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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 18 November 2014

ABSENCE OF THE SPEAKER

The Clerk announced the absence of the Speaker.

The Deputy-Speaker (The Hon. Thomas George), in the absence of the Speaker, took the chair at 12 noon.

The Deputy-Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

Pursuant to resolution private members' statements proceeded with.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ALBURY ELECTORATE MUSEUMS "IDENTITY" EXHIBITION

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [12.08 p.m.]: This Saturday 22 November the history of several towns in the Albury electorate will be showcased in a project to be launched at the Albury Library Museum. Named "Identity", the special exhibition tells unique stories drawn from five local museums by taking a theme from the various collections to explore the town's identity and showcase the history of the region. History, of course, was not shaped in isolated, independent passages of time and events. Therefore, there is a connection for each story and overall the museums have worked in partnership to present the significant pieces from the past to create a unique identity for each community today.

The items of significance and their stories come from the collections of the Corowa Federation Museum, the Yarrowonga-Mulwala Pioneer Museum, the Jindera Pioneer Museum, Henty's Headlie Taylor blacksmith shop and the Holbrook Submarine Museum. This regional networking project has been coordinated by Ros Russell from Canberra, working with the Albury Library Museum's Bridget Guthrie. They assessed the various collections to identify elements which expressed the town's individuality, and these are now on show.

From Henty comes the story of Australia's greatest inventor in the field of agricultural machinery—Headlie Taylor, the farmer's son who left school at the age of 14 and subsequently developed the header harvester. In a farm blacksmith shop at Henty he established the foundation of mechanical harvesting of grain which was adopted in Australia and throughout the world. The original design concept has stood the test of time and today's modern self-propelled harvesters use the same principles as the original machines built in a blacksmith's shop 100 years ago.

For Corowa it is the town's magnificent collection of Federation memorabilia celebrating the Corowa conference of 1893 that contributed to federating the colonies. Indeed, Corowa identifies itself as one of the birthplaces of our nation. The "Identity" project goes beyond a collection in the Albury Library Museum and encourages participation in a museum trail. A bus tour is being arranged over the weekend to all the regional museums and with this in mind the Corowa District Historical Society has mounted a new Federation display, including a video featuring committee president Allan Handberg and vice-president Elizabeth Morgan.

At the Yarrowonga-Mulwala Pioneer Museum our early aviation history is on show, including Douglas Sloane's biplane which remained in the rafters of a Mulwala woolshed when he died in a flying accident crossing from England to France in 1917. The Mulwala museum is also noted for its collection of pioneer agricultural equipment, including a series of Furphy water carts. The Jindera Pioneer Museum presents itself as

a preserved country store and residence. The first German settlers arrived in the Jindera area in 1867, having trekked from Adelaide in horse-drawn wagons. In 1874 Johann Rosier and Peter Wagner built a store and three-room residence on a site which housed a wattle and daub hut built in the 1840s. The new construction became known as Wagner's Store.

The Jindera Pioneer and Historical Society formed in 1967 and purchased the store, residence, and the grounds around the wattle and daub hut, and restored them to their original condition. The museum takes the form of the buildings with their contents—the store's items for sale, the original furniture, household goods and machinery. Dr Russell commented that two sets of portraits in the museum gallery amazed her—one of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra and the other with Kaiser Wilhelm II and his wife. She remarked that the portraits illustrate the identity of the town with its English and German heritage and in the context of the centenary of World War I they say much about the conflict people experienced, with feelings towards the old fatherland and the new motherland.

The Holbrook Submarine Museum offers something completely different, recounting the story of Royal Navy Lieutenant Norman Holbrook, the commander of a British submarine HMS *B11*, which penetrated the Dardanelles in December 1914 and sank a Turkish battleship. The museum recounts how the town of Germanton was renamed Holbrook in honour of this daring young commander who was the first submariner to receive the Victoria Cross. The naval association continues to this day with the original above water line superstructure of the Oberon Class submarine HMAS *Otway*, a hologram of the *B11* story and tours into the recreated submarine officers' wardroom and control room, with an opportunity to look through the periscope.

I have noted that the very existence of this museum encourages individuals with submarine-related memorabilia to donate items to expand the collection and in this way the visitor experience is enhanced year by year. Then there is the host museum itself with its Aboriginal possum skin cloak and collections from the Bonegilla migrant camp and the Dutch DC2 aircraft, the *Uiver*, which was guided to a safe landing at Albury in a fierce electrical storm during the 1934 London to Melbourne air race. The Albury Library Museum enjoys a just reputation as a flagship museum, and I congratulate Bridget Guthrie and the staff on the new exhibition about to take place and on the imaginative and impressive displays constantly provided to residents and visitors.

Mr JAI ROWELL (Wollondilly—Minister for Mental Health, and Assistant Minister for Health) [12.13 p.m.]: I acknowledge the member for Albury on raising the issue of his local museum. We certainly know the importance of our local museums in showing our history to our community. The member for Albury is hardworking and a strong advocate for his community. Recently I had the opportunity to visit Albury with the member, and we inspected Albury Hospital. I was proud to announce, with the member, that from 1 July this year mental health services from the Murrumbidgee local health district transferred to the Albury-Wodonga Health District. This means that issues that occurred on the border are now removed, allowing everyone on both sides of the border and the river to access mental health services. That is due to the hard work of the member for Albury, and once again I thank him for his strong advocacy.

DOONSIDE TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [12.14 p.m.]: Today I congratulate Doonside Technology High School on achieving one of the biggest academic improvements of any high school in New South Wales. Doonside Tech, as it is more colloquially known, has recently achieved some of the highest advances in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] and Higher School Certificate [HSC] results across the State. This is truly an incredible feat, especially due to the fact that Doonside Technology High School enrolls students from some of the lowest socio-economic backgrounds in the State.

The school's NAPLAN writing scores have moved from 44 places below State average to eight places above State average. In writing Doonside Tech recorded an average growth score of 58, compared to the New South Wales average of 21, with 75 per cent of Doonside Technology students recording growth above the State average. Indigenous students at Doonside Tech also saw a rise of 30.9 in writing results from last year. This is compared to an average fall across New South Wales of 0.09 in 2014. It was only seven years ago that less than a third of students at Doonside Technology High School completed their HSC. Now a third of last year's HSC students have gone to university, with 63 per cent of students completing their HSC in 2013. This is up from only 29 per cent in 2009.

Students at Doonside Technology High School are now achieving the highest bands in Standard English, at three times the rate of all students in New South Wales. In 2013, 22 per cent of students achieved a

mark above 80 in Standard English, with three students being placed on the merit list for Standard English between 2011 and 2013, taking them to amongst the top 20 students for the subject in the State. Among the students of Doonside Tech are Indigenous students, refugees from West Africa and about 78 students with a diagnosed learning disability—equal to one in every 10 enrolled at the school. This school embodies both the social and cultural diversity that is representative of the electorate of Blacktown. These are truly tremendous accomplishments especially for a school, which school Principal Joe Begnell, says:

... enrolls arguably the most marginalised students in all of NSW.

Mr Begnell said that a key factor to the schools' success has been the additional resources provided through the Resource Allocation Model [RAM] as part of the Gonski funding reforms. This \$700,000 in extra funding, as well as the hard work of the teachers of Doonside Tech, has been the difference in helping students close the achievement gap and reach their potential. As a community that has suffered from disadvantage, the additional resources provided to the school have been crucial to Doonside Technology's recent success. That is why we must continue the fight to ensure we get the full six years of Gonski funding so schools like Doonside Tech get a fair go. Finally, I finish with a quote by Principal Joe Begnell:

Only through the power of education can low SES kids aspire to break the cycle of generational poverty and welfare dependency.

This quote truly embodies the importance of a good quality education for communities across New South Wales as it lays the foundation for every child to reach his or her full potential. It is the most important investment we can make and the outstanding achievements of Doonside Technology High School are a perfect example of why every student in New South Wales deserves a quality education. It is with great honour that I acknowledge the achievements of Doonside Technology High School in this House. This school has taken great strides to become one of the highest achieving schools in my electorate and I am sure that it will continue to provide quality education for its students into the future.

In my electorate I am privileged to have great schools with great principals. Great schools have great principals and outstanding schools have outstanding principals. And Joe Begnell leads by example. He does not simply see his job as principal; he sees himself as an educator and a critical part of the community. I pay tribute to Joe for his great work not only at Doonside Tech engaging those kids and helping them achieve the great results to which I have alluded but also in the wider community around Doonside, ensuring that kids are going to school and that issues at home are being resolved. If there are matters impacting on the education of those students, Joe is always there to solve those problems and ensure that those kids can focus on their studies.

Mr JAI ROWELL (Wollondilly—Minister for Mental Health, and Assistant Minister for Health) [12.19 p.m.]: It is not very often that the Leader of the Opposition and I agree on anything, but I am sure that I and all other members of this House certainly could agree that our schools in our local electorates are full of dedicated teachers and support staff, deputy principals and principals. I know in my own electorate of Wollondilly we are blessed with fantastic staff that do some amazing things for our next generation, our young people of New South Wales. The New South Wales Government is committed to continuing investment in our schools as evidenced by New South Wales being the first State to sign up to the Gonski reforms and fund the full six years. This Government has adopted a proud position on education. Like the Leader of the Opposition, I am very proud of our local schools.

NSW GAS PLAN

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) [12.20 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I draw to the attention of the House the NSW Gas Plan and the benefits the plan will bring to Northern Rivers communities. I and other members of North Coast electorates welcome the gas plan because it is positive and real. There is a stark contrast between the plan of the Coalition and the headline that Labor has. We have a real plan and Labor has a headline, and nothing but a headline. Labor is all hot air and no soufflé when it comes to coal seam gas. The NSW Gas Plan, which produces a framework that has the capacity to make the Northern Rivers gas field free, is positive. Northern Rivers communities have been crying out to be gas field free for some time and the Government has responded with positive and affirmative action. That action began last Thursday when the Minister for Natural Resources, Lands and Water, and Minister for Western NSW introduced a bill in this House that will revoke 16 pending applications and extinguish them so that 43 per cent of the State that the applications cover will be gas free. That is a positive plan.

If Labor members were serious instead of being intent on just raising a headline about keeping the Northern Rivers district gas field free, why did they not introduce a bill at some stage during the past 3½ years

instead of merely carping about coal seam gas? The Labor position on this issue represents hypocrisy of the highest order. Apart from extinguishing applications, the Government will be buying back existing exploration licences, which also is a positive move. The Government will adopt all the recommendations made by the Chief Scientist and Engineer, Mary O'Kane, which will set the bar higher.

Companies that cannot meet the requirements laid down by the Chief Scientist and Engineer of New South Wales will have no place in New South Wales. The New South Wales Government is serious about listening to communities that do not want coal seam gas. In response to the blockade in Bentley, the New South Wales Government suspended Metgasco's licence based on community consultation not having been carried out effectively in accordance with the terms of Metgasco's licence agreement. That indicates how serious the Government is about regulating the coal seam gas industry in New South Wales.

The New South Wales Government has the capacity to deliver a gas field free Northern Rivers district, not simply produce a headline like Labor. Labor produced a headline but no details. As I said earlier, Labor's position was all air and no soufflé. To gauge Labor's position in relation to coal seam gas, I need only refer to last year when the then Federal environment Minister, Tony Burke, approved a coal seam gas mine at Gloucester. What was the position adopted by the Federal member for Richmond, Justine Elliot? Did she cross the floor? Did she jump up and down and oppose the approval of that coal seam gas mine at Gloucester? No, yet now she is jumping up and down in an attempt to grab a headline in the Northern Rivers district and destabilise the good work of this Government. Labor has no policy and no credibility in relation to coal seam gas.

Labor issued the coal seam gas licences without regard to landowners or communities. All Labor did was issue the licences, take the money and then walk away. The New South Wales Government's gas plan will regulate the industry and give the community a say in what will happen in that region. The New South Wales Government has listened to our communities and has formulated this policy. Although it has been a long process, the Government deliberately proceeded carefully to dot all the i's and cross all the t's and ensure that the New South Wales Government will be able to deliver on what has been promised—unlike Labor, which produced a headline without details. The New South Wales Government is committed to ensuring that its gas plan will produce the best possible outcome for residents of the Northern Rivers region to meet their expectations.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.25 p.m.]: I support my colleague and his electorate as well as the electorate of Mr Deputy-Speaker, the member for Lismore. Last week the Government announced a clear plan to buy back 16 licences, which represents 43 per cent of the State. The Government has a plan and has adopted all recommendations made by the Chief Scientist and Engineer whereas Labor has no plan, other than grabbing cheap headlines. The Federal member for Richmond, Justine Elliot, has paid for advertisements to be published in local newspaper to create fear and misinformation. The New South Wales Government has produced its plan for coal seam gas and it is about time Labor showed us its plan. Labor cannot do that because it does not have a plan. Labor is creating nothing but fear and misinformation. Federal Labor should hang its head in shame for what it is doing to the people. The New South Wales Government's position is clear-cut. We stand behind the people of the Northern Rivers. We stand for the Northern Rivers area being coal seam gas free.

MEMBER FOR PORT STEPHENS RETIREMENT

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [12.26 p.m.]: Today, possibly for the last time, I reflect on the last eight years representing the fantastic people of Port Stephens. Eight years ago my predecessor and good mate, John Bartlett, similarly used a private member's statement to talk about his eight years in this place. John had cancer; he knew he was not coming back, but valedictory speeches were not scheduled when he left here early. As much as I have enjoyed this place, perhaps I would have been happier if John were still here and I was still on the Port Stephens Council. Having the opportunity to represent one's community in the oldest Parliament in Australia is an honour and a privilege that comes to few. It is not an easy lifestyle: bouquets are much rarer than brickbats.

My wife, Victoria, has been beside me all the way—advising, encouraging, representing and supporting, without a cross word or complaint. My sons also have been with me all the way and I thank them from the bottom of my heart—and have they not matured in the past eight years! Angus is a medical registrar and is presently in Alice Springs with a great career ahead of him in caring for others. I managed to convince Stuart to work as a professional engineer for 15 months before he turned his back on the greatest profession and

obtained his masters and commenced his doctorate in economics at Edinburgh. James is about to graduate in animal science with aspirations to follow Angus into medicine. How is it that all five of us went to the University of Sydney and not one ended up as a lawyer?

Mr Greg Smith: Shame, shame!

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: I thank the member for Epping for his interjection. Without doubt, my electorate staff are the best in the business. Michelle Mexon and Jacqui Silsbey have directed and guided me and worked miracles for those who sought the help that we are elected to provide. Previous electorate officers have been Carol Rumble, John MacGowan, Bernice Kelly nee Derriman, and relief staffers have been equally professional and passionate. In this place I have made many friends whom I will never forget. Those with whom I served in opposition and those with whom I served in government are too many to name, but in this adversarial place I have made great friends elsewhere as well.

Greg Piper and I were friends before we became members of this House; in opposition, I was a committee member with Grant McBride, David Borger and Ninos Koshaba—great members and great mates. Dr Andrew McDonald, the Opposition's attack puppy, has been a good friend for eight years, Nathan Rees has been a good friend for not quite as long. When he was a Minister and Premier he was a bit standoffish, but when he moved to level 10 in 2010, we welcomed him with open arms. I think he has forgiven me for all the rotten things I did to him when he was Premier and his departure will leave a huge hole, intellectually and morally, in the Opposition. Clayton Barr is a Hunter member of this House with brains and charisma. It is just a pity he cannot behave in the House during question time. I offer special thanks to the many excellent staff in this building, such as staff in the Legislative Assembly Procedure Office, Hansard, security, catering, cleaning, administration or information technology. They do a great job for 135 diverse—or, should I say, perverse—egos.

We owe the leaders, be they Premier or Minister, respect and thanks. Barry O'Farrell and Andrew Stoner started to drag New South Wales kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century and I know Mike Baird and Troy Grant will continue that momentum. I thank Barry and Mike for my appointment as Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Planning. I spent three years, three months and three weeks assisting two great Ministers and even greater friends, Brad Hazzard and Pru Goward. I have special admiration for their staffers and other ministerial staffers. I have to mention the war. I was first elected to Port Stephens Council in 1987 with an anti-corruption agenda. I detest corruption and find myself gutted to have the current accusations against me and my colleagues.

When inherently unfair and bad legislation is introduced and all and sundry are cross-examined in open session, without any procedural fairness, I wonder what message is being sent to good, talented community-minded people who are interested in representing their peers in this place. In my case, I did not receive one cent from banned donors; I made a mistake with one declaration that did not influence or affect the result of the 2007 or 2011 elections. I have apologised for that and suffered the public humiliation that only a star chamber and voyeuristic media can achieve. And at the end of the day, the people of Port Stephens will suffer if the seat goes to Labor. I will consider my options when the commissioner releases her final report. Whatever the future holds, serving my constituents in this place for two terms is a rare and rewarding honour, and that—however hard others try—can never be taken away.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr ROBERT FUROLO (Lakemba) [12.31 p.m.]: Having worked for and helped local residents with their housing needs for more than 20 years, I have developed a strong and deep interest in the issue of housing affordability. When one considers that housing expenses, whether rent or payment on a mortgage, are the largest single expense for most households, this is a policy area that we simply must get right. My electorate has a very significant number of residents living in public and social housing. Notwithstanding this, nearly 50 per cent of all renters in my electorate are living in housing stress—defined as spending more than 30 per cent of household income on rent. While it is easy to speak about statistics, the reality of these figures should make us all accept that few public policy areas require more attention.

When low-income households are spending up to 50 per cent of their income on rent, the consequences on their quality of life are immense. According to a study by T. Burke and S. Pinnegar titled "Experiencing the Housing Affordability Problem", when lower income households were paying 40 per cent plus in rent, 29.6 per cent sometimes went without meals, 38.7 per cent had children go without adequate health or dental

care and 32.9 per cent relied on welfare or charities for financial assistance to pay bills. Having spoken to hundreds of local families in housing stress and desperately waiting for social housing, I know only too well the stories of deprivation, and the impact that poverty wreaks on families, especially children.

Issues that arose included: overcrowded accommodation, leaving many school-aged children with nowhere to do homework or study, relegating them to missed opportunities in their education and the chance to break out of poverty; forgone medical appointments, with the devastating impact of avoidable health problems becoming chronic and affecting quality of life, often requiring hospitalisation and compounding difficulties in securing and maintaining employment; and working longer hours and travelling greater distances for scarce work opportunities putting greater pressure on families and leading to family breakdowns. This is what these statistics mean. And it is why this and every subsequent government needs to work harder to genuinely address housing affordability in New South Wales.

For a start, we need to address the massive backlog in housing supply. We know that the New South Wales economy rides on the back of the construction industry. Jobs and government revenue are linked to growth in this sector, but our planning system has failed to keep pace with demand. However, supply is but one component of housing affordability puzzle. We must also be looking seriously at incentives that are practical and realistic for the development industry to step in and provide more affordable housing.

The current State environmental planning policy on affordable housing is a disincentive to developers. For example, in areas with a floor space ratio of 2.5:1, a bonus of 0.5:1 is provided if affordable housing is included in the project. While this sounds great, the developer then needs to provide a total of 1.5:1 or half of the total development site for affordable housing. Many developers have walked away from projects because accepting a one-eighth bonus on their site requires them to dedicate 50 per cent of the total site for affordable housing. This requirement also presents significant funding problems with banks often unwilling to lend on projects with such a high affordable housing component.

We also need to help local councils recognise the role they can play in partnering with community housing providers and developers to deliver more affordable housing. Councils in my view are the key to unlocking so much possible development, but they must be given the resources to help them develop sustainable affordable housing policies. One way would be to provide a rebate to councils to help them cover the cost of developing policies, provided they meet minimum targets on the creation of new affordable housing properties. I note that the Minister for Family and Community Services has today released a discussion paper on social housing. While a discussion paper on this issue is welcome, especially for the thousands of families in my electorate who are waiting more than 10 years for public housing, more must be done. The draft report by the Government's Affordable Housing Taskforce was delivered in 2012 yet it seems the Government has not delivered a formal response, and certainly has not taken steps to implement any of the findings in its own report.

For a start, housing policy particularly in relation to affordability requires a national response. And the State must step up and take responsibility in the implementation of housing affordability policies. Clear targets and accountability are essential if we are to see any progress in this critical public policy area. Consistent with the draft report by the Affordable Housing Taskforce, the Property Asset Utilisation Taskforce should undertake a detailed audit of all government-owned land, including public housing stock, to determine the best ways to maximise these assets and facilitate partnerships with the community housing sector. The families in my electorate and all over Sydney who are living in overcrowded housing, existing on handouts and going without proper medical treatment, cannot wait forever for this issue to be solved. I intend to take a strong interest in the issue of social and affordable housing after my time in Parliament and will be working to achieve a solution to this vexing and serious issue.

BATHURST ELECTORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Minister for Local Government) [12.36 p.m.]: I have pleasure in speaking about a number of achievements that have occurred in my electorate of Bathurst over the past 3½ years and which are shaping the future of our region. The Liberal-Nationals Government has introduced real solutions that demonstrate a strong commitment to respond to various challenges and rebuild not only our State but also local communities. New South Wales is the leading State in economic performance with some of the best front-line services in police, nursing and education.

In Bathurst the Government has made a record investment in road infrastructure with its announcement of \$48 million for the Bell's Line of Road to construct seven overtaking lanes, the first of which is completed.

The Bell's Line of Road has been identified for a number of decades as in need of safety work and under this Government's Fixing Country Roads program it has been allocated \$37.5 million. The Great Western Highway has received \$250 million. Under the Government's Bridges for the Bush program bridges in my electorate will be upgraded to ensure that we move freight across this State and deliver it in a more timely manner.

In the local government area of Bathurst, the daily train service called the Bathurst Bullet was installed nearly two years ago. It is a very important service that gives commuters the opportunity to travel to Sydney daily to carry out business, attend health appointments and undertake recreational activities. For decades it was promised but never eventuated. When the Government was elected it made it happen for the benefit of Bathurst and its surrounding towns. Bathurst also has a 24-hour fire station with additional firefighters and the provision of new equipment. The Government has provided \$1.8 million for a new group home to support the most vulnerable in our community. Denison College of Secondary Education, Bathurst, has received \$8 million to construct a gymnasium. The New South Wales Government made an \$8 million investment to achieve that.

We have committed \$5 million for a second track at Mount Panorama. We have seen enormous benefits from our Community Building Partnership program. For example, Blayney Showground received \$20,000; Napier Oval received \$25,000 to construct a new toilet block; Carcoar Shed received \$25,000 for its showground cattle yards; \$20,000 was provided for a new community bus supported by the State Government and the community for our local elderly, frail and those with disabilities; and the State Emergency Service [SES] received \$56,000 for a new vehicle. We have new boats for the Blayney community. Millthorpe Museum received \$30,000. More than \$1 million has been invested to fix up bridges in the Blayney local government area.

Kandos and Rylstone received \$80,000 for the Cementa Festival to promote tourism and cultural events. The local preschool was a beneficiary, as was the men's shed. It might have been only \$6,000 but this money is significant in providing support for activities on behalf of the community. The Government provided \$25,000 for improvements to Dunns Swamp and \$30,000 for Rylstone Showground. In Lithgow the Portland sewerage works received an investment of \$10 million and there was \$8 million for Lithgow sewerage; \$800,000 for a new Wallerawang fire station; \$4.3 million for flood mitigation at Farmers Creek; \$3 million for a new Lithgow aquatic centre; \$2.1 million to promote tourism on Wolgan Valley Road as part of a \$4.2 million project; over \$1 million for Lithgow High School; \$3 million for Blackbridge at Wallerawang; just under \$100,000 for a community bus; Pearsons Lookout, which was said could not be done, received \$120,000; and \$450,000 for Lithgow Police and Community Youth Club, just to name a few.

We should not forget Oberon. The junior rugby league club received \$27,000; \$25,000 for Oberon Golf Club; \$56,000 for new vehicles for the local SES; \$10,000 for the Oberon Men's Shed; \$1.6 million for Mayfield Road to improve tourism in that area; and just under \$7,000 for the Oberon Tarana Heritage Railway. We support these projects in our communities to make sure that quality of life improves for everyone.

Mr JAI ROWELL (Wollondilly—Minister for Mental Health, and Assistant Minister for Health) [12.41 p.m.]: I acknowledge the member for Bathurst and congratulate him on his appointment to the ministry. He is a fantastic Minister and certainly is a fantastic local member. Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the local men's shed in the Bathurst electorate, which received funding through his efforts to continue its important work.

Mr Paul Toole: It was \$10,000.

Mr JAI ROWELL: It was \$10,000. I can assure the House that that money went right to the heart of the work of the men's shed. The member for Bathurst's hard work and advocacy secured that vital funding. Right across the Bathurst electorate the Government has delivered due to the local member's hard work. The story is the same in my electorate of Wollondilly. We have delivered infrastructure services right across Wollondilly, including sewerage connections, road upgrades, train station upgrades, men's sheds and hospital upgrades—so much to mention but not enough time to mention all today. Those on this side of the House have been delivering for their communities for a long time. I thank the member for Bathurst for his strong advocacy.

WYEE SEWERAGE

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [12.42 p.m.]: The Minister for Natural Resources, Lands and Water, Kevin Humphries, delivered fantastic news to the people of Wyee with his announcement last week of a \$26 million plan to connect Wyee to the Hunter Water reticulated sewerage system. This is fantastic news for

the people of Wyee not only because this commitment will end the inconvenience and financial burden they have lived with for so many years, but also because it will finally unlock the vast potential of this town. Wyee is a strategically located town poised for substantial growth. The only thing that has been holding it back is the lack of this basic service that is enjoyed by the vast majority of people in urban areas. This announcement should have happened 30 years ago when the Hunter Sewerage Project was rolled out and many other areas around the lake received sewerage services, but it did not and has caused a lot of hardship for those who live in the area. However, by committing to this project now, the Government is making good on that oversight.

This was a good day for the town and also a good day for me. The fight to get Wyee sewered has spanned my 24-year political career. It was a priority when I was first elected to Lake Macquarie City Council in 1991. As mayor of that council I fought to get the service, and it has been one of the defining issues of my two terms to date as the local State member of Parliament. In fact, the need for sewerage for Wyee was the subject of my first private member's statement in this House on 10 May 2007. It seems to have been such a long time coming, but more so for the long-term residents of Wyee. I was very pleased to have been a part of the announcement last week. I am grateful to the Minister, to his Government and to Hunter Water for agreeing to provide this essential service and on delivering this infrastructure. I thank them also for having patiently endured my endless lobbying—but that is my job.

