State, 50 per cent of all juveniles sentenced to a period of detention are Aboriginal. In western New South Wales that proportion rises to more than 80 per cent. The school attendance rate for Aboriginal students is only 85 per cent compared with 92 per cent for non-Aboriginal children, with some areas, such as Boggabilla, having a reported rate of only 64 per cent.

After finding significant deficiencies, the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman recommended that strengthening accountability mechanisms should be integral to any future Aboriginal Affairs policies. The Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs was established in response to the reports and it engaged in two rounds of community consultation during which it listened to Aboriginal communities express frustration at the many ad hoc, off-the-shelf programs previously deployed. Following this, the task force recommended a new accountability framework based on independent advice to government and a voice for Aboriginal people within government. At the end of the day, Aboriginal people want to see an end to inefficiency and waste. They want to find a solution to the fundamental lack of accountability. According to the NSW Treasury Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure, former governments' investments in Aboriginal programs have delivered dismal results, with many programs being poorly designed, poorly targeted and without clear evaluation.

Both the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman called for the appointment of an independent body to review government programs for Aboriginal people. The new role will be appointed by the NSW Ombudsman and will therefore draw on the experience, integrity and resources of that office. The NSW Ombudsman's Aboriginal Unit helps Aboriginal people in New South Wales resolve complaints about community services and child protection, policing matters, out-of-home care, education matters, disability services, local councils, Aboriginal land councils, housing matters, Juvenile Justice and Corrections, and other issues. Since 2005 the NSW Ombudsman has prepared 15 major reports on concerns highlighted by the Aboriginal communities of New South Wales, which include child protection, policing, domestic violence, asbestos management, access to housing and disability services, the impacts of fines, out-of-home care, and probity standards for funded organisations.

Section 8 of the Ombudsman Act 1974 provides that the Ombudsman can appoint a deputy ombudsman who can exercise any function of the Ombudsman, subject to certain limitations that are set out in section 8A. This bill will insert new section 8 (1B), which will provide that the Ombudsman is to appoint a deputy ombudsman to support the monitoring and assessment of Aboriginal programs. The programs to be monitored and assessed by the Ombudsman will be listed in the regulations and it is proposed that Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment will be the first Aboriginal program listed in the regulations after the bill is enacted. The Ombudsman's powers to compel the production of information and documents from agencies and the power to enter premises to access documents will be delegated to the Deputy Ombudsman in order to monitor and assess Aboriginal programs, and the investigative powers of the Ombudsman will apply to the monitoring and assessment of those programs.

The bill proposes that government agencies will have a statutory duty to provide the Ombudsman with full and unrestricted access to records under their control for related matters. It also provides for the Minister responsible for an Aboriginal program and the Ombudsman to initiate consultation about the program at any time and for the Ombudsman to make a special report to Parliament on any systemic issues relating to Aboriginal Affairs. The role of the Ombudsman is expected to build strong partnerships with Aboriginal peak bodies and to build the trust and rapport needed to confidentially support and evaluate programs.

I thank the Minister for bringing the bill forward. As I said at the outset, the bill is important for those in our community who have not received the necessary care and attention with regard to the programs that have been made available. The proposed Deputy Ombudsman's arrangements have been carefully designed to improve program delivery and to address the shortcomings of the past. They deliver unprecedented oversight of the implementation of Aboriginal programs that fall under Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment, or OCHRE. The amendment will support a new future where Aboriginal programs not only are better coordinated across government but also are driven by innovation, reaching new levels of success for the Aboriginal people of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [6.21 p.m.]: I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we are meeting today, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I acknowledge also the traditional owners of the land of Cabramatta, the Cabrigal people of the Darug nation. I acknowledge their elders and descendants past and present. History and traditions are important to us all and are part and parcel of this great nation, Australia. I also acknowledge any Aboriginal persons in the building. I acknowledge my colleague the member for Canterbury and I pay my respects to her. I will make a brief contribution to debate on the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014. I support the object of the bill, which is to amend the Ombudsman Act 1974 to allow for the monitoring and assessment by the Ombudsman of designated Aboriginal programs funded under the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment, or OCHRE package in the Aboriginal Affairs Plan.

The programs to be evaluated are Connected Communities, Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, Opportunity Hubs, and the Local Decision Making project. I will speak a little about each of these programs, which are at the core of this bill. The Connected Communities program is about making schools in regional areas community hubs where parents can also access a range of services for their children from birth through to school and to further training and employment. It works in partnership with local Aboriginal leaders to help improve education outcomes for young Aboriginal people. Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests is a program that aims to keep Aboriginal languages alive. This is a critical program as it is through language that we keep the culture alive. Opportunity Hubs build partnerships between schools, employers, education and training providers, and the local community to create opportunities for Aboriginal students. Its goal is to deliver better outcomes for Indigenous young people, including greater participation and retention at school, the creation of career paths, further education and training, and placements in sustainable jobs.

The last program to be evaluated under this bill is Local Decision Making, which is a key initiative that focuses on improving service delivery for Aboriginal communities. The ultimate aim of Local Decision Making is for Aboriginal communities to gain more control of government services in their communities. All these programs should be monitored and assessed objectively to ensure that they meet the needs of Aboriginal communities and that they are an effective use of taxpayers' money. However, the scope of this bill is extremely narrow. It could go a lot further to address the gap between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. The bill does not allow for a wider look at service delivery to Aboriginal communities. In addition, my colleague the member for Canterbury was right when she said that the bill will not do anything to protect services for Aboriginal communities from the Federal Government's brutal cuts.

The Government has missed the opportunity to give the Ombudsman more scope to look at how the New South Wales Government is addressing Indigenous disadvantage. Nor will the bill look for or find solutions for the current gaps in services. I am not sure why the Government is not addressing those issues in this bill. Maybe it is laziness or maybe it is because it simply does not understand what service delivery for Aboriginal communities means. This bill merely seeks to appoint a deputy ombudsman. A glaring omission from the bill is the stipulation that the role be filled by an Aboriginal person. However, I note that the Minister has indicated that the person appointed will be Aboriginal. I am sure we can take the Minister at his word.

However, to ensure that this role will always be filled by an Aboriginal person, the Opposition will seek to amend the bill. It is important because gone are the days when our Indigenous communities were forced to live the way their non-Aboriginal governors told them to. Aboriginal communities have the human right to

self-determination. It is vital then that Aboriginal people have power over their lives and their communities. So it is only right that we have a qualified and experienced Aboriginal person overseeing the evaluation of these programs for Aboriginal people and communities. I will not oppose this bill but I will support the amendment to ensure that the role of Deputy Ombudsman will always be filled by an Aboriginal person.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [6.25 p.m.]: I support the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I pay my respects to the elders past and present. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who is in the Chamber, has already set out the details of the amendments for the House. I recognise the significance of the amendment bill for the Aboriginal people of New South Wales and, indeed, the whole of New South Wales. The bill is groundbreaking legislation; it is an Australian first. It takes a brave government to shine a strong light on government performance in service delivery in any area. Certainly, the Minister must be commended for courageously leading the way with a groundbreaking national first. Again, I place on record my congratulations to the Minister and to the Government on taking this step.

The NSW Ombudsman is an impartial and independent watchdog of the New South Wales Government. We have seen this Government repeatedly give record funding and resources to a range of watchdogs, and that can be compared with the previous Government's record. Clearly there are occasions when providing extra funding is not ultimately a self-serving exercise—we are seeing this at the Independent Commission Against Corruption at the moment, with the provision of record funding to that body. In a similar fashion it may not be in the Government's defensive interests to shine greater light on service delivery or deficiencies in service delivery. But in the bill we are seeing accountability and responsibility in government to an extent that we did not see from the previous Labor regime.

I shall make two comments in response to the contribution of the member for Canterbury. First, we on this side know that it is important to respect the independence of the Ombudsman. As I said, the Ombudsman is impartial and independent, and that should be respected. If we try to fetter the administrative discretion of the Ombudsman by prescribing a particular type of person—gender, racial background or whatever—it takes away from the independence of the Ombudsman's position. I note that the Minister has indicated that the clear intention is to appoint a person of Aboriginal background, and that is appropriate.

Ms Linda Burney: We have sorted that.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: It is sorted when the Opposition indicates it will not move its amendment. Until the amendment is removed, it is not sorted, with respect. If the intention is not to move the amendment, then the matter will be sorted. The second point I make relates to Opposition members' criticism about the scope of the bill. There is no doubt that the intended initial scope is not all-encompassing but focuses on the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment [OCHRE] initiatives initially as part of a potentially broader scope of operation under the bill, which is quite appropriate. In that sense, and mindful of the lack of action from those opposite for 16 long years, I find the Opposition's criticism quite shallow—and, in fact, hypocritical. The bill states:

The object of this Bill is to amend the *Ombudsman Act 1974*:

- (a) to provide for the monitoring and assessment by the Ombudsman of designated Aboriginal programs (being Government initiatives or services relating to Aboriginal affairs prescribed by the regulations), and
- (b) to provide for the appointment of a Deputy Ombudsman for the purpose of enabling the Ombudsman to monitor and assess those Aboriginal programs.

Clearly there is scope under this bill for further areas to be prescribed by regulation. I note that the Public Accounts Committee, which I chair, tabled a report last week following a performance audit looking into the issue of Aboriginal literacy in New South Wales. The committee made a number of recommendations, including that the new Deputy Ombudsman, whose role is foreshadowed in this bill, be given powers to investigate all initiatives designed to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. So that is an example of where we have said proactively, "Yes, we should go further than the OCHRE initiatives." The Government will respond to that report of the Public Accounts Committee in due course, six months after the report was tabled last week.

I acknowledge that this legislation is an excellent first step and if we try to bite off too much too soon ultimately it may become difficult or self-defeating. I acknowledge that the Minister has included a range of proposals in the launch of this initiative. I do not think it is appropriate to criticise what should be commended as an excellent initiative that can be built on over time and which was suggested by the Public Accounts

Committee recommendation. With regard to the previous Government's 10-year plan for Aboriginal affairs, the Auditor-General's performance audit of Two Ways Together confirmed that programs implemented under the policy had failed to deliver their intended improvements for Aboriginal people. I would have thought that Aboriginal people, like all fair-minded people in New South Wales, want to see an end to the inefficiency and waste that has occurred in the past and find a solution to what has been a fundamental accountability deficiency in many programs.

The Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure by NSW Treasury in 2013 found that there had been a dismal return to date from the substantial government investment in Aboriginal programs, with many programs being inadequately designed or poorly targeted and lacking in clear evaluation—a theme that was touched on in the Public Accounts Committee report, which will be the subject of a take-note debate later this week. I have no doubt that both the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman called for the appointment of an independent body to review government programs for Aboriginal people. The proposed body, to be appointed by the NSW Ombudsman under this legislation, will draw on the experience, integrity and resources of the Ombudsman's office in an appropriate way. It will be open to comment from Aboriginal people about a diverse range of issues, which were outlined by the member for Gosford, whether they are raised by individuals or communities.

To perform this role the Deputy Ombudsman will be expected to form strong partnerships with a range of stakeholders, including Aboriginal peak bodies, not just to establish strong communication lines but to build trust and rapport, which will be needed in order to support and evaluate programs competently. The proposed deputy ombudsman arrangements have been designed carefully to improve program delivery and to address the clear shortcomings of the past. They provide unprecedented oversight of the implementation of Aboriginal programs that come under the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment plan, but there is scope to go further. This initiative should be welcomed with open arms. I put on record my admiration and commendation of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [6.35 p.m.]: I support the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014. I too acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we stand. I also acknowledge the traditional owners in the Tamworth electorate, the Kamilaroi people. May I say, "Yamaa Yamanday Gomerie", which means hello and welcome in Kamilaroi. The Kamilaroi are indigenous Koori people from the area that extends from around Singleton in the Hunter Valley to the Warrumbungle Mountains in the west and up through the present-day centres of Quirindi, Tamworth, Narrabri, Walgett, Moree, Lightning Ridge and Mungindi in New South Wales to Nindigully in south-west Queensland. The Kamilaroi is one of the four largest Indigenous nations in Australia, and Kamilaroi is classified in the Pama-Nyungan family of Australian languages. The Kamilaroi Highway is named after them, the Sydney ferry *Kamilaroi*—which operated from 1901 to 1933—was named after them and a variety of durum wheat widely grown in their territory today is also named after the Kamilaroi.

I have provided a little background about the Kamilaroi people and I will speak later about their wonderful elders who perform a Welcome to Country that we thoroughly enjoy, respect and acknowledge when we attend ceremonies in the Tamworth electorate and surrounds. After finding significant deficiencies in the previous Government's Two Ways Together Aboriginal affairs plan, both the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman recommended strengthened accountability mechanisms as being integral to any future Aboriginal affairs policies. That is why this bill was introduced. The Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs met in Tamworth and, under the guidance of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who is in the Chamber—I acknowledge his thoughtfulness and resourcefulness; his ability to connect, understand and guide in his portfolio is quite outstanding—after two rounds of community consultation recommended a new accountability framework based on independent advice to government and a voice for Aboriginal people within government.

It was timely for the Government to sit down, listen, understand and take on board those concerns. The Government's response to the recommendations of the taskforce—the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment plan—proposed an accountability framework centred on improved coordination and oversight of Aboriginal affairs across government. In November 2013 Cabinet approved a bill to require the appointment of a deputy ombudsman to support the Ombudsman to monitor and assess Aboriginal programs. The Ombudsman Act 1974 provides that the Ombudsman can appoint a deputy ombudsman under section 8 who can exercise any function of the Ombudsman, subject to certain limitations. The bill proposes new section 8 (1B), which provides that the Ombudsman is to appoint a deputy ombudsman to support the monitoring and assessment of Aboriginal programs.

As a member of the Committee on the Ombudsman, the Police Integrity Commission and Crime Commission that oversights the Ombudsman and having met the Ombudsman on several occasions, both formally and informally, I believe this will be a natural fit with his department and will certainly assist Aboriginal people in New South Wales. I note that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs understands the reasons for this appointment. I have had the pleasure of hosting the Minister in the Tamworth electorate on several occasions and I know that he rolls up his sleeves and gets out and about on the front line.

On one occasion we visited Trelawney station at Somerton in the Tamworth electorate. The program is run in conjunction with the local Aboriginal land council under the chairmanship of Harry Cutler. The program works to help students who do not like school and who have fallen off the rails. They have fallen foul of the administration and they seek guidance and support. The program being run on Trelawney station at Somerton does just that. A bus picks up the kids and takes them to Trelawney. The Department of Education and Communities, in conjunction with TAFE, offers courses to provide them with life, social and cultural skills that are critical to teaching young people where they come from, where they are now and where they are going.