I specifically include in my thanks Premier Mike Baird and Treasurer Andrew Constance, both of whom welcomed me into their offices on a number of occasions, listened to my pleas and took a personal interest in this issue. Without their support, I doubt this result would have happened. I must mention quite a few local people who have been a large part of the continued fight for this outcome. Perhaps the longest-standing residents of Wyee who fit that category are Gwen and Russell Deaves. Unfortunately, they will not be immediate beneficiaries of this rollout, but I am sure they will be pleased for Wyee. The announcement was made at the Wyee Child Care Centre and I thank the owners, Karen and Ian O'Connor, for hosting the announcement and for lobbying for this outcome. It was great also that the owners of Wyee Nursery, Nichole and Adrian Roberts, were there. Both of these businesses have shown a longstanding commitment to the local community and I have no doubt will benefit from the opportunities and growth that will come with sewerage.

So often at the heart of such communities is the local Rural Fire Service [RFS]. Therefore, I was very pleased that another local stalwart and president of the Wyee RFS, Terry Pryor, was present. The sewer capacity being provided in Wyee through Hunter Water will give Lake Macquarie City Council much greater scope in considering the strategic development of Wyee, including resolving the difficult issue that is the paper subdivision of Wyee West. One of the local characters who have been fighting for those property owners is Fred Lawrence, who also was delighted to attend the announcement.

I remember another person who worked to get this result but, sadly, never saw the outcome. Michael Meagher was a former journalist, member of the Australian Labor Party and subsequently a consultant with development company Saltro, which later became Wyee Development Fund, to bring sewerage to the area. He called me in early August to arrange a meeting as he had an idea of how to move things along. He was very excited and wanted to meet me the following week after he had taken his family away for a weekend. I was saddened to learn that on 8 August while away with his family he was tragically killed in a skiing accident when he hit a tree. His passing is a great shame.

I pay particular tribute to the managing director of Hunter Water, Kim Wood, and one of his heads of staff, Jeremy Bath. Kim came to Hunter Water in 2011 from Queensland bringing to the organisation a whole new way of doing things. Without him, things certainly would not have happened. Jeremy Bath has been fantastic in dealing with us and helping the local community. I pay tribute to the Wyee community for its assistance in helping me put the case. The lobbying has been relentless, but largely respectful and constructive. I thank the community for keeping the faith. Last Thursday's announcement was a victory for this community and the environment, but most of all it was a victory for common sense. I truly believe it is the start of something big for Wyee, and I look forward to watching this town grow and prosper in coming years. Once again, I thank the Minister and the Government for this investment in my community.

SHRI NARENDRA MODI JI, PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [12.47 p.m.]: I was honoured to join thousands of members of the local Australian-Indian community to celebrate the arrival of Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji to Australia—the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Australia in more than 28 years. Mr Modi Ji has been in Australia for the past five days on his inaugural visit to our country. He attended the G20 Summit in Brisbane,

discussing important global agreements with 19 of the world's most advanced economies and taking part in bilateral trade talks with many countries, including Australia. On Sunday night I joined members of the local Australian-Indian community in our own little India at Harris Park to celebrate Modi's presence in Australia. Thanks must go to Sanjay Patel for hosting me and hundreds of people, and cutting a welcome cake to honour Modi's visit to Australia. Last night I joined the Premier and other parliamentary colleagues for an official reception with Prime Minister Modi Ji at Allphones Arena. It was a fitting location for a man who has been described as a rock star Prime Minister because of his popularity both in India and Australia.

His popularity was evident, with more than 15,000 people at Allphones Arena and 5,000 more watching on the big screens outside the venue. Many came from around Sydney, including Harris Park, for this event. People came from around Australia, including a delegation from Melbourne, who caught the Modi Express, a special train from Melbourne to Sydney, for this event. During his speech Modi Ji highlighted his trillion dollar infrastructure plan, allowing 100 per cent foreign direct investment in railways. Modi Ji spoke of his People's Wealth Plan, which aims to provide at least one bank account for each Indian household, along with a debit card, giving some of India's poorest people access to finance. Modi Ji said his goal is to open 75 million accounts by January and the program has already created more than 71 million accounts to date. He aims to create a cleaner India, both literally and metaphorically, by cleaning the streets and clearing litter to improve the health and wellbeing of the nation and by cleaning India's image as a nation to improve its relations with the nations of the world. Modi Ji states:

I need to make small contributions, for small people, and to make small people reach big feats.

This morning Prime Minister Modi Ji addressed the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia, highlighting the strong ties between Australia and India and the common values and ideals that our two nations share. He recognised the bonds that link our two nations, and could not let the opportunity pass without mentioning our mutual love of cricket. He reinforced the strong relationship that is contributing to the growth of our two-way trade. In September 2014 Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott visited India and met with Prime Minister Modi Ji. They renewed the countries' commitment to a comprehensive trade agreement and reinforced the strong links between us.

Prime Minister Modi Ji is a symbol of hope to the people of India and to members of the Australian-Indian community. I joined with members of the local Indian community in Harris Park on the night of the elections in India to celebrate Prime Minister Modi's landslide victory. I could sense the hope in the room brought about by Modi Ji's victory—new energy to India and its people by this positive change. He pledged to speed up government decision-making and remove bureaucratic hurdles that slow development and growth in India, similar objectives to our own government in New South Wales.

Modi Ji's strong record as the longest serving chief minister of Gujarat is one of the main reasons that his election victory provided hope to the people of India. He has consistently sought to attract foreign investment to Gujarat and deliver economic prosperity. For a decade under his leadership Gujarat has experienced double digit growth. He has a strong international reputation for diplomacy, which he has continued as Prime Minister. He is known for delivering vital infrastructure for the state of Gujarat. I was honoured to meet Prime Minister Modi while he was Chief Minister of Gujarat when I attended the Vibrant Gujarat Summit in 2013 and I am delighted to hear that the Premier will be attending the Vibrant Gujarat Summit in January 2015. I was humbled by Modi's humility, charismatic personality and can-do proactive leadership. Clearly Mr Modi is India's own rock star Prime Minister.

HMAS SYDNEY COMMEMORATION

Mr BRYAN DOYLE (Campbelltown) [12.52 p.m.]: It is with great humility that I update the House on Campbelltown's commemoration of the sinking of HMAS *Sydney* by the German merchant raider *Kormoran* on 19 November 1941 and I am very pleased that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier for Youth, Homelessness and the Centenary of Anzac is in the Chamber. For our young nation the loss and disappearance of HMAS *Sydney* and all 645 hands in the early days of the Second World War came as a shock and it was not until 2008 that the mystery of what happened to both ships was solved after they were finally located off the Western Australian coast.

Each year the Campbelltown Sub-branch of the Naval Association of Australia gathers to remember the loss of HMAS *Sydney* on that fateful November day so many years ago. Leading the commemoration was Mr Warren Browning, President of Campbelltown Sub-branch of the Naval Association, assisted by a chaplain of the Royal Australian Navy as a mark of respect for those brave sailors who gave their lives for the

preservation of our freedom. Campbelltown, in particular, suffered heavily following the sinking of HMAS *Sydney* with all hands. Fourteen local families are direct descendants of those brave seamen. As we in this place have recently begun our commemorations of the First World War it is important that we do not forget those young Australians who fought in every major conflict in the past.

Campbelltown and the wider Macarthur share a proud military history, including the Bardia and Ingleburn barracks. I note that the first battle of HMAS *Sydney* was in the Mediterranean, which involved the shelling of the bases at Bardia. In fact, HMAS *Sydney* received battle honours for the 1940 Mediterranean battle and the Battle of Calabria where it assisted the British Fleet against the Italian fleet. In the Battle of Spada, which is probably its most famous victory, the Australian cruiser and HMS *Havock* were ordered to patrol the Gulf of Athens for Axis warships and shipping and to provide support for a four-ship destroyer force—HMS *Hyperion*, HMS *Ilex*, HMS *Hero* and HMS *Hasty*, which were conducting an anti-submarine sweep north of Crete. John Collins, Captain of HMAS *Sydney*, kept the ship closer to the four little destroyers anticipating that there was going to be trouble. That came about 7.20 a.m. on 19 July when the destroyer force was spotted and engaged by two Italian light cruisers, the *Giovanni dalle Bande Nere* and the *Bartolomeo Colleoni*.

The British destroyers, in big trouble, turned for home, making as best they could to where they knew HMAS *Sydney* was last located, not knowing whether it was coming. The captain of HMAS *Sydney* ordered the crew to have breakfast, steam at full speed and maintain radio silence, which I am sure annoyed his admiral no end. HMAS *Sydney* arrived at the scene unexpected by both parties and then set about levelling the score, damaging one of the Italian cruisers and sinking the second, while suffering only minor damage herself. When HMAS *Sydney* was sunk by the *Kormoran*, it had a big effect on the national psyche. HMAS *Sydney* was a lucky ship; she was the ship of hope. For her to be lost at sea with all hands was very hard to comprehend.

With the entry of Japan into the war just three weeks later, the nation was left feeling somewhat exposed; its lucky ship that had survived bombings in the Mediterranean, submarine attacks and battles with the Italians and the Luftwaffe, had been lost in such mysterious and intriguing circumstances. The fact that the families now have some certainty as to the fate of those brave sailors on both the *Kormoran* and HMAS *Sydney* provides some closure. I commend the commemoration to the House.

WERRIS CREEK

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [12.57 p.m.]: I have had the pleasure of visiting again the great town of Werris Creek in the Tamworth electorate. I took the opportunity last time I was in Werris Creek to meet and congratulate the new mayor of Liverpool Plains Shire Council, Councillor Andrew Hope, and the new deputy mayor, Councillor Robert Webster, along with the general manager, Robert Hunt. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet with the new executive of Liverpool Plains Shire Council, which I know has a very strong focus on Werris Creek and is looking to progress, develop and deliver the resources needed for Werris Creek.

We take a walk through the streets of Werris Creek to visit the shops and we always receive a warm welcome. We stop at the Coffee Corner, located inside the Werris Creek Pharmacy, for an excellent cup of coffee. I am looking forward to working with the new mayor, Councillor Andrew Hope, to investigate things in Werris Creek that we can help with, such as its fire service. We had the pleasure of donating and presenting a State flag to Leila Gillies and the hardworking volunteer crew of Fire and Rescue NSW at Werris Creek. We are making progress in allocating funds to redeveloping the fire engine tanker bay so that the new tanker can fit. The fire station is an old service station that backs onto the railway line and at the moment the tanker bumps the back wall when it is reversed into the building. The crew do a magnificent job and are happy with their location but the area needs upgrading. We are happy to help so that we provide the best resources for our Rural Fire Service. Its workers and volunteers do a wonderful job in all areas across our region when they are needed in times of emergency. We thank them sincerely.

We are also working on concerns surrounding the Werris Creek coalmine. We are endeavouring to keep the community updated at all times about activities at the Werris Creek coalmine. Hopefully that will help to alleviate some of their concerns. We are constantly working with the community and Whitehaven mine on issues about the close proximity of the mine and the blasting that occurs. The people of Werris Creek have a strong community spirit and are focused on progress in their town. It is famous for its railways but it has so much more to offer. We are also working to ensure that the Werris Creek preschool, under the directorship of Julia Cameron and the parents who support it, remains viable into the future.

We are working hard with the education Minister to ensure that funding flows through to the preschool so that continues to be the heartbeat of Werris Creek. The preschool allows three-, four- and five-year-olds to

interact socially and provides a solid educational foundation that will springboard them into a world of opportunity. Werris Creek is a great community, and I look forward to working with residents to provide further investment. Hopefully, we will be able to upgrade David Taylor Oval—the home of the mighty Werris Creek Magpies—and add some playground equipment, amongst other things. I am proud to represent Werris Creek in this place and I look forward to continuing to support it in any way I can.

GLADESVILLE RAVENS SPORTS CLUB

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Resources and Energy, and Special Minister of State) [1.02 p.m.]: I pay tribute to a sporting organisation within my community that has contributed widely to the electorate of Lane Cove for more than 50 years. The Gladesville Ravens Sports Club has been a dominant force in sport throughout the Gladesville, Hunters Hill and Ryde areas since its inception in 1960. Started more than 50 years ago by a group of community-minded parents, the club continues the proud tradition of providing a vibrant sporting club, which is run by volunteers. The club boasts teams across junior and senior men's football, junior and senior women's football, and junior and senior netball.

The club is the biggest of its kind in the area, with more than 1,300 active members aging from three to 65 as well as 21 life members. Many of these life members formed the original founding committee in 1960. Most notably, the late Bob Clark was in the founding group. He was elected to the committee on 22 June 1960 and became a life member in 1966. True to the family traditions of this great club, Bob's grandson David Clarke has served as president for the past five years. Last night at the club's annual general meeting he stepped aside to make way for incoming president Cathy Inglis.

In 1960 Bob was joined by the late John Sunderland to coordinate a social soccer club alongside Christ Church in Gladesville. Within a few months the Ravens had attracted great interest in the area. By 1961 they had enough numbers to field a team and join the Gladesville-Hornsby Football Association. The success that followed was unprecedented in the area and the club's membership grew exponentially. This was a credit to the hard work of Bob Clark and John Sunderland. A home ground was now required and the club approached Ryde council for a lease to develop land adjoining Stanbury Street in Gladesville. Many dedicated members of the community transformed gullies full of blackberries into a level playing field. The ground was eventually named Peel Park after Peel's Dairy and was ready for use in the 1964 season.

At the time of its foundation, the majority of sports were male dominated. The Ravens were ahead of the curve and, in 1962, the committee added women's basketball to its growing base of sporting clubs. This move drew much support from the community, and goes to the heart of the inclusive spirit that defines the Gladesville Ravens. Fundraising activities have been a major component of the growth of the Ravens. Innovative measures to raise funds have not only been successful in the core function of financing the club but also been a source of positive and inclusive community events. The social gathering of families in the organised sporting development of their children was so successful that a new designation was required. It changed its name in the early 1980s to match the gradual change in the nature of the club, and so the Gladesville Ravens Sports Club came alive. Its emphasis was on broadening the range of sports offered in the community and managing these competently.

The annual car rally included a much-anticipated picnic day that drew families together quite outside the games in which their children participated. In 1981 soccer for women and girls was announced and the Ravens became a foundation club in the new Gladesville-Hornsby Women's Soccer Association, which was an instant success. In 1988 numbers and proficiency had grown to such a degree that the club sought entry into the Women's State League, and the Ravens continue to participate today. The first international tour took a women's soccer team to New Caledonia to play games in a very different cultural environment. In 1990 the club celebrated 30 years in style with a festive dinner dance at the Ryde Civic Centre at which life members and founders were honoured.

The club had grown well beyond the vision of its original founders and incorporation was deemed necessary to cope with new complexities in the financial and legal requirements of youth sport. The management of club activities required a board structure. Each sport and major administrative responsibility was assigned a director who reported to the president. There were years when the number of soccer teams for women and girls exceeded the number for men and boys. In fact, the club was one of the largest in Australia in the context of female teams. Female players grew in confidence and experience with extended time in the game. In 2009, similar to the men's team a decade earlier, the over-30s women's team was crowned the New South Wales

Champion of Champions. In 2014 the club has 61 teams playing soccer, 32 of which are girls and women's teams. That is an indicator of how girls are taking up the sport and Ravens is proud to provide a pathway for females from grassroots to elite football within the same club.

Ravens have built a framework that provides exceptional development through their curriculum. The club boasts several former players who represent the Matildas at a national level. I believe sport across all levels for all ages is an important part of the fabric of our community. The Gladesville Ravens are an exceptional example of a club that is run by the community for the community. The great tradition of the Gladesville Ravens has not wavered over the years; they continue to grow and move onto bigger and better things. I sincerely congratulate each member of the board of directors on their sustained achievements: David Clark, Colin Munce, Caroline Galanos, Vicki Kevans, Jacqui Wisemantel, Jason Moody, Rob Barbagallo and Cathy Inglis. I wish the club, its members and all the players every success into the future.

PREMIER'S ANZAC MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.07 p.m.]: Six months ago, under the patronage of Premier Mike Baird in his capacity as Minister for Western Sydney, ClubsNSW Chief Executive Officer Anthony Ball and I established the Premier's Anzac Memorial Scholarship program. I acknowledge that the member for Blue Mountains is in the Chamber; she was very much involved in the scholarship, which is open to all 16- and 17-year-old Higher School Certificate students and senior high school students across Western Sydney. They were asked to produce a 1,000-word essay on why the Centenary of Anzac is important for modern Australia.

Eighty essays were shortlisted and 20 of those were judged by Dr Roza Sage, the member for Blue Mountains, Mr Nathan Rees, the member for Toongabbie, and retired General Warren Glenny. In August the Premier announced the six successful students who would journey to Gallipoli, the Western Front and London. They all came from either middle-class or working-class backgrounds; for some, this was their first trip overseas. The six students returned to Australia last Thursday night. Whilst overseas they were asked to keep a journal and to write some poetry about their experiences. The quality of their work leaves me in no doubt that they will be our future leaders. I will read onto *Hansard* extracts of some of those writings. On leaving Anzac Cove, Lihini de Silva of Baulkham Hills High School wrote:

100 years have since gone by
They left their homes, they bade goodbye
100 years have since passed
They were young at age and heart

A shore of pebbles down my feet
The deathbed which many of ours did greet
Softly the waves lap the shore of Gallipoli
A once war torn land now exhales tranquillity

...

100 years have since gone by
A mother's tears are still not dry
100 years have since passed
Their courage brought us peace at last

Those chilling words were written by a young lady from a non-English speaking background. With such academic prowess she will no doubt be an Oxford scholar one day. Madison Thompson of St Columba's Catholic College wrote:

Yet I sense that stopped time has torn a hole in this place
The beauty as undeniable as the sorrow
Those men cannot be released from beneath their silent stones
I murmur a prayer into the peace
Knowing my wish cannot possibly follow

Emily Frey of Quakers Hill High School wrote:

We remember them
The tears I shed on the once raging battlefield are just a drop in the ocean of despair already shed by the women hurt 100 years
before
We remember them
The undeniable role that they have played in shaping Australia into the peaceful society it is today.
We remember them

Jack Jeffries of Parramatta Marist High School wrote:

Along the sandy shores of barren beauty
 Endless stones line the waters edge
 Marking the graves of these fallen brothers
 Deserving of more than our mere ANZAC pledge

Dan Nguyen of Hurlstone Agricultural High School wrote:

Today, young Australians pay their respects
 A wreath, upon the memorial of world war
 The passing years will not dampen their effect
 And their name will liveth for evermore

Accompanying these students to the battlefields of Europe was an extraordinary experience for the member for Blue Mountains and for me. Sam Lewis of St Columba's Catholic College captured it well when he wrote:

The Turks released their bullets
 Firing in a bright and deadly flash
 Yet nonetheless the Anzac charge
 Fearing neither death nor ash

I also put on record part of a journal entry by Madison Thompson, which those with an interest in military history may find emotional. Madison wrote:

Today was possibly the most momentous day of my life, one which I had been anticipating for some time. We were going to see Gallipoli. Dressed in our blazers and formal finery, we were blessed with a warm day and clear blue skies.

I was struck by the words of our Turkish tour guide as we rattled along the dusty road to the battlefields, "You and me, we were once fighting against each other. But since then there has grown a friendship strong and never before seen. You and me are now friends."

This was a wonderful experience for these six students from Western Sydney. I thank ClubsNSW for its sponsorship. I suspect the success of this event means that it will be repeated in the future.

GREAT WESTERN HIGHWAY UPGRADE

KEITH DUNCAN MEMORIAL RURAL FIRE SHED

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [1.12 p.m.]: It has taken a long time for that part of the Great Western Highway that traverses the Blue Mountains to be upgraded to four lanes. Indeed, I have lived in the Blue Mountains for 32 years and in all that time roadworks have been going on. Labor promised that the highway upgrade from Lapstone to Katoomba would be finished for the Sydney Olympics. Unfortunately, it did not specify which Olympics. I am pleased to announce that last week the Bullaburra west section of the highway, referred to locally as Bodington Hill, was opened with a small ceremony. This project, which cost \$80 million, was a monumental engineering feat. A large part of a hill had to be removed and a deep gully filled in. Additionally, an important wildlife corridor for the spotted quoll was provided under the road. The Bullaburra east section, which is due to be finished in mid to late next year, is the last section yet to be completed.

I made an election commitment to have those sections of highway fast-tracked for completion, and the Government has delivered. The Liberals and The Nationals understand the importance of providing good infrastructure to enhance the economy of an area. I have received numerous comments from people locally and from afar about how wonderful the drive is now through the Blue Mountains. This stretch of road is of great importance to the Blue Mountains tourism industry and the economy of the Central West. Tourism operators had often commented to me that Sydneysiders, in particular, were not visiting the Blue Mountains because of the numerous roadworks. But with the completion of every stage, I am now hearing how much better the journey is.

Since being elected in 2011, I have presided over the completion of four sections of the highway upgrade: Lawson, Wentworth Falls, Hazelbrook-Woodford and now Bullaburra west. Unfortunately, the Hazelbrook-Woodford section was fraught with problems due to the collapse of Reed Constructions and a poor contract prepared by the former Labor Government. I am pleased to report that, in conjunction with the

Hazelbrook and Woodford associations, Roads and Maritime Services, the council and contractors, I have been able to produce a much better outcome than was previously thought. I also acknowledge the tremendous support of the Minister for Roads and Freight, the Hon. Duncan Gay.

The Minister understood the way in which the people of Hazelbrook and Woodford had been let down by those opposite. I pay tribute to the hard work and steely determination of community groups in achieving these sensible outcomes—for any party to say otherwise would be a complete fabrication. The final sections of the upgrade at Bullaburra were totally funded by the New South Wales Government. To date, the Liberal-Nationals Government has allocated \$569 million in funding to complete this project. This clearly demonstrates the Government's approach in getting the job done rather than the ad hoc mess left by Labor.

Last weekend I was honoured to attend the renaming of the Megalong Valley Rural Fire Brigade fire shed as the "Keith Duncan Memorial Rural Fire Shed". The Megalong Valley is the rural part of the Blue Mountains electorate and the Megalong Valley Rural Fire Service is the oldest of the 23 brigades in the Blue Mountains. Before volunteer bushfire services were organised in the area a loose collection of locals in the Megalong Valley fought any bushfires. The inception of organised firefighting in the Megalong Valley can be traced back to the horrific fires of 1904-05—some things never change—when Keith Duncan's father, Jack, was a pioneer on the firefighting front. Keith served the brigade for 68 years in all capacities, from active firefighting to president of the brigade. He also donated the land on which the previous shed stood and the present shed stands.

Many Megalong Valley residents, brigade members and Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers as well as Keith's children and grandchildren turned out for this important recognition. Keith was remembered as a generous and well-respected member of the community as well as a dedicated member of the Rural Fire Service. Like many others in the Blue Mountains, his service demonstrates an intergenerational commitment to the Rural Fire Service. His legacy is now immortalised in a way that he would have approved of.

WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS

Mr TONY ISSA (Granville) [1.17 p.m.]: I wish to acknowledge the Parramatta community and the reception held for our local heroes the Western Sydney Wanderers at the street parade and at Parramatta Town Hall after winning the Asian Cup championship. More than 1,000 people attended Parramatta Town Hall for a special function held by Parramatta City Council to honour our local heroes. Chanting for the Wanderers created a wall of noise that echoed off the buildings as people cheered on the heroes—and heroes indeed they are. All the people I spoke to at the reception and also out in the street on the day of the game had nothing but praise and absolute admiration for this young team. The success of the Wanderers has captured the imagination of not only the State and the people of Western Sydney but also the entire world. The Wanderers have made us very proud. The noise at the reception from the excited crowd was a true representation of the team's amazing success.

The football culture in Western Sydney is big, and the Wanderers have made it bigger. There are 100,000 registered footballers in Western Sydney, all of whom represent the multicultural tradition and heritage of a love of football. In the 2012 season—their first season—the Wanderers quickly emerged as one of the leading clubs in Australia, with the intention to lead throughout the whole of Asia. The Wanderers won their first league premiership to gain the club direct qualification into the 2014 AFC Champions League, the first international championship competition with the Premiers' Plate, and making it through to the grand final. Western Sydney is a very proud region and the success of the Wanderers has provided the glue, the soul, and the sense of spirit and identity that has allowed the multicultural community to come together and celebrate the west in the form of the Wanderers.

When the Wanderers lost the grand final in 2012 they showed no sign of disappointment as they waved to the fans and enjoyed the reception, knowing the crown of the champions of Asia would be theirs—and it was an historic feat. Last year the Wanderers were presented with the key to the City of Parramatta while thousands of fans marched the streets singing and cheering the team. On the day of the game this year more than 6,000 excited fans assembled at Parramatta Square from 1.00 a.m. to watch the direct broadcast from Saudi Arabia on the big screen organised by Parramatta City Council. I would like to acknowledge my son Steven, the Deputy Lord Mayor of Parramatta, for organising the event for this loved team and community. The game was a true celebration of the spirit of Western Sydney and was enjoyed by all.

On a personal level, I am pleased to say that my family is deeply involved with the Wanderers, in particular my daughter Natalie and her husband, who are on the promotional committee. I am also pleased to acknowledge my grandson Xavier, who has been selected and signed up to the Parramatta representative team and will hopefully one day represent the Wanderers and Australia. Finally, I congratulate the Wanderers and their supporters in Western Sydney—my home—and, above all, I congratulate Australia on having such a wonderful team.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mark Coure): I thank the member for Granville and I congratulate his grandson Xavier. I also congratulate his son, the Deputy Lord Mayor of Parramatta, on the outstanding work he is doing in Parramatta.

ENGADINE COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote) [1.23 p.m.]: I congratulate the member for Granville on his family's activities and I wish them well. Today I speak about two organisations in my electorate, Engadine District Youth Services and Essential Community Solutions, which was known as Engadine Community Services [ECS] until this year. Both of these organisations are an integral part of our local community, offering support and essential services for many residents from youth to parents, the frail and the elderly. Essential Community Services was established in the 1970s and was the first organisation of its type in the Sutherland shire. It works tirelessly to promote and enhance community capacity through the provision of a range of services for families. Its extensive programs provide general crisis and ongoing support to the disadvantaged, aged, disabled and carers.