The programs being offered around the district, including Gunnedah and Tamworth, are essential to ensure that our young people are guided back on the right path to becoming meaningful citizens in the community. I congratulate the Minister and thank him for visiting Tamworth some time ago. Trelawney station is seeking ways to be sustainable. The teenagers work on the farm; they grow crops, fix machinery and work with animals, learning the true value of agriculture and its importance not only to the region but also to them. The farm was suffering from a serious drought and needed a water pump, which was the lifeblood for pumping water onto paddocks of newly sown oats to enable them to be sustainable, to grow and to be harvested.

It was pleasing that the Minister provided in the vicinity of \$20,000 for the water pump and I assure the Minister that the pump will be put to good use, showing these young people the important role agriculture plays and that grounds them with the earth on which they walk. I say that because many of the dancers, for example, Marc Sutherland, a young, strong, progressive Aboriginal man, teach younger kids to dance. Marc also explains the meaning of the dance, whether it is the Dance of the Brolga, the Dance of the Snake or the dance where they kick up the dust to let it float up to the clouds so that the two can meet and become one. Their incredible explanation of the dances enables people to have a greater understanding of their meaning. It is a pleasure to sit and watch the growing number of people joining in these traditional dances led by Marc Sutherland and others.

I listen intently when elders such as Len Waters and Uncle Neville Sampson give the traditional welcome to country. They explain the welcome to country, which is about welcoming visitors to their land, letting them know about the laws and ways of conducting themselves within that land, and highlighting that people have an obligation to abide by those laws. The welcoming ceremony allows them to feel welcomed and loved by one another. It is a very moving thing to be welcomed to country. The smoking ceremony also is very special. Recently we visited the Tamworth Base Hospital where Len Waters held a traditional smoking ceremony. People breathe in the smoke of the buddha bush—I stand corrected if I am wrong—and become immersed in it. Len walks around welcoming everyone and with the smoke wafting over them they become part of the ceremony. It is wonderful to be part of that ceremony.

It is a pleasure to work with the Minister for Citizenship and Communities and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in what he is trying to achieve on the ground. It is a common-sense approach to working with Aboriginal people, which is all they want. They want someone to work with them, to give them a fair go, to listen to them, to understand them and to respect and acknowledge what they have done over the years. It is with pleasure that I support the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014.

Mr BRYAN DOYLE (Campbelltown) [6.45 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to support the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014. This Government was elected to make sure that New South Wales was again number one and a key component of that is to restore accountability in public life. I am pleased that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Victor Dominello, the member for Ryde, is in the Chamber. He has been a wonderful Minister. As he noted, historically throughout Australia all levels of government have struggled with the issue of accountability for Aboriginal programs and unfortunately the losers have been those who most needed the support. I know from my 27 years of policing, particularly my three years at Broken Hill, Wilcannia and Wentworth, of the many failures of program delivery. Often Aboriginal victims of domestic violence had only the police and police prosecutor battling in their corner.

That is one of the reasons I strongly support this bill. It charts the way forward with the appointment of a dedicated deputy ombudsman for Aboriginal programs to bring accountability to the fore. It is important to

note that this initiative came from Aboriginal community leaders, who found a Government and a Minister prepared to listen and to work in genuine partnerships with them to implement this much-needed reform. The need for this reform has been highlighted in a number of reports. I draw the attention of the House to comments from the Auditor-General in 2012. He advised that the previous Government's policy of Two Ways Together had "... not delivered the improvement in overall outcomes for Aboriginal people that was intended". I draw attention also to the comments of the NSW Ombudsman in 2011 when he too reported on the Two Ways Together program and stated:

Wasted opportunities stemming from a large amount of funds being spent on a disparate 'grab-bag' of programs without adequate accountability.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has taken up this challenge. He chaired the New South Wales Government's Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, which had a focus to improve education and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and to improve service delivery and accountability. This task force held community consultations across the State, with one being held in Campbelltown where I was pleased to host the Minister. The result of the discussions has led to the creation of Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment [OCHRE]. The focus will be to support more Aboriginal young people to stay at school, more Aboriginal young people to transition into employment, increasing the skill and capacity of local governance bodies and making both government and communities more responsible for the public money they spend.

This has led to the creation of an opportunity hub at Campbelltown, which is being led by MTC Australia. This will support Aboriginal young people to stay at school and, more importantly, to thrive at school and to help with their transition into employment. I take this opportunity to congratulate MTC Australia on being chosen to operate the opportunity hub at Campbelltown, a key initiative of Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment, which will coordinate and match training opportunities for Aboriginal students and provide incentives to finish school and transition into sustainable jobs.

The Campbelltown Opportunity Hub will work with students to help develop a personalised career plan that will match local training and education services to full-time employment. The hub's specialised services will assist Aboriginal kids from a young age by nurturing their ambitions and supporting their personal and professional development. When one speaks with young people and asks them, "What do you want to do when you grow up? What are your hopes and desires?", often they do not reply as they do not know. A truism is that if one does not have a dream it can never come true. The hub will encourage these kids and give them a sense of their abilities and the opportunities that our great community provides of which they can take advantage.

Mr Martin Keil, general manager for youth and community at MTC Australia, notes that through the opportunity hub MTC Australia will endeavour to create positive pathways for Aboriginal people. It aims ultimately to contribute to the prosperity of Aboriginal people. We are fortunate in Campbelltown to have an organisation such as the Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service, which provides for Aboriginal community health at Airds. Darryl Wright is the chief executive officer at the Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service—an organisation that demonstrates what this is all about. At one stage it was on the rocks and it was due to be wound up but the community decided it needed to do better.

Darryl Wright brought accountability, structure and direction to the organisation. It has now become an award winning medical service. It is a micro example of what can happen when one brings accountability and direction to services. A good friend, Uncle Ivan Wellington, has a room named after him and he features on an Aboriginal mural at Campbelltown Hospital. Uncle Ivan Wellington conducted a smoking ceremony for the Campbelltown Hospital \$139 million multi-bed extension and I have no doubt that that smoking ceremony ensured its smooth construction. That project is way ahead of schedule.

This bill will provide for the monitoring and assessment by the Ombudsman of designated Aboriginal programs being government initiatives or services relating to Aboriginal affairs. Most importantly this bill will provide for the appointment of a deputy ombudsman for the purpose of enabling the Ombudsman to monitor and assess government or privately operated Aboriginal programs. It is important to note that under this bill it is mandated that the head of a public authority, which has functions under an Aboriginal program, is to provide the Ombudsman with full and unrestricted access to records under that person's control. However, it is a requirement that these records remain relevant to the operation of an Aboriginal program for the Ombudsman to operate those functions.

The Ombudsman will be entitled under this section to inspect and, on request, be provided with copies of any such record and to inspect any non-documentary evidence associated with any such record. The

Ombudsman and the Minister responsible for the Aboriginal program to which this bill will apply may consult with each other on the monitoring and assessment of matters relating to the program and its services. In this regard I note the many services to which this bill will apply including health, education and policing. As part of any accountability the bill will allow for the reporting on Aboriginal programs, including allowing the Ombudsman to provide a report on any matter concerning an Aboriginal program to the Minister responsible for the program and to any other Minister or public authority affected, in the opinion of the Ombudsman, by the report.

This bill is about bringing accountability and direction to the Government's proposals. It aims to lift and bring prosperity to Australians of Aboriginal background. This Minister has consulted, listened to and walked the distance with Aboriginal people. My experience with Aboriginal elders in Broken Hill, Wilcannia and Wentworth taught me that nothing was achieved by confrontation. Standing together or walking down the road and talking was like sharing a journey—they would not do business with people until they knew them. In this regard I know the Aboriginal community knows and trusts the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and this Government. That is largely due to the wonderful services that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has provided. I support this bill wholeheartedly.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [6.55 p.m.]: I speak in support of the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014 and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I acknowledge the Biripai people and the Worrimai people of the electorate of Myall Lakes. The object of the bill is, first, to amend the Ombudsman Act 1974 to provide for the monitoring and assessment by the Ombudsman of designated Aboriginal programs being government initiatives or services relating to Aboriginal affairs prescribed by the regulations; and, secondly, to provide for the appointment of a deputy ombudsman for the purpose of enabling the Ombudsman to monitor and assess those Aboriginal programs.

Recent independent reports have called on the Government to have greater accountability in the design and delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal people. These include two reports by the NSW Ombudsman entitled "Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: The need to do things differently" and "Responding to child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities". The Auditor-General commented in his report on the previous Labor Government's Aboriginal Affairs Two Ways Together plan. In response to the Auditor-General's report the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs established and chaired the New South Wales Government Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs. That task force made recommendations to the Government about improving education and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people across New South Wales and improving service delivery and accountability in Aboriginal affairs.

In response to the task force recommendations the New South Wales Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs, Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment was created. As part of the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment plan and in consultation with Aboriginal communities it was proposed that an Aboriginal deputy ombudsman should be appointed. As stated by the Minister in his second reading speech the idea for this initiative came from Aboriginal community leaders and demonstrates the commitment of the Government to listen to communities and to work in genuine partnership with them to implement much-needed reform. This is an Australian first. No previous State or Federal government has opened itself up to this level of independent scrutiny of its Aboriginal programs.

In October 2011 the NSW Ombudsman identified similar shortfalls with the Labor Government's policy in his special report to Parliament "Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: The need to do things differently". He found wasted opportunities stemming from a large amount of funds being spent on a disparate grab-bag of programs without adequate accountability. The Labor Government's record shows 16 years of doing nothing to help Indigenous people in this State. In my electorate I have had a lot to do with the Aboriginal community, first as a police officer, secondly as a lawyer and, thirdly, as a local councillor. I can honestly say that the Labor Government did not look after the people in my electorate.

Approximately 5 per cent of the population of Myall Lakes is Indigenous people and they are in desperate need of services including health and education. That is illustrated by the fact that two of the 15 schools trialling Connected Communities are in Taree. At least three other high schools and several other primary schools want to be part of that trial program. Over the years many programs have been rolled out in my area. None of them have changed the situation. At least 70 per cent of white youth in New South Wales go on to do the Higher School Certificate but less than 30 per cent of Indigenous youth do so. In my area the percentage

of people of Aboriginal descent who study for the Higher School Certificate is far less than that. When looking at health and child sexual assault as a police officer I investigated cases in which children as young as three suffered from gonorrhoea.

A program that has been mooted that I think has a great deal of merit is First Steps Count. Teachers and staff have found that by the time children start school at the age of five they are already so damaged that there is little the school can do for them. Through the Connected Communities strategy the First Steps Count project aims to put a preschool within the school to engage children at a younger age. The First Steps Count project is also seeking to engage with parents before their child reaches preschool age. Pregnant women and new parents will be referred to the organisation by their hospital or doctor. They will be able to live at an establishment where they will learn how to be parents and be taught about nutrition and how to look after a child from birth.

First Steps Count is a community organisation that has raised about \$2 million and needs another \$2.5 million to complete building its facility. It is an outstanding and worthwhile project that cannot be pigeonholed. The services it will provide do not fall under a single banner of education, health, family and community services, law and order, or justice but will benefit all those portfolio areas. When it is established it will be the only organisation of its kind in Australia. As I read through this bill I can see how worthwhile First Steps Count will be. There are some wonderful people in the community who want to help the Aboriginal community. An amount of \$1 million of its funding has come from a philanthropist. That person cannot continue to fund the organisation forever so I hope that at some point both the State and Federal governments will consider funding the operations of this truly worthwhile organisation.

As I said, the Auditor-General said in his report that something needs to be done. Aboriginal people have expressed concern that they are being "overserved but underdelivered" and that they are "talked to, not worked with". It is interesting to note that rather than implementing the Connected Communities strategy straightaway the department conducted a 12-month consultation process with local Aboriginal communities before it was satisfied with the model for Taree High School and Taree Public School. The good thing about the Minister, his task force and this Government is that we have listened to Aboriginal communities rather than dictated to them. We have worked in partnership with them to find a solution. As a result of our partnership with Aboriginal people, Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment, known as OCHRE, was created.

Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment is the New South Wales Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs, which has been developed in partnership with Aboriginal people and is the response to the task force recommendations. Through consultation, the Government heard from thousands of people who requested support for more Aboriginal young people to stay at school, more Aboriginal young people to transition into employment, and for the teaching of Aboriginal language and culture in order to build people's pride and identity. I must say that Aboriginal languages have really taken off in my community. I was impressed by the member for Tamworth, who has learnt a few words in the Aboriginal tongue native to his area. He has inspired me to go home and do the same.

The Government has drafted regulations in readiness for the changes proposed in this bill. That demonstrates that the Government does not just pass legislation; it also ensures that the regulations that go hand in hand with bills are drafted and ready to go. The draft regulations propose that Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment be the first Aboriginal program to be prescribed by the regulations. The Deputy Ombudsman's support of the Ombudsman in the independent monitoring and review of Aboriginal programs should encourage progressive and continuous improvements in those programs. All good businesses and organisations constantly re-engineer and re-examine what they are doing to ensure that they have the best programs and quality assurance to meet their targets. It is great to see review mechanisms built into the bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GARRY EDWARDS (Swansea) [7.05 p.m.]: I support the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014, which outlines a proposal for the appointment of a deputy ombudsman for Aboriginal programs. The bill will ensure that under this Government there is greater accountability in the design, delivery and expenditure of programs and services for Aboriginal people. This bill also represents a clear commitment by this Government to seek out partnerships with communities to deliver much-needed reform. The Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014 is a landmark reform for Aboriginal affairs. I congratulate Minister Victor Dominello, who is in the Chamber, on his initiative in introducing this bill.

As the Minister has previously advised members, the former Government's Two Ways Together Aboriginal affairs plan has shown limited demonstrable improvement in the lives of Aboriginal people. In three

recent independent reports both the New South Wales Auditor-General and the NSW Ombudsman noted the plan had an absence of genuinely shared decision-making between government and Aboriginal communities, duplication of services, lack of coordination, unclear accountability pathways and a large amount of funding spent with little improvement to overall results. The reports pointed to systemic dysfunction in the coordinating of Aboriginal programs and made a number of recommendations to improve the quality of service delivery and accountability. One such recommendation was to appoint an independent adviser who will act as a champion for Aboriginal people.

In response to the reports the Government established a Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs and began community consultation to establish a new Aboriginal affairs framework. This accountability framework was later established as Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment, known as OCHRE. The Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014 will amend the Ombudsman Act 1974 by the inclusion of new section 8 (1B), which provides that the Ombudsman appoint a deputy ombudsman to support the monitoring and assessment of Aboriginal programs. The Ombudsman has existing powers, including the power to compel information and documents from agencies and the power to enter premises to access and examine documents. The Deputy Ombudsman will be delegated these powers in order to monitor and assess Aboriginal programs.

In addition to the Ombudsman's investigative powers, the bill proposes that government agencies will have a statutory duty to provide the Ombudsman with full and unrestricted access to records in their control where they are reasonably required to monitor and assess nominated Aboriginal programs. This is pursuant to proposed section 25M. The Ombudsman may provide information obtained this way to another agency or agencies holding a legitimate interest. Central to the Ombudsman's role within the Government's accountability framework is the power to produce reports. This bill proposes that the Ombudsman may prepare a report on any matter concerning an Aboriginal program, including recommendations for improvements.

The report will be provided to the Minister responsible for the Aboriginal program and the Ministers and agencies whose portfolio interests are pertinent to the contents of the report. After one month the Minister responsible for the Aboriginal program must furnish a copy of the report to both Houses of this Parliament. The bill provides for the Minister responsible for an Aboriginal program and the Ombudsman to initiate consultation about the program at any time. The Ombudsman also may make a special report to Parliament on any systemic issue relating to Aboriginal affairs. The contents of this bill are the culmination of years of work and consultation that this Government undertook to reform Aboriginal affairs. It will improve the lives of many Aborigines in New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr TONY ISSA (Granville) [7.10 p.m.]: I am pleased to contribute to debate on and express my support for the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014. As a former member of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee, I learned a great deal about the adversity endured by Aboriginal people and the need of the Aboriginal people—culturally, physically and spiritually—to have their connection to their land and water recognised, cared for and respected in the interests of all Aboriginal people now and in future. I acknowledge and pay respect to the elders, past and present. As a former Lord Mayor of Parramatta City Council, I had the privilege of opening the Sorry Garden at Lake Parramatta, which acknowledges proof, prior to European colonialism, of the land being used by local Aboriginal people. The currently remaining evidence of Aboriginal occupation lies along the shoreline of the Lake Parramatta Reserve in the form of shelters, hand stencils, middens and much more.

When I became the lord mayor I realised that the Sorry Garden acknowledgement of the Aboriginal people was long overdue. Labor had failed in its duty to commemorate the origins of the Aboriginal community by establishing that important garden. Today I am pleased to acknowledge the hard work of the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Veterans Affairs, and Assistant Minister for Education, the Hon. Victor Dominello. By listening to community leaders and adopting their ideas, the Minister has demonstrated the commitment of our Government to listen and to work in partnership to implement this much-needed legislative reform. I commend the Minister for bringing this important bill to Parliament.

The bill outlines the proposal for the appointment of a deputy ombudsman for Aboriginal programs—an Australian first, and a landmark reform for Aboriginal affairs. No previous State or Federal government has opened itself up to such a level of independent scrutiny of its Aboriginal programs, but the New South Wales Government has. In three recent independent reports both the New South Wales Auditor-General and the New South Wales Ombudsman called on the Government to have greater accountability in the design and delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal people. This reform bill addresses the need for greater accountability in the design and delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal people. In October 2011 the New South Wales

Ombudsman identified similar shortfalls with the previous Government's policy. In particular, the Ombudsman pointed out wasted opportunities stemming from program funding being spent without sufficient accountability. Consequently, the previous Government did not deliver the improvements in overall outcomes for Aboriginal people that were intended.

The Ombudsman recommended that an independent agency inquire into and report on the effectiveness of the implementation of the Government's plans for addressing Aboriginal disadvantage. This Government is committed to improving the lives of Aboriginal people across New South Wales by providing them with the services they require and by sharing decisions with them about the welfare of the Aboriginal community. As a result of this partnership with Aboriginal people, Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment [OCHRE] was created. OCHRE is the New South Wales Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs that has been developed in partnership with Aboriginal people. It is the response to the task force's recommendations. In other words, the Government will work in partnership with the Aboriginal people by providing support for Aboriginal young people to stay at school, for transition to employment and for learning the Aboriginal language and culture to build Aboriginal pride and identity.

The OCHRE accountability framework provides for an Aboriginal voice in the design and delivery of programs and services, a refocused role for the Aboriginal Affairs agency and improved coordination and oversight as well as meaningful and measureable reporting. Further, this bill creates a new section 25N that will permit the Ombudsman to provide a report on any matter concerning an Aboriginal program to which part 3B applies, including any recommendations for improvements in the delivery of the program, to the Minister responsible for the program and to any other Minister or public authority that, in the opinion of the Ombudsman, is affected by the report. The OCHRE reform is a long-term policy. We are mindful that not all reports from the Ombudsman will be positive. We are realistic regarding the historic challenges that face program delivery, in particular in matters relating to Aboriginal affairs. No program is perfect and no doubt the program will require a degree of fine-tuning. The bill will provide an opportunity for the Government to fine-tune programs along the way to improve the model and therefore the outcomes.

If we can build genuine partnerships with Aboriginal people, who use their own initiatives and consult with leaders of Aboriginal bodies, agencies and other relevant stakeholders, combined with a solid accountability structure that measures outcomes, we will make a difference. In conclusion, I reiterate my support for the bill and congratulate the Minister for delivering on this Government's commitment. The creation of the position of the Deputy Ombudsman for Aboriginal Programs definitely will lead to a better outcome for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. This legislative reform will address the need of Aboriginal people in New South Wales for better outcomes, and by partnership and cooperation will improve education and employment as well as opportunity outcomes for future generations. I congratulate the Minister on introducing the bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [7.15 p.m.]: I support the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014 and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I pay my respects to elders, past and present, and I also pay my respect to elders of the First Nations of New South Wales. I also recognise the significance of this amending bill to the Aboriginal people of New South Wales: this is an Australian-first proposal. I have listened to members who have preceded me in this debate. I certainly acknowledge the work that has been done by the previous Government and the difficult environment in which governments work. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the portfolio held by the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Veterans Affairs, and Assistant Minister for Education, the Hon. Victor Dominello, is a very difficult portfolio.

The portfolio presents challenges for which so far we have not found a formula that works. I acknowledge the Minister for introducing this bill. I have worked closely with him in the administration of his portfolio. I visited Aboriginal communities and I met with Aboriginal people. I am impressed by the manner in which the Minister has dealt with his portfolio and his responsibilities as well as his absolute commitment to doing the very best he can. I respect him for that. I also acknowledge that when the Ombudsman's report was published about the previous Government's program, Two Ways Together, I did not take it as a total reflection on the previous Government; rather, I believe it highlights the challenges we must meet as parliamentarians and as people who want to see a greater future created for Aboriginal people in New South Wales.

The problem that we face is to consider the particular elements that exist within communities and to develop and adapt programs to suit communities in different locations. The challenges for Aboriginal people

living in remote areas are greater than for those who live in the inner city. There is a constant need to evolve. The greatest critics of programs are the Aboriginal people themselves. They are forthright in their opinions and they tell us what is going on. After the ministerial task force was held, through the Minister we recognised the need to have greater engagement with Aboriginal people and to allow them to determine the best way of dealing with their issues. I recognise that need but I know that there will be challenges. The Government needs to be dynamic and to be constantly reviewing the programs that are put in place. The deputy Aboriginal Ombudsman will oversee these programs to consider how they are working and whether they are providing the benefits that they were designed to achieve.

We need to get the measure of the quality of life of Aboriginal people in New South Wales. A good quality of life is something that we take for granted in our society but it is something that Aboriginal people have not yet achieved. Deterioration of the standards of Aboriginal communities continues through the generations, caused by a range of issues. Aboriginal communities recognise these problems but they are difficult, complex issues, driven primarily by the attitude of the people with whom we need to engage. They are problems that we have not yet had the ability to address. We need to find a language that works and a trigger that motivates people to change. That is what we need most in our Aboriginal communities: the need to change and to understand that programs have to drive change. People need to change their lifestyle and to engage with programs that provide greater benefits to them. So far, it has been a difficult area to work in and I think that, while the programs we introduce today might not always be the greatest solutions, they will engage some parts of the Aboriginal community and will gain some level of success.

When we were with the Minister in Wilcannia the other day, it was apparent that there are young Aboriginal people who are prepared to take leadership roles. They will determine the future direction of the communities in which they live and demonstrate the best way forward and the opportunities that are obtained from a change in lifestyle. For those who choose to participate and engage in that process, the rewards will be great. We need to identify a process by which they can become involved in a program that will produce a positive outcome for them. We need to see a demonstrated change in the way they live which will open up opportunities for them and for their children. The new generation is where we need to identify the greatest area that needs change. We need to ensure that the environment that the young people are living in is the best environment to enable them to have the greatest opportunities.

When I go to Wilcannia and we talk about the issues that young Aboriginal children confront, one thing that is really appalling is the level of trauma to which they are exposed. That has been identified as one of the greatest challenges for young Aboriginal children. The situations they experience and the things that they see are a real challenge to their personal development and have an impact on their lives. The member for Myall Lakes identified the fact that most Aboriginal children have been subjected to some sort of sexual assault. This is unacceptable; it can have such a negative effect on their personal development and future lives.

The opportunities that we might be able to create through our programs are discounted by the fact that those young Aboriginal people have a lot of difficulty in engaging with the community and in the processes that we want to put in place. I recognise what the Minister has done so far and I take great interest in the future. It is not going to be easy; it has never been easy. It is the greatest challenge we have as politicians and the greatest challenge for the people of Australia. I do know that we want a better environment for Aboriginal people. We want to see them have greater enjoyment of life and participate in every way in our communities.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde—Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Veterans Affairs, and Assistant Minister for Education) [7.25 p.m.], in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate but in particular the members representing the electorates of Canterbury, Gosford, Cabramatta, Davidson, Tamworth, Myall Lakes, Swansea, Granville and Murray-Darling. What is evident from both sides of the Chamber is that there is a real passion and commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal people in New South Wales. Some of the initiatives that are part of OCHRE include culture and language, opportunity hubs and local decision-making.

As I travel around the State and see, for example, how important culture and language is for community, I realise it is not just important to and for the Aboriginal community; it is important for our national identity because it should be one of the things that unites us as Australians. That is why it is critical that these initiatives that have been designed and requested by Aboriginal communities have every chance of success. This bill is, in many ways, the central cog to try to ensure that these initiatives that have been requested by the Aboriginal community have every chance of succeeding. I thank all members for their contributions. I understand that there is a proposed amendment from the member for Canterbury. I know that she brings the amendment in good faith and I will deal with that in Consideration in Detail.

I am proud to be part of a Government that has the courage to introduce reform of this magnitude, which provides transparency and empowers community through the deputy Aboriginal Ombudsman to ensure independent monitoring and assessment of Aboriginal programs. This is unquestionably an historic reform; it has never been done before in any Australian jurisdiction at a State or Federal level. I commend the Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014 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.

Consideration in detail requested by Ms Linda Burney.

Consideration in Detail

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Garry Edwards): By leave, I will propose the bill in groups of clauses and schedules.

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury) [7.30 p.m.]: I move Opposition amendment No. 1 on sheet C2014-033A:

No. 1 Page 3, schedule 1 [1], line 6. Insert "The person so appointed must be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander." after "Part 3B."

This amendment is designed to ensure that the person appointed as Deputy Ombudsman is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. I outlined the Opposition's reasons for proposing this amendment in my contribution to the second reading debate. I am looking at this from a holistic perspective. I am very fearful that what is about to be delivered in the Federal budget and by the Federal Government generally is a shutting down of Aboriginal voices across this country. The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples has already been ripped to pieces. We know there will be incredible cuts to the Aboriginal early childhood sector and, in particular, to Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning Incorporated. I am also very worried about the shutting down of Aboriginal voices and services, in particular the Council of Australian Governments Closing the Gap initiatives and the Aboriginal child and family centres.

That will have a devastating effect on the progress and development that we have made over the past 40 years, not only in ensuring that Aboriginal voices and advocacy groups are heard but also in supporting the great work done in a bipartisan way at both the State and Federal levels in the development and improvement of Aboriginal social justice outcomes and, importantly, the promotion of the rights of Aboriginal people. I can speak with some authority on this topic. As members know, I have worked in Aboriginal affairs for well over 30 years, including as a very important advocate for Aboriginal education and training for 10 years with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated. That is not my only experience. A number of people were handpicked at the Federal level without any discussion or consultation with Aboriginal communities and a series of recommendations were made that will be disastrous in the long term for Aboriginal people.

I have had discussions with the Minister and I have outlined why I believe the person appointed as Deputy Ombudsman must be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The position will have much more legitimacy and credibility, particularly in the Aboriginal community, if the person appointed is a well-respected and obviously properly qualified Aboriginal. We need such a person to be able to undertake the tasks and to deal with the challenges that have been set out in the bill. Credibility and acceptance are important issues. I know the Minister understands that if we want Aboriginal people to be truly honest and open and to have effective dialogue we must establish trust. It will be much easier and progress will be achieved much more quickly if we have a credible Aboriginal person in that position. The Office of the Ombudsman will also be a much better place as a result of the employment of an Aboriginal person at the Deputy Ombudsman level. It will enhance not only the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment program but also Aboriginals' understanding of the office, which can only be a good thing.

I was on the Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales for a long time and I know there is capacity to identify positions within this State to which Aboriginals could be appointed—although I am not sure

that that is true across the country. Given what the Aboriginal affairs sector is about to face, I cannot think of a more important time than now to have as many Aboriginal voices as possible speaking out about accountability and what government should evaluate and being part of that evaluation. I listened very carefully to the contributions from the member for Murray-Darling and the member for Granville. They said that Aboriginal people are forthright in their opinions. To have an Aboriginal person in that role will mean that people will be more honest and much clearer. They will be able to provide a clear and real perspective about what is happening on the ground, and that can only be a positive thing.

I am disappointed that the previously announced coordinator general's position has not eventuated. I accept that the Deputy Ombudsman will take this role very seriously. I am encouraged by other members saying that this is the beginning of an oversight role. However, there must be more accountability in some of the big agencies that have huge responsibility for delivering services to Aboriginal people. The education, health and justice systems should be more accountable for the way programs are rolled out. Having oversight will improve the rollout of programs and ensure that they are evaluated. We should be told where things need to change and having an Aboriginal person in that role will make any recommendations much more legitimate and much better understood.