I have witnessed firsthand a number of the programs in action and the enormous support these programs offer. I will recount one story. I had the pleasure of attending the service one day when they were celebrating a gentleman's 101st birthday. I made the terrible faux pas of patting somebody else on the back because I thought he was the gentleman turning 101. A young bloke sitting next to me said, "No, it's me". This fellow was so sprightly I could not believe it; it was quite embarrassing. It is fantastic that someone in the beautiful electorate of Heathcote can live to that age—and I hope I can do the same.

I have been approached by the manager of Engadine Essential Services who discussed with me at length the situation that his organisation will face next year due to a change in Federal funding that will result in a \$50,000 shortfall for the service. The impact of this funding shortfall is that, after more than 30 years, Engadine Essential Services will have to close. The centre operates under the management of Carl Piraino and with the hard work and dedication of 65 volunteers, many of whom have written to me to express their concern about the possible closure of such an institution in the Engadine community. Engadine Essential Services has grown and developed over 30 years in response to the changing needs of the community and, in my opinion, the service and the programs provided are essential to support the ongoing health, mental health and wellbeing of local residents.

Another service in my electorate is Engadine District Youth Services. Engadine District Youth Services, known locally as EDYS, is a community-based, non-government organisation that works with young people aged 11 to 18. Professional staff operate a vibrant youth centre located in the heart of Engadine's central business district, opposite my office, which provides a safe, non-judgemental space. It is a place where young people can relax with friends, get involved in fun activities and, with the support of qualified youth workers, explore challenges or decisions they may be facing and the issues that are important to them. The work of Engadine District Youth Services also involves the network around young people that is important to them, such as parents, carers and extended family. Clients come from the surrounding areas of Engadine and Heathcote as well as from the broader Sutherland shire.

Through various activities and practices, such as community development, referral, case management and group work, EDYS encourages and supports young people to make informed decisions about their lives and advocates on their behalf in relation to broader youth issues. Regular activities offered include after-school activities, informative and interactive forums for parents and engaging ways of working with young people. Young people can head to Drop In and Vida Lounge, where they can hang out after school and catch up with friends. There is also a young parents playgroup, which is a supported playgroup for parents aged between 16 and 24 where they can gather new skills and useful information, and be supported in a non-judgemental environment.

FATHER MICHAEL WILLIAMS SILVER JUBILEE OF ORDINATION

Mr CHRIS PATTERSON (Camden) [1.28 p.m.]: My wife, Vicki, and I had the enormous honour and pleasure of attending a lunch to mark the silver jubilee of Father Michael's ordination to the priesthood, which was held at the Campbelltown Catholic Club on Sunday. Also in attendance were the Mayor of Camden, Councillor Lara Symkowiak, and her husband, Andrew. It was wonderful to share the lunch with them and Father Michael's great friend, Father Sean Cullen, and his family. The morning started with a 10.00 a.m. church service in honour of Father Michael's silver jubilee. It was standing room only. I would say there were in excess of 600 parishioners acknowledging Father Michael's great work. Also in attendance was the Most Reverend Peter Ingham, Bishop of Wollongong. Father Michael Williams is the parish priest of St Paul's, Camden, a wonderful church in my electorate. More importantly, he is someone I consider a very good friend and someone I feel very comfortable seeking advice from as needed.

Father Michael was born in Sydney and went to school at St Bernadette's Catholic Primary, Lalor Park; St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Belmore; and St Patrick's College, Strathfield. He owes much to the Sisters of St Joseph and to the Christian Brothers. Upon completing school, he attended two of the great sandstone institutions in Sydney—the University of Sydney and St Patrick's Seminary, Manly, as it was then. From 1985 to 1988, Father Michael worked for the New South Wales Chamber of Commerce and then for two years as an economist for the Westpac Banking Corporation. Father Michael was ordained a deacon in 1988 and a priest in 1989. He worked in Nowra for six years and West Wollongong for eight years. He has been parish priest at St Paul's, Camden, since New Year's Day 2003.

Father Michael has a very deep affection and appreciation for Australian culture and a very genuine appreciation for the church, sacred music, current affairs, finance, rugby, rugby league, golf, cricket, Aussie rules and tennis, and takes a passing interest in many other sports. As a younger man, Father Michael played rugby until the age of 30 and cricket until entering the seminary as a 21-year-old. He continues to play golf at his home club of Lakeside Golf Club Camden, which is a beautiful, quintessentially Macarthur course. Father Michael mentioned that his reason for becoming a priest some 25 years ago was an awareness of the love and mercy of God, and a feeling of deep and enduring gratitude. I extend to Father Michael our congratulations, and our enduring gratitude for the love and support he has provided to the Camden community during his time as parish priest of St Paul's, Camden. On a personal level, Father Michael was a tower of strength and a wonderful friend to me when my father passed away last December.

St. Paul's Camden began when James and William Macarthur provided the site for the church. From about 1845 a small brick church stood on the spot. It was built by Father Gould and was part of Campbelltown parish. The first mass in the area was celebrated by Father Therry in Thomas Galvin's cottage Elderslie in the early 1820s. In February 1859, with 800 people in attendance, Bishop Polding laid the foundation stone for a more substantial building beside the smaller one. It was consecrated the following November. From 1860 Camden had its own Catholic parish, with Father Jerome Keating as parish priest. He was followed by Father John Ridley. William Munro designed the church and the builder was J. B. Elphinstone. The smaller church became Mrs James's home and schoolhouse. This was demolished in 1901 and a new school built on the site in the early 1980s.

Over the past 30 years, Camden has been growing. Indeed by the early 1980s it had become apparent that the church built in 1859 was no longer able to meet the parishioners extra demands. A new church was built to hold about 600 people. This beautiful church was opened by Bishop Murray in 1987, when the Catholic population in the parish was about 6,000 people. All the Catholic schools in my electorate do an outstanding job. It is due in no small part to Father Michael's oversight that they are held in such extremely high esteem and regard today. The Catholic schools are St Paul's Catholic Primary, Camden; St Clare's Catholic Primary School, Narellan Vale; St Justin's Catholic Primary School, Oran Park; Magdalene Catholic High School, Narellan; St Benedict's Catholic College, Camden; St Gregory's College, Campbelltown; St Patrick's College, Campbelltown; and Mater Dei, Camden.

The Camden parish, which began as an isolated rural outpost, is now the fourth-largest parish in Australia. It remains the largest parish in New South Wales. I commend Father Michael and thank him for all that he contributes to my community on behalf of the people of Camden. It is wonderful to have such a committed priest in the local area. He does an outstanding job. He is someone I am proud to call a friend and mentor. I look forward to continuing to work with him for the people of Camden.

Private members' statements concluded.

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

VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I welcome to the public gallery school leaders and State sports awardees, their parents and teachers from St Therese Catholic Primary School and Eastwood Heights Primary School, guests of the Minister for Citizenship and Communities. I also welcome Sister Rose Therese Tannous, guest of the member for Drummoyne.

CENTENARY OF FIRST WORLD WAR

The SPEAKER: About this time 100 years ago in mid-November 1914, with the troops of the Australian Imperial Force [AIF] still crossing the Indian Ocean, another ship was preparing to set sail for the

war, this time from the port of Brisbane. The Australian hospital ship *Kyarra* was taking on board its first contingent of Australian nurses, members of the Australian Army Nursing Service. During the course of the war 2,139 nursing sisters served abroad and a further 423 served in Australia. Twenty-one nurses died on active service overseas and a further eight died in Australia. A total of 388 nurses were decorated for their service, including seven who were awarded military medals for courage under fire.

It is impossible to overestimate but all too easy to ignore or forget the service of those dedicated Australian women. They were to see horrors for which no traditional nurse training could ever have prepared them and they endured their share of suffering along with the men for whom they provided such exceptional care. It is appropriate that we should recall and honour their service alongside the men in arms. Lest we forget.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business

[During the giving of notices of motions.]

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

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.22 p.m.]

ELECTRICITY PRIVATISATION

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: Madam-Speaker—

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Attorney General to order for the first time.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Treasurer. As a briefing note by the Premier's policy director shows that TCorp guarantee fees paid by State-owned electricity companies are forecast to reach \$471 million by 2016-17, can he confirm that the State budget will lose at least half of those TCorp fees under his plans to privatise our electricity network?

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I would be surprised if the Leader of the Opposition knows the functions of TCorp. For the assistance of the Leader of the Opposition, TCorp is the central financing authority for New South Wales. Ultimately, what will result from this transaction? According to Deloitte there will be a \$30 billion per annum economic benefit to the State from additional economic activity off the back of recycling capital through a lease arrangement on the distribution network. It intrigues me that Labor is obsessed about this. I cannot work out whether the Leader of the Opposition knows the view of the member for Maroubra in relation to this transaction.

The Opposition asking questions about interest rates, retention value and now about TCorp in relation to ongoing returns of the businesses intrigues me. It is somewhat bemusing that Opposition members have not studied the budget papers even within six months of them being presented in this place. It is very clear in Budget Paper No. 2 Chapter 9 that there are significant changes to dividends and tax equivalent payments associated with those businesses. It is somewhat intriguing that Labor continues to ask questions.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. The question asked whether the Treasurer can confirm that we will see a loss of half of those fees. It is pretty straightforward and simple.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Treasurer is being relevant to the question asked by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: As I stated earlier, TCorp exists to manage the State's debt. What we know about the Leader of the Opposition is that he is addicted to debt. We also know that if Labor had continued to manage the State's finances net debt was expected to be well over \$20 billion this year, but now stands at \$8.6 billion because of the hard work of this Government. If he is concerned about management fees of TCorp associated with debt, it is a somewhat unbelievable question for the Leader of the Opposition to ask.

I cannot help but wonder where New South Wales would be if Bob Carr had undertaken this transaction in 1997 when the assets were worth \$30 billion. In today's terms that value would be \$45 billion. This State would not be suffering through a great deal of congestion, freight pinch points across the regions that need to be untied, and assets would have been managed to unleash capital potential. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask about debt management, TCorp fees, retention value, dividends and tax equivalent payments, we wonder where he is going with this. The bottom line is that the New South Wales Government has a \$20 billion infrastructure plan to unleash the potential of this city and this State.

In the next four months the Leader of the Opposition will run around promising to build the same projects that the Government has committed to funding, but without the money. The Leader of the Opposition is all about protecting his mates at the Electrical Trades Union [ETU] and their union rorts, and he is all about maintaining high power prices for the people across New South Wales. He has no plan to fund the vital infrastructure and unleash the potential of New South Wales, rebuild the State, and deliver the outcomes that the people of New South Wales have a right to expect from their Government.

STATE ECONOMY

Mr CHRIS PATTERSON: My question is addressed to the Premier. How has the Government rebuilt the New South Wales economy since 2011?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: What a very good question from a very good member. In my view, the member for Camden is the best member for Camden the State has ever seen. When it comes to economic management it really is a tale of two governments. After 16 years of Labor, there is a great deal of evidence to show what this Government inherited and where we are today. New South Wales is now a very different story from when Labor was in office. On jobs growth, you cannot use a monthly or quarterly figure; you need a good period of time on which to base a track record. How about 10 years? Over the past 10 years of the Labor Government, where was New South Wales on jobs growth in Australia? It was absolutely dead last. That was Labor's record.

The good news is that after 3½ years of this Liberal-Nationals Government, New South Wales is number one again on jobs growth, with 132,000 jobs created. This is a tale of two governments: a government delivering, and a government that held this State back. On economic growth, again I pick a time period of 10 years. Where was New South Wales on economic growth in the last 10 years of the Labor Government? It was absolutely dead last. That was what Labor delivered. Under this Government, New South Wales has got back to number one again. Part of the reason for that achievement is that this Government got the budget under control and ensured that it continued to invest in the drivers of the economy. That is what a responsible government does: invest in the drivers of the economy, and let the economy grow. The benefits are there for everyone to see. What about business confidence? It will not surprise this House to know where it was under those opposite.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Under Labor, business confidence in this State was the lowest in the nation. Who could blame businesses? How could they have any confidence under that Government to do anything whatsoever, let alone invest and make long-term decisions? They never knew what was going to happen. The good news is that business confidence under this Government is back—leading the nation, again. What about housing supply? Talk about the lows of that Government: Housing supply was not the lowest in 10 years, 20 years, 30 years or even 40 years—it had 50-year lows. That is where housing supply was under those opposite: spectacular 50-year lows. It took a lot of hard work, but that is what Labor delivered for this State: the slowest housing growth in 50 years. I think it is worth telling the House where the State is now on housing growth: We are back leading the nation in housing starts.

Housing growth makes a significant and important contribution to the overall economy. It is growing. It is the overall solution to housing affordability, and housing is once again moving in this State. Retail trade in New South Wales, under those opposite, was the lowest in the country. Under the Liberal-Nationals, it is back, leading the nation. This is a strong economic story. The State is receiving those benefits, because if you have economic growth, jobs growth and business confidence it is no surprise that the economy moves upwards, and that is exactly what is happening in New South Wales. We know that under Labor this State's triple-A credit rating was under threat; indeed, it went under watch. Just listen to those opposite, claiming they were economic managers. They were so good that they were last in absolutely everything.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Keira to order for the first time. He will cease shouting at the Premier. I call the member for Cessnock to order for the first time.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: They should not try to pretend that they had any economic credibility.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition talk about the budget. They have not even looked at a budget in four years; they do not know what a budget looks like. I think all in this State would be pleased to see that, after a lot of hard work, not only is this Liberal-Nationals Government getting expenses under control, and not only has the economy started to come roaring back, but in the past few months Standard and Poor's has said that New South Wales has a triple-A credit rating again.

Pursuant to standing order additional information provided.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Retaining a triple-A rating is a good news story for the people of New South Wales because that is billions and billions of dollars over the next 10 years that we can put into services and infrastructure, which under those opposite would have gone into making higher interest payments, because they just do not care about fiscal responsibility.

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

Mr MIKE BAIRD: It is not just me saying this, or one of our reports saying this; CommSec came out, as it had never done before, and reported that across all economic indicators New South Wales was finally back to number one again. That is good news for the people of this State. People around the world are looking at Sydney and New South Wales and noting that we are leading the world. That is why it was great to have the G20 in Brisbane and to have the Global Infrastructure Hub in Sydney. I do not expect compliments, but I would have thought Opposition members would have stood up, clapped and said, "Well done on having the Global Infrastructure Hub in Sydney."

Could members have imagined 3½ years ago having a global infrastructure hub in Sydney, when Labor's piece de resistance was the Rozelle Metro? They would have had to explain to the world how the Rozelle Metro would work. It's a cracker: You get \$500 million, throw it away, and you get nothing. That was their infrastructure plan. We on this side of the House are proud to be delivering for the people of this great city and State a record infrastructure spend, as is acknowledged by the world, and an economy that finally is moving back to number one. That is what the people of New South Wales expect, and that is exactly what this Government is proud to deliver.

The SPEAKER: I welcome to the gallery Rosemary Foot, AO, a former member for Vaucluse.

ELECTRICITY PRIVATISATION

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: My question is directed to the Treasurer. A leaked briefing note prepared by the Premier's director of policy shows that there will be an \$818 million hole in the State budget once the proceeds from electricity privatisation are spent. Will this \$818 million hole be filled by tax increases or further cuts to public services?

The SPEAKER: Order! The clock will be stopped until members come to order so that the Treasurer can be heard in silence. I call the member for Keira to order for the second time.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I am glad that the member for Maroubra has asked about electricity reform. The member would be aware that in recent years, in a debate in this Chamber about electricity reform, a member of this House was referencing the former Auditor-General of New South Wales, Tony Harris, who had examined the effect of electricity reform in Victoria. That member, as is recorded in *Hansard*, stated "conclusively that the electricity reforms in Victoria led to a significant price decrease in that State."

Mr John Sidoti: Who was that?

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: That was not the member for Manly, it was not the Minister for Energy, the member for Lane Cove, and it was not the member for Toongabbie or the member for Blacktown. It

was, of course, the member for Maroubra. I cannot help but think that every time the member for Blacktown gets up and says electricity prices will go up, the member for Maroubra thinks the member for Blacktown is a liar.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: My point is taken under Standing Order 129. The question was about the hole in the State budget, not electricity prices. I ask that the Minister be directed back to the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I heard the specific question. I can only advise, in accordance with the standing orders, that the Treasurer remains relevant in his response to the question he was asked.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: One cannot but think that the member for Maroubra is backing in the plan, and that every time the member for Blacktown gets up and says that prices are going to go up under electricity reform, the member for Maroubra thinks that the member for Blacktown is a liar—

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

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: —because the Auditor-General has made the position crystal clear. Labor can run its scare campaigns about holes in budgets and everything else—

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra takes a point of order. The Treasurer will resume his seat.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: —but off the scoping work, off the back of the State Infrastructure Plan, New South Wales will remain number one.

The SPEAKER: Order! Has the Treasurer completed his answer?

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I have, Madam Speaker.

REGIONAL SERVICES

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier. How is the Government delivering better services for regional New South Wales?

Mr TROY GRANT: I thank the member for Tweed for his question; he is a wonderful regional member who has served the Tweed electorate outstandingly not only in the past four years but throughout his term as a member of this place. The member for Tweed, as Parliamentary Secretary for Police and Emergency Services before he was promoted to Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier, did some outstanding work with his colleagues on the North Coast to ensure their voices were heard on the pressing need for more front-line police. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services told me that he was on the North Coast recently to announce an additional 90 police officers for the North Coast by May 2015. This is a prime example of how this Government is delivering better services.

What better service to deliver than those of front-line police in law and order to ensure community safety across our State? I am extraordinarily proud to be part of a Government that has a record number of regional Ministers who are listening to their communities and delivering on these services. Across the State we have regional members from Maitland, Wagga Wagga, Tweed Heads, Barwon, Murray-Darling, New England, Tamworth and the Northern Tablelands delivering because they do one simple thing that those opposite failed to do for 16 years: They listen to their communities.

Ms Cherie Burton: You sound a bit worried.

Mr TROY GRANT: I am not worried at all. Regional communities of this State spoke when we came into government. They said they wanted their voices to be heard. They want to make the decisions locally that impact on them. They do not want a bunch of biscuit-eaters in Sydney telling them what they can and cannot have. They do not want a bunch of biscuit-eaters telling them what hospitals they can and cannot have. They do not want a bunch of biscuit-eaters saying they cannot have the police they want on the front line. This Government has an education Minister that says local schools will make local decisions.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will be removed from the Chamber if they continue to interject.

Mr TROY GRANT: No more biscuit-eaters will be telling regional New South Wales what they can and cannot have. This Government has a health Minister who says that when it comes to delivering health services, local health districts will make the decisions.

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

Mr TROY GRANT: We are seeing record investment in Health, with more doctors flooding to regional New South Wales. We have seen hospitals rise out of the ground because local communities have been listened to and they are making the decisions. No more biscuit-eaters are dictating to regional New South Wales about what we will and will not have. When it comes to one of the perilous conditions that those opposite ignored for so long—regional roads that carry kids on school buses—

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

Mr TROY GRANT: A few biscuit-eaters are upset today.

The SPEAKER: Order! All members who have been called to order on one or two occasions are deemed to be on three calls to order. I warn members that they will be removed from the Chamber for the remainder of the day if they continue to interject.

Mr TROY GRANT: Regional roads that buses used to take our kids to school and to take tourists up and down the State are now safer to use. Regional communities are no longer being ignored because we are listening. Seventy-five per cent of the Roads and Maritime Services budget was dedicated to those regional roads—the important links that take our produce from paddock to plate and our tourists—

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Wollongong to remove herself from the Chamber until the end of question time.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Wollongong left the Chamber at 2.43 p.m.]

Mr TROY GRANT: The bar is open for the member for Wollongong. I give this assurance, as the Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Premier of this State—

Ms Tania Mihailuk: He's not even answering the question.

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Premier is answering the question. I remind the member for Bankstown that interjections are disorderly at all times.

Mr TROY GRANT: —this Government, led by Mike Baird and served by the wonderful members across regional New South Wales, will not stop listening and will not stop delivering for them.

The SPEAKER: Order! I reiterate that all members called to order on one or two occasions are now deemed to be on three calls to order. I will have no hesitation in ejecting members from the Chamber if they continue to shout and interject. There is far too much audible conversation coming from both sides of the House.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS RENT PAYMENTS

Ms LINDA BURNEY: My question is directed to the Premier. He said the Government is about "looking after and protecting the vulnerable" and that "efficiency for efficiency sake doesn't ... deliver true community outcomes". Why is the Government now forcing 1,200 not-for-profit community groups across New South Wales to pay full market rents of up to \$2,000 per week?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: In respect to the details of that question and the groups the member for Canterbury is talking about, I start with the premise that it is completely and utterly wrong because that is a good place to

start with anything that comes from the Opposition. Let me see the exact details and I will be happy to provide some sort of comment. I will not respond to some grand statement, because the Parliament deserves better. I say to all those opposite: You sit there on your moral high horses and talk about all types of programs.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! It is a bit early to take a point of order on relevance. Is it relevance?

Ms Linda Burney: It is.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is entitled to make introductory comments.

Ms Linda Burney: I think it is a reasonable question. It is going to mean that 1,200 not-for-profit groups could well close down and he is the Premier.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Canterbury may think it is a reasonable question, but the Premier is entitled to answer it in the way he sees fit. There is no point of order. The member for Canterbury will resume her seat.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: On the information provided in the question, I am happy to look at any further details provided. It is quite simple: We have been very purposeful in our fiscal strategy. Those opposite might have missed it because they have not paid much attention during budget time.

Ms Cherie Burton: Neither has your Treasurer.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I remember the shadow Transport person spending budget day looking at the *Weekly Cat*. That gives us a sense of the approach those opposite have taken.

The SPEAKER: Order! This is not an opportunity for the member for Canterbury to argue with the Premier.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Let me answer the question, which is quite simple. In our fiscal strategy we have said we need to live within our means, but we need to invest in the drivers of the economy. We need to improve services, build infrastructure and look after the vulnerable. Unless those opposite missed it, they can sit there and oppose every saving measure this Government has implemented, which they have done, but they have given no indication on how they will fund any service. They can sit there in gaga land, which is where they are. How on earth can anyone in this State—

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! I indicated that the Premier was being relevant to the question he was asked, and he remains relevant.

Ms Linda Burney: I put to the Premier that if he is such a good fiscal manager—

The SPEAKER: Order! It is not for the member for Canterbury to put anything to the Premier. The member has asked her question.

Ms Linda Burney: I think he should reverse the decision.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member for Canterbury is using points of order to argue with the Premier. The Premier has the call.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Their day of reckoning, and the shadow Cabinet has not yet picked it up. Those opposite have opposed every saving measure put forward and are against any infrastructure plan we put forward. Basically, they are taking the State completely backwards. For them to put any credible policy forward they have to tell us how they will fund it. We on this side have been getting the budget back in order from the train wreck that those opposite left. We have reached a position where we have had to prioritise the vulnerable and we have done that proudly. We were the first State to sign up to the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. The basis on which we did that was that Cabinet said it needs to be sustainable into the long term.

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Kogarah to remove herself from the Chamber until the end of question time under Sessional Order 249.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Kogarah left the Chamber at 2.48 p.m.]

Mr MIKE BAIRD: We needed to find an expenditure line with our revenue and that is what we did with the NDIS. That is why in the last budget we provided close to an extra \$500 million to help our caseworkers on the front line who deal with some of the most vulnerable kids and families in the State. We were very proud to do that and we are continuing to do that. It will be a key part of our Government.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier remains relevant to the question he was asked. What is the member's point of order?

Mr John Robertson: Standing Order 129, relevance. The Premier debated the question, which is a breach of standing order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition is debating the question.

Mr John Robertson: Standing Order 130—

The SPEAKER: Order! Has the Leader of the Opposition changed his point of order to Standing Order 130?

Mr John Robertson: No, I am raising both.

The SPEAKER: Order! Is the Leader of the Opposition still relying on Standing Order 129?

Mr John Robertson: I refer to Standing Order 130. The Premier debated the question. Now he refuses to remain relevant. If this is true, it is pretty straightforward: Will he reverse the decision?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Our Government has prioritised a fiscal approach that provides a capacity to look after the vulnerable not only for today but also for future generations. We are proud to do that. Opposition members should pay attention. We were the first State to sign up to the National Education Reform Agreement, which provides the most disadvantaged kids with every opportunity. They deserve the same amount of funding as every other kid across the State. This is the first time that every Aboriginal student in New South Wales has funding, which is something that this Government is proud to deliver. I do not care what scare campaigns the Opposition runs; it can run scare campaigns. We are proud to look after the vulnerable, which is what we have done for the past four years.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE: My question is addressed to the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research. It has been four years since the Minister told the voters of New South Wales to "change the Government so you change the health system". How has the Government improved health services for the people of New South Wales?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I thank the wonderful member for Wagga Wagga, who has campaigned for more years than I can remember to upgrade the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. Have we delivered? Yes, we have. I will correct the continual misuse of truth—that is another way of saying "lying"—by the Opposition, particularly the Leader of the Opposition, claiming there has been some kind of cut to the budget. I know the Premier has said that Opposition members do not read budgets; they appear to not know how to read them. The budget estimates for 2011-12 show on page 6-1 that the recurrent budget—this is just after the Opposition left Government—was \$15.471 billion. This year's budget estimates, page 4-1, show \$18 billion. Is that a \$3 billion cut? No, it is not. The Leader of the Opposition does not know the truth.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the members for Cessnock and Fairfield that they are on three calls to order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: Anyone in the gallery will know that is the biggest "porkey" they have ever heard. How have we improved by increasing the budget? We are treating more patients. When Labor was in office the number of patients seen in emergency departments was 2.49 million. Now it is 2.66 million. The number of elective surgeries done was 206,000; now it is 217,000. The number of patients admitted to hospital was 1.36 million; now it is 1.8 million. There has been a massive increase in the number of patients being treated, and they are being treated faster and more effectively.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: When Labor was in office the percentage of elective surgeries done on time was 89 per cent; now it is 97 per cent. That is the best in the country. That is not just me saying that. Those statistics come from the latest report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. In Australia, we have the best statistics for semi-urgent patients being treated on time. In respect of adverse events, New South Wales has the lowest proportion reported in Australia. That is a big tick. We have more patients being treated faster than ever with fewer adverse events. We are now rated number one in the nation when it comes to delivering timely and quality emergency care in our emergency departments.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report showed that for 2009-10 the median waiting time was 20 minutes; it is now 15 minutes. Under Labour, 75 per cent of patients were seen on time; now it is 81 per cent. Under Labor, the so-called net target of patients who went through the emergency department in four hours was 59 per cent; now it is 75 per cent. No matter what category we look at, we are doing it better. In respect of clinical excellence, the national report shows that we are delivering high clinical standards when it comes to infection control. We are leading the country in those targets. We have done this by re-engaging critical staff through establishing local health districts, and empowering doctors, nurses and others. We are publishing budgets. We are providing an activity-based management portal so that they can see, through their intranet, the number of patients who are treated and every intervention of each patient in their own hospitals.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: We have increased front-line staff. An additional 4,600 nurses have been appointed—that is 3,400 full-time equivalents—which is a record of 48,500. An additional 1,400 full-time equivalent doctors have been appointed. More than 1,000 hospital support staff have been appointed. Intern positions have increased to 980 this year, which is up 13 per cent since 2012. There are 205 more paramedics. Furthermore, we have not only increased numbers in the recurrent budget, but numbers have increased in the capital budget, which is where the member for Wagga Wagga comes in. The balance of money invested in the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital was State money. Altogether \$5 billion of the State budget was allocated to redeveloping hospitals. Members opposite made promises but never delivered; they were hollow promises. In the country we have smaller hospitals in Wagga Wagga, Dubbo, Parkes, Forbes, Tamworth, Bega.