The Opposition will not call for a division on the question that this amendment be agreed to. I have moved it to make the point strongly that this position must be filled by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander for the reasons I have outlined. While it is perhaps outside the leave of the bill, if what has been reported about the measures in tonight's Federal budget is true, I am sure we will have more to say. This is apolitical, but my fear is that State governments will be expected to pick up the scattered remains, and that will be extremely difficult. The potential train wreck will not be the result of anything done in this Chamber; it will be the result of the Abbott Government's actions. Although the Opposition does not oppose the bill, it has moved one amendment on which it will not call for a division. I cannot underscore how important it is that the Minister take up the issue of an Indigenous person being employed in this position.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde—Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Veterans Affairs, and Assistant Minister for Education) [7.39 p.m.]: The Government respectfully does not support the proposed amendment. The member for Canterbury is moving the amendment from a position of good faith. Indeed, in the preparation of this bill I have wrestled with whether this should be a prescribed position. All members of Parliament should be cautious about proposals for laws making a legal requirement for public appointments based on individual characteristics of race rather than skill and experience. Even the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner is not appointed on the legal requirement of race, but rather on significant experience in community life with Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders. This position was introduced in 1992 by the Keating Government and it appears in the same form today.

I assure members that the Ombudsman has been extensively consulted about the arrangements in this bill, including the appointment process for the Deputy Ombudsman for Aboriginal Programs. As I stated in my second reading speech, it is intended that the deputy ombudsman position will be filled by an Aboriginal person who will be appointed administratively. I echo what the member for Canterbury said in relation to the importance of having an Aboriginal person in that role, but I believe it is not for us as legislators to dictate to an independent body like the Ombudsman what he or she must or must not do on issues internal to the important office of the Ombudsman. However, it is very clear that both sides of the Chamber are of the view that the appointee be an Aboriginal-identified person. I am sure that will not be lost on the Ombudsman. We do not want to affect the integrity or the independence of the Ombudsman by dictating selection criteria for whom he should or should not appoint. For those reasons the Government respectfully does not support the amendment.

Question—That Opposition amendment No. 1 [C2014-033A] be agreed to—put and resolved in the negative.

Opposition amendment No. 1 [C2014-033A] negatived.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Consideration in detail concluded.

Third Reading

Motion by the Hon. Victor Dominello 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.

ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BILL 2014

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Victor Dominello, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde—Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Veterans Affairs, and Assistant Minister for Education) [7.43 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I speak in support of the Advocate for Children and Young People Bill 2014. The New South Wales Government cares deeply about children and young people and wants to make sure that their challenges and opportunities are addressed effectively through consultation with communities and strong advocacy. Only by listening to children and young people, and consulting with the key groups with whom they engage, can we ensure that the work we do for them actually makes a positive difference to their lives. Although the Commission for Children and Young People provides advocacy mechanisms for our State's younger citizens, I believe there are opportunities to strengthen the advocacy model to ensure the voices of disenfranchised, and vulnerable children and young people are being heard and addressed by the New South Wales Government.

That is why last year, following the transfer of the Working With Children Check function from the commission to the Children's Guardian, I authorised the most extensive community consultations on advocacy for children and young people since the commission was established over 14 years ago. These consultations involved the appointment of two youth ambassadors to guide and oversee the consultation process; the release of a discussion paper for public comment; community round tables for children and young people in Cabramatta and Wollongong; a non-government organisation round table at which 40 agencies were represented; and classroom consultations held in 34 schools across metropolitan, regional and rural New South Wales and in each of the school sectors. Responses were received from more than 900 children and young people.

The key messages from the consultations were as follows: children and young people should have a say on the matters that affect their lives; children and young people from all walks of life should be encouraged and assisted to speak for themselves in ways that suit the individual child or young person; an advocate for children and young people is needed to promote the voices of children and young people, and to stand up for their interests; children and young people want respect from adults and see a strong role for adults and experts in helping make their lives better.

Further key messages include: an advocate should have a strong focus on enhancing the lives of all children and young people, and a particular focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged young people; strong advocacy for children and young people means being solely focussed on improving the wellbeing of children and young people, and therefore should be independent of other agendas; strong advocacy for children and young people should be underpinned by an understanding of the lives of children and young people and the role of Government, and so needs to be supported by sound policy-relevant research and analysis; and an advocate must work with others to make a difference, ensuring there is coordinated action to tackle the issues that affect children and young people across agency and sector boundaries.

This legislation reflects the abovementioned messages and creates an independent statutory office of the Advocate for Children and Young People to represent the needs and interests of children and young people in New South Wales. The New South Wales Government is therefore committed to having a strong advocate for children and young people whose job is to stand up for the rights and interests of children and young people, and to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard by the Government and by the whole community. The key features of this independent role mirror those of the Commission for Children and Young

People. The important oversight role of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People is retained, and the Governor may remove the Advocate from office only for incompetence, incapacity or misbehaviour.

As the name suggests, the new Advocate will have a clearer advocacy role than the Commission for Children and Young People, which was also responsible for regulation of the Working With Children Check until that function was transferred to the New South Wales Children's Guardian in June 2013. The legislation provides an overarching function that the Advocate must "advocate for and promote the safety, welfare and well-being of children and young people". The legislation also gives the Advocate the critically important role of promoting the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions that affect their lives. This strengthened advocacy role will be supported by clearer requirements for the Advocate to engage with a wide range of children and young people across New South Wales, and to work collaboratively with the many agencies inside and outside Government that are also committed to improving the lives of children and young people in New South Wales.

The legislation extends the Advocate's remit to people aged from 0 to 24 years and brings together the Office of the Advocate and the New South Wales Youth Advisory Council. This will enhance effective advocacy for children and youth by clarifying responsibility within Government for work on youth matters and work on matters concerning young people; providing a structure for working collaboratively on agreed priorities; combining resources to maximise effective advocacy for children and youth; providing a clear point of contact for independent advice on child and youth-related matters for Government and non-government agencies in New South Wales; and recognising the important transitions for young people as they move through schooling and into further education, training or work.

The Youth Advisory Council will retain all of its existing functions and will continue to provide direct advice to the Minister on matters of concern to young people. In addition, the Youth Advisory Council will be an important source of advice to the Advocate, and the Youth Advisory Council, in turn, will benefit from closer connections with the Advocate, including access to the Advocate's networks in the non-government sector. The Advocate will act as a facilitator for the Youth Advisory Council by liaising with agencies across government to raise issues and potentially implement Youth Advisory Council recommendations.

The legislation retains many of the features and functions of the Commission for Children and Young People, including the conduct of special inquiries; making recommendations to government and non-government agencies on policies and services affecting children; conducting and monitoring research into issues affecting children and young people; and giving priority to the interests and needs of disadvantaged children and young people. The stakeholder consultations undertaken last year identified that a key role for the Advocate should be working to ensure better coordination of policies and programs at the systemic, cross-government level to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people in New South Wales. The legislation therefore requires the Advocate to prepare, in consultation with the Minister and the wider community, a three-year strategic plan for children and young people in the State. Following Government approval of the plan, the Advocate will be responsible for monitoring its implementation.

A number of functions of the Commission for Children and Young People will no longer be specifically required of the Advocate. The Advocate will not have a specific function of monitoring trends in complaints made by or on behalf of children. It is the Ombudsman's role to monitor trends in complaints and it is the Advocate's role to provide a systemic approach that ensures children and young people are heard, that they have their views understood and that they are able to bring issues of concern to them. The Advocate and the Ombudsman should be working together on child friendly complaints standards and this role sits comfortably within the Advocate's broader functions of promoting the participation of children in the making of decisions that affect their lives, and promoting and monitoring the overall safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people in the community.

The Advocate will not have a specific role in conducting, promoting and monitoring training on issues affecting children or in conducting, promoting and monitoring public awareness activities affecting children. Those specific roles are subsumed under the new overarching function that the Advocate will advocate for and promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. There will be no requirement for an expert advisory committee to be appointed to advise the Advocate across the range of his functions. The Advocate's work needs to be informed and shaped by a wider range of experts and stakeholders than can be represented on one expert advisory committee, and a range of mechanisms are needed to obtain this input and advice.

The legislation enables the Advocate to establish dedicated, project-specific advisory committees as required and includes strengthened provisions requiring the Advocate, in exercising his or her functions, to consult with children and young people from diverse backgrounds, relevant experts, government agencies and non-government organisations. This is a strong model for advocacy for children and young people in contemporary New South Wales. By having the Government work collaboratively with the wider community, we can be assured that the voices of young people are being heard. I commend the bill to the House.

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

ENERGY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (RETAIL PRICE DEREGULATION) BILL 2014

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Anthony Roberts, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Resources and Energy, and Special Minister of State) [7.55 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Energy Legislation Amendment (Retail Price Deregulation) Bill 2014 makes good on the Government's commitment to place downward pressure on the cost of living by increasing competition in the electricity market and reducing prices for New South Wales customers. The bill amends both national and State-based energy laws and regulations as they apply in New South Wales to increase competition and choice in the State's electricity market. The bill provides for the removal of retail electricity price regulation; the establishment of a Market Monitor in New South Wales to monitor and report annually on the performance and competitiveness of the electricity retail market; the appointment of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] as the Market Monitor; the transition of electricity customers currently on regulated offer contracts to standard retail contracts; and the continuation and maintenance of retail gas price regulation.

The move to a more competitive energy market without price controls has been in train for nearly a decade. In 2004 the Commonwealth of Australia, along with all State and Territory governments, entered into the Australian Energy Market Agreement. The agreement set the agenda for phasing out retail electricity and gas price regulation in markets where competition is found to be effective. A competitive market provides the best form of customer protection and the lowest prices for customers. Competitive markets give customers the power to change retailers if they are unhappy with the prices or level of service offered by their existing retailer. This means that over time retailers will compete to retain their customers by offering more competitive prices, better products and better protection for customers.

I turn first to the electricity price amendments. Competition has been steadily evolving in the New South Wales electricity market over the past decade. Already, more than 60 per cent of New South Wales customers have switched from the regulated price to a competitive market contract, and more are switching each and every day. Currently, approximately 16 electricity retailers are actively offering products and services in New South Wales—a far cry from the days of the government-owned monopoly retailers when customers were given one choice and one price. A further 33 companies are licenced to operate in New South Wales and are expected to enter the market as a result of this magnificent reform.

Over the past few years the New South Wales Government has encouraged the development of competition in the retail electricity market through the terms of reference it has provided to IPART. Among other things, the Government's instructions to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal were to set average regulated prices that reflected the efficient costs of supplying electricity to customers. In addition, the regulated retail prices were to support the long-term interests of consumers and the stability of the electricity market. The practical outcome of this is that over the years electricity prices have been set at cost-reflective levels, allowing smaller, newer retailers to enter the marketplace. This has helped to create a competitive retail electricity market.

In 2013 the Australian Energy Market Commission [AEMC] undertook a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of competition in the New South Wales retail energy market. As part of this review, the Australian Energy Market Commission consulted extensively with households, small business holders, consumer groups and industry. The Australian Energy Market Commission found that competition is sufficiently developed in the

New South Wales electricity market to justify removing retail price regulation. Based on the Australian Energy Market Commission's recommendations, the New South Wales Government has decided to proceed with deregulation of the electricity market. This bill will remove the requirement for the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal to regulate retail electricity prices and will make consequential amendments to the State's energy legislation to remove references to retail electricity price regulation. As a result, retailers will no longer be required to offer customers regulated retail electricity prices.

Electricity deregulation will not degrade customer protections. The regulation of retail prices provides an effective form of protection for customers only in markets where competition is not effective and where individual retailers can exert their market power and influence prices. As the Australian Energy Market Commission has made clear, that is not the case in this great State. Importantly, retail price regulation does not prevent price increases, and this has been seen through the double-digit electricity price rises over the past few years caused by Labor. To put it simply, retail price regulation does not provide effective protection for customers in a competitive marketplace.

An effective and competitive market provides the strongest protections and lowest prices for customers, and that is what this historic reform delivers, as supported earlier by the member for Campbelltown. Importantly, electricity deregulation will reduce red tape and the administrative burden that that imposes on retailers. This means that the cost of this red tape will no longer be passed on to consumers, placing further downward pressure on electricity bills. Electricity deregulation will also encourage further competition in our State. Retailers have advised that they will be able to offer customers new, innovative and more competitive electricity offers.

In addition, as I mentioned earlier, electricity deregulation will encourage new retailers to enter the New South Wales market, further enhancing competition and providing customers with increased choice. The Government is proceeding with electricity deregulation because evidence has shown that there is strong competition in the New South Wales electricity market. To keep an eye on the level of competition in the New South Wales market, the bill provides for the appointment of a Market Monitor. The Market Monitor will scrutinise and report annually on the competitiveness and effectiveness of the retail electricity market. This will ensure that any problems arising in the market can be addressed early so that customers will not be subject to unfair pricing.

I am pleased to announce that the Government has nominated the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal as the Market Monitor. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal has the experience in the New South Wales electricity market and as such is considered an appropriate body to monitor the market in its transition away from retail price regulation. To ensure that the competitiveness of the market is reviewed in a comprehensive manner, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal will assess the extent to which customers are engaged with the market and the measures retailers are taking to attract and retain customers. The Market Monitor will also look at whether there are any barriers preventing retailers from entering or exiting the marketplace. The Market Monitor will consider the movements of electricity prices and product diversity in the market to determine whether these movements are typical of competitive markets.

The bill also provides the New South Wales Government with the power to request the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal to conduct a special review if necessary. The special review will include a detailed review of retail prices and profit margins in New South Wales, and whether these reflect a competitive market. The Minister for Resources and Energy is charged with the responsibility of requesting a special review if required, and may request the Market Monitor to consider other matters should there be additional concerns. This provides an additional layer of customer protection as the Market Monitor acts as a watchdog over the market. If these special reviews highlight any concerns with the competitiveness of the market, the Government will take swift action.

In making the transition to a market free of retail electricity price controls, customers will not face any disruption or be required to do anything extra to maintain access to the supply of electricity. Customers on regulated contracts will automatically transition to standard retail contracts. The terms and conditions of these contracts will be exactly the same as those under the regulated contracts. If customers were on a payment plan or subject to a hardship policy, then these protections will automatically continue to apply to their new contracts. In fact, the only changes most customers will notice in the move to a market free of retail price regulation will be a reduction in their electricity charges.

Under this reform the Government has ensured that most customers moving to the transitional tariff will receive a 1.5 per cent decrease compared to the regulated price. This is the first time in more than a decade

that customers on the regulated price will experience a decrease—an achievement for which this Government is rightly proud. Members opposite have written me a note asking me to ask where the Leader of the Opposition is. He was responsible for 20 per cent increases in price on his watch. Importantly, customers are not required to remain on the transitional tariff and have the option of shopping around for a better deal at any time. In many cases regulated offer customers may be able to save hundreds of dollars a year by switching to a competitive market offer. Indeed, in its 2013 report on the competitiveness of the New South Wales market, the Australian Energy Market Commission highlighted that most families could save between \$300 and \$400 on an average annual household electricity bill.

The bill will also make consequential amendments to the New South Wales Electricity Supply Act 1995 to remove references to "regulated offer customers" and related terms. The bill will also preserve the eligibility of Solar Bonus Scheme customers to ensure that they continue to receive scheme payments until the closure of the scheme in 2016. An additional safeguard in the national framework is the standing offer price. This is a default price, set individually by each retailer, which they are required to offer to customers. Standing offer prices have intrinsic protections built into them, such as minimum terms and conditions and restrictions on how often the prices can be changed. The bill ensures that customers can choose standing offers with these baseline protections, and is consistent with the national legislation.

I turn now to the second area of amendments. These relate to retail gas price regulation. In its report on competitiveness in New South Wales energy markets, the Australian Energy Market Commission also reviewed the effectiveness of competition in the New South Wales retail gas market. The commission found that while competition was effective in some sections of the retail gas market, some regional areas did not show effective levels of competition. Overall, competition in the retail gas market has not evolved to the extent that it has in the retail electricity market. The Government is committed to ensuring that strong and effective protections are available for all New South Wales customers. For that reason the Government will not remove retail gas price regulation. Consultation with industry, consumers, regulators and government bodies was a key part of the commission's review of competition in New South Wales.

Submissions were received from industry groups, consumer groups and the New South Wales Energy and Water Ombudsman. This feedback and ongoing consultation informed the bill before the House today. In addition, public forums were held throughout the State and stakeholder working groups were convened to canvass different issues. The information gathered from this consultation played a key role in the development of the policy positions underpinning this bill. As I said earlier, the shift to a deregulated electricity market has been in train since the former Government first entered the Australian Energy Market Agreement in 2004.

We are finalising the process, and we are delivering on the commitment to reform this market and empower New South Wales customers. Households and businesses in New South Wales will benefit from more retailers and more innovative energy offers in the marketplace. The bill delivers on the New South Wales Government's commitment to place downward pressure on energy prices. It delivers on the Government's commitment to maintain best practice consumer protection in the energy market. Importantly, it delivers on the Government's commitment to deliver a more competitive and innovative electricity market for the benefit of the people of this great State. I commend the bill to the House.

Debated adjourned on motion by Mr Ron Hoenig and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

CRIMES (SENTENCING PROCEDURE) AMENDMENT (FAMILY MEMBER VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT) BILL 2014

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 7 May 2014.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [8.10 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition in debate on the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill 2014. The Opposition does not oppose this bill. That is hardly surprising, as the core of this bill is identical to an Opposition bill that the Leader of the Opposition introduced in this place and moved be read a second time on 20 March—two months ago. This bill was rushed into the House last week to enable the Government to catch up with the Opposition. It has made sure the bill must be dealt with today and tomorrow because the second reading

speech of the Leader of the Opposition continues on Thursday. The Government decided to pretend to honour its election pledge on this topic when it was shamed into it by the Opposition. The bill states that its object is:

To enable a court on the application of the prosecutor to take a family victim impact statement into account for sentencing purposes on the basis that the impact of an offence on the immediate family of a deceased victim is an aspect of harm done to the community.

The overview notes that the bill overrules the decision in *R v Previtera*, 1997, 94 A Crim R 76, which held that the impact of the death of a victim on the victim's family is not relevant to determining the sentence of the offender. The law of evidence is said not to be affected insofar as it relates to the use of family victim impact statements in sentencing. The bill also seeks to clarify that the absence of a family victim impact statement does not mean that an offence had little or no impact on the victim's family. Whether the subject of debate for some time has been impact statements can be taken into account when sentencing an offender for wrongful death. At present, they must be tendered but not taken into account on sentencing. That is perceived to have some benefit for the victim's family at a therapeutic level, but many advocates have argued for more.

The current position prohibiting their consideration for sentencing is established by the New South Wales Court of Criminal Appeal in *Previtera*. That decision has been summarised this way: It is offensive to fundamental concepts of equality and justice for criminal courts to value one life as worth more than another. It is inappropriate to impose a harsher sentence upon an offender because the value of the life lost is perceived to be greater in the one case than in the other. A sentence must be proportionate to the objective seriousness of an offence. The sentence will already have taken into account the value of a human life. The Court of Criminal Appeal argument about the equality of each human life is one that I personally find very powerful. Granted that some homicide or manslaughter victims will die without family available or willing to make an impact statement, there is the potential for inconsistent sentencing—that is, a court could impose a harsher sentence in a case where the victim has a grieving and loving family than where the victim does not, and thus one victim's life would be valued higher than another.

Other jurisdictions have not adopted the course in *Previtera*. Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, for example, allow sentencing courts to consider family statements in homicide cases. The case is the same, as I understand it, in Canada and the United Kingdom. In 1996 in this jurisdiction, however, the NSW Law Reform Commission recommended that impact statements should be inadmissible in death cases. It argued that such use of statements could only be "An attempt to persuade the court to impose a harsher sentence on the accused on the basis that, in some way, the death of a person who was, say, young and surrounded by a loving family and friends is more serious than, say, the death of a person who was alone, unhappy or elderly." This of course is similar to the reasoning in *Previtera*, which has been followed in other cases, for example, *R v Dang*, 1999, NSW CCA, 42. Interestingly, in *R v Berg*, 2004, NSW CCA, 300, then Chief Justice Spigelman argued in obiter comment that *Previtera* might need to be reconsidered in light of section 3A (g) of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999, which came into effect in 2002. That statutory provision requires the court when sentencing to "recognise the harm done to the community". The then Chief Justice said:

It appears to me strongly arguable that the recognition of this purpose of sentencing would encompass the kind of matters which are incorporated in a victim impact statement. It may in some cases be appropriate to consider the contents of such statements in the sentencing exercise. This was not a purpose of sentencing recognised in *Previtera*.

Because the deceased was part of the community, consideration of a family impact statement is part of the consideration of the harm done to the community by the death of the deceased. Framed in this way, the principle at the core of *Previtera* can be retained while an impact statement is still able to be considered in sentencing in cases involving death. This is a limited and constrained consideration of statements. It is of course precisely the model in this bill, and indeed in the Opposition bill as well. Of course, that is not what the now Government promised in opposition.

On 23 February 2011 the then shadow Attorney General and member for Epping said that, if elected, the Government would legislate "to specifically provide that courts in New South Wales may consider victim impact statements by family victims in homicide cases when determining an offender's sentence". There were no qualification or restrictions then and no reference to section 3A (g); just a bald promise, which is not honoured by this more restricted but entirely sensible and supportable bill. Having come to power, the new Government released a document in May described as a background policy paper entitled "Family victim impact statements and sentencing in homicide cases", which provoked a flurry of submissions and considerations—but not much else. There was certainly no legislation.

At an estimates hearing on 26 October 2011 the then Attorney General flagged the possibility that the Government would not attempt to implement its policy. That seems to have been the last public comment until the Government's unseemly scramble this year to introduce a bill to catch up with this side of the House. This proposal can be seen as giving statutory reform to what Chief Justice Spigelman said was one possible interpretation of section 3A (g). The death of a homicide victim does not occur in a vacuum. That legislative provision was introduced in 2002 after *Previtera*. This interpretation of the significance of section 3A (g) is not without dissent—I note, for example, the article by Tracey Booth in the *Law Society Journal* in November 2007. On the other hand, the possible questioning of *Previtera* suggested in *Berg* was also referred to but not decided by the Court of Criminal Appeal in *R v Tzanis*, 2005, NSW CCA, 274.

The bill also subjects the authors of impact statements to potential cross-examination. Such a step may undo much of the therapeutic effect otherwise expected from a statement. Impact statements are unsworn and untested documents. In practice, at the moment in New South Wales there is no cross-examination of the content of a statement. It is possible, and a little concerning, that that may change. The Opposition does not oppose the bill and congratulates the Government on catching up, several months later, with the Opposition. I note that the bill is a sensible and reasonable response to the calls for consideration of victims' impact statements on sentencing in cases of wrongful death.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [8.17 p.m.]: I support the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill 2014. At the outset, I acknowledge the Attorney General, who introduced this bill, and also the efforts of the former Attorney General, the honourable member for Epping, who also had carriage of the bill in opposition as shadow Attorney General. The object of the bill is to enable a court, on the application of the prosecutor, to take a family victim impact statement into account for sentencing purposes on the basis that the impact of an offence on the immediate family of a deceased victim is an aspect of harm done to the community.

The bill over-rides the decision in *R v Previtera*, 1997, 94 ACR 76, which held that the impact of the death of a victim on the victim's family is not relevant to the determination of the offender's sentence. This bill does not affect the application of the law of evidence in connection with the use of family victim impact statements in sentencing. Importantly, it makes clear that the absence of a family victim impact statement does not give rise to an inference that the offence had little or no impact on the victim's family or harm done to the community. The Government made a commitment to move into this space at the last election. While after the election the proposal had little stakeholder support among victims groups, the manslaughter of Thomas Kelly in July 2012 saw a shift in attitude from the stakeholder groups. After that case concerns were raised that victim impact statements appeared to carry little or no weight, particularly in the area of sentencing, for the court. Therefore, the Government engaged in a fresh round of consultations, which led to the bill being brought before the House.

Like many members in this place, I have spoken to, been lobbied and had meetings with a number of victims groups who have asked for victim impact statements to be given more strength, more weight and more legitimacy in the eyes of the court, particularly when it comes to sentencing. I am proud to support this legislation on behalf of those groups and the families of victims of crime. Victim impact statements provide considerable relief and a sense of closure for many victims of crime in cases that do not result in death. However, victim impact statements can certainly bring closure to a family when there is a death. It is my view, and that of many others, that the weight of victim impact statements needs to be considered during sentencing. That is absolutely critical.

Another critical element of the bill is that there is no compulsion on families to give a victim impact statement, and certainly no compulsion to insist that the statement be considered as part of sentencing because the bill does not affect the application of law of evidence in connection with these statements. I support the bill on behalf of the many victims and their families who have approached me. This is very welcome reform that hopefully will result in better sentencing outcomes in our courts in the future. Again, I acknowledge the Attorney General and the former Attorney General, the member for Epping, and commend the bill to the House.

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) [8.21 p.m.]: I make a contribution to debate on the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill 2014. As the shadow Attorney General indicated, the Opposition does not oppose the bill and I adopt his comments. Item [1] of schedule 1 to the bill seeks to insert new section 28 (4), which in part refers to:

...punishment for the offence on the basis that the harmful impact of the primary victim's death on the members of the primary victim's immediate family is an aspect of harm done to the community.

That careful and well-drafted provision is probably consistent with the view expressed recently by the former Chief Justice. It is also consistent with the Opposition's proposal, although it is not entirely consistent with the comments of the Attorney General in his second reading speech. Although in part the new measure overrules some aspects of the *Previtera* case, item [2] of schedule 1 retains an important principle. I draw the attention of the House to that principle, which was best described by Justice Adams in *Regina v. Sutcliffe* [2000] NSW SC at 825.

I know the case well, as would other members. I was counsel for the offender in the sentencing proceedings. It was an horrendous murder in which the offender threw rocks from a railway bridge onto the Hume Highway and an innocent truck driver was tragically killed. In sentencing the offender His Honour Justice Adams at paragraph (29) acknowledged the dreadful loss that Mark Evans' death had caused to his family and the wider community, which effectively picks up section 3A (g) of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999. His Honour, referring the *Previtera* case, indicated that the law does not thereby place victim impact statements to be weighed on the scales of justice. He stated:

I respectfully agree with and adopt the careful reasoning of the Chief Judge at Common Law in *R v Previtera* (1997) ACR 76 at 85 as to why this must be so.

The loss of a life is the gravest injury known to the criminal law. Accordingly, it is not made any more serious because the victim's death is the cause of pain or grief to others, however, intensely felt. It would significantly undermine the moral standards essential to the rule of law if justice were to regard the life of one person as more or less valuable than the life of another or, to put it in another way, the killing of one person as more grievous than the killing of another, because of their personal or social circumstances.

All right-thinking people would accept that it would be completely wrong to take one day from an otherwise appropriate sentence for an offence which resulted in death because the deceased was obnoxious, stupid and without friends or family to grieve for him or her. By exact parity of reasoning, it cannot be right to add a day to an otherwise appropriate sentence because the deceased was loved and loving and surrounded by friends and family. If this were not so, counsel for an offender whose actions caused the death might rationally submit that, as the deceased was of the former character, the sentence should be more lenient and the Crown prosecutor, by referring to a grieving family, submit the contrary.

The virtues or vices of the deceased, the extent of his or her social connections and whether the death caused grief or was simply unnoticed by the indifference of the uninvolved, would then become the subject of evidence and argument. The law will neither value a life nor punish a death by such a demeaning process.

The observations made by His Honour relating to *Previtera* simply mean that the law values all human life equally and the criminal law condemns the loss of it unlawfully. Therefore, whether it is a homeless person who is killed or Dr Victor Chang, the value of human life is identical so great is the loss to society in the criminal law. That principle and maintaining the value of the lives of all our citizens is the real rationale behind the *Previtera* case. With the greatest respect to the Chief Judge at Common Law, had it been framed differently in 1997 the issue may not have arisen. It has arisen now from the sentence of Justice Campbell in the matter of Loveridge. That matter is pending before the Court of Criminal Appeal and no doubt that court will have given ample consideration to section 3A (g) of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999.

Nevertheless, despite the issue not being considered as yet, the Opposition regards schedule 1 as being an appropriate statutory provision to ensure that the loss of human life and its impact on the immediate family is an aspect of harm done to the community. I will outline for the House some of my experience with victim impact statements. I have spent almost a lifetime practising in the criminal courts of this State. Objectiveness, which is a lawyer's key attribute, often means that, even though the facts may not be reduced to a mathematical exercise in sentencing proceedings, one can lose sight of the impact of the crime. Victim impact statements and statements made by victims to courts prior to sentencing highlight to the court and the judge the actual impact of a particular crime on the community.

It is a reminder, as one engages in and applies the law as one is required to, that there is a human element involved. The offender must be punished for his actions and the victims of crime and the families of victims who are left behind must be treated with respect. This bill effectively moderates the wording of *R v Previtera* but maintains the underlying concept that all human life is valued by the law of this State and any offender who causes the loss of life through a criminal act will be punished appropriately.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [8.30 p.m.]: The Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill 2014 amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to provide for the consideration of family member victim impact statements in sentencing. I applaud the Attorney General for introducing the bill to the House and note that the previous Attorney General was the architect of the bill. The bill makes a commitment, and it is important that it becomes law. I note that the

Opposition does not oppose the bill. There is a lot of legal information contained in this bill and unless you are a lawyer or a judge you will struggle to interpret the different sections. However, it is important to note that the community's view is being recognised. Too often in law community views are lost in the legalese and the offender seems to have more rights than the victim.