Pursuant to standing order additional information provided.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: We also have hospitals in the city, such as Blacktown, Mount Druitt, Campbelltown, St George and Sutherland. We are getting on with the job of starting on hospitals such as Westmead. I have travelled all over the State talking and listening to front-line staff. In the last quarter, July to September, I visited the Kirby Institute, the Kolling Institute, Dubbo Base Hospital, Forbes, Parkes, Peak Hill, Westmead, Hornsby, Royal Prince Alfred, Royal North Shore, St Vincent's, Wagga Wagga, Lockhart Lismore, Ballina, Tweed, new Byron, and Central hospital, Byron Ambulance, and I could go on.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members who do not want to listen to the answer should leave the Chamber.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: We have talked to people and we have listened to our members who represent their communities. We have delivered. We have provided upgraded infrastructure in our hospitals, we have employed more clinical staff, and we are treating more patients and achieving better outcomes. Health is number one again under the Liberal-Nationals Coalition.

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: My question is directed to the Premier. Will he rule out supporting any increase in the rate of the GST?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Some days I think they will not ask a question and other days they do. For the benefit of Opposition members, 6277 7111 is the number for the Federal Parliament in Canberra.

Mr Ryan Park: Point of order: It is Standing Order 129. A number of times in recent years this Parliament has debated carbon tax and other issues—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Keira will resume his seat. There is no point of order. The Premier is making a relevant point.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: There are no plans to change the GST. There is absolutely nothing on the table in relation to GST. The Opposition can pretend there is. There is a tax forum next year. The Opposition's shadow Treasurer, in a rare moment—the only time in four years—said sensibly, "Let us have a constructive debate about tax reform." Let us have a constructive debate about tax reform. There are no plans to do anything. It is great to have the member for Bankstown—otherwise known as PO Box 1158—ask a question.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: My point of order is under Standing Order 73.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Macquarie Fields is very chivalrous. There is no point of order. The Premier has the call.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The member for Maroubra has shown some leadership in his reasonable proposition that we need to have a mature debate about tax. My concern is that the Leader of the Opposition has failed to show any leadership.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. It was a simple question even for the Premier. I know it is tough for those opposite to answer questions.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Premier was being relevant to the question he was asked.

Mr John Robertson: The answer is either yes or no.

The SPEAKER: Order! If the Leader of the Opposition behaves in that manner again he will be removed from the Chamber. There is no point of order.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The Leader of the Opposition is leaking against the member for Auburn.

Ms Tania Mihailuk: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. The South Australian Premier has ruled out supporting the GST.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bankstown will resume her seat.

Ms Tania Mihailuk: Why don't you rule it out?

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member has taken a point of order to argue her point. I direct the member for Bankstown to remove herself from the Chamber until the conclusion of question time.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Bankstown left the Chamber at 3.00 p.m.]

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The Leader of the Opposition has leaked to the paper that the problem for the member for Auburn is that she had a reference from Eddie Obeid.

Mr Ron Hoenig: Point of order: Neither the member for Auburn nor any other member is relevant to the question as to whether the Premier supports a variation in the GST.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has answered the question. If the member for Heffron had been listening he would have heard the Premier answer it.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: The Leader of the Opposition was happy to say that about the member for Auburn, but who put him into his leadership position? It was Eddie Obeid. The Leader of the Opposition will not stand up for Barbara—

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. As much as the Premier likes to avoid answering the question—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has answered the question he was asked.

Mr John Robertson: Madam Speaker, with respect, the standing orders clearly state that a member is required to be generally relevant for the full five minutes of his or her answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! I know what the standing orders say. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mr John Robertson: The member for Auburn has no relevance to the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order. The Premier will remain generally relevant to the question he was asked.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I am talking about leadership. On the question of tax the member for Maroubra has shown some leadership. I am asking the Leader of the Opposition to show some leadership. Why does he not back Barbara in?

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: The Premier is flouting your ruling. I ask that the Premier be directed to return to the leave of the question.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. If I could identify which Government member was responsible for instigating that unnecessary noise I would have that member removed from the Chamber. The member for Monaro and the member for Hawkesbury will be removed from the Chamber if they continue with their inappropriate behaviour.

CHILD PROTECTION AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: Madam Speaker—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mulgoa is no doubt about to ask a sensible question. The member for Mulgoa never interjects or argues. Members should observe her behaviour, as I have for the past four years, every question time. Members will recall that last week I also made note of the behaviour of the member for Balmain. Both are gold star members—it is hard to find any others who are. The member for Mulgoa will be heard in silence.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES: I address my question to the very good Minister for Family and Community Services. How is the Government delivering reform to better protect the most vulnerable in our community?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I thank the member for Mulgoa for her question. Not only has she earned a gold star today—

The SPEAKER: Every day.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: As the Speaker said, every day. When we came to government Family and Community Services was not helping enough people in need. Under Labor's leadership people were failing to get what they needed. For the benefit of those opposite, I will recount what we had at that time. Our child protection system was not providing a safe home for life for our vulnerable young people and their families. Our social housing system was entrenching disadvantage. Our homeless services system treated people at their crisis point rather than helping them when we can make the biggest difference—namely, early on when they are at risk of being homeless.

In contrast—and if those opposite had been listening to the Premier they would have heard this—we are turning the system around. This Government is helping more people in need. Let us talk first about the important work we have done in child protection. In the budget funding of more than half a billion dollars has been allocated over four years for child protection services. What does that mean? It means we can provide

more services and better outcomes for more children at risk and in care. The Government is creating a better child protection system. What else are we doing? Through our reforms, which were passed by this Parliament earlier this year and are now operational, we are promoting better parenting, promoting permanency decisions so children will have a safer, stable home much earlier, and we are also creating a child-focused child protection system. These are important generational reforms.

I will now talk, as the Premier has done many times in this Chamber, about the Going Home Staying Home reforms. What do they do? Under these reforms we have delivered half a billion dollars over three years in homelessness services across New South Wales. The Government is providing more services and better outcomes for people at risk of being homeless before they become homeless. The evidence shows that if we help a person who is at risk of homelessness then that person may not become homeless. We are helping those people to help themselves and I am pleased to report that the transitioning to this new system is going strong. I will now turn to the important issue of social housing. We must continue to deliver smart reform in this area. We must protect those vulnerable people who cannot provide housing for themselves in the private rental market.

Today I have released a discussion paper on social housing. I particularly draw this to the attention of those opposite because Labor has shown time and again that it has no vision, no policies and no plans. This discussion paper confirms that our social housing system is about providing a safety net for the most vulnerable in our society. Those people will always have our support, but what more should we do? We should provide a fairer and more sustainable system. We should provide a system that does not have waiting lists that continue to climb and a system without the maintenance backlog we inherited from Labor. Labor failed to look after social housing and the most vulnerable in our community. I encourage all members to take the opportunity to put their ideas forward. Not only does this discussion paper say we want a fairer and more sustainable system, but we also want a social housing system that provides opportunity. Social housing should not be a destination for everybody.

Ms Linda Burney: It is for some people.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I note the interjection of the member for Canterbury. Some will be provided for in social housing for life. That is important and they need our support. Social housing can also be a way in which we can help people in the short term to get back on their feet and this discussion paper supports that concept. It also says that we should be providing education and training opportunities for work. I welcome the comments of all members on this discussion paper. The Government is making a social system for those most vulnerable in New South Wales.

NEWCASTLE RAIL LINE

Mr TIM CRAKANTHORP: My question is directed to the Premier. The people of Newcastle have now, following the lord mayoral elections on Saturday, elected local, State and Federal representatives who all oppose the removal of the rail line into Newcastle.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order so that I can hear the question. The member for Coffs Harbour and the member for Upper Hunter will cease being silly. I will decide if the question is too long.

Mr TIM CRAKANTHORP: Will the Premier now finally listen to the community in Newcastle and stop his plans to rip up Newcastle's rail line on Boxing Day?

Mr MIKE BAIRD: In some respects I feel sorry for the member for Newcastle and the member for Charlestown. In the past few weeks they have realised that they have been completely and utterly duped—they were not warned about this. Opposition members did not tell them about the leadership team. They did not tell them that no costings whatsoever were done for anything that was promised. They did not tell them anything. They said, "Don't worry; we'll look after it." Well, they looked after it; and now they are in a pickle. So in some respects I feel sorry for the new members. They seem like good people, and I am sure it is an honour for them to represent their electorates. But I feel sorry for them because their team is what we see before us. In regard to the member's question whether we will continue with the urban renewal of Newcastle, yes, we will. I will tell the member why we will do that—because the people of Newcastle were ignored by those opposite for so long.

A strong majority of people want to see that city renewed. It has taken this Government to deliver for them, and we will deliver for them. If we are to establish why those opposite are so despondent we need only to

look at a recent policy announcement by another Labor luminary. Let us take a step back and remember Labor's policy. What will Labor members do with that heavy rail line? They will put in level crossings which create congestion and cause safety concerns. The Leader of the Opposition, in his own words, said it was incredibly dangerous. That is what he said. At a recent policy launch in Victoria Labor leader Daniel Andrews said. The member for Newcastle might be interested in what Mr Andrews thinks about the policy that the Leader of the Opposition has given him. Mr Andrews said:

Labor equals removing the 50 most dangerous and congested level crossings, because too many people have died, too much time has been wasted, and these level crossings that are a relic of the past simply must go, and they will go, but only under a Labor Government.

The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Newcastle have not done their homework on their policy to renew the great city of Newcastle. They did not tell the member for Newcastle about this, did they? They forgot to say that, by the way, when they get out their crayons there is no substance behind their policies. What does their policy mean in practice? It is not safe, it will cause congestion and it would cramp the city of Newcastle. We on this side of the House will not stand for that.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance under Standing Order 129. The Premier has not been to Newcastle for three months, despite all his promises.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is being relevant to the question he was asked. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I am inclined to remove him from the Chamber.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I am happy to work with the member for Newcastle, and I am happy to work with the council. We will work with members of the local community as it is their project. We will deliver the project for them. The great thing about this Government is that we are not taking this for granted. We are turning what we think is a great city into an even greater city. We are delivering economic growth, jobs and opportunities for a city that was neglected by Labor. We are not going to take it for granted. We are going to deliver for the people of Newcastle. I look forward to working constructively with the member for Newcastle, because the city of Newcastle deserves nothing less. We are proud to make decisions that will take that city forward and that region forward, which is what they deserve.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr CHARLES CASUSCELLI: My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport, and Minister for the Hunter. How has the Government improved public transport after 16 long years of Labor neglect?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I thank the member for Strathfield for his question and wish him at least 16 long years as the member for Strathfield. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about recent transport highlights. I am also pleased to talk about some Labor policy highlights relating to public transport, but I will get to that later. I start by noting some of the things that this Government has done in recent times. On the North West Rail Link we have a big tick. Three tunnel boring machines are in the ground and 13 construction sites are in full swing. The skytrain works are underway and the operations contract has been awarded.

The South West Rail Link is another tick for this Government. Construction has been completed a year ahead of schedule and \$300 million under budget, with services to start early next year. The Inner West Light Rail extension is another big tick. It is open to the public, with nine new stations and 12 new light rail vehicles to be rolled out. There is a big tick for the central business district [CBD] and South East Light Rail. Early works are already underway and we are in final negotiations with the primary contractor for that contract.

The Opal card is another tick. Some 1.3 million cards have been issued already, including more than 30,000 gold seniors Opal cards. The Wynyard walk is another big tick. It will see the construction of an active transport way between Wynyard station and Barangaroo, a six-minute pedestrian walk. I am also pleased to announce that the light rail routes in Parramatta have been shortlisted, from 10 down to four, which I know is welcome news to the member for Parramatta. And there are our very positive plans about renewing Newcastle and building light rail in Newcastle. In our first 3½ years in government we have introduced more than 10,500 weekly transport services. Under our Transport Access Program, which is a \$770 million program, we have 180 projects either completed or underway including station upgrades and improved car parks—you name it; we are delivering it.

There is plenty more to talk about. I also think it is worthwhile to compare the record of this Government with what those opposite offer in this policy area. I have some highlights from the Labor Party in

relation to public transport. The first one was a budget day highlight. As we know, most shadow Ministers spend budget day looking through the budget papers to see what is going on. I waited with bated breath to see what the shadow Minister for Transport, from the other place, would talk about on budget day. And this was her response on budget day, "Question time is a bit dull today. Glad I found this in my folder,"—she was talking about the latest news from the Cat Protection Society of NSW. Another highlight was in relation to the shadow Minister's interest in policy. She lists 14 policy interests, including things like energy, prisons and improving democracy through technology—

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance under Standing Order 129. The Minister is required to remain relevant to the question. The question related to what the Government is doing; it was not about what the shadow Minister is doing.

The SPEAKER: Order! One can sometimes draw a contrast though. There is an argument that the Minister is making a contrast. The Minister can talk about Opposition policies in answering the question. There is no point of order. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: She listed 14 policy interests. Unfortunately none of them were on public transport, and she is the shadow Minister for Transport. That is what the shadow Minister for Transport said. In his budget reply speech the Leader of the Opposition did not outline any vision for public transport. Then again, in another place he said he would build the North West Rail Link faster, but we know that he still denies the work is being done. He says that we failed to start the North West Rail Link. The Italian Prime Minister left Italy to come to Kellyville and witness the work on the North West Rail Link. The headline of the newspaper I am holding reads, "Bellissimo!" It is good enough for the Italian Prime Minister but not good enough for the Leader of the Opposition. The Italian Prime Minister chose to go to Kellyville, a stone's throw away from the electorate of the Leader of the Opposition.

Pursuant to standing order additional information provided.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: The newspaper reads:

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi made a post-G20 visit to Kellyville to check out the progress on the North West Rail Link Skytrain—and he loved what he saw.

Kellyville is a stone's throw away from the electorate of the Leader of the Opposition, but he cannot be bothered to turn up to see the North West Rail Link and he does not acknowledge that it is being built. I would like to know whether the Leader of the Opposition supports his colleague in the other place.

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Fairfield to remove himself from the Chamber until the end of question time.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Fairfield left the Chamber at 3.20 p.m.]

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I want to know whether the Leader of the Opposition agrees with the Hon. Steve Whan, who said last year, "They are directing their funds into the North West Rail Link ... I would cut the North West Rail Link." Does the Leader of the Opposition support that member in the other place? Other highlights from members opposite include their answer to cutting congestion by kicking pensioners off trains in peak hour. They do not care about pensioners. In relation to congestion busting they say that we should forget about building new rail lines or providing new services and throw pensioners off in peak time. They said in the document I am holding that Labor would restrict the use of discount tickets during peak times, especially off-peak returns and potentially pensioner excursion tickets.

Question time concluded at 3.22 p.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Valedictory Speeches

Motion by Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS agreed to:

That business of the House be interrupted at 4.40 p.m. to permit the presentation of a valedictory speech by the member for Oxley.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Committee Reports****Motion by Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS agreed to:**

That standing and sessional orders be suspended at this sitting to permit, following the conclusion of the valedictory speech by the member for Oxley, consideration of orders of the day—committee reports—for a period of up to one hour.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Petitions Signed by 10,000 or More Persons****Motion by Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS agreed to:**

That on Wednesday 19 November 2014 standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the consideration of Business of the House—Petitions—orders of the day Nos 2 to 9, followed by order of the day No. 1, during the period set aside in the routine of business for government business prior to 1.15 p.m.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, of the Auditor-General's Financial Audit Report, Volume Seven 2014, dated 18 November 2014.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Report**

Mr Stephen Bromhead, as Chair, tabled the report entitled "Legislation Review Digest No. 66/55", dated 18 November 2014, together with minutes of the committee meeting regarding Legislation Review Digest No. 65/55, dated 11 November 2014.

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

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**Report**

Mr Jonathan O'Dea, as Chair, tabled the report entitled "Tenancy Management in Social Housing", Report 20/55, dated November 2014.

Ordered to be printed on motion by Mr Jonathan O'Dea.

PETITIONS

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

Ageing, Disability and Homecare Services

Petition requesting that the Government retain provision of ageing, disability and homecare services, received from **Mr Jamie Parker**.

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

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

Mount Druitt Free Shuttle Bus

Petition calling on the Government to provide a free shuttle bus service in Mount Druitt, received from **Mr Richard Amery**.

Pymont and Ultimo Bus Services

Petition requesting the improvement and expansion of bus services to Pymont and Ultimo, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Sydney Electorate Public High School

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

Elizabeth Bay Marina

Petition calling for an open and transparent public tender process for development of the Elizabeth Bay Marina, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Mount Druitt Hospital Cardiac Unit

Petition opposing the closure of the Mount Druitt Hospital cardiac unit and calling on the Government to reverse its decision and to retain the unit, received from **Mr Richard Amery**.

Same-sex Marriage

Petition supporting same-sex marriage, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Women's Refuges

Petition calling on the Government to adequately fund women's and girls' refuges and to reinstate such refuges where dedicated services are no longer available, received from **Mr Richard Amery**.

Commonwealth Clean Energy Supplement

Petition requesting that social housing tenants receive the full benefit of the Commonwealth Clean Energy Supplement to offset increased living expenses, received from **Mr Richard Amery**.

Inner-city Social Housing

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

Pet Shops

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

Slaughterhouse Monitoring

Petition requesting mandatory closed-circuit television for all New South Wales slaughterhouses, 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**.

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**.

Mental Health Services

Petition requesting increased mental health support for people with a mental illness who are tenants of Housing NSW and community housing, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

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

Harris Street Walkway

Petition requesting the reinstatement of the Harris Street walkway connection to the central business district and the upgrade of lighting on Darling Harbour walkways, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital Parking Facilities

Petition requesting additional parking facilities at Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

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

The Hon. Adrian Piccoli—Wollongong Public School—lodged 16 October 2014 (Ms Noreen Hay)

The Hon. Duncan Gay—Marine Rescue Ballina—lodged 16 October 2014 (Mr Donald Page)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Business Lapsed

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) Nos 3013 and 3015 to 3044 lapsed pursuant to Standing Order 105 (3).

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

State Economy

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.27 p.m.]: The motion that I seek to be accorded priority states:

That this House:

- (1) Notes that only with a strong economy can you build vital infrastructure, improve key services and protect the vulnerable.
- (2) Acknowledges that under the previous Government, New South Wales was ranked last across a range of economic indicators.
- (3) Recognises that only this Government can rebuild New South Wales and make this State number one.

As this is probably the last sitting week of this Parliament it is a logical time to do a stocktake of where we were, where we are and where we are going. Fundamental to that stocktake is the economy. Members on this side of the House recognise that good economic and financial management is vital to delivering infrastructure and services and looking after the vulnerable. But what are members on the opposite side of the Chamber thinking? How many Opposition motions sought to be accorded priority this year have mentioned the State economy? Absolutely none—zip, zilch, zero, rien, nichts, niente, nada.

Members opposite have no interest in our economy. Is it any wonder when we look at their sore and sorry record? Members opposite squandered the great opportunities the Liberal-Nationals provided for this State by securing the 2000 Olympics when Bob Carr and subsequent Premiers put up the no vacancy sign. Who in this House is proud of having the slowest growth on record of any State for a decade under Labor? No one—not even members on the other side. Who is proud that New South Wales now has the strongest annual economic growth of any State in the country? We are all proud.

That growth rate is double the rate of Western Australia and quadruple the rate of Victoria. Who is proud that for the past decade under Labor our great State had the slowest jobs growth of any State in the country? No-one is proud. But now who is proud that New South Wales has the second-lowest unemployment rate across Australia? All Government members are proud. This motion should be accorded priority because the economic transformation we have seen in 3½ years of Liberal-Nationals Government is the cornerstone for great things that Minister Skinner, Minister Berejiklian and others are delivering in transport, education and health. I commend the motion to the House. For the reasons I have stated, it should be accorded priority.

Health Services

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [3.30 p.m.]: The motion I have foreshadowed deserves to be accorded priority so that the truth comes out about the state of health in New South Wales. I will refer to figures published in October this year by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that show that New South Wales has the longest elective surgery waiting times in the country. Despite what we hear day after day from the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research, who continues to interject and heckle, figures published in October by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that New South Wales has the longest waiting times for elective surgery in the nation. Worse still, the figures also show that New South Wales patients are waiting longer for elective surgery than patients in any other State. In New South Wales patients wait 49 days for elective surgery in comparison with Queensland. It is true that New South Wales is number one—because patients in New South Wales wait longer than those in any other State when it comes to elective surgery.

Let me examine the median patient waiting times in New South Wales compared with the national average: 290 days for knee replacements whereas the national average is 194 days; 233 days for tonsil removal whereas the national average is 99 days; 218 days for cataract removal whereas the national average is 79 days; 191 days for hip replacement whereas the national average is 106 days; 131 days for ear, nose and throat surgery whereas the national average is 70 days; 175 days for ophthalmology whereas the national average is 69 days; and 104 days for orthopaedic surgery whereas the national average is 66 days. Despite all the rhetoric in the budget and the statements regarding health in New South Wales, New South Wales patients are waiting longer than patients in any other State. That is not based on what I say but, rather, it is based on Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures.

When it comes to TAFE, we have had massive cuts, which have resulted in 1,100 teachers and staff being sacked. Fees have been increased despite the fact that we have double-digit unemployment rates right across the State. The answer to that from Government members is to make it harder for young people to get a skill and more expensive for young people to get skills and a job while we impose cuts. In relation to health, New South Wales has a Premier who fails to stand up to the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, when it comes to the \$7 general practitioner [GP] tax. I have listened to the Premier and the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research saying that the \$7 GP tax is hypothetical but every time, almost 30 minutes after they say that, the Prime Minister or the Treasurer, Joe Hockey, or the Federal health Minister, Peter Dutton, confirm they are committed to the \$7 GP tax. Government members do nothing to stand up for the people of New South Wales instead of telling Tony Abbott to dump it. [*Time expired.*]

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I place the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Macquarie Fields on three calls to order.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 57

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

Noes, 23

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

Pairs

Mr Hazzard	Mr Collier
Mr O'Farrell	Mrs Perry
Mr Roberts	Mr Rees

Question resolved in the affirmative.

STATE ECONOMY**Motion Accorded Priority**

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.41 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes that only with a strong economy can you build vital infrastructure, improve key services and protect the vulnerable.
- (2) Acknowledges that under the previous Government New South Wales was ranked last across a range of economic indicators.
- (3) Recognises that only this Government can rebuild New South Wales and make this State number one.

As I said in seeking priority for this motion, what a stark contrast it is between where we were under those opposite and where we are now. In the last decade of Labor, New South Wales had the slowest jobs growth across Australia. Under this Coalition Government, New South Wales has the second-highest number of jobs created anywhere in Australia and the second-lowest rate of unemployment. Under the last decade in office of those opposite, New South Wales had the slowest economic growth of any State. No New South Wales has the strongest growth of any State in Australia—almost double that of Western Australia, and almost quadruple that of Victoria.

Business confidence in New South Wales was the lowest of the mainland States for the five years to March 2011 under Labor; under this Government, New South Wales is now leading the country, and has been positive for the past 14 consecutive months. In housing supply, New South Wales had the lowest number of new dwelling starts per capita in Australia under the last five years of Labor, compared with New South Wales now leading the country, with the number of dwellings approved in the past 12 months being 41 per cent higher than the decade average, and more than 106,000 homes built from April 2011 to the June quarter 2014. Compare that with the 50-year lows under Labor.

In retail trade, under Labor, New South Wales had the lowest average annual growth of any State; under this Government, New South Wales is the strongest of all the States in through-the-year terms. CommSec reported that in the last four complete quarters under a Labor government New South Wales was dead last, bumping along the very bottom. Where are we now? For the first time ever in a CommSec's State of the States report, New South Wales is ranked number one overall as the strongest economy in the country. It is only with a strong economy that you can build vital infrastructure, improve key services and protect the vulnerable, and that is what this Government has been doing. We have been pumping money into productive, State-funded infrastructure.

Under those opposite, State-funded infrastructure expenditure averaged \$5.9 billion in 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11. We increased that expenditure by 25 per cent, to an average of \$7.4 billion in 2011-12,

2012-13 and 2013-14; and it is projected to increase to an average of \$8.8 billion annually from 2014-15 through to 2017-1—in other words, 49 per cent more State-funded infrastructure every year than there was under those opposite. We are building the largest road project in the country, WestConnex. We are building the largest public rail transport project in the country, the North West Rail Link. Not only that, but we are delivering: the NorthConnex, with a delivery date of 2019; the CBD and South East Light Rail project; the Western Sydney roads package; the Pacific Highway upgrade; the Barangaroo development; the South West Rail Link; the next generation rail fleet; Darling Harbour Live; the northern beaches health service redevelopment; and a plethora of other major infrastructure. None of those would be possible if we relied upon those opposite to balance the books.