I note the remark by the member for Northern Tablelands that the bill will offer closure to family members impacted by the death of the victim. The rights and feelings of family members of victims should be recognised in sentencing the offender. This bill provides that an application can be made by the prosecutor to take a family member's victim impact statement into account for sentencing purposes on the basis that the impact of the offence on the immediate family of the deceased victim is an aspect of harm done to the wider community. Parliament may lose track of the community when passing some laws. I applaud the introduction of this bill and fully endorse it. It is about time we listened to the victims' families about sentencing. Deliberate and appropriate sentences are required. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [8.32 p.m.]: The Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill 2014 takes the important step of according legal weight to victim impact statements submitted to the court by bereaved family members in homicide cases. We often hear in news reports about family members submitting victim impact statements to the court at sentencing hearings but I think it would come as a surprise to many lay people to know that until now New South Wales courts and judges could not take these statements into account when considering the sentence of an offender.

I note that the former speaker referred to the experience of people who have a legal background interpreting the bill. I acknowledge the Attorney General, the former Attorney General, members of the Opposition and others who have that legal training. I, like the vast majority of people in the community, will approach the bill as a lay person. Courts in New South Wales have been guided by precedent set by the *Previtera* decision, which was referred to by the Attorney-General in his second reading speech. Most members of the community will not understand what that means. That decision found it was not appropriate to take a victim impact statement into account in sentencing when it deals only with the effect of the victim's death on the family. That had ramifications on the understanding and expectations of the community.

The Government undertook to review this situation and hastened to bring the resulting bill before the House in the wake of community response to the prosecution and sentencing of Kieran Loveridge for the one-punch killing of Thomas Kelly in Kings Cross, and other incidents. The Kellys, like many bereaved families before them, were frustrated to find that their heartfelt victim impact statements would have no bearing on the sentence handed down to their son's killer. Subsequent representations by them through the Thomas Kelly Foundation, along with the support of other victims groups, including the Newcastle-based organisation Victims of Crime Assistance League [VOCAL], have helped to bring this timely bill to the table.

Recently in this place I made a private member's statement on behalf of a constituent who was also aggrieved by the legal process in relation to family member victim impact statement. That constituent, Kim Flack, lost her 29-year-old daughter Bianca Turnbull in 2011 when Bianca's car was hit from behind by an alcohol-affected driver and forced off the road and into a telegraph pole. The driver fled after the incident and was subsequently charged and convicted of both causing Bianca's death and failing to stop and render assistance. Like many people in similar situations before them, Bianca's family felt disillusioned and marginalised by the court proceedings, believing the system was more sympathetic to the perpetrator than the victim and the family there to represent her.

Their dismay was exacerbated when Kim's carefully and tenderly composed victim impact statement was unsympathetically—and, might I suggest, unreasonably—vetted by the defence's legal team. In my private member's statement I gave a couple of examples of passages removed from Kim's victim impact statement at the behest of the defence. The sections edited out did not contest or contradict the evidence but were merely personal statements about the magnitude of her loss, which, while completely benign to the outcome of the case, were meaningful to her and to her family. One omitted section stated:

We cannot forgive that the accused never stopped to get help; no one should ever die alone. No parent should have to bury their child; it is not the natural progression of life.

Another omitted section reflected the impact on Mrs Flack as a grandmother and stated, in part:

It is very hard to deal with the emotional questions from Bianca's little son as he tries to comprehend why his mother cannot be there for him when he hurts himself, his birthdays, Christmas; all the milestones of his life will never be shared by his mother.

I remain perplexed as to what justified the removal of those passages other than they may have made the offender feel uncomfortable. In contrast, the offender's mother was apparently able to take the stand to make an unsworn, unchallenged statement to the court about her son and the impact the incident had had on him. The bill before the House will give the families of deceased victims the authority to decide whether to submit a victim impact statement and, in consultation with the prosecutor, determine whether they would like it to be taken into account in sentencing. Those who decide to allow their statements to be submitted for consideration as part of the sentencing process will then be subject to the rules of law and may be called for cross-examination.

Some families will not want to go through this process and may opt, for that reason, to have their statements put on record but not considered in sentencing. We should ensure that those people are not then subject to the sort of unreasonable restrictions that were placed on Mrs Flack. The experience of submitting a victim impact statement should be compassionate and healing; it should not cause the family more trauma and leave them feeling that their rights have been violated. On the other hand, many families will welcome the opportunity to have their victim impact statements considered for sentencing purposes, regardless of the discomfort it may cause them to have to front the court or be questioned by the legal team for the defendant. When I sought Mrs Flack's thoughts on this aspect of the bill, her response was, "Bring it on", and I suspect many other families who have felt aggrieved by the current system would respond similarly.

The victims' advocacy organisation, Victims of Crime Assistance League, broadly endorses the bill and the Government's move to give courts the capacity in sentencing to consider the impact of a homicide on the community. However, it has some reservations about the process of cross-examination of family members. Primarily, it cautions that family representatives will need to be properly informed, prepared and supported so they can participate appropriately and also to minimise further trauma that may arise if their expectations of justice are not met—for instance, if their evidence is disregarded due to the inadvertent breaching of a legal principle.

There will be challenges in the way in which this legislation is enacted. However, I believe that the community overwhelmingly supports the principle of homicide victims being given a voice in court through their loved ones and the impact of their deaths being taken into account in the consideration of the appropriate penalty for the crime. This reform will help to redress what many victims' families in the past have felt to be an imbalance in the courtroom that has placed more emphasis on the rights of the perpetrator than the victim. Losing a family member to a criminal act is an enormously traumatic experience. As a society we have a responsibility to ensure that families affected in this way feel that they and their loved ones have been fairly and sensitively represented in the court. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GARRY EDWARDS (Swansea) [8.40 p.m.]: I support the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill 2014. This legislation fulfils an election commitment to change laws to allow the courts to take family victim impact statements into account when determining a sentence where a court considers it appropriate. The Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 already provides for family members of a homicide victim to give victim impact statements to courts. However, this information will not be used in determining the offender's sentence. The Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill will enable a court, on the application of a prosecutor, to take a family victim impact statement into account for sentencing purposes where the court considers it appropriate to do so.

This Government believes there will be circumstances in which a family victim impact statement that deals only with the impact of the offence on the immediate family members of the deceased victim should be taken into account in determining an offender's sentence. Last year an offender was sentenced for the crime of manslaughter for the death of a teenager at King Cross. Members of the public and homicide victim support groups were highly critical of the sentence as it appeared victim impact statements did little to contribute to a harsher sentence. This Government feels that reform is needed in this area of sentencing. I congratulate the Attorney General, the Hon. Brad Hazzard, on introducing this significant legislation.

New item [1] of schedule 1 replaces section 28 (4) of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 with a new section dealing with victim impact statements given by the family of victims. New section 28 (4) provides that a victim impact statement given by a family member may be considered and taken into account in determining a sentence for an offence on the basis that the harmful impact of the victim's death on the members of the victim's immediate family is an aspect of harm done to the community. If the prosecution seeks to have the contents of a victim impact statement taken into consideration upon sentencing, the family member may be subject to cross-examination on it. However, the Government recognises the necessity for cross-examination if the contents of a victim impact statement could impact on the sentence given.

Despite the provision dealing with victim impact statements being used in the determination of sentences, there are circumstances in which it would not be appropriate to use statements, especially in cases where a family provides a statement, as a form of closure or for therapeutic purposes but does not wish it to be used in sentencing. I also note that family victims and other victims of crime are provided with an information package by the Director of Public Prosecutions to help them to prepare a victim impact statement for the court for sentencing purposes. New schedule 1 [3] makes it clear that the absence of a victim impact statement given by a family victim does not give rise to an inference that an offence had little or no impact on the victim's family. This provision is consistent with an existing provision that applies to the absence of a victim impact statement in matters other than homicides.

New schedule 1 [4] inserts a provision requiring these amendments to be reviewed as soon as possible after three years from their commencement to determine their effect. The report on the outcome of the review is required to be tabled in each House of Parliament within 12 months of the end of the three-year review period. I congratulate the Attorney General, the Hon. Brad Hazzard, on introducing the bill. I also congratulate the former Attorney General, the Hon. Greg Smith, on formulating the legislation and for its carriage until recently. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [8.43 p.m.]: I support the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill 2014. A private member's bill that requires sentencing courts to take all victim impact statements into account introduced by the Leader of the Opposition is awaiting debate in this House. The Government opposes that bill because it does not provide any clear basis for a family victim impact statement to be considered relevant in determining a sentence in a homicide matter, mandatory consideration of a victim impact statement may lead to inconsistent sentencing for otherwise substantially similar offences if no victim impact statement has been provided, and the bill requires the Commissioner of Victims' Rights to provide a statement in homicide matters if there is no family victim impact statement. This is an impractical provision, given the number of homicides prosecuted in New South Wales courts.

The purpose of this bill is to enable the court to take a family victim impact statement into account for sentencing purposes in homicide matters. It is intended to overrule the Supreme Court's decision in *R v Previtera* (1997) 94 A Crim R 76 that the impact of the death of a victim on the victim's family is not relevant to the determination of the offender's sentence. I commend the Attorney General, the Hon. Brad Hazzard, for his work and acknowledge and pay tribute to the former Attorney General, the Hon. Greg Smith, for his work over the past three years in that portfolio. This bill amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to enable a court on the application of the prosecutor to take a family victim impact statement into account for sentencing purposes on the basis that the impact of an offence on the immediate family of a deceased victim is a harm done to the community. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [8.45 p.m.]: Everything that needs to be said has been said about the appropriateness of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Family Member Victim Impact Statement) Bill 2014, its wording and the reasons for its introduction. However, the case of *Previtera* should be considered in light of the case of Birmingham in South Australia, which was also heard in 1997. In that case it was said that unquestionably all lives have the same value, but it is a question of perspective. This is where the judgement in *Previtera* was wrong. While Justice Spigelman and various others have chipped around the edges, none of them has interpreted the changes in the Sentencing Procedure Act to acknowledge that Parliament intended it to change.

It was said in the case of Birmingham that it is a question of perspective. It is not a matter of valuing one life more than another; it is a question of having a regard to the totality of injury, loss or damage, which may include that suffered by family victims. However, the loss sustained by family victims will reflect the value and worthiness of the deceased. The South Australian court acknowledged that some family victims may suffer more than others. In particular, the court noted that offenders must take victims as they find them. Accordingly, the injury, loss or damage to others flowing from the death of one human being may be more severe in one case than another and warrant a harsher penalty reflecting the greater harm caused by the offence, including greater harm to the community. That is precisely the sentencing outcome that the court in *Previtera* was so keen to prevent on the basis that it would breach rules of equality and justice.

The extent of harm sustained by victims' families will be determined by the impact of the deceased's death on them and the impact of the deceased's death will be a function of his or her value and worthiness. Thus, the more valuable and worthy the deceased, the greater the impact on the deceased's family, the greater the harm

caused by the offence, and the greater the penalty imposed. For example, if a father of five young children is murdered in cold blood, the mother must then endure hardship in bringing up those children and the community suffers more. Surely that murder deserves a greater penalty. Victor Chang, who is mentioned from time to time, did great service for the community as a skilled surgeon, saving many lives. Surely he was worth more than someone who makes no contribution to the community.

I ask members to consider the community reaction when his murderer was due to be released on parole. Even though the murder occurred 25 years ago, there was community outcry because we had lost a champion. The community was outraged about the perpetrator's release, after which he was sent back to Singapore. I argued the case of FD and JD in the Court of Criminal Appeal, which was aimed at overturning Previtara, but it did not. It involved a woman who wanted to sell a valuable diamond engagement ring belonging to her son. She was trapped by a couple of con men, who savagely wounded her husband. Her son, who chased after them, was then stabbed to death. She witnessed all that, and the guilt of Mrs Taylor lives on. Surely her feelings from witnessing this homicide deserve greater punishment than the punishment for somebody who murders secretly under the cover of night and no-one knows what was done. I commend this bill to the House. This is a great time to introduce this bill. I commend the Attorney General for having the courage to introduce it.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst—Attorney General, and Minister for Justice) [8.49 p.m.], in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate in particular the members representing the electorates of Liverpool, Northern Tablelands, Heffron, Tweed, Lake Macquarie, Swansea, Tamworth and Epping. I formally place on the record my thanks to the former Attorney General, the Hon. Greg Smith, for the work he has done in a vast number of areas of the law in the past three years to improve the lot of the community in this State. His work has been excellent and this bill reflects much of the work he has done. I thank him for that work and for assisting me as the new Attorney General. There will be times when the contents of the statement under discussion will be relevant to the purposes of sentencing. However, there may be other times when the contents will not be relevant to the sentencing process. As I indicated in my second reading speech, the Government believes that the courts should be permitted to take family impact statements into account when determining the penalty for homicide offences.

The court should be allowed to consider a victim impact statement when determining the appropriate sentence, but only if it is relevant. The Government believes that it is the sentencing court, with all the sentencing material before it, that is best placed to determine whether a victim impact statement is relevant to the sentencing exercise. If the court is to do that it needs to have a basis to allow that to happen. The Government's bill provides a proper basis for a court to do so by making it clear that the harmful impact of a homicide on the victim's family can be considered as an aspect of harm done to the community. The Government's bill also will provide flexibility to allow family victims to decline to have their statements considered for sentencing purposes if they do not wish that to happen. 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 Brad Hazzard 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.

COURTS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2014

LEGAL PROFESSION UNIFORM LAW APPLICATION BILL 2014

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

Pursuant to resolution private members' statements proceeded with.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL BUS SERVICES

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda) [8.53 p.m.]: Sylvania High School is an excellent school with an excellent reputation for achievement. In 2012, for example, around 50 per cent of its Higher School Certificate students gained honours on the distinguished achievers list. Performing and creative arts are very strong, with a significant number of students being selected for prestigious programs in dance, drama, music and visual arts. It is little wonder that Sylvania High School attracts students from suburbs beyond traditional drawing areas including Sans Souci, Dolls Point, Monterey, Brighton-le-Sands and Ramsgate on the other side of the Georges River, to the north of the Sutherland shire. Herein lies a longstanding and frustrating problem, which the Government appears to be unable or unwilling to resolve despite the best efforts of the school's hardworking parents and citizens association. I quote from a letter dated 7 May from the parents and citizens association president, Sue Szalay:

I'm writing to you, as new local Member for Miranda, regarding our ongoing request to have a dedicated bus route from Ramsgate to Sylvania High School.