This Government stands for less congestion and better public transport. Those on the other side delivered nothing in 16 years. We have delivered not just in infrastructure but also in front-line services, with 4,000 extra nurses, 700 extra teachers, 590 more police officers and 200 extra paramedics. We are putting resources into the front line, whereas the Labor member for Maroubra wants to put them into middle management and the back office. We are delivering an additional 10,500 weekly transport services, delivering the Opal card and delivering Service NSW. What an amazing job Minister Skinner is doing on hospitals. Compare where we were under Labor with where we are now: 59 per cent were leaving an emergency department within four hours under Labor administrations, compared with 75 per cent under Minister Skinner; 91 per cent of urgent elective surgery on time under Labor, 100 per cent under this Government; 85 per cent of semi-urgent surgery under Labor, 97 per cent under this Government; and 86 per cent of non-urgent elective surgery under Labor, and 95 per cent under this Government. So we are improving services at every turn.

We are looking after the vulnerable. New South Wales was the first State to sign up to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We will have given \$500 million in additional funding over four years to our hardworking caseworkers. We understand the importance of Going Home Staying Home. We have increased specialist homeless services funding by 9.6 per cent, or \$13 million. We can look after the vulnerable, we can improve key services, and we can build vital infrastructure because we are looking after the budget and we have restored the New South Wales economy to number one. We have a plan to go forward and turbocharge infrastructure with another \$20 billion after March next year. Those opposite have no money, and they have no plan.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra) [3.46 p.m.]: One of the things that occur over a four-year period is that themes start to develop in governments and in certain members of this place. If one were to encapsulate the theme of this Government it would be that those opposite are experts. You have to give them top marks: They are experts in conjuring up a whole heap of words in lieu of action. Government members come into this place every day and speak like the member for Cronulla, who said that they are building the largest road project in the country. Well, in fact, they are not. It has taken the Government two years to prepare an environmental impact statement on the first stage of WestConnex, which is to do with its widening.

Last month the Minister for Roads and Freight announced that the first stage in the planning process was going to be complete. It was not. The first stage in the planning process is to put in an application with an environmental impact statement attached to it, and the environmental impact statement on the M5 duplication will not be completed for another year. The motion before the House today is based on the verbosity of the Government over the past 3½ years. The fact is that the New South Wales economy—as I have said from government and from opposition—has always been a strong economy.

Unlike the economies of other States, the New South Wales economy does not bounce around; it does not have the boom-bust cyclical factors that attend a mining boom, for example—which we see with Queensland and Western Australia, off the growth of mining booms streaking forward and then having huge corrections such as are now happening to those States. CommSec's State of the States report compares a limited number of factors in State economies. I have always said that the New South Wales economy has always been strong; it has always had a strong services-based sector; it has always had, and still has, strong manufacturing—despite the difficulties that a very high Australian dollar has brought. New South Wales has always had steady growth, and has always had an unemployment trend that is comparable with trends in the rest of the country—except for the past four years, when unemployment has increased by almost 1 per cent.

What intrigues me particularly is that in the motion the Government has the audacity to say it is improving key services. The health budget had \$3 billion cut from it, \$1.7 billion was cut from education and 1,100 TAFE teachers were sacked. Victims' and women's shelters have been closed and we have now learned that 1,200 not-for-profit community groups will be forced to pay market rent. That is not an improvement of key

services; nor is it a protection of the vulnerable. But those opposite have actually started some work on one project: the North West Rail Link. I recall early in this term of government reiterating the words of Nick Greiner. He said that the North West Rail Link is a project one might build but it certainly should not be a high priority. Interestingly, Geoff Winestock writing in the *Australian Financial Review* said:

NSW Premier Mike Baird has backed a second rail crossing under Sydney Harbour after admitting the business case for the \$8.3 billion rail line to the north-west does not make sense without it.

That is quite a generous opening comment because later in the article he quotes the Premier:

"Obviously, we didn't have a business case," Mr Baird said.

The Liberal Government has never submitted the North West Rail Link for analysis to Infrastructure NSW. The body's former chairman, Nick Greiner, was critical of the project. In respect of the North West Rail Link those opposite are saying, "Let us flog off the State's electricity assets; let's spend another \$10 billion to \$15 billion on a second harbour crossing just to make this \$8.3 billion rail line viable"—\$8.3 billion spent with no business case and with a cost-benefit ratio of 0.8. In economic terms that means every dollar spent returns 80¢ in benefits to the taxpayers. It is a bit rich for the member for Cronulla and the Premier today in question time to talk about wider economic benefits.

The North West Rail Link is the only project in four years that those opposite have started and they have dug only 400 metres, and it was the wrong project at the wrong time to build—not according to me, but according to Nick Greiner, the man those opposite trusted to put in charge of Infrastructure NSW and who walked, along with its chief executive officer, because this Government would not listen. Those opposite come into this place and talk all their self-serving nonsense; they have not had a very good track record over the past four years, but God they can talk.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.51 p.m.]: I support my colleague the member for Cronulla and note that with a strong economy the infrastructure can be built, services can be improved and the vulnerable can be protected. The previous speaker spoke about themes. Mr Deputy-Speaker, you and I sat in opposition and listened to the theme of lots of promises and project announcements with nothing being built under Labor. Under Labor, the North West Rail Link was announced at least 10 times over many years. It was unbelievable. This Government came to power and started to get things happening by building a strong economy. What was the situation when we came to government? Under Labor, we had the slowest growth of any State for the past decade. Where are we now? We have the second-highest number of jobs since April 2011. Where were we under Labor in economic growth? Our economy was the slowest of any State for the past decade. Now we are the strongest of all the States in year terms.

Business confidence is important to build infrastructure. Under Labor, business confidence was the lowest of the mainland States for the last five years to March 2011. Where are we now? Business confidence has been positive for the past 14 consecutive months. Under Labor, we had the lowest number of new housing dwelling starts per capita for the last 5 years. Where are we now? The number of dwellings approved in New South Wales in the past 12 months to September is 41 per cent higher than the decade average. Under Labor, our important annual retail trade growth was the lowest, on average, of any State. Where are we now? We are the strongest of all the States in through-the-year terms. While all Labor States have had their credit ratings downgraded, New South Wales has retained the highest triple-A rating and has been upgraded by Standard and Poor's to a stable outlook. These are not just Government claims; this information comes from independent bodies that monitor economies.

Mr Deputy-Speaker, you work hard in your great electorate of Lismore and have seen great improvements in the economic output. You have seen hospital upgrades and the like. You have worked damn hard to get those results. Everywhere I go in Sydney I see cranes; people have jobs. There is buoyancy in the business community. This did not happen out of the blue. In recent days the Prime Ministers of Italy and India have visited, along with the President of China and a number of other world leaders. They recognise that Sydney is the economic powerhouse of the whole of Australia. This did not just happen overnight; it is the result of hard, committed work by the Baird-Grant Government. It has pushed hard to achieve it. Well done.

[*Interruption*]

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I remind the member for Wollongong that she was removed from the Chamber during question time and that she remains on three calls to order.

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) [3.54 p.m.]: I make a contribution to the debate on the motion accorded priority. Paragraph (3) of the motion states that this House:

- (3) Recognises that only a New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government can rebuild New South Wales and make this State number one.

What are we number one for? We are number one for TAFE fee increases. I am sure that one or two men and women in the various electorates of those opposite may have let them know—if they have been out in the community—that they are concerned about being number one for TAFE fee increases. So that is a good record. What about the \$1.6 billion in education cuts? We are number one for cuts to education. What an amazing achievement. What about Gonski? The New South Wales Government signed up to it but does not raise it at the Council of Australian Governments meetings or even in ministerial meetings to urge its Federal counterparts to fulfil their end of the deal. Gonski cannot be delivered unless—

Mr John Barilaro: Yes it can.

Mr RYAN PARK: The Minister for Small Business says it can. I remind him that Gonski is funded by Commonwealth and State governments through an agreement. Unfortunately for the Minister, this Government has yet to raise the matter in Canberra and get any movement from the Minister for Education. But we are number one also in massive falling TAFE enrolments. We have record numbers of people failing to turn up to TAFE and enrol because those opposite are pricing them out; it is making it more difficult for people to access a quality education unless their bank balance is considerable.

Mr Mark Speakman: Point of order: This debate is about the economy and the member for Keira has not once mentioned the word "economy".

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! There is no point of order. The member's time has expired.

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.57 p.m.], in reply: The time for debate is about to expire, so I will be extremely brief. I invite those reading about this debate in *Hansard* to look at the budget papers, where they will see that this Government is spending record amounts on health and education. The idea that there have been cuts to health and education is a complete and absolute furphy. The member for Maroubra complained about the progress of the WestConnex. The M4 and M5 were congested, clogged motorways, about which Labor did nothing for 16 years. Labor is responsible for the grossly under-engineered M5 that afflicts south-western commuters daily. In building WestConnex we are undertaking the largest road project in Australia and we will have two stages ready by 2019. The member for Maroubra said that the New South Wales economy does not bounce around.

But for 16 years under Labor it bounced around at the very bottom of the Australian economy. He referred to the mining boom. Under Labor, New South Wales should have been better off with a mining boom than were Victoria or Tasmania; yet New South Wales came last. The improvements to the New South Wales economy have not occurred by chance. They have occurred because of sound, proactive policies by this Government. Massive land releases have tripled those of the former Government. The first home buyers grant raised the threshold by \$100,000, to \$750,000, and targeted new home construction. There has been a massive infrastructure spend. The payroll tax rebate has been increased and the payroll tax threshold has been lifted. The Jobs Action Plan has created incentives for tens of thousands of new jobs. Workers compensation premiums have been lowered, thus making it easier and cheaper to employ people and create jobs.

There was an average reduction of 12.5 per cent in 2013 and there has been a further 5 per cent reduction in June this year. Reform of workplace health and safety laws have brought them into line with those in other States. According to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, red tape reductions have saved businesses \$259 million annually by removing or simplifying requirements. It is not by chance that New South Wales has transformed from being at the bottom of the pack to the front of the pack. Its performance was boosted by all those measures undertaken by the New South Wales Government.

Pursuant to sessional order business interrupted and motion lapsed.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I welcome to the public gallery Mr Jeremy Travers, who is a great supporter of this Parliament.

Pursuant to sessional order Government business proceeded with.

COMMSEC STATE OF THE STATES 2014 REPORT**Debate resumed from 13 November 2014.**

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [4.02 p.m.]: It is good to speak about CommSec's latest State of the States report, which clearly acknowledges the hard work and good effort by the New South Wales Government over the past 3½ years. While members on the other side continue to deny CommSec's findings, its report illuminates the situation in respect of employment, jobs growth, housing construction and a number of other factors. CommSec's independent report makes for great reading, and I encourage everyone to read it. I will quote from a couple of the items that have reinforced the good work of the Baird Government. The first page states:

And for the first time since the July 2011 report, there is a new leader at the top of Australia's economic performance rankings—

Mr Bryan Doyle: Tell us who.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I will tell the opal of south-western Sydney: It is New South Wales. I congratulate the Baird Government. The member for Manly was Treasurer at the time. He did a wonderful job and has transitioned to become one of the best Premiers—if not the best—we have ever had. The second page of the report reflects economic growth performance. It states:

NSW is top of rankings on population growth and dwelling starts and second in retail trade, business investment and unemployment. NSW is also third on housing finance and fourth on overall construction work and growth.

It further states:

NSW has the fastest annual economic growth rate in the nation, up by 6.3 per cent on a year ago, ahead of Western Australia with 3.3 per cent and Victoria (1.7 per cent).

The opal of the south-west, the member for Campbelltown, is always interested in economic growth because he cares about employment and the economy. He knows, as I do, that without a strong economy we cannot build infrastructure, we cannot create jobs and without jobs people cannot realise their dreams and aspirations. New South Wales has not been ranked number one out of all the States and Territories by accident. It is the result of 3½ years of hard work by this Government. In question time today the Premier mentioned four key points. I will reiterate them because they are important.

The first is fiscal responsibility. In other words, we have to live within our means. Everyone knows that we must balance our budgets; we cannot spend money we do not have. It is okay to borrow money as long as it is invested wisely. We have practised fiscal responsibility over the past 3½ years by minimising our costs while maximising the amount by which we can pay down the State's debt and investing in record infrastructure. The Minister for Health, the Hon. Jillian Skinner, is making a sensational effort rebuilding the New South Wales health system. We heard from her today about the wonderful achievements being made not only for rural hospitals but also for inner-city hospitals, especially places such as the Westmead precinct. I spoke to the member for the North Shore about the wonderful work that is happening at Westmead.

The second key factor to becoming the number one State is managing and manipulating the economic drivers. We know that policy and regulation are particularly important to ensure the settings are right to drive the economy forward. Reducing red tape allows businesses to achieve their potential to grow and employ more people. It is wonderfully reassuring that not only CommSec but also Standard and Poor's says we are good at managing the economy well. It has upgraded the State's triple-A credit rating to stable. Premier Mike Baird and our Treasurer should take credit for their fiscal management of the economy. Another economic driver is the recycling of assets. While some people may object, it would be wonderful if the Government could own everything. But we do not live in a utopian society. It is sad that we need capital because of the mess that Labor left us in after 16 years.

Mr John Barilaro: And what a mess—16 shameful years.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I acknowledge the Minister's interjection. What a mess. They were 16 shameful years. People like our Minister for Small Business understand the effects of those 16 shameful years on small businesses. He employs 20-odd staff and understands what it means when the economy is operating well. The Minister visited Parramatta and retold his story about how hard it was to start his small business. He worked in a

factory during the night making timber frames for windows, which he installed during the day. But he built a business. He is the Minister for Small Business because he understands what it means to invest his money and time in a small business to provide for his family.

That is in contrast to those opposite who were union employees, union thugs and union hacks. I say no more about that. However, it is appropriate to bring the successful history of the Minister for Small Business in this area to the attention of the House. I should also compliment his wife, because she is the driver behind the business. Indeed, I understand that she is currently running the business. Since the Minister has been a member of this Parliament his business has gone from strength to strength—I do not know if there is a correlation there.

Economic drivers are important and recycling assets is a creative way in which to deliver infrastructure. Our mandate in the lead-up to the 2011 election was to deliver infrastructure. At that time people on the streets of Parramatta and in the surrounding suburbs told me constantly that if we were elected then they wanted this Government to deliver more infrastructure including roads, hospitals, bridges and schools, and provide more police, teachers and nurses. Over the past 3½ years an additional 180 nurses have been employed at Westmead Hospital and the Children's Hospital at Westmead, and the new Waratah trains have been rolled out. Today I travelled to Parliament House on the new train service from Parramatta.

Mr Bryan Doyle: Was that the service joining from Campbelltown?

Dr GEOFF LEE: I acknowledge the interjection by the member for Campbelltown. Clearly the service between Campbelltown and Parramatta continues to grow stronger.

Mr Bryan Doyle: It now goes straight from Campbelltown to Parramatta.

Dr GEOFF LEE: Yes, it does. This is the first time in 10 years that we have had new trains on the western line, and the people in Western Sydney love it. I certainly enjoy catching the new trains. I note that the member for Granville is in the Chamber. The member for Granville really appreciates the new train services as well as the new commuter car parking at Granville railway station. Prior to the last election the member for Granville put his good reputation on the line and continually lobbied the Minister—apparently he wore a path to the Minister's door and, figuratively, twisted the Minister's arm—until he was successful in getting approval for the Granville railway station upgrade. That is currently underway.

Mr Tony Issa: More is to come.

Dr GEOFF LEE: The member for Granville is not complacent. He has said he will continue to fight for more—and as long as Granville is behind Parramatta that is fine by me. All members in Western Sydney understand the value of infrastructure. We understand that strong economic growth is important not only in Western Sydney but also across the State. The fourth reason for making New South Wales number one again is to look after the most vulnerable in our State. The championing of the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] by Minister Andrew Constance, then Minister for Disability Services, and now Treasurer, is a great example of that.

The NDIS provides a wonderful opportunity to look after those who, through no fault of their own, need a bit of help. Under this scheme person-centred programs will be delivered so those people can get what they want. This will be a huge financial commitment. New South Wales was the first State to sign up to the NDIS. Currently the scheme is being trialled in Newcastle. I look forward to it being rolled out across the nation, particularly in my electorate. A strong economy with record employment, and house approvals and construction et cetera will allow us to concentrate on building infrastructure.

As I said earlier, after 16 years of inaction by those opposite the good people of Parramatta would like more infrastructure built. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the fantastic \$400 million commitment given by the Minister for Transport for light rail in my electorate. Light rail has many advantages—it is frequent, fast, people friendly and does not make a lot of noise. In fact, I suggest it makes less noise than buses, which means that those who live near the corridor will not be impacted. I am grateful to the Minister for her commitment, but I will continue to ask for more. Indeed, I am seeking a further billion dollars in funding. Some may say that is not achievable but I will continue to champion it as part of the 20-year strategy to deliver light rail.

At the press conference, when we were discussing the cost-benefit analysis of four to 10 corridors, the Minister encouragingly said that the initial investment will provide the "backbone" for light rail services. As

more money becomes available we will be able to extend those services. But to get more money the Government will have to continue to manage the economy, make tough decisions and live within its means. The Government will have to continue to look for creative solutions to provide benefits to both the economy and the people of this State. Another project that I am not backward in coming forward about is the upgrade of Pirtek Stadium at Parramatta. The other day I was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as to why we want to upgrade Pirtek Stadium. We want to upgrade it because it makes sense to do so.

Mr John Barilaro: For the Eels.

Dr GEOFF LEE: No, it is not for the Eels. The Minister is obviously an Eels fan, but we want it upgraded for several reasons. First, although ANZ Stadium is very nice it is also very big. No-one really wants to go there because you sit something like 16 miles away from the players! Pirtek Stadium is a much better option for spectators and fans. Secondly, part of the experience of going to a game is what one does before and after the game. Parramatta has wonderful eat streets—

Mr John Barilaro: It's a vibrant city.

Dr GEOFF LEE: It is a vibrant city with a good atmosphere—no better example was when the Red and Black Bloc marched through Parramatta singing its song. We held a civic reception the other day for the Wanderers on becoming the winners of the Asian Champions League. I congratulate the Western Sydney Wanderers on their victory.

Mr John Barilaro: A great story.

Dr GEOFF LEE: It is a great story. I acknowledge Steven Issa, the Deputy Lord Mayor of Parramatta and, by strange coincidence, the son of the member for Granville. I am very impressed with Steven. At the reception I made a speech on behalf of the Government but the crowd, after calling a few nice and not so nice things out to me, called for Steven to talk to them. It was great to see the enthusiasm of that crowd of 3,000 or 4,000 people calling for a major stadium upgrade. They want a \$120 million upgrade—obviously much more than the \$30 million already committed by this Government. The recycling of assets will drive those revenues for further investment opportunity. It would be wonderful if the Government had a bucket of money that it could give away. I understand the Government is considering that at the moment—all options are still on the table. I will not stop pestering the Minister for Sport and Recreation or Premier Baird until we get that well-deserved upgrade.

At the end of the day, it just makes sense because it is a transport hub. Parramatta has the fourth-busiest transport interchange in New South Wales, and the busiest one outside the Sydney central business district. Some 33,000 people go through the turnstiles every morning at Parramatta station, and most of those people are catching the new Waratah trains with air conditioning and better accommodation for travellers. Another issue we have been discussing, which is slightly more contentious and which highlights why it is important that we do well economically and why we need to drive revenue to enable us to invest in critical infrastructure, is the creation of an arts precinct in Western Sydney. We must create an arts facility in Parramatta to redress the current concentration of spend in the eastern suburbs and in the central business district.

Approximately two million people live in Western Sydney. Another one million people will live in Western Sydney in the next 20 years. If they want to go to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Opera House or the Powerhouse Museum they have to come into the city, and really access is not great. Parramatta is geographically the centre of Sydney. We must look at not just concentration of spend and redirecting more to Western Sydney and Parramatta, but also accessibility and not just for tourists but also for schoolkids and locals. We are looking at things like the proposal to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta, which would be a fantastic announcement by the Deputy Premier and the Premier. It really would raise the profile of Parramatta. It would provide a catalyst project for the city and other spinoff benefits. It would benefit all of Western Sydney. It is all about providing access to cultural, artistic and entertainment events.

Mr Tony Issa: Anything that benefits Parramatta benefits Granville.

Dr GEOFF LEE: I acknowledge the interjection from the member for Granville. This is about Western Sydney. My colleagues the member for Riverstone and the member for Campbelltown, who are in the Chamber, agree that anything that is good for Parramatta is also good for the whole of Western Sydney. We have to live together harmoniously. It is wonderful that my colleagues are so supportive in that regard. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Because there is such support for Western Sydney it would be sad to conclude my speech just yet. We know that the strong economic performance of New South Wales is good. Another catalyst project—and, as I said, we need catalyst projects—is the Camellia precinct. Transforming these industrial wastelands into vibrant new communities is a major opportunity for Western Sydney, and Parramatta in particular. In the next 20 to 50 years the Parramatta central business district will extend from Westmead Hospital through to Parramatta, Camellia and right up to Homebush. This will provide the jobs of the future and the houses for the future.

Certainly I am championing the transformation of the industrial wastelands of Camellia. This project could provide 30,000 jobs and 30,000 homes for that peninsula. It could transform and remediate the area, which currently is contaminated from years of industrial processes on site. It could deliver the jobs and houses we need for Western Sydney. We know it is pretty tough at the moment to find affordable housing in the city, especially around Parramatta where home prices have increased by 30 per cent over the past few years. Increasing the supply of homes will help to alleviate the latent demand and future demand from the one million extra people who want to live in Western Sydney.

Recently a Grattan Institute report on productive cities said that we need to create jobs, homes and transportation systems between the two. The objective is to live within 30 minutes of work so that people can spend more time at home. We want a community with 30,000 knowledge intensive jobs, which people want to do and which they can build their lives around. We want to give them the opportunity to work and live in the same area. Of course we will need some infrastructure for that. Where does the money come from for infrastructure? It comes from running the economy well so that we can collect money and then invest it back into the community.

Mr Kevin Conolly: It requires fiscal responsibility.

Dr GEOFF LEE: As the member for Riverstone says, it requires fiscal responsibility. That is so important. We cannot spend money we do not have. Householders know that we cannot overspend every week.

Mr John Barilaro: The Government has to live within its means.

Dr GEOFF LEE: The Minister is absolutely right. He comes from a small business background. He and his brother started a business. His is a typical story of a family businessman becoming a successful businessman. He is a successful window manufacturer, and the business has really gone from strength to strength since his wife took over the running of it when the Minister entered Parliament. This is about opportunity. The report from CommSec was very enlightening. The future is very right for Western Sydney, because this Government is committed to Western Sydney. We do not take Western Sydney for granted. We continue to deliver. We will speak later about the budget. I do not want to pre-empt my speech in that debate. But to give members a brief tidbit, because I know they are all interested in this, Parramatta was blessed to receive \$1 billion in the budget.

Mr John Barilaro: How much?

Dr GEOFF LEE: It was \$1 billion. And we will not stop there. As I said, we will ask for more money for a cultural and arts entertainment precinct. We want an upgrade to the stadium. As I said, that is not only for Parramatta but for the whole of Western Sydney. I know many people are interested in this. It is about the experience of the fans, and the before-match and after-match entertainment. It is about being the transport hub of Western Sydney and the busiest interchange in New South Wales outside Sydney's central business district. I conclude my remarks by again congratulating the Premier, the Treasurer, and the Deputy Premier on their strong leadership. Indeed I congratulate all Government members. Without fiscal responsibility, without living within our means, without managing the economic drivers and levers of the economy it would not be possible to build the infrastructure that people demand.

The Government is using creative approaches to infrastructure delivery, building and financing. The Government is looking after those most vulnerable in the community and giving them a hand up, not a handout. This independent CommSec report rated New South Wales number one in terms of economic performance. In the past three years it has gone from last to first. That is a true commendation of our strong leadership and our ministry. It shows the Government's dedication, and that it understands that sometimes we have to make tough decisions—just like we do at home when balancing the household budget. The Government has a plan, and it is sticking to it. In my contribution to the debate on the budget I will talk about that plan, the budget and what it really means for the people of Western Sydney, especially the great people of Parramatta. I conclude by again commending the Baird Government for its strong leadership and performance.

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) [4.29 p.m.]: Wow! I cannot believe how busy Government members are with three days left of Parliament. We could be in our electorates working hard for our communities, but instead we are up to day three of talking about a CommSec report. I thought the library bill debate of a couple of years ago was bad, but this is crazy. Historically in this place in the last three days of Parliament there has been a logjam of legislation as the government of the day continues to work to get more legislation passed. I cannot wait to tell my electorate what has happened this year.

I read with great interest that order of the day No. 6 was resumption of the interrupted debate on the CommSec State of the States Report. The debate has been going for three days already. It is phenomenal. Order of the day No. 5 was resumption of the budget estimates and related papers debate. The budget is about six months old. It is an absolute disgrace that this week the Parliament has been brought back to debate these sorts of trivial matters when we each have constituents whom we should be out in the community serving. We should not be here today.

If Government members do not have enough work to do they should shut the Parliament down. We should not be wasting our time when we have electorates to serve. We are in this place to serve our community. I am not here to debate stupid reports that have already been discussed 25 times during a debate that has gone on over three days and then proceed to debate something that happened six months ago. The Government says it is busy. It is not busy. It is trying to make work. The member for Parramatta desperately tried to filibuster about Parramatta stadium. What else can we talk about? Let us talk about the centre lines on Macquarie Street.

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order: I always enjoy the soliloquies by my friend the member for Keira.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! What is the member's point of order?

Mr Gareth Ward: My point of order is relevance under Standing Order 76. I ask you to draw the member back to the substance of this great debate about New South Wales being number one again and talking about the positives. I know that he is capable of doing it because he is a wonderful fellow with great ideas. The Parliament needs to be apprised of those great ideas in this debate.

Mr RYAN PARK: I always take pleasure in responding to my very good friend the member for Kiama.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I have not ruled on the point of order. I have listened to the member for Keira. I have given him a fair bit of latitude. I am sure he is about to come back to the leave of the motion.

Mr RYAN PARK: I am sure the CommSec State of the States Report is a very important document that makes riveting reading, but I question whether with three days to go it is the most important thing that the oldest Parliament in the country should be debating. There are real issues such as massive TAFE fee increases, a blowout in elective surgery waiting times and rising youth unemployment.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: My point of order is Standing Order 76. The member for Keira has admitted that he has not read the report, yet he is participating in the debate. If he cannot be relevant to the debate he should sit down. If he has not read the report he cannot be relevant. If he wants to criticise the Government he can do it by other means.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! Minister Barilaro will direct his comments through the Chair. The member will address his comments to the leave of the motion. If he does not have a copy of the report I have one he may borrow.