We have been corresponding regularly over the past three or so years with your predecessor, Mr Graham Annesley ... Attached are the last couple of letters between Mr Annesley and our past President, Mr Mike Sheedy ...

As stated in this letter, as our school grows we are extremely concerned for the welfare of students coming from this area.

Sylvania High School has become ... a popular choice for students living on the other side of the Tom Uglys and Captain Cook Bridges. For those parents wishing their children to attend a quality school such as ours, getting to school is not easy due to the lack of transport.

As at 2013, we have 262 students travelling from the Ramsgate Area to our school. This represents close to 34% of our students.

To support our request, we have collected location map data, conducted surveys of travel routes used and even stood at the bus stops and checked actual numbers. All of which we supplied to Mr Annesley ...

We would appreciate it if you could present our wishes to the Minister, in the hope of moving forward with securing a dedicated bus route from Ramsgate to Sylvania High School.

I make no criticism of Mr Annesley, who attended parents and citizens meetings and made representations to the Minister for Transport. In her last response to Mr Annesley dated 29 July 2013, before his departure from office, the Minister said:

The NSW Government is committed to providing school students with public transport to and from school. Subsidised travel is provided under the School Transport Scheme (STS), and existing services should be utilised when available and capacity exists.

The problem is that there is no direct service for more than one-third of students attending Sylvania High School from the suburbs in which they live. I am advised that there is a bus service from Kogarah railway station, which is 4.2 kilometres from Sans Souci, 4.9 kilometres from Dolls Point, 3 kilometres from Monterey, 3.1 kilometres from Ramsgate and 3.3 kilometres from Brighton-le-Sands. Sylvania High School is nowhere near any railway station, the nearest being Miranda some 2.6 kilometres away. In her letter to Mr Annesley the Minister advised the parents and citizens association to discuss its concerns with a nominated official at Transport NSW. In emails to that official dated 5 November 2013 Mr Sheedy said:

As of the Minister's reply in July, nothing has changed. ...

... our prime concern is the safe transport of children. ... This includes ... adequate services for the feeder areas. We are mindful of the economic impact that the provision of bus services can have, but equally we see the impact of students being left waiting for up to an hour and a half for a seat on buses already full as they drive past them loaded with students from other schools at preceding stops.

The new school year is coming and we now have enrolment data for the coming year's student intake as well as the existing population.

Call me direct if you need help in resolving this as the P&C receiving a suitable response.

In a further email dated 3 December 2013 to the same official Mr Sheedy noted:

It is disappointing to see that another month has passed on this matter since I last wrote and this also makes yet another year ... It appears that regardless of the representations made to the Minister and the Minister supporting the wish to seek improvements in the system, nothing happens. It also appears that ... the end users—the students and their parents—come last.

As there has been no reply correspondence on this matter from the various departments, I shall now forward a written letter to the Minister direct ...

It will be hard for me to explain to 170 new students and their parents at tomorrow's Orientation Day that ... getting *to* school will probably be a lot harder than getting *through* school.

Quite clearly, this problem has gone on for too long. The Sylvania High School Parents and Citizens Association is not seeking a multiplicity of bus routes serving each of the suburbs I have mentioned. What it is seeking is a single dedicated bus service from the central suburb of that area—namely, Ramsgate—direct to the school. One seemingly simple, common-sense solution would be the local bus company, Transdev, which operates a service from Kogarah, extending the route an extra 3.1 kilometres to start at Ramsgate shopping centre, which lies at the heart of the suburbs I have mentioned. Surely in this day and age, and given the Government's commitment to service as expressed in the Minister's letter, that is not too much to ask for the students of Sylvania High School and their parents.

The parents and citizens association has gone through the appropriate channels and has done its homework. The time for patronage surveys has passed. Three years of correspondence from a committed parents and citizens association and the support of members of Parliament on both sides should be more than enough to convince the Minister of the need for a bus service to get these students safely to their school and of the need for funding to do so. No group of parents should have to fight and argue with the bureaucracy for three years for a bus service to get their kids to attend school. I have written to the Minister for Transport accordingly and on behalf of the parents and citizens association I now call on the Minister to institute a regular, direct bus service from Ramsgate to Sylvania High School as a matter of urgency.

NATIONAL RUGBY LEAGUE 2014 COUNTRY V CITY ORIGIN

Mr TROY GRANT (Dubbo—Minister for Hospitality, Gaming and Racing, and Minister for the Arts) [8.58 p.m.]: I inform the House of a fantastic event that occurred in my electorate, in the city of Dubbo, on Sunday 4 May. The event was the annual country versus city rugby league representative fixture. There have been questions about why this match should exist and whether it should continue. People have asked what part it plays in the rugby league calendar. I can tell the House that 10,000 people turned up on a freezing cold day to see the stars of the National Rugby League perform at Caltex Park, which boasts a multimillion dollar surface. It was a very appreciative crowd not just from Dubbo but from far and wide that watched an outstanding rugby league game that sent a message to those who doubt the need for this fixture.

Dubbo is a rugby league town. It is a rugby union town. It is a cricket town. It is a sporting mecca. It is an oasis in western New South Wales when it comes to sporting fixtures as Dubbo has outstanding sports infrastructure. This is an opportunity for regional New South Wales to show that it is the heart of the game of rugby league. It is why the game is important to our communities. The festival of football ran over the week and outstanding efforts were made by all those involved in New South Wales Rugby League and, in particular, Country Rugby League, which is celebrating 80 years this year. They put on a week that made the rugby league family very proud. The players were highly engaged in the community. Some kids drove 2½ hours from outlying communities just to meet the players in the autograph and meet the players events.

Rugby league players engage broadly across the community and they visit schools and hospitals. Players have made visits to Dubbo Hospital to highlight a couple of health initiatives being undertaken by Dr Randall. The players are held in great esteem, particularly by country kids, and the opportunity to have face-to-face contact and to meet some of their heroes is appreciated across country communities, particularly communities in and around the Dubbo electorate, and for that I thank Country Rugby League. It was a very sombre year for us after the sad passing of Mr Jock Colley, an ornament to Country Rugby League. He was probably one of the strongest advocates for the concept and future of Country Rugby League and for making sure that it remains strong. He was fittingly given a tribute prior to the match.

As I said, just shy of 10,000 people packed the ground in bitterly cold weather, including the Continuous Call Team and the Channel 9 commentators. Everyone was blown away by the standard of the facilities and the commitment of the crowd. I spoke to Rabbits Warren and Andrew Johns, who commented specifically about the fact that the crowd knew its rugby league and appreciated the match and the skill that was on show—and we saw some fabulous skill displayed during the match.

Rugby league tragics like the member for Monaro and I watched the match in awe. We watched the aerial ability of Daniel Tupou from the city side, the magician that is Jarrod Mullen and the hard work of Beau

Scott, who proudly captained the country team. We were enormously proud of the players' contributions. The city guys could not go through the country defence for the majority of the match and we had a handy lead for most of it. It was only through the aerial skills that they crossed our try line. Tonight I stand proudly wearing the Country Rugby League tie. I am a bush boy and very proud of it. It is these events and the continued support of the players and the organisations behind these events that will continue to keep rugby league growing.

Regional and country New South Wales is a nursery for most of the rugby league stars. We celebrated the Team of the Century a few years ago in rugby league and most of the team came from the bush. As they say: You can take the boy out of the bush but you cannot take the bush out of the boy. Every year we get the opportunity to celebrate that fact and I thank the players for what turned out to be an exciting 26-all draw. But, most importantly, the country side retained the shield. Congratulations go to all.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I take this opportunity to endorse everything the Minister said about the Country Rugby League versus Sydney game played at Dubbo. I watched the game with envy from Lismore, thinking about how they were having such a great weekend in Dubbo. I endorse everything the Minister said about what Country Rugby League does not only in Dubbo but throughout New South Wales in supporting our younger players in achieving their dream to play in the National Rugby League throughout Australia. I congratulate the member for Dubbo and everyone associated with the event at Dubbo. It was a real spectacle and Dubbo deserves to be congratulated on what it achieved that weekend.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [9.03 p.m.]: It gives me enormous pleasure to speak about the wonderful volunteers who contribute so much to the fabric of the Blue Mountains community. This being National Volunteer Week it is fitting that I should honour the many volunteers in the Blue Mountains. The volunteering spirit is strong in the Blue Mountains with 12,655 people registered as volunteers in the Blue Mountains electorate. That is a staggering 23.2 per cent of the electorate and it is 6 per cent higher than the national average. The figure does not factor in those people who volunteer in church groups and other groups who are not registered.

Being a part of the Blue Mountains community for more than 32 years I know firsthand the generosity of spirit and the great care and concern our community members have for each other. This came sharply into focus during and after the disastrous bushfires in October 2013. During this time thousands of volunteers came together to care for our beleaguered communities. We also had many volunteers from far afield, mainly comprised of Rural Fire Service volunteers from areas outside the Blue Mountains as well as those from interstate, whose contribution we very much appreciated. But I would like specifically to mention our own local Blue Mountains volunteer organisations. During the bushfire period I observed locals from the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, Anglicare, Seventh Day Adventists, local service organisations including Lions and Rotary clubs, church groups including the Winmalee Presbyterian Church and the Springwood Baptist Church, to name a few. Those volunteers give of themselves, not for any accolades or reward but because they love to help their fellow human beings.

Yesterday I was privileged to attend the thank you lunch for members of the Blue Mountains Food Services organisation. That is an organisation which runs Meals on Wheels, but it does more than just bring meals. Along with the meal the volunteers bring friendship and a kind word, connecting that person to a wider community. As an evolving organisation, over the years it has identified a need to provide social support to its many clients, who are often elderly and need more than just a meal delivered. As part of its network of volunteers it has a social support service in which volunteers take out clients, who are often isolated in their homes, for a coffee or to do their shopping or just to have a yarn with them.

There is also the Dementia Support project and the Drawing Out project, which encourage people with a mental illness to step out into an outdoor environment and explore their creative expression through visual art—drawing and painting—and share a healthy and nutritious lunch together. This short-term project was funded from the ClubGRANTS program. At the Blue Mountains Food Services lunch David Baumgarten, chairperson of the board, spoke about the challenges in bringing about changes in response to changing client needs, partnering with other organisations to enhance the services provided to the community and how to prepare for the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

David mentioned that the Blue Mountains Service alone delivers 1,200 meals per week and that 105 volunteers are needed to achieve that. The service runs five restaurants a week in the mountains and feeds

200 to 210 clients weekly at the restaurants. Altogether, 280 volunteers cook, man the phones, make deliveries and do administrative work, among other jobs. One of the challenges that was discussed at the lunch is getting younger people to help out in organisations. I know that is a challenge for many organisations across the Blue Mountains as well as all over New South Wales and Australia.

Many of the volunteers present at the lunch were honoured with service awards. I was pleased to be able to award 20 years of service awards to Harry and Elizabeth Abell and Ian Seargent, all of whom I know very well. Other 10-year awards were also presented. I congratulate the manager of the Blue Mountains Food Services, Fran O'Leary, along with Karen Frawley and Kris King, for organising such a wonderful event and I say a big thank you to all who volunteer with Blue Mountains Food Services. I also mention the many generous sponsors who gave prizes and gifts to those people who received awards, including iKOU and Bygone Beautys from Leura, who are good supporters of many charities.

ASSYRIAN NEW YEAR FESTIVAL

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [9.08 p.m.]: I had the honour of attending the Assyrian New Year Festival on 30 March this year—a very important event for the Assyrian community in my electorate. This year I joined them in celebrating the start of the year 6764. This New Year marks the first day of the ancient Babylonian calendar, which is lunar based and is said to begin with the building of the first temple at Assur in the year 4750 BC. Amazingly, the temple survives to this day and is now a United Nations world heritage site, protected for future generations to enjoy. The Assyrian culture is ancient and rich. This was clearly demonstrated at the Assyrian New Year Festival. Several thousands of people attended the event at the Fairfield Showground. There were theatrical and musical performances and a spectacular fireworks display. I also heard about the pain and suffering of Assyrians in the Middle East and the many Assyrian lives lost from persecution and genocide in their homeland.

Assyrians started coming to Australia in the 1950s. Since then they have thrived in this country. There are now well over 40,000 Australians of Assyrian origin making great contributions to our nation as teachers, doctors, nurses and social workers. I join with the Assyrian community in Australia in praying for the plight of Assyrians in the Middle East who continue to suffer from persecution. I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the leaders of the Assyrian Universal Alliance and the Assyrian Australian National Federation for their dedication to supporting and advocating for their community in Australia and around the world. I especially recognise Mr Hermiz Shahan, the Deputy Secretary General of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, and Mr David David, the President of the Assyrian Australian National Federation. On behalf of my community I wish everyone a happy and healthy 6764 Assyrian New Year.

HOLSWORTHY PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT PARLIAMENT

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Menai) [9.12 p.m.]: Today I acknowledge the great work that is undertaken at Holsworthy Public School by both the staff and the students. As part of the school's student welfare policy, each year Holsworthy Public School elects a student parliament including prime ministers and ministers who are responsible for looking after set portfolios. The set-up of the parliament at Holsworthy Public School is similar to a State or Federal Parliament. Not only does it have prime ministers and ministers; it also has whips, clerks, Hansard, a sergeant-at-arms, media and, importantly, a speaker. I have visited the school on numerous occasions and each time I have been impressed with the impact that the student parliament is able to have on the students. They take their roles in the parliament very seriously and put forward policies and opinions to the teachers and the ministers for changes that they believe will make life better for students and assist with the day-to-day running of the school.

By participating in the school parliament students are able to have a say in the running of the school while at the same time developing their debating, speech making, logical argument, critical thinking and conflict resolution skills. I congratulate this year's prime ministers, Harris Memon and Courtney Denning, along with other member of the parliament, Alex James, Sophie Guo, Prathik Subbanna, Ana Prasad, Nicholas Xue, Emily Clark, Alex Ferguson, Mayia Bankowski, Gautama Desaraju and Sophie Lamont. They have done a brilliant job so far, and I know they will continue to do good work for the school. Each school year students from year 2 also nominate students to represent them at the school parliament. This provides the younger students with a chance to see how the parliament works and to have access from early on to school policy and teachers. Importantly, they have access to learn from the older students.

I congratulate the teachers, students and the entire school community on taking politics so seriously and including a hands-on experience with parliament as an integral part of their learning environment. I am sure it

will help them understand how democracy works, especially having a daily use of terms such as "speaker", "Hansard" and "whip". It can only be beneficial to their education. In March I had the opportunity to visit the school with the former Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Don Page, MP, to meet with the school parliament. Our visit involved hearing how the parliament is run, as well as receiving a rundown on each of the Ministers portfolios. Our Minister then told the students about his first introduction to politics through his grandfather Sir Earle Page who was the eleventh Prime Minister of Australia and a long-serving health Minister.

The students loved hearing about how Sir Earle Page started his career as a surgeon where he was very well respected. His surgery led him to buying perhaps the first car on the North Coast so he could reach some of his patients. He moved into politics in 1913 when he established the Country Party, now The Nationals, and he is still the second-longest serving parliamentarian in Australia, serving close to 42 years. The Page family has given many years of service to our country. The former Minister has family that includes a town clerk and a shire president, so he was able to give the students a good rundown on all the different levels of government. He gave the students a breakdown on the role of Minister for Local Government and how this portfolio had an impact on local councils and local policy, and how that works in with the State Parliament.

Before we stopped for a very lovely morning tea the former Minister and I took some questions from the students. I always thought that question time in this House was the place where the hard questions were asked, but the students thought of some good questions for us. I hope we answered them well. The students took the chance to ask both me and Minister Page about our reasons for entering politics and what we found the most challenging. In March the prime ministers and ministers attended the 2014 National Young Leaders Day. A program is aimed at developing strong leadership values amongst young Australians.

Multimedia presentations and interactive learning and keynotes were used throughout the program where students learned about the lives of leaders in the community and their leadership qualities. The students also learned about the power of influence and how leaders can have a positive influence on others because people follow and listen to a natural leader. Once again I congratulate the prime ministers and ministers of the student parliament at Holsworthy Public School on their representation of the student body and the work they do for the school at large. I also congratulate the relieving Principal, Ms Tammy Deiri, and her staff on continuing to support such a great school program that provides fantastic leadership opportunities to all who are involved.

Private members' statements concluded.

INTERNATIONAL NURSES DAY

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE MIDWIFE

Matter of Public Importance

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie-Parliamentary Secretary) [9.18 p.m.]: I lead for the Government on discussing this matter of public importance. International Day of the Midwife is celebrated on 5 May and International Nurses Day is celebrated on 12 May, which was yesterday. Of course, 12 May is significant because it is the birthday of the world's most famous nurse, Florence Nightingale. The theme for this year's International Nurses Day is "Nurses: A Force for Change—A Vital Resource for Health". On this day we honour and celebrate across the globe the common qualities of nurses that confirm why each of them is deserving of our admiration and respect. They are compassionate, dedicated and determined, and their clinical excellence ensures that all of us who encounter a nurse or midwife, whether it be at times that are personally distressing or at times that are momentous, will be in the best care.

New South Wales has more than 47,500 nurses and midwives within the health system who provide around-the-clock care to the more than 1.5 million patients admitted to our hospitals each year. Nurses are the public face of our health system and provide the support and care that can make a patient's experience easier. New South Wales has about 12,000 registered midwives. I know members will join me in acknowledging their invaluable work. Since being elected to office in March 2011 we have increased the nursing workforce by 4,100. In my area on the mid North Coast we have an additional 234 nurses working across the local health district, which is great news for patients, their families and their carers. We made a commitment of \$340 million to increase the nursing and midwifery workforce by 2,475 over the first four years of this Government. In fact, we met that milestone within the first two years.

It is important that we talk about the increase in nurse numbers because nurses on the front line, whether they work in the wards, theatres or clinics, need the support of an effective team around them to

perform their job to the best of their abilities. As a former nurse I understand the importance of having a strong and united team on the ground and a mix of skills and expertise that will allow them to perform their role effectively. Last Friday I joined with many of my former colleagues at Port Macquarie Base Hospital to celebrate the professional and dedicated team of local nurses and midwives. I was honoured to present a number of awards, along with the Chief Executive Officer, Stewart Dowrick, and the acting Director of Nursing and Midwifery, Alan Pretty.

I congratulate all the nominees, and particularly acknowledge the following recipients of awards: new registered nurse or registered midwife, Kellie Simon; assistant in nursing, John Wood; endorsed enrolled nurse, Donna Thompson; preceptor/mentor, Elaine Carey; nurse manager, Duncan Pretty; registered nurse/midwife, Elaine Brown; and the nurse of the year for clinical excellence, Jan Aitchison. I have spoken previously about the importance of having the right mix of expertise and experience, and one of the ways that has been achieved across the health sector is through a comprehensive scholarship program as well as paid study leave to enable our nurses and midwives to undertake further education.

The Government is also committed to protecting the skill mix of the nursing and midwifery workforce, developing more rapidly the clinical skills of new nursing and midwifery graduates, attracting experienced registered nurses and midwives back to New South Wales hospitals and filling current nursing and midwifery vacancies. We will continue to support initiatives that aim to enhance and further develop our nurses' and midwives' skills and knowledge, enabling them to continue to improve the experience of patients. In February 2014 more than 1,800 new graduate nurses and midwives started work in 123 hospitals across the State. More than one-third—34 per cent—of this year's statewide cohort of graduate nurses and midwives have taken up positions in rural regional hospitals.

I know that many members took the opportunity to welcome these new graduates and to thank them for choosing such an important profession as nursing and for devoting their time to caring for our community. The Government has taken steps to upskill previously registered nurses affected by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's Recency of Registration Practice Standards. We are offering 60 re-entry to nursing scholarships to the value of \$10,000 each to individuals who wish to return to their profession after an absence of five to 10 years and who are committed to working for two years in the public health system. One hundred and seventy five postgraduate student midwife places were offered in 2013 to help to boost the midwifery workforce. Supporting the rural midwifery workforce is also a priority for the Government and 10 rural midwifery postgraduate scholarships were provided in 2013, with a further 10 to be awarded this year. This grow-your-own strategy supports the ongoing sustainability of rural maternity units within New South Wales.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [9.23 p.m.]: Modern healthcare is probably the most complex thing the human race has ever provided. The New South Wales health system is one of the world's better health systems, but it has never been under greater pressure. If we want things to stay as they are the system needs to change. On International Nurses Day what will drive this change more than anything else is the nursing profession. It is the most trusted profession in society because of its mixture of altruism, dedication, advocacy, at times great humour, and wonderful care. Nurses are trusted by the community in everything they do on an individual patient basis and the NSW Nurses Association has greater credibility with the wider community than any other professional group in New South Wales.

The modern university-trained registered nurse is the best trained nurse that Australia has produced. I still teach them and I am forever blown away by their competence. However, change is vital to the future of the health system, and the university-trained nurse has never been in a better position to drive that change with his or her ability to adapt and also to change work practices. The Grattan Institute has found that we could save \$1 billion a year in health costs simply by changing hospital work practices. The main way to do that is to allow nurses to do more. Today I was at a demonstration by members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association. Joe Hockey has just delivered his budget speech. I will read from the media release of Brett Holmes, General Secretary of the Nurses Association, because I believe it deserves a wider audience. He stated:

The nurses and midwives of NSW are committed to the notion of health as a public good with shared benefits and shared responsibilities. We believe that access to adequate health care is the right of every Australian and a crucial element of the Australian social compact ...

We believe in access to essential care regardless of how much money you have in your wallet. We believe that a great and wealthy country like Australia can afford Medicare ...

The introduction of a co-payment to visit your general practitioner or present in an emergency department for medical assistance, regardless of how high is the fee, is an abhorrent attack on our world-class universal health system. Brett Holmes reflects the views of most nurses and most people in New South Wales. Mr Holmes continued:

And we know already that Australians most in need of health care are the ones least able to afford it and the evidence shows that co-payments impact disproportionately on vulnerable groups ...

Delaying or avoiding consultations, diagnostic tests and prescriptions can have catastrophic consequences both for outcomes and costs of care. Australia is facing a major chronic disease burden in the future and it will become increasingly important to find more efficient ways of managing chronic illnesses.

Brett Holmes has shown that the modern Nursing Association is very keen to adopt changing work practices as a way to save healthcare money rather than making the poor, sick and the vulnerable pay for the ideology of the Abbot Government. According to Brett Holmes, the Coalition's attacks on Medicare are ideologically driven. They hate the idea that we can alleviate the suffering of those already disadvantaged by illness by having them share the financial burden of costs. Nurses are fantastic at advocating for their patients. The speech from Brett Holmes says it all about our nurses. The Minister for Health can support local nurses by supporting their campaign for ratios to deliver safe patient care. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [9.28 p.m.]: International Nurses Day was celebrated on 12 May. I acknowledge and thank nurses for all their hard work in our communities and, in particular, our country communities. The Central West and the Orange district have some wonderful nurses and I will mention a few of them. I mention particularly Maryanne Burgess from Orange, who was named the top nurse for the region in 2014. Ms Burgess has been in the nursing profession for 30 years and currently works as a rehabilitation nurse in the coronary care unit in the catheter laboratory of Orange Health Service. A panel of senior nurses who cover the whole region, which stretches from the Victorian border, west to the South Australian border and north to the Queensland border, voted for that award.

Ms Burgess is very modest and does such a wonderful job that she deserves the award. Ms Burgess was featured in the local newspaper with her colleagues Josephine Cunningham, Gemma Pearce, Jenny Sharp, Kath McMaster, Jacqui Haire, Meagan Johnsen, Sandi McAtamney, Meegan Connors and Mark Telford. I also mention the team at the cardio catheter laboratory. The Orange Health Service has let it be known that 35 patients a week who could have died from a heart attack are undergoing a stenting procedure in that unit. The Director of Nursing at Orange Health Service, Sue Patterson, honoured the 13 specialist nurses in the coronary unit by awarding them the annual Director of Nursing Team Award this week to mark International Nurses Day.

Those team members include Lizzie Vardanaga, Maryanne Burgess, Meagan Johnsen, Allison Hembrow, Maudy Lawrance and Acting Nurse Manager, Kath McMaster. They were on hand as part of the celebrations. It is appropriate that we honour all our nurses on International Nurses Day. In many respects they are unsung heroes. We are all glad they are there but it is really only when we have a relative or friend in hospital or we are in hospital ourselves that we see the important work they do. It is hard work, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. International Nurses Day gives an opportunity to salute our hardworking nurses and midwives and to thank them.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [9.31 p.m.], by leave: I congratulate the member for Port Macquarie on her recent promotion as Parliamentary Secretary for Renewable Energy and thank her for bringing forward this timely matter of public importance, given that yesterday was International Nurses Day. As the member for Orange stated, nurses in our hospitals, particularly in country hospitals, are unsung heroes and it is appropriate that we take time to acknowledge them and pay tribute to them tonight. It is a time to reflect on the round-the-clock care and support that nurses give to more than 1.5 million patients in our public hospital system, at home or in the community.

I thank all the hardworking nurses in hospitals across country New South Wales, but particularly in the Northern Tablelands electorate. The care and commitment nurses bring to their work not only provides medical care and expertise but also much-needed support and companionship to patients. When I talk to patients this is what they remark on first, not the medical care but the compassion, emotional care and support they receive from nursing staff in our hospital system. Nurses provide an invaluable service to our local communities and we cannot do enough to thank them.

I place on record also that in February I had the pleasure of welcoming 11 new nurse graduates to hospitals throughout the Northern Tablelands electorate—two at the Inverell District Hospital, one at Glen Innes, seven at Armidale Rural Referral Hospital and one at Tenterfield. I had the pleasure of being at Inverell

District Hospital on Monday 10 February to welcome Dan King from Newcastle and Kelly Loosz from Wollongong, who were in the midst of their first day on the job in the hospital, getting to know the hospital environs and meeting fellow health workers. It was amazing to meet them. I will pick up on a point made by the member for Macquarie Fields. I was amazed not only by their passion and dedication, which I expected from them, but also by their professionalism and expertise for such young graduates.

I was thoroughly impressed with meeting both Dan and Kelly. They are very enthusiastic. They will be at Inverell District Hospital for the next 12 months and it is hoped that, like the three nurse graduates from last year's cohort, they will stay on at the hospital and become employed on a permanent basis. I know they love being in country areas. They love Inverell, and why not? It is one of the best communities in the Northern Tablelands and country New South Wales. I know they will enjoy their time there and the hospital will be the better for their being there, as will the patients. I join with my parliamentary colleagues in marking International Nurses Day yesterday and paying tribute to all nurses throughout the State. I thank them and salute them for the job they do, which is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie-Parliamentary Secretary) [9.34 p.m.], in reply: First, I thank the member for Macquarie Fields, the member for Orange and the member for Northern Tablelands for their contributions to this matter of public importance and for joining me in honouring the wonderful nurses across our public hospitals, in aged care facilities and the like. I acknowledge again that on 5 May we celebrated International Day of the Midwife. Midwives make an enormous contribution to the care of women and their families in their journey from pregnancy to parenthood. Indeed, the World Health Organization has recognised midwives as the health professionals best able to deliver safe and cost-effective maternity services to the majority of families. They are in the privileged position of sharing the journey of a woman and her family from pregnancy to parenthood.

In closing, I reflect particularly on my own nursing career, a career that, on reflection, was much briefer than I envisaged, interrupted as it was by my election to this House. I undertook my nursing studies later in life and joined with many other mature age students to embark on a new journey, a journey that saw all but one of the graduates employed in local public hospitals and in a very short time take on pivotal roles as clinical nurse educators and nursing unit managers. I am often asked, "Do you miss nursing?" In fact, I had that question directed to me just last Friday at the nursing awards at Port Macquarie Base Hospital.

Dr Andrew McDonald: I bet you do.

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS: I do miss the uniqueness of this profession, one where new challenges emerge on a daily basis, whether it is extending practical skills, communicating or organisational expertise where these tasks are interspersed with compassion and emotion. However, what I miss most is the genuine bond and rapport that exists among nurses and the strong connection amongst the workforce on each ward, from the team of nurses, doctors and ward staff to the receptionists, wards men and cleaners. Much of my time nursing was being part of an amazing team of people on ward 1C, what was then a mix of medical, palliative and cardiac patients, who were brilliantly led by nursing unit manager Grace Livingstone. I thank Grace sincerely for her mentorship and leadership. I thank the many people I worked with for their support and friendship. I consider myself extremely privileged to have had this opportunity and now to be honoured to advocate for each of them in this place. I join with my colleagues in thanking all nurses and midwives across New South Wales for all they do. I hope they enjoyed International Nurses Day, which was an opportunity for all of us to recognise their great work.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I am sure every member in this place would support everything that has been said tonight about nurses and their work not only in hospitals but also in the community. The member for Northern Tablelands said that the three new nurses at Inverell District Hospital were young and able to handle their work well. For a young member of Parliament to acknowledge that they were young, they must have been young.

Discussion concluded.

TRAVEL AGENTS REPEAL BILL 2013

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

**The House adjourned, pursuant to resolution, at 9.38 p.m. until
Wednesday 14 May 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**