Mr RYAN PARK: I do not need a copy of the report. Right now we need real legislation, real motions and real material debated in the oldest Parliament.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: The member is canvassing your ruling.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member has finished his contribution.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [4.35 p.m.]: The Government is proud that the CommSec State of the States Report found that New South Wales is number one again. Sound economic and fiscal management

is not an end in itself—however hard it is to achieve and however rare it was when Labor was in government—but it is a way of delivering for the people of New South Wales. Government members fundamentally understand that we need sound economic and fiscal management so that we can deliver services and infrastructure that meet the needs of the people of this State.

I can read off a list of projects that we have delivered and will continue to roll out if we are successful in the coming election on the back of our sound economic management. We have already delivered a total of 10,500 extra weekly services since coming to power. As we heard the Minister for Transport say, when Labor was in government what did it do to transport services? Cut, cut, cut. Because members on this side of the House have managed the finances properly and restored the economic status of New South Wales we can afford to provide 10,500 extra services every week for the people of this city and State. Of course, it does not stop there.

We have employed more than 4,000 extra nurses in our hospitals to meet the needs of patients across the system and speed up reaction times to address the blockages that existed under the former Labor Government. That is what sound economic management is about. Being number one again means good economic management. Good fiscal management means that we can deliver the services and provide the infrastructure to meet the needs of the communities we represent. Members on this side of the House are delivering. It is a tribute to the Government that CommSec has recognised the progress it has made in just three years.

Beyond that, we have employed hundreds more teachers. In many cases they have been targeted specifically to literacy in the early years of primary education. We have employed more police so that a record number of police are now in service protecting our communities today. We have also built many infrastructure projects, some of which are close to my heart in the electorate of Riverstone. When I was campaigning in 2011 I encountered a pressing need for new schools in that massive growth area. We have been able to deliver not one or two but three new schools in the Riverstone electorate. A new high school, primary school and school for kids with special needs will open next year to meet the needs of the rapidly growing community.

Those projects are a tremendous tribute to the work of the Government in getting its economic house in order, stimulating economic growth and finding the funds to meet the needs of the community. That is what it is all about and that is why we are so proud of the economic performance of the Government. It has reined in waste. It has prevented funds from bleeding into areas where they were not meeting the needs of the community and redirected them to where funds could meet longstanding need. The Government also has encouraged growth in the private sector of New South Wales that will stimulate more income for the Government so that it will have a greater capacity to meet the needs of the community.

The achievements do not stop there. Just a few years ago when I was elected to represent the electorate of Riverstone, just over half the trains on the Richmond line were air-conditioned whereas currently 100 per cent of the trains on that line are air-conditioned. That is an example of this Government meeting the needs of the community. It gets pretty cold in my electorate in the middle of winter. I have no doubt that the Minister for Finance and Services and member for Castle Hill will agree that someone boarding a train that is not air-conditioned at Richmond early in the morning in July or August would certainly know about it: he or she would freeze. Passengers need the time it takes for the train to pass through quite a few stations to regain feeling in their fingers and toes.

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

Pursuant to resolution valedictory speeches proceeded with.

VALEDICTORY SPEECHES

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley) [4.40 p.m.] (Valedictory Speech): A little more than 16 years ago I came into this place a bit green, having been a somewhat reluctant recruit to politics, but keen to make a difference in the lives of the people I was privileged to represent by achieving more jobs, safer roads, better health care, better education, and a good environment in which to live. On top of those aims was a strong belief in the importance of regional communities and industries; a belief in a fair share; and in ensuring that regional communities' needs were at the very heart of government. Today, 16 years down the track, I look back with some satisfaction that much has been achieved, especially over the past 3½ years of this term of government when I have been honoured and privileged to serve as Deputy Premier and as a Minister of the Crown.

Approximately four weeks ago I made a very difficult decision. The decision was made more difficult for me because of the positive changes that are underway in this great State: for example, seeing our State's economy number one again; seeing the massive infrastructure program that is underway; but also knowing about the exciting times ahead with considerable funds at the Government's disposal from the proposed partial lease of the electricity network businesses to invest in a more prosperous future and a better quality of life for the citizens of this great State. It was not so easy to leave, being so near the pinnacle, especially after 12 years in opposition. Members who also served in opposition during that time—many of whom are present in the Chamber—know that it was a hard grind, but it was important that a strong voice for regional New South Wales be heard during policy development and when a case for change was put.

That change occurred on 26 March 2011, which I have to say remains the standout moment in what will be my 16-year career in politics. But after that, the really hard work began. As co-leader of the Government I served on six Cabinet subcommittees as well as Cabinet itself. I was responsible for a major economic portfolio in the Government. I was spending approximately five days each week away from home. In 2013-14 my rough estimate was that I spent approximately 250 days away from home in Sydney, regional New South Wales, elsewhere in Australia and overseas. Of course, I remained the representative of the quite large and diverse electorate of Oxley and spent approximately an additional 50 days away all day serving my electorate, but that was an additional 50 days away from my family. When all that is added, there was not a lot of time left for family. There was not a lot of time for the most important thing in anyone's life—his or her family.

Despite the enormous satisfaction of having achieved so much of what I had set out to achieve and the potential to finish the job in future years, the price being paid by my family for my contribution to achieving those aims was simply too high. I also have a strong belief that no-one is indispensable. I know that positive reform will continue under the leadership of my good friends Mike Baird and Troy Grant. I hope members will indulge me as I reflect upon some of the achievements I have mentioned, of which I am proud. At a statewide level I am proud to have led the reform of the National Party. When I came into the role a little more than 11½ years ago, in the view of most observers the party was in decline. It had been reduced to 12 lower House and four upper House members, or 16 members in total. In Paul Davey's excellent book, *The Nationals: The Progressive Country and National Party in NSW, 1919-2006*, he describes a strategic planning retreat I led in Orange in 2003 where we developed a strategy of modernising the party and broadening its electoral appeal.

To reflect the profound social and demographic changes in regional New South Wales since the party's inception almost 100 years ago, we transformed the party so that The Nationals would be more inclusive of all regional people and in so doing more clearly articulated our *raison d'être* of fighting for policies and funding that would better support regional communities and industries. I am proud that in this Parliament and in government we now have a very strong voice: 26 members in all, 19 in the lower House out of 20 seats contested—a record that I think will be almost impossible to break—as well as seven very fine members in the upper House. The Nationals members come from all walks of life and represent a diversity of demographics. The new Nats are proof that the modernisation worked. Our team includes the youngest member of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Sarah Mitchell, and Australia's first-ever and, I believe, only member of Parliament who was preselected by an entire electorate, primary-style, the great Kevin Anderson.

Mr Kevin Anderson: I hear you, chief.

Mr ANDREW STONER: He is present in the Chamber. It is not about numbers for their own sake but, rather, about influence for the greater good. I am pleased to say that the party of which I am proud to be a member has used that influence in government—with, I must say, the forbearance of our Liberal partners—to help to bring about common sense in areas that are key to regional communities: for example, the management and use of national and marine parks, bushfire prevention, native vegetation laws and pest animal control. We also led the charge on decentralisation with policies and programs, including a guaranteed 30 per cent of Restart NSW funds and 40 per cent of payroll tax rebates for regional New South Wales.

There are also regional relocation grants that now have been refined as the Skilled Regional Relocation Incentive. The Regional Industries Investment Fund has supported the creation of thousands of jobs in places such as Eden, Guyra, Orange, Broken Hill and Kempsey, to name a few. Approximately 500 public sector jobs already have been decentralised to regional centres such as Orange, Grafton, Dubbo, Maitland, Port Stephens and Nowra with another 1,500 jobs to come by 2021.

I mentioned the regional component of the Restart NSW Fund. This has supported a record \$13 billion of infrastructure investment in regional New South Wales to date including through new programs such as

Resources for the Regions, Bridges for the Bush, western freight corridors—also known, as the member for Murray-Darling, John Williams, would attest, as sealing the Cobb and Silver City highways; fixing country roads; regional tourism infrastructure; and regional water security. All that investment underpins major economic benefits for key regional industries such as agriculture, energy, resources and tourism, as verified by Infrastructure NSW. I am proud of them all because they are contributing to the strong economic growth of this great State.

But I am particularly proud of Regional Water Security, which aims to drought-proof western New South Wales communities, in particular. I have seen firsthand the devastating impacts of the millennium drought on western communities. I subsequently witnessed devastating floods over the same landscape. It behoves us to conserve at least some of that water for the next inevitable drought and to boost productivity for our agribusinesses, which have enormous export opportunities ahead. Regional Water Security has already helped many regional communities, but I am especially proud of our commitment for a major new dam in the central west, on the Belubula River, which will be a godsend for all the communities down the Lachlan catchment, through access to more water on a more reliable basis.

I am also proud to have made a positive contribution to the amazing economic turnaround in this State as part of the Cabinet's economic forum, the Expenditure Review Committee, and through my former portfolios, particularly Trade and Investment, and Tourism and Major Events, which I shared with the Hon. George Souris. We have again engaged with our major trading partners and investors by conducting targeted trade missions and establishing new trade and investment offices in key markets, including Japan, Korea, the United States, and shortly Indonesia. Outcomes of this renewed focus on international engagement have included increased exports, particularly in farm produce, food products and professional services, as well as greater investment into New South Wales, including better outcomes for our asset recycling transactions.

We also contributed economically through the development of key industry action plans in partnership with industry. This process has led to many key initiatives, including an economic development framework for the State, an annual New South Wales business leadership forum, smart work hubs, a new body, StudyNSW, to grow that international education sector, which is a huge export earner for our State, key industry knowledge hubs, a strategy to position Sydney as a global talent hub, and work alongside the Federal Government and finance sector towards establishing Sydney as an offshore trading hub in the Chinese currency, the renminbi. We worked hard on the latter initiative, just announced by the Premier today, coinciding with the Sydney Shanghai financial symposium.

I recall speaking on this topic at the same symposium in Sydney in 2011, in Shanghai in 2012, leading a financial trade mission on the same topic to the Shanghai Lujiazui financial forum in 2013, and facilitating discussions between our banking sector, the Centre for International Finance and Regulation, and the Reserve Bank including a forum at NSW Trade and Investment in 2013.

Probably 60 per cent of my trade missions were to China, reflecting its status as the world's largest economy and New South Wales' number one two-way trading partner. Over that time, I pushed for a China-Australia free trade agreement, which will be a huge boon to our exporters, particularly agribusiness and services like finance, so I am thrilled with yesterday's announcement and must congratulate Andrew Robb, the Federal Minister for Trade and Investment—a good operator who in a short time has delivered three key free trade agreements—with China, Korea and Japan.

I am also pleased that next July Sydney will host a Bo'ao forum on financial services. This is a major global event which will build upon the aforementioned successes. It took some years of building relationships, and I look forward again to seeing the chairman of the Bo'ao forum, Ambassador Zhou, when he visits Sydney next week. I acknowledge the strong contributions to these successes made by the Secretary of NSW Trade and Investment, Mark Paterson, AO, and others including deputy secretaries Angus Armor, Janine Biviano, Kylie Hargreaves, and the Chief Executive Officer of Destination NSW, Sandra Chipchase, as well as our international trade commissioners including Tony Zhang in Shanghai, Cher Jones in Guangzhou, Geoff Walker in Tokyo, Rohit Manchanda in Mumbai and Moin Anwar in Abu Dhabi. Our State is fortunate to have truly committed, professional public servants of such high calibre.

I have also been honoured to have provided ministerial oversight for the International Convention Centre precinct redevelopment at Darling Harbour, our first public-private partnership and a project which has met every milestone on its way to contributing an estimated \$200 million per year to the State's economy. I am pleased to have worked with Business Events Sydney in attracting large conventions including Sibos 2018, the

World Congress of Accountants 2018 and Nu Skin 2016 to ensure those economic benefits are realised. And it has been a rare honour and an absolute privilege to have had the opportunity to act as Premier of the premier State for a little over three months in total over the past 3½ years. I know a little of what Mike Baird puts up with on a daily basis—but only a little.

On a more local level, I am also proud of what has been achieved in the electorate of Oxley in the nearly 16 years I have been its member in this place. Particularly over the last term, Oxley has been getting the attention it deserves, with record infrastructure investment and front-line resourcing of more nurses, teachers and police. In regard to capital, just this financial year more than \$600 million has been invested in Oxley, including in the much-needed upgrade of Kempsey District Hospital. The other district hospitals have not missed out either under this Government, with Wauchope, Bellingen, and shortly Macksville to receive overdue attention. I must credit our very fine health Minister, Jillian Skinner, who cares about rural and regional health.

But the bulk of the capital in Oxley this year has gone to the Pacific Highway. Finally, we have a real end date, with funding locked in. I congratulate both Duncan Gay and Warren Truss for sticking to this task, which started after Australia's worst ever road accident, when 35 were killed when two buses collided on the Pacific Highway just north of Kempsey. Now the upgrade is going hell for leather, with works underway on the Oxley Highway to Kempsey, Frederickton to Eungai, Warrell Creek to Nambucca Heads, and Nambucca Heads to Urunga projects in Oxley alone. Other roads in Oxley are also getting attention including Waterfall Way and the Oxley Highway, two important east-west routes. I hope that as a result of the proposed networks lease transaction, these highways, together with the Kempsey to Armidale Road, receive more substantial upgrades including straightening, widening and overtaking lanes.

Along the way, in both opposition and government, I have fought for major improvements to schools, including Wauchope public and high schools, Kempsey High, and Frederickton Public School, as well as Wauchope TAFE. There is a new police complex and correctional centre at Kempsey—not together, incidentally, but some distance apart—an ambulance station and community health centre at South West Rocks, a HealthOne facility, renal dialysis, and a fire station at Nambucca Heads, funding for a sports complex at Macksville, \$14 million for a new dam in Nambucca shire, and too much more to mention.

I leave this place, however, with a sense of some frustration over what I regard as unfinished business. This involves some of the more difficult issues—including coal seam gas, our State's problematic planning regime, native vegetation laws, and the difficulties faced by our world-class and sustainable forest industries. Our State's economy could have been even stronger had these issues been able to be resolved.

Time does not permit me to talk about all these issues, but I will touch briefly on coal seam gas [CSG]. The facts are these: this State urgently requires more gas. Gas is a relatively low-emission energy source, for both industry and residential users. New South Wales has an abundant supply of natural gas, trapped in coal seams, which can be safely extracted through modern technologies without damage to water or land resources, based upon a prudent regulatory approach. This is made abundantly clear in the recent report by our outstanding Chief Scientist, Professor Mary O'Kane. And I congratulate Minister Roberts for coordinating the Government's balanced and sensible response to that report, announced just last week. It is clear that the careful development of this resource has minimal impacts—especially compared to a mine or some other large-scale development.

I have been contacted by residents of south-west Sydney, the area hosting the only CSG production currently in New South Wales. These people tell me the wells are barely noticeable and that they have been operating safely for more than a decade. A viable natural gas industry would attract billions of dollars of investment to New South Wales, would create thousands of jobs, and would provide a base income to rural landholders whose finances otherwise take a massive hit every time there is a drought. Yet the mother of all scare campaigns, driven and funded by individuals and groups ideologically opposed to the use of any fossil fuels, has created widespread and often irrational fears, which have manifested in mass protests and blockades against safely accessing this low-emission energy resource. Sadly, some vested interests have opportunistically jumped on board this campaign and helped spread the fear.

So in my final speech to the Parliament I make a heartfelt plea to all members, including, I must say, the Leader of the Opposition, to put aside unseemly populist posturing designed to capitalise on a lack of knowledge of the facts in an effort to garner cheap votes. I plead with members instead to put the State's interests ahead of their own. In the case of the Leader of the Opposition, it is not only base populism; it is transparently hypocritical, given that when the member for Blacktown was a Minister in the former Government he was involved in granting gas exploration leases—without the checks and balances we have imposed—over many of the same areas of land that he now says he wants CSG-free.

We can manage the risks to avoid damage to the environment and to agriculture. We can ensure supply of sufficient natural gas to keep prices down and industry strong. We can reward farmers with gas under their land to ensure that they and their communities prosper through drought, and we can attract billions in investment and create thousands of jobs. This issue is much too important to keep playing pathetic politics with. But enough of that; it is time I acknowledged the many people who have helped me on my journey.

First and foremost my wonderful wife, Cathy, and children Steve, Beau, Gemma, Abbie, Annalise and Nat—I seek an extension of time on that! As I mentioned at the outset, my family members have paid a high price for my parliamentary career, but they have remained my rock at home through the many turbulent times I faced. The incredibly supportive Nationals membership in Oxley, too many to name, include Brian and Kay Irvine, my first campaign manager Rod Dale, Mrs National Party Mary Tarr—anyone who has ever been to The Nationals conference knows Mary Tarr—Noel and Mandy Atkins, Rex and Carolyn Fowler, Fred and Narelle Handebo, Dallas and Kay White, Barry and Janine Reed, Bob and Margaret Young, John and Lyn Tickle, Mary Kell, Peg Parbury, to name a few—just wonderful, salt-of-the-earth people.

The Nationals chairmen Pat Maher, Helen Dickie, Christine Ferguson, Niall Blair and Bede Burke, State directors Michael Priebe, Scott McFarlane, Alison Penfold and Ben Franklin, and my Sydney staff, including chiefs of staff Bryce Osmond, Stuart St Clair, Peter McConnell, Rod Bruce and terrific Tom Callechor—I apologise, but I have started alliteration—Brilliant Bree Price, Ben Shine, Lis Davies and former Dubbo boy Sean O'Connell who I knew would be in the Chamber; he is always there. I refer also to Tara Black, Peter Crosdale, Rhylstone girl Laura Clarke, Blake Hardy, Trenton Brown, Alex Bruce, Nick Santucci, Aidan Cromarty, Gemma Wald, Regina Mcculla and Tanya Cleary. As I was wont to tell them, and I apologise to Hansard, they are the number one kickass team in State politics.

My electorate staff Marg Bateman, Helen Elliott, Patricia Baker, Jodie Griffiths, Rob Nardella, Matthew Clarke, Bec Tyson, Carolyn Fowler and Chrissy Jones kept the constituents happy whilst I had my nose to the grindstone, usually elsewhere. To the entire Nationals parliamentary team, current and retired, with whom I have worked, it was an honour to lead the closest-knit party in politics for 11½ years. A former Deputy Premier once told me that if I wanted a friend in politics I should get a dog, but I did not have to because I had several friends, and none finer than you, Mr Deputy-Speaker.

Liberal leaders John Brogden, Peter Debnam, Barry O'Farrell and Mike Baird are all good men and friends. Barry is a great Coalitionist and brought stability and unity to the Liberal Party and Coalition, setting a platform for our amazing victory in 2011. Mike Baird is an inspiration, a man of integrity with the courage of his convictions, who just gets better in the role of Premier each day, and who I know will go down in political history as a great leader. I sincerely hope we can continue to have those board meetings out beyond the breakers at Manly, or perhaps in my backyard on the magnificent mid North Coast. So now with the benefit of the aforementioned international trade experience I say sayonara, zaijian, jagbyeol insa, selamat tinggal, farewell.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): To Andrew, as the member for Oxley, shadow Minister of a number portfolios, the Leader of The Nationals until his retirement—the longest-serving leader of any party in Australia—as Deputy Premier and Minister of a number of portfolios, every member of this House joins me in wishing you, Cathy and your family all the best and trust that you will be blessed with good health and happiness in your future.

Pursuant to resolution Orders of the Day (Committee Reports) proceeded with.

LEGAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Report: Debt Recovery in NSW

Question—That the House take note of the report—proposed.

Mr BRYAN DOYLE (Campbelltown) [5.07 p.m.]: As chair of the Legal Affairs Committee, I speak in the take-note debate on the report entitled "Inquiry into Debt Recovery in NSW." My career has been one of peace through justice. The just recovery of debt is vital to the functioning of business and small business in New South Wales. This committee's inquiry was prompted by concerns about the adequacy of current legislation and administrative processes for the collection of debts. The aim of the committee throughout the inquiry was to remove barriers to debt recovery and explore measures to make the debt recovery process more efficient. The committee focused on a number of areas. The first area considered was the current licensing system for debt collectors in New South Wales. This included the current training requirements, costs and oversights of commercial agents.

The committee has made two recommendations to streamline the licensing requirements for commercial agents in the debt recovery industry and to support the introduction of a negative licensing scheme for those agents. The second area the committee looked at was the effectiveness of current processes for the recovery of debts in the court system and the enforcement of court judgements. This was of grave concern to members of the inquiry. The committee has made a total of 13 recommendations in these areas, including expanding the jurisdiction of the Small Claims Division of the Local Court from \$10,000 to \$30,000; introducing simple, plain English information and pro forma documents to simplify processes associated with the filing of court documents; and considering outsourcing the enforcement functions of the Office of the Sheriff to reduce delays and allow greater flexibility.

The third area examined by the committee was the difficulties that creditors and debt collectors face in attempting to locate debtors. The committee was concerned to ensure that the right of creditors to locate debtors was balanced with a debtor's right to privacy. The committee has made four recommendations to enable creditors to ascertain more easily the whereabouts of debtors. Finally, the committee examined the activities of the State Debt Recovery Office in recovering debts owed to the New South Wales Government, considered the impact of debt recovery processes on the more disadvantaged members of our society and examined poor practices that sometimes occur in the debt collection industry. So that vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals are protected, the committee recommended that a minimum balance be retained in debtors' bank accounts and that debt collectors be encouraged to offer referrals to external independent financial counsellors.

The recommendations made in this report will greatly improve current practices for the recovery of debts while at the same time ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our community are protected. Over the course of the inquiry, the committee consulted with members of the debt collection industry, the judiciary and legal practitioners. The committee received a total of 35 submissions and heard evidence from nine organisations at a public hearing held in June this year. I take this opportunity to thank those who contributed to the inquiry by way of making a submission, appearing at the public hearing or briefing the committee privately.

Each contribution was valuable to informing the committee's deliberations and the final recommendations of the report. I acknowledge my committee colleagues for their hard work, dedication and support throughout the inquiry, namely, the member for Davidson, the member for Myall Lakes, the member for Wallsend and the member for Lakemba. I also take this opportunity to thank the committee staff for their work and support, especially John Miller. I commend the committee's report to the House.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [5.12 p.m.]: I make a brief contribution to the take-note debate on the Legal Affairs Committee report No. 2/55. The inquiry into debt recovery in New South Wales was prompted by concerns in a number of areas, particularly the adequacy of the current legislation and the processes for debt collection. As the chairman has said, the committee focused on barriers to debt recovery and investigated ways to make debt recovery more efficient. The committee received 35 submissions in total from a broad range of sources, including debt recovery industry associations and legal representatives as well as the New South Wales Government. The committee also held public hearings at Parliament House on 16 June, and evidence was taken from 16 witnesses representing nine organisations. The evidence we heard left no doubt that what is happening now cannot continue.

The evidence and submissions suggested that changes must be made and must be streamlined. As a result, the committee made a total of 22 recommendations to remove barriers to streamline procedures to make debt recovery more cost effective and, at the same time, to provide protection to those who are disadvantaged. The committee studied the submissions and the evidence, and the chair worked extremely hard to ensure that the report reflects not only the needs of the people of New South Wales but also the needs of commercial industry and that the changes to legislation result in a more cost-effective and fairer system. I commend the report to the House.

Mr ROBERT FUROLO (Lakemba) [5.14 p.m.]: I am pleased to comment on the tabling of the report of the Legal Affairs Committee inquiry into debt recovery in New South Wales. I acknowledge the many groups and individuals who made the effort to contribute to this inquiry through written submissions and oral evidence and at the public hearings. I have noted on several occasions that I believe policy development, through the committee process, delivers better, more informed outcomes. Frankly, more bills in this place should be developed through multi-party inquiries. I recognise the shortcomings and negative impacts of the current debt collection process in this State. For those who are owed money and where the courts have issued a judgement, the process for having that debt finalised can be excessively long and frustrating. It should be a goal of this and any government to find ways to ensure that debts of this nature are settled in the quickest possible time.

As a result of the evidence presented to the committee, both in submissions and through the public hearings, it is my contention that one of the easiest ways to reduce the unacceptable delays in resolving this issue is to better resource the Office of the Sheriff. We have heard that a wholesale deregulation of the industry and outsourcing of the work of New South Wales sheriffs is a simple solution to this issue. Further, some have argued that we should cease the requirement to regulate or licence those who undertake debt collection. I do not support either of those proposals. It was apparent to me from our visit to the Office of the Sheriff and from submissions and evidence that the staff of the office do a great job but that they are hamstrung by insufficient resourcing. The delays that I believe sparked this inquiry are the result not of any lack of ability or professionalism on the part of New South Wales sheriffs but of a lack of adequate resourcing so they can do their job.

Given its sensitive nature, the Office of the Sheriff is best placed to take responsibility for collecting debts, especially from vulnerable and disadvantaged people, and to ensure that these processes are conducted in a professional, impartial and sensitive manner without profit being a motive and driving force. Further, given the vulnerable nature of many people who find themselves before the courts for their inability to pay outstanding debts, financial counselling should be an essential component of the debt recovery process. Assistance and advice on managing their income and debts is the key to ensuring that people can meet their obligations and avoid returning to court over similar incidents. Finally, any decision to enable private operators to be further involved in the debt collection process will necessarily require careful consideration of and safeguards for the privacy rights of all involved. Any private firm engaged to pursue debtors will need a clear regulatory framework and monitoring regime to protect the rights of all New South Wales citizens.

I thank the chair, the member for Campbelltown, for his role in ensuring a fair and balanced inquiry process and report. I also acknowledge all members of the committee and thank them for their input. I thank and acknowledge the committee secretariat and staff for their professionalism, integrity and hard work in making sense of my rambling contributions to meetings throughout the inquiry. The staff of all committees make us look far more capable than we deserve.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.18 p.m.]: The Legal Affairs Committee Report No. 2/55 has been well canvassed. It was well chaired by the member for Campbelltown, Mr Bryan Doyle, and all members of the committee contributed. I joined the committee fairly late in the term of this Parliament but certainly enjoyed participating and working with a group of people who were focused on delivering a better debt recovery system for New South Wales. As the chair outlined, we looked at four main areas, including the current licensing system for debt collectors, the effectiveness of current processes for the recovery of debts in the court system and the enforcement of court judgements, and the difficulties that creditors and debt collectors face when attempting to locate debtors. I have commented before that perhaps the privacy pendulum has swung a little too far in a protective sense without necessarily adjusting for nuances and requirements that ensure our justice system and society operate in the way we want.

Finally, the committee focused on the activities of the State Debt Recovery Office in recovering debts owed to the Government and the impact of the processes on more disadvantaged members of society. We must always keep in mind those who are particularly vulnerable, as we did in this inquiry. After some discussion, our 22 recommendations were agreed to unanimously. I repeat that the chair did an excellent job not only in helping focus the discussion but also in getting the best out of committee members and secretariat staff, in particular John Miller, whom I also commend for doing an excellent job. This is a good report, which has received a little media attention. The significant and valuable contribution that committees of this nature make to helping our legal system and making our Parliament a better place cannot be overemphasised.

Question—That the House take note of the report—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Report noted.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE OFFICE OF THE VALUER GENERAL

Report: Report on the Ninth General Meeting with the Valuer General

Debate resumed from 6 November 2014.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [5.21 p.m.]: It is with much pleasure that I follow the contribution of the new chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the Office of the Valuer General, Ms Melanie Gibbons, in this take-note debate. I state at the outset that it has been a pleasure to work with the many members of this

committee. For better or for worse, I appear to be the last man standing. Ms Melanie Gibbons, the member for Menai, took over from Mr Matt Kean, the member for Hornsby, who chaired the committee until 15 May this year. She also took over from Mrs Leslie Williams as a member of the committee. Mr Christopher Gulaptis, member for Clarence, took over from Mr Scot MacDonald, who was deputy chair until 15 May this year. The Hon. Charlie Lynn took over from Mr Scot MacDonald as a member of the committee and, finally, Mr Ernest Wong took over from the Hon. Adam Searle as a member of the committee.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to those committee staff who have assisted the committee so ably over the past four years. Their journey has been somewhat similar to mine—pretty much the last people standing. In particular, I pay tribute to Vedrana Trisic and Millie Yeoh. Amazingly, Vedrana managed to fulfil the rapid-fire, fast-changing last-minute needs of the committee as it worked through its processes. Last year I made a contribution to the take-note debate on the report on the inquiry into the land valuation system and the eighth general meeting with the Valuer General. At that time there were concerns as to how the land valuation process had been conducted to that point. Mr Philip Western took on the role of NSW Valuer General in 2003 and served in that position until the expiry of his contract on 31 August 2014. In my opinion he is a man of considerable integrity and talent and that he is no longer in that position is a loss to this State.

For the benefit of members of the public who are following this debate, each year some 2.47 million land valuations are provided in New South Wales. Last year, for example, 744,000 individual notices and valuations were carried out across New South Wales and for the first time land values in New South Wales have exceeded one trillion dollars. It is an enormous job. Over recent years, under both the former Labor Government and the current Government, funding for the position of Valuer General has continued to shrink while the value of our properties has continued to grow. It is incredibly important for land valuations to be correct because the rates paid based on those valuations form a significant part of family budgets.

I place on record my disappointment that the Minister for Finance and Services did not communicate with the committee about the decision not to continue Mr Philip Western's term as NSW Valuer General. I have been a member of this committee for four years. I have printed and read thousands upon thousands of pages of information. Unfortunately, I have also had to go through about 29 million line items on an Excel spreadsheet which crashed our computer system. I have spent hundreds of hours doing all that and the Parliament has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on this committee. I was disappointed that that decision was made without any notice being given to the committee. It makes me wonder why members give so much of their time to our parliamentary committees. Having said that, I commend the report to the House.

Question—That the House take note of the report—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Report noted.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Report: Follow up of Repeat Recommendations from the Auditor-General's 2013 Financial Audit Reports

Question—That the House take note of the report—proposed.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.25 p.m.]: It is my pleasure to make a contribution to this take-note debate on the follow-up of repeat recommendations from the Auditor-General's 2013 financial reports. This is the eighteenth report of the Public Accounts Committee in the Fifty-fifth Parliament, and the third annual report to examine systematically high-priority repeat recommendations from the financial audit reports tabled by the New South Wales Auditor-General. The purpose of the committee's financial audit reviews is to follow up on action taken by the agencies in response to repeat recommendations made by the Auditor-General. As part of the follow-up, the committee questions agencies about their response to the recommendations. The Auditor-General also has the opportunity to provide comments and submissions made by agencies.

The committee only follows up in areas where recommendations have been made at least once previously and are deemed to be significant, either by the committee or by the Auditor-General. This process ensures that ongoing issues are addressed by relevant agencies and, hopefully, leads to concrete outcomes. The reduction in the number of substantial recommendations pursued in this report, compared with the previous two similar reports, reflects the success of this process over some years. Indeed, the process of following up financial reports had not been followed for well over a decade. This report examined recommendations directed

to the States Records Authority, the Department of Justice, Transport for NSW, the Department of Planning and Environment, and the Office of Environment and Heritage. On the whole, it was pleasing to see that the relevant agencies have taken the recommendations of the Auditor-General seriously and have worked towards their implementation. Several of the responses received outlined the significant savings made due to the implementation of these recommendations, which highlights their importance.

Given this committee's special, previously demonstrated interest in the future of infrastructure in New South Wales, it was particularly satisfying to find that the Department of Planning and Environment has improved its accounting methods to provide a more accurate indication of the requirements of infrastructure projects. Further transparency will encourage additional stakeholders to invest in this crucial area. I commend the Government for its recent announcement at the G20 forum of becoming an infrastructure hub. I look forward to its response upon the rising of this Parliament to an infrastructure report tabled by the committee earlier this year. However, this report identified five areas where further work or clarification is required to ensure that the full benefit of the Auditor-General's recommendations are realised.

These recommendations aim to ensure that agencies will continue to work to address issues and that resulting outcomes are meaningful. This will help to ensure that the agencies achieve the savings and efficiencies highlighted by the Auditor-General and avoid the need for him to make similar recommendations in the future—we do not want to be hearing the same things over and over again. I will highlight one area that was the subject of the Auditor-General's report we are taking note of today—the financial audit into Transport for NSW. One of the five recommendations the committee made in our report, which was tabled only a few weeks ago, related to managing excess annual leave in Transport for NSW. I am disappointed to see again in the Auditor-General's report released today, the Financial Audit Report Volume Seven 2014, that:

... managing excess annual leave continues to be a challenge for many transport agencies with over 3,000 employees accruing more than 35 days annual leave at 30 June 2014.

We know that staff who do not take regular adequate annual leave can adversely affect their own health and welfare, as well as there being an increased risk of fraud when employees with key control functions work for extended periods without being relieved. There is obviously also a continuing contingent liability, which is not prudent financial management. So whilst we do not necessarily look to criticise the Government, that is an area I am happy to criticise as chair of a committee that represents this Parliament, not the Government and not the executive. In performing the role of watchdog of the executive, the committee has always held—and will continue, in the small amount of time left for this Parliament, always try to hold—the Government to account where performance needs to be improved.

The other four recommendations in the report, which I have not referred to specifically, point to areas of potential further improvement. I am not dwelling on the significant demonstrated improvements and effective implementation of recommendations because the committee's focus is on continually pushing and searching for areas of further improvement. Only a Government that is focused on continuous improvement is truly acting in the interests of the people of New South Wales, as indeed only a Parliament that pushes for increasingly better outcomes on behalf of the people is doing its job. I commend the report to the House.

Question—That the House take note of the report—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Report noted.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Report: Examination of the Auditor-General's Performance Audit Reports May 2013—July 2013

Question—That the House take note of the report—proposed.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.32 p.m.]: This is the third report I have had the privilege of speaking on today, and indeed the third report I have recently spent a lot of time creating, together with my colleagues and the committee secretariat. So I have been working—I say that to my electorate and to members of Parliament. It is my privilege to present this report, entitled "Examination of the Auditor-General's Performance Audit Reports May 2013—July 2013". This is the nineteenth report of the Public Accounts Committee in this Parliament and continues the committee's vital role of following up performance audit reports tabled by the New South Wales Auditor-General.

The purpose of the committee's performance audit reviews is to follow up on action taken by agencies in response to recommendations made by the Auditor-General. We follow up performance audit reports as a matter of routine about a year after those recommendations have been tabled. It is different from the financial audits process, where we follow up only repeat recommendations of the Audit Office. As part of the follow-up the committee questions agencies about their responses to recommendations and, if required, holds public hearings to examine witnesses. Again, the Auditor-General has the opportunity to provide comments on the submissions that agencies make. The committee's examination is designed to test action taken on performance audits in order to maintain a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. Concrete outcomes of this process have repeatedly demonstrated the value of following up the Auditor-General's report recommendations.

The report we are taking note of today follows up on six of the Auditor-General's audit reports tabled between May and July of 2013. Those reports were: "Management of the ClubGRANTS Scheme", "Management of Historic Heritage in National Parks and Reserves", "Building Energy Use in Public Hospitals", "Managing Operating Theatre Efficiency for Elective Surgery", "Reducing Ambulance Turnaround Time at Hospitals" and "Making the Best Use of Public Housing". I note that the Government today tabled another report on public housing, and indeed the Minister has launched a discussion paper. So there is a lot of action in the area of public housing at the moment.

Overall, the committee was satisfied with the response of agencies to these performance audits. It is clear to the committee that agencies have taken the Auditor-General's findings seriously, with most recommendations being accepted. On this note, the committee was pleased that NSW Health has included the addressing of recommendations made by the Auditor-General in its contracts with chief executives. Perhaps other agencies might do the same and look at putting into the contracts and key performance indicators of their staff members, particularly their senior executives, a requirement that they address recommendations of this nature. They do not always have to accept the recommendations, but they do need to show this Parliament respect by addressing the recommendations properly, and likewise show respect to the Audit Office of New South Wales.

This report makes 12 recommendations that are designed to improve the performance of government agencies. Most of the recommendations go to matters already identified by the Auditor-General. The committee would like to see more timely action in some areas, but committee members recognise that on occasion agencies may encounter legitimate delays. The committee also recognises that some recommendations will be addressed in the context of other processes. For example, the committee is aware of the Housing NSW tender process for its maintenance contracts. As I said, housing and social housing is an area that is subject to a lot of discussion at the moment.

Without going into the 12 specific recommendations, I note that they span a range of agencies. The one area that I will focus on is heritage management. New South Wales has 800 national parks and reserves, with more than 10,000 items of historical significance. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has done a great job managing these assets, but it cannot maintain them all. We need a clear, statewide strategy to prioritise the assets that the Government wishes to maintain. In one of its recommendations the committee recommended particularly that the Minister for the Environment conduct a review of permissible uses of heritage assets in national parks and reserves.

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has done a great job revitalising some heritage sites for public use but has been hampered by out-of-date legislation. The current legislation is overly restrictive and needs to be reviewed. For example, more private sector involvement could be permitted. I understand that this area is being looked at, and I know that we have a very capable Minister for the Environment, who will no doubt respond. In closing, I record my appreciation for the assistance provided by the Auditor-General and the Audit Office staff. I also thank the committee members—they all do a great job—and the secretariat staff for their assistance during the inquiry process and in the preparation of this report.

Question—That the House take note of the report—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Report noted.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report: Legislation Review Digest No. 65/55

Question—That the House take note of the report—proposed.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [5.38 p.m.]: I thank the House for this opportunity to update the House on comments made by the Legislation Review Committee in its recent digest, which was

tabled on 11 November. This is the sixty-fifth digest prepared by the Legislation Review Committee of this the Fifty-fifth Parliament. A total of three bills were introduced in the sitting week commencing 4 November, of which the committee commented on two. I turn now to each of the bills considered. The Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. 2) 2014 forms part of the statute law revision program, which has been in place for the past 30 years. Bills of this nature are an effective method for making minor policy changes, repealing redundant legislation and maintaining the quality of the New South Wales statute book.

The bill proposed amendments to the Ombudsman Act to ensure that certain office holders cannot give evidence or produce any document in legal proceedings in respect of any information obtained in the course of office or service with the Ombudsman. The committee noted that if a person cannot produce certain documents or give certain evidence in legal proceedings it may affect his or her right to access justice. Nonetheless, much of the information dealt with by the Ombudsman is of a highly sensitive nature and has been provided to the Ombudsman to enable him or her to perform his or her functions, not for use in an open court. In the circumstances the committee made no further comment.

Schedule 3 to the bill repeals various Acts. However, under schedule 4 the Governor is enabled by proclamation to revoke the repeal by the bill of any Act or any provision of an Act or instrument. It was the committee's opinion that re-enactment of primary legislation or parts of it should be dealt with by a reintroduction and consideration of the bills by Parliament, not via proclamation. As such, the committee referred the matter to Parliament for further consideration.

Schedule 1.7 item [3] amends the Electricity Supply (Safety and Network Management) Regulation to provide that scheme rules prescribe the fees required when applying for accreditation to supply electrical or other services. In the committee's view, to allow for appropriate parliamentary scrutiny, fees should be set by regulation and not via scheme rules. Unlike regulations, there appears to be no requirement under the Interpretation Act for the rules to be tabled in Parliament and be subject to disallowance. The committee referred the matter to Parliament for further consideration.

Finally, Schedule 1.21 item [1] replaces the definition of "corresponding law" in the Parole Orders (Transfer) Act with a definition that allows a law of another State or Territory that corresponds or substantially corresponds to the provisions of the Act to be treated as a corresponding law without the need for a notice to be published by the Minister. By removing the requirement for the Minister to publish a notice declaring the law of another State or Territory to be a corresponding law for the purposes of the Parole Orders (Transfer) Act the bill reduces the capacity for oversight and review of the Minister's decisions. As these decisions may affect parole transfers and, therefore, personal rights and liberties, the committee referred the matter to Parliament for further consideration.

Turning to the Valuation of Land Amendment Bill, the committee noted that new section 21 (1) provides that the amendments made by the bill are taken to have applied and always to have applied to any land valuation made before the commencement of the section. The committee also noted that the retrospective application of new section 21 (1) is intended to ensure the validity of all previous valuations that had been made under an earlier interpretation of the Valuation of Land Act. It is not intended to vary the rights and liberties of individuals with retrospective effect. As such, the committee made no further comment.

However, still on the issue of retrospectivity, new section 21 (2) provides that the retrospective application of amendments will not affect any decision made by a court in proceedings commenced before the date of introduction into Parliament of the bill. As a result of the provision, the committee noted that the bill will affect matters to be considered in proceedings commenced after the date of introduction into Parliament of the bill rather than after the date of the bill's commencement. That means that for the period between the introduction date and the commencement date key provisions of the bill will be operational despite not having been formally adopted into law. As such, there will also be a brief window where the bill will in fact be deemed to apply retrospectively. The committee referred the matter to Parliament for its further consideration.

Lastly, the committee noted that the object of the bill is to reverse the effects of a Land and Environment Court decision. Ordinarily, the committee may regard this as a legislative interference with judicial matters and unfair on parties to proceedings before the court. However, new section 21 (2) preserves the findings of the court in that matter and all subsequent matters that commenced before the introduction of the bill. As such, the bill is unlikely to adversely affect parties to ongoing or past proceedings. The committee did not make any further comment. I thank the hardworking staff and committee members. This may be the last

take-note debate on a Legislation Review Digest unless the order of business is changed on Thursday. As the member for Mount Druitt knows, the Legislation Review Committee is the hardest-working committee of all. I thank the committee for its work and commend the sixty-fifth digest to the House.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [5.43 p.m.]: On behalf of the Opposition I speak in debate on Legislation Review Digest No. 65/55. We have one digest remaining to take note of and I hope we will be able to hold that debate on Thursday. In the event that we do not have that debate, I echo the words of the chairman and congratulate the committee staff on their incredible efforts over the past almost four years. I also acknowledge my fellow committee members: the member for Myall Lakes as chair; the member for Parramatta as deputy chair; the member for Rockdale; the member for East Hills; and our upper House colleagues Mr David Shoebridge, the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps and the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane. The meeting for digest No. 65 was not nearly as controversial as the meeting for digest No. 64.

Mr Andrew Gee: You were there?

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: I was. I have been to a number of meetings since the committee has been far kinder to me.

Mr Stephen Bromhead: Good chairman.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: The chairperson was kind, yes. At the meeting the committee considered the Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (No. 2) 2014. The bill will amend the Ombudsman Act by providing that former office holders, including the Ombudsman, experts formerly engaged to assist the Ombudsman and Australian legal practitioners appointed or formerly appointed to assist the Ombudsman cannot give evidence or produce any document in legal proceedings in respect of any information obtained in the course of office or service with the Ombudsman. The committee made the following comment with respect to access to justice:

If a person cannot produce certain documents or give certain evidence in legal proceedings this may affect his or her right to access justice. Nonetheless, much of the information dealt with by the Ombudsman is of a highly sensitive nature and has been provided to the Ombudsman to enable him or her to perform his or her functions—not for use in an open court. In the circumstances, the Committee makes no further comment.

With regard to private property rights the committee made the following comment about schedule 1.26, which will amend four sections of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010:

If a landlord is required to let his or her property to an occupant who has taken out an apprehended domestic violence order against his or her tenant, this limits the landlord's private property rights. However, the provision makes it less likely a domestic violence victim will become homeless after reporting a domestic violence incident by assisting the victim to remain in his or her rented home. In the circumstances, the Committee makes no further comment.

The committee reviewed the Valuation of Land Amendment Bill 2014, the object of which is to reverse the ramifications of a decision of the Land and Environment Court. The bill will confirm longstanding practices and functions of the Valuer General. It will put beyond doubt that the Valuer General can make valuations based on the improvements presently on the land. The bill restores the status quo. In his second reading speech the Minister gave an assurance that it will not result in any increase in land values. The position in law before the Fivex case will be taken to have always applied. The committee commented with respect to retrospectivity and referred the matter to Parliament for its further consideration. The committee also made comment with respect to trespasses on personal rights and liberties. The final bill the committee reviewed was the Fisheries Management Amendment Bill 2014 and made no comment. I commend the digest to the House.

Question—That the House take note of the report—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Report noted.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

Report: Preparations for the 2015 NSW State Election

Question—That the House take note of the report—proposed.

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) [5.48 p.m.]: Last year dramatic events in the administration of the Western Australian Senate election saw the first re-run in Australian history. It affected the reputation of the

Australian Electoral Commission, damaged public confidence and cost the Australian taxpayer an estimated \$13 million. While there has been a good track record of running elections in New South Wales through the work of the New South Wales Electoral Commission it is essential that any applicable lessons from the Keely inquiry are understood and applied at future elections.

The inquiry reviewed the findings of the Keely report, recognising the importance of looking at the events that occurred in the Western Australian Senate election in 2013 to flag specific issues that would benefit and inform the inquiry. The inquiry received submissions from the Australian Electoral Commissioner, politicians and political parties. It took evidence from the New South Wales Electoral Commissioner and his staff, as well as additional questions on notice. In reviewing the commission's preparations for the election, the inquiry investigated a number of issues relating to risk management, the management of ballot papers, staff recruitment and training, iVote and broader information technology issues, and the suitability of polling facilities.

Having sound foundations and governance structures are important when planning a major event such as the New South Wales 2015 general election. The New South Wales Electoral Commission [NSWEC] has established mechanisms to ensure the effective management of risk, including an independent audit and risk committees. One of the biggest failures of the Western Australian Senate election was the logistical arrangements around the movement, storage and security of ballot papers, ballot boxes and materials. The inquiry therefore looked carefully at the New South Wales arrangements, particularly in relation to the upper House.

The committee was pleased to note the use of technology to scan and track ballot paper boxes and the new process to minimise the movement of the Legislative Council postal ballot papers which, once opened, will be retained centrally for counting. Concern was also raised about un-initialled ballot papers that could be lost if papers were ruled invalid. While the commissioner reassured the committee that those ballot papers would not be ruled informal under the Act, there remained a concern about the lack of legislative certainty. The committee recommended that the Government consider amending the legislation to make the initialling of all ballot papers a legislative requirement. In the interim, for the 2015 election the committee also recommended that the practice should be reinforced during training for election staff.

The commission has well-established and robust procedures in place to recruit temporary staff for the election. By using experienced staff from previous elections who have demonstrated the capacities and skills required, the commission will also mitigate risk by ensuring that all key decision-making during the election is made by professional electoral staff. Accessibility of polling stations for everyone is important to ensure that people are not disenfranchised from the electoral process. The commission is working hard to put in place alternative arrangements, should premises not be suitable, by contacting every declared institution. The committee also felt it was important to provide storage facilities at polling stations for party workers and their equipment. While the selection of suitable premises is constrained by the market and what is available, the committee recommended that the need for storage form part of the contract negotiations.

Technology will play its part in the 2015 election. A number of advances and upgrades have been introduced by the NSWEC in its preparation. They include updates to the iVote system and the new vote counting system for Legislative Assembly ballot papers. Those enhancements will increase the security and integrity of the systems, and help the commission to make every vote count. The committee noted that the commission is confident that the measures it has in place will ensure the integrity of the iVote system, but it expressed its concern that the verification service project is still ongoing and hoped that this important project is implemented in time for the election.

An effective communication and advertising strategy is an important element of the preparation in ensuring that key messages are conveyed to the electorate. An increase in the use of social media in promoting elections hopefully will increase engagement with young voters. The committee looks forward to further progress in that area. The committee also considered a number of related matters, including fraudulent enrolments, eligibility of candidates, the legislative framework and requirements to retain copies of paper rolls. The committee recommended that the Government give consideration to amending the legislation to remove the requirement for the Electoral Commissioner to keep paper rolls for inspection. The committee considered that, based on the evidence, the New South Wales Electoral Commission has made good progress in relation to preparations for the 2015 general election and that there are no major concerns. The Electoral Commission has utilised lessons learned from the Western Australian election and has improved its processes. The commission is on track to deliver a well-run election.

The committee considered the issue of electronic mark off. I am strongly of the view that it must be introduced and I am also strongly supportive of the committee's previous recommendations relating to voter identification. It is more difficult to obtain a video card than it is to cast a vote in relation to the future of this State or our nation. To ensure the integrity of election outcomes, I believe the Government must introduce electronic mark off and must ensure that voter identification is presented. It has been done in Queensland. The Stafford by-election went very smoothly, and New South Wales should follow suit. We have the very same technology available and it is just a case of government funding. We send people away to fight for our democracy and to ensure that our freedoms are retained. In that vein, we should ensure that we do everything we can to ensure the proper outcomes of elections and that the outcomes are what was intended.

I take this opportunity to thank my fellow committee members—the deputy chair, the Hon. Robert Borsak; the Assistant-Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Andrew Fraser, whom I thank for many occasions of personal guidance and whose wisdom when I sought clarification was greatly appreciated; the Hon. Peter Primrose, Mr John Sidoti, the Hon. Paul Lynch, Mr Greg Aplin; the Hon. Amanda Fazio; the Hon. Trevor Khan and the inimitable Dr Peter Phelps. I also thank past members of the committee, Mr Daryl Maguire and the Hon. Jai Rowell, Minister for Mental Health, and Assistant Minister for Health, who was the previous chair.

I also take this opportunity to thank Pauline Painter, David Hale, Leon Last, Rachel Simpson, and Jason Arditi. David Hale and Jason Arditi are two of the most fantastic staff members in this place I have worked with. Both served the committee exceptionally well. I thank them for their service and thank all members of the committee and all those who provided evidence for the report. I hope that, like the last report, which was my first report as chair of the committee with just about all its recommendations adopted and passed through this Parliament, that the same thing occurs in relation to this report and its recommendations. I commend the report to the House.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): I commend the remarks made by the member for Kiama and chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. It has been a pleasure to work on the committee.

Question—That the House take note of the report—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Report noted.

Pursuant to sessional order private members' statements proceeded with.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

"A JOURNEY TO ARMENIA" PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.55 p.m.]: Last Thursday, along with some colleagues, I attended the official opening of a photographic exhibition called "A Journey to Armenia" in the New South Wales Parliament House Fountain Court. The exhibition commenced on 4 November and will continue until Thursday 27 November. It showcases a number of photographs as an initiative of the Armenian National Committee of Australia and displays places and people of Armenia that have been captured on film by leading Australian-Armenian photographers Teny Aghamalian, Jacob Majarian and Nuran Zorlu. The exhibition celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Armenian community in New South Wales. It was officially opened by the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, Deputy Liberal Leader and Minister for Transport, and was attended by more than 100 distinguished guests, including members of Parliament.

One of the photographers, Mr Nuran Zorlu, lives in Frenchs Forest in my electorate of Davidson and I have met him a number of times. He has captured some breathtaking photographs of historic sites and majestic landscapes. His outstanding work is part of this insightful exhibition and reveals some spectacular scenes from this landlocked European country. Mr Zorlu is well qualified for this exhibition, not only through his ethnic background but also as a respected commercial photographer. He is well known as a judge, educator and curator in the Australian photographic industry. He also is currently working on documenting sites of cultural significance in Armenia, Turkey and Iran.

Last year I visited Armenia when I led a parliamentary delegation as chair of the Armenia-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group and saw some of those amazing and historic sites firsthand. Nuran has been able to capture through his lens a taste of Armenia. I am pleased that his work is displayed in Parliament House. I encourage anyone who has not seen the exhibition to take a close look at all three artists' work that is displayed around the Fountain Court. Next April, just prior to Australians commemorating the Centenary of Anzac Day, Armenians will commemorate the centenary of the Armenian genocide. This will be noted particularly by the various Armenian groups, including the Armenian National Committee of Australia [ANC]. At the opening of the exhibition, Mr Vache Kahramanian, who is the ANC's Australian Executive Director, said:

I would not only like to dedicate this exhibition to the memory of the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide, but also to those who have stood on the side of truth and justice. The New South Wales Parliament has been one of the shining beacons in humanity's quest to recognise this abhorrent crime against humanity.

This statement reflects that New South Wales was the first Australian Legislature to recognise the Armenian genocide in April 1997—a recognition that it reconfirmed in a motion this year. Last month, along with parliamentary colleagues, I attended the Armenian National Committee Australia 2014 banquet, where we heard from a special overseas guest, Mr Giro Manoyan, and again acknowledged the historic truth of the Armenian genocide. Recently it was sad to see a report from Mr Robert Fisk, the *Independent's* longstanding Middle East correspondent, who had just been in Syria. Reportedly, the entire 173-year-old church of the Armenians in Deir ez-Zor was destroyed a few weeks ago by an Islamic group. This particular church housed the archives of the Armenian genocide, including the many bones, skeletons and skulls of those who died. These bones were apparently thrown into the street and burned, when church leaders would not acknowledge this Islamic group as the legitimate government in Deir ez-Zor.

Geoffrey Robertson, QC, recently visited Sydney and appeared on a number of television programs. His visit coincided with the launch of his book *An Inconvenient Genocide: Who Now Remembers the Armenians?* in which he addresses the question of the Armenian genocide from a legal perspective. His book explains how the horrific events of 1915—witnessed by many, even some Australian prisoners of war—constituted the crime against humanity that is known today as genocide. As we move towards 25 April next year, let us not forget that Anzac Day is not the only occasion of historical significance that occurred 100 years ago.

CYBERBULLYING

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [6.00 p.m.]: This evening I raise a topic that would not be unknown to many people in this day and age who use the Internet, Instagram, Facebook and hundreds of other social media websites. I am talking about trolling. According to Wikipedia:

In Internet slang a **troll** is a person who sows discord on the Internet by starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a newsgroup, chat room or blog) with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion.

This sense of the word **troll** and its associated verb **trolling** are associated with Internet discourse, but have been used more widely. Media attention in recent years has equated trolling with online harassment and bullying.

This is not the first occasion on which I have raised this matter in this place. Members will not be surprised when I say that I have had some negative media coverage over my political life.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: Connected with your electorate and your position as a member of this House.

Ms NOREEN HAY: It is connected with the electorate, because issues raised with me relate to negative comments being made on blog sites and other media outlets regarding people in the Wollongong area. Such comments make me concerned for young people who may not have developed the tenacity and strength of character that will enable them to cope with that kind of nastiness. Today I was contacted by a number of people about some such comments. I do not read blogs and comments designed to distract and upset, but I have been subjected to a fair share of negative media coverage. As a politician, one can cope with that, and over time one becomes stronger and is able to ignore it.

But it struck me when people telephoned me about this today how young people would cope. I am the mother of four, the grandmother of seven and the great-grandmother of one, and I am very concerned about this,

especially as a member of my family suicided, which I have spoken about in this place. That people hide behind pseudonyms in an attempt to be as nasty and as low as possible is one thing, but through this modern-day media they have a platform on which to tweet, Facebook and otherwise make negative comment about one another and other individuals without ever having to be responsible for their comments. To my way of thinking this is really a form of bullying and gutless behaviour.

I wonder whether everyone in political life should not be looking at whether there is some means of protecting young people who have not developed the tenacity and resilience to cope with trolling. I raised with a couple of people today my absolute amazement that media representatives would allow certain comment to be made in their media. We put our hands up as politicians in the knowledge that we will have to live with this kind of thing, being aware that there may be some truth in the old adage that if one cannot take the heat one should get out of the kitchen. But I am concerned for our youth, particularly in the electorate of Wollongong, and how they cope with trolling. I wanted to make the House aware of my concerns about these kinds of things.

MENAI ELECTORATE BOUNDARIES REDISTRIBUTION

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Menai) [6.05 p.m.]: Tonight I say, "Thank you, Menai". The redistribution has meant that I will lose the area I have represented for 11 years, 8½ of those as their local councillor. While I am excited to run for the new electorate of Holsworthy, I am saddened to see the Menai electorate split between the electorates of Heathcote, Miranda and Holsworthy. Menai has always been its own district, with its own sports awards, business awards and identity. I know that will not be lost but the redistribution may see it become confused and disjointed. I hope that the three State members will be able to work together to continue to best serve this wonderful and thriving community.

As I look back on the past four years as the local member, I am pleased and proud of the differences I have been able to make as part of the O'Farrell and Baird Liberal governments at both a local and regional level. In my inaugural speech I said that I would judge my time on how we assist people with disabilities so I am happy that, with the assistance of the Minister for Transport, we now have a ramp at Jannali train station as part of an easy access upgrade, making the access to this station far safer for people in wheelchairs and for people pushing prams.

I was happy to join the Minister, the member for Heathcote and our candidate for Miranda, Eleni Petinos, to open the lift at Sutherland station. This was something I saw the need for when I was a school student—so it was a great moment to be able to deliver it. Sutherland station will soon benefit from the more than 300 new commuter car parking spots. These are very much needed and will make such a difference to our Menai commuters in particular. Our hospital at Caringbah has also benefited recently from a new car park, taking some of the stress out of visiting a loved one during a time of need.

I am pleased to see the full duplication of the Alford's Point Bridge—not just the additional bridge offering one extra lane, as the Labor Government built; our Government increased it from four lanes to six. The approaches are also finished—done without fanfare because the commuters were desperately in need of this major infrastructure. We also built a barrier along the approaches to the Woronora Bridge, which was needed to reduce the accidents that occurred here. Similarly, we have made changes to Heathcote Road to try to reduce the likelihood of accidents along this dangerous road. The construction of the new Deadmans Creek Bridge is just one of these changes, and I am looking forward to it being completed by the start of 2016. We are by no means finished, but I am pleased that funding has been announced to investigate further measures to ensure the safety of commuters.

Graffiti has long been a bugbear, not just of mine but of many of my constituents on this half of the Menai electorate. I know that our new legislation and the introduction of the graffiti hotline have made a real difference in reducing its occurrence and the blight on our area. Time prevents me mentioning more but, as members know, it is often the help we provide to our constituents on an individual basis that matters most—the work that does not make it into our glossy brochures but that can help to change lives. I have been so blessed to have been given the opportunity to make a difference, especially when helping people with disabilities who are, or whose families are, at their wit's end.

Menai is considered to be a lucky community, but its troubles often go unnoticed or are kept hidden. As the local member I hope I have helped to address some of these, by offering an ear, assistance, representation to Ministers or through funding. I love looking at the Sutherland Shire Family Support Services and seeing the

difference we were able to make through the Community Building Partnership program for people who have experienced domestic violence. I thank the people who work there and the volunteers for all they do. The Community Building Partnership program has made a difference to Project Youth.

I hope it has helped to prevent many young people falling through the cracks. Being able to represent the two vibrant areas of the Menai electorate has been an honour and an education. The Sutherland shire and the Liverpool community both offer wonderful lifestyles and amazing history. They are vibrant and exciting, and I have been so lucky to have been able to represent both these distinct areas in this place. As all members know, we do not do this alone, and I thank my wonderful staff and all the people who gave me this opportunity to serve here, many of whom have come along tonight.

I particularly thank my permanent staff—Jeffrey Page and Natalie Peterson—who have been with me from the start. Currently, Natalie is on maternity leave with her beautiful daughter, Ruby. So I have had Lauren Benikos and Faith Perryman helping me out. My ATS staff keep getting offered better opportunities. My office provides them with a great education and then they are poached. I thank Rebecca Maher, Tara Wilson, Cheryl Johnson, Stevie Lillis, Amy Cook, Tracey Cook, Rachael Johnston, Kate Shorten, Julia Rikerink, Scott Williams, James Coward, Elizabeth Ryan, Kim Honeyman and Anna Iline for all their help to me and the electorate. I would not be here without the support of everyone who helped on my campaign for the seat of Menai, especially Chris Hall, Marc Landrigan and Kent Johns. These men have supported many women candidates in their campaigns and on being elected to Parliament and I thank them for all they have done.

My parents have helped me and put up with me and the demands that go with this occupation. I thank them again publicly tonight. This job is so much easier when you know you have people who love and support you and are looking out for you. My inaugural speech emphasised two themes: how I wanted to be judged on my time as the member for Menai and the strong and effective women who have guided my life. I hope my time here has reflected these themes. As one of just over 50 female members of Parliament who have served in this place, I would like it to be noted that Menai may well be the only seat to have been held only by women. Let us hope this is not the case for long. Thank you to the State seat of Menai—it has been an amazing honour to have been your voice in Parliament.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Chris Gulaptis): I thank the member for Menai and welcome her family and friends in the gallery.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck—Minister for Primary Industries) [6.11 p.m.]: I pay tribute to Melanie Gibbons, an outstanding member of Parliament and outstanding member for Menai who, through no fault of her own, has found herself in the midst of a redistribution, as have I. I lose my seat of Burrinjuck in the redistribution as well. I have admired Mel, been friends with her and recognised her as a very hard worker and conscientious member of Parliament. She has a great sense of humour and terrific empathy for all her constituents. From the kings to the paupers she is at one with her community. I wish her the best of luck in the new seat of Holsworthy should she be successful. I certainly hope that the community sees her as the terrific representative we know her to be and vote 1 Melanie Gibbons for Holsworthy because we need her here. Well done Mel. Congratulations on all you have done for your electorate of Menai. Good luck for the future.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Chris Gulaptis): Well said Minister. I am sure the House feels exactly the same way about the member for Menai.

MARRICKVILLE ELECTORATE EVENTS

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville) [6.12 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about a number of recent events in my electorate, which once again demonstrate that the inner west has a strong sense of community, which plays an important role through its many organisations in my electorate. I recently attended the annual general meeting [AGM] of Guthrie House in Enmore. Guthrie House was founded in 1979 and is a transitional accommodation service for women leaving prison, including women who are pregnant or who have preschool-aged children in their full-time care. It is one of the few services that accept women who are participating in pharmacotherapy treatment. Guthrie House provides health care, alcohol and other drugs services, psychological assessments, domestic violence counselling, Aboriginal services, and educational and skills programs.

I congratulate all involved with Guthrie House including its board director, Rebecca Gilsenan, who is stepping down this year after many years of service; manager Glenda Milne; and all other members of staff and board members. They have delivered another year of impressive achievements. In the past year, 51 women were

admitted to the residential program with 20 on the after-care program, and 43 women or 84 per cent of those who participated in the residential program were successful in completing it—a great outcome as it is by no means easy.

All clients received referrals or advice upon discharge and Guthrie House facilitated 15 different programs, including those on parenting, communication skills, legal workshops and financial management. Guthrie House is an important service that provides safe and secure accommodation for women in the criminal justice system, as well as the wraparound services needed to address their offending behaviour. Its programs give women the opportunity to learn some of the skills they need to successfully transition to long-term housing. I had the chance to talk with some of the residents at the AGM and they all spoke of the difference that Guthrie House had made to them and their chances of returning to a life free from crime. I congratulate all the staff on their care, compassion and hard work.

The second event I attended was a sod-turning ceremony at Dulwich Hill for the new Holy Trinity Youth and Community Centre. Just over a year ago the historic building that housed the Holy Trinity Anglican Church's youth service tragically was burnt down. This was a huge loss to the local community as for more than 20 years the Holy Trinity Youth and Community Centre had provided services for young people from this site. The centre was established by Father Dave Smith—or the fighting father as he is often called—to provide a safe place for young people after school. Over the years it has been a sanctuary for thousands of young people. Father Dave indeed is a legend in Dulwich Hill and beyond for his commitment but more so for his broader commitment to social justice and to serving his community.

The hall became a vital part of the Dulwich Hill community providing services to residents, young people, schools and local groups—everything from the fight club through to playgroups and choir rehearsals. The hall has been sorely missed since it burnt down. It was very exciting to be at the sod turning ceremony for the new architecturally designed, multipurpose community centre. The cost of rebuilding the centre, as is so often the case, is substantial and will exceed whatever insurance money will be returned to the church. The church continues its fundraising efforts to complete the project, but has benefited also from a community building partnership grant of over \$40,000. I look forward to the completion of this project and the enormous benefits it will bring to the local community.

The final event I speak about tonight is the inaugural Marrickville High School Market Day, which was held on 8 November. While the market day was a fundraiser with the funds going towards upgrading the school hall lighting, it also was an opportunity for the school to welcome the broader community into its grounds. The inner west loves a good market and the school had over 25 quality and unique market stalls. The students operated a barbecue and the food technology department prepared jams and preserves to sell. Students also provided the entertainment and I congratulate the talented students who performed.

I also congratulate Trish Busch and all the other parents involved with the Marrickville High School Parents and Citizens Association, and principal Ms Arey Dassaklis, who provides great leadership for the school and its students. Arey Dassaklis is a relatively new principal to Marrickville High School. She has shown great enthusiasm, energy and commitment to building the school and opening it to the local community, which is very much appreciated by the broader community. All three events that I have spoken about showcased the Marrickville electorate at its best—diverse, hardworking and compassionate.

PORT MACQUARIE ELECTORATE

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.17 p.m.]: As we move ever closer to the conclusion of the Fifty-fifth Parliament in New South Wales it is an opportunity for all of us as local members to reflect on what we have achieved as representatives of our local communities. Local communities are at the heart of what we do and have entrusted us with the responsibility of representing them in this place. Like us, local communities aspire for a strong economy, quality services, new infrastructure, a strong local environment and communities, and accountability in government. That is what we promised our communities we would deliver in government and when I reflect on the changes in the Port Macquarie electorate I am confident that we have been a part of the change that has seen New South Wales number one again. In the past 12 months the Port Macquarie electorate has witnessed a number of exciting projects come to fruition—projects that have supported our local community and, importantly, our local economy.

For example, members of the Tacking Point Surf Life Saving Club, kicked off 2014 in a fantastic way with a \$250,000 State Government grant to improve facilities at its clubhouse, including improved disabled

access, upgraded toilet amenities and the installation of a sun awning as well as improved amenities and increased storage facilities. The more than 400 members of the Tacking Point Surf Life Saving Club provide an invaluable service to our community year in and year out in helping to ensure our beaches are safe throughout the surf season. The volunteers of the surf life saving movement deserve our support. This financial injection will see their dream of an expanded and revitalised clubhouse come to fruition and it will reap many long-term benefits, not only for its club members but also for the community. I assure the club that I will continue to work closely with them to assist wherever I can to secure more funding to complete this vision.

As most people in this place know, my public life started when I stood side by side with my local community in Lake Cattai to continue advocating for a local public school. I am pleased to report that construction of the school—which the Labor Government ignored for 16 years—is nearing completion and the \$8.3 million investment by this Government is a celebrated addition to our local landscape. The new school, which will open on day one of term one next year, has 10 classrooms, a library, a school hall and a canteen. The building works also include construction of an administration office, staff facilities, games and assembly courts, an enormous covered outdoor learning area, a sports field and a car park. In many ways I am saddened to think that the community, parents and students have waited such a long time to be provided with such an important facility.

I grew up in a regional community and know only too well the importance of a local school. The Lake Cattai Public School will be no different. It will be the hub of our community—a place of learning, teaching, sharing, caring and gathering. The excitement in the community is palpable. Locals are discussing planning schedules, exploring uniform options, deciding on logos, and arranging school fundraisers and significant events. I recently experienced a memorable day when I toured the school with principal Jock Garven. His enthusiasm and excitement for the opportunity he has been given to be the leader of this vibrant school community is obvious to all who meet him. I congratulate him on his new role and I look forward to working with him in the years ahead as the Lake Cattai Public School emerges as a showcase for public education.

In 2014 the ambitious plan to link the shared cycleways and pathways in the Camden Haven took a giant step forward when the New South Wales Government announced an allocation of \$420,000 for the planning and commencement of the projects. Two projects are being developed by the Beach to Beach and the Schools to Schools committees which, when completed, will see approximately 24 kilometres of shared cycleways and pathways constructed in the Camden Haven. I was pleased to take part in one of the first concrete pours on the first stage of the Beach to Beach project at Dunbogan. I can confirm that the end result is already being well utilised. I congratulate the hardworking committees on each of these projects and I will continue to support them in any way I can during the year ahead.

Over the past 12 months a significant investment has also been made in regional and local roads, thanks to the Minister for Roads and Freight, the Hon. Duncan Gay. He understands the needs of regional communities and responds accordingly. One of the busiest intersections in Port Macquarie will be upgraded following an announcement by the Minister to install traffic lights at the intersection of the Wrights Road and Oxley Highway roundabout. In the first half of next year, \$7 million will be spent to deliver a fully signalised intersection. I am proud to be a member of the Liberal-Nationals Government that has invested in improving our local communities in the Port Macquarie electorate. Many projects, as I have outlined, are currently underway or nearing completion. As well as those highlighted, we look forward to the commencement of the new Police Citizens Youth Club in Port Macquarie, the duplication of Ocean Drive and the long-awaited replacement of Stingray Creek Bridge.

Private members' statements concluded.

Pursuant to sessional order matter of public importance proceeded with.

NATIONAL PARKS ESTATE

Matter of Public Importance

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [6.24 p.m.]: I am blessed to be able to live in and represent the Blue Mountains, the most beautiful part of New South Wales. The city of Blue Mountains is located within the Blue Mountains National Park, which is part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area. I hazard a guess that the Blue Mountains National Park is one of the best known in New South Wales and Australia

because of the Three Sisters landform at Echo Point, Katoomba. It is also one of the most iconic tourist destinations. The Blue Mountains National Park not only possesses breathtaking scenery, great bushwalks and much Aboriginal heritage but also has walking tracks of historical significance.

In fact, this area could be labelled as the seed of the conservation movement. One hundred years ago Myles Dunphy and Herbert "Bert" Gallop set out on an 11-day, 200-kilometre trek to walk the length of the Kowmung River, which took them into the heart of the southern Blue Mountains. They mapped and marked their route along the way. The Blue Mountains is only one of many renowned national parks in the New South Wales estate. Over the past week New South Wales has played host to more than 5,000 delegates from around the world who are attending the sixth International Union for Conservation of Nature's World Parks Congress. The congress has been a wonderful opportunity to show the world the breadth and beauty of New South Wales, to showcase the State's 865 national parks and reserves, and to highlight our leading environmental management practices.

New South Wales has a strong history for protecting areas. It is home to the world's second-oldest national park—some might argue the oldest—the Royal National Park, an area that my colleague and friend the member for Heathcote represents in this place. The park's estate has grown into an expansive network covering more than seven million hectares or 9 per cent of the State. Our national parks attract approximately 35.5 million domestic visitors each year and an estimated three million international visitors. This figure no doubt will continue to grow following events such as the congress. The congress brings together people from all walks of life—from presidents to park rangers, from business executives to Indigenous leaders—in a common endeavour to plan the future for terrestrial and marine parks and protected areas around the world.

The congress is a rare opportunity for a rational, evidence-based global conversation about environmental issues where we look for common ground and shared solutions. National parks and reserves, including marine reserves, are crucial for global biodiversity conservation. They play an important role in the health and wellbeing of communities from providing a source of green space and clean air to job opportunities, and they enhance food security through the preservation of wild crops. Their importance cannot be undervalued.

Last Saturday I was delighted to welcome the United States Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell, to my beautiful electorate of the Blue Mountains. The secretary is a keen bushwalker and the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Rob Stokes, and I had the opportunity to guide her on the National Pass track, which offers fantastic views of the Jamison Valley and the surrounding cliffs in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. During her visit, the secretary was particularly interested in visiting some of the areas that were affected by the bushfires that occurred in the Blue Mountains last October and most recently on the Friday before her visit to Katoomba. In particular, the secretary wished to better understand how we in New South Wales implement fire management in our natural reserves. In fact, we were able to advise her that under the Enhanced Bushfire Management Program the New South Wales Government has committed to nearly double hazard reduction and to improve bushfire response capabilities on parks and reserves by 2016.

The Government has committed to provide an additional \$62.5 million over five years from 2011 to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for hazard reduction work and an additional 94 trained firefighters have been employed full time. At this point I express my thanks and appreciation for the tremendous job done by our National Parks and Wildlife Service rangers. They often make up the remote area fire teams, or the RAFT crews, that are winched into remote areas to fight fires. The overriding objective of fire management for this Government is to safeguard human life and property. We will do everything possible to prevent the loss of human life and property in our national parks. The Minister for the Environment has announced a ban on smoking in national parks. I emphasise that banning smoking in national parks is about protecting our special places from fire and litter while supporting a healthier New South Wales.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville) [6.29 p.m.]: I thank the member for Blue Mountains for placing this matter of public importance on our agenda tonight. There is no doubt that national parks play a critical role in our State not only from an environmental perspective but also from an economical perspective. We know that our national parks are one of the great attractions for tourists visiting New South Wales. I am proud of Labor's record in government and the substantial additions we made to the national park estate.

I will now share an interesting statistic with the House. When Bob Debus was Minister for the Environment he gazetted more national parks in one day than the previous Coalition Government gazetted in its entire term in office. Labor has always had a strong commitment to growing our national park estate. We have recognised not only the incredibly important conservation values of our national parks but also the huge

difference it makes to our quality of life to have these beautiful national parks protected in perpetuity. Whether it was the south-east forest, the north-east forest, the Pilliga, or the river red gums—which occurred during my time as environment Minister—they were all hard-fought battles.

We do not always have universal agreement on issues such as the boundaries that should encompass a national park, how the logging industry is to be treated once a national park is created, and the impact they will have on people's livelihoods. Nonetheless, the actions taken by the Wran, Carr, Iemma, Rees and Keneally governments to preserve and conserve these wonderful parts of the State will keep them in perpetuity for future generations. I am pleased that the member for Blue Mountains has brought this matter of public importance to the attention of the House. Interestingly, last week three New South Wales national parks were announced in the list of the world's top 20 national parks—the Green List of the world's best-managed and protected areas. New South Wales was the only Australian State to have its national parks recognised. The three national parks are: Montague Island Nature Reserve, Cape Byron State Conservation Area and Arakwal National Park, and they were selected by international peers for inclusion on the list.

The managers and staff of our National Parks and Wildlife Service are to be congratulated on this remarkable achievement. To have one park included in this list would have been significant; to have three parks included is quite extraordinary. I am proud that Labor governments have played a critical role in all three of those parks. For example, the Montague Island Nature Reserve was established in 1953 as a wildlife sanctuary but in the late 1990s the Carr Labor Government recognised that it was significantly under threat from feral animals and kikuyu grass—they were harming the little penguins for which the island is so well known. A program was put in place to eradicate them.

That work is now complete. Montague Island Nature Reserve has been acknowledged as a sanctuary for threatened species. The Arakwal National Park and the Cape Byron State Conservation Area were both brought into the New South Wales national park estate by the Carr Labor Government. The Arakwal National Park was established through the Arakwal Indigenous Land Use Agreements, which began under the Carr Labor Government but was signed by the Iemma Labor Government and the traditional owners, the Bundjalung people.

The Cape Bryon State Conservation Area, which was gazetted in 1997, includes the Cape Byron headland and the iconic Byron Bay lighthouse. The Carr Labor Government recognised that it was not only the conservation area but also the water surrounding it that was so important to the conservation values of the area. Accordingly, the Byron Bay Marine Park was declared to ensure that the marine environment was also protected. I thank the member for Blue Mountains for giving us the opportunity to speak about these wonderful parks. The member for Blue Mountains also has a wonderful national park within her electorate.

Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote) [6.34 p.m.]: I thank the member for Marrickville for her kind words. I am fortunate enough to represent an area that has an abundance of national parks. Indeed, the second-oldest national park in the world, the Royal National Park, and the newest national park, the Dharawal National Park, are located in my electorate. It is but one hour's drive from the Sydney central business district to the beautiful electorate of Heathcote. It is estimated that more than four million people visit the Royal National Park each year, and that number is increasing exponentially. The Royal National Park was established in 1879 and, as I have said, it is the second-oldest national park in the world. It was added to the national heritage list in 2006 and in 2013 we started the long and arduous march towards World Heritage listing. Indeed, we are hopeful that the world congress that is currently in town will assist us in that march.

I take this opportunity to talk about the recent announcement about no smoking in national parks. National parks protect our most important natural places. They also provide opportunities for people to appreciate our great outdoors—places where people can be inspired to be healthy and protect the natural systems we are so lucky to have. Each year more than 35 million people in New South Wales visit our national parks. Banning smoking in national parks will further increase the community's enjoyment of these green open spaces. The Office of Environment and Heritage, which includes the National Parks and Wildlife Service, manages more than 860 national parks and reserves, which cover about 9 per cent of the New South Wales land mass. In addition to vast open green spaces, this also includes historic buildings, lookouts, camping areas, picnic areas, walking tracks and ski lifts.

New South Wales is already a leader in tobacco control. Smoking is already banned under the Smoke Free Environment Act in outdoor places such as near children's play equipment, public swimming pools, spectator areas at sports grounds, public bus and train stops, and within four metres of a pedestrian access point

to a building, and as from early July next year people will not be able to smoke in outdoor dining areas. The decision to ban smoking has been driven by the Government's ongoing desire to reduce the risk of bushfires to people and property. Smoking carries bushfire risks. An unextinguished cigarette butt can smoulder for up to three hours. Banning smoking can help to reduce the likelihood of unextinguished cigarette butts being disposed of in national parks and so help to reduce a source of bushfire risk.

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [6.37 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Marrickville and Heathcote for their wonderful contributions to this debate. National parks are an important part of modern-day life. It is great to be able to go into our national parks and enjoy breathtaking views, in particular, those in my electorate. The tourism industry also contributes to the economic value of our national parks. I was interested in the comment of the member for Marrickville about three New South Wales national parks being included in the list of the world's top 20 national parks. That is a great credit to this State. I was interested also to hear the history of the Montague Island Nature Reserve.

The Royal National Park, the second-oldest national park in the world, and the Dharawal National Park, the newest national park, are both located in the electorate of the member for Heathcote. The member for Heathcote also spoke about no smoking in national parks. It is well known that smoking in national parks can cause a lot of problems. Interestingly, around 50 per cent of bushfires in national parks in New South Wales are of a suspicious or unknown cause—discarded cigarette butts may well be the cause of many of those fires. The banning of smoking in national parks will assist in diminishing the risk of bushfires. It will reduce the amount of litter in our parks and will also have health benefits. The animals eat the cigarette butts left in our national parks and this causes problems for them too. There are many benefits to banning smoking in our national parks.

The risk of fire from cigarette butts is particularly important to all those communities who live close to bushland. In the Blue Mountains in the past two weeks we have had two fires of unknown cause. Bushfires can start from natural causes but many houses are located close to bushland. We should do everything we can to protect our national parks from being put in jeopardy of fire ignition from carelessly discarded cigarette butts. Members will recall the devastating bushfires in Victoria in which more than 170 people died. In its deliberations into those terrible fires the royal commission singled out cigarette butts as one of the likely causes of bushfires in Australia generally, but not necessarily of those fires. In conclusion, once again I thank members for their participation in this debate and reiterate the great value that we in New South Wales place on our national parks.

Discussion concluded.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 6.40 p.m. until
Wednesday 19 November 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**
